

JAMES BROWN

1698-1739

Great-Grandson of Chad Brown

By

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Great-great-great-grandson of James Brown

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JAMES BROWN,¹ Jr., great grandson of Chad Brown, and second son of the Rev. James and Mary (Harris) Brown, was born in Providence, March 22, 1698, and died there April 27, 1739. He married, December 21, 1722, Hope Power (b. Jan. 4, 1702—d. June 8, 1792), daughter of Nicholas and Mercy (Tillinghast) Power, and grand-daughter of the Rev. Pardon Tillinghast.

With his younger brother, Obadiah, he established the Commercial House of the Browns, of Providence, R. I., that later became Nicholas Brown & Co., Brown & Benson, and finally Brown & Ives.

There were five sons and one daughter. The eldest son, James, died in York, Va., in 1750, while master of a vessel. The other four, Nicholas, Joseph, John and Moses, later familiarly known as the "Four Brothers," acquired great distinction in private and public affairs, and were partners in the enterprises established by their father and uncle, that they largely extended and increased. The daughter, Mary, married Dr. John Vanderlight, of Steenwyk, Holland, chemist, and a graduate of Leyden University, who later became associated with his brothers-in-law in the manufacture of candles, having brought with him a knowledge of the Dutch process of separating spermaceti from its oil.

At the time of James Brown's death in 1739, the eldest of his five sons, James, was only fifteen years of age, and the care

¹In the seventeenth and early eighteenth century the name was often spelled Browne.

of the boys devolved on their uncle Obadiah. It was largely due to his oversight and devotion that the brothers gained the distinction they did.

Early in the century Providence was becoming an important shipping port. Leading families were giving their attention to foreign trade, and exchanging the occupation of farmers and land traders for that of sailors and ship owners.

James Brown, Jr., belonged to a generation that made its living on the sea and over the counter.

When only twenty-three, and almost two years before his marriage to Hope Pöwer, he appears as one of five partners, all of Providence, who employed a certain John Barnes to build a sloop. Soon after the wedding, he was on the quarterdeck of the "Four Bachelors," as Capt. James Brown, ready to sail for the Leeward Island in the West Indies. In the following fall he opened a shop on Towne Street, near the corner of College Street and Market Square, almost opposite his own home. It is to the wise forethought of his youngest son, Moses Brown, the Quaker, that the documents containing the details of his affairs were preserved. Several shop-ledgers are mines of information respecting the stock in trade, and business methods of this, the first department store in Providence.

The 1723 ledger opens with an index of customers alphabetically arranged, according to the initial letter of their given names, and phonetically spelled, following the compiler's interpretation of sound. Sometimes the patron's trade is given.

For a man of his energy, the demands of business, of wife, home and shop, could not suffice to keep him in port. On February 24, 1727, as master of the sloop "Truth and Delight," he sailed with a cargo of horses, Indian corn, tobacco, cheese, tar, boards and shingles, for the West Indies, and by June 19th had returned with a cargo of molasses and rum.

Mere buying and selling did not exhaust James Brown's resources. He lent money on interest, owned a slaughter house, rented either horse or scow as occasion served, provided storage, and drove a thriving trade with his distillery, not to mention his crowning venture in sending the pioneer slave-ship

"Mary" from the port of Providence to the Guinea Coast. After that he gave up the command of vessels. His interests, however, in the shipping trade were more important than all his other pursuits combined.

Obadiah Brown acted as Captain on some of his brother James' West Indian crafts, while James was giving sailing orders and computing expenses and profits. In the spring of 1736 the "Sloop Mary," John Godfrey, Master, was fitted out for a twelve months' voyage to the ill-famed Guinea shore. Among the bills attached to the ledger is the account of James Harding, blacksmith, for iron work, including "35 pare of handcoofs."

Obadiah was the "factor" on the "Mary," and so the management of sales and purchases was in his hands. In reply to a letter from Obadiah, telling of the poor slave market, James wrote, "If you cannot sell all your slaves to your mind, bring some home, I believe they will sell well."

Later James Brown was offering the "Mary's" cargo for sale, writing one of his customers that he could have a slave, if he would come before "they are all gone."

The mercantile careers of Obadiah Brown, and of his nephews, the "Four Brothers," show that the slave trade was but a minor element in furtherance of their prosperity, although in March, 1759, they sent the schooner "Wheel of Fortune" to Africa. The "Sperma Ceti Works," "The Hope Furnace," their distilleries, and foreign commerce seem to have been their chief occupations.

