1861: The Civil War Comes to Cambridge

By Michael Kenney

On January 5, 1861, James P. Richardson, an attorney with offices in Central Square, announced in the Cambridge Chronicle that he proposed “to organize a company of volunteers to render their service to our common country, and to do what they can to maintain the integrity and glory of our flag and Union.” Any citizen “of moral character, and sound in body” was invited to call at his office. And with that notice, the War came to Cambridge.

Richardson, born in 1821, had worked at Davenport and Bridges, the Cambridgeport carriage-makers, then graduated from Harvard Law School in 1855. He lived on Western Avenue and had been the local commander of the Wide-Awakes, an organization working for Abraham Lincoln’s election.

By April, some 60 men had joined his volunteer company.

And when President Lincoln, responding to the April 12 attack on Fort Sumter, called for 75,000 volunteers, recruits crowded the stairway to Richardson’s office. Reporting at the State House on April 17, they were mustered as Company C, 3d Volunteer Regiment – the first unit raised in Massachusetts – and ordered to Fort Monroe in northern Virginia.

Back on the home front, according to the 1871 History of Massachusetts in the Civil War, the city government, acting on April 17, appropriated $5,000 “for support of the families of volunteers,” and a vote-of-thanks was passed to the Cambridge women “for their offer of flannel undergarments” for the volunteers heading to the war front.

In the following weeks, $1,700 was transferred from the appropriation for watering the streets to a fund to aid soldiers’ families; several orders were passed to provide rations and barracks for a second company of volunteers being raised; and it was voted “to decorate with a flag” the chair of a member of the Common Council who had volunteered for active duty.

Over the summer months, several other volunteer companies were raised and in July, $300 was appropriated “to give a reception” to Captain Richardson’s Company C on its return from three months’ garrison duty at Fort Monroe. Richardson and his men, however, did not stay home for long. That fall, Richardson was appointed captain of Company A, 38th Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. The regiment was ordered to Maryland and later to New Orleans.

As the year was ending, Mayor Charles Russell and a member of the Common Council were appointed as a committee to visit the regiments encamped on the Potomac River “to see that they were well cared for, and take charge of any sums of money which they might wish to send home to their friends.”

To be continued.
New Frontiers, New Challenges

The Historical Society had an exciting year in 2010. We won a national IMLS grant to digitize our photo collection. With the help of a remarkable staff and an amazing group of 27 volunteers, we became a regional leader for digitizing historical material and creating online content. We published a critically acclaimed book on the history of our house, featuring submissions from some of the most prominent members of the New England preservation community. We hosted 18 events in 10 different locations that both connected to our longtime members and brought in many new faces. We collaborated with groups in the city to expand an awareness of the Society. Finally, our collection of original manuscripts and photos grew faster than ever before.

However, 2010 was also a difficult year. The economy limited the growth of our membership and reduced donations to the Society; two of our major fundraisers brought in less than we’d hoped for. This, coupled with the expanding costs created by our success and the ongoing maintenance of our house, led us to have an operating deficit.

The Cambridge Historical Society is at a turning point. If we want to maintain this level of activity, we will have to expand our support base and convince more members of the community to join us. I believe that we must push forward to expand the Society: creating more digital access to our collections, increasing our membership, diversifying our sources of revenue, and continuing to increase our profile in the community. With a strong new Council, a seasoned team of volunteers, and a talented staff, I look forward to the challenges and new frontiers this year will bring.

The Harvard Square Business Association Celebrates 100 Years in Cambridge

In 2010 the Harvard Square Business Association marked its 100th anniversary as the first business association in New England and the second in the nation.

In January, “100 Years -- 100 Images,” an exhibition of photographs, posters, and memorabilia, opened in Holyoke Center.

The centerpiece of the show was a commemorative video, filmed by Ted Resnikoff of Free Radical Creative. It captured the history and spirit of the HSBA from over 40 interviews with members representing the association’s history and its future. Notable inclusions were Sheldon Cohen, the newsboy who created Out of Town News in 1955 and became the unofficial mayor of Harvard Square; Christos Soillis, the owner of Felix Shoe Repair, founded in 1913; and Paul Macdonald of Leavitt & Peirce, founded in 1883.

