


The Early Years (1855-1863)

William Montgomery Brown was born September 4, 1855 near Orville, Wayne County, Ohio. Willy's parents, Joseph Morrison Brown and Lucina Elzina Cary Brown lived in a log cabin located on or near the farm (Fountain Hills Nursery) where Joseph worked very hard for the owner, Jacob Gardner. Lucinda worked equally hard for Jacob's wife, Rachel. It was here that Willy was born.

In 1858, according to Miss Miriam Sayre, the Browns and their two children (William and Mary Jane "Jennie") moved to Ionia, Michigan to "set out on their own truck farm to supply vegetables for towns in the surrounding area." Their last child (James Allison) was born there in September 1859.

1860 United States Federal Census



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Name: **William M Brown**
Age: **4**
Birth Year: **abt 1856**
Gender: **Male**
Birth Place: **Ohio**
Home in 1860: **Portland, Ionia, Michigan**
Post Office: **Maple**
Family Number: **1369**

Name	Age
Joseph M Brown	33
Lucina Brown	23
William M Brown	4
Mary J Brown	3
James A Brown	8/12

Household Members

Because they were struggling to make a living, Joseph enlisted in the Union Army in October 1861 for a three-year tour of duty during the Civil War. His hope was to supplement the meager truck farm income. While his military monthly income was only \$13, at least it was guaranteed income. By March 1862, Joseph became very ill and remained in Nashville, Tennessee for three months before being discharged. Brown returned to Michigan and on August 1, 1862 died there. Shortly after, Lucina applied for a widow's half-pay claim but was denied as there was no evidence Joseph died as result of disease contracted while in the service.

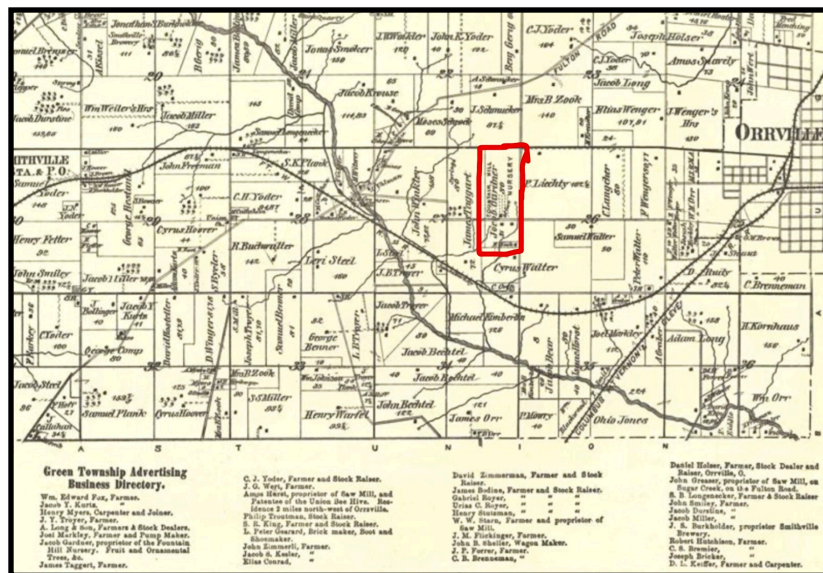
Childhood and Youth (1863-1878)

Since she had no way to support her family, Lucina and her 3 children (ages 7, 5, and 4) returned to Wayne County, Ohio. In the summer of 1863 when Willy was 7 years old, his mother "bound out" Willy to a German-speaking Jonas Yoder who lived near Smithville, a short distance from the Gardner home where Willy was born. It was at the Yoder farm where Willy was subjected to harsh discipline. Willy had to live in the barn and sleep among the animals he cared for; he was not allowed to attend school or play

Name:	Jacob Gardner																		
Age in 1870:	51																		
Birth Year:	abt 1819																		
Birthplace:	Pennsylvania																		
Home in 1870:	Green, Wayne, Ohio																		
Race:	White																		
Gender:	Male																		
Post Office:	Chippewa																		
Value of real estate:	View image																		
Household Members:																			
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with neighboring children. Willy's tasks included milking cows, feeding hogs, driving herds of cows, pulling weeds, and picking potato bugs. Willy's sister, Mary Jane, was "bound out" to a couple in Orville and was well treated. Lucina kept Jimmy, her youngest son, with her until 1874 and then he was "bound out" to Jacob Shull. In 1870, seven years later, at the age of 14, after numerous complaints regarding the manner in which Willy was treated, he was removed from the Yoder's and was destined for the "poor house," taken by official James Bodine, but was taken in by Rachel and Jacob Gardner and thrived at his new home.

