

# the agassiz WHISTLER

Vol. 1, No. 12

March 8, 1971

Ten Cents

## A D V E R T I S E M E N T

COMMUNITY ORGANIZER to work with teens. Nights and afternoons. Will also help with program development for entire Agassiz Neighborhood. Prefer male with background in education and interest in sports. Send resume special delivery to Cambridge Community Schools Office, City Hall Annex, 57 Inman St., Cambridge, Mass. 02139. Phone 876-6800, ext. 350.

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### NEW COMMUNITY SCHOOLS DIRECTOR

Dr. Nancy Curtis of Cambridge has been named as assistant to the City Manager for Community Schools. This appointment, as several others announced at the February 22nd City Council meeting, has been the source of new controversy between Cambridge's City Manager and its citizens.

Over and over community Schools people have stated that Dr. Curtis herself is not the issue, but the manner in which her appointment was made. The Community Schools Advisory Committee (citizens from the 14 neighborhoods) was not consulted and another candidate for director had already been recommended by the Community Schools Commission.

City Councilor Ackermann, at the February 22nd meeting, was quoted by the Cambridge Chronicle, "The City Manager does not seem to consult with agencies affected by appointments, so who does he consult?"

The Community Schools Advisory Committee showed its discontent with the matter in a letter to the City Manager delivered to him just before the March 1st City Council meeting. (He had been requested to appear to explain his recent appointments as he was not present on February 22nd.)

The letter said in part, "We the

undersigned (23 names) feel that we are speaking for many of the more than 700 Cambridge residents, who have volunteered hundreds of hours of time as members of the Advisory Committee or the individual Councils, when we express our resentment of this way of doing business."

At the March 1st meeting Mrs. Ackermann read another excerpt from the letter. "We feel, as well, that the appointee...has been placed in the uncomfortable position of being responsible for a citizen-based

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### THANK YOU, AGASSIZ NEIGHBORS

Contributions continue to come in each day for The Whistler. We are most grateful for your generosity. (The coupon below is for those of you who may have missed it last week.)

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Yes, I want to receive The Whistler AS LONG AS POSSIBLE. (Make check or money order payable to the Agassiz Community Schools Program.) I enclose \$1 or more.

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## MID CAMBRIDGE DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

(Reprinted with permission from the Cambridge Historical Commission's Report Two: Mid Cambridge, 1967, p. 17.)

The role of Mid Cambridge during the American Revolution was primarily that of a conference ground, no battles having been fought in that area. The only fortifications were on Dana Hill, which was seen as a strategic point of defense. After the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, a chain of earthworks was constructed from Riverside to the Somerville line. As part of this chain, a fort was built near the corner of Putnam Ave. and Franklin St.; from this fort (according to Drake's Historic Mansions and Highways) there extended "a series of redans, six in number, joined together by curtains...across the road and up the slope of what was then called Butler's, since known as Dana Hill, terminating at their northerly extremity in another redoubt, situated on the crest and in the angle of Broadway and Maple Avenue...A hundred yards behind this line...was another rampart of earth." A redan consists of two parapets joined at a projecting angle; curtains are connecting earthwork walls.

The need to house Revolutionary troops transformed two estates in the area into military barracks. Because of their Tory sympathies, Ralph Inman and his family were forced to leave their mansion. The Committee of Safety confiscated the estate, and after the Battle of Bunker Hill, the grounds accommodated the tents of 3,460 soldiers. The mansion house itself became the headquarters of General Israel Putnam, who directed construction of the fort in East Cambridge that played an important part in forcing the British evacuation of Boston in 1776. After

the evacuation the Committee of Correspondence, a Revolutionary group with governmental powers, leased the Inman farm for the benefit of the American cause; the estate did not return to the Inmans' possession until 1783. A stone marker indicating the site of the house is all that reminds us of it today.

The Committee of Safety also quartered three companies of soldiers on the estate of John Foxcroft! A Tory sympathizer, Foxcroft first took refuge in Boston. He soon returned to Cambridge, and after both houses on his estate were levelled by fire in 1777, he moved into the John Hicks house in Old Cambridge.

West of Foxcroft's estate, the gambrel-roofed dwelling of Jonathan<sup>2</sup> Hastings, Jr., on the Little Common was the site of important decisions in the early years of the Revolution. Hastings had bought the house, part of which probably dated to the seventeenth century, in 1737; he was Steward of Harvard College and an ardent supporter of the Revolu-

<sup>1</sup> The major estate in the Shady Hill area.

<sup>2</sup> A triangle of land cut into the corner of Massachusetts Ave. and Kirkland St.

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THE AGASSIZ WHISTLER is published twice a month by the Agassiz Community Schools Program for the entire neighborhood. The cost is 10¢ per issue. Call 876-9268 for more information or visit the office at 28 Sacramento St. We welcome your literary contributions, letters, suggestions, or advertisement requests.