That James Brown did not lose sight of his own spiritual welfare, and that of the community, is evidenced by his building, at his own expense, the first Meeting House in Providence, occupied by the Baptists.

JAMES BROWN's father, the REV. JAMES BROWN, grandson of the Rev. Chad Brown, was born in Providence in 1666, and died there October 28, 1732. He married Dec. 17, 1691, Mary Harris, (b. Dec. 17, 1671—d. Aug. 18, 1736) daughter of Andrew and Mary (Tew) Harris, and grand-daughter of William and Susannah Harris. William Harris was one of the five

who originally came with Roger Williams to Providence. For several years this James Brown was the Pastor of the Baptist Church, serving first as a colleague with the Rev. Pardon Tillinghast, and, on the latter's decease, as an associate of the Rev. Ebenezer Jenckes, in the same pastoral office. He was also a well to do citizen and husbandman, and a steadfast upholder of the Baptist doctrine, according to the "Six Principles in Hebrews 6. 1-2."

He took an active interest in civil, as well as religious, affairs. He was a member of the Town Council from 1705 to 1714, when he became Town Treasurer. After five years in that position, he returned to the Town Council, and served there in 1719-20, and 1725.

He wrote² concerning local affairs that had historical interest. His account of the founding of the Colony, though somewhat vague, was no doubt based on information derived from the records of the day, and from the early settlers. As he was about sixteen years of age when Roger Williams died, he must have often heard Williams, and later others, tell about the happenings of that period.

His story of his efforts to prevent a separation in the Baptist congregation was that of a witness to the incidents he narrated.

He was given to penning poetry as well as prose. Some of his "Metrical Observations" give an insight into his religious beliefs, and his desire for the welfare of his fellow men. In one of his sermons he contrasts the wealth and profits of an importing merchant, with the spirituality and glory of a Christian, much to the discredit of the former.

Not so long after this, his son, and grandsons, became prosperous and leading examples of the class he so strongly condemned.

JOHN BROWN, the father of the Rev. James Brown, eldest son of the Rev. Chad Brown, was a native of England. He was born

²Extracts from Rev. James Browne's *Truth* were printed in *R. I. Hist. Soc. Proc.* 1873-74, p. 29, and other writings by him were printed in 1917 in a small volume entitled *James Browne, His Writings in Prose and Verse*.

in 1630, and died about 1706. He married Mary, daughter of the Rev. Obadiah and Catherine Holmes, of Newport, R. I. He was a Baptist Elder, and served the Town in various capacities, as Surveyor of Highways, Moderator, Juryman, Deputy, and was frequently on Town Committees. In 1654 he was one of the Commissioners from Providence to meet representatives from Warwick, for the purpose of adjusting difficulties which threatened to disturb the peace and harmony of the colony. In 1662, he was appointed an associate with Roger Williams and Thomas Harris, the three composing the Town Council of Providence.

CHAD BROWN was the first of that name in the Colony, and was the founder of the family in this country. Accompanied by his wife, Elizabeth,⁸ and their son, John, then eight years of age, he emigrated from England in the ship "Martin," which arrived in Boston, Mass., July, 1638.

In the same year he came to Providence, where he became at once a leader, and one of its most valued citizens. With twelve others he signed the famous "Compact," whereby the participants were bound to subject themselves to the orders and agreements made by the major assent of the inhabitants, but "only in civil things." In 1640 he was one of the Committee that reported to the Colony the first written form of government. It was adopted, and remained in force until 1644, when Roger Williams returned from England with the first Charter.

In 1642 he was ordained as the first settled Pastor of the Baptist Church, that for more than half a century had no Meeting House. The place of assemblage for public worship was a grove, or orchard, and, in unpleasant weather, in the house of a member.

He was the town surveyor, and drew up the list of home lots and meadows, from which the knowledge of land ownerships was first obtained.

He was often the arbiter of existing differences between

⁸Probably Sharparowe. See genealogy of Chad Brown and His Descendants in *N. E. Hist. and Gen. Reg.*, Jan. 1926, p. 74.

individuals, communities and the colonies, and was commended by Roger Williams for his services in that regard. He died in about 1665.

The history of Chad Brown is the history of the Colony in his day. He was identified with everything that concerned its inception and development. The story of his achievements is too well known, and too long, to be more than mentioned here.

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