from the river. This seems to have been the first time that Cambridge citizens saw how easy access to Boston might be through the Cambridgeport area. The forts of the Revolution were the first structures in the city to point away from Old Cambridge toward the river and Boston.

1793–1815: Initial Development

The opening of the West Boston Bridge (Fig. 12) on Thanksgiving Day, 1793, marked the beginning of Cambridgeport as a settled area. The “way to Pelham’s Island” became a main thoroughfare to Boston, and, despite the surrounding salt marsh, the causeway to the bridge (Main Street) was immediately recognized as an important commercial location.

Before the year was out, Robert Vose and Royal Makepeace had built a store on the north side of the causeway. The following year Vose built a house for himself opposite the store, and in 1795 Leonard Jarvis (who owned the Inman estate from 1792 to 1798) built a tavern east of the store. Within a year or two a cluster of half a dozen buildings, mostly stores and shops, had grown up on what had been Pelham’s Island. Judge Francis Dana and Leonard Jarvis began to build canals and dikes to drain some of their land nearby, but Jarvis’s part in this project (and in Cambridgeport development in general) was cut short in 1798, when the United States government took possession of his property for failure to pay a $40,000 debt.

Dana then shifted his activity to a portion of his estate nearer his Dana Hill mansion. In 1800 and 1801, in agreement with an adjoining owner, William Watson, and in order to straighten lot lines, he laid out the streets now called Brookline, Pearl, and Franklin. “Squares” of 100-foot house lots were established, and parallel streets were put through them. Both Dana and Watson sold lots facing on Massachusetts Avenue, Franklin Street, and Auburn Street. On a lot on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue, Josiah Hovey built Hovey’s Tavern (Fig. 281). Another tavern, a store (also Hovey’s), and a handful of dwellings created a small center around the haymarket (Central Square). In spite of these early lot sales, Dana’s Cambridgeport land purchases amounted to substantially more than his sales. Watson and several other landowners south of Massachusetts Avenue also kept more than they sold. Their holdings and others of the early 19th century are shown on the map in Fig. 13.

A boost to settlement came when the Federal government sold the Jarvis property at auction in 1801, opening up land at Lafayette Square and on both sides of Main Street. One of the new landlords, Jonathan Austin, laid out Austin Street through part of his property and established house lots there. His financial success encouraged other landowners to offer both large tracts and small lots for sale.

In 1805, two important new roads connecting the bridgehead with inland towns were authorized: Broadway (originally part of the Cambridge and Concord Turnpike) and Hampshire Street (originally part of the Middlesex Turnpike). The easterly portion of Harvard Street (then called Canal Street) was laid out in 1804, and its westerly extension to Old Cambridge followed in 1808. Webster Avenue (originally called Medford Street) was opened before 1809. All these routes converged on the West Boston Bridge. In the northerly part of Cambridgeport, Cambridge Street was put through in 1809 to connect the Canal Bridge in East Cambridge with Harvard Square, and in the southwest, River...
13. EARLY 19TH-CENTURY LANDHOLDINGS IN CAMBRIDGEPORT

Street (originally called Brighton Street) connected the River Street Bridge of 1811 with Central Square and Prospect Street (the latter laid out in 1804). Thus, in the first period of Cambridgeport development, major transportation routes were established that influenced all subsequent development and are still in active use today. Cambridgeport transportation patterns were, and are, bridge-oriented.

The high point in the early history of the district occurred in 1805, when Cambridgeport was declared a United States port of delivery. Two persons, Rufus Davenport and Royal Makepeace, were influential in launching the seaport idea. Davenport an ambitious, enterprising businessman, began an informal partnership with Makepeace in 1803, the former finding the money and the latter doing the legwork. They assembled large tracts of land by buying up small marsh lots around the causeway from descendants of original grantees.

They also acquired portions of the Jarvis estate and a 65-acre tract from Andrew Bordman’s farm. With three other landowners (Josiah and Daniel Mason and Charles Clark), they incorporated as the Cambridgeport Proprietors. With interest in the venture proportional to the amount of land each had invested, Davenport and Makepeace held 80 out of 100 shares.

Over their lands the Proprietors established a network of canals for the port and a canal-oriented street and building-lot pattern around Broadway and Hampshire Street. Lots here were sold in 1805 and 1806, with restrictions that any building should be at least three stories high and constructed of brick or stone. A few rows of such buildings were built on Broadway and Harvard Street. Small house lots (40 by 80 feet) around Worcester and Suffolk Streets began to sell, as did generous 100-foot-square lots offered by Andrew Bordman near Washington, Pine, Cherry, Moore, and Clark Streets. Although growth was sparse, houses arose in greater numbers on these lots than on Dana and Watson land south of Massachusetts Avenue. As if to lend assurance to this growth, Andrew Bordman built a three-story mansion for himself on the corner of Windsor and Hampshire Streets, where it still stands, much altered and moved to the rear of the lot (Fig. 63).

Although still remote and marshy, with high tides overflowing cellars, Cambridgeport — at least in the hopes of Davenport and Makepeace — was a promising commercial center. Wharves, such as Josiah Mason’s at the end of the causeway (Kendall Square), appeared along the canals. Gravel was brought in to fill drained marshes; fruit trees and gardens were planted. Young men from the country established themselves in “mechanical employments” and “trade with the interior.” Deeds show that a large number of the first settlers were housewrights, carriage builders, curriers, harness makers and leather workers, hatters, glaziers, paper makers. Stores and taverns like Mason’s, Hovey’s, and Kimball’s flourished along the roads leading in from the country — Broadway, Hampshire Street, Massachusetts Avenue and Main Street. In 1806, five years after the Jarvis sale, Dr. Abiel Holmes estimated that the Port’s population had grown to 1000.

