Kenan House
Official Residence of the UNCW Chancellor

History & Information
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Kenan House
1705 Market Street
Wilmington, NC 28403
This stately home was constructed in 1911 for Thomas Emerson, the president of the Atlantic Coastline Railroad. When Emerson died in 1913, his widow rented the dwelling to Lyman Delano, executive vice president of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and a cousin of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In 1923, it was sold for $36,000 to Mrs. Sarah Graham Kenan, a Wilmington native known as “Miss Sarah.” Mrs. Kenan, a widow, bought the house in order to live closer to her sister, Jessie Kenan Wise, whose home was located nearby at 1713 Market Street, now the historic UNCW Wise Alumni House. Mrs. Kenan affectionately called the neoclassical-style home “Sunnyside.” Following a disastrous fire in 1931, it underwent extensive renovations. Upon Mrs. Kenan’s death in 1968, the house was donated to the University of North Carolina Wilmington by her nephew, Mr. James Graham Kenan II.

To preserve and protect the house, the university initiated an extensive renovation project in 2003. The electrical, plumbing and mechanical systems, which were installed around 1931, required extensive repairs. By taking some space from the original butler’s pantry, an additional first-floor bathroom was added to supplement the existing, small powder room. A budget of $1.2 million in non-state dollars was set aside for the renovations, which were completed in November 2004. The Kenan Family, led by Mrs. Kenan’s grand-nephew, Thomas S. Kenan III, provided additional financial support for the structural renovation and interior restoration. Nearly every academic institution in North Carolina counts members of the Kenan family among its philanthropic supporters. UNCW is fortunate to have many examples of their generosity to share with the public, including Kenan House, Wise Alumni House, Kenan Hall and the Sarah Graham Kenan Memorial Auditorium.

Since 1969, Kenan House has served as the official residence of the UNCW chancellor and is used extensively by the university for entertaining alumni and friends of the university, as well as dignitaries and visitors. It is a special place that is intended to inspire and make friends for the university. While the downstairs is designated for public university use, the upstairs is reserved for the private residence of the chancellor. The 7,500-square-foot mansion on the corner of 17th and Market Streets has nine fireplaces, six bathrooms, molded ceilings and more than a dozen rooms.
Architecture & Architects

Joseph F. Leitner, a Wilmington architect, designed many buildings in the city of Wilmington (several since destroyed) in the early 1900s, before moving to West Virginia in 1921. Leitner designed the Kenan House in the Neoclassical Revival architectural style. With its 30-foot-wide grand portico supported by four Corinthian columns, Kenan House stands as a premier example of this particular style of architecture.

After purchasing the home, Mrs. Kenan hired Thomas Hastings, a notable New York City architect and partner of the firm Carrere & Hastings, to design the solarium, the pine paneling installation in the dining room and a two-story garage. Carrere & Hastings designed many well-known buildings, including the New York Central Public Library, the Life Magazine Building in New York City and the Murray Guggenheim Mansion in Elberon, New Jersey, for which the firm won a Gold Medal Award from the American Institute of Architects. Henry Flagler, Mrs. Kenan’s brother-in-law, had been one of the firm’s first significant clients. Carrere & Hastings also designed two hotels and two churches for Flagler in St. Augustine, Florida, as well as “Whitehall,” his personal home located in Palm Beach, Florida.

Leonard Schultze, another notable New York City architect and a partner of the firm Schultze and Weaver, was chosen by William Rand Kenan Jr. to create the plans for reconstructing the house following the 1931 fire. Schultze and Weaver designed many impressive structures, including the Waldorf-Astoria in New York City and The Breakers Hotel in Palm Beach, Florida.

Schultze instructed workmen to save as much as possible from the original structure, including the exterior brick walls, the portico, solarium, wood paneling, decorative plasterwork, marble mantels, staircase and balcony. In addition, the reconstruction project focused on making the home fire-resistant, which was accomplished through massive steel framing, poured-concrete flooring or sub-flooring throughout the entire house and solid masonry interior walls.

