PAPER

From Home Front to Architectural Frontier: How The Cambridge School Redefined Architectural Pedagogy

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Keywords: architectural pedagogy, women, home front, The Cambridge School

The Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, active from 1915 to 1942,[1] was a groundbreaking institution in architectural education. It was the first U.S. school to grant master's degrees to women and integrated the teaching of architecture and landscape architecture.[2] Beginning and ending at the height of two world wars, the Cambridge School challenged prevailing academic and professional norms, offering a disruptive, barrier-free space that redefined architectural pedagogy and influenced the field.

Largely forgotten to history, this paper uses the conceptual framework of the home front to reframe the school's legacy as one of defiance to a system that tried to silence it, particularly its influence on Harvard's Graduate School of Design (GSD). By collecting and uncovering previously disparate source materials from several archives, this paper connects the physical manifestations of the school to its pedagogical frameworks to elucidate the school's complex and far-reaching influence during its active years and beyond.

Recognizing the Cambridge School's contributions provides a deeper understanding of the women's role in architectural education and challenges historical dismissals of their contributions. This pioneering institution reshaped architectural pedagogy, promoted women's agency, and continues to offer valuable lessons for a more inclusive and equitable architectural profession.

INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (1915 - 1942) was a short-lived but significant experiment in architectural education. Over its 27-year lifespan, it produced over 800 graduates,[1] more than 250 women-led firms,[2] and was one of the larger schools at the time. It was also the first US architecture school to offer women master's degrees and the first school to combine the teaching of architecture and landscape architecture.[3] It redefined architectural pedagogy, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and academia's relationship to practice. Today, its history is hardly known.

When it is remembered, the Cambridge School is viewed as a discrete event created by a handful of specific individuals who believed in the value of educating women in Architecture and Landscape Architecture and the value it provided to the profession.

There are a handful of publications about the school's history and one detailed chronological account from one of its alumni, providing invaluable information on the school's founding and active years as it pertained to itself.[4] This paper aims to add to this existing scholarship but also to reframe the historical narrative of the Cambridge School as one of far-reaching influence during and beyond its lifetime rather than an isolated short-lived experiment. As such, this paper presents the Cambridge School through five stages: how it started in a living room, moved to a house, transformed into a school, and became a home, all the while manifesting as a new type of home front that lived on well beyond its closure in 1942 when it dissolved into Harvard's Graduate School of Design.[5]

The home front speaks both to the actions of civilians to uphold private and public life during World Wars I and II[6] and to its ideology as one of defiance during times of diminished agency. The two wars were crucial in the formation of the school, initiating its creation and facilitating its demise. These shifts social power dynamics provided the necessary changes to support a women-only institution. The school's founder in his unfinished written history of the school stated that "while development in education is naturally associated with periods of peace and prosperity, the great periods of progress in education grow out of eras of war and of national reverses".[7] The Cambridge School embodied this defiant ideology of the home front during times of social reversal. It used it to create a home for its novel approach to academia and practice with far-reaching but underacknowledged effects.

Excluded from broader pedagogy, the school used the gendered biases against it to its advantage, centering community, collaboration, and the idea of home-making to produce a home that reimagined what design education could mean. An idea that is today highly pertinent to the shifting attitudes the professions of architecture and landscape architecture are witnessing.

