

Spring | Summer 2018
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St. Michael's

University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto Alumni Magazine



Revitalizing BRENNAN HALL

Major renovation will bring
new life to much-loved centre

BRENNAN HALL

Continuity in change

Major renovation will revitalize this much-loved centre while maintaining its place as the social heart of St. Mike's

BY MARK OSBALDESTON 9To





On the morning of August 29, 1939, hundreds of St. Michael's College alumni came back to campus to celebrate the official opening of Brennan Hall. The day started with Mass at St. Basil's Church and, following the formal dedication of the new building by Archbishop James Charles McGuigan, concluded with a festive lunch in Brennan's second-floor dining hall. No one in attendance on that late-summer morning could have known how radically life was about to change: less than two weeks later, Canada declared war on Germany.

Change has been a constant in the eight decades since. Yet through it all, Brennan Hall has remained at the centre of St. Mike's campus life, providing space for dining, meeting and socializing. Now a major, two-stage renovation is underway that aims to revitalize Brennan Hall's interior while securing its place as the student-focused social heart of St. Mike's for years to come.

"Where else could one relax with a Coke and french fries, listen to loud Beatles' tunes, and compare exam results with a bunch of co-ed friends? Where else could you dance, meet other USMC'ers—non-residents, as well as those in other dorms—and still be close to your dorm... in order to get back before curfew?"

For us, Brennan Hall really was the "heart" of USMC... a place for socializing, nourishment and fun....

— Jane Lavery 6T8

"During my five years at U of T, I spent time in many areas of campus, taking courses and engaging in peace activism, but I called St. Mike's home. In particular, Brennan Hall and the [Dodig Family] COOP were home because that was where my friends were. I met most of these folks on the first day of orientation in September 1986, and a group of us developed a close-knit friendship/family that remains strong today.

I was a commuter student—a 'day hop'—and having a welcoming meeting place to socialize on campus was invaluable to me. Both Brennan

Lounge and the COOP reflected the diversity not only of the university, but of the city. There were members of the Italian Club who lounged there, the student council offices were there, and of course everyone knew that Lourdes, who ran the COOP, would provide comfort food for all.”

– Esther Cieri 9T0

A DESIGN FOR THE AGES

Architect Arthur W. Holmes, then in his 70s and at the end of a prolific career that had seen him design Catholic churches and institutional buildings across the province, planned Brennan Hall in the same Gothic revival style as his 1935–36 Teefy/Fisher/More complex on Queen’s Park Crescent. But Brennan Hall marked a turning point in the development of the campus. Both complexes can be traced to a pre-Depression master plan that would have seen every building on campus razed, including St. Basil’s Church. Yet Brennan Hall’s deft insertion among its historic neighbours suggested a new ethos where the best of the past could be integrated with new construction.

The emergence of Brennan Hall at the top of Elmsley Place also signalled the transformation of an upscale residential enclave into a new academic precinct. It was named after Fr. Laurence Brennan (1847–1904), who, after teaching history at St. Mike’s and serving as its director of studies, became the first full-time pastor of St. Basil’s Church. The building that bears his name knit St. Basil’s into what had become an urban campus with a unique village feel—an impression heightened by the sight of St. Basil’s spire (constructed in 1895 under Fr. Brennan’s pastorship, to Holmes’s design) rising above the whole.

“[My] uncle, Fr. Wilfrid Dore, CSB, was a long-time faculty member in the Department of Philosophy. During his long tenure at SMC, he undertook a number of creative initiatives. On the social level, he became the advisor to groups of Young Christian Workers, who ended up building two small village communes near Sharon, Ontario. Another of his projects was the rock garden outside of Brennan Hall. He had a green thumb and for many years he designed and cared for this garden. I believe it was once featured in a Canadian magazine on gardens.

I wish you well with the new designs for Brennan Hall. I hope you are able to preserve space for a rock garden to provide a place for peace and for wonder on a busy campus in the heart of the city.”