Murray Guggenheim Mansion

The Breakers Hotel
The Kenan Family arrived in colonial North Carolina in the 1730s from Scotland, settling first in the Duplin County area and later coming to New Hanover County. Sarah Graham Kenan, a Wilmington native, lived in the family home at 202 S. 3rd Street. Her siblings included William Rand, Jessie Hargrove and Mary Lily Kenan, wife of railroad tycoon Henry Flagler. Sarah married her first cousin, Graham Kenan, a 1904 graduate of UNC and an attorney in New York. Upon his death in 1920, Sarah returned to Wilmington and purchased the house on Market Street to be closer to her sister, Jessie Wise, who lived two houses down the street. The sisters frequently traveled to New York, Florida and Europe, and they often used Wilmington as their winter stopping point when the gardens were in bloom and infrequently, they spent Christmas in Wilmington. During the last ten years of her life, Sarah Kenan remained at her Market Street home year-round. As benefactors of their sister Mary Lily Flagler’s estate, the remaining Kenans created charitable foundations that greatly benefited North Carolina academic institutions throughout the state.
William R. Kenan, Jr.

William Rand Kenan Jr., was born in Wilmington, North Carolina, on April 30, 1872. He graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1894 with a Bachelor of Science degree, receiving particular recognition in chemistry, physics and mathematics. It was during his college years that Kenan assisted his professor, Dr. F.P. Venable, in discovering the process that converted calcium carbide to acetylene. Following graduation from the university, he was active as a chemical and mechanical engineering advisor, responsible for the installation of several important plants for the carbide and acetylene industry in the U.S., Australia and Germany. In 1896, Kenan went to Niagara Falls to work at what would later become known as the Union Carbide Corporation.

During 1899 and 1900, Kenan was drawn into frequent contact with the former business associate of John D. Rockefeller, Henry M. Flagler, who was then engaged in developing the east coast of Florida. Flagler persuaded Kenan to join him in his Florida enterprises, which included the Florida East Coast Railway and the Florida East Coast Hotel Company and its famous The Breakers Hotel.

In 1901, Flagler married Kenan’s sister, Mary Lily, and, in 1904, Kenan married Alice Pomroy of Lockport, whom he first met in Flagler’s home. The fusion of business and family interests between the Kenans and the Flaglers ultimately resulted in the inheritance by Kenan and his two surviving sisters of the major portion of the Flagler estate, which included ownership of the Flagler System companies. From 1924 to the time of his death, Kenan was president and managed the companies during their active corporate existence. In Lockport, where he made his home, Kenan owned the Western Block Company, which became the largest maker of block and tackle in the country. He also owned and developed the Randleigh Farm, a model dairy farm used for research and that also included Jersey cattle. His extensive research was published as a six-volume text book titled *History of Randleigh Farm, Lockport, New York* in 1947. Kenan’s memoirs, *Incidents by the Way*, also was published between 1946 and 1958.

In his later years, Kenan’s interests and activities turned more and more to philanthropy and his desire to commemorate the Kenan name. In 1926, he provided funds for the construction of Kenan Stadium on the Chapel Hill campus of the University of North Carolina. In 1944, the university conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws in recognition of Kenan’s diversified contributions to science and humanity.

Following his death on July 28, 1965, a significant part of Kenan’s estate became the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust, a part charitable and part non-charitable perpetual trust.

Kenan also gave generously to Lockport, the city that served as his home for more than sixty years, including gifts totaling about $3 million to schools, churches, hospitals and community organizations. He was founder and chief benefactor of Camp Kenan on the shores on Lake Ontario, and, prior to his death, deeded his home and property to the First Presbyterian Church in Lockport for development as a community center.
Henry Morrison Flagler

Henry Morrison Flagler was born in Hopewell, New York on January 2, 1830, the son of a struggling Presbyterian minister. Morrison was the name of his mother’s first, deceased husband (Hugh Morrison). Henry left school after the eighth grade to work for the Harkness family in Ohio. There he began work with his half-brother, Dan Harkness. Penniless, he worked hard and learned all aspects of the mercantile business. He was promoted quickly to manager when Dan Harkness moved to a larger store in Bellevue, Ohio. After five years, he bought out a partner in one of the Harkness operations, using money he had saved and moved to Bellevue. In Bellevue; he courted and married, his step-uncle’s second daughter on November 9, 1853. Henry Flagler and Mary had two daughters, Jennie Louise and Carrie. Carrie died at age three.

