

BIKE TOURS OF CAMBRIDGE 2009

Sponsored by Cambridge Bicycle Committee
and the Cambridge Historical Society

RIDE INFO: www.cambridgebikes.org



PEDALING THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

A HISTORY OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN CAMBRIDGE

SUNDAY
OCTOBER 4

INTRODUCTION

“All politics is local” said Tip O’Neill, Cambridge resident and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1977 to 1986. From its creation by a group defined by their religious and political extremism, Cambridge has been the home of people with strongly held convictions. The city played a central role in the American Revolution and the abolitionist movement before being named “The People’s Republic” for its role in the anti-war, civil rights, tenant’s rights, gay rights, sustainable development, and environmental movements.

Pedaling the People’s Republic will take participants on a tour of past political activity from the Revolution to the grass roots movements of the 20th century.

Our tour circles Cambridge history. We start at the Cambridge Common and loop past locations connected to the 19th-century No-License movement on the way to “Barry’s Corner” in North Cambridge. We stop at the former 18th-century free African-American community of Lewisville near the Radcliffe Quad and visit a site near Central Square associated with the 1960s anti-war movement. We finish, historically, where we started: at Lechmere Square in East Cambridge, named for a Loyalist who fled the country at the beginning of the Revolution.

We hope you enjoy this spin through time and through the city of Cambridge!

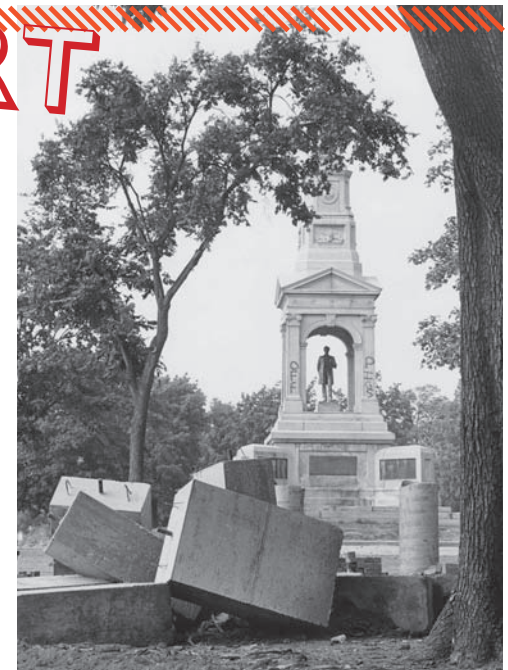
START THE CAMBRIDGE COMMON!

The Common was established in 1630 as part of the original plan for the city. The core of Cambridge was surrounded by palisade fences, and outside the fortifications were the farm lands and the livestock. This system of farming relied on a vast area of undivided common land. The Common land once stretched to Arlington Heights, including woodlots, ox pastures, and grounds for grazing sheep. The Common along Mass Ave was a cow pasture and stretched from the Burying Ground to Linnaean Street.

The Common is probably most famous for its role during the American Revolution. On September 1, 1774 British troops seized gunpowder and other military supplies from a powderhouse in Somerville. On September 2, 1774 in response, citizens from all over New England marched toward Boston and 4,000 protesters gathered on Cambridge Common, shortly thereafter the loyalists in Cambridge fled.

After the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the New England militias marched to Cambridge and set up camp on the Common. Within two days about 10,000 Minutemen came and Cambridge quickly becoming the center of the American Revolution. It was on the Cambridge Common on July 3, 1775 that General George Washington took command of the Continental Army.

Following the Revolutionary War, the Common began to evolve. The Common was reduced in size and buildings were constructed along its edges leading to the appearance of a compact and enclosed space. The enclosure of the Common land was a controversial process, pitting the established

