PART THREE: CONCLUSION

ANALYSIS OF THE AREA BY STREETS

Discussing the outstanding or typical buildings tells only part of the story of an area; the total environment must be considered as well. All the buildings in a given district, whatever their condition or importance, create an atmosphere, a streetscape. Streets can be grouped together as neighborhoods where there are similar house types, living patterns, and inhabitants. Since adjacent neighborhoods have natural affinities to each other, larger units (such as Dana Hill or the Oxford Street area) grow up.

This final section will describe and analyze the various streets and neighborhoods of Mid Cambridge. No attempt has been made to mention each of the more than ninety streets in the study area. Instead, the different neighborhoods will be characterized and a few outstanding streets described.

The streets of Mid Cambridge are remarkably varied. There are long avenues and short streets, streets with buildings all of one period, streets with examples of all the nineteenth century styles. Some are narrow corridors closely lined with buildings; others are more open, with widely spaced houses. The early houses were built in scattered clusters; the filling-in of streets has been gradual. In East Cambridge, by contrast, whole blocks were built up very rapidly and in one style, and there was less disparity in size and cost of buildings than in Mid Cambridge.

The Major Thoroughfares

The key to the development of Mid Cambridge as a whole lies in its major thoroughfares: Massachusetts Avenue, Harvard Street, Cambridge Street, and Kirkland Street. These thoroughfares developed as, and still serve as, transportation routes to Boston and to the several urban foci of Cambridge -- the villages (Old Cambridge, East Cambridge, and Cambridgeport) and the squares (Harvard, Central, Inman, and Porter). The function of these streets as a transportation network made possible the suburban development of Dana Hill, Shady Hill, and the Oxford Street area. Purely residential neighborhoods grew up between the thoroughfares, always within walking distance of transportation to the larger centers. There was no need for Mid Cambridge to develop an urban center of its own, since the major streets served as ribbons tying the three areas to the rest of the city.

Most of the thoroughfares were similar in their development. Starting as highways through unsettled farm land, they gradually assumed a more residential character as handsome mansions were built along the routes. By the end of the nineteenth century, increased urban pressures for new commercial areas and for higher density land use had brought apartment buildings and stores to most of these streets. Today their residential character is almost totally lost. One can only regret that lack of zoning and failure to develop an appropriate architectural character have made some of the streets as unattractive as they are today. Where change is inevitable, one hopes that the new will equal the old in quality. Gas stations and laundries are no substitutes for the fine buildings now destroyed.

Massachusetts Avenue

Massachusetts Avenue, now the longest of the streets within the study area and its western and southern boundary, is also one of the oldest. The southern arm, or Main Street, was first a path from Harvard Square to the salt marshes and Pelham's Island (near the present Columbia and Pine Streets); later it was extended as a causeway leading to the West Boston Bridge. The northern arm, or North Avenue, was the original road to Menotomy, now Arlington. In 1894 the names of both branches were changed to Massachusetts Avenue.
at the same time that West Chester Park in Boston was so changed, thus establishing the long avenue that today runs from Dorchester to Lincoln.

The northern arm, the road to Menotomy, played a role in the American Revolution. Dawes took this road as he carried the message of the British march, and Lord Percy followed the same route, taking troops to the aid of Pitcairn and Smith at the battles of Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775. At that time, a handful of farm houses was scattered along the road, and near the Little Common was a small group including the Hastings-Holmes house. The Walling map of 1854 shows a cluster of buildings near Porter Square and some survivals from the pre-Revolutionary period near the Little Common. Later, a number of impressive mansions were constructed along the avenue, most of them now destroyed.

Few pre-Revolutionary houses existed along the southern arm of Massachusetts Avenue, or Main Street. By 1830, Cambridgeport's development had brought a cluster of buildings to what is now Central Square, and by 1854 another group, concentrated between Ellery and Hancock Streets, had appeared. Among the latter group were some of the city's finest Greek Revival houses, none now surviving (see Fig. 73). By 1877, large and impressive houses lined the entire length of the avenue, and many of the city's most important citizens lived there.