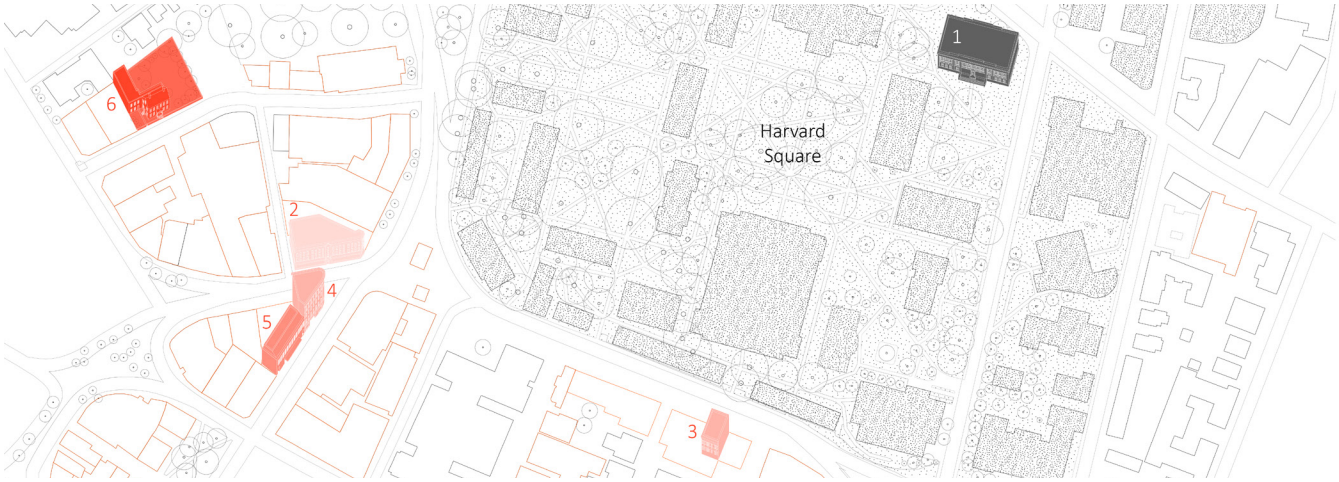

Figure 1. Spaces of Exclusion: the various homes of the Cambridge School. 1: Robinson Hall. 2: No.4 Brattle Street. 3: 1278 Mass Ave. 4: The Abbott Building. 5: 13 Boylston Street. 6: 53 Church Street. Image produced by author.

A LIVING ROOM

In 1915, the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture began in Katherine Brook's Cambridge living room.[8] The reason the school started in a living room and not in a more expected academic environment was because, at this time of the early 20th century, women were not yet granted open access to the male-dominated spaces of higher education both in America and further afield.

Professor Henry Atherton Frost - a professor of Landscape Architecture at the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture[9] - was approached by Katherine Brooks in 1915 - a recent Radcliffe College graduate - to privately tutor her so that she could work in landscape architecture.[10] The Cambridge School, in its early days, functioned similarly to that of Radcliffe College - Harvard's sister institution that provided higher education to women through contractual relationships with existing Harvard professors.[11]

Katherine was a privileged white woman from a wealthy Boston family who could afford private lessons.[12] Frost accepted for two reasons. The first was the desire for extra income, and the second was the freedom to teach outside Harvard's strict and traditional curriculum.[13] Within a year, Frost - alongside Bremer Whidden Pond, a second Harvard professor - "had a school and were unaware of it."[14] Pond and Frost's main incentive at this time was to provide the technical training women needed to enter the professions without access to master's degrees. By 1916, the title of "The Cambridge School of Architectural and Landscape Design for Women" was given, with "domestic architectural design and landscape design" being the focus of instruction.[15] Despite Frost and Pond creating the school to provide opportunities for women in the profession that were previously denied, in these early years, they still maintained tightly held beliefs that their contribution should be restricted to the "domestic."[16]

As such, the setting of a living room was - inadvertently - appropriate. There was no desire to more formally define the school, perhaps because it was not understood even by the women themselves the significance and necessity of educating women to participate in creating the built environment. Until this time, women rarely acted with agency in this field. It was not uncommon for women to serve as draftswomen in architectural or landscape architecture practices.[17] However, it was rare for women to have design agency. This agency was made more accessible to those holding professional degrees, but only a small number schools across the US offered such an education to women at the time, none of which provided both Architecture and Landscape Architecture together.[18] It is important to note that wealth - predominantly accessible to white individuals - was a significant factor in career development. The subsequent student body of the Cambridge School was largely comprised of women from moderate wealth, able to afford private schooling.[19] This should not diminish the achievements of the school and its students, but the school was by no means breaking boundaries for women from other means or backgrounds.

The informality of the living room suited the small group of students served. Despite the school's origins playing directly into the hands of sexist beliefs that women can and should only contribute to matters of the home, the setting of the living room provided the freedom for the school to rethink how the practices of architecture and landscape architecture can be learned and taught. Historically understood as a space of collective leisure, the living room supported a collaborative approach to learning. The women hunched over on couches and stools to design spaces for living - kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms, gardens, and living rooms. These early days encouraged the pioneering attitude that defined the school during its tenure and marked the significance of a collaborative working environment that defined it and its subsequent alumni-led firms.