In 1802 there were enough children in the district to warrant starting a school, which was built on a lot donated by Andrew Bordman at the corner of Windsor and School Streets. The following year a fire engine was bought. To fill the need for a meeting house, the Cambridgeport Meeting House Corporation was formed, with Davenport and Makepeace holding not quite half the 100 shares. A public square at Columbia and Harvard Streets was set aside — half donated by Bordman, half by the Proprietors — and on it a large brick meeting house was built in 1807 (Fig. 170). Provision was also made that if Middlesex County should desire, it could have the east half of Meeting House Square for its buildings.

On the west side of the square was Columbia Street, envisioned by the Proprietors as the main axis of their city. Across from the meeting house they laid out “Eight Block Place” as the shopping center of the city-to-be. Farther along, small lots lined each side of the thoroughfare, but the Cambridge Selectmen refused to accept Columbia Street in 1806 because not a single house had been built on it. A parsonage lot was located at the corner of Harvard and
Prospect Streets in 1808, and the land between it and Eight Block Place was purchased for a burying ground in 1811. Sennott Park (Fig. 378) now occupies the burying-ground site.

Thus established in the hopes of its proprietors and physically laid out into streets and lots, Cambridgeport came legally into existence on March 1, 1808, by act of incorporation. Already, however, the Embargo of 1807-1809 had gone into effect, and although a committee headed by Royal Makepeace, Francis Dana, and Samuel Fay protested to President Jefferson, they could do little else. Land values plummeted and commercial ventures faltered. In 1812 came the war. By the time peace was restored in 1815, any hope for Cambridgeport as a great commercial city had been dashed; instead, the manufacturing activities of East Cambridge were attracting attention formerly given to the Port.

The canals that had been dug to accommodate coastal shipping remained to block industrial progress until the 1870's, when they began to be filled in—a process that has continued to the present. Davenport and Makepeace were financially ruined, their land almost as worthless as the idle canals they had built. Lots that had sold for $500 to $1000 at the height of speculation went for $10 or less. People like Jonas Wyeth and James Otis, who had commenced to stake out streets and lots south of Massachusetts Avenue around Pleasant Street, passed on their land empty and undeveloped to descendants. The Danas, whose holdings south of Massachusetts Avenue were more extensive than anyone else’s, were not inclined to sell until the second quarter of the century.

Although trading enterprises along the main street were still active, Cambridgeport was a drowsy settlement, a fitting location for the almshouse built on Norfolk Street in 1818. All that the Port could point to that served more than local needs was the state powder magazine on Captain’s Island, also built in 1818.

1815–1850: Trade Route and Suburb

After the speculative boom and bust of the early 1800's, Cambridgeport settled into a more realistic role as a Boston-oriented commercial suburb. Fig. 15 shows the pattern of land use at the beginning of this period. The Cambridgeport economy depended heavily on commercial traffic passing to and from Boston via the West Boston Bridge. The bridge and related street transportation made commuting so easy that a large number of Cambridgeport residents held jobs in Boston. Later, the Charles River's advantages for shipping were rediscovered as an adjunct to manufacturing, increasing the Port's tendency to look to Boston and the east for its livelihood. The reliance upon Boston and the Charles is further explained by the fragmentation of Cambridge. Until the 1840's, when Dana Hill was developed, a good half-mile strip of woodland kept the Port physically separated from the rural, college-centered community of Old Cambridge, and extensive marshland on the northeast isolated the Port from East Cambridge. (See the Hales map of 1830, Fig. 16.)

The commercial hegemony of Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue was established early in the 19th century. As the main thoroughfare from the bridge to Old Cambridge and points west, this road occupied a dominant position. The building of inns and other commercial structures converted the avenue from a market center at the haymarket (now Central Square) to a business strip stretching from Inman Street on the west to Windsor Street on the east. Fig. 14 shows Lafayette Square as it looked in the mid-1820's, with Hovey's Tavern on the left. In 1849, 83 out of the 100-odd retail shops in Cambridgeport were located along Main Street and Massachusetts Avenue; small manufacturing concerns and workshops were also located there. As late as 1865, 80% of the Port's shops and stores were along this strip. The rest were beginning to align themselves along the other major northwest-southeast thoroughfares—Broadway, Harvard Street, and Hampstead Street.

Attempts were made to exploit the commercial possibilities of the Lower Port, the district along the causeway and canals. The Hales map of 1830 (Fig. 16) represents this district as unimproved salt marsh, except for the causeway embankment near the junction of Broadway, where seven buildings were located—two taverns and five stores or houses. In the next two decades several wharves were built along the causeway near what is now Kendall Square. For the most part, these wharves were used for the lumber, coal, and stone trades—a different kind of use from that envisioned by the early port developers, who had in mind international trade rather than coastwise shipping of wholesale lots of bulky material.

14. LAFAYETTE SQUARE IN MID-1820'S. AT LEFT: HOVEY TAVERN OF 1802. PARTLY VISIBLE BEHIND TREE: FIRST UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF 1822