

Progress Report from the Cambridge Historical Commission

By ALBERT B. WOLFE, *Chairman*

THE Cambridge Historical Commission is conducting a survey of architectural history unique in scope in the country. Established in 1963 in part to administer four historic districts, the Commission is directed by or-

menced the survey in the summer of 1964, and has now gathered material on about two-thirds of the city, exclusive of Harvard's main areas, and has published two reports, with two more in process.

Working area by area from east to

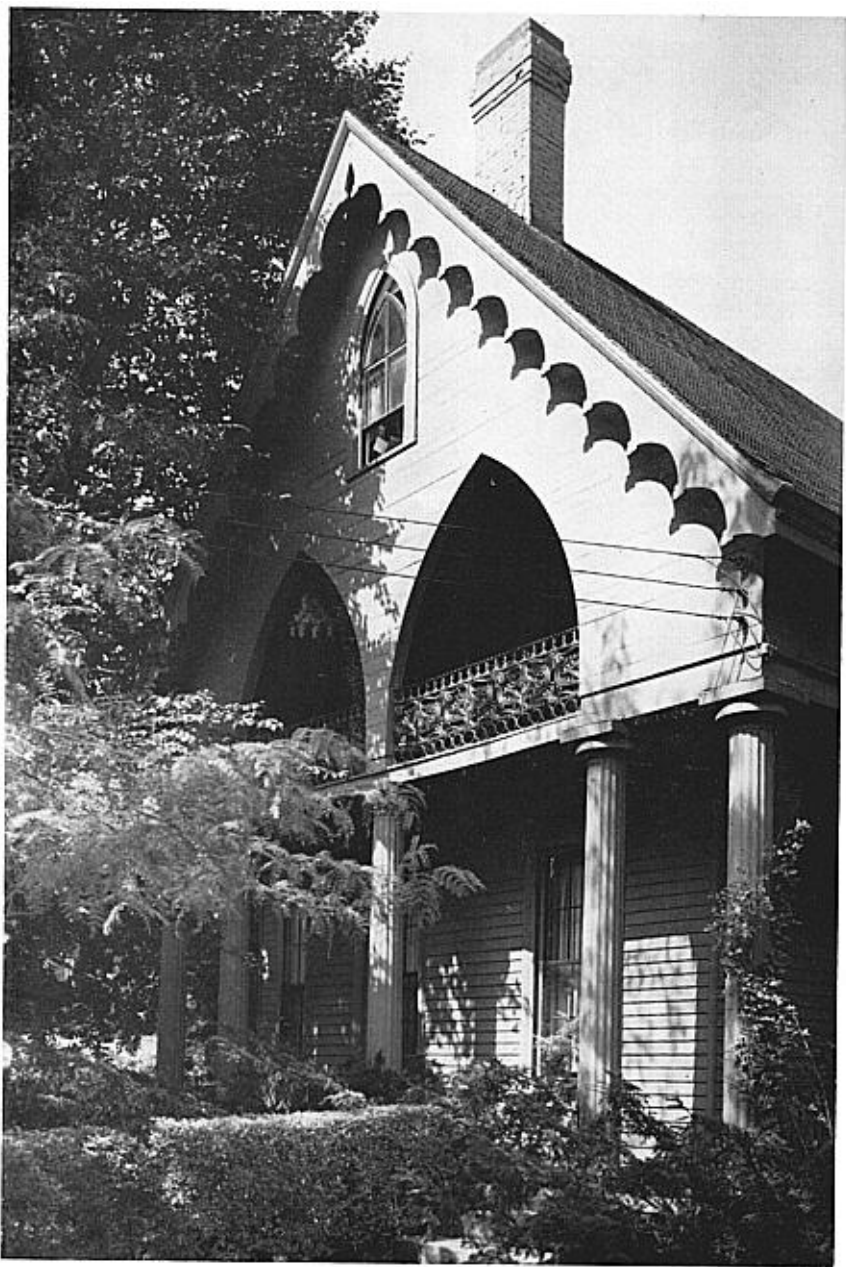


MANSARD MANSION (1862) AT 1627 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, ONE OF THE MANY VICTORIAN STRUCTURES ILLUSTRATED IN *Mid-Century*

Photo: Jack Boucher, HABS.

