

# FORM B – BUILDING

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

31-13	Salem		BEV.1132
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**Town/City:** Beverly

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*):  
Gloucester Crossing

**Address:** 7 Sohier Road

**Historic Name:** Beverly High School /  
Briscoe Middle School

**Uses:** Present: school

Original: school

**Date of Construction:** 1923-25

**Source:** dedication program, municipal documents

**Style/Form:** Classical Revival

**Architect/Builder:** Adden & Parker, architects;  
William H. Cann, contractor

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: not visible (concrete?)

Wall/Trim: brick with cast stone trim

Roof: tar and gravel

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

Office shed (late 20<sup>th</sup> c)

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

Demolition of original shop building (late 20<sup>th</sup> c?)

**Condition:** good

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** 6.5 acres

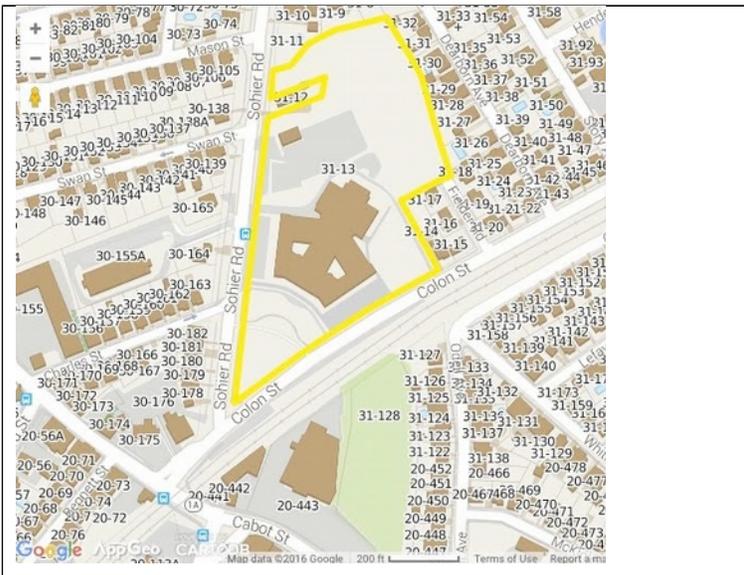
**Setting:** Faces small commercial node of Gloucester Crossing to south (at intersection of Colon, Cabot, and Rantoul streets). Densely built residential neighborhoods (mostly late 19<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) surround the site on the east and west; mid-20<sup>th</sup> century public housing development to the north.

**Photograph**



Southwest (façade) and southeast (Colon Street) elevations

**Locus Map** (north at top)



**Recorded by:** Wendy Frontiero and Pamela Hartford

**Organization:** Beverly Historic District Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): September 2016

# INVENTORY FORM B CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

BEVERLY

7 SOHIER ROAD

Area(s) Form No.

	BEV.1132
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Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.  
*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

*Use as much space as necessary to complete the following entries, allowing text to flow onto additional continuation sheets.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

Beverly High School/Briscoe Middle School occupies a large, mostly flat site at the intersection of Sohier Road and Colon Street. The building occupies the middle portion of the parcel. The triangular front yard and Colon Street setback are maintained in lawn; regularly spaced street trees line both the street edges. Most of the remainder of the lot is covered with asphalt pavement for surface parking. The building consists of a monumental, pentagonal-shaped main block and a rear wing composed of multiple lower volumes centered on the back (northeast) elevation.

Measuring 175 feet across the front and 165 along the street sides, the massive main block has a formal façade with canted end bays that set up the angled side elevations, which parallel Sohier Road and Colon Street. The building rises three stories above a raised basement (which has windows only on the rear elevation) to a flat roof. The rear elevation is shaped by three angled walls and provides a connection for the gymnasium wing that projects towards the back of the lot. Exterior walls are clad with waterstruck brick (American common bond with header courses every fifth row); the street elevations also feature a base of concrete scored to look like stone block. Walls are trimmed with cast stone quoins at the corners, a cast stone cornice, and a brick parapet with balustraded panels in the entrance bays and at the outer bays of the facade. Windows typically have large, 12/12 double-hung sash and cast stone sills and lintels. Molded sills are continuous at the first and third floor levels; and the three street-facing elevations have decorative cast stone lintels, with rectangular panels and decorative keystones at the first floor and plain flared lintels and keystones on the second floor. The rear elevation has plain rectangular lintels on the lower two floors.

