

March 21, 2019

The Painter Estate: A History of Ownership and Use

In 1903, wealthy Cleveland businessman John Painter purchased 8.5 acres to build a home on Fairmount Boulevard in Cleveland Heights. Before construction of the original home designed by Cleveland architect Frank Skeel could be completed, John Painter died. Construction continued and Painter's wife and son Kenyon moved into the house in 1905. Additions designed by Eckel and Aldrich were added in 1928.

Kenyon Painter lived in the home until his death in 1940 after he had spent time in prison for "misapplying" \$2 million of funds from Union Trust Bank, where he was director and principal stockholder. Ohio Gov. Martin L. Daley pardoned Painter due to his poor health. He died penniless. Afterward, his second wife, Maude, moved back to her native St. Louis. In 1942, the property was purchased by the Ursuline Sisters from Mrs. Painter for \$50,000. At the time, the Painter family owed more than \$40,000 in back taxes on the property.

Decline and Renovation

According to, *The Broad Highway: A History of the Ursuline Nuns in the Diocese of Cleveland 1850-1950*, by Mary Frances Hearon, OSU, when the sisters first visited the home on March 4, 1942, "They were painfully surprised at the condition of the house: the walls on the first floor had been stripped of their wood paneling; there was no electricity; not a metal fixture remained—neither faucet nor door knob could be found in the house; every fireplace had been ripped out." Between April and August 1942, the sisters undertook a significant renovation, including installing details and materials in the mansion considered harmonious with the original interior.

The school, originally chartered as Ursuline Academy in 1850 and formerly located at E. 55th and Scovill in Cleveland, opened in September 1942 on the mansion grounds with 100 students. The new school was given a new name, Beaumont School for Girls, as a tribute to the first Ursuline General Superior in Cleveland, Mother Mary of the Annunciation Beaumont. The sisters turned parts of the house into classrooms and a library and used auxiliary buildings on the site for related educational purposes, including a kitchen and cafeteria in the former garage and a gym in the main trophy room. In 1943, they created additional space for sophomores by renovating the Aviary building. In 1944, they added a temporary four-room structure for freshman. This was replaced by a permanent structure in 1954, which today comprises the English wing and Advancement department. In 1964, the sisters built a new school building on the property with classroom space for 540 students, a gymnasium, dining room, chapel and administrative offices. The Aviary and Trophy Rooms were converted to house the Fine Arts Department.

Other Changes to the Mansion

The upper floors of the mansion were reconfigured to provide bedrooms for up to 60 sisters, though the average was around 30. A number of rooms on the second floor were subdivided and the main section of the third floor was subdivided into dormitory-style sleeping quarters. A major portion of the grand wooden staircase on the first floor was removed and replaced with a “modern” staircase that would meet fire codes and provide safer navigation for the sisters. Much of the original flooring on the upper floors was removed or covered over with linoleum tile or carpet.

The Sisters Seek New Ownership

Operating the school and maintaining the Painter property proved to be a significant cost for the Sisters. Though they developed master plans and kept up with routine maintenance and repairs, it was clear that costs were becoming more than the Congregation could bear. In early 2000, they were considering selling the mansion and property. That year, Beaumont commissioned Doi Dickinson Architects (DDA) of Cleveland to conduct an assessment of the Painter property and the mansion (at that point, the Beaumont Convent) to determine their usefulness for potential academic programs.

The firm wrote in its assessment: “It is our opinion that renovating the building (the mansion) to convert it back to academic programs for Beaumont School may be cost prohibitive and defeats the intent of the proposed master plan.” Among the reasons for its conclusions, DDA cited the need to bring the mansion up to code for educational uses (life safety upgrades, mechanical and electrical upgrades, new bathroom facilities and installation of a fire sprinkler system). The firm also noted that the building would need to be brought into compliance with existing ADA requirements, including installing a new elevator and replacing all interior doors and door hardware. In addition, if the school decided to relocate only its fine and professional arts program to the mansion (an option Beaumont considered), it would still need to build a “sizable” addition to the building to accommodate that program.