The association’s website, www.harvardsquare.com, has dedicated several pages to a broad presentation of its history, including stories about some of the Square’s more illustrious characters written by our own Gavin Kleespies and intern Katie MacDonald.

A splendid gala, “One Night in One Hundred Years,” was held on November 20 at the Charles Hotel with 370 guests in attendance.

Support Your City’s History

We are an independent, nonprofit organization. Your membership helps preserve our history.

Single $35 _______ Family $60 _______ Dana Fellow $100 _______ Dual Dana Fellows $150______

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Cambridge Historical Society, 159 Brattle St., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138.
If you’ve read anything about Richard Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983), you probably know that Fuller was kicked out of Harvard College. And not just once, but twice. He never graduated. You may not know, however, about some of his more positive experiences in Cambridge, including a stint as a visiting Harvard professor in the early 1960s.

In May of 1929, the Harvard Society for Contemporary Art presented an exhibition called “4D,” which displayed a model of Fuller’s Dymaxion House. During the exhibition, Fuller himself lectured and demonstrated the features of the house daily. He used 4D to reference the fourth dimension – time – to emphasize his preoccupation with efficiency. His six-sided house was designed to be affordable, easily assembled, adaptable, and virtually self-sufficient. Inspired by Henry Ford’s automobile plants, Fuller hoped his house would be similarly mass-produced.

The local press covered the HSCA exhibition with bemused interest. On May 21, 1929, the day after the show opened, the Harvard Crimson ran a fairly objective story outlining the principles of Fuller’s design and announcing details of the exhibition. The next day, the Crimson took a more critical stance. The unknown writer described the translucent, plastic walls, inflatable doors and floors, and its central, collapsible mast, then expressed concern for the architectural profession and aesthetics if the concept caught on.

A headline in the Boston Globe of May 20, 1929, declared, “Hangs His House from a Mast Instead of Resting It on Ground,” and described the exhibition and Fuller’s “highly revolutionary idea on housing.” It detailed some of its more unusual features: “To open the door, you press a button which deflates the door, to shut it you blow it up….The bathroom is no longer a collection of fixtures – it is a “sculptural unit,” made in one piece. “All this and much more sounds freakish,” the Globe reported, but then reassured, “Mr. Fuller is no crank. He is an accomplished engineer. He has served in the Navy and is sane enough to have been entrusted with the command of a destroyer…”

The young Philip Johnson, then an undergraduate at Harvard, attended one of Fuller’s lectures that week. Later he reminisced: “That Dymaxion House, I disliked it very much, but that made no difference. You see the point is…that I learned vast amounts of the potentialities of architecture that I never forgot – from that show” (Nicholas Fox Weber, Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art, 1928-1943, New York, 1992, 68).

The Marshall Field department store in Chicago presented the first public display of Fuller’s house in April of 1929. The public relations people at the store disliked Fuller’s 4D, and worked with him to come up with a new term. They had him talk for several hours as they wrote down words that inspired them. Syllables from “dynamic,” “maximum,” and the scientific term “ion” became Dymaxion. They patented it in Fuller’s name and it soon became the catchall referent.

In March of 1930, a model of the Dymaxion House was displayed again in Cambridge, this time in the lobby of the Fogg Museum, with Fuller again present to lecture. The following February he spoke at the Harvard Club in Boston under the auspices of the Harvard Engineering Society. He again illustrated his lecture with a model of the Dymaxion House and, as the Crimson of February 2, 1931, reported, also used “pictures showing the application of new and revolutionary ideas to the business of everyday living.”

The Dymaxion Car also came to Cambridge on an April morning in 1934, when it was driven through Harvard Square. The Harvard Crimson of April 16 described the scene: “A strange looking, 19-foot, rodent-like vehicle meandered up and down on Massachusetts Avenue in the neighborhood of the Square on Saturday morning.” Two months later, Fuller’s three-wheeled car was an attraction at a week-long open house at the Ford Motor Company assembly plant in Somerville. The Boston Globe of June 7 ran a photo, calling it “a radical departure in automobile design.”

