

Charles Davenport
1813-1903

Charles Davenport began as a woodworker in the carriage building trade. Seeing the future of transportation, he partnered with Capt. Ebenezer Kimball who owned a stage coach line that ran between Boston and Cambridge. They built an omnibus in 1834 to replace the usual stagecoach style: a longer vehicle entered from the end with an aisle between the seats. Eventually this street-car style led to rail road passenger cars similarly arranged – in contrast to overseas models with a series of compartments along one side and an aisle on the other (like the Hogwort Express). While the company was located in a Central Square workshop, one of their ads read:

Kimball & Davenport
Cambridgeport, Mass.
Rail Road Passenger Cars, Omnibuses
Barouches, Carryalls, Chaises and Buggies
Constantly on hand and made to order.

Soon enough their buggies made way for rail road cars for this was the golden age of rail road building. As Davenport Car Works the company relocated to a new complex in East Cambridge with access to the river and its own rail spur in an area now owned by MIT. Its foundries built engines that could pull 5 passenger coaches at the blistering speed of 45 mph, while the freight engines traveled 15 mph hauling 100 cars each loaded with 5 tons of coal. The company sold \$4 million worth of RR cars to over 50 different rail roads. Because Charles also invested in some of those rail roads he lost a fortune when the boom burst. However, he held patents on various vital parts of rail road car construction and made a respectable amount to retire on when the company was sold in 1855. (The buildings later housed a boiler factory, Alexander Graham Bell's experiments, and a fledgling Polaroid. It was only recently been demolished.)

Davenport, at the ripe old age of 45 retired to his country estate in Watertown on the eastern slopes of Meeting House Hill (just below the present Oakley Country Club). He built a 2-story bracketed Italianate mansion with porches and a cupola, a summer house, a 2 story barn (also with a cupola), and a fountain complete with statues. This impressed the locals and gave the estate the name "Fountain Hill." In 1858 he donated a plot of land to the town -the triangle at the junction of School and Belmont Sts. site of the former school house- on condition the old school building be removed and the plot remain open common forever. (This was at the beginning of communities paying attention to open spaces.) Charles' son –Dr. Bennett Davenport- was a founder of the Historical Society of Watertown.

Davenport sold Fountain Hill in 1860 to shipping magnate Alvin Adams who enlarged the house considerably –but that's another story.