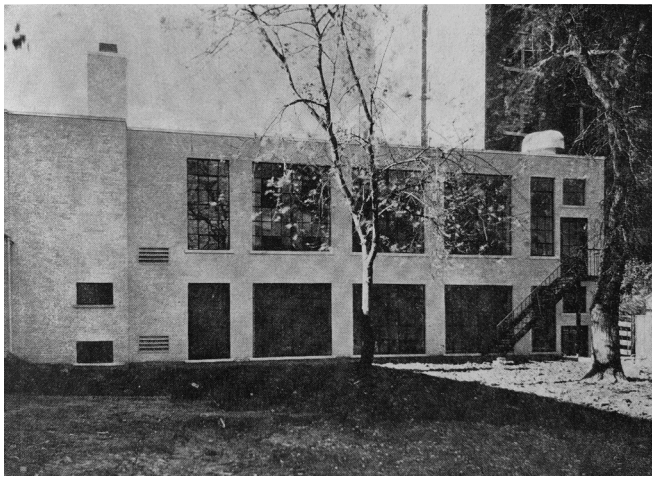

Figure 2. The alumni-designed extension at 53 Church Street.
The Cambridge School Pamphlet, Smith College Special Collections. .

A HOUSE

As the student body grew, what was a living room very soon became an entire house. This "house" moved around the periphery of Harvard Square until it finally settled in 1928. In 1916, the school moved from the living room into the office of Frost and Pond at No.4 Brattle Street.[20] The school rapidly outgrew the space and moved above an ice cream parlor at 1278 Mass,[21] and then appropriated another commercial space, this time at the heart of the square in the Abbott Building.[22] In 1927, an open-plan workshop at 13 Boylston (now JFK) Street - typically a mechanic workshop - housed the school.[23] In 1928, the school found its final home in a Colonial-style house at 53 Church Street.[24] The house - a prior meeting house for the women's suffrage movement in Cambridge[25] - set the stage for the school's permanent home.

These fast-changing but exciting years of the school informed much of its developing pedagogy. Each space brought with it new ways of learning and designing. Studying architecture and landscape architecture in spaces designed first and foremost for commerce forced the school to be agile in its modes of teaching. The space at 13 Boylston Street foreshadowed the ample open-plan collective studio space the school would eventually hold. At 1278 Mass Ave and the Abbott Building began the dialogue between the school and its context, where the school, until its closure, constantly participated in urban life, being a part of Cambridge's commercial and social heart.

While constant movement yielded productive outcomes, it also presented challenges. The temporary nature of the school's residences was a physical manifestation of the exclusion from broader pedagogy that underpinned the very foundation of the school and its creation. When traced over the map, the Cambridge School can be seen moving around the perimeter of Harvard Square (Fig 1), held at arm's length from the institution that denied entry to the women so eager to participate in and contribute to the architecture and landscape architecture professions. During this time, Harvard's Architecture and Landscape Architecture schools resided inside the academic fortress of Robinson Hall.[26] It remained distanced but not for long, as soon Harvard's students started to petition the Cambridge School to allow them to participate in the classes, trips, and events that provided new and exciting learning methods not yet present within the curriculum at Harvard. The Cambridge School hosted countless lectures, one notably by architect Frank Lloyd Wright.[27] They organized extensive field trips to Germany, Italy, France, England, Scandinavia, and the US.[28] Exchanges with the Architectural Association in London and the Lowthorpe School in Massachusetts,[29] as well as summer schools with Oxford University and with Harvard University.[30] The summer school with Harvard - which saw students from the two schools building structures together inside Harvard Yard[31] - can be traced to today's 'Harvard Design Discovery' summer program. Today, Design Discovery centers around the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to design, connecting architecture, landscape, and urban planning[32] in ways that directly relate to the ethos of the Cambridge School. Yet today, the Cambridge School by name and even more so by influence is almost entirely unknown within the GSD.

Despite its limitations, the all-female environment of the Cambridge School helped women recognize and overcome biases against them in a male-dominated industry. It acted as a platform for self-awareness, akin to Michel Foucault's concept of power.[33] Foucault's idea of the Panopticon as a symbol of societal power dynamics is relevant here.[34] The school empowered women by making them aware of the dynamics and enabling them to subvert them to their advantage. This empowerment was facilitated by the school's unique environment, where women could embrace their strengths. Ultimately, the Cambridge School was pivotal in empowering women in the industry for 27 years and beyond.