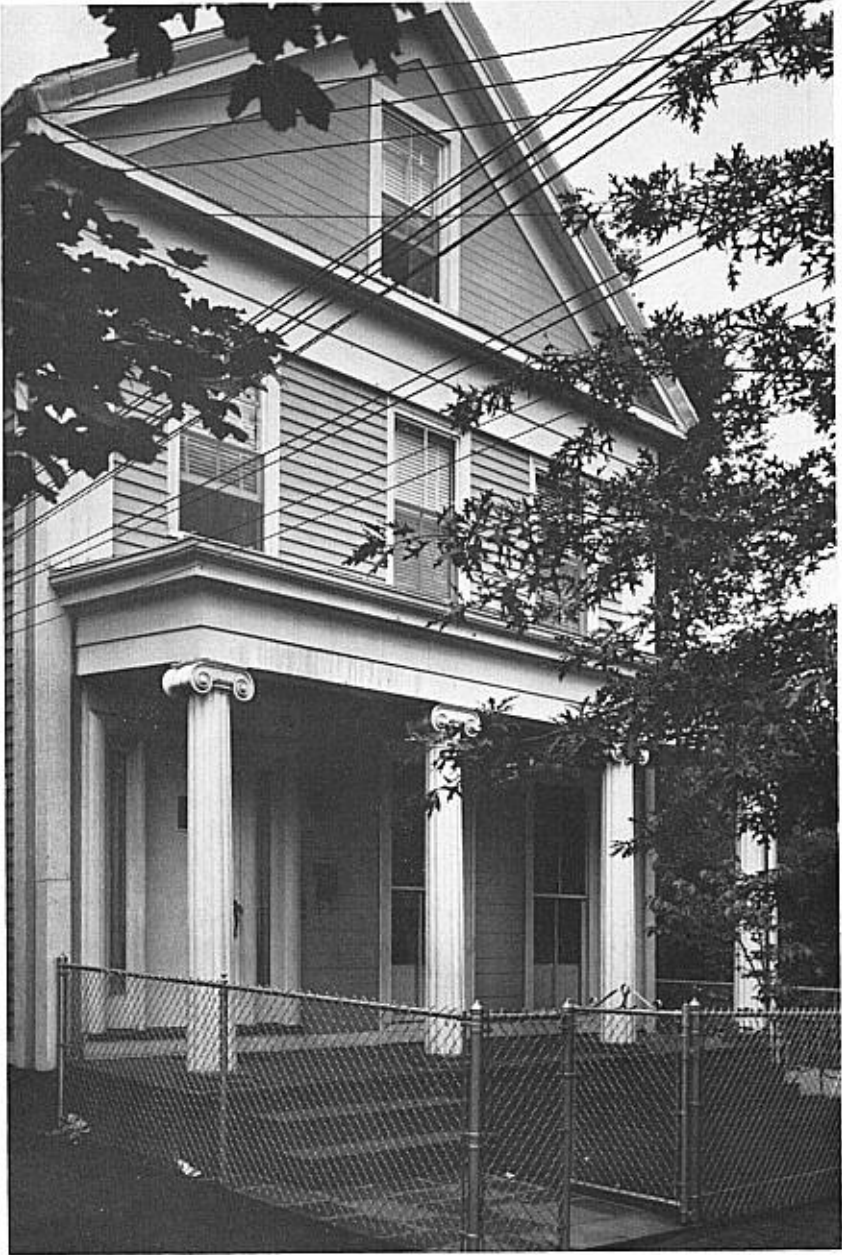
dinance "to conduct a survey of Cambridge buildings for the purpose of determining those of historic significance architecturally or otherwise, and pertinent facts about them." A professional staff, financed by city appropriations approximating \$30,000 most years, com-

west, the staff makes a building-by-building inventory, recording facts about every structure before singling out those of significance for further research and photography. Survey archives are kept in the Planning Board office, where they are accessible to all who are interested.



GREEK REVIVAL HOUSE (1844) AT 69 THORNDIKE STREET, TYPICAL OF
THE BUILDINGS PRESENTED IN THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL
COMMISSION'S FIRST SURVEY REPORT, *East Cambridge*

Photo: Jack Boucher, HABS.



GOTHIC COTTAGE (1841) AT 7 DANA STREET, A DANA HILL LANDMARK
DISCUSSED IN THE COMMISSION'S SECOND VOLUME, *Mid-Cambridge*

Photo: Jack Boucher, HABS.

At this point the files contain historic and architectural information on nearly all buildings in the areas covered, as well as a growing collection of photographs both old and new.

The illustrated reports interpret and evaluate the raw survey data. *Report One: East Cambridge* (1965) contains a general introduction to the city's history and architecture plus specific coverage of the East Cambridge district. Its authors are Survey Director Bainbridge Bunting, Professor of Architectural History at the University of New Mexico and author of *Houses of Boston's Back Bay*; Robert Bell Rettig, the Commission's Associate Survey Director; Robert H. Nylander, several of whose articles have appeared in OLD-TIME NEW ENGLAND; and Stephen C. Lockwood, an architecture student. *Report Two: Mid Cambridge* (1967) covers the part of the city north and east of Harvard Yard. Its authors are Antoinette F. Downing, Chairman of the Providence Historic District Commission and co-author of *The Architectural Heritage of Newport, Rhode Island*; Elisabeth MacDougall, Assistant Professor of Fine Arts at Boston University; and Eleanor Pearson, formerly with the Society.

In addition to conducting the survey and administering the city's four historic districts, the Commission has cooperated with local, regional, state, and national agencies on matters of historic preservation. Locally, the Commission has supported two successfully completed private preservation projects that involved moving and restoring threatened buildings; other similar projects spurred by the Commission are in the works. Last year the Commission participated in the historic sites survey of the Eastern Massachusetts Regional Planning Project and the Massachusetts Historical Commis-

sion by selecting and documenting one hundred Cambridge areas and buildings most worthy of preservation. Nationally, the Commission has participated in two recording projects of the Historic American Buildings Survey and has worked with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Commission has also begun compiling brochures and guides to points of historic and architectural interest in Cambridge. In 1965 it prepared a Heritage Trail brochure for the benefit of visitors to the Harvard Square area; a current project is a walking-tour guide to Cambridge architecture. When the survey is completed, attention can be turned to a comprehensive preservation plan for the entire city, involving lists of the most significant areas and buildings, further recommendations for historic districts, and proposals for historic markers, displays, and further publications.

Since the survey publications are of more than local interest, the Commission has made arrangements to distribute them nationally. Copies of *Report One: East Cambridge* and *Report Two: Mid Cambridge* of the *Survey of Architectural History in Cambridge* are available at \$4.95 each through bookstores or through the distributor, The M. I. T. Press (50 Ames Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142). The *Final Report of the Historic Districts Study Committee* is available through the National Trust for Historic Preservation and also (at \$1.00 per copy) through the Commission (57 Inman Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139). The Heritage Trail brochure may be obtained free from the City Manager's office (City Hall, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139). Hopefully, the Commission's publications may be helpful to other communities undertaking studies of their historic and architectural heritage.