

Rufus P. Bruner (1838-1897)

Civil War Veteran

Rufus Bruner's life story began in the little settlement of Point of Rocks, Maryland, which in 1838 was a tiny village situated on the northern bank of the Potomac River at a river crossing to Virginia. Just 4 years earlier, two large construction crews had come through on their way west building the competitive C&O Canal and B&O Railroad. This, of course, had a significant impact on the economy and way of life of that community. It was there, on September 16 of that year, that a 13- or 14-year old girl by the name of Mary Bruner gave birth to a baby boy, whom she named Rufus.

Not much is known about Mary and Rufus during those earlier years. Eventually, they moved to Brunswick, where, in 1850, they were living with a Mr. Michael Breslin, an Irish laborer who was 20 years older than Mary. Whether they were related or not is not indicated. Mr. Breslin died 4 years later, and about that same time Mary married Bernard (also known as Barney, or Bill) McDonald, another Irishman, 5 years older than Mary, who was working as a railroad hand at the time. He later became a superintendent on the railroad. At age 21, Rufus was still living with the McDonalds. No job was listed by his name in the 1860 census.

Involvement in the Civil War. On Sept 30, 1861, Rufus P. Bruner went to Frederick and enlisted in Company G of the 1st Regiment of the Potomac Home Brigade, and mustered in one month later, on Oct 24. This was 6 months after the war broke out at Ft. Sumter, SC. He served until the end of the war, 3 ½ years later.

After some initial training at Camp Worman just north of Frederick during the winter of 1861-62, the PHB's initial assignment was to march to Winchester to guard the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Subsequently, they were marched to Harpers Ferry, and on May 27, 1862, they saw their first action in a skirmish with Mosby's Rangers at Loudoun Heights.

They were part of the forces defending Harpers Ferry when it was surrendered to Stonewall Jackson on Sept 15, 1862, and were marched off to Camp Parole in Annapolis for the winter. Had they not been taken prisoner and been placed on parole at that time, they would have marched to Antietam to participate in that slaughter just two days later.

They spent the winter at Camp Parole until a prisoner exchange was arranged in the spring. They then returned to their original assignment, which was "for the protection of the canal and the property and persons of loyal citizens of the neighborhood, and to be stationed in the vicinity whilst in the service."

However, as the war progressed, they were called on to participate in some significant battles, most notably the Battle of Gettysburg (July 3-5, 1863), and the Battle of Monocacy (July 9, 1864). On April 8, 1865, members of the 1st PHB were transferred to the 13th Maryland Infantry Regiment (MIR). The following day, April 9, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, ending the war. The 13th MIR was disbanded on May 29, 1865, and Rufus Bruner, along with the others, mustered out of service at that time.

The 1870 census found Rufus living in Berlin with his wife Helen (age 25). He was a railroad hand. Living in the same household was the McDonald family: Barnard (50 yo, railroad

superintendent), Mary E. (46; Rufus' mother), Belinda (67), and John (10). Berlin was still a small village at that time. The census taker reported 42 dwelling houses and 46 families living in Berlin in 1870.

In 1880, Rufus (40 yo) was still living in Berlin with his wife Hellen (36), and still working on the railroad. They had no children. Living close by were Leander Barger (civil war veteran) and Catherine Shilling (mother of Hezekiah Shilling, another civil war veteran).

He was involved in the community. An article in *The News* (Frederick, MD) in 1887 listed Rufus as a member of the new county central committee of the Republican party, along with 4 other men from Petersville. And his obituary indicates that "he was bailiff of the town [Brunswick] for a short time, also a deputy sheriff several years ago."

Rufus died at home in Brunswick of consumption [TB], on Feb 2, 1897, at the age of "58 years, 4 mos, & 16 days." (Calculated date of birth: Sep 16, 1838.) The *Brunswick Herald* reported that he was buried "in the town [Brunswick] cemetery." However, his tombstone (which he shares with his wife Helen) is located in the Mountain View Cemetery in Sharpsburg, MD. It is possible that he was reinterred to that cemetery.

Rufus's widow Hellen Bruner (age 66) was living in "Brunswick Town" in 1910 with her mother-in-law, Marry McDonald (85, also widowed), who was running a boarding house with 5 other boarders. Mary* died on July 1, 1911, and was buried in Sharpsburg.

Hellen Bruner was living by herself in Sharpsburg in 1920. She died in 1927 at the age of 83, and was buried with her husband and mother-in-law.

*Mary McDonald, mother of Rufus Bruner, had quite a story of her own. She "was known among railroad men as Mother Mac. For over 50 years she kept a boarding house there. Railroad officials when visiting Brunswick always went to her house for some of her famous mince pies and apple dumplings." [Source: *Obituary in Mail, Hagerstown*.] According to at least two articles in the *Brunswick Herald* (1894 and 1907), she ran a boarding house on 1st Street (today: Virginia Ave.). In 1910, widows Mary (85) and Helen (66) were living together. Mary was now running a boarding house on 3rd Street (Maple Ave.), across from Dr. Horine's residence. At that time, she had 5 boarders staying with her. Of interest is the fact that Mary never learned to read or write [per 1900 census].

Mary's husband Barnard died in December 1898.

Mary died July 1, 1911 at the age of 86. She willed her house and lot to the widow of her son, Helen Bruner. She also bequeathed "to the Reformed church of Brunswick, \$25 for the erection of a memorial window in the church to her memory." However, no memorial window with her name on it is to be found in what is now Beans in the Belfry.

Mary E. McDonald was buried in Sharpsburg. I'm not sure why she was buried there, as she spent most of her time in Berlin/Brunswick. Apparently, her daughter-in-law had moved to Sharpsburg, where she was found in the 1920 census living by herself.

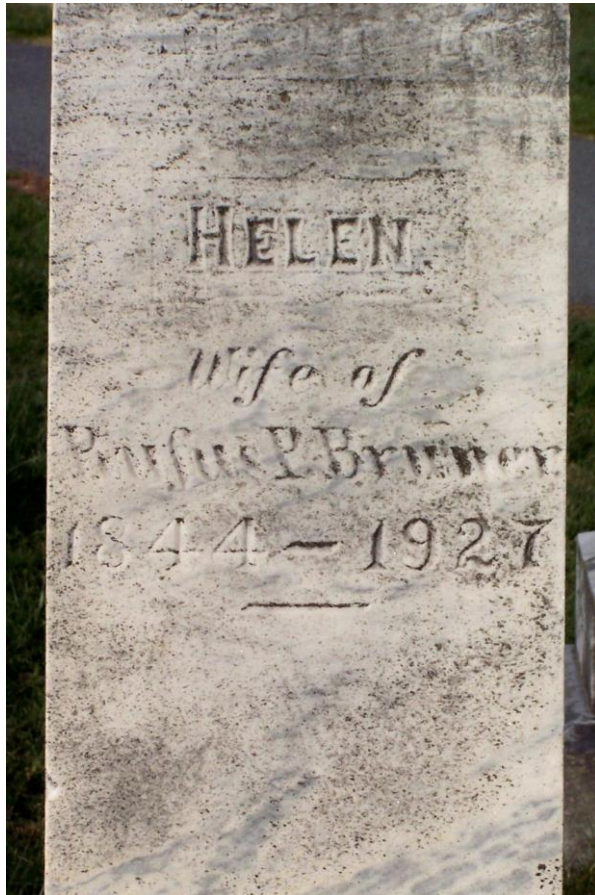
Family monument, Sharpsburg.



Rufus P. Bruner



Helen Bruner, wife of Rufus.



Mary E. McDonald, mother of Rufus.

