

828 6th Ave

Built c. 1902



The only stone house in Brunswick is not quite as old as it looks, but its nearly 120-year history is incredibly rich. Six families have lived there since 1902, one of which called it home for almost 50 years. The house has also been a silent witness to Brunswick's growth: over the course of a century, it went from being situated on a distant plot of farmland to comfortably within city limits.

The land that the home sits on—plus much of the surrounding area—was purchased by Baltimore businessman Thomas Jefferson Cannon in December 1889, just months before the arrival of the B&O railyard transformed quiet Berlin into the boomtown of Brunswick.¹ After a year had passed, Cannon realized that he had made a profitable investment. His company, Mutual Land & Improvement Co., began to sell several lots which came to be known as The Cannon Addition to Brunswick.²

Some of the property remained in the Cannon family, including 50 acres of farmland north of the growing town. There, Thomas Cannon ordered the construction of a stone house. Building the house with stone was a sign of wealth and confidence: it would be more durable than a wooden frame house, but would also require more time, skill, and money to complete.

The home was finished in or just before 1902, but Thomas J. Cannon never lived there. Instead, his son did. Milton Harvey Cannon, his wife Margaret Traugh Cannon, and their two-year-old daughter Eleanor relocated from West Virginia and became the home's first residents in August, 1902.³ In 1904, they celebrated the birth of a son, Thomas (named after his grandfather), followed in 1906 by their third child, Jessie.

Yet the Cannon children were not to spend their whole childhood there: the elder Thomas Cannon's unexpected death in 1910 without a will led ownership of the property to change hands several times in the three years that followed. Milton Cannon and his family returned to West Virginia, where Milton worked as a yardmaster for the B&O railroad and later served honorably as a military engineer during the First World War.⁴

In 1913, the home was bought by Charles B. Michael, a railroad conductor who had leased some of the surrounding farmland a few years before. He settled in with his wife, Blanche V. Nichols Michael, and their several children.⁵ The children had ample space to roam. The property still contained over 20 acres of farmland and sat well outside Brunswick proper: the 1920 Census records the Michael residence not as on 6th Ave, but “Sandy Fork Hill.” The Michaels made a swimming hole by building a concrete dam across the stream behind the house—which today divides the properties on the upper part of 5th Ave from those on 6th—and they ran a dairy business that supplied Brunswick with milk and cream. They offered another type of refreshment during Prohibition: the property’s small spring house was home to a still, and friends and neighbors would make the walk there to partake in some homemade moonshine.⁶

Yet hard times eventually follow good ones, and when Charles and Blanche Michael fell into ill-health they sold parcels of the surrounding farmland, likely in order to make ends meet. When their son Raymond and his wife Louise inherited the house in 1929, only one and a half acres remained on the property.⁷ The farm was gone: Charles Michael was the last inhabitant to be recorded as a farmer, in the 1920 Census. Charles passed away in 1929 at age 60, and Blanche died the year before—her funeral took place in the home’s parlor.⁸ Raymond, a railroad fireman according to the 1930 Census, lived in the home for less than ten years. Ownership passed to a loan corporation in 1938, probably the result of foreclosure during the Great Depression.⁹

In 1939, Elmer and Florence Brengle purchased the house.¹⁰ “Pete,” as Elmer Brengle was known, was a manager at the Chesapeake and Potomac (C&P) Telephone Company, one of the first two phone companies to operate in Brunswick.¹¹ Florence Brengle ran a beauty shop out of the home. Florence, who was born in Kentucky, was Elmer’s second wife;¹² when the 1940 Census was taken, Elmer was 45 years old and Florence was 30. The couple had no children together and lived alone in the stone house until at least 1949. For some time thereafter, a succession of renters briefly inhabited the home.¹³

The next owner was a lifelong railroad man, George E. Hoopengardner, with his wife Mabel L. Hoopengardner and their children Mary Lou and George, Jr. The Hoopengardners bought the home in 1955, when George and Mabel were in their late 30s and the children were teenagers.¹⁴ George Hoopengardner rose through the railroad ranks from brakeman to foreman, and told of counting telephone poles to keep track of his train’s progress on foggy nights.¹⁵ He was also an engaged citizen, a member of the American Legion and the Moose and Eagles clubs who trooped down to Washington, D.C., more than once to protest legislation that he thought gave Brunswick and its railroaders a raw deal.¹⁶ Mabel kept a large garden and strawberry patch on the property and sold strawberries at a stand by the driveway.¹⁷

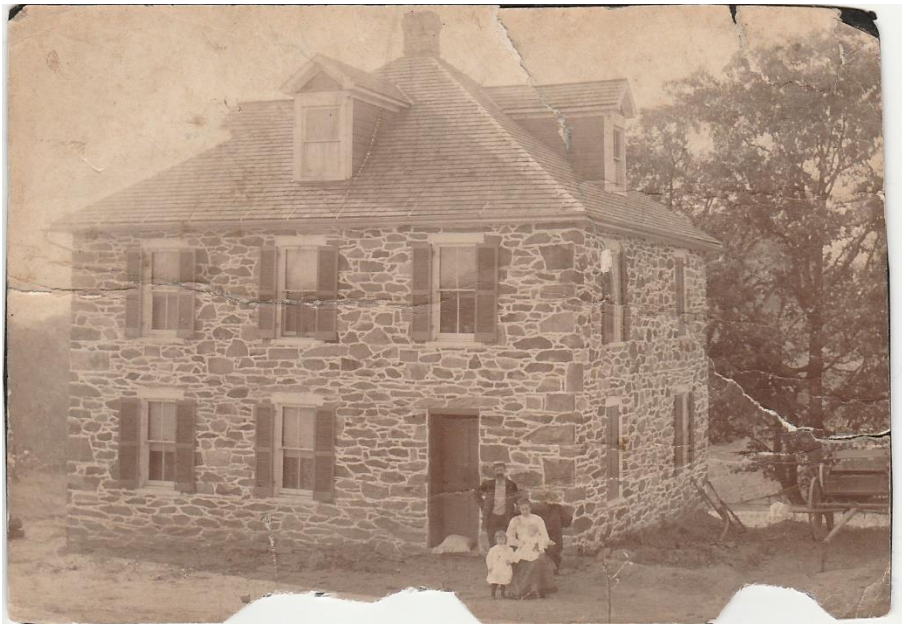
In late 1971, the Hoopengardners sold the home to Alfred (Al) and Connie Koenig, who arrived with four of their children in 1972 to begin a nearly 50-year residency in the stone house. It got off to a rocky start: not a week had passed when Hurricane Agnes caused the Potomac River to flood and backed up the sewers all across Brunswick. The basement filled with three feet of water, soaking the Koenigs’ moving boxes and damaging the furnace. But their neighbors and the Brunswick Volunteer Fire Company lent a hand to dry things out after the storm, and so the Koenigs settled in and made a few new friends in the process.¹⁸

