



CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Date: June 10, 2009

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Charles M. Sullivan, Executive Director

Re: 1797-1803 Massachusetts Avenue (former North Prospect Church)
landmark designation report and recommendation

Attached please find 45 copies, plus the original, of the Final Landmark Designation Study Report for the former North Prospect Church property at 1797-1803 Massachusetts Avenue.

On April 2, 2009 the Historical Commission determined that the property met the criteria for landmark designation, but voted to continue discussion of the suggested guidelines for review of alterations and new construction. The following report contains some editorial changes to the discussion of planning issues, description, history, and significance of the property. A revised version of Section VII, Standards and Criteria, was further amended and then adopted by the Commission at its continued hearing on June 4 2009; the changes made on that occasion were posted for comments on the Commission's website until Wednesday, June 10, 2009, but none were received.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

**Final Landmark Designation Study Report
North Prospect Congregational Church
1797-1803 Massachusetts Avenue**



The 1845 North Prospect Congregational Church is historically and architecturally significant as one of seven surviving pre-Civil War churches in the city. The church is associated with the founding of two important religious congregations in Cambridge, the Old Cambridge Baptist Church and the North Prospect Congregational Church. The history of the structure, which was relocated in 1867 from its original site on Kirkland Street near Harvard Square to 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, reflects the evolution of the Porter Square area from an outlying district of Cambridge to a gentrified suburban area. It is the best-preserved Greek Revival church in the city and is the only remaining church in Cambridge designed by the mid-nineteenth-century architect, Isaac Melvin.

On April 2, 2009 the Historical Commission determined that the property met the criteria for landmark designation, but voted to continue discussion of the suggested guidelines for review of alterations and new construction. The following report contains some editorial changes to the discussion of planning issues, description, history, and significance of the property. A revised version of Section VII, Standards and Criteria, was further amended and then adopted by the Commission at its continued hearing on June 4 2009; the changes made on that occasion were posted for comments on the Commission's website until Wednesday, June 10, 2009, but none were received.

Original report prepared by Susan McDaniel Ceccacci, 1990
Revised and updated by Sarah L. Burks and Charles M. Sullivan

Cambridge Historical Commission
June 10, 2009

I. Location and Planning Issues

A. Address and Parcel Information

The former North Prospect Congregational Church property is located at 1797-1803 Massachusetts Avenue, at the corner of Roseland Street, just south of Porter Square. The parcel on which the church stands, number 1 on Assessor's Map 153, contains 13,430 square feet of land with a frontage of 75 feet on the east side of Massachusetts Avenue and 179.9 feet on Roseland Street. A second lot to the south, number 18 on Map 153, contains 14,634 square feet and has an 81 foot frontage on Massachusetts Avenue.

The assessed value for the land and buildings on the two lots combined, according to the FY09 Assessor's Department online property database, is \$2,351,300.

B. Ownership and Occupancy

The North Prospect Congregational Church sold the building and the adjacent parcel to Lesley University in January 2006 and now worships as the North Prospect Union United Church of Christ in Medford. Lesley University has renamed the building Prospect Hall. The former sanctuary space is used by the university as an auditorium and the basement level is currently occupied by the Agassiz Preschool.

Lesley University, founded in 1909, has seen a period of great growth, both in its academic offerings and its physical portfolio of university buildings. The school merged with the Art Institute of Boston in 1998 and changed its name from Lesley College to Lesley University in 2000. In "The Lesley University Campus Master Plan 2009: Centennial Plan," the university identifies the three parts of its Cambridge campus, the Quad Campus, Porter Campus, and Brattle Campus. The North Prospect church site is located in Lesley's Porter Campus, which also includes University Hall (the former Sears, Roebuck & Company building) at 1815 Massachusetts Avenue, the two parking lots across the street from University Hall, a three-story administration building at 815 Somerville Avenue, and the parking lot behind University Hall.

C. Zoning

The premises are currently located in a Residence-B zoning district, which allows for two-family residential use. The maximum height limit is 35 feet with a FAR of 0.5, allowing medium density residential development.

Lesley University has petitioned to amend the zoning ordinance to extend the Business C zoning district 160 feet to the south to encompass both lots 1 and 18 and to create a new Lesley Porter Overlay District, which would have dimensional and use regulations unique to Lesley's Porter Campus. The university proposes developing the church parcels (lots 1 and 18) for academic use, with the proposed new occupancy of the Art Institute of Boston. The Art Institute of Boston is relocating from Kenmore Square in Boston.

D. Area Description

The former North Prospect Congregational Church is situated on Massachusetts Avenue, a major thoroughfare, at the corner of Roseland Street. The south side of Roseland Street is residen-

tial in character and zoning but the north side of the street is part of the Business C zoning district and is occupied by Lesley University's University Hall and parking lot on the old Sears, Roebuck & Company site. The property is located on the southern edge of the Porter Square neighborhood, a vibrant mixed-use area of institutional, residential, and retail buildings.

Several residential neighborhoods abut this end of Porter Square, including the Avon Hill Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD), so designated in 1998, west of Porter Square and north of Linnaean Street. The Lower Common neighborhood extends to the west of Massachusetts Avenue and south of Linnaean Street. To the northeast are the residential and retail uses along Somerville Avenue, the city boundary with Somerville. To the southeast is the Agassiz neighborhood, which extends south to Kirkland Street to the east of Massachusetts Avenue.

The neighborhood around the church reflects the growth and change in the area from the mid nineteenth century through the mid twentieth century—first as a neighborhood of single-family residences lining Massachusetts Avenue and side streets, and later, along the avenue, as an apartment district and more-intensive commercial environment. The area along Massachusetts Avenue today is mixed use and is characterized by one-story brick commercial blocks of the early twentieth century and mostly four-story brick apartment houses. University Hall, the old Sears building, is a large yellow brick commercial building originally built in 1928. South of the church is 1791 Massachusetts Avenue, a Mansard house built in 1867 as a single-family residence. The neighboring buildings on the south side of Roseland Street are mostly two and three stories, formerly single-family houses built in the second half of the nineteenth century, which have since been converted to multi-family use. The houses that were demolished on the north side of Roseland Street for the construction of the Sears building were of similar size and period. The Agassiz neighborhood is primarily residential, except along the busier streets such as Massachusetts Avenue and Oxford and Kirkland streets which also include commercial and institutional buildings. Lesley's Quad Campus, in the area of Everett, Mellen, and Wendell streets, includes many older houses that have been converted to institutional uses.

The former North Prospect Congregational Church is the oldest building for several blocks on this part of Massachusetts Avenue. Built in 1845 and moved to this site in 1867, this monumental building draws the eye along Massachusetts Avenue and serves as a visual and historical connection between Harvard and Porter squares.

