

## Virginian Pilot Online/Print Article on “Cambridge Hall”, 441 Washington Street:



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Cambridge Hall, a storied building that served as a Catholic school for more than a century, is up for auction.

The restored landmark establishment has graced the corner of [London and Washington streets in Olde Towne Portsmouth since circa 1892](#). It was originally St. Paul’s Academy for Boys and later known as Portsmouth Catholic High School. The beautiful building became [a special events venue in 2022](#) and has been fully restored to its original splendor, said William J. “Billy” Summs Sr., auctioneer with Atlantic Asset Management Group.

“It’s ready for either someone to carry on with special events or as a professional building,” Summs said. “Or, it could be a day care or school again because it has so much space.”

The [online auction of the 6,054-square-foot building starts at 12:01 a.m. Jan. 23](#) and concludes at 12:30 p.m. Jan. 30. Bids will be taken in three ways: for the business, for the building and for the combined business and building. There is no opening minimum bid and whichever brings the highest amount will determine the sale, Summs said.

“It’s kind of a unique way of doing it. We’ve done this before and it’s worked out pretty well,” said Summs, an auctioneer for 43 years.





William "Billy" Summs Sr. is the auctioneer who will sell the 1892 Cambridge Hall building at the end of this month. As seen Friday, Jan. 10, 2025. (Stephen M. Katz / The Virginian-Pilot)

Today, Cambridge Hall's glistening chandeliers, sparkling hardwood floors, mahogany ceilings and period architecture windows are all a nod to the building that had many schoolhouse transformations throughout the years. It was St. Paul's Academy through the 1930s then St. Paul's Central High School in the late 1950s when it made history as the first integrated school in the city. It operated as Portsmouth Catholic High School in 1964 until the building was shuttered in 1991.

In 2005, local builder Ernest Holloway and his wife, Cheryl, bought the building from the city and focused on uncovering its original facade and restoring it to its true grandeur. Under the Holloways' charge, the original slate roof, maple flooring and beadboard ceilings were restored and repaired. They also discovered and recreated the building's original staircase.

Holloway turned the building into office space, but he died in 2019 while the transformation project was still underway.

Later that same year, Ed O'Brien, an insurance agent with New York Life, purchased the building and continued its restoration. O'Brien hired historic preservation experts Museum Resources to safeguard the building's historical integrity.

The project included the installation of 45 large, hand-built wooden windows complete with pulley systems, a build-out of the basement, expansion of the kitchen,

painting the entire exterior, pointing up the bricks and granite and replacement of the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system.

Close to \$300,000 was spent to update and completely finish the building since it was purchased by O'Brien two and a half years ago, Summs said.



Currently an events and entertainment venue, Portsmouth's Cambridge Hall will be sold through an online auction at the end of this month. As seen Friday, Jan. 10, 2025. (Stephen M. Katz / The Virginian-Pilot)

Cambridge Hall has since hosted wedding receptions, birthday parties, bar mitzvahs, private music performances and community, corporate and neighborhood events, O'Brien said.

The business was thriving, but O'Brien said he doesn't have the required time to devote to it.

"I just decided to sell it and let somebody else make a go of it," he said. "Everybody that goes in it just loves it."

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