Commercial buildings were then confined to Central and Harvard Squares. Since the mid 1890's, however, the character of Massachusetts Avenue has been changing. First, lots were subdivided and large apartment buildings squeezed between the older houses. Later, as the need for additional commercial space grew, shops and stores began to spread away from the squares; today the avenue's residential character is completely lost. Since it is unviewable from any distance in front, one catches only sidelong glances of it where it intrudes among the smaller nearby buildings. Whether or not future construction of the tall buildings planned by the university will pull things together depends on the architec's understanding.

Today the situation on Kirkland Street is changing rapidly, and the street is becoming more and more crowded and nondescript. The change is symbolized by the present entrance to Kirkland Street, dominated by an unlikely combination of buildings: Ware and Van Brunt's Memorial Hall (1870, Fig. 49) and Yamasaki's William James Hall (1964, Fig. 70). The two tall buildings tower over the area, the gleaming white of the recent building as discordant a note as the harsh polychromy of the older 'Gothic' one. The later building, while appealing in its own right to many people, fails in juxtaposition to its neighbors. Since it is unviewable from any distance in front, one catches only sidelong glances of it where it intrudes among the smaller nearby buildings. Whether or not future construction of the tall buildings planned by the university will pull things together depends on the architects' understanding.

Harvard overshadows Kirkland Street in more ways than one. Over the years, the university has gradually spread out, engulfing and in some cases destroying the houses of Professors' Row. Both Harvard's need to expand and the pressures for more multi-unit dwellings have changed the original character of the street.

Kirkland Street

Kirkland Street is one of the oldest thoroughfares in Cambridge; it was already in use as the highway from Watertown to Charlestown when Cambridge was settled in 1630. It remained a highway throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with a few houses (such as the Danforth, Frost, and Foxcroft houses) near the western end. By 1830, when the former King's Highway assumed its present name, the early houses had been replaced by five dwellings that gave it the nickname "Professors' Row." Additional buildings appear on the 1854 map, and by 1877 the western half of the avenue was lined with impressive houses, a few of which remain today, such as the Lovering house at 38 Kirkland Street (Fig. 71) and the Francis house at the corner of Francis Avenue and Kirkland Street (Fig. 25). The eastern end of the street remained rural until about 1900.

Broadway and Cambridge Street

Broadway and Cambridge Street resulted from the construction of two bridges between Boston and the eastern part of Cambridge -- the West Boston (now Longfellow) Bridge, built in 1793, and the Canal or Craigie Bridge (now replaced by the Charles River Dam), built in 1809. Connections with Old Cambridge were soon provided. The first, Broadway, was laid out in 1805 by the Cambridge and Concord Turnpike Corporation as an extension of the Concord Turnpike from its terminus at the Cambridge Common to the causeway of the West Boston Bridge. Originally called Concord Street, Broadway was opened to traffic in 1812. Cambridge Street was started by Andrew Craigie, who, with associates, had built the Craigie Bridge and was developing East Cambridge. William Winthrop and Francis Foxcroft, who owned land at the western end of the road near its junction with Broadway, were his partners in the construction of
the street. It was finished shortly after the completion of the bridge in 1809. Both streets were slow to build up, reflecting their function as thoroughways rather than as residential streets. Starting in 1853, horsecar lines went down Cambridge Street and Broadway to connect Harvard Square with Boston; these lines served commuters who lived on the quieter side streets.

Before 1854, each of the two streets had only a few buildings, grouped near the ends or at major crossings. A few of these early buildings still survive, such as three Greek Revival double houses at the western end of Cambridge Street, built in the 1840's by Royal Richardson (Fig. 103). Another Greek Revival group still stands on Broadway near Prospect Street, but so rebuilt as to be almost unrecognizable.