The southwest façade contains two angled end bays, a three-bay frontispiece for the main entrance, and four bays to each side of the entrance. The main entrance features two-story high, engaged columns framing recessed double-leaf doors with bracketed hoods; they support a full entablature on which the school's name is lettered (it originally read "Beverly High School" and now says "Briscoe Middle School".) Flat pilasters embellish the top floor of the entrance frontispiece, and the roof parapet steps up at these three bays, decorated with a solid concrete panel in the center flanked by balustraded openings. The angled outer bays of the façade each have a first floor window with a pedimented and bracketed entablature and scrolled side pieces, a decorative plaque high on the second story, and quoined concrete trim at the third story window. The entrance is accessed by a modern concrete ramp and broad stone steps with what appear to be original lamps on the side plinths.

The symmetrical Sohier Road and Colon Street elevations each contain 17 window bays, each with three bays on the outer ends and two secondary entrance pavilions. The elaborate entrance pavilions on these elevations display a double-leaf doorway with Ionic pilasters and a semi-circular pediment at the first floor, a second story window with scrolled side pieces and heavily molded casing, and a third floor window with quoined concrete trim. The more utilitarian rear (northeast) elevation has ten bays of windows on each of its long sides, six in the center, and a pair of tall, square towers that likely function for ventilation. The assemblage of brick volumes that projects from the rear of the building has a two-story core (containing the gymnasium) surrounded by one-story extensions for locker rooms and the heating plant. A corridor extending across the interior end of this wing has decorative entrances facing southeast and northeast, consisting of double leaf doors with quoined trim and a lintel scored to look like flared stone.

The floor plan of the building is distinguished by the auditorium centered in the middle of the structure, with large light courts to each side. The northern edge of the site was originally lined by a high brick shop building that measured 52 feet wide by 206 feet long. It has been replaced by a much smaller, utilitarian wood-frame building that is used for offices.

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In the triangular space in front of the building, there is an open lawn with both deciduous and evergreen trees, planted in a random order. Between the lawn and the building, a curved two-way vehicular drive that mirrors the curve of the building's front elevation allows cars to enter in front of the building from either Sohier or Colon streets. The road widens toward the center of the curve closest to the building, allowing parking spaces for ten cars. A planting bed filled with low boxwoods creates a separation between the road and a pedestrian walkway that passes along the front of the building. Connecting the center of the parking area to the front steps of the building is a modern concrete ramp, planted on either side with two pairs of Kousa dogwoods.

From the Sohier Road entrance, cars may also turn left and drive along the west side of the building and park. At the northwest border of the property, a lot has been created for school bus parking, surrounded by a high chain link fence. Adjacent to the parking area, at the very back of the property is a large open grassed area, which provides open space for informal play and field sports.

On the east side of the building, a wide concrete walkway runs parallel the building, with panels of grass on either side and planted with rows of young elm trees. The path leads to an open area adjacent to the gymnasium that contains an asphalt basketball court. A vehicle entrance from Colon Street enters to the northeast corner of the school property and parallels the basketball court, connecting to the parking area on the west side of the building.

Well preserved, the Briscoe Middle School is an excellent example of ambitious, early 20<sup>th</sup> century civic design in Beverly. The building is notable for its large size, innovative floor plan, extensive fenestration, ornamental trim, and formal, classically-decorated entrance bays.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

Presently known as Briscoe Middle School, the Beverly High School was built in 1923-25 to address overcrowding at its site on Essex Street (3 Essex Street; 1878; BEV.113). Enrollment at the high school had increased by more than 50% in the previous 12 years. Planning for the construction of a new high school began in 1912. In 1921, the land on Sohier Road was acquired and a building program was developed by the school committee. The committee explained the early need for an architectural program as follows:

“This was a very important piece of work, for upon the foundations planned at that time would depend in large measure the usefulness and adaptability of the building to the needs, not only of the present, but what is of more importance, to those of the future” (*Municipal Documents*, 1923: 239).