E. Planning Issues

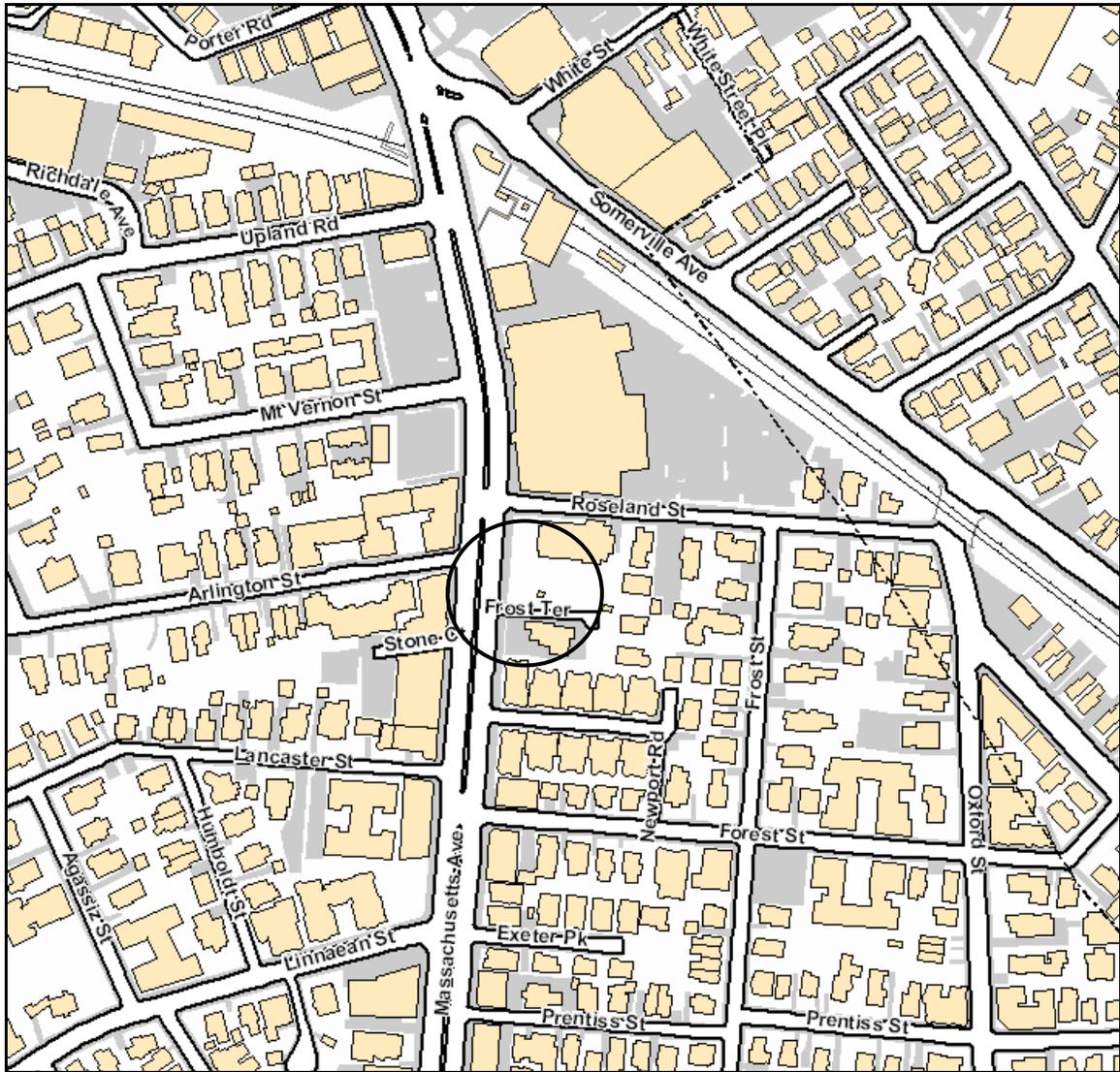
Lesley University has engaged the public with a series of meetings beginning in June 2007 to discuss long term planning ideas for its Porter Campus, the proposed Art Institute of Boston relocation, and the details of the proposed zoning amendment. The zoning proposal includes changing the base zoning district for the North Prospect parcels from Residence B to Business C as well as creating a new overlay zone for the university's Porter Campus.

Under the existing Residence B zoning, development of the North Prospect parcels is limited to residential use with a height limit of 35 feet and a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.5. The religious use of the building was grandfathered under the present zoning code. The proposed zoning amendments would both allow residential, institutional, retail, and office uses at the North Prospect site and increase the density of allowable development on the site. The base zoning of these parcels with Business C designation would increase to an FAR of 1.25 for educational use, and under the proposed new Lesley Porter Overlay District, the FAR could be as much as

