

This Place Matters*

In May, we celebrate the preservation of historic buildings and sites. Brighton's historic preservation law is 30 years old this year. The seven-member Commission meets monthly to designate properties, provide certificates of appropriateness, and discuss preservation issues in the town. Over 80 Brighton buildings are designated town landmarks, from an eighteenth-century cottage to a 1950s ranch house. Even the harp lamps that illuminate many of Brighton's neighborhoods are protected by landmark status.

Designated in 2002, the complex of buildings that includes Our Lady of Mercy School for Young Women occupies a large tract of land at the corner of Blossom Road and Clover Street.

The land on which the Mercy school buildings sit has a history of its own. The land originally belonged to Orringh Stone, pioneer innkeeper on East Avenue, who owned all 210 acres in lot 12. After his death in 1839 and most of his heirs having moved west, the acreage was purchased by neighbor Samuel P. Gould. The land eventually ended up with John Peter Tolan in 1859. Tolan added to the Stone property, acquiring land north and east of it, including part of what is now Blossom Road.

John and Ellen McKeon Tolan had two daughters before John's death in 1879. Mrs. Tolan and her daughters continued living in the former Stone house, leasing some of the land for farming and selling some of the other acreage. Mrs. Tolan died in 1914. Her older daughter, Mary, decided to become a Sister of Mercy and entered the convent at the order's temporary quarters in Charlotte. It was customary to provide a dowry at the time of entering the convent, so Mary Tolan's dowry was her portion of the land inherited from her mother in 1914. This enabled the Sisters of Mercy to build a school and motherhouse on Blossom Road in Brighton.

In 1928 the Sisters moved into the third floor of the building designed by eminent architect, J. Foster Warner. Classrooms on the first and second floor accommodated grades nine through twelve. In 1931, the construction of the Motherhouse as a residence for the teaching sisters made available for classrooms the third floor of the original school/convent building.

In 1941, another large-scale construction project added the auditorium and gymnasium. In the 1950s, John Flynn and H. H. Bohacket designed the chapel in the Motherhouse portion of the complex. In 1959, architect Walter Nugent designed the McCauley Junior College as an addition on the west side of the complex. When the junior college was discontinued, that area became part of the high school. More recent additions have been the black box theatre and the larger gymnasium/main entrance.

Worthy of landmark designation because of its design by architect J. Foster Warner, its collegiate Gothic architectural style, and its association with the cultural, economic, social, and architectural history of the community, this imposing complex will celebrate its centennial in 2028.

*National Trust for Historic Preservation campaign slogan in 2008.