

ANNE WHISTON A map is a door into time and place, Boston, 1775. To look at this map is to travel in time, to visit a city that no longer exists, or does it? River, hill, harbor, and a common are constants. But where's Boston Neck today and what has become of the Mill Pond?

Fly 50 years forward, do the shape and structure of Boston look more familiar? What do names like India Wharf, Liverpool Wharf, and Russia Wharf say about Boston, the world, in 1826? What does the map reveal about the original role of Washington Street? And what do you make of Receiving Basin that abuts Boston Common?

Moving toward Cambridge, and forward another 50 years, follow the bridge to the juncture of Broadway and Main Streets, to what is now Kendall Square. Note where the water laps against the railroad along Albany Street in 1877. And observe how this canal functions and what it enables.

40 years later, the pictorial quality of the last map is replaced by new layers of information, building shape and materials, red for brick, yellow for wood, owners identified by name. Each name tells a story. Every word is a clue to the history of this neighborhood, to broader stories and shifts in culture.

As this map from 1916 fades into its 1930 counterpart, watch what happens to the Lever Brothers soap factory. Moving back and forth between 1916 and 1930, what do the changes over this 14-year period say about the nature and pace of change in this part of Cambridge? By 1970, homes and factories have been swept away. Who has the power to erase roads, to consolidate hundreds of properties? Why do some things persist and others disappear? To walk through these maps and return to the present is to cross a threshold and enter the once and future city.