The Gardner's never formally adopted Willy but they treated him kindly and gave him work he could easily do around the farm, Fountain Hills Nursery. It was at his time at the Gardner's that Willy contracted typhoid fever. Later, Brown said that he promised God he would become a minister if only he could live. It was after his sickness that weakened him that he was assigned lighter work on the farm, especially the orchard. In addition, Jacob's son Eli had a sawmill and rake factory in Orville where Willy was assigned light work. Willy's health improved dramatically in his 6 years with the Gardner's.



During the time Brown spent with the Gardner's, Lucina, Brown's mother, had married Gustav Lunman in 1865 and attended the same Methodist church the Gardner's and Willy attended from 1870-1876. He certainly must have had contact with Lucinda, his biological mother, during those years. Lucina and Gustav had 3 daughters, Willy's half sisters: Minnie (1867-1945), Hettie (1869-1953), and Emma (1874-1942).

During his time at the Gardner's, Willy was influenced by Rachel, a devotee of the Methodist Church and Jacob, who did not show much piety. The Gardner children were also an influence on Willy, especially John and Sarah, graduates of Methodist Mt. Union College in Alliance, Ohio. Both of them taught Willy his letters and the basics of counting. Brown could have gone to school in Wayne County, but because of his lack of schooling he would have been embarrassed to start out at such a low grade with the younger children. Brown waited until he had left Ohio in 1876 to enter school among pupils to get the basics of an elementary education.

Bill Brown arrived in Omaha, Nebraska in the spring of 1876. He was hired to drive a carriage for Judge Clinton Briggs, a wealthy and well-known Omaha citizen, and even was known through the entire state of Nebraska. While Brown was in Omaha for approximately a year and a half, he started his schooling. At 21 years of age, Brown started at the 4th grade level and quickly advanced to about the 8th grade level.

Brown returned to Ohio in 1877 and records show he was baptized January 2, 1878 at Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland.



One of his sponsors, and later his mother-in-law was Mary Scranton Bradford. She was a prominent Cleveland philanthropist and, as she did with William Montgomery




Brown, helped young men enter the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

Ministry and Marriage (1878 - 1885)

1880 United States Federal Census

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Name **William M. Brown**

Age **24**

Birth Year **abt 1856**

Birthplace **Ohio**

Home in 1880 **Faribault, Rice, Minnesota**

Race **White**

Gender **Male**

Marital Status **Single**

Father's Birthplace **Pennsylvania**

Mother's Birthplace **Ohio**

Occupation **Pupil Divinity Student**

Household Members	Name	Age
	William M. Brown	24

Mrs. Mary Scranton Bradford agreed to finance William's education to become an Episcopalian minister. She hired private tutors to help William in his preparation for the seminary. She then sent him to Seabury Divinity School in Faribault, Minnesota. Brown attended there from 1879-1880 to get his regular education up to an acceptable level to enter the Ohio Theological Seminary at Kenyon College, also known as Bexley Hall.

Brown was accepted, as one of 13 students, April 8, 1881 by the Standing Committee of the Diocese of Ohio for entrance to the Theological Seminary in the course for Holy Ministry.

William gained the reputation of being a scholar as he did so well in his preparation for the ministry. He finished his studies in 1883, but he did not graduate from Bexley. Rules had changed and one could get a degree from Bexley if all courses were taken there. So, he did not receive a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Bexley.

In 1883, Bishop Gregory Bedell, in Trinity Parish, ordained Brown a deacon and assigned him to Grace Church, a mission in Galion, Ohio. At the time, Galion was a major railroad town and only 50 miles from Orville, Ohio where William was born. In 1884, Brown was ordained as a Presbyterian, making him a full-fledged priest at Grace Episcopal Church, the only church he had full charge over.

There is no information that indicates when William asked Ella to marry him. Perhaps, he asked for her hand in marriage in 1882 as there is a gold watch belonging to Brown in his office safe. The watch is engraved with the date December 25, 1882, "Now is the accepted time."

It is possible that Mary Scranton Bradford had William in mind as her future son-in-law when she financed his

studies for the ministry. William and Ella's wedding took place in Cleveland at Trinity Parish April 9, 1885 and was regarded as one of the major events

of Cleveland's social scene. The Brown's returned in May 1885 from their Columbus, Ohio wedding trip and lived in a temporary house on Atwood Street near the church from 1885 to 1887 while their "mansion" was being built.



Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Marriage Records and Indexes, 1810-1973