Kate Mattes, Agassiz Community  
Schools Coordinator  
Jay Lord, Assistant Coordinator  
Jill Norton, Editor for The Whistler

tionary cause. The Committee of public Safety met in the Hastings House to organize the Provincial Army and to chart its military tactics. General Artemus Ward, commander-in-chief until Washington took command on April 19, 1775, also had his headquarters there. Washington himself stayed in the house for a few days before moving into the John Vassall house on Brattle St.

In the nineteenth century the Hastings house came into the possession of Judge Oliver Wendell, whose only daughter married the Rev. Abiel Holmes, minister of the First Parish Church and author of the first history of Cambridge. The couple lived in the gambrel-roofed building with her father; their son Oliver Wendell Holmes was born there in 1809. Holmes later wrote of the house in Poetic Localities of Cambridge, "I should hardly be quite happy if I could not recall, at will, the Old House with the Long Entry and the White Chamber where I wrote the first verses that made me known." These verses were "Old Ironsides," the poem that saved the U.S.S. Constitution and chronicled the War of 1812 to later generations. The Holmes family sold their historic house to Harvard University, which demolished it in 1883. Since the house appears to have been in good condition at the time, the reason for its destruction would seem to have been to improve the view of the new Austin Hall.

The significance of Mid Cambridge in the American Revolution lies in the meetings held there in the early years of the war. The earthwork fortifications were allowed to disintegrate, any traces of them having disappeared long ago. Loss of the Inman house and of the Hastings-Holmes house, buildings of real historic value to the city and the country, was unnecessary and unfortunate.

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TO MEMBERS OF THE AGASSIZ COMMUNITY:

In the December 21 issue of The Whistler there was a request for volunteer drivers to deliver surplus foods to elderly Cambridge residents who are eligible for this program but cannot take advantage of it because of lack of transportation.

As a volunteer driver, I would like strongly to urge other members of our community who have access to a car to consider volunteering a greatly needed service. It involves one to two hours, once a month, and provides an opportunity to become acquainted with an elderly person who may not see too many people from day to day, or who rarely gets out of the house except to pick up surplus foods with a volunteer.

If you can help, call Mrs. Katherine Mansfield at C.E.O.C. (Cambridge Economic Opportunity Commission) at 868-2900. Or, you can call me at 864-9081.

Sincerely,  
(Mrs.) Phyllis Kornfeld  
67 Hammond Street

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OPENINGS AT NURSERY SCHOOL

The Cambridge Nursery School is still accepting enrollments for next year for their Farrar St. location, particularly for four-year-olds. Applications should be made as soon as possible.

Cambridge Nursery School is cooperative. Mrs. Virginia Demos is enrollment chairman. You can call her between 8 and 9 p.m. Monday through Friday at 923-1940.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO CAMBRIDGE CITY GOVERNMENT

The City of Cambridge has a Plan E Charter, which was adopted in 1940 as part of a reform movement that put an end to the corrupt and inefficient system which preceded it. Plan E is one of the standard charters authorized by the Massachusetts Legislature for use by cities. Its distinguishing features are (1) administration by a professional City Manager rather than an elected official, and (2) legislation by a City Council and a School Committee elected by proportional representation. These aspects of Plan E are discussed below:

The City Manager is appointed by the City Council as the business manager of the city. He supervises the administration of all city departments except the school department and he is responsible for the city budget.

The City Council is composed of nine members elected every two years. It is the legislative and policy-making body of the city. As stated above, it appoints the City Manager. It also elects a Mayor from its own membership. The Mayor is the presiding officer of the City Council and a member and the presiding officer of the School Committee.

The School Committee is composed of seven members--the Mayor plus six persons elected every two years. It has complete control of the public school system. It decides on school policy and on the school budget. Perhaps its most important function is the appointment of all school personnel, including the Superintendent and the other senior administrators.

Proportional Representation Voting. Voting by the proportional representation voting system (called PR) is designed to provide a City Council and a School Committee in which the various groups and geographic areas

of the city are represented in proportion to the voting strength of each. This has been its effect in Cambridge, where it has resulted in representation on the Council and the School Committee for all of the city's major ethnic groups and for all sections of the city. Unlike plurality voting, PR cannot result in complete domination of the city government by one group. Majority control and minority representation are both assured.

(The information above was prepared some time ago by the Cambridge Civic Association.)

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AGASSIZ SCHOOL PTA PROGRAMS

A second Hammer 'n Nails night, similar to the one held in October, will be held in the school auditorium on Tuesday, March 9, from 8 to 11.

Parents and friends handy with a hammer and saw are invited to come help build small and large items needed for classrooms. If you have them, bring saw (or power saw), hammer, nails, and screws. Other equipment which would be useful to bring: coping saws, files, sandpaper, clamps.

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Watch for the announcement of an evening meeting late in March concerning high school curriculums in Cambridge. Plans are being made to have a representative of Cambridge High and Latin and of the Pilot School come to our neighborhood to explain these two programs.

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When civic groups are introduced to the final candidates for Cambridge School Superintendent, our area will be represented by Mrs. Barbara Brower, for the neighborhood, and Mrs. Joan Keenan, for the PTA.

