

Foreword

The following pages complete an important aspect of the work of the Cambridge Historical Commission, the survey and analysis of the City's architectural history, including both the invisible past and the visible present.

Like the other volumes of the Survey — *East Cambridge*, 1965, *Mid Cambridge* 1967, *Cambridgeport* 1971, and *Old Cambridge*, 1973 — the present publication is the combined work of many talented and devoted people — members of the Commission, past and present, interested and knowledgeable advisers from the community at large, scholars, researchers, writers, photographers, designers, and the members of the Commission's excellent staff, who are listed in the succeeding section of acknowledgements. Included also in the present

book is an index for ready reference to the vast amount of information contained in this and the four preceding volumes of the Survey.

The Survey, now complete, is but a tool to serve the Commission and the community in facing larger issues of city planning and governmental attitudes. Whereas, until recently, change in our cities and towns has largely been spontaneous and unguided, we are coming to a more mature awareness that not everything new is good, nor should everything old be replaced. And while headlong individualists continue to regard public concern over the effect of their activities as odious and even unconstitutional, there is growing a new attitude, already reflected in law, which dictates that we as a society have the right to evaluate environmental changes before they are made. The development of criteria and factual bases for such evaluation has been one of the chief concerns of the Commission and the reason for the creation of these volumes.

Appreciation, conservation and use of the City's historic resources will continue to be aided by the Survey, but the Commission has a multitude of other programs aimed at effective understanding and care of our heritage. During the recent Bicentennial years a fine slide-tape history of the City entitled "Reflections on Cambridge" has been presented free to the public each summer at Harvard Hall in conjunction with Harvard's own Bicentennial exhibition. A large scale model showing Cambridge as it was in 1775 has been prepared and is now on exhibition above the main stair at City Hall. These presentations were paid for by a grant from the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission which was generously matched by five local banks.

During 1976 the Commission's first historic building and site markers have appeared — blue porcelain enamel ovals with dates and texts in white lettering (Fig. A). Eventually about two hundred such markers will be put up to signify the City's notable historic structures, sites and events. Other markers of a more detailed type are the "history stations", outdoor pylons of concrete bearing porcelain panels which tell in

text and pictures the story of the City's growth. The first history station is now standing before the Middlesex County Registry of Deeds in East Cambridge. Others will follow in Central Square, Harvard Square and Porter Square.

Further public education about the City's history and architecture has been pursued with publication of brochures: "Walking Guides" to Old Cambridge and East Cambridge, and "Cambridge in the Revolution", all available to the public without charge. Forthcoming brochures will deal with such subjects as the history of the Black community in Cambridge and the cultural life of Cambridge in the 19th century. A further publication, "Paint Colors for your 19th Century House" has stimulated interest in appropriate maintenance of the City's numerous Victorian buildings, and additional publications on building maintenance and restoration are planned.

Additional awareness of desirable renovation procedures has been sought by initiation of a program of awards for appropriate historic preservation and restoration, the first such public recognition having been given this year to the Wellington-Harrington Corporation for its sensitive remodeling of Linwood Court Homes at Broadway and Columbia Streets.

Increasing public interest in the protection offered by historic districting has led to a proposal, now before the City Council, to amalgamate the existing three historic districts — the North Cambridge Historic District into an enlarged and unified Old Cambridge Historic District. In East Cambridge also there has been interest expressed in formation of a new historic district to protect this remarkably preserved and historically valuable part of the City.

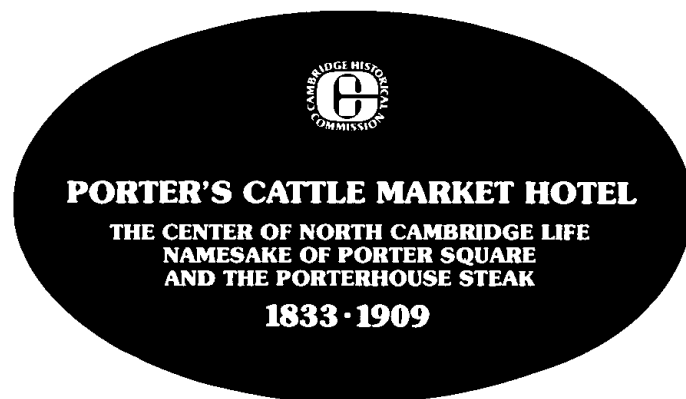
While research, education, publications, and creation and administration of historic districts have occupied most of the Commission's energies in the past, the future appears to hold a wide range of new responsibilities and usefulness. Increasing Federal funding of historic preservation projects through the National Park Service and the Community Development Block Grant Program has brought the Commission

new tasks and new relations with other branches of the City government. At the present time the Commission is administering the restoration of Fort Washington in Cambridgeport and restoration of The Old Burying Ground in Harvard Square, the first such public works projects to be initiated, funded and administered by the Commission — or perhaps by any Commission. In addition the Commission now must review and approve applications for National Register grants, and review and comment on the historical and architectural impact of all Federally funded public works and housing rehabilitation projects. Under another program, new this year, the Commission makes direct grants to owners who wish to restore or retain original architectural features of their homes, but could not otherwise afford to do so. This program is administered in cooperation with three agencies involved with the City's Home Improvement Program.

In these activities and in many others, such as advising on the renovations to the Common and the creation there of the Dawes Memorial, or in creation of a new system of historic street signs with the Traffic Department, the Commission works to build on increasing understanding and awareness of the City's remarkable historic resources. Central to this effort, of course, is the on-going study of a Preservation Plan for the entire City, a system of concepts and procedures which is being developed with the Planning Department and other City groups and agencies.

The present volume on Northwest Cambridge, which completes the Survey begun in 1964 will, we hope, open the eyes of many to the interest and significance of a part of Cambridge too long regarded as ordinary. Instead of chronicling mostly architectural, political and social history, as in the past, this volume breaks new ground by approaching the subject from an urban geographer's point of view, in this way giving us fresh insights and criteria which will condition our future judgments.

Robert G. Neiley,
Chairman
Cambridge Historical Commission
July 17, 1976



A. Historic Site Marker,
Porter's Hotel.

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Northwest Cambridge

By: Cambridge Historical Commission

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