By 2007, the Ursuline Sisters determined that they could no longer afford to own the property and advised the Beaumont School Board of Directors that they were going to have to sell the mansion and all the acreage – to a developer if Beaumont were not interested. While the Board had strong interest in ensuring that a developer did not buy the land, minutes from board meetings held at the time indicate that there was no real interest in the mansion once the members learned it was not suitable for educational purposes. Conversation with the board chair at the time also confirmed that the purchase was made “for the land.” The title transfer occurred on July 1, 2009.

Beaumont School Assumes the Property

While Beaumont subsequently used the first floor of the mansion for some school-related functions, classes were never again held in the building. For several years, the Advancement offices, the President’s office, and offices for the Finance Department operated out of converted bedrooms on the second floor of the mansion. In the meantime, Beaumont made changes to other structures on the

Painter mansion site, investing more than \$756,000 in projects, including updating the original carriage house now home for the school's fine arts program, and upgrading the banquet hall for multiple uses.

When the current president arrived in 2017, she found staff members located in the mansion working in conditions exposing them to mold, asbestos, non-functioning plumbing, and drinking water that “ran black” for more than an hour before it cleared. Moreover, moving the staff to the mansion had isolated them from the school, students, and faculty, creating a cultural division that was not healthy for the good of the organization.

In late summer 2017, Beaumont was scheduled to spend \$65,000 of an annual \$200,000 routine capital school budget on waterproofing the basement of the mansion. The president asked staff to hold off while she discussed options for the project with the board. She subsequently recommended that staff remaining in the mansion move back into the newer school building where office space for them was available and the mansion be mothballed. The board approved the move and the amount saved – about \$90,000, including the waterproofing that was not performed – was reallocated for other school needs. Staff left the mansion and returned to the newer building between December 2017 and February 2018.

Looking Toward the Future

In the 2018-19 school year, Beaumont's enrollment grew by 2%, despite a highly competitive private school market in Northeast Ohio. Indeed, as a private non-profit, the school constantly faces the challenge of providing a competitive education in facilities that support that education – all based on tuition and philanthropic support. In January 2019, Beaumont's Board of Directors approved a new five-year strategic plan, which includes developing a new master campus plan focused on projects that will help grow enrollment. This plan includes investing in the student experience, including athletic facilities.

In fact, one of the areas identified as a weakness for Beaumont through a market perception study conducted in 2017 is the school's athletic facilities. Beaumont has a track and field that are not regulation size. This means the school is unable to host some athletic events. Home games are often held off site, adding expense to operations for transportation and rentals and resulting in fewer people coming to see and experience Beaumont. Since many of the school's coaches work elsewhere (as opposed to being on staff at the school), practices often cannot begin until 5 p.m. Because the field does not have the proper lighting, students in fall sports are unable to use the facility for practice or games as the evening light fades.

Although the campus comprises 21 acres, most of the land has been developed for other uses. The remaining acreage, including the existing track and field, are not sufficient to house a regulation-size track and field facility, nor can the existing track be expanded to do so. Meanwhile, the Painter Mansion and the 8 acres sit unused, with no educational purpose. While the mansion has a security system, it is more of a liability the longer it sits empty.



A Catholic school in the Ursuline tradition educating women for life, leadership and service.

Founded in 1850, Beaumont is the oldest private school in Northeast Ohio. Since its founding, the school's mission has been to educate well-rounded women who can compete in, and contribute to, a changing world. There's never been a greater call for women with these skills. That's why Beaumont is so important. Today, Beaumont's student body includes young women from nearly 70 different grade schools throughout Northeast Ohio, including parochial, private and public schools. Clearly, Beaumont is meeting a community need.

The school's strategic plan, "Beaumont and Beyond: Preparing Global Leaders" is the school's roadmap for continuing to meet that need. Finding a new use for the Painter Mansion site is an integral part of that effort.