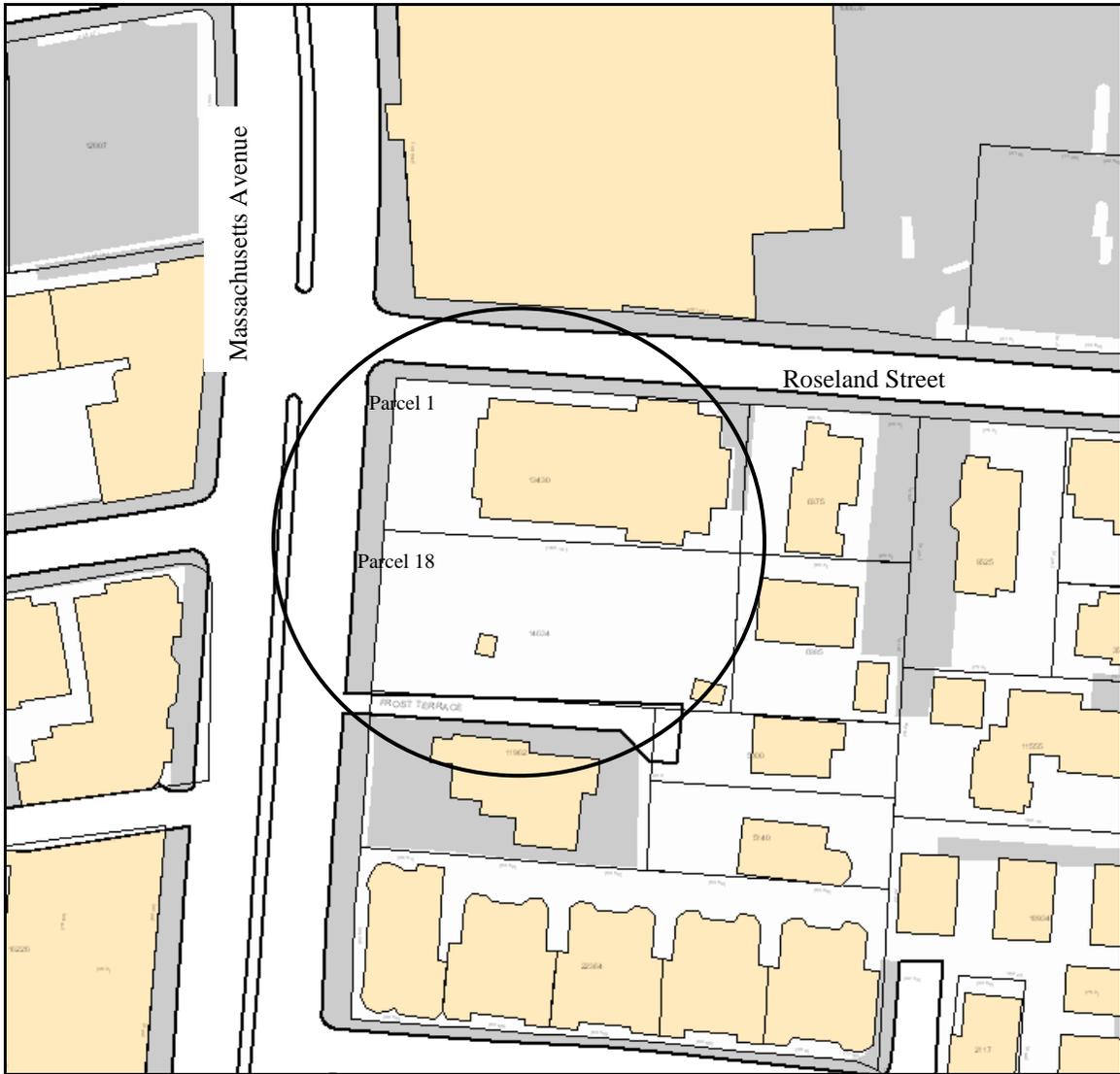
2.5. Transfer of development rights from elsewhere in the overlay district would be allowed. The height limit for new construction on the parcels would be 55 feet, while the historic building would be exempt from height and setback limitations. The immediate effect of the proposed change would be to permit institutional uses and increase the allowable gross floor area (GFA) from 14,035 square feet to 95,210 square feet (the existing building has a GFA of 15,192 square feet).

The church property has been individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1983. The Cambridge Historical Commission initiated a landmark designation study for the North Prospect parcels on October 4, 2007 and extended the study, with the university's consent, on October 2, 2008. The current study period expires on July 4, 2009. If the landmark designation is not adopted, an application to move the building or demolish significant portions of the building would trigger the citywide demolition review ordinance administered by the Historical Commission.

The university selected Bruner/Cott & Associates to study the program needs of the Art Institute of Boston's (AIB) relocation to Porter Square and to develop a schematic design study. The current proposal, dated May 2008, includes demolishing the 1872 addition, relocating the church from the corner of Roseland Street to the front of the southern parcel, Lot 18, and lowering the ground floor to approximately 5' above sidewalk grade. A new three to five story building would be built at the corner of Roseland Street, with another two levels below grade, and a sunken, glass-enclosed courtyard between the old and new buildings. This proposal was presented to the Historical Commission in May 2008 for the purpose of seeking initial design feedback. Further design work has been put on hold until the outcome of the proposed rezoning petition is known. If enacted by the City Council, the amended zoning would allow for institutional use of the church site and provide greater dimensional flexibility for the development proposal, subject to approval of a special permit by the Planning Board.



1. Property Map of 1797-1803 Massachusetts Avenue, City of Cambridge GIS, 3/17/09



2. Detail Map of Assessor's Map 153 / Parcels 1 and 18, City of Cambridge GIS, 3/17/09

II. Description

A. Type and Use

The church was originally built for the Old Cambridge Baptist Church in 1845. It was sold to the North Avenue Congregational Society in 1866 and the following year was moved up Massachusetts Avenue from the corner of Kirkland Street (present site of Harvard's Littauer Center) to its current location at the corner of Roseland Street. The congregation merged with the Prospect Congregational Church in 1985 to become the North Prospect Congregational Church. The building remained in use as a church until the sale of the property to Lesley University in 2006. The Agassiz Preschool, which had leased the ground level space and side lot from during the church's ownership of the property, continues in this use to the present.

B. Physical Description

As designed in 1845 by local architect Isaac Melvin, the North Prospect Congregational Church closely reflected its New England meetinghouse ancestry in its frame structure, gable roof, clapboard siding, and prominent tower. The simple rectangular plan, originally four bays deep, was essentially late Georgian in form with a tall, multi-stage spire surmounting a projecting entrance portico (see Figs. 5-6). The addition of a chancel and transepts in 1872 created a cruciform plan.

The original church derived its appearance from the London churches of Christopher Wren and James Gibbs, a form which had become popular with colonial church builders and was first used by the Congregationalists in the Old South Meetinghouse in Boston (1729). Like Gibbs' St. Martin-in-the-Fields in London (1726), the North Prospect Congregational Church is fronted by a freestanding portico, and the tower rises from the main body of the church. Gibbs' combination of a temple-like front with a Baroque spire was perpetuated in the early nineteenth century by the Boston architect Charles Bulfinch.

Melvin's design for the Old Cambridge Baptist Church (1845) closely resembles Bulfinch's New South Church in Boston (1814; Fig. 6). While Bulfinch generally derived the massing of his church designs from the traditional Wren-Gibbs formula, Robert Adam was the source for his refined detailing. The details of the North Prospect Congregational Church, on the other hand, were more closely aligned with the contemporary Greek Revival style. Bulfinch's attenuated columns and Adamesque detailing are modified here by heavy Egyptian capitals and boldly articulated carved wood details.

The carved recessed panels on the four faces of the tower base and panels above the pedimented doors of the main entrance are important decorative features that may have derived from designs of Asher Benjamin (Fig. 5). Other details worthy of note are the paired corner pilasters, weighty window frames with pedimented caps, smooth flush-boarding on the main facade, horizontal patterned boarding on the first stage of the tower, and a well articulated entablature including low-relief tripartite architrave, smooth frieze, heavy cornice, and pediment with double recessed paneling.

The original 125-foot, three-stage tower and spire closely recalled that of the New South Church. It was damaged in a storm and the upper two round stages and the spire were replaced in 1906 with a square belfry and a copper dome (Fig. 9). Only the pedimented first stage of the

original steeple remains today. The present eight-faceted spire, built in 1964 after the dome was struck by lightning and caught fire, is sheathed in marine plywood covered with fiberglass. The 1964 spire is not compatible in proportion, design, or sculptural effect with the rest of the building. Numerous other alterations to the structure have occurred since its construction, yet most are better integrated with the original design.