The company expanded into the grain and distillery businesses, and was sold after making considerable money. One of Flagler’s grain brokers was none other than the famous John D. Rockefeller. In 1862, Flagler and Barney York formed a salt-producing company that boomed because of demand for salt brought on by the Civil War. He sold his interest in the grain business to his half-brother and moved to Saginaw, Michigan. When the Civil War ended in 1865, so did the huge demand for salt. The Flagler and York Salt Company went bankrupt a year later, leaving Flagler with a $50,000 debt.

Instead of returning to Bellevue, the Flaglers moved to Cleveland, Ohio where he re-entered the grain business and renewed his connections with John D. Rockefeller. Handsome profits from the grain business allowed him to pay off his debt and to have sufficient money to invest in a new adventure. In 1868 at age 37, he partnered with John Rockefeller and Samuel Andrews to form the Rockefeller, Andrews and Flagler Oil Refinery, also known as the RAF Refinery. Under Flagler’s guidance, Standard Oil began buying out almost all of the smaller refineries, resulting in a monopoly. In 1870, Flagler’s first and only son, Harry Harness Flagler, was born. By 1884, Standard Oil moved its headquarters to New York City, where it became the largest and richest industrial company in the world. Then, in 1887, both Flagler and Rockefeller moved their residences to New York City.

When Henry Flagler’s wife Mary was diagnosed with tuberculosis, her doctor recommended she avoid the harsh New York winters and seek a warmer climate during the colder months. Florida was chosen for the winter of 1878, and the Flagler’s set out for Jacksonville. Within a few weeks, Henry, Mary and Harry returned to New York City. Mary died in New York at age 48, on May 18, 1881. Young Harry was just 10 years old. Two years later on June 5, 1883, Flagler married one of his first wife’s nurses, Ida Alice Shourds. They also went to Florida for the winter, but this time to St. Augustine. Flagler’s developed an increasing interest in Florida; he reduced his workload with Standard Oil, and at age 53, he began a brand new vocation. Continued on Page 8
In St. Augustine, he built two hotels, the Ponce de Leon and the Alcazar; he also purchased another hotel from a competitor, renaming it The Cordova. To make his hotels more accessible, he purchased and rebuilt a short-line railroad company, which is how he entered the railroad business. He also built several churches, a hospital, waterworks, electric and sewer utilities, and a winter home for the family in St. Augustine. It was 1885 when he purchased a short-line railroad between Jacksonville and St. Augustine, the forerunner of the Florida East Coast Railway (F.E.C Rwy.). This proved to be a turning point both in Flagler’s life and in Florida’s history.

He started extending his railroad lines to the south, first to Ormond Beach and then to Palm Beach, Florida in 1893. He purchased existing railroads and even built new ones. He also built schools, hospitals, hotels, churches, fire stations, city halls, courthouses and utilities. Together, these various entities (Florida East Coast Railway or F.E.C. Rwy., the entire system of hotels, the land holding companies, the Peninsular & Occidental or P&O Steam Ship Company and all other subsidiaries) comprised the Flagler System. However, only the overseas railroad is correctly titled the Key West Extension, Flagler System.

In 1897, Flagler’s wife Ida Alice was committed to an insane asylum in New York. Because insanity was not considered as legitimate grounds for divorce in either New York or Florida at that time, Flagler convinced the Florida Legislature to change its law in 1901. He then married his third wife, Mary Lily Kenan, whom he had known for many years. As a wedding present, he built her a mansion in Palm Beach and named it Whitehall. Florida later repealed the change it had made in its divorce law.

Six years later, in 1913, Flagler fell down a flight of marble stairs at Whitehall. He never recovered from the fall and died in Palm Beach of his injuries on May 20, at age 83. Three days later, his body was sent to St. Augustine where he was laid to rest along side his first wife Mary Harkness in the Memorial Presbyterian Church mausoleum, originally built for his daughter Jennie Louise. His pallbearers were mostly his Florida associates; John D. Rockefeller did not attend his funeral.