A SCHOOL

By 1928, the Cambridge School was an established name, and with their new formalization into a verified academic institution in 1924,[35] the domestic environment of the house required transformation into a school.

A program-specific development of the site turned the house into a school. This development was one of the Cambridge School's most defining events. Four early graduates of the school worked collaboratively to transform the site. Eleanor Raymond, Laura Cox, and Faith Bemis designed the extension, and Edith Cochran designed the landscape (Fig 2).[36] Their collaborative design approach reflected the school's pedagogy - centered around interdisciplinary collaboration. The extension was completed in 1929,[37] providing a large open-plan studio space akin to those in trend-setting European architectural schools such as the Bauhaus.[38] Interestingly, the Bauhaus, a school world-renowned for its interdisciplinary approach to education, was

Figure 3. The alumni-designed extension at 53 Church Street. The Cambridge School Pamphlet, Smith College Special Collections. .

founded in 1919, four years after the Cambridge School.[39] The open plan studio sat in contrast to the Colonial-style house with its highly domestic interior. The living room, dining room, kitchen, hallways, attic and bedrooms all remained in form, sitting as a backdrop to the new ideologies around modern living from the student's design pursuits. Not unlike the Georgian townhouses of the Architectural Association which also originated from domestic environments to produce innovations in pedagogy.[40]

Inside the extension, barriers between the disciplines didn't exist, and students from the two disciplines took most of their courses together, only diverging at the end of their studies for their thesis.[41] The alumni-designed extension demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the 'International Style'. It was one of the first of its kind in the traditionally-dominated architecture of Harvard Square. Large steel windows - reminiscent of their tenure at 13 Boylston street - prioritized natural light for working and a connection from the outside to the rear (Fig 3). At the front, the facade is subdued, pulled back to be subordinate to the colonial house with a modest entryway that makes one miss the school's presence almost entirely. Its design acted much like the school did; on the surface, it was a school that had its place and was inferior to those around it, but once engaged with it, unveiled itself to be a place filled with new ideas and exciting potential.

In 1966, 22 years after the school's eventual closure, Harvard purchased the property of 53 Church Street, including the alumni-designed extension.[42] It remained dormant for many years until, in 1991, a petition was filed for a landmark designation for the extension as a site of historical significance concerning the Cambridge School and women's contribution to architecture. In a now largely unknown letter, Harvard rejected the application and instead suggested installing a plaque "that would commemorate the importance of this site to women's history."[43] Furthermore, Harvard did "not want in any way to dismiss the significance of women's entry into the design professions."[44] In 2002, enabled by the lack of a landmark designation, Harvard commissioned a significant project to renovate the extension. The project turned the extension, which was once an open, inspired environment fostering collaboration, into a subdivision of small computer labs.

A HOME

In the school, the house, and the living room, the students found themselves a home (Fig 4). This notion of home was central to the Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture on many levels, making it fundamentally different from other design schools at that time. For the curricula, home was central in the school's focus on housing and domesticity. For the organization, its exclusion from broader pedagogy created a sense