After 1854, the development of the two streets took different paths, since Broadway built up rapidly, while Cambridge Street remained undeveloped until the end of the century. Construction on Broadway came in clumps rather than in a continuous strip along the entire length of the street. A group of mansards soon filled in around the Greek Revival houses near Prospect and Inman, and another group, now destroyed, grew up at the western end of the street near Trowbridge and Felton. On the heights of Dana Hill between Dana and Hancock Streets, the houses and lots were larger. Several imposing mansions were built, among these, the house of J. Warren Merrill, mayor of Cambridge in 1865-66 and developer of much surrounding Dana Hill land. The Merrill house and the neighboring one of Emmons Raymond, also a real estate developer, have since been torn down, and this section of the hill today is covered by apartment buildings and two-family houses. There is still no coherent sequence of buildings on Broadway; while a few handsome houses are to be found, the image is no longer domestic. The large schools at either end of the Dana Hill section of Broadway -- Rindge Technical and Cambridge High and Latin at one end, Longfellow and Harvard (now City Hall Annex) at the other -- dominate and define the character of the street. The several apartment houses along the length of the street reinforce the non-residential mass and scale. Broadway remains today a traffic artery; one tends to pass along it, scarcely aware of the buildings on either side.

Harvard Street

Harvard Street is the only one of the east-west avenues that has never served for through traffic. Unlike Massachusetts Avenue, Broadway, and Cambridge Street, no street railway has ever run along it, and even today there is no bus line. Started as Canal Street in Cambridgeport in 1801, by 1803 it had been extended as far as Lee Street in Dana Hill. Despite opposition by Judge Dana, whose property it crossed, the street reached Harvard Square, and the whole length was opened to traffic by 1808. It has always been more residential than the other east-west streets, either because there was no transportation line on it or because the subdivision of lots along it set the stage for larger houses. Later, it was protected by zoning to a limited degree. The portion of Harvard Street from Prospect Street to its junction with Massachusetts Avenue was partitioned in the 1830's, and by 1854 thirty-three houses had been built, among them some of the finest Greek Revival mansions in the city. Less than a third survive today, but they include 325 Harvard Street, near Hancock Street, and a fine group of smaller houses just across the street (320, 322-24, 330; Fig. 101). Each successive building style brought fine examples to Harvard Street, including the handsome mansards between Hancock and Bigelow (most now destroyed or altered), the Italianate and Gothic houses at 336 and 338 (Fig. 120), the series of Queen Anne houses at 280, 284, 298, and 314 (Figs. 175-177, 164), and the Colonial Revivals at 340 and 339 (Figs. 186, 187). Most of these houses were impressive, large, single-family dwellings set high above the street. A few multi-unit structures were equally impressive in scale and quality; notable is a brick row at the corner of Lee Street.

Fully built up by 1896, Harvard Street was one of the handsomest streets in the city. The vista of the street started at Quincy Square with the impressive gray mass of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church (Fig. 42), followed, as the street gradually sloped up the ridge of Dana Hill, by a series of brick and frame houses. At the top of the hill stood the Whittemore house (formerly at 329, destroyed in 1965; Fig. 79), flanked by four other houses similar in scale. Only two survive, the James P. Melledge house at 335 and the Albert Vinal house at 325. Down the slope of Harvard Street toward Prospect Street was the series of mansard and Queen Anne houses already mentioned; a small Gothic-style church on the corner of Inman marked the end of Dana Hill.

In the light of its earlier handsome character, no street in the area has suffered more or is suffering more today than Harvard Street. Shortly after 1894 several apartment buildings, discordant in scale and squeezed onto inadequate lots, were put up. By 1930, thirteen more had been built, and an equal number have been added since
then, seven just in the years 1961-66. This latest series of apartment buildings is particularly intrusive. No attempt has been made to harmonize with the older houses on the street; materials, heights, and siting are all discordant.

Population has increased enormously. Since 1894, twenty-five houses on Harvard Street have been replaced by 740 dwelling units, 280 built in 1961-66. Only ten single dwellings are left on the street; although almost all were single-family originally, most have been converted to apartments or rooming houses. Increasing population in this era brings the problem of cars, which crowd the street and destroy its formerly quiet character.

Despite the unfortunate changes, Harvard Street is not run-down. Houses along it are well kept up, and with a few exceptions, retain their original handsome appearance. Harvard Street is now zoned for high density land use, which, while recognizing prevailing conditions and future demands, probably also condemns the remaining houses to destruction and replacement by apartments. Even though it is too late to recapture the original greatness of Harvard Street, enough of the original appearance is left in most sections to justify preservation efforts.