## NEW PLANS FOR ENVIRONMENT GROUP

by Priscilla Ellis

The Agassiz Environment Group has decided to discontinue its bi-monthly meetings for the time being. In the 7 months since we began, we have had a chance to learn a lot about particular environmental issues, especially in the area of recycling, and to make contact with various groups and individuals involved in ecological activities in the Boston area. We have also been happy with the response from the Agassiz Community to the newspaper recycling project, which we were forced to discontinue because collection costs exceeded the diminishing price for waste paper.

Our decision to suspend regular neighborhood meetings is based on our belief that more can be accomplished if we join a more widely-based group such as the Sierra Club. During the last month, several of our members attended two meetings sponsored by the Solid Waste Committee of the Sierra Club. These meetings made it clear that legislative action is crucial in the area of recycling, and that it is difficult for a small neighborhood group to make an impact in such an area by itself. This is not to say that individual or small group recycling efforts are negligible; rather, these efforts, in combination with continuous political lobbying and action, are necessary to change attitudes and processes relevant to solid waste disposal.

We urge you to alert your representatives at all levels of government to the importance of legislation promoting the recycling of glass, paper and metals, and the use of recycled materials in the manufacture of new products.

Members of the Agassiz Group plan to join forces with one or several of the Sierra Club committees. We also plan to keep in touch with the Agassiz Community through The Whistler and

perhaps occasional leaflets. Should the opportunity arise, we will hold meetings at the school. In the meantime, we hope you will let us know of any concerns or ideas you have about the environment. (Call me at 864-1672.)

When the weather gets better, we may attempt a newspaper recycling project where people bring their newspapers to a central location in the neighborhood, thence to be transported to a recycling plant.

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## SERIES ON CITY GOVERNMENT OPEN TO ALL

During March, the Cambridge Forum Sunday evening programs sponsored by the First Church in Cambridge, Unitarian, will take a close look at our city government. These events are free, open to the public, and are held at 8 p.m. Sunday evenings at the church at 3 Church St., off Harvard Square.

The League of Women Voters is co-sponsor March 14 for, "What Change for Cambridge Government?". Speakers will be Mary Newman, former representative to the State Legislature, and Paul H. Weaver, Assistant Professor of Government, Harvard University.

On March 21 all prospective (non-incumbent) city councilors have been invited to attend. The evening's program is entitled, "What if You Elect Me?". So far, Charles Nowiszewski, Leonard Russell, and William Walsh have accepted.

A working session with the Cambridge Police Department, "What Police Regulations Need Changing?", with Captain Chester Hallice, Chairman of the Rules and Regulations Committee, will be held March 28.

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program without any reference to or relationship with the citizens whom she must serve. She has a right to expect more than that from the chief executive of the City who is responsible for her appointment."

After some discussion, including Councillors Ackermann and Coates questioning of Mr. Corcoran, (Corcoran's position was that he was acting legally and that the person the Commission recommended was asking for too much money) three questions were put to the City Manager by Mrs. Ackermann.

- 1) Would he inform Dr. Curtis of this controversy?
- 2) Would he reopen the appointments?
- 3) Would he appoint new Community Schools Commissioners? (Nominations had been submitted for vacancies on the board in August.)

He answered that, yes, he would inform Dr. Curtis of the situation, no, he did not intend to reopen the appointments, and then turned to Mayor Vellucci, asking for nominations for the Commission.

The apprehension that if Mr. Corcoran made the director's appointment in this manner, he might also appoint neighborhood coordinators, brought the statement from him, "I will not change any coordinators."

The issue of the director's appointment pre-empted discussion of the budget allotted by Mr. Corcoran for Community Schools' neighborhood programs, which staff and many citizens in the 14 areas consider inadequate. Earlier on Monday, March 1st, a representative group had attempted to meet with him over this matter. They were told he was too busy preparing for the evening council meeting.

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COMMUNITY SCHOOLS - AN EVALUATION

(Below is a part of a report requested by the City Manager. The authors, Louis O'Malley and Geoffrey Pierson, prepared it while working as interns in City Administration as part of their Administration Careers Program at Harvard.)

The precise impact of the community schools is difficult to measure. It is an available service which not everyone in Cambridge will use or probably support. In the political arena in which decisions are made, it may be more difficult to defend than a public works program which affects all citizens. Yet, given the deteriorating state of cities and of neighborhoods within these cities, municipal governments are observing that psychological as well as physical conditions must be maintained and, in some cases, rehabilitated.

Cambridge is among the first cities to recognize and to react to this need. Its decisions to invest in human resources, and to do so wholeheartedly, appears to have been a wise one. Instead of creating an elaborate bureaucracy which might alienate the very people it seeks to affect, Cambridge has chosen to translate its concerns for the human condition into a flexible, accessible, and local program. It has chosen to bring services to the people instead of bringing people to the services. In so doing it has made city government a much more humane and popular activity.

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The next regular meeting of the Agassiz Community Schools Council will be held on March 15th, at 8 p.m. in the school library. Everyone in the community is invited.

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