

“THISTLE DHU” – THE BROWNING HOUSE

138 Landon Lane, Orange, Virginia

In 1912 while Teddy Roosevelt, William Taft, and Woodrow Wilson were battling it out for the Presidency, Alexander and Adra (Bradbury) Browning did something truly historic, they constructed the first Arts and Crafts house in the Town of Orange. This striking home sits on a nearly half acre lot in the Marshall Heights neighborhood at 138 Landon Lane. On the exterior it featured a steep gable roof, wide eaves, a wide front porch with thick square concrete columns, a back porch, tall windows, two coal burning fireplaces, and a wood burning stove. The interior includes a mix of oak and pine hardwood floors, plaster walls, pocket doors, oak trim around the windows and an oak trimmed stairway with a 180-degree turn landing. Small, numbered brass tags found on the frames of the first-floor windows strongly suggest that this was a kit-built house, common during this era. A rare interior architectural element is the three side-by-side inswing casement windows across the back wall of the dining room. The house remained in the Browning family for the next 103 years when it was acquired by the current owners in 2015.

It is noteworthy that the other two homes on this year's tour located on Landon Lane also have Browning family connections. Specifically, the Old Manse was occupied by Alexander Browning's distant cousin, George Landon Browning and his wife, Evelyn. Alexander's brother, William Browning and his wife, Mary, built and occupied the Pied-a-Terre home (The William and Mary Cottage).

The current owners were drawn to this home for many reasons, most importantly by the preservation of the original design and materials, and the vintage neighborhood. Numerous infrastructure renovations were subsequently made with the aim of maintaining the design and character. In recent years, two tiled fireplace surrounds were installed with art nouveau themes, and a cottage/garage with a second-floor guesthouse replaced the original corrugated tin shed. In addition, a granite lined brick walk to the front porch was installed along with cobblestone edging between the front lawn and the sidewalk. Two large scale mosaics now cover the concrete enclosure of the outside steps leading to the basement as well as brick mosaics in the rear parking area. Regarding the grounds, Mrs. Adra Browning was an avid gardener, and the current landscaping and planting beds pay homage to her love of gardening.

- *Jim and Anne Cantrell, owners*