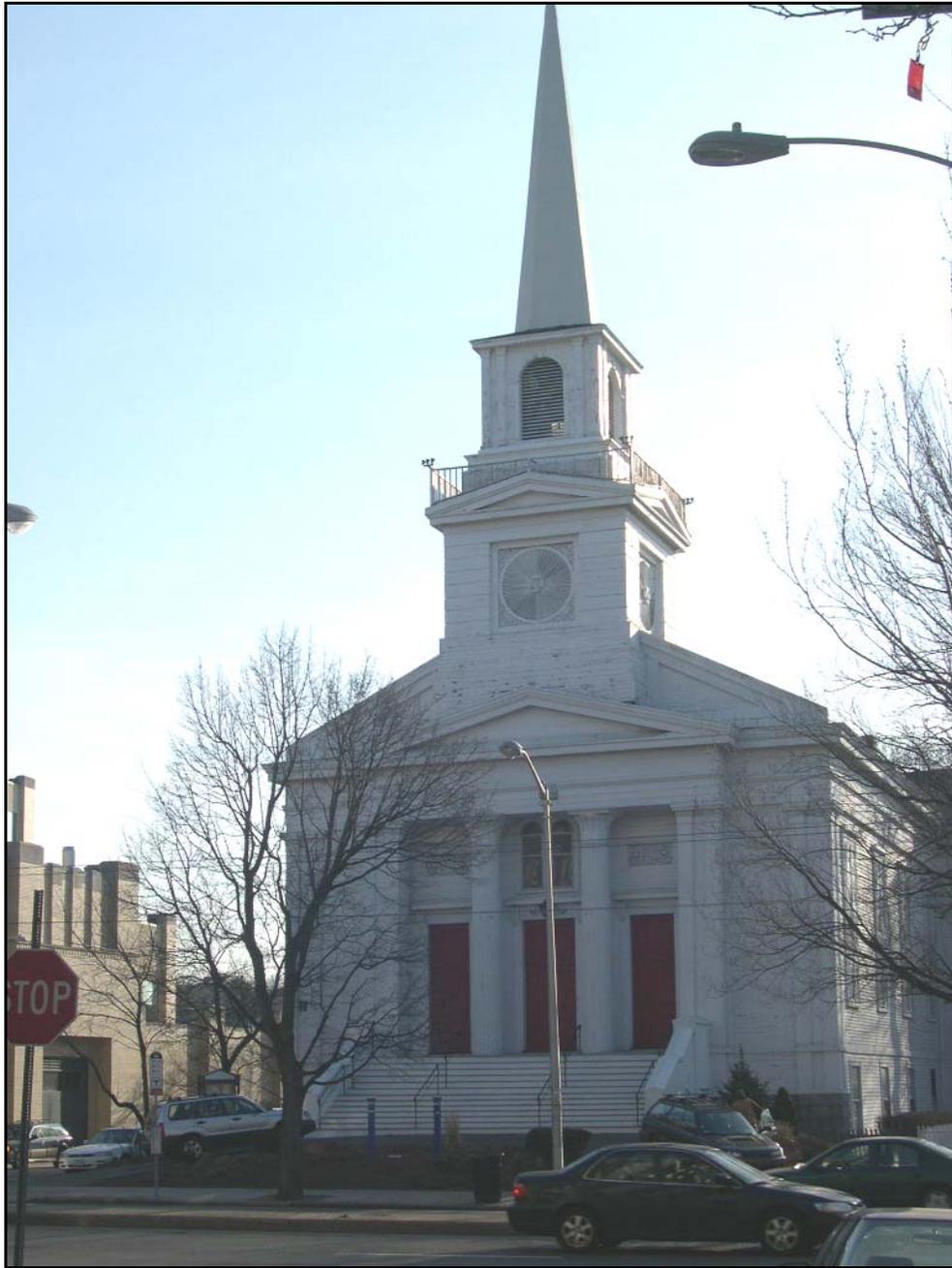
In its original location, the floor of the portico (the level of the sanctuary floor) stood about 5' above grade. When the church was placed on its new foundation, the floor of the portico was raised to about 12' above grade to allow an entire new level to be inserted beneath the church (See Fig. 1). Originally, the church was placed at the head of Peabody Street so as to be seen from Harvard Square; in its present location, the church has a similar (but distinctly secondary) relationship with Arlington Street, which was laid out in 1861.

By 1872, the church congregation had already outgrown the approximately 600 seats in the church. With a new addition to the east of 28', which included transepts on either side and a chancel at the east end, and by constructing a new gallery at the back of the sanctuary, the church's capacity expanded to over 1000 seats. The designer of this addition, though not known, took care to match the cornice and fenestration details to Melvin's original. The addition of the transepts and chancel changed the simple rectangular plan into a cruciform shape. Likely added at this time, to light the new gallery, were a pair of round-arched windows above the central entrance portal, replacing a decorative carved panel that was identical to those that remain above the doors on either side. Other ornamental details that have been removed include a parapet along the long sides of the building, small turrets at each end of the main pediment, and two acroteria that adorned either end of the portico roof (Fig. 9).

In 1892 changes were made to both the exterior and interior of the church. The exterior was painted brown, the roof repaired, new stairs constructed to the sidewalk, and new doorways installed to the vestry on the lower level. Interior remodeling included tinted walls, the installation of seven memorial windows and four or five windows "of a like and even grade," new oak pews which were "made in the west" and upholstered in red mohair damask by John Holman & Co. of Boston, a pulpit of quartered oak by Isaac McLean, and pulpit furniture by the A.B. & E.L. Shaw Company of East Cambridge. These interior furnishings and the windows remain in place. Steam heat and electric lights were also added around this time.

A second addition was added to the east end of the church in 1899 to enlarge the pastor's office and ladies parlor, though this time it was considerably smaller (measuring only 10 x 15 feet) (see Fig. 2). According to the centennial anniversary report of 1957, the exterior paint color was changed to a sage green in 1901. The sanctuary was renovated in 1930, including ceiling repairs and new wooden pilasters. A new organ was purchased in 1947. The sanctuary was again redecorated in 1957, along with roof repairs, and repairs and painting of the exterior (Fig. 11).

C. Current Photographs



1. 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, front (west) elevation, March 2009.
Photo by Sarah L. Burks.



2. 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, from the northeast, March 2009.
Showing 1872 transept addition and 1899 rear addition.
Photo by Sarah L. Burks.



3. 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, front entrance, March 2009.
Photo by Sarah L. Burks.