– Paul Burns 6T2



“
For me, this was
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a place where we connected
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a place where we helped one
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of discovering ourselves.”

– Michael McCarthy 9T4

A SOCIAL HUB

If the St. Michael’s College campus can be viewed as a village, Brennan Hall is its undoubted community centre, a gathering place for faculty and students alike, both resident and non-resident. Brennan’s role as social hub was solidified when renovations in the early 1960s allowed the COOP cafeteria, which had opened in 1947 (and is now called the Dodig Family COOP), to relocate to Brennan from the first floor of Carr Hall.

In the 1950s, the architects J.F. (Frank) Brennan, an SMC/U of

T alumnus (though not related to Fr. Laurence Brennan), and George Richard Whale, a U of T alumnus, designed Elmsley Hall to the west of Brennan Hall, connecting the buildings with a bridge. Both Elmsley Hall and Carr Hall (which Brennan and Whale had collaborated on with the Quebec architect Ernest Cormier) displayed a version of the distinctively tooled limestone facing of Teefy/Fisher/More and Brennan halls. In the later 1960s, Brennan and Whale continued the use of this distinctive stonework in devising a major northern addition for Brennan Hall, complementing it with copper, plate glass and concrete. That addition, named the Student-Faculty Centre, opened in 1967, providing the current home for the COOP. The sun-filled location, overlooking a sunken terrace, would provide a pleasant place for meals by day and later, on Friday nights, lots of room for dancing at the St. Mike’s pubs.

“During the year 1961-1962, I was the manager of the COOP, after its recent physical transfer from Carr Hall to the totally remodelled first floor of Brennan Hall. Our biggest-selling food items at the time were coffee, infrared heated hot dogs, pie, and butter tarts, among a few others.

One day, Lester B. Pearson, who was running for election, visited the St. Mike’s campus. As he and his entourage wanted to enter Brennan Hall, we had to ban him from entering the COOP area, and locked the doors from the inside, because of a real fear of harm that could come due to overcrowding.

Another COOP story from that time was when one evening during our regular cleanup, Fr. John Kelly came down from upstairs when a particularly loud Oscar Peterson song was playing on our jukebox and told us, ‘Shut that g.d. thing off!’ (We worried and thought we were going to be expelled.)”

– Ed Ehmann 6T3

“Brennan Hall would magically transform into the St. Mike’s Pub every Friday. For me, this was a place where I worked, a place where we connected with friends, and a place where we helped one another through the clumsiness of discovering ourselves.”

– Michael McCarthy 9T4

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Now, eight decades after Brennan Hall was built and five decades after its 1960s expansion, the building’s public spaces are in need of major renovation. In keeping with Brennan Hall’s own history of adaptation and renewal, this renovation will build on the past while taking the complex into the 21st century. A significant change will be the relocation of the USMC Office of the Registrar to Brennan Hall from its current location on the second floor of the Muzzo Family Alumni Hall. A review undertaken in 2016 by USMC Principal Randy Boyagoda, working with the Office of the Registrar of the Faculty of Arts and Science, found St.

Mike’s services lacking when compared to best practices at similar-sized universities. A 2015 survey had found that students ranked registrar services as foremost in importance, followed by the Office of Student Life. Moving the Registrar’s Office to Brennan Hall will make both offices easily accessible in a single building for the students they serve. The new Registrar’s Office will occupy space on the eastern half of Brennan Lounge, in the 1939 part of the building, whose main foyer off Elmsley Place will also be updated. The western half of Brennan Lounge will contain flexible space for socializing and quiet study.

“Brennan and the COOP were at the heart of my St. Mike’s experience. We want that to be true for generations of students to come.”

– David Mulroney 7T8, President and Vice-Chancellor,
University of St. Michael’s College

“As someone who transferred to St. Mike’s in their second year, the Registrar’s Office was extremely helpful in guiding me to choose the right courses. But sometimes we would have to wait for an hour or more in areas with few chairs and little space, and there were times I would have to walk out. The idea of the Registrar’s Office being in an open, inviting space where I can work while I wait would make a huge difference and make the process much easier.”