Three Neighborhoods and Their Side Streets

The thoroughfares linked Mid Cambridge to the urban centers, but they also served to divide it into separate neighborhoods. Through traffic moving along the thoroughfares created natural barriers, isolating the small streets between and allowing a series of subneighborhoods to develop. Since the dynamics of development in Mid Cambridge have always been centrifugal (people go out to work, out to shop, out for services), none of the three areas studied has the cohesion and sense of neighborhood identity found in East Cambridge.

Dana Hill

Dana Hill gives evidence of its long, slow development. Greek Revival cottages are overshadowed by apartment buildings; mansards and three-deckers stand side by side. The east-west avenues have set up barriers so that there are three subsections within the larger area. Between Massachusetts Avenue and Harvard Street, the side streets are lined with modest houses, many still occupied by single families. A number of these streets were built up in one period; there are fewer intrusive new buildings than elsewhere in Dana Hill. There is a sense of neighborhood, or of several small neighborhoods each a few blocks square.

The character of the area between Harvard Street and Broadway is quite different, as it always has been. The mansions on Harvard Street and Broadway occupied large lots stretching back toward the center of the blocks. Fewer houses were built on the very short
side streets, and then not in groups as they were south of Harvard Street. The larger holdings did not break up until late in the century. Thus, an area like Merrill and Crawford Streets and Goodman Road was immediately built up with apartment buildings and two-family houses. The process begun on the Broadway side is now continuing at an accelerated rate near Harvard Street; as the new apartment buildings go up, the area grows more and more characterless. Large apartment houses on Hancock and Ware Streets, as well as those along Broadway and Harvard Street, increase the sense of the anonymous urban community.

A third neighborhood, between Broadway and Kirkland Street, can be distinguished. From the beginning, the houses on all but a few streets have been more modest, more closely spaced, less varied in form than in the other areas. The character of the neighborhood has changed less. As new streets have been opened and as new types of buildings have become popular, the style and even the scale of the houses have changed, but there is a consistent pattern of modest, often identical houses closely grouped along the tree-lined streets. Here, in contrast to other parts of Dana Hill, there is a strong sense of community. Children play on the sidewalks, neighbors chat as they walk along the street, gardens are well tended, and houses are well maintained.

Of the individual streets, Dana Street can be singled out to exemplify the history of the development of Dana Hill. The street's origins reach back to the original settlement; the last buildings on it were put up shortly after 1900. There have been mansions as well as cottages, and there are examples of all the nineteenth century house types. Dana Street was first a path to the common pales and a division between the Planting Field and Small Lot Hill; later it was dominated by the Dana mansion. After the mansion burned down and the Dana estate was divided, a handful of small Greek Revival houses was built near the Massachusetts Avenue end (Figs. 96, 97), and two imposing houses appeared on the corners of Dana and Centre Streets. The survivor, 8 Dana (Fig. 77), was owned by Zebina Raymond, mayor of Cambridge and the entrepreneur who, between 1848 and 1872, built many houses along Dana Street. Between Harvard Street and Broadway, the houses are more closely grouped together. They consist of a series of late Queen Anne style two-family houses and small apartment buildings that maintain the scale and roof line of the single-family houses on either side. Further along the street, between Broadway and Cambridge Street, a brick mansard row is followed by a series of mansard single-family houses. Near the Cambridge Street end, a number of Colonial Revival houses and a few three-deckers complete the catalogue of architectural styles. Variety of shape and style is the keynote of this street; similarity of scale and function provides the unifying factor.

In contrast, Bigelow Street, laid out in 1868 by Albert Vinal and almost completely built up in the next ten years, gives an impression of uniformity. Most of the houses along it are mansards; despite individual variations in ground plan and decorative detail, the whole street is an harmonious entity. Adjustments in basement level compensate for variations in grade along the street, creating an almost uniform roof line; setbacks are uniform, too. Unlike the houses on Dana Street, however, many of the houses on Bigelow Street have become run-down, and some have been quite inappropriately repaired or remodelled. A once elegant street, lined with impressive and costly houses (the average cost, about $11,000), Bigelow Street now seems shabby. Yet so much of the original fabric survives that it could easily be revitalized.