Although neither the car nor the house caught on with the public, Fuller, of course, continued to invent and had a long career in engineering, technology consulting, and as a board member for many companies. In the academic year 1961-62, he was back in Cambridge, living at Quincy House on the Harvard campus, serving as Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry.

By the early 1960s, Fuller had made his reputation and was considered a philosophical sage but was still bent on solving all the world’s problems. “Buckminster Fuller is technology incarnate,” wrote Michael Gruen in the Harvard Crimson of February 27, 1962. In an early piece on one of his Norton Lectures, Gruen noted, “Fuller spoke for two and a half hours without script or notes. ‘Thinking out loud,’ he began slowly, but later spewed forth his thoughts at breakneck pace” (Crimson, February 23, 1962).
The Cambridge Historical Society’s Annual Report

Curator’s Committee
By Heli Meltsner

The list of gifts to the Society’s collection has been impressive in 2010: in their quality, quantity, and the surprising number of donors. They include many objects, such as fire irons and andirons from the Edwin Land House, candy boxes from a Cambridge candy manufacturer, photographs, and material from the Cambridge Tenants’ Organizing Committee. An unusual object for our collection is a beautiful friendship quilt made and signed by her friends in 1848 for a Cambridge woman embarking on a religious mission abroad.

We have also received many collections that will add to our archives: among others, the travel diaries and hundreds of slides of West Cambridge resident Lois Forbes, documenting landscapes and gardens around the world; and the extensive personal family papers of Betsy Siggins-Schmidt, the manager of Passim, whose family history goes back to the 1600s in Boston as well as those that relate to her long and deep relationship with folk music in Cambridge. Rounder Records donated a set of all its available recordings on CD, a huge collection. The papers of a former Cambridge teacher will help document education in the city.

For the second year, students at MIT undertook to digitally document every building in a Cambridge neighborhood. This year they donated between 400 and 500 photographs of buildings in Area 4. Gifts of images from Cambridge residents at the Society’s Second Annual Photo Scanning Day in August amounted to over 500 photos.

The digitization of the Society’s archives has been a major undertaking. We received a federal Institute of Museum and Library Services matching grant for $12,000 for digitizing our large photo collection assembled over one hundred years. Under the direction of Assistant Director Cynthia Brennan and with the help of numerous volunteers, much has been accomplished.

Staff and volunteers have greatly expanded access to our resources, adding finding aids for the Old Cambridge Photographic Club collection, the Siggins-Schmidt collection, Mitch Greenhill’s Folklife collection, the CHS photo collection, Bill Cavellini’s papers and the Child Family papers, and the Hollis-Gerrish papers related to the Squirrel Nut Company. All of these will eventually go on our website; the last two of them already are.

In the last few years we have added to our collections as much as we did in the last one hundred years. Due to the mass of these resources, we are fast running out of space for the archive. A Space Access Committee appointed to deal with this issue met frequently throughout the year. After considering all options, it planned to expand the archive into an unused attic, but the plan was abandoned because, although the cost was modest, we had no money in the budget for the necessary work. Nevertheless, the problem remains critical, and space will have to be found to store our acquisitions.

Our resident archivist, Mark Vassar, continues to do a splendid job with limited resources. We are lucky to have him as well as the many volunteers who scan, catalogue, and make accessible our growing collections.

Publications Committee
By Michael Kenney

*The Rediscovery of the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House*, a major publication of the Society, appeared in the spring. Edited by Michael Kenney and Gavin Kleespies, it contains articles by leading authorities on Colonial architecture, as well as historians and researchers who worked on the rediscovery project, which authoritatively dated the initial construction of the house to 1685.

Finance Committee
By Andrew Leighton

In 2010, financial operations showed a deficit of about $35,000 that is the product of two principal factors: first, about $15,000 was due to the mismatch in timing of expenditure and the receipt of monies raised for specific activities; and second, about $20,000 was the result of a very ambitious program of activities whose costs were in excess of normal funding sources. These significant activities were: increases in collections, the number of educational programs, responses to research questions, coordination and outreach with other organizations, and significant efforts to bring the Society into this digital age. All of this activity has put a strain on the Society’s financial resources and will be a major subject of review by the Council.