4. 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, March 2009.
Showing carved detail above front entrance doors.
Photo by Sarah L. Burks.

III. History of the Property

A. Historic Development Patterns

1. Deed History of the Property

The two lots now known as Lots 1 and 18 on Assessor's Map 153 both trace their roots back to Gideon Frost through his sons William and Walter. The north parcel (Lot 1, measuring 75' x 180') was inherited by Walter Frost, but the property passed to Ozias Morse by foreclosure. Ozias Morse, Jr. sold the property to John H. Lockey of Leominster, who in turn sold the lot to the North Avenue Orthodox Congregational Society in 1866 (Deed Book 976 / Page 280).

The southern parcel (Lot 18, measuring 81' x 180') was owned by Gideon Frost's youngest son, William. It was the original site of the Federal period William Frost House (1807), which was moved to 10 Frost Street in 1867. William's grandson, William E. Frost, then built two Mansard houses next to each other at 1791 and 1797 Massachusetts Avenue (Fig. 9). The church acquired the property at 1797 on March 31, 1920 for \$10,000 and demolished the house the same year, intending to build a parish house and gymnasium. The second Mansard house (1791 Massachusetts Avenue) survives today on the abutting lot.

2. Development History of Parcel and Surroundings

In the 18th century, Ebenezer Frost and the descendants of his brother Edmund acquired much of the present Agassiz neighborhood through marriage and purchase. Ebenezer, a tanner, bought the Samuel Cooper farm in 1730. Edmund and Hannah Cooper Frost lived on the homestead established by his grandfather on Kirkland Street, but their daughter Hannah married Samuel Bowman, whose farm was near Porter Square, and their son Gideon consolidated the Bowman and John Cooper, Jr. farms to give the Frost family control of all the fields between Wendell Street and Porter Square as well as much of Avon Hill. Gideon Frost's holdings remained substantially intact until 1833, when his land began to be sold out of the family.

Gideon Frost (1724-1803) was the archetype of the respected Yankee farmer and town leader, whose death in 1803 foreshadowed Cambridge's transition to a suburban community. A selectman for six years and a deacon of the First Parish for twenty, his life was little different from those of his forbears: prominent in town affairs but isolated from the college and from Boston, and deeply embedded in relations with other old families like the Coopers. His real estate activities, while more extensive than most, were typical for 18th century husbandmen, who accumulated land for its agricultural value and as a legacy for their descendants, rather than for its development potential. Frost's children were the first generation that could capitalize on the social and economic opportunities presented by the opening of the West Boston Bridge, and his grandchildren either completed the transition from rural to mercantile pursuits or sought better agricultural opportunities in the west.

Gideon's son Walter (1766-1818) inherited the old Bowman farm in 1803; with other land that he inherited, his farm now consisted of 20 acres with about 700 feet on the avenue and ran all the way to Elm Street in Somerville. In 1806, a year after Somerville Avenue divided his farm in two, he mortgaged the property to Royal Makepeace, a Cambridgeport promoter who sought to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the new bridges, canals, and turnpikes. Makepeace

assigned the mortgage to Ozias Morse, a farmer in Charlestown, who soon foreclosed. Walter sold his unfinished house to his sister Sarah and brother William and relocated to Haverhill.

Ozias Morse, Jr. inherited the Bowman farm in 1817 and operated a nursery there with his mother, who received the house and 5½-acre triangular lot in Cambridge as her dower. They sold a strip of land near their greenhouses to the Charlestown Branch Railroad in 1840, and the Fitchburg Railroad erected a depot on Somerville Avenue in 1846. In 1845 the Morses leased their house to a Mrs. Freeman, and the rest of the premises, including the Noah Bowman house, to James Hill, who ran the place as the Roseland Nursery. After Hill's ten-year lease ran out in 1855, the old house was demolished and its site was leased to the Holmes Congregational Church for five years. The Society erected Holmes Chapel in 1857, but moved it to Arlington Street (then Chapel Street) in 1861 when the lease expired.

Morse laid out Roseland Street in 1863 with 25 small lots, along with 27 more lots on Mossland Street in Somerville. John H. Lockey, a manufacturer from Leominster, purchased most of the lots. After five years on Arlington Street, the congregation had outgrown the 300-seat Holmes Chapel and decided to move back to the original location on North Avenue. In 1866, Lockey sold a 75' wide by 180' deep lot on the corner of North Avenue and the recently laid out Roseland Street to the newly re-named North Avenue Orthodox Congregational Society (Deed Book 976 / Page 280).

The society purchased the Old Cambridge Baptist Church for \$8,000, and moved it from the corner of Kirkland Street to the corner of Roseland Street in 1867. Moving the church with its 125 foot high steeple, organ, and all the fixtures was apparently quite a complex undertaking, and it took 21 days to complete. It was, however, an important event in the development of the neighborhood. Lockey replatted his land into 14 large parcels in 1868, and by 1873 there were already eight houses on Roseland Street. The remainder of the Morse property was developed for commercial purposes around the railroad station.

The southern lot (Map 153 / Lot 18) passed to Gideon Frost's children, William and Sarah when their brother Walter left Cambridge. William completed Walter's house and occupied half of it. William Frost (1774-1832) was the last Frost in Cambridge to take up farming and follow the rural traditions of almost all his ancestors and relations since the 17th century. He worked for his father on the farm until he was 26 or 27, married late, and accumulated wood lots, pasture and marshland in other parts of Cambridge to pass on to his heirs. His children were the first generation of Frosts to join the western migration; a daughter married and left for New York State, and two sons moved to Illinois, and then on to Iowa. Only one of his six children, William Frost, Jr., achieved the prominence of his father and grandfather in local affairs.

William Frost, Jr. (1801-1858) inherited the property and in turn, left it to his son, William E. Frost (1845-ca. 1887). William E. Frost moved the 1807 Frost house to 10 Frost Street in 1867 and built two Mansard houses south of the church. As noted above, the North Avenue Congregational Society acquired Lot 18 (1797 Massachusetts Avenue) in 1920 and demolished the house. Lot 18 remains open today, and serves as the playground for the Agassiz Preschool. The second Mansard house (at 1791 Massachusetts Avenue) survives on the abutting lot.

IV. Significance of the Property

The North Prospect Congregational Church was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 for its historical and architectural significance.

A. Historical Significance

The historical significance of the North Prospect Congregational Church stems from its historical associations with two important church congregations of long standing in the community and for its associations with the development of North Avenue between Harvard and Porter squares in the mid nineteenth century and the related growth and affluence of that community.