– Samantha Douek,
President 2017-18, St. Michael’s College Students’ Union

“The renovations at Brennan Hall will [create] a multi-functional hub where you can relax, you can chat with friends, and you can get your business done with the Registrar. It will also create a through-line from that student services experience into a social/work space, the kind of place where St. Mike’s alum have had some of their most memorable experiences.”

– Randy Boyagoda, Principal, University of St. Michael’s College





“

Brennan and the COOP were at the *heart* of my St. Mike's experience. We want that to be true for *generations of students to come.* ”

– David Mulrone 7T8, President and Vice-Chancellor,
University of St. Michael's College

Construction on the new Registrar's Office and refurbished Brennan Lounge began on January 22, 2018, and constitutes the first phase of the renovation plan devised by the architectural firm Gow Hastings. The Toronto-based architects bring relevant experience to the job, having designed the Ryerson University Student Services Hub, the Registrar's Office for the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) and U of T's Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation, among other post-secondary student and administrative spaces. Continuing a tradition of student consultation that informed Brennan and Whale's Student-Faculty Centre addition in 1967, Gow Hastings canvassed students early in the planning process, along with faculty and staff. The resulting design is intended to provide maximum flexibility in the public areas for the various functions that Brennan has always served, along with modern amenities such as charging stations for electronic devices that would have seemed the stuff of science fiction in the past.

The second stage of the project, which started this spring, will see the northern half of Brennan Hall refurbished, including the Dodig Family COOP. From the COOP, the adjacent offices of the St. Michael's College Student Union will be visible through glass partitions. Existing offices and meeting rooms on the first and second floors of the 1967 addition will also be opened up visually to refurbished lobby areas through the use of glass, providing welcoming space for *The Mike*, student clubs, chaplaincy services and commuter dons.

When construction is completed next fall, the resulting building may seem, in one way, like a different Brennan Hall. But in its renewed ability to serve the changing needs of the community for which it was built, Brennan Hall will be very much the building whose dedication proud alumni gathered to witness 79 years ago. ♦

USMC alumnus Mark Osbaldeston (9T0) is the author of the books Unbuilt Toronto, Unbuilt Toronto 2 and Unbuilt Hamilton. He is the curator of the Unbuilt Hamilton exhibit being presented now through Labour Day at the Hamilton Museum of Steam and Technology.

How can you help?

The \$4 million project will be partially funded through a \$2 million fundraising campaign, which was officially launched this month with two \$500,000 pledges and three spring reunion class projects. All St. Mike's alumni and friends are invited to help see this exciting initiative through to its completion by making a donation to the Brennan Hall project. Gifts received (up to \$2 million in total) will be matched by USMC.

"I was happy to give my annual donation to the Brennan Hall renovation project. It is a place where we all spent many memorable times. Brennan and St. Basil's Church were the centre of our lives at St. Mike's, and I hope it continues that way for students in the years to come."

–Major General Thomas Flynn 5T2

For more information on how you can support the Brennan Hall renovation, please see the back cover or visit stmikes.utoronto.ca/brennan.

IT'S TIME TO WRITE THE NEXT CHAPTER IN BRENNAN HALL'S GREAT HISTORY

Since 1939, Brennan Hall has been a place for St. Mike's students to relax, study with friends and celebrate special moments together. Now, it's time to update Brennan for the 21st century. Give today to support the renovation of Brennan Hall, which will create a state-of-the-art student services hub, provide a welcoming space for student groups and staff, and reassert Brennan's unique place at the heart of the University of St. Michael's College for years to come.



St. Mike's students at a Football Dance in Brennan Hall, 1950.

BOUNDLESS

Support the renewal of Brennan Hall today and the University of St. Michael's College will match your gift. **Give now at donate.utoronto.ca/stmikes**, or contact Ken Schnell, Advancement Manager, Annual Campaigns, at 416-926-7281 or ken.schnell@utoronto.ca for more information.

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