Another street notable for its mansards is Maple Avenue. First laid out in 1841 on the eastern edge of Hovey's Nursery, it was developed with more ample lots than are common on the other streets between Broadway and Cambridge Street. A series of fine mansards, interspersed with a few Queen Anne and Colonial Revival houses, line Maple Avenue. More widely spaced and more uneven in height and size than the Bigelow Street mansards, these houses do not give Maple Avenue the same rather overpowering dignity that one senses on Bigelow. The assertive mansard roofs and bay windows create a rhythmic punctuation to the voids of gardens and to the low forms of the later houses. One of the most attractive streets in Dana Hill, Maple Avenue still retains much of its original appearance. Approximately half the houses are owner-occupied, and most are well kept up. Maple Avenue can and should be preserved as an example of Cambridge at its best.

Less consistent in architectural style is Fayette Street, which dates from 1842. Two Greek Revival houses and two Italianate double houses (Figs. 83 and 118) survive among later buildings ranging from mansards to three-deckers. The original Fayette Street deed restrictions called for deep setbacks. These, and the large lots, give an air of spaciousness to the street. At the north end, a group of three-deckers and two-family houses crowded on the former Fay and Harding land is monotonous and cramped, but the overall effect of Fayette Street is one of interesting variety.

Inman Street and Prospect Street, laid out in 1802, have suffered a great deal from later construction. In comparison to the top of Dana Hill, they were built up early. By 1854 there were twenty-one families living on Inman Street and forty-eight on Prospect. The series of Greek Revival houses on Inman Street between St. Mary Road and Hampshire Street established the original character of the street. Set back from the street on ample lots, they are fine examples of the double house type (Fig. 102). Both streets had even
more distinguished houses at the Massachusetts Avenue end, and
both had and still have churches of impressive scale and quality.
Later, however, as urban pressure grew, lots grew smaller, houses
were divided, and three-deckers were squeezed onto the narrow
portions of land available. The destruction in 1937 of the Valentine-
Fuller house (Fig. 82) marked the beginning of the end of Prospect
Street as a residential area. The street is now lined with small
shops at the Massachusetts Avenue end; each month brings the
destruction of another of the older houses and its replacement with
commercial or multi-unit residential buildings. Heavy traffic
between Central Square and Somerville makes the street crowded
and noisy. Prospect Street's change from a residential avenue to
a commercial traffic artery is inevitable, but Inman Street could
be maintained. Though many Inman Street houses have become run-
down, there are signs, at the northern end at least, that some neigh-
borhood rehabilitation has begun.

Sumner Road is a remarkable survival from an earlier period. Laid
out in 1838, it originally had a group of seven Greek Revival and
Italianate houses, many built by the housewright Isaac Cutler. Four
of the original number survive, although unfortunately Cutler's own
house, formerly at 7 Sumner, has been replaced by an apartment
building. Despite this building and a three-decker at number 3,
Sumner Road retains to an amazing degree the appearance of a mid-
nineteenth century street. The unusual survival of a whole group of
Greek Revival houses makes it possible to visualize the irregularity
and liveliness of the streetscape in the 1850's.

The same liveliness, achieved by a more complicated interplay of
forms, is to be found in one of the most interesting streets in the
Dana Hill area, Leonard Avenue (Fig. 217). Built up by a developer
within a few years, between 1892 and 1896, it is a wonderful example
of a street where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. None
of the houses is outstanding architecturally, yet the group forms a
distinguished ensemble. The street is unified without being monoto-
nously repetitive, attractive without costly elaboration.

Shady Hill

The most homogeneous of all Mid Cambridge areas is Shady Hill.
Largely a part of the Norton estate until the 1880's, it is the most
recent Mid Cambridge district to have been built up. As yet, nothing
has occurred to change the balance of the neighborhood, and several
factors will continue to operate against a change. The absence of
through streets both enhances the desirability of the neighborhood
and seals it off from contamination by commercialization. As long
as Kirkland Street retains its predominantly residential character,
Shady Hill should be safe. The streets, laid out in long sweeping
curves by the landscape architect Charles Eliot, are very much
alike. Wide, planted with trees, they are lined with ample houses,
usually set on large lots. The speed with which the area developed
has created an uniformity of architecture not found in older parts of
Cambridge. Most of the houses are either late Queen Anne or Colonial
Revival; they are similar in scale and function. Except for the later
double houses in Shady Hill Square (1915) and the row houses in
Holden Green (1927), almost all appear to be single family dwellings,
and there has been no intrusion of three-deckers or apartment
buildings. Despite traffic to the Divinity School, whose main buildings
are at the end of Francis Avenue, the impression of a quiet, unhurried
suburb of an earlier era has survived.