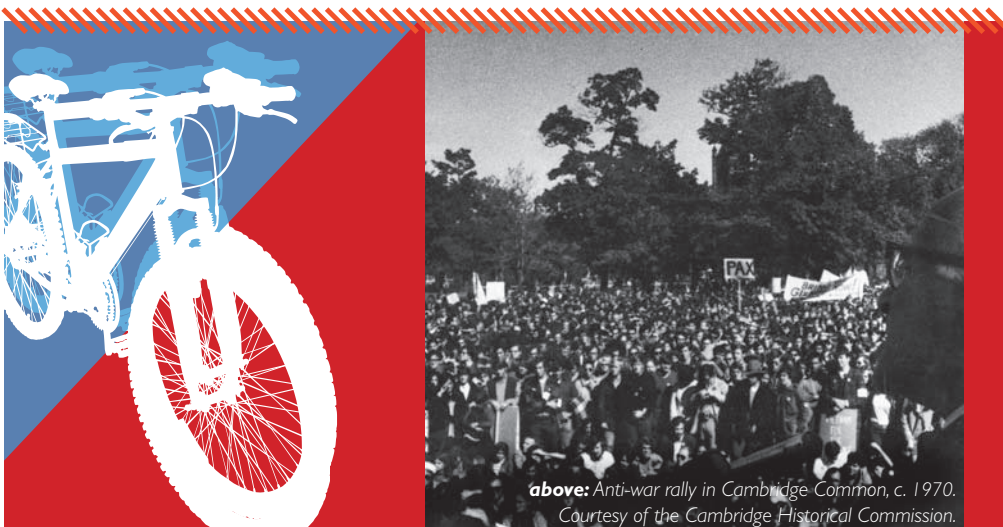


above Cambridge Common, c. 1970.
Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Commission.

Cambridge residents against farmers, tradesmen, and supporters of the turnpikes that ran through the Common. The issue became so controversial that the church leaders threw the village meetings out of the meeting house, as the discussions were too heated for a sacred building.

Leading up to the Civil War, the Common was the site of political gatherings, which continued throughout the 19th century as a site for proclamations and diatribes. During World War II there were barracks built along the Mass Ave edge of the Common and the site was again used for drills.

By the 1960s the Common was a part of the counter culture movement, with parties and music happening throughout the summers. This continued into the early 1980s with the puppet group Bread and Circus performing on the Common. Today the Common is relatively peaceful, with the occasional monument popping up.



above: Anti-war rally in Cambridge Common, c. 1970.
Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Commission.

STOP 1

SHADY HILL SQUARE —THE “NO LICENSE” MOVEMENT!

Though it may surprise latter day Cantabrigians, the defining movement of the last two decades of 19th-century Cambridge was rooted in the temperance movement, i.e. the fight “to ban the saloon.” Massachusetts granted in 1881 the right of cities and towns to ban drinking establishments and some towns, including neighboring Somerville, soon chose this local option causing some of the saloon business to migrate to Cambridge. The pivotal moment came in 1885 when a man named DeWire moved his saloon a few blocks across the line to Kirkland Street in the Shady Hill neighborhood. This incident set off the “No License” movement which eventually grew into what became known

as “The Cambridge Idea”—built on the banning of the saloon, maintaining an honest and efficient municipal government, and nonpartisanship in municipal elections. Liquor remained banned until the end of Prohibition, and the principles of The Cambridge Idea eventually gave rise to calls for changes in the municipal charter, which culminated in the Cambridge Committee for Plan E in the late 1930s. Soon after the adoption of the Plan E Charter, several reform organizations merged to form the Cambridge Civic Association, which survived through the end of the 20th century.



above: The Cambridge “No License” logo. Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Society.

right: A typical saloon in Cambridge circa 1898; this is the type of establishment the “No License” movement would rally against. Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Society.



above and right: Anti-war protests in Harvard Square, 1970. Photographed by P. Hirshorn. Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Commission.



STOP 2 TIP O'NEILL AND BARRY'S CORNER!

The Cambridge Idea was only one side of the body politic of Cambridge. Partisanship in municipal government along party and ethnic lines grew with the influx of immigrants to Cambridge in the early 1900s. Thomas P. O'Neill, a former city councillor and father of Thomas P. “Tip” O'Neill, became commissioner of sewers and “was in a position to control such jobs as teacher, policeman, city clerk, fireman, and trash collector” through the patronage system in effect during those years. The political dichotomy of Cambridge was really between political patronage (often along ethnic lines) and the good government crowd (the “goo-goo,” the continuation of The Cambridge

Idea). Politics became intertwined with the ability to get and retain a job. This was the environment that spawned Congressman and later Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill. Ironically, Tip's father was a teetotaler and an adherent of the temperance movement. Tip O'Neill's formative years were centered around a clubhouse in an abandoned barbershop at the intersection of Cedar and Rindge streets known as Barry's Corner. Many years later, when Cambridge antiwar protests in Harvard Square and elsewhere reached a fever pitch, it was Tip O'Neill's shift to an antiwar stance that signaled the nationwide dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War.



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- 1 Shady Hill Square—The “No License” Movement!
- 2 Tip O’Neill and Barry’s Corner!
- 3 Garden and Linnaean Streets—Lewisville!
- 4 Sgt. Brown’s Memorial Necktie Coffee House!
- 5 University Park—Simplex Steering Committee!