A key figure in the development of the east coast of Florida and founder of what became the Florida East Coast Railway, Flagler is known as the father of both Miami and Palm Beach, Florida.
MARY LILY KENAN FLAGLER BINGHAM

Born Mary Lily Kenan in Wilmington, she met Henry Morrison Flagler, at the home of mutual friends in Newport, Rhode Island. Already married, he set about obtaining a divorce from his wife who eventually had to be confined to an asylum. Although it took several years, the couple married ten days after the divorce became final. The groom was 72; she was 34. Their marriage, by all reports, was a happy one. In March 1913, however, Flagler fell down the stairs at their Whitehall mansion and broke his hip. At 83, the injury proved mortal. Two months later, he died with Mary Lily at his side. With his death, she reportedly became the richest woman in the country, with a fortune worth between $60 and $100 million.

Within two years, she became reacquainted with an old friend, Robert Worth Bingham. Late in 1916, she agreed to marry Bingham, and under pressure, they agreed to a waiver to any claim of his to her fortune. The ceremony was held November 15, 1916 in the Pembroke Jones New York City apartment. Mary Lily died eight months after her wedding. She is buried at historic Oakdale Cemetery in Wilmington, N.C.
The Great Hall

With its dramatic proportions and classical décor, the Great Hall offers guests a spectacular welcome to Kenan House. The architectural elements in the 55-foot-long room include 16 columns with Tower of the Winds capitals, an open string staircase with 22 steps and turned-wood balustrades, and bas-relief plaster ceilings.

An elegant Czechoslovakian crystal chandelier that lights the stairwell formerly hung at “Satan’s Toe,” the Flagler summer residence in New York. Henry Flagler gave the chandelier to Sarah Kenan after she admired it during a visit. A variegated Italian marble mantel stands on the west side of the Great Hall. The Italian mantel originally served as a feature in Jessie Kenan Wise’s formal garden before Miss Sarah purchased the piece and used it as a focal point in the Great Hall.

The most valuable painting in the Kenan House collection, “Young Girl Defending Herself Against Eros,” (c. 1880) by William Adolphe Bouguereau, typically hangs opposite the mantel. It originally hung in Whitehall, Henry Flagler’s Florida estate. Other valuable works of art in the Great Hall include “Landscape” (c. 1882) by Esteban Chartrand and “Holy Family,” a 17th century work from the School of Rubens on loan to UNCW by Tom Kenan. The paintings that hang in the second story stairwell are “Portrait of Anna van Graet,” produced in the 17th century by an unknown Dutch artist and “Gentleman in Landscape,” produced in the 18th century by an unknown English artist.

The Great Hall features many furnishings from Sarah Kenan’s collection such as handmade oriental rugs, a pair of French 19th century marble urns on marble pedestals, a Camerden and Forster grandfather clock, and an elaborate mantel clock.
The Drawing Room

The architectural items of interest in the Drawing Room include Bolection moldings that frame the panels above and below the chair rails, a modillion cornice and a plaster medallion centered in the ceiling. Marble and metal rose candelabras from Sarah Kenan’s collection stand on the white marble mantel. The antique European furnishings also came from her collection, originally from the French Salon at the Flagler “Whitehall” residence. A collection of Sarah Kenan’s hats are also on display within a French 19th century Rococo-style vitrine. They were found in the attic in their original boxes by Chancellor Rosemary DePaolo. A secret drawer also was discovered in the French Louis XVI-style cylinder desk. A family letter found inside that drawer now resides in the UNCW Library Archives.

The Dining Room and Solarium

The pine paneling that gives the Dining Room special distinction was acquired intact from an 18th century manor house in Surrey, England. Chinese silk artwork hangs above the mantel. A “Portrait of M. John Athow of Norwich,” painted by Sir William Beechey (c. 1809), is featured above the Regency sideboard. The maroon, Sienna marble that surrounds the Dining Room fireplace matches the wainscoting in the Solarium, or “Flower Room.” A delicate wrought-iron and bronze water fountain is attached to the southwest wall in the Solarium. The grill work is of museum quality.
The Library

The architectural items of interest in the Library include the gray-white marble fireplace with foliated pilasters supporting a molded mantelshelf. A dramatic oil painting, “Cupid Breaking Bow,” by A.J. Chantron hangs in the Library. The work, created in the late 19th century, is set in a highly carved gilt wood frame.