The Congregationalists and Baptists were the predominant Protestant denominations in nineteenth century Cambridge. Both denominations grew in membership during the nineteenth century, a period of religious reform and evangelism. The Old Cambridge Baptist Church was established in 1844 to serve the Old Cambridge membership of its parent church, First Baptist in Central Square. Originally built on Holmes Place at Kirkland Street, a site of great prominence near the Common, Harvard College, and Harvard Square, the 1845 building served the Old Cambridge Baptist Church for twenty-one years. By 1866, the Baptists had outgrown their first building and were making plans for a Gothic Revival church at 398 Harvard Street, which they financed in part through the sale of their original building to the Holmes Congregational Society of North Cambridge. In turn, the Congregationalists sold the Holmes Chapel to the North Avenue Methodist Episcopal Society, which moved it down the avenue to a site opposite Waterhouse Street (where the present Harvard Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church now stands). The fast rotation of these church buildings and sites demonstrates the number of new churches forming in this area and the speed of their growth during the second half of the nineteenth century. It is also evidence of Yankee frugality in making new use of existing buildings and of the regularity with which buildings were moved from place to place.

The North Avenue Orthodox Congregational Society began in 1857 as the Holmes Congregational Society, named in honor of Rev. Abiel Holmes. The term "orthodox" referred to the theological matter of a Unitarian or Trinitarian concept of God. In 1829, the First Parish Church divided and the Trinitarians (the orthodox party) left with Rev. Abiel Holmes to form the Shepard Memorial Congregational Church (now First Church in Cambridge, Congregational).

The North Avenue Orthodox Congregational Society leased land on the east side of Massachusetts Avenue (then called North Avenue), near where the present church stands, for five years and built the Holmes Chapel. Rev. William Carruthers was installed in 1861 as the first called pastor of the church. When the lease expired, the church moved the chapel to the opposite side of the avenue, fronting the newly laid out Arlington Street, where it remained for another five years. In 1866, the society acquired a lot near its original location at the corner of Roseland Street and North Avenue and purchased the Old Cambridge Baptist Church at what was deemed a very reasonable price of \$8,000, making the construction of an all new building unnecessary.

The establishment of the Holmes Congregational Society in 1857 corresponded to the burst of residential growth that was occurring in the area at that time. The railroad station in Porter Square had opened up North Cambridge to industry and residential development, but it was the

introduction of a horsecar line from Harvard Square to Porter Square in 1856 that spurred growth of the affluent suburban Agassiz and Avon Hill neighborhoods. The horsecar made it easy for businessmen employed in Boston to commute from this part of Cambridge, and large mansions began to line North Avenue. The church grew quickly and required larger accommodations. This decision coincided with a period of economic growth in Cambridge following the Civil War. Presumably, the church's prominent middle-class members also wanted to make a bold statement with their stately "new" building on the avenue. The church was placed on a high foundation, adding both visual prominence and usable space on the new ground floor. The church continued to grow with great speed, adding 457 new members during the tenure of Rev. David Mears from 1867-1877. It was during this time that the church constructed the major 1872 addition of the transept, chancel, and rear gallery, which added approximately 400 seats to the sanctuary.

The 1889 conversion of the horse cars to electric trolleys speeded up growth in this community once again. The church soon made significant aesthetic alterations; in 1892 it changed the exterior paint color, built new front steps and grade-level doors to the vestry, added stained glass windows, all new interior furnishings for the sanctuary, and new heating and lighting systems.

Each period of growth and affluence in the church can be directly associated with the economic and social development of North Avenue and the surrounding residential neighborhoods. The history of the church and its building reflect the evolution of Porter Square from an outlying district of Cambridge to a gentrified suburban area.

B. Architectural Significance

The North Prospect Congregational Church is the only Greek Revival church still standing in Cambridge and the only remaining church in the city designed by the mid-nineteenth-century architect, Isaac Melvin. The main body of the building, including the original steeple base, retains nearly all of its original detail.

North Prospect Congregational Church is one of seven surviving pre-Civil War churches in Cambridge (Christ Church, 1760; First Universalist, 1822; Third Congregational, 1827; First Unitarian, 1833; Second Baptist, 1838; North Prospect Congregational, 1845; and Prospect Congregational, 1851). All of these churches have undergone interior and/or exterior renovation schemes. The seven surviving early churches, each in a different style, illustrate the evolution of architectural design from the late 18th to the mid 19th century, from the Georgian Christ Church to the Italianate Prospect Congregational.

In addition to its status as the only extant Greek Revival church in Cambridge, North Prospect Congregational is the only extant non-residential Greek Revival building in the city. While the style was rarely used for buildings other than houses, the city's two other outstanding Greek Revival structures (Dane Hall, 1832, and the Lyceum, 1841) have long since been demolished.

Finally, the church is the only survivor of three Cambridge churches designed by local architect Isaac Melvin. Of the other two Melvin-designed churches in Cambridge, the Lee Street Unitarian (1847, 35 Lee Street) was destroyed by fire in 1856 while the Allen Street Unitarian (1851, 14-20 Allen Street) was so thoroughly altered when it was converted to a tenement in 1868 that it is no longer recognizable as a church.

Originally from Concord, Isaac Melvin (1811-1853) began his career as a carpenter, master builder, housewright, and architect in Lexington, where he was living in 1833. Melvin resided in Cambridge from about 1841 until 1852. With his partner Isaiah B. Young, Melvin is credited with the designs of the Lexington Town Hall (1846); First Church, Lexington (1847); the Calvinistic Congregational Church, Sandwich (1847); Arlington Town Hall (1852); and several other significant public buildings. Melvin designed as many as twenty buildings of various types in Cambridge between 1837 and 1852, including his own house at 19 Centre Street. In 1852 he set out for California, but fell ill on board ship and died just two days after reaching San Francisco on January 21, 1853.

V. Relationship to Criteria

A. Article III, Chapter 2.78.180 a.

The enabling ordinance for landmarks states:

The Historical Commission by majority vote may recommend for designation as a landmark any property within the City being or containing a place, structure, feature or object which it determines to be either (1) importantly associated with one or more historic persons or events, or with the broad architectural, aesthetic, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City or the Commonwealth or (2) historically or architecturally significant (in terms of its period, style, method of construction or association with a famous architect or builder) either by itself or in the context of a group of structures . . .

B. Relationship of Property to Criteria

The North Prospect Congregational Church meets landmark criterion (1) for its important associations with the broad architectural and economic history of the City and as one of seven surviving pre-Civil War churches in the city. The structure is associated with the mid nineteenth-century founding of two important religious congregations, the Old Cambridge Baptist and the North Prospect Congregational churches. It reflects the general development pattern of church building as religious societies proliferated in nineteenth-century Cambridge and the evolution of North Avenue from a country road to a fashionable residential street to a locus of commercial and institutional uses.