The Koenigs, who had both grown up in Nebraska, quickly took to life in Brunswick. Al worked with the National Bureau of Standards (which later became NIST, the National Institute of Standards and Technology) and painstakingly maintained the old home. Connie dedicated

herself not only to the home's upkeep, but to its history as well, composing a detailed chronology from which much of this brief story is drawn. Connie's enthusiasm for researching the house's history soon expanded to the history of Brunswick itself. She became a member of the Brunswick History Commission, in which role she successfully applied to have Brunswick's downtown Historic District recorded on the National Register of Historic Places, and then she became the first Director of the Brunswick Historical Museum. Five Koenig children lived in the stone house and became members of the Brunswick community in their own right.

One other interesting fact from the Koenigs' time in 828 6th Ave relates to the distinctive light poles in front of the home. The fixtures had originally been located at Brunswick's War Memorial on A Street, but the City and the American Legion decided at some point to no longer maintain them. Rather than letting them rust out and go to the dump, the Koenigs salvaged the light poles, restored them, and installed them in their front yard.¹⁹

In December 2020, after forty-eight years of keeping the house in good repair, the Koenigs moved to warmer climes and sold the property to another pair of newcomers to Brunswick. Following in the Koenigs' footsteps, the current owners have thrown themselves enthusiastically into Brunswick's community life and the maintenance of the old stone home.



The Cannon family outside the house in 1904: Milton Harvey Cannon, Margaret Traugh Cannon, Eleanor Cannon (child, standing; later Eleanor Cannon Kroh), and Thomas Jefferson Cannon (infant, held in lap).

Photograph provided by Connie and Alfred Koenig, to whom it was originally given by Eleanor Cannon Kroh.



Some of the Michael children or grandchildren in the yard outside the home, taken sometime between 1913 and 1938.

Photographs provided by Connie and Alfred Koenig, to whom they were originally given by a relative of the Michael family.



A swimming hole built with a small dam (see right) on the creek behind the house, photo taken sometime between 1913 and 1938.

Photographs provided by Connie and Alfred Koenig, to whom they were originally given by a relative of the Michael family.



A recent photograph of the house dated November 29, 2020.

Photo taken by Jerry Knight. Image file available on the Brunswick History Commission website at:
https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:6th_Avenue_Number_828,_November_29,_2020.jpg

¹ From a chronology of the “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” compiled by Connie J. Vavra Koenig between 1972 and 2020. Mrs. Koenig examined the deeds of Thomas J. Cannon’s land purchases contained in the Maryland State Archives: Liber WIP 9 Folio 637 and Liber WIP 9 Folio 638.

² Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

³ According to Eleanor Cannon Kroh, with whom Connie Koenig corresponded during the 1970s. “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

⁴ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

⁵ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology. Property record: Liber 302 Folio 496.

⁶ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology. Based on Connie Koenig’s conversations with Clarence Michael, one of Charles Michael’s sons who lived at the home, and a number of neighbors.

⁷ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology. Property record: Liber 370 Folio 295.

⁸ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

⁹ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology. Property record: Liber 412 Folio 247.

¹⁰ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology. Property record: Liber 421 Folio 351. Oddly, although the property record examined by Connie Koenig listed “Elmer E. and Florence M. Brengle,” the 1940 Census lists Florence’s last name as Thomas, not Brengle. It is possible that she kept her maiden name, but used Brengle on some documents.

¹¹ *Brunswick: 100 Years of Memories*, The Brunswick History Commission, 1990, p. 151, available to download on the Brunswick History Commission website at
https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Brunswick_100_Years_of_Memories.pdf.

¹² Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

¹³ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

¹⁴ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology. Property record: Liber 549 Folio 348.

¹⁵ Monica Bacorn, “Retired but not retiring—George Hoopengardner,” *The Brunswick Citizen*, October 26, 1978, available on the Brunswick History Commission website at:
https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:George_and_Mabel_Hoopengardner_from_The_Brunswick_Citizen,_Vol_5,_No_46,_October_26,_1978.jpg

¹⁶ Bacorn, “Retired but not retiring—George Hoopengardner,” *The Brunswick Citizen*; “Railroaders headed to Washington, DC to make a statement,” Myer Kaplon Photo Collection, Brunswick Community Library, 1961, available on the Brunswick History Commission website at

https://www.brunswickmdhistory.com/index.php?title=File:Railroaders_headed_to_Washington,_DC_to_make_a_statement.jpg.

¹⁷ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

¹⁸ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.

¹⁹ Connie Koenig, “Koenig/Cannon Stone House” chronology.