Works of art in the Side Hall

Two paintings of interest are on display in the Side Hall that extends from the Great Hall to the porte-cochere entrance on the west side of the house. Both are set in carved wood and gesso gilt frames. “Tavern Scene” is an oil-on-panel and most likely dates to the late 19th century. “Two Cavaliers,” by Jehan Georges Vibert, is a watercolor on paper. The work is not dated, but the French artist lived from 1840 to 1902.

The Living Room

A white marble mantel with variegated marble glyphs in its frieze graces the Living Room. The magnificently-framed “View to Grand Canal in Venice,” an oil painting attributed to Felix Francois Georges Philibert Ziem, hangs in the Living Room, as does a portrait of Sarah Graham Kenan, painted in 1991 by Dupree Fuller and presented as a gift by the Kenan family to the university. The marble-toped table is also from “Whitehall.”
The majority of the furnishings are original to the Kenan House and other Kenan family homes. Art work and furnishings owned by UNCW or on loan from the Kenan Fund cannot be moved, removed or destroyed without permission from the university.
Garage & Loft

Through additional generosity from the Kenan family, the former carriage house was renovated in 2010. It is now a modern facility with a garage and loft apartment.

The upstairs apartment, known as “The Loft,” features a living area with a kitchenette and flat screen TV, a bedroom and a bathroom. It is used for special guests of the university and chancellor.

The garage features remote-controlled, drive-through doors that allow cars to flow from Market Street straight through to the home’s convenient, rear alley exit on 16th Street. Although no longer functional, the original, overhead fire sprinkler system is still in place.
The Kenan Gardens are classic Southern style, featuring azaleas and dogwoods, along with multiple sculptures placed among manicured boxwoods. The yard is fully enclosed by a brick wall and iron gates. The “White Garden,” or courtyard, was refurbished through a gift from the Kenan family. The fountain and benches provide an oasis from the bustle of downtown living.

Sarah Kenan’s landscape plans, dating back to 1932, are housed in the UNCW Library Archives. The landscape architect, Earle S. Draper, was an influential land planner of the period. He was instrumental in planning many suburbs and golf-course neighborhoods. He also designed various areas in Charlotte, N.C., including Myers Park.
Ghost Stories

Like many Victorian and antebellum towns and cities, Wilmington has a plethora of ghost stories. While not included on any of Wilmington’s public “ghost tours,” the Kenan House has three separate stories that have found their way into haunting folklore:

- The image of a woman in blue has been seen walking through the house.
- A young child, believed to be one of the Emerson children who first inhabited the home, has been seen and heard running through the house.
- Big Ben chimes have been heard from time to time, even though there are no mechanisms in the house playing that tune.

The Kenan Family burial grounds at Oakdale Cemetery
Mary Bridgers, an heiress of Col. Robert R. Bridgers of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad and other railroads and businesses, was the major developer of the Carolina Heights area and the blocks along Market Street from 17th to 20th Streets. The four houses in the 1700 block of Market Street, all imposing early 20th-century structures, comprise the “Market Street Mansions” area, listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In full-blown Neoclassical and Colonial Revival styles, the block recalls the confident wealth of the pre-World War I era. Built and occupied by railroad and commercial magnates or heiresses, four homes convey the gracious style-of-living typical of the early 20th-century affluent residents who lived in the Wilmington suburbs. A fifth dwelling, the Judge George Rountree House, originally stood between the Kenan and Wise Houses. Built in 1911, it has since been demolished.

Kenan House, 1705 Market Street

Holt-Wise House, 1713 Market Street

Bluethenthal House, 1704 Market Street

Bridgers-Brooks House, 1710 Market Street
Expenditures for exterior and interior painting, minor structural and roof repairs may be paid for from the Kenan-Wise Houses’ Endowment Fund, established by the William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust, as long as any changes are consistent with and maintain the original house decorations.

An annual inventory is required. Upon the final departure of each UNCW chancellor, another inventory is required.