The property meets criterion (2) as a rare example of its style in Cambridge and for its association with an important architect. The church is the only extant Greek Revival church in the city and the only remaining church in Cambridge designed by the mid nineteenth-century architect, Isaac Melvin.

VI. Recommendations

A. Purpose of Designation

Article III, Chapter 2.78.140 states the purpose of landmark designation:

preserve, conserve and protect the beauty and heritage of the City and to improve the quality of its environment through identification, conservation and maintenance of . . .

sites and structures which constitute or reflect distinctive features of the architectural, cultural, political, economic or social history of the City; to resist and restrain environmental influences adverse to this purpose; [and] to foster appropriate use and wider public knowledge and appreciation of such . . . structures . . .

B. Preservation Options

Landmark designation or donation and acceptance of a preservation restriction are two options for the permanent long-term protection and preservation of the North Prospect Congregational Church. While it is individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, National Register listing alone does not permanently protect and preserve buildings. Moving the building and demolishing significant portions of it would trigger the Historical Commission's review under the citywide demolition delay ordinance, but this provision of Ch. 2.78 provides only a delay mechanism and is not as strong a protection as landmark designation. No plans are underway for historic district or neighborhood conservation district study in the area surrounding the property.

C. Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Commission find that the North Prospect Congregational Church meets the criteria for landmark designation and vote to recommend that the City Council designate the property as a protected landmark under Article III, Chapter 2.78.

VII. Standards and Criteria

Under Article III, the Historical Commission is charged with reviewing any construction, demolition or alteration that affects the exterior architectural features (other than color) of a designated landmark. This section of the report describes exterior architectural features that are among the characteristics that led to consideration of the property as a landmark. Except as the order designating or amending the landmark may otherwise provide, the exterior architectural features described in this report should be preserved and/or enhanced in any proposed alteration or construction that affects those features of the landmark. The standards following in paragraphs A and B of this section provide guidelines for the treatment of the landmark described in this report.

A. General Standards and Criteria

Subject to review and approval of exterior architectural features under the terms of this report, the following standards shall apply:

1. Significant historic and architectural features of the landmark should be preserved.
2. Changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.
3. Deteriorated architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced.

4. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence.
5. New materials should, whenever possible, match the material being replaced in physical properties, design, color, texture, and appearance. The use of imitation replacement materials is generally discouraged.
6. The surface cleaning of a landmark should be done by the gentlest possible means. Sandblasting and other cleaning methods that damage exterior architectural features shall not be used.
7. Additions should not destroy significant exterior architectural features and should not be incongruous to the historic aspects, architectural significance, or distinct character of the landmark, neighborhood, and environment.
8. Additions should be designed in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the landmark would be unimpaired.

B. Suggested Review Guidelines

1. Site Development:

a. Relocation

The church's present location at the corner of Roseland Street speaks directly to the building's association with the Holmes Congregational Society, which occupied the site from 1857-1861. The site is also significant for its exposure to distant views from north and south along Massachusetts Avenue and for its alignment with Arlington Street. The elevation of the church above Massachusetts Avenue is a significant aspect of its relationship to its surroundings.

Proposals to move the church should be evaluated in terms of a) the significance of the building on its current site and b) aspects of the development proposal that may enhance the building and/or provide significant public benefit. Relocation of the church, if permitted, should preserve and preferably enhance the current public view of the front and sides of the original structure from north and south on Massachusetts Avenue and from Arlington Street. The first priority would be to maintain the church in its present position. The second priority would be to maintain the church at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Roseland Street. In this case, relocation should be restricted to moving the church closer to Massachusetts Avenue and lowering its foundation in proportion to its forward movement. The church should not be lowered below its original height above grade (approximately five feet). Other possible sites should be evaluated in the context of these priorities.

If the church is relocated, an appropriate setback, such as the average setback of the front wall planes of the adjoining buildings at 1791 and 1815 Massachusetts Avenue, should be maintained.

b. Partial demolition

The General Standards and Criteria provide that "changes and additions to the landmark which have taken place over time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood.

These changes may have acquired significance in their own right and, if so, that significance should be recognized and respected.”

The owners have proposed removing the 1872 and 1899 additions to return the church to its original massing. While both additions represent the growth and vitality of the congregation in the 19th century, the 1899 addition could be considered less significant. The 1872 addition is not only historically significant but architecturally compatible with the original building to a degree that was exceptional for the period. Proposals to remove the additions should be evaluated in terms of a) the intrinsic significance of the additions themselves and b) aspects of the development proposal that may enhance the remaining building and/or provide significant public benefit.

c. New Construction

Future development on Lot 18 should not have substantial adverse impacts on the church, wherever it is located. An addition or a new building should be sensitive to the siting of the church, both from historical and urban planning perspectives, and should preserve the public views of the portico, steeple, and forward bays of the church. The design should be sympathetic in massing and materials, while being clearly delineated in style. Points of intersection of the historic church and a new building should be minimal and well removed from the front portico. The setback of a new building should be guided by the need to maintain sightlines of the historic building from public ways; an appropriate distance might be the average setback of the front wall planes of the adjoining buildings at 1791 and 1815 Massachusetts Avenue.

2. Alterations

a. Ornamentation

The ornamentation of the church conveys the design skill and craftsmanship of the architect and builders. Elements such as the Egyptian capitals, Asher Benjamin-inspired carved panels, cornice and window trim, and windows are specific examples of such ornamentation.

Exterior materials should be preserved insofar as practicable. Special care should be taken to protect and maintain the original pilasters, columns, decorative carvings and ornamentation, doors, cladding, cornice trim, windows and window trim. The historic exterior cladding is significant because it shows the passage of time and may be a higher quality than available today.

b. Fenestration

Window placement and location is a critical element of the architectural character of the building. The 1872 addition remained consistent in its fenestration pattern to the original structure. Introduction of new window openings should be discouraged. Existing sash should be maintained. Storm windows may be installed without review in conformance with current Commission guidelines.

c. Spire

The 1964 spire, atop the lower portion of the church’s original steeple, is not compatible in proportion, design, or sculptural effect with the rest of the building. Restoration of the original

steeple, or the subsequent copper dome, would be considered appropriate. Revisions to the steeple, after removal of spire or otherwise, remain subject to the approval of the Commission.

d. Interior features

Although interior features are not subject to the jurisdiction of the Cambridge Historical Commission, the owner should be encouraged to preserve original materials and detailing such as the pilasters, cornices, wainscoting, and window trim.

