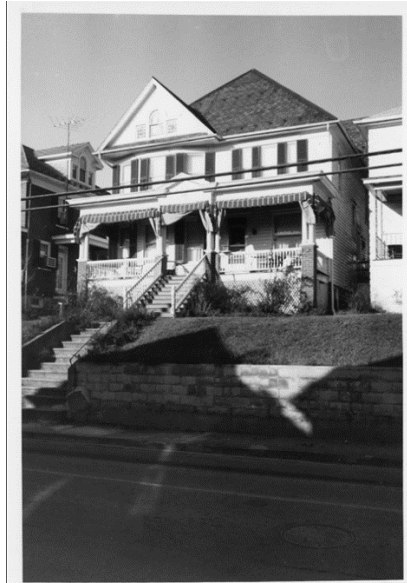


## **521 West Potomac Street**

**Built c. 1909**



The history of 521 West Potomac Street begins with the Elgin family. In 1890, William and Emma Elgin moved to Brunswick from Sandy Hook in Washington County with their twin children, Medora “Dora” and Eugene, both born in 1886.<sup>1</sup> William Elgin was a successful merchant who opened a general store and a hotel in the booming railroad town. He also got into the real estate business, beginning a “family tradition of building and selling houses.”<sup>2</sup>

When William Elgin died in 1900, he passed on this tradition to his children. 521 West Potomac Street was most likely built by a member of the Elgin family, possibly Eugene, in or before 1909.<sup>3</sup> Sometime between 1910 and 1920, according to U.S. Census records, Medora and her husband John Brady took up residence in the home. Emma Elgin lived there with her daughter and son-in-law until her death in 1936.

Medora Elgin Brady was a remarkable woman who lived to be 95 years old and resided in 521 West Potomac Street longer than anyone else. Yet the fact that she stayed in Brunswick for so long was, by her own admission, a product of chance. Looking back on her life on her 91<sup>st</sup> birthday, Medora said: “When he [my father] died and my twin brother moved to Harrisburg, I stayed here because I had met John Brady.”<sup>4</sup>

Medora and John Brady (1877-1962) wed in Brunswick in 1907.<sup>5</sup> John Brady had been born in West Virginia but moved to Brunswick sometime in the 1890s or early 1900s. He was an entrepreneur in his youth: the 1910 Census records him as a “Cigar Merchant,” and he briefly owned a soda confectionary on 5 East Potomac Street from 1910 until 1913.<sup>6</sup> By 1920, according to the Census, John Brady had settled into a steadier job as an insurance salesman. The 1940 Census shows that he was still working as an agent for MetLife Insurance Company when he was 63 years old.

Medora Brady kept busy as well. She “was an authority on antiques and a collector. She dealt in antiques, at one time having a shop at the crossroads of Routes 79 and (now) 180. She

also dealt from her home [at 521 W. Potomac Street]. In addition, her home was filled with 19th century furniture.”<sup>7</sup> In the 1940 Census, she was recorded as a manager at Haines Shoe Co.

The 1940 Census record also shows that another couple, William and Eugenia Deener (34 and 33 years old at the time, respectively), lived with the Bradys at 521 West Potomac Street between 1935 and 1940, likely renting out a part of the home. William Deener was a longtime resident of Brunswick who was once a Boy Scout in Brunswick’s Troop 2.<sup>8</sup> According to the 1940 Census, William worked in a service station and Eugenia was a public school teacher.

Medora and John Brady had no children, and Medora continued to live in 521 West Potomac Street after John passed away in 1962. She spent much of her time doting on her nieces and nephews<sup>9</sup> and kept her home well-stocked with antiques. “My whole house is full of antiques,” she said in 1977. “Not one vase is a reproduction, no reproductions – all antiques.”<sup>10</sup>

Medora passed away in 1981.<sup>11</sup> Around that time, Arthur Phelps purchased the home at auction.<sup>12</sup> Detailed information is not publicly available about Mr. Phelps, who sold the home to Landmark Investment Co. in March 2020, according to the Frederick County tax record. The home had fallen into disrepair several years before the March 2020 sale, and the city government had considered abating and condemning the property.<sup>13</sup> Fortunately, Landmark Investment found new buyers in November 2020, and the current owners have expressed their strong desire to continue the home’s long and storied history.

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The 500 block of West Potomac Street c. 1915. 521 West Potomac Street is the house with the awning on the left side of the street.

Image file available on the Brunswick History Commission website at:  
[https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:West\\_Potomac\\_Street,\\_Brunswick\\_in\\_the\\_Model\\_T\\_era.jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:West_Potomac_Street,_Brunswick_in_the_Model_T_era.jpg)



Undated photo of Medora Elgin Brady later in life, likely taken inside 521 West Potomac Street.

