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Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge East Cambridge

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Early Settlement and Development

East Cambridge, unlike the other villages that gradually coalesced to become modern Cambridge, was essentially the creation of a single individual, Andrew Craigie. Although the first inhabitant settled here in the 1630s, little use was made of this watery land until the early 19th century. Then Craigie, an accomplished land speculator, obtained a charter for a bridge to Boston and enlisted some of the most powerful men in the commonwealth to carry out his plans. In 1814, in an astonishing political maneuver, Craigie and his associates even persuaded the Middlesex County commissioners to move the county seat from Harvard Square, in Old Cambridge, to the remote marshes opposite Boston.

East Cambridge eventually thrived, although Craigie died bankrupt. Its proximity to Boston rivaled that of Cambridgeport, Charlestown, and South Boston, and its superior access to water, highway, and rail transportation attracted some of the largest industrial enterprises of the time. The filling of the surrounding marshes and tide flats proceeded for almost a century and a half until 1950, when the last lots on Commercial Avenue were developed. Built over once, East Cambridge is now undergoing redevelopment at Kendall Square, along the Lechmere Canal, and at North Point.