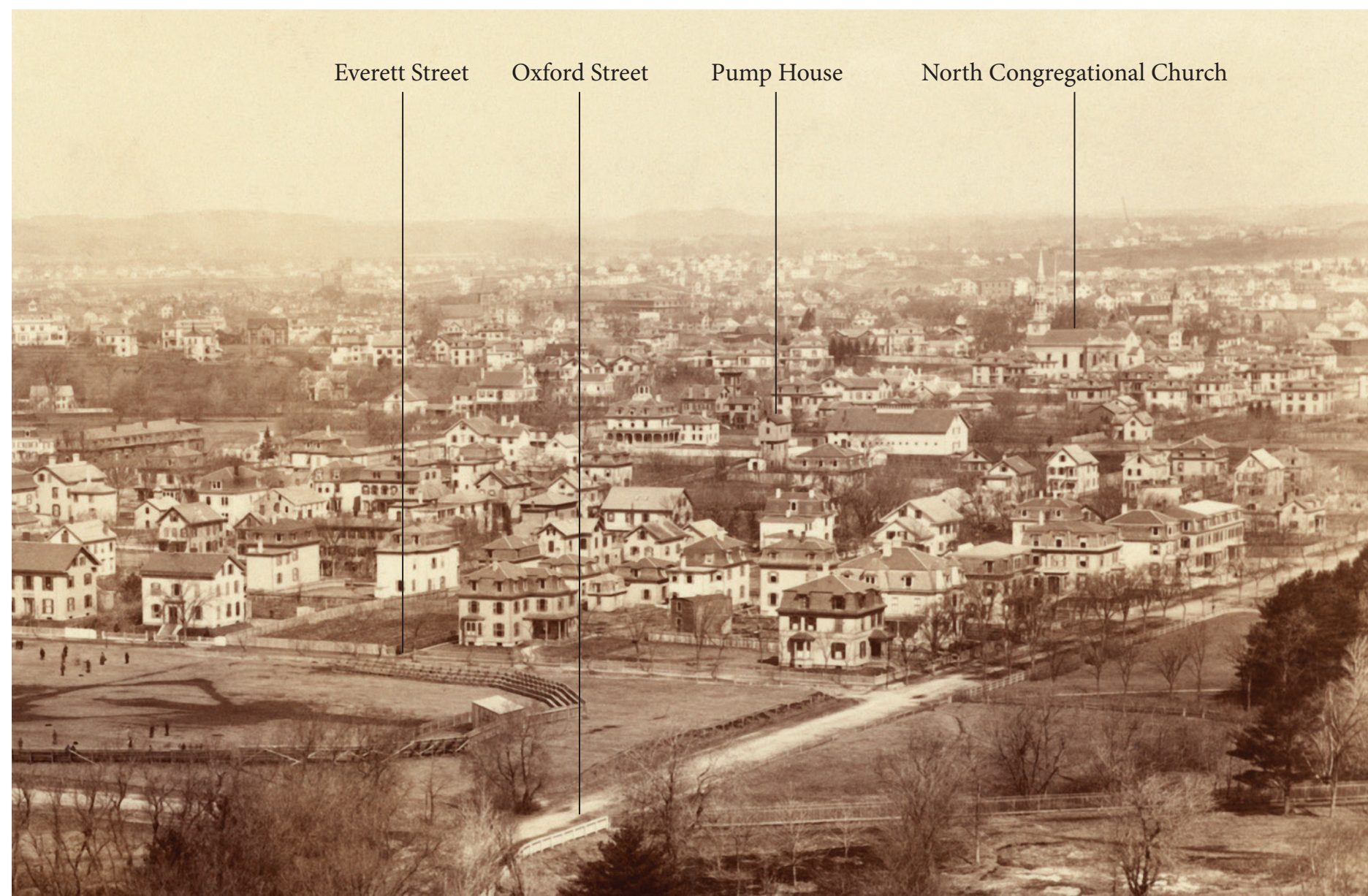


Sacramento Field



The Agassiz neighborhood in 1875, as seen from the tower of Memorial Hall with Everett and Oxford streets in the foreground. The large house and barn in the center were removed to permit construction of Garfield Street in 1882. The tall structure near the barn was the reservoir pump house. Harvard University Archives.

Sacramento Field lies in a part of Cambridge that was known from Colonial times for its high water table and copious springs. The long, narrow fields on the east side of Massachusetts Avenue extended to the Somerville line, and the streets that were laid out beginning in the 1840s (including Sacramento Street in 1851 and Garfield Street in 1882) followed the same orientation.

In 1848 David McClure, a Cambridgeport varnish manufacturer, purchased a 4½-acre homestead from Elizabeth Frost. The principal feature of the place was a spring-fed pond and a brook that drained into the Millers River in East Cambridge. The Somerville Dyeing & Bleaching Company bought the spring lot in 1853, built a stone reservoir 175 feet long and 40 feet wide, and drilled wells to augment the natural supply. A steam-powered pump supplied the plant on Somerville Avenue with 100,000 gallons of water a day. Later in the century, the owner “fenced in the property ... planted trees, vines and

flowers, and stocked the reservoir with many varieties of fish.” The property was “bordered on three sides by arched arbors which in summer are weighted down with grapes ... honeycombed with paths bordered with flower beds, and dotted with peach, pear and cherry trees” (*Cambridge Chronicle*, Feb. 4, 1922).