For any maintenance and operations, HVAC, electrical, plumbing, carpentry, painting, locksmith work, the protocol is to respond to work requests (either reactive due to a failure, or scheduled as preventive maintenance) starting after 9 a.m. Exceptions must be cleared with the housekeeping staff or with a designated person from the Chancellor’s office.

Mechanical equipment is monitored via computer, with abnormal conditions set to alarm via computer and pager to on-call employees. Computer checks of mechanical equipment are made 7 days/week at 7 a.m.

If Physical Plant identifies a mechanical problem that requires attention after normal working hours, the Physical Plant director or asst. director will review the problem and determine whether or not to respond, but will make contact with the chancellor or the chancellor’s designee before addressing the problem. Physical plant director can be reached at 910.685.3975.

For after-hours repair when the house is vacant, the craftsman or workman will call UNCW Police to request an escort to the house. After-hours, on-call craftsmen or workmen also can be reached via UNCW Police.

With the exception of the locksmith shop, craftsmen do not have keys to enter Kenan House.

The basement (that houses most of the mechanical equipment) is not alarmed. However, the inner basement door is alarmed.

The housekeeper often is the first to recognize maintenance problems. She/he knows how to get in touch with the Physical Plant work order desk, and she/he knows how to submit work requests. The housekeeper works from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Routine housekeeping includes Kenan House, Wise House, Wise Carriage House and the Kenan House Garage Loft.

Many preventive maintenance work requests already are entered in the university’s computer-based, work-order maintenance system, and as such, will automatically generate maintenance work to be scheduled at intermittent frequencies.

Landscaping: two landscape employees are assigned to the Kenan House and Wise House. Working hours are from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Structural changes on the first floor are not permitted unless approved by Thomas Kenan III or his designee, or are necessary to meet life-safety issues.

The Kenan House is not rented out for public events, weddings or parties.
Filming Policy

Film production has become a major employer and economic force for both the Wilmington area and the state of North Carolina. Wilmington has been the site of more than 300 television and feature productions, including the “Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood,” “One Tree Hill” and “Betsy’s Wedding.”

Opportunities for commercial filming are very limited, due to the uses of Kenan House as the Chancellor’s residence and for hosting official university functions.

With prior university approval, filmmaking will be permitted on university campus or property leased by the university, provided that such activity does not interfere with the education, research and normal operating or program functions or previously scheduled events of the university and that does not pose a security or safety risk. Furthermore, the university reserves the right to deny filming on the basis of content related to pornography, defamation, obscenity, activities in violation of State law or if the university deems that the content of the production is contrary to the mission of UNCW. The use of campus images requires the express written approval of the university; refer to UNCW’s Filming on University Property policy for additional details and information.

Filming activity and photography requests conducted for the purpose of marketing or promoting the university (commercials, admissions-related, etc.), or reporting on persons, events or scenes that are in the news for newspapers, television news and other news media, including the Internet must be discussed with, and approved by, the Office of Marketing and Communications before filming commences.

Authority: Chancellor
History: Revised and Reformatted January 23, 2009;
Effective September 1, 1990; Supersedes former policy FAC1.20, which Replaced MSC 1.10
Source of Authority: UNC Code, Chapter X, Section 502A
Related Links: Copyright Ownership Policy; Request for Filming Form
Responsible Office: Business Affairs
Office of Marketing & Communications: 910.962.2088
Resources

Tour a Port City Treasure: Kenan House, a tour guide booklet written by Andrea Weaver, Information and Communication Specialist, and produced by The Friends of UNCW.

Appraisal of Personal Property Belonging to Kenan House UNCW Chancellor’s Residence prepared for the University of North Carolina Wilmington by Accredited Appraisal Associates in October 2000.


“Secret Garden,” an article published by NC Home magazine in December 1992. Mimi Cunningham, Assistant to the Chancellor for University Relations, wrote the article.


Artwork and architecture research maintained by Mary Forsythe, Director of Purchasing at UNCW.

 Archived materials maintained by Adina Riggins, UNCW Archivist.

Of Interest


Video of past Kenan House holiday parties hosted by Mrs. Sarah Kenan, Kenan House.

Compiled by Jennifer M. Rich, University Advancement, Spring 2011