The most architecturally distinguished street in the Shady Hill area
is Kirkland Place, a short cul-de-sac laid out by Isaac Cutler in
1854. Six of its seven houses were built by 1857. Each is a fine
example of mid-nineteenth century architecture; all are in fine con-
dition. Disguised and isolated from Kirkland Street by an apartment
building and by William James Hall, Kirkland Place is virtually un-
known, yet it is the sole intact survival of the days when Kirkland
Street was known as Professors' Row.
Oxford Street Area

The Oxford Street area has the least sense of neighborhood identity of any of the three Mid Cambridge areas covered in this report. Isolated by Massachusetts Avenue, Harvard University buildings, and the Somerville line, it is divided further by Oxford Street. Traffic patterns and great differences in architectural styles from street to street make it impossible to think of the area as a whole. The streets are of several different dates, and there is little architectural continuity. On the whole, the area east of Oxford Street, which was built up later, almost entirely with three-deckers, two-family houses, and apartment buildings.

Sacramento Street is typical of the development pattern of the area. Laid out across the former Frost estate in 1851, it filled up slowly with a great variety of buildings, from Italianate to modern stucco and from mansions to cottages. Ample lots and deep setbacks give a feeling of spaciousness to the blocks between Massachusetts Avenue and Oxford Street. The tall narrow mansard houses at the western end of the street (one now a Harvard dormitory and the other the Cambridge Mental Health and Guidance Center) face a three-decker with an unusually elaborate, curving center porch. Down the street, a pair of brick mansard rows face a Queen Anne house with a tower (Fig. 163), and a large mansard (Fig. 132) with balconies. Next to the rows is a smaller Greek Revival house (21 Sacramento) to which has been added a tower with a mansard roof.

In contrast, Garfield Street is an example of a street that was built up in a very short time; it is difficult to imagine a better example of a Queen Anne period development. The street was laid out in 1883; all but three of the twenty-five houses were built between 1885 and 1891, nearly all by different builders. Most are large houses, on lots averaging 60 by 100 feet. Deed restrictions required a ten-foot setback from the street. The smaller side-entrance houses such as 19 and 27 averaged $4,500 in cost, while the larger houses went up to as much as $10,000. The chief impression of the street is one of bewildering diversity and invention, yet a basic unity is provided by the uniformity of lot size, setback, and house height. Variety and interest are created by the different shapes and heights of towers, bays, and porches; by the different roof forms (hip, gable, and mansard); and especially by the decorative detail that exists in exuberant quantities. Although few of the houses are still single-family residences, and many are rooming houses, the street outwardly appears as it originally did. Most of the houses are well maintained, and almost all have their original siding; only a few have been disfigured by asphalt shingles.

Garfield Street should be preserved, but action must be taken soon. The shift away from owner-occupancy and the appearance of rooming houses are often the first steps towards destruction. In addition, recent purchases by Harvard along the street suggest further possible changes.

Another harmoniously unified section is the oldest part of Prentiss Street between Frost and Oxford Streets. Laid out as Harris Street in 1858, it still retains a flavor of a much earlier period. The houses are chiefly mansards with a few Queen Annes at either end. The strong vertical accents of the tall narrow mansard houses are counteracted by their wide spacing; lots average 75 by 150 feet. The impression is tranquil and spacious. Little seems to have changed on Prentiss Street in the last eighty years.

Among the many pleasant streets of the area, Frost Street should be mentioned. Laid out in 1858, it was built up gradually. The earliest building, the Frost house (Fig. 8), was moved in from Massachusetts Avenue in 1866, and the other houses all date after 1873. There are a number of outstanding houses along Frost Street, including number 17, a shingle style house (Fig. 180). Two Colonial Revival houses at the north end and a brick row near Prentiss Street should also be mentioned. Unfortunately, many of the houses today are run-down or have been disfigured with artificial siding, and the continuity of the street is broken by a parking lot at 5 Frost.