



McCoy Farmhouse

This house on Syene Road was originally built in 1860 by Benjamin Brown. He had moved to the area from New York to raise tobacco. The house is built with cream colored brick from Milwaukee in the Italianate style. There is no wood frame. The exterior walls are three courses of brick thick.

The house has had many owners and residents through the years. Most recently the Brown farmhouse has been associated with Elizabeth McCoy (1903-1978). She was recognized as a world renowned microbiologist. She became one of the first women to contribute to the study of microbiology, doing major research in bacteria toxins and in botulism. During World War II, she worked with penicillin and detected the strain that was produced for common use.

Dr. McCoy bought the farmhouse because it had been owned by her grandfather, James McCoy, in the late 19th century. She had remembered visiting the farm as a child and she considered the property as a "family memory."

By her arrangement, the property was left in the hands of the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF). Because it was in such a state of disrepair, WARF sought to demolish the house. After a spirited fight with preservationists and Fitchburg, the house was declared a "cemetery" and as such, it could not be destroyed. The basis for this claim was the persistent tale that a workman had been killed during construction and was buried in the basement.