The investment portfolio started the year with a value of almost $468,000 and, even after withdrawals to fund the operating loss, ended the year up $10,000, to almost $478,000. This was the result of a market appreciation of almost $33,000 over the 4% spending rule withdrawn for budgeting purposes.

Membership fees, fundraisers and annual giving all did well but have not kept pace with the costs of the current level of programming, leaving a gap in net operating income. It is this gap that must be closed either by finding additional income or by reducing the level of endeavors undertaken. There do not appear to be any easy solutions, but that is the task the Council must work on this year. It seems the Society is suffering from its own successes.

Development Committee
By Rebekah Kaufman

For our 2010 spring fundraiser we had 68 donors for a total of $16,090. To compare: In 2009, we had 95 donors for a total of $16,405. It is interesting to note that although we had 28% fewer donors in spring 2010 vs. spring 2009, our total gift level remained
If all goes well, I guarantee that you will savor every moment of this most satisfying event.

Facilities Committee
By Charlie Allen

If this were a popular radio show it might sound like this: “It’s been a quiet year here at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House, where the bones are old and the pipes are too.” This is the sixth time I’ve stood before you as your Facilities Chair, and each year I’ve told you about big doings with roofs, and chimneys, and wiring, and painting, and discovery. All made possible by two Cambridge Community Preservation Grants administered by Charlie Sullivan and the Cambridge Historical Commission and seriously depleting the Cambridge Historical Society’s savings to pay the matching portions. But not this year.

The good news this year is that nothing happened. No ice dams, no conked-out air conditioners, no breaks in the plumbing pipes—nothing major broke and nothing dramatic got repaired. The silver lining is that the buildings and grounds portion of the budget balanced. And we didn’t spend more precious savings on matching grants to make capital improvements.

Instead, the staff and Council worked with a generous grant from the Cambridge Savings Bank that published our book, funded the displays, and otherwise allowed us to reinterpret the house as a Cambridge History Museum.

Last year I said that if you went out to the garage you’d see two rows of 2-inch-thick slabs of honey locust wood from a tree that had to be taken down in our neighbor’s yard. It may well have been planted by Joseph Lee shortly after the Revolutionary War and was over 200 years old. Major portions of the tree were milled into lumber. Thanks to the relentless hard work and frugality of our executive director, Gavin Kleespies, enough of the Cambridge Savings Bank grant is left to have conference tables made from our portion of the tree.

Also last year I asked if you’d noticed that the shutters were off the front of the house. Gavin and I didn’t think they’d make another winter. You see they are now back. Still sagging magnificently but now reinforced and epoxy-ed together enough to stand the test of another New England winter. We retrieved them from the garage and had a shutter “stabilization” party.

It may well have been good or even necessary to take a break from the frenzied capital improvements. The staff and our coffers deserved a break. That said, everything old and tentative is another year older: the Chandler-era plumbing, the magnificently sagging shutters, exterior painting, needing more archival space, and on and on.

Hopefully next year I will be able to at least tell you we have a plan to raise the funds for those endeavors. Thank you all for your continued support.

Program Committee
By Gavin Kleespies

In 2010, we hosted 18 programs for CHS members, 16 of which were also open to the public. Our programs were held in 10 different locations across the city and were meant to appeal to different groups within our membership. We also used our programming to help build relationships with other organizations. Some highlights for the year include:

- Cambridge music history with the New England Folk Music Archives
- Perkins 28, a film about secret Harvard trials of students accused of homosexuality with the filmmaker
- The history of printing in Cambridge held in the Athenaeum Press building
- A culinary history tour featuring chefs and owners as speakers
- Cambridgeport History Day, featuring “If This House Could Talk…”
- Our first “How To” Workshop on the correct way to digitize historical photographs
Richard Beaty