Prior to this process, an undated and unattributed booklet promoted a new *junior* high school building for a public vote. Interestingly, it contains a rendering of a three-story building much like the building that was eventually constructed. The proposal's accompanying floor plans were prepared by Little & Browne, Architects, of Boston, with Lester S. Couch listed as associate architect. More research is merited to investigate the connection between this proposal and subsequent design work.

In 1922, a construction bond was issued for \$750,000 and a competition was held to select an architect. Three firms were invited to participate, and the contract was awarded to Adden & Parker of Boston, architects; William H. Cann of Beverly, contractor; and Ingalls & Kendriken, engineers. The drawings were completed in 1922, after review by a nationally-known school building architect, William B. Ittner of St. Louis. Construction began in 1923 and was completed in 1925, when the building was dedicated.

The commanding new high school featured such impressive building components as tile by the R. Gustavino Co. of Boston and New York, Payne elevators, a Spencer Turbine Vacuum Cleaning System, and Holtzer-Cabot telephones, fire alarms, and doorbells. The dedication program provides a lengthy description of the interior and exterior design of the building. It is complemented by a list of 26 “features which especially interest visitors” that was submitted by the School Committee in its report for 1925, ranging from aesthetic to functional to mechanical (*Municipal Documents*, 1925: 287). The total cost of the Beverly High School, including buildings, furnishing, systems, and landscape, was \$1,146,000.

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Beverly High School became the Briscoe Junior High School in 1965, housing grades 7 through 9, and eventually became Briscoe Middle School, with grades 6 – 8.

The architectural firm of Adden & Parker was comprised of Willard P. Adden and Winthrop D Parker, who formed a partnership in 1905. Parker (d. 1955) studied architecture at and was graduated from MIT in 1895; he worked with the prominent Boston firm of Wheelwright and Haven in 1903-04. Adden worked as a draftsman for Charles Brigham, another leading Boston architect, from approximately 1891 to 1895 and collaborated with Brigham until about 1903. (They designed together the James Library and the James Mercantile Building in Madison, New Jersey [both, 1899] and reportedly the Atlantic Avenue Station of the East Boston tunnel.) MACRIS identifies 20 properties associated with Adden & Parker. Constructed throughout eastern Massachusetts, mostly between 1906 and 1927, they include houses, banks, a library, church, and several schools. The firm also designed five significant buildings in the Shawsheen Village area of Andover for the American Woolen Company (administration offices, restaurant, commercial building, and two garages).

The original drawings for the Beverly High School indicates a landscaped "turf bowl" in the triangular front lawn and a girls' playground at the back of the building along Colon Street, which is presently occupied by a basketball court. The open area at the back of the property was designated as a boys' playground. Along Sohier Road, a series of rectilinear beds were designated as "Experimental Gardens." The organization of the grounds around the school was highly formal, suggesting they were part of an overall concept put forth by the architecture firm. Further research into the history of the school - perhaps through the visual record in school yearbooks - would help determine the extent to which the original landscape design was realized.

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**SUPPLEMENTARY IMAGES**



Southeast (Colon Street) elevation



Gymnasium wing on northeast elevation



Northeast and northwest (Sohier Road) elevations



Detail of main entrance on southwest (façade) elevation

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**National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form**

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible       Eligible **only** in a historic district
- Contributing to a potential historic district       Potential historic district

Criteria:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**

Criteria Considerations:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**     **E**     **F**     **G**

Statement of Significance by Wendy Frontiero

*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

Beverly High School/Briscoe Middle School is one of Beverly's major municipal buildings. Well preserved, the school is an excellent example of ambitious, early 20<sup>th</sup> century civic design in Beverly. The building is notable for its large size, innovative floor plan, extensive fenestration, ornamental trim, and formal, classically-decorated entrance bays. Historically, the property represents a period of enormous growth and new prosperity in Beverly following the arrival of the United Shoe Machinery Company in 1903, and a flowering of civic pride and idealism. Retaining integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, the Beverly High School/Briscoe Middle School is recommended for listing in the National Register with significance at the local level under Criteria A and C.