Image file available on the Brunswick History Commission website at:

[https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Medora\\_Elgin\\_Brady\\_\(no\\_date\\_given\).jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Medora_Elgin_Brady_(no_date_given).jpg)

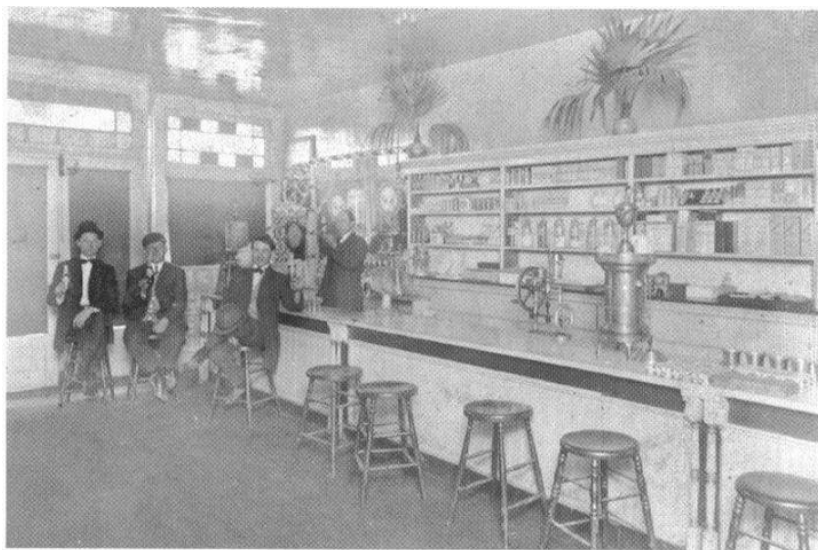
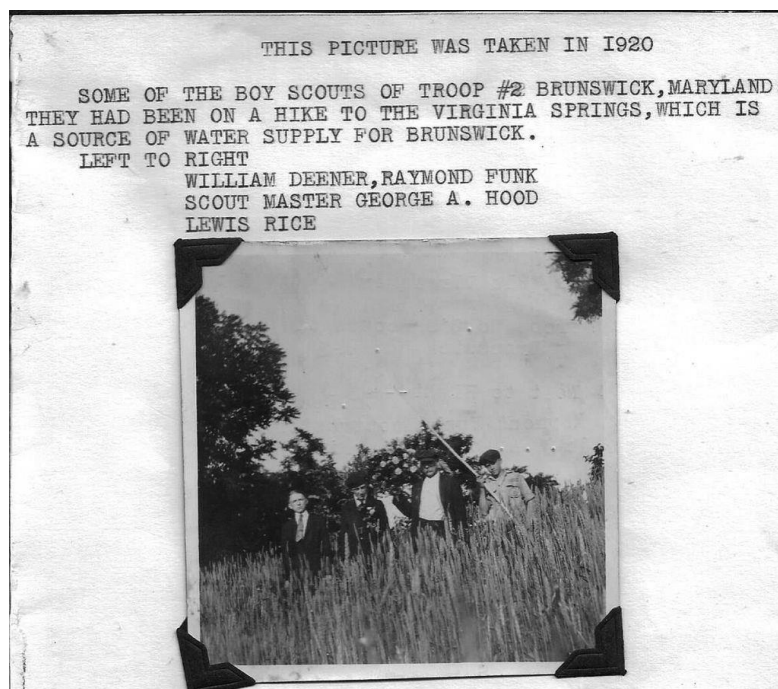


Photo of John Brady's soda confectionery on 5 East Potomac Street circa 1908. Brady is behind the counter on the right.

Image file available on the Brunswick History Commission website at:

[https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Darr%27s\\_Confectionery,\\_5\\_East\\_Potomac\\_Street\\_circa\\_1908.jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Darr%27s_Confectionery,_5_East_Potomac_Street_circa_1908.jpg)



1920 photo of William Deener (left) as a Boy Scout, age 12 or 13.

Image file available on the Brunswick History Commission website at:

[https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Boy\\_Scouts\\_Troop\\_2\\_in\\_1920.jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Boy_Scouts_Troop_2_in_1920.jpg)

<sup>1</sup> Brunswick Distinguished Citizen application for the Elgin family prepared by Medora Elgin Brady c. late 1970s (received recognition as Distinguished Citizens in 1990), available on the Brunswick History Commission website at [https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Elgin\\_Family,\\_Distinguished\\_Citizen\\_1990\\_\(1\).jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Elgin_Family,_Distinguished_Citizen_1990_(1).jpg).