VIII. Proposed Order

ORDERED:

That the North Prospect Congregational Church, 1797-1803 Massachusetts Avenue, be designated as a protected landmark pursuant to Chapter 2.78, Article III, Section 2.78.180 of the Code of the City of Cambridge, as recommended by vote of the Cambridge Historical Commission on June 4, 2009. The premises so designated is the land defined as parcels 1 and 18 of assessor's map 153 and the building thereon and the premises described in a deed recorded in book 46939, page 421 of the South Middlesex Registry of Deeds.

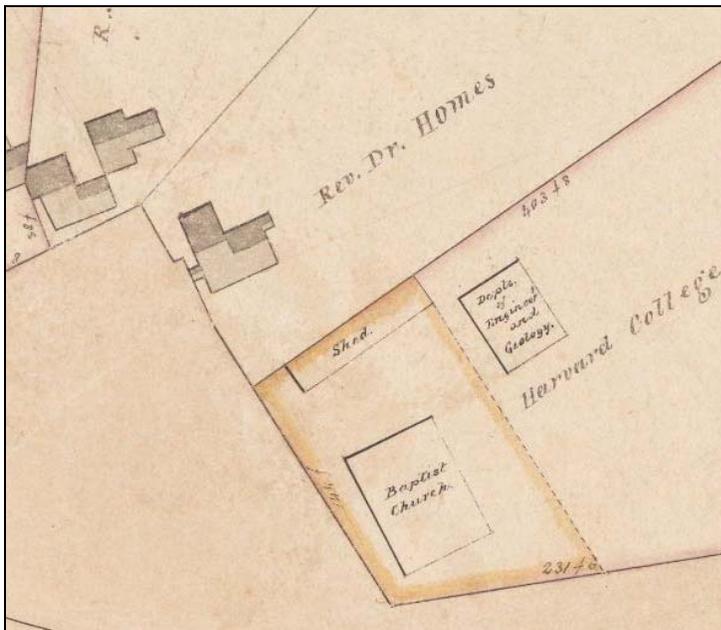
This designation is justified by the important architectural and historical associations the property embodies as one of seven extant antebellum churches in Cambridge, the only extant Greek Revival church in the city, and the only remaining church in Cambridge designed by architect Isaac Melvin.

The effect of this designation shall be that review by the Cambridge Historical Commission and the issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness, Hardship or Non-Applicability shall be required before any construction activity can take place within the designated premises or any action can be taken affecting the appearance of the premises, that would in either case be visible from a public way. In making determinations, the Commission shall be guided by the terms of the final landmark designation report, dated June 10, 2009, with respect to the designated premises, by Section VII, Standards and Criteria of said report, and by the applicable sections of Chapter 2.78, Article III, of the Cambridge Municipal Code.

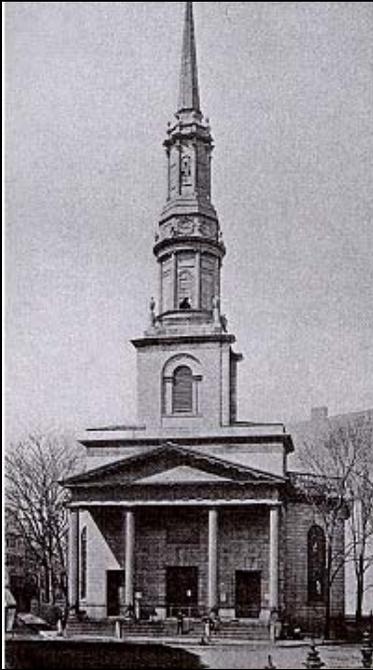
IX. Historic Photographs and Maps



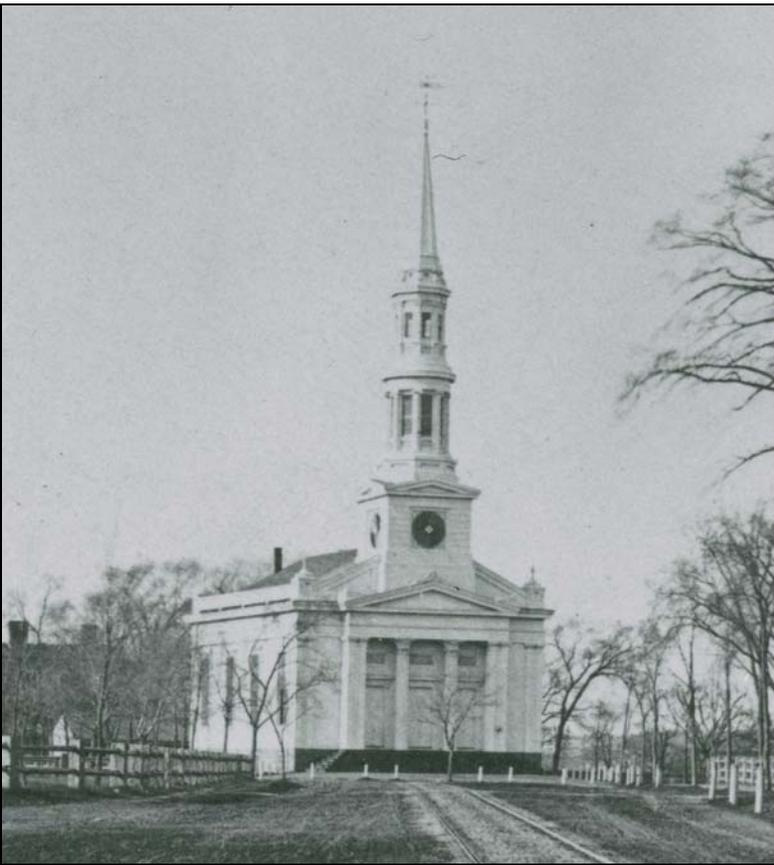
5. Old Cambridge Baptist Church, Holmes Place at Kirkland Street (looking North from Harvard Square; now site of Harvard's Littauer Center). Photo taken between 1856-1867.



6. Alexander Wadsworth, "Map of the Village of Old Cambridge," 1833, with later corrections (detail). Showing original location of the Old Cambridge Baptist Church (1845), with carriage sheds at rear of lot.



7. New South Church, Boston. Designed by Charles Bullfinch, 1814.
<http://www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/HVDpresidents/kirkland.php>



8. Detail of Figure 5, showing three-stage spire and original configuration of foundation and steps at the sides of the portico.



9. North Avenue Congregational Church, 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, after 1906. Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities photograph. Looking North toward Porter Square, showing relocated church with acroteria, corner turrets, and dome (added 1906). Also showing Mansard house at 1797 Massachusetts Avenue (demolished 1920).



10. North Avenue Congregational Church, 1803 Massachusetts Avenue, ca. late 1930s.
Photo by Roger Gilman. Showing square belfry and copper dome.



11. Interior of North Avenue Congregational Church. B. Orr Photography. Photo ca. 1966-1967.

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