When the Middlesex Bleach, Dye & Print Works closed in 1936 it was the oldest cloth finishing plant in America. Founded in Somerville in 1801, the firm operated under several different names and twice burned to the ground. In the 1920s, 175 employees worked in five buildings on the site of today’s Conway Park. All were demolished in 1939.

In 1939 Cambridge attorney Thomas Culhane planned a private recreational park with tennis courts and swimming in the reservoir, but after vociferous objections from the neighbors he returned to the Board of Zoning Appeal in 1940 and won approval to build four apartment buildings. Nothing came of this, and after World War II another owner filled in the stagnant reservoir. In 1958 Harvard

University purchased the 1.2-acre site, which had become an informal playground known as Sacramento Field. The university’s plans for a 40-unit student housing project were stymied by a neighborhood downzoning in 1974. The city acquired the property by eminent domain in 1980.

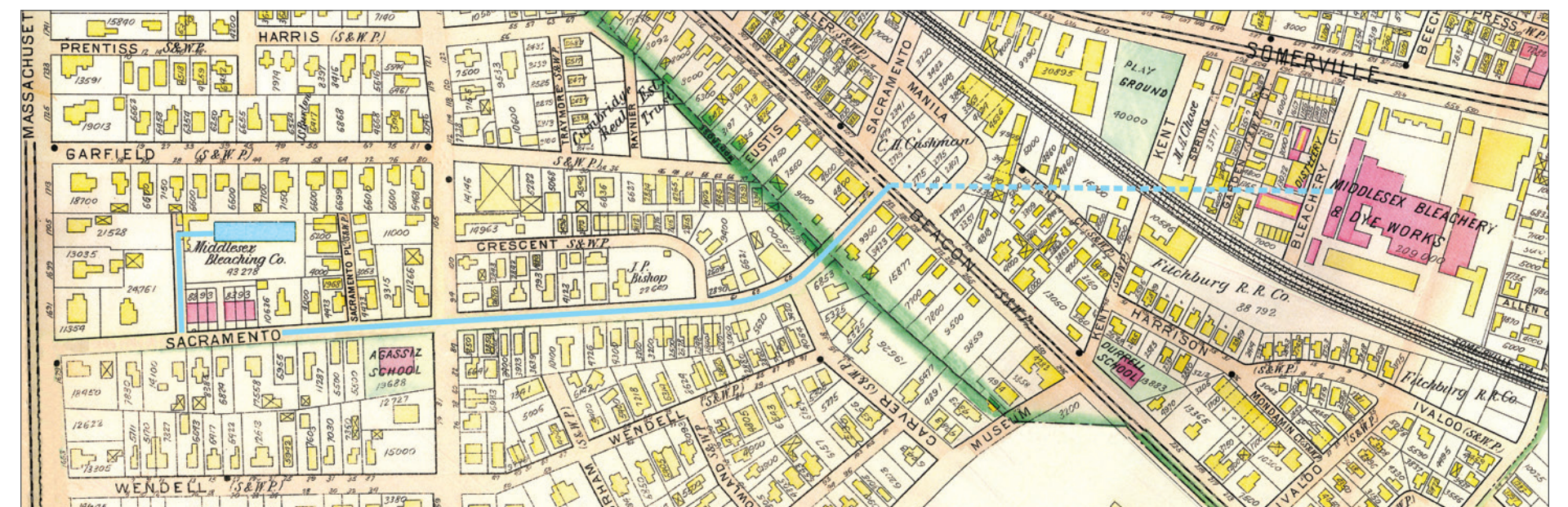
The City Council first appropriated funds for renovation of Sacramento Field in 2013. An intensive community process informed plans for the perimeter path, active and passive play areas, and extensive landscaping that were designed by Robert Steck of the Cambridge

Community Development Department and constructed in 2017. The Cambridge Arts Council commissioned Bland Hoke to create a public art project responding to the site. *Artesian Well—A Portal to Sacramento Park’s Past* includes two benches and a sculptural element along the west pathway to the park.

Sources:

Cambridge Chronicle. “Bubbling Springs in the Heart of the City,” July 7, 1906; “Interesting Facts About A Familiar Landmark,” February 4, 1922; “Thomas Dente, Gardener, Vigneron and Philosopher,” April 8, 1922.

Maycock, Susan E. and Charles M. Sullivan. *Building Old Cambridge: Architecture and Development*. The MIT Press, 2016.



Sacramento Field and the Middlesex Bleachery in 1900. Geo. W. Stedley & Co. *Atlas of Middlesex County, Mass.*, Vol. I. Boston, 1900.



The owners of the bleachery landscaped the reservoir and stocked it with fish; in the early 1920s the caretaker annually harvested up to 1½ tons of wine grapes from the property. Photo 1937. CHC, Cambridge Planning Board collection.