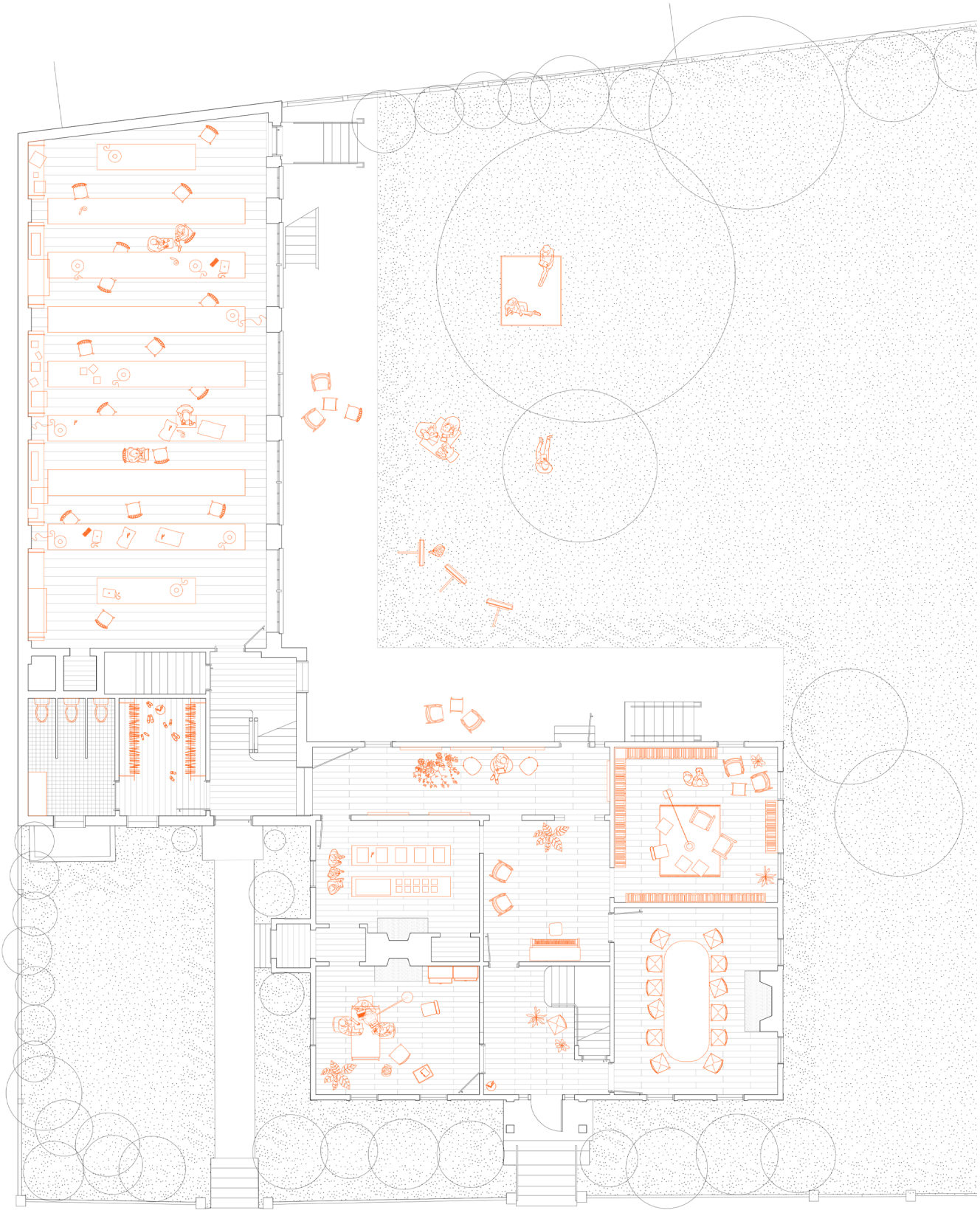

Figure 4. Life at the Cambridge School in their home at 53 Church street. Image by author based on historical plans and photographs of 53 Church street and the alumni-designed extension.

of home through belonging. And for the community, its unique focus on collaboration created a home for its family of designers.

In 1924, "The Cambridge School of Domestic Architecture and Landscape Architecture" was officially incorporated,[45] and by 1932, the school became an official graduate school,[46] with 24 students receiving master's degrees in architecture and landscape architecture.[47] The "domestic" label further demonstrated how the school needed and wanted to differentiate itself from those around it. Despite removing the term in 1932, as requested by the students,[48] "home-making" remained at the core of the school's pedagogy, and its spaces. This unique focus allowed the school to carve out a space for itself within the academic environment of the time. Here, the school was perceived to be inside its lane, not threatening the approach at the neighboring GSD and beyond. Those outside the school deemed its work separate to the wider discourse and, as such, isolated the Cambridge School and its pedagogy from the academic scene. Yet within this exclusion came a reinforcement of home as it was the only space where the women were welcomed with open arms.

In 1928, Frost noted "that offices were beginning to specialize in particular building types,"[49] and collaboration was the future. However, this approach was partly due to Frost's preoccupation with ensuring that women were employable. In 1941, towards the end of the school's life, Frost stated in a bulletin that "it has always been, so far as I know, the only school maintaining a close relation between architecture and landscape architecture under one faculty requiring of its landscape students a considerable amount of architectural training."[50] At that time - and in many ways still - even if a woman on paper has the same skills as her male counterparts, discrimination against her for a particular job remains. Frost knew this and knew that the Cambridge School's success resided in its ability to open up opportunities for women in the professional domain. By learning both disciplines, more professional opportunities for women were ensured.

