

# The BRONNENBERGS



A brief history of the Bronnenberg family and its lasting impact on Mounds State Park.

*The Bronnenberg House, built around 1840, is recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. Its cultural and architectural significance help capture the story of Mounds State Park.*

## EARLY SETTLERS

Frederick Bronnenberg Sr. arrived in the United States from Germany around 1800, supposedly sent by his mother to avoid being recruited by the military. His migration west led him to Pennsylvania, where he met his wife, Barbara Easter, and soon had children. The family was destined for Illinois, but only reached what is now Madison County, Indiana, around 1820.

There are many stories why the Bronnenbergs decided to settle here instead of going farther. One story tells of broken down oxen and a wagon. Another story cites the illness and death of a young daughter making it too painful for Barbara to continue. Whatever the reason, Frederick purchased the acres of what is now Mounds State Park, and settled just west of the Great Mound in a log cabin.



Frederick Sr. and Barbara had 12 children, nine of which survived and prospered. The third child, Frederick Jr., built this brick, two-story Bronnenberg home around 1850. Frederick Jr. and wife Hulda Free raised six children in the home.

The Bronnenberg family men were successful and educated business operators. Frederick Sr. ran a tannery, saw mill and grist mill. Frederick Jr. farmed the large family homestead. These ventures made the Bronnenbergs wealthy and well known in local circles.

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## THE HOUSE

The Federal style home was originally “ell” shaped, consisting of five rooms. The four main rooms, two up and two down, were connected by a central hall with a stairway. Upon entering the home, the fifth room, the ell, was located on the first floor on the back of the house off of the left side room.

Around 1870, Frederick Jr.’s son Ransom added a second floor to the ell, enclosed the back porch, and added a second floor to it. The large step-up through the door at the top of the stairs was actually an old window! This addition made space for Ransom’s family of six children and created the house standing today.

Building materials used in construction were native and local. Tuliptrees provided most of the wood in the home. The 14-inch walls are load-bearing. The original floor, exposed in the first room to the right, is probably a species of oak. The foundation is limestone, the window sills are sandstone, and local clay was fired for brick. Note on the front of the home the decorate eave of bricks jutting out at an angle. The home exterior was painted white and then green at some point.

The house is the only surviving structure from the Bronnenberg Farm. The original farmstead included a barn, corncrib, smokehouse, summer kitchen, spring house and more.

## A PARK IS BORN

Frederick Jr. died in 1901, leaving Ransom in charge of the estate. In 1905, Ransom leased approximately 40 acres of land to The Indiana Union Traction Company with the option to buy in five years. The 40 acres are now the southern corner of Mounds State Park. The Traction Co. built an amusement park called “Mounds Park” that ran successfully until 1929. The Traction Co. then sold the land to the Madison County Historical Society, which promptly donated it to the Indiana Department of Conservation. Mounds State Park was established Oct. 7, 1930.

## THE LEGACY

Frederick Bronnenberg Jr. recognized the uniqueness of the Mounds, and, from the beginning, fought to protect them against looters and farm-plow destruction. He passed on his beliefs of stewardship to his children, who also guarded the mounds. Even when an amusement park and railroad shared the same ground, the mounds were preserved and touted as an attraction to behold. The conservation efforts of the Bronnenbergs helped make the mounds in this park some of the best remaining examples in the region.

The Bronnenberg house is a reminder of their diligence. Restoration efforts are currently underway.

Contact the interpretive naturalist if you wish to donate time, money, or historic items to this effort.



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[interpretiveservices.IN.gov](http://interpretiveservices.IN.gov)

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