STOP 3

GARDEN AND LINNAEAN STREETS —LEWISVILLE!

Lewisville was a self-sufficient community of free African Americans, beginning in 1790 and well-established by 1830. It was located on what is now Observatory Hill, in close proximity to the prominent residents of Old Cambridge. Lewisville inhabitants included people who had tended the land of Andrew Craigie, descendants of slaves owned by the Vassal family, and possibly a former slave of Judge Joseph Lee. Some of Lewisville was land confiscated from Loyalists, while some was purchased from people such as Craigie. Many members of the community were radical abolitionists. Walker Lewis was a member of the Massachusetts General Colored Association, an all-black anti-slavery group that advocated immediate emancipation and equality. His younger brother Andress published *Light and Truth: a Universal History of the Colored and Indian Race*. Through the acts of fighting for their own freedom, publishing their own histories, and owning their own land, the Lewises left a legacy of independence and empowerment.

MEMORIAL DRIVE— SAVE OUR SYCAMORES!

In 1962, the MDC announced plans to widen Memorial Drive and construct underpasses at River Street, Western Avenue, and Boylston Street (now JFK Street). The plan would require cutting down most of its then-60 year-old Sycamore trees. Community activists, led by Edward Bernays (the “father of public relations”) and longtime resident John Moot, mobilized a campaign against the plan, attracting the attention of the national media.

A highlight of the successful campaign was a “National Recreation Day” along the riverbank organized by Bernays. That prompted neighbor Isabella Halsted to propose a “Riverbend Park.” At a charity auction, she was the high bidder for a luncheon with Senator Edward Kennedy at which she lobbied him on her proposal—and a call from Kennedy to MDC Commissioner John Sears set in motion the Sunday street-closing which today’s Bike Tour riders will enjoy.

left: Advertisement for Sgt. Brown’s Memorial Necktie Coffeehouse that appeared in the *Old Mole*, an underground newspaper. Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Society.

Central Square

**SGT. BROWN'S
MEMORIAL NECKTIE**

49 Pleasant Street

tuesday political discussions thursday
free movies saturday entertainment
free sunday nights only dinners 75c

open tues wed thurs 7:30 to midnight
fri sat sun open 2 to midnight for
details call 491-9427

888 MEMORIAL DRIVE— WOMEN’S RIGHTS PROTEST!

In 1971 an abandoned Harvard building at 888 Memorial Drive was taken over as a symbolic move intended to spark awareness about women’s issues both at Harvard and citywide. For 10 days a group of women, including members of the Bread and Roses group, occupied Harvard’s former Architectural Technology Workshop. From this action the Women’s Center grew and became a hub of women’s education as well as a

valuable resource for the community. The Women’s School was also founded from the momentum of the takeover and the forming of the Women’s Center; the school operated for 20 years (1971–1992), empowering community women through practical and accessible education.

right: The 1971 takeover of 888 Memorial Drive by women activists. Courtesy of the Harvard Crimson Photo Archive.

STOP 4

SGT. BROWN'S MEMORIAL NECKTIE COFFEE HOUSE!

During the late 1960s and into the 1970s, Central Square was a center of anti-war activity. The building now housing Keezer’s Clothing was the site of a coffeehouse operated by members of the Boston Draft Resistance Group (BDRG). It took its name from the clip-on black necktie that was ripped from Sgt. Brown’s uniform during a demonstration at the Boston Army Base which was the local processing and induction center.

Within a few blocks were the offices of the *Old Mole*, a radical bi-weekly, newspaper published by a collective made up of members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the BDRG’s draft counseling center. Also in and around the Square were the offices of the Student Mobilization Committee (Mobe), which organized anti-war demonstrations, and an underground group that supported raids on draft boards.



“INNER BELT” MURAL!

The mural on the side of the Microcenter building commemorates the fight of neighborhood activists against a proposed Interstate Highway link that would have cut through Cambridgeport along Brookline and Elm streets. The fight was organized by two newly-formed groups, Citizens United, led by Catholic priests whose churches stood in the path of the proposed highway, and Save Our Cities, led by neighborhood activists Ansti Benfield and Bill Ackerly. Their battle cry, coined by MIT professor and City Councilor Thomas H.D. Mahoney, was “Cambridge Is a City, Not a Highway.” The local fight morphed into a suburban movement against further highway construction and led to Governor Frank Sargent’s 1970 decision to kill the Inner Belt and impose a moratorium on all limited-access highway construction inside Route 128.