<sup>2</sup> *Brunswick: 100 Years of Memories*, The Brunswick History Commission, 1990, p. 182, available to download on the Brunswick History Commission website at [https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Brunswick\\_100\\_Years\\_of\\_Memories.pdf](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Brunswick_100_Years_of_Memories.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> The Frederick County tax records and the Brunswick Distinguished Citizen application for the Elgin family indicate that the home was built in 1909, although the house is reportedly pictured in an old postcard dated 1908. It would not have been constructed earlier than 1890, the year the Elgins moved to Brunswick and Brunswick began to expand due to the arrival of the railyard. A longtime resident of a neighboring home, interviewed by a member of the Brunswick History Commission in 2021, recalled that the house was built by a “Dr. Elgin.” Eugene Elgin was a medical doctor who moved to Pennsylvania sometime between 1910 and 1920 and, according to *Brunswick: 100 Years of Memories*, “became Division Chief of the Pennsylvania Health Department in preventing foodborne illnesses in public eating facilities, and ultimately head Epidemiologist of Pennsylvania. He also served in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.” It is also possible, however, that the home was built by Dr. Fisk Elgin (no direct relation), who was active in the Brunswick real estate market at the turn of the century, and subsequently purchased by Eugene Elgin or his mother. Fisk Elgin had left Brunswick and was living in Washington, D.C., by 1910, according to the Census. *Brunswick: 100 Years of Memories*, p. 182; “Will Shortly Build,” excerpt from the *Brunswick Herald*, June 2, 1899, available on the Brunswick History Commission website at [https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:The\\_Brunswick\\_Herald\\_1899.pdf](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:The_Brunswick_Herald_1899.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Carol Blank, “Mrs. Brady Celebrates 91<sup>st</sup>,” *The Brunswick Citizen*, Vol 4, No 13, March 31, 1977, available on the Brunswick History Commission website at [https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Elgin\\_Family,\\_Distinguished\\_Citizen\\_1990\\_\(2\).jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Elgin_Family,_Distinguished_Citizen_1990_(2).jpg).

<sup>5</sup> “Happy Birthday, Mrs. Brady,” *The Brunswick Citizen*, Vol 5, No 12, March 23, 1978, available on the Brunswick History Commission website at

[https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Elgin\\_Family,\\_Distinguished\\_Citizen\\_1990\\_\(3\).jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Elgin_Family,_Distinguished_Citizen_1990_(3).jpg).

<sup>6</sup> *Brunswick: 100 Years of Memories*, p. 107.

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<sup>7</sup> *Brunswick: 100 Years of Memories*, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> A 1920 photograph of William Deener on a hike with Scoutmaster George A. Hood and fellow Boy Scouts Raymond Funk and Lewis Rice is available on the Brunswick History Commission website at [https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Boy\\_Scouts\\_Troop\\_2\\_in\\_1920.jpg](https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Boy_Scouts_Troop_2_in_1920.jpg).

<sup>9</sup> “Happy Birthday, Mrs. Brady,” *The Brunswick Citizen*.

<sup>10</sup> “Mrs. Brady Celebrates 91<sup>st</sup>,” *The Brunswick Citizen*.

<sup>11</sup> She is buried in the cemetery of St. Mark’s Apostolic Church in Petersville.

<sup>12</sup> According to the longtime neighbor interviewed in 2021, Mr. Phelps bought the 521 West Potomac Street at auction in 1976 or 1977. As Medora Brady was still living there in March 1977 (“Happy Birthday, Mrs. Brady,” *The Brunswick Citizen*), it is likely that this purchase happened either later in 1977 or possibly a few years later. The neighbor does not recall the home being vacant for long around that time, which means that, at the latest, Mr. Phelps would have moved in not long after Medora Brady’s death in 1981.

<sup>13</sup> City of Brunswick Mayor and Council Meeting Minutes, June 11, 2019, pp. 2-3, available on the City of Brunswick website at [https://brunswickmd.gov/vertical/Sites/%7B6128680E-2B73-4AA3-90D8-2ADE82D7827D%7D/uploads/2019-06-11\\_MC.pdf](https://brunswickmd.gov/vertical/Sites/%7B6128680E-2B73-4AA3-90D8-2ADE82D7827D%7D/uploads/2019-06-11_MC.pdf); City of Brunswick Mayor and Council Meeting Minutes, February 25, 2020, available on the City of Brunswick website at [https://brunswickmd.gov/vertical/Sites/%7B6128680E-2B73-4AA3-90D8-2ADE82D7827D%7D/uploads/2020-02-25\\_MC\\_Minutes.pdf](https://brunswickmd.gov/vertical/Sites/%7B6128680E-2B73-4AA3-90D8-2ADE82D7827D%7D/uploads/2020-02-25_MC_Minutes.pdf).