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*Stories Behind the Bricks and Mortar*

**History Professor's walking tours of Brighton Campus prove popular**

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The history, topography, architecture and folklore of the University's recently acquired Brighton campus took on a sharper focus for two groups of employees and neighbors who participated in walking tours of the property led by Clough Professor of History James O'Toole.

O'Toole, an archivist for the Archdiocese of Boston from 1978 through 1986 and author of several books on Boston's Catholic heritage, hosted the 30-person groups on tours of the former archdiocesan land on Oct. 2 and 4 as part of an employee development program sponsored by the Human Resources department.

"There was a lot of interest [in the tours] because so many people have probably driven by the property and said 'I wonder what is in there?'" says O'Toole. "What impresses people the most is the sheer size of it." Boston College has purchased 64 acres of land and numerous buildings from the archdiocese in transactions dating back to 2004.

O'Toole started each walking tour at the Lake Street entrance to the tract. "We went up over the hill and the first building that you see is what used to be the Tribunal Building," he says, "which was the archdiocesan marriage court for people seeking annulments and such." (The building now houses the University's Office of Marketing Communications and the Center on Work and Aging.) "It's a square, two-story building, but then there's this funny little third story that almost looks like a house on top of the building. It's an odd architectural thing.

"The story there," O'Toole continues, "is that when the building was built it was the Chancery office. The priests who worked there lived in the rectory at St. Columbkille's Church in Brighton, but when the pastor raised the rent for the priests who lived there, Cardinal [William] O'Connell said, 'The heck with this, I'll build them a residence on top of the Chancery.' If you go up there, there are living rooms, bedrooms, bathrooms and so on."

O'Toole explains that St. John's Seminary was built on the site – a former orchard – in the mid-1880s. Cardinal O'Connell relocated the archdiocesan offices and built his own lavish residence there in the 1920s after receiving a generous bequest from the will of Paul Keith, son of Boston vaudeville magnate Benjamin Franklin Keith.



**Clough Professor of History James O'Toole describes some historical details of the former Archdiocese of Boston property, now Boston College's Brighton Campus, to a group of BC employees. (Photo by Lee Pellegrini)**

“In fact, there are still some apple trees on the lawn in back of the Cardinal’s Residence,” O’Toole says. “I would not be surprised if those are the original trees that were there in the 1880s.”

One stop on O’Toole’s property tour always draws special interest: the burial place of Cardinal O’Connell. “When he died in 1944, they had already built this little chapel where he would be buried,” he says. Not only was the prelate laid to rest in the tiny chapel, but his tomb was sealed with concrete so that it could never be moved.

“I have seen newspaper photographs of the funeral with all of the cement trucks,” O’Toole laughs. “There is also a rock ledge fairly shallow under the topsoil there. I don’t know what BC’s intentions are, but it will take a lot to get the cardinal out of there.

“He was a member of the Class of 1881, so to some extent, I suppose, it is suitable that he is back at Boston College,” he says.

O’Toole also likes to include the story of what is not on the former Archdiocesan property. “There used to be a small cemetery located next to the old gym on the property. When the seminary first opened, the faculty consisted of priests of the Sulpician order who were based in Baltimore and whose particular mission was educating clergy.

“When Cardinal O’Connell came in, however, he didn’t like the Sulpicians,” O’Toole laughs. “He had himself been a student as a teenager at a Sulpician minor seminary in Maryland and after a couple of years was dismissed from the seminary as an ‘unfit candidate’ for the priesthood.

“In later life he of course was ordained and eventually became an archbishop, but he hadn’t forgotten about this. When he became the archbishop he dismissed the Sulpician faculty and had priests of the diocese teach in the seminary. He not only kicked the living Sulpicians out, he had them dig up the bodies [of priests buried in the little cemetery] and sent them back to Maryland as well.”

O’Toole’s Brighton campus tours were such a success that he is considering offering them again in the spring. “We had waiting lists for both tours,” says Director of Employee Development Bernard O’Kane.

“They were extremely positively received. People I spoke to who went on the tours were fascinated.”

“People liked hearing the stories and seeing the property,” O’Toole says. “They liked hearing about what it used to be as we think about what is going to be there now.”