The approach of the Cambridge School aligned the disciplines of architecture and landscape architecture in the belief that this approach produced better designers. Over its short lifespan, it had 823 alumni, of which over a third were associates at or directors of design firms[51] - a significant feat for any architecture school, let alone one for women. For comparison, the GSD at this time was of a similar - if not slightly smaller size.[52] Their most prolific alumni - Eleanor Raymond - designed more than 300 buildings.[53] The extension was one of Raymond's first projects. Today, her archive is owned by Harvard, which meticulously accounts for almost all of her projects, bar the design for the extension. The drawings for the project are instead held by Harvard's Property Information Resource Center.[54] It is here where a missing piece to the school's history is found. 'The Architect's Collaborative' - a firm spearheaded by Walter Gropius and an experiment on collaborative practice - had two of its eight founders graduating from the Cambridge School.[55] This was another of countless alumni-led firms that attempted to reimagine practice for women during a time of significant restriction. Although these successes cannot be directly attributed to any one part of the Cambridge School, it is clear the interdisciplinary approach was significant. This becomes even clearer when the history of Harvard's schools is read alongside it.

In 1936, Harvard's School of Architecture, School of Landscape Architecture, and School of Urban Design - previously disparate schools - combined under one school: Harvard Graduate School of Design.[56] In 1935, Joseph Hudnut, the Dean of the School of Architecture and a trustee of the Cambridge School, "created the umbrella of the School of Design to bring the disciplines together."[57] The women's work at the Cambridge School first showed the benefits of this system, laying the way for Harvard to follow. This pedagogical shift meant that the GSD "quickly became not just an American institution but one with a strongly international outlook."[58] Today, this is still one of its most significant selling points, and it is one of the few schools that house all three disciplines under one roof, allowing for holistic cross-collaboration. The formation of the GSD mimicked the collaborative and interdisciplinary approach the Cambridge School had already exemplified for twenty-one years.

A HOME FRONT

In this place of belonging - a kind of home front formed - and was felt in the living room, the house, and the school. The home front typically describes the contribution of civilians - specifically women - to the war effort. In the context of the Cambridge School, the home front was its origin and its downfall. In WWI, the term home front first became known. It was this home front that allowed Katherine Brooks to obtain a new kind of architectural education, which unfolded to include the broadening of a woman's role but also a broadening of 'home' design and housing within an architectural curriculum and The Cambridge school becoming the site of belonging - a home - for the students, where no other such place existed for them at this time. Whilst the home front of WWII led to the school's eventual decline.

At the height of WWII, The Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture dissolved into the GSD.[59] As with any new venture or organization, its infancy had benefits and drawbacks. For the Cambridge School, financial insecurity led to its reliance on other institutions, and its eventual absorption into the GSD.

In 1942, after Pearl Harbor, Harvard and other male-dominated institutions faced declining admissions and financial challenges.[60] Simultaneously, the Cambridge School, then managed by Smith College, struggled financially due to a lack of donor support.[61] Despite earlier efforts like the 'Houses and Housing' exhibition at the MOMA,[62] donors hesitated to back an institution excluding men. Harvard decided to "temporarily admit women for the duration of the war",[63] and the Cambridge School's activities ended in June 1942.[64] The exclusion of women from Harvard had led to the Cambridge School's creation, and with that barrier gone, the

school ceased to exist. Women could now study at Harvard but lost the institution they had pioneered for themselves.

In 1942, twenty-four women continued their studies at Harvard's GSD.[65] Of the GSD's first thirteen women to graduate, eight were from the Cambridge School.[66] During this time, the ending of WWII and, thereby, the home front, saw a shift in workplace roles upon the return of men from war - and a return to academia. Women were newly skilled and ready to work. Where previously they were relied upon, they became competition - a threat to the established power dynamics.