President of Hammond Real Estate’s Cambridge and Belmont offices, Tod Beaty is a 32-year resident of Cambridge and a graduate of Beloit College and of Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education. In 1981, Tod founded Ingram, Rettig & Beaty Real Estate, where he built the firm’s residential division before becoming president in 1990. In 1993, he joined forces with Hammond Residential’s Saul Cohen and Joe Hare to extend the firm’s reach in Greater Boston. Tod’s company has grown through acquisitions that include Ellis & Andrews, Cambridge’s oldest real estate firm, and Breed & Associates and Natoli Real Estate in Belmont. Tod is active in a range of community organizations, including the Harvard Square Business Association, the Cambridge Center for Adult Education, and the Buckingham, Browne & Nichols School.

Liz Adams

Liz was born and raised in Bethesda, Maryland. Her love of all things historical began at the National Cathedral School for Girls. Her love of Cambridge began when she moved here in 1978 to attend Harvard, where she majored in American History. After graduation and working for IBM in Manhattan, Liz received an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School at Northwestern University. She moved to Boston and worked as a marketing director for BayBanks, Boston Company, and Fidelity Investments. She retired to care for her three children.

Liz is married to Cliff Lasser. They just renovated a 115-year-old home on Cambridge’s Hubbard Park Road. When not driving carpools, Liz reads nonfiction and researches genealogy (her ancestor George Adams settled in Watertown in 1645). A former high school and college competitive swimmer specializing in distance events, Liz practices with the Cambridge Masters Swim Club.

Film Documents 1971 Takeover

Employing multiple perspectives, the documentary film Left on Pearl: Women Take Over 888 Memorial Drive tells the story of a little-known but highly significant event in the history of the Second Wave of the Women’s Movement.

The March 6, 1971, takeover of a Harvard University building, formerly a knitting factory, was the “surprise ending” of that year’s International Woman’s Day march. The occupation of 888 Memorial Drive by hundreds of women highlighted many of the hopes, triumphs, conflicts, and tensions of Second Wave feminism. The building the women seized was long ago demolished; the site is now Harvard graduate student housing.

One of the few takeovers by women for women, this action was transformative for participants, sparking the development of other feminist and community organizations.

Through archival footage, news articles, television news footage, and interviews with participants, community activists, scholars, and Harvard representatives, this documentary, directed by local filmmaker Susan Rivo, will help make visible the oft-hidden history of women and enrich public understanding of gender and the construction of memory.

The takeover led directly to the establishment of the longest continuously operating community Women’s Center in the United States, located at 46 Pleasant Street. The 888 Women’s History Project, which is producing this film, was created to document the history of the Cambridge Women’s Center and second-wave feminism in the Boston area. Libby Bouvier and Susan K. Jacoby are the Project’s founders and the film’s producers.

A fine-cut work-in-progress screening of “Left on Pearl: Women Take Over 888 Memorial Drive, Cambridge” will take place on March 6, 2011, 2 p.m., at the Brattle Theater.

Society Hosts First “How To” Workshop

On December 1, 2010, Cynthia Brennan, the Society’s assistant director, presented the first in a series of how-to workshops at the Hooper-Lee-Nichols House. The session, “Digitizing Your Historic Material,” gave twenty participants an opportunity to access new technology or to improve their existing skills.

Having scanned and photographed rare and historic materials for the American Antiquarian Society and for the Society’s own collection, Cindy has a wealth of information to share. Her PowerPoint presentation covered some of the technical aspects of digitizing, the options for file types, and the settings recommended to produce a master scan. The group learned how to deal with different kinds of materials, such as film, slides, and bound books. While organizing and keeping track of a digital archive appears to be complex, posting the scanned materials on web-based services or sending them by email is an easier task.

Cindy described basic equipment for digitizing, such as scanners, cameras, tripods, and copy stands. She then demonstrated several scanners by digitizing photos brought in by workshop members.
Bill is a partner at Epstein & August, LLP, concentrating in the representation of municipalities and nonprofit, tax-exempt, charitable corporations. Bill has been very active in the city and has a strong interest in Cambridge and American history. As one of the founders and president of the Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association, he was part of the team that helped organize Cambridgeport History Day.