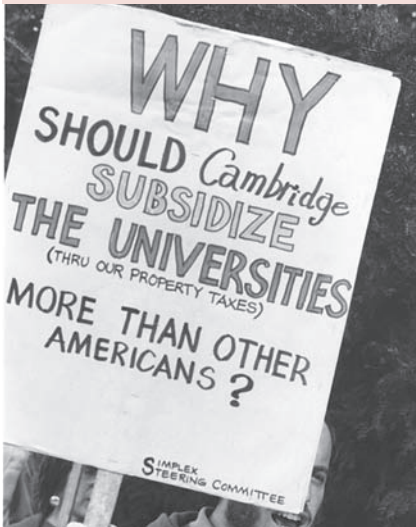
STOP 5

UNIVERSITY PARK—SIMPLEX STEERING COMMITTEE!

Cambridge once had a significant amount of manufacturing within its borders—from machinery to soap, from candy to automobiles—that created a huge number of skilled and unskilled working class jobs. One of the last of those firms was the Simplex Wire and Cable Company. As MIT sought to expand and also create a surrounding neighborhood of high tech and R&D businesses, a deal was struck with Simplex that hastened the firm's departure. In response to the transformation of the area's employment opportunities, local residents formed the Simplex Steering Committee to fight for zoning and programs that would create jobs and affordable housing. It took nearly twenty years of fighting, but some of the housing was built. The jobs, however, have never returned and once rent control was eliminated through a statewide vote, Cambridgeport (and much of the city) quickly gentrified.

DRAPER LABS!

1969 was the year when the war was brought back home in Cambridge. There was increasing anger at MIT's involvement in the Vietnam War. The off-campus but closely affiliated Instrumentation and Lincoln labs received \$106 million in 1969 alone from the Pentagon as they developed such projects as radar that detected Viet Cong in the jungle and a multiple-warhead guidance system for the Poseidon missile. Some students and other activists from the Boston-Cambridge anti-war community wanted the institute out of the development of weapons of war. The November Action Coalition staged demonstrations on November 4 and 5 involving hundreds of demonstrators and police, which resulted in several arrests and some injuries. Anti-war protests continued with the Harvard Square protests and riots in May of 1970. The Instrumentation lab changed its name in 1970 to the Draper lab in honor of its founder Charles Stark Draper and became independent of MIT in 1973, mainly as a result of ongoing anti-war sentiment.



left: Courtesy of the Bill Cavellini Collection, Cambridge Historical Society.



above: Anti-war protests in Harvard Square, 1970. Photographed by P. Hirshorn. Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Commission.

FINISH

LECHMERE CANAL PARK!

In keeping with Cambridge's reputation of being a community of forward-thinkers who value equality and human rights, Cambridge can boast being home to one of the earliest steps toward the abolition of slavery. In 1769, a case was heard that predates widespread abolitionism in New England. James v. Lechmere was brought before the Massachusetts Superior Court when James, a slave owned by prominent Loyalist and land-owner Richard Lechmere, sued for his freedom. The case was decided in favor of James, granting him freedom from the grips of slavery. This case set a precedent for the unconstitutionality of slavery. Lechmere returned to England at the beginning of the American Revolution, and his lands were later seized.



left: Simplex Steering Committee demonstration. Courtesy of the Bill Cavellini Collection, Cambridge Historical Society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

cover photos

top: Courtesy of the Harvard Crimson Photo Archive..

bottom: Anti-war rally in Cambridge Common, c. 1970. Courtesy of the Cambridge Historical Commission.

Thanks to members of the Cambridge Bicycle Committee and the staff of the Cambridge Historical Society, city staff and others for their work in making this ride possible. In particular, thanks to ride planners Cindy Brennan and Gavin Kleespies of the CHS, Jenni Alden, Catherine Hornby, Steve Miller and Gerry Swislow of the Bike Committee and Robert Winters of the Cambridge Civic Journal. Also thanks to Michael and Sara Kenney for their contributions to the brochure text and to special guest speaker LeRoy Cragwell, president of the Cambridge African American Heritage Alliance. Thanks

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left: Harvard Square during the 1970 anti-war protests. Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Herald-Traveler Photo Morgue.

right: Black activists stage a takeover of Harvard's University Hall in 1970 to protest the lack of black students and faculty at the school. Here, a student is shown stationed in the Dean of Students' office. Courtesy of the Boston Public Library, Herald-Traveler Photo Morgue.