During this transition, Bremer Pond, the Dean of the Landscape Architecture department at Harvard - who was also one of the co-founders of the Cambridge School - sent a letter to his male students informing them of the new additions to the student body - he likened the women to the oysters in Alice in wonderland, questioning if they would "meet the same fate as they skipped towards the cook shed, or be v-e-r-y difficult to dislodge."[67]

The very professor who championed women's education within his profession seemed only to do so as long as it did not affect the opportunities he and his male students benefited from. As soon as the women entered Harvard, they were "matter out of place."[68]

Only in the 1960 - 1961 Harvard GSD register do we see the first mention (which was subsequently removed) of female students existing within the school.[69] There is little documentation of the women's experiences between 1942 - 1960. Despite this, their influence and the influence of the Cambridge School lived on through the format of the combined departments and the curriculums of each. In 1946, the GSD received its first female-faculty - Catherine Bauer - who taught a seminar called 'Housing 7'.[70] Here, she began reinterpreting how we approach housing design and contemporary living, which is now a core part of architectural pedagogy.[71] Today, housing is one of the core principles of architectural education. The approach of the Cambridge School was making its way into the core elements of the GSD, despite the women on the surface seeming to have little agency upon their return to a world dominated by men.

CONCLUSION

The Cambridge School, during and beyond its twenty-seven-year lifespan, was at its core an act of resistance against the discriminatory attitudes that defined it, generating productive momentum out of implicit biases. The school subverted the gendered ideas towards women as being only able to design domestic spaces into redefining how domesticity is understood and learned within architectural pedagogy.

Interdisciplinary collaboration - now a cornerstone of many design schools - found its early origins in the Cambridge School. An ideology that first and foremost manifested in the school's approach to architecture and landscape architecture being taught together, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of its summer schools, alumni-led practices, and promotion of collaborative learning spaces at large. Despite starting with a focus on domestic architecture, the school cleverly subverted gendered stereotypes, leading to its influence on Harvard's Graduate School of Design both in cross-disciplinary pedagogy as well as broadening the attitude towards home design, which now holds a central focus in contemporary academic pursuits.


LET WOMEN PLAN HOUSES FOR WOMEN

Mere Man Doesn't Know Where to Put the Closets or Arrange For the Furniture, Say Students at This Cambridge School of Architecture and Landscape Gardening

GROUP OF GIRL STUDENTS IN THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND LANDSCAPE GARDENING

Figure 5. An early newspaper article documenting the opening of the school, clearly placing the women in the territory of domesticity even before this was formalized as part of their official pedagogy. The image is the only remaining photograph depicting the students in the 4 Brattle Street location where they studied for three years. Newspaper clipping from the Boston Daily Globe newspaper, February 24, 1918, p 42.

These innovations were enriched not only through the fact that it was a school by and for women but also through the physical spaces within which they studied and practiced together. The school's pedagogy was by and of its site - from its origins in a living room to its alumni practicing the school's ideology through the collaborative design of the extension. The uniqueness of the domestic academic environment informing, contrasting, and questioning the domestic focus of the architecture and landscape architecture curriculums cannot be understated. The school's ideology to provide women's education, alongside their physical adaptations of non-academic spaces as a result of their exclusion from broader pedagogy, led to their productive and meaningful approach to collaborative architectural education.

Shortly before the school's closure, Professor Frost said: "One thing this School has stood for in its twenty-five years is to break

down discrimination against women in education. It seems necessary to continue to do so."[72] Yet, as this broader understanding of the context shows, the school, in many ways, did not break down discrimination against women. With the significant power Harvard held over the school during its lifetime and the subsequent erasure of the Cambridge School's history through its absorption by the GSD, we see that discrimination against women doesn't simply end with their acceptance into education.

The pioneering ways the women of the Cambridge school embraced the educational opportunity led them to make expansive contributions to academia and practice. Domestic architecture is still considered peripheral in the profession and academia today, and as such, the school's expansive contribution to this field remains unknown and undervalued. The school's history prompts us to question how domesticity within architectural practice and education is valued and its direct relationship to how women are valued within the profession. It also invites us to look further afield to the broader connection between interdisciplinary approaches to academia and work alongside the increasing inclusion of women within the field. The Cambridge School's diminished legacy teaches us the value of seemingly peripheral approaches to education and pedagogy, both historically and in the broader narrative. As the Cambridge School's legacy enters its second century, there is still much to learn from this overlooked yet defiant institution.

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