Bill also spearheaded the support that resulted in a zoning amendment to better preserve open space near the historic Charles River Basin, and he is also working on other Charles River historic preservation projects. He is a graduate of Princeton University and Harvard Law School.

Marie S. Lodi is currently the senior vice president, chief human resources and marketing officer at Cambridge Savings Bank. Marie has been employed at the bank for 17 years and is a member of its senior management team. She is the Human Resources Committee Chair for the Massachusetts Bankers Association and is a member of the New England Work and Family Association Steering Committee. She is also a member of the Northeast Human Resources Association, the Society for Human Resources Management, and the New England Financial Marketing Association. Marie grew up in Cambridge, earned her bachelor’s degree at Bentley University and her M.B.A. at the University of Massachusetts.

Travis McCready is the first executive director of the Kendall Square Association, leading the efforts to preserve, promote, and advance the interests of Kendall Square, the densest square mile of innovation on the planet and a vibrant place to live and work. Travis was previously the COO and CFO of the Massachusetts Convention Center Authority, where he oversaw all operations for the commonwealth’s three convention centers. He also served as chief of staff of the Boston Foundation, one of the nation’s oldest and largest community foundations, and director of community affairs for Harvard University. In 2009, the Boston Business Journal named Travis one of the areas top “40 under 40” young business leaders. He currently serves as a trustee of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, an overseer of the Institute of Contemporary Art, and director of the Boston Public Market Association. He received his B.A. from Yale University and J.D. from the University of Iowa.

Jason Weeks is the executive director of the Cambridge Arts Council (CAC), a public nonprofit agency. CAC provides services and programming designed to nurture and stimulate public awareness of and support for the arts. Jason works with the CAC Board, the Trustees of the Arts Council’s nonprofit corporation, the Cambridge Public Art Commission, and the Cambridge City Council and administration to develop, refine, and produce the core agency programs and services. In addition to his role at CAC, Jason lectures at schools and universities and regularly participates in conferences to discuss issues, challenges, and effective strategies related to arts administration. Jason has a background in music and theater and holds a B.A. in Music from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a master’s degree in Arts Administration from Boston University. Jason and his family currently live in Maynard.

By Daphne Abeel

The Cambridge Historical Society held its 106th annual meeting on Sunday, January 30. Two councilors, Charles Allen and Maggie Booz, were elevated to officer rank, vice president and secretary, respectively.

The meeting was enlivened by two talks, from Cynthia Brennan, CHS assistant director, and photographer Phyllis Bretholtz.

Brennan described the effort to digitize the CHS photo collection, aided by a grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services. The year-long project will digitize photographs, negatives, lithographs, and paintings of various sizes. This will make the collections more accessible to the public and lessen the risk to the original items.

Bretholtz, a Cambridge photographer and resident, was once a teacher at CRLS. After her retirement, her career as a photographer shifted from documenting people to documenting places.

Bretholtz’s work documenting Central Square. Taken from the roof of the Holmes Building, looking north

One high point was an exhibit she worked on featuring Central Square, titled “Central Square: Then and Now,” a study of what has changed and what has stayed the same. Mimicking the sites of older photographs, Bretholtz positioned her camera to achieve the same view as the older image.

The project was a joint effort by the photographer, the Clear Conscience Café, which held an exhibit of the photographs, the Cambridge Historical Commission, and the CHS. The collection of images can be seen at www.cambridgehistory.org.
Test your knowledge!

This is an 1866 photo of a church that is still standing in Cambridge. It was built in 1845 and moved in 1867. Designed by Isaak Melvin, it is one of a handful of pre-Civil War churches in the city. Do you know the original site of this church? Do you know where it is today and how it has been altered? To learn the answers, look at a 12/10/10 post on our Facebook page.

This image was digitized thanks to a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and matching funds provided by the Cambridge Trust Company, the Gund Family, and the Council of the Cambridge Historical Society.

CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
The Hooper-Lee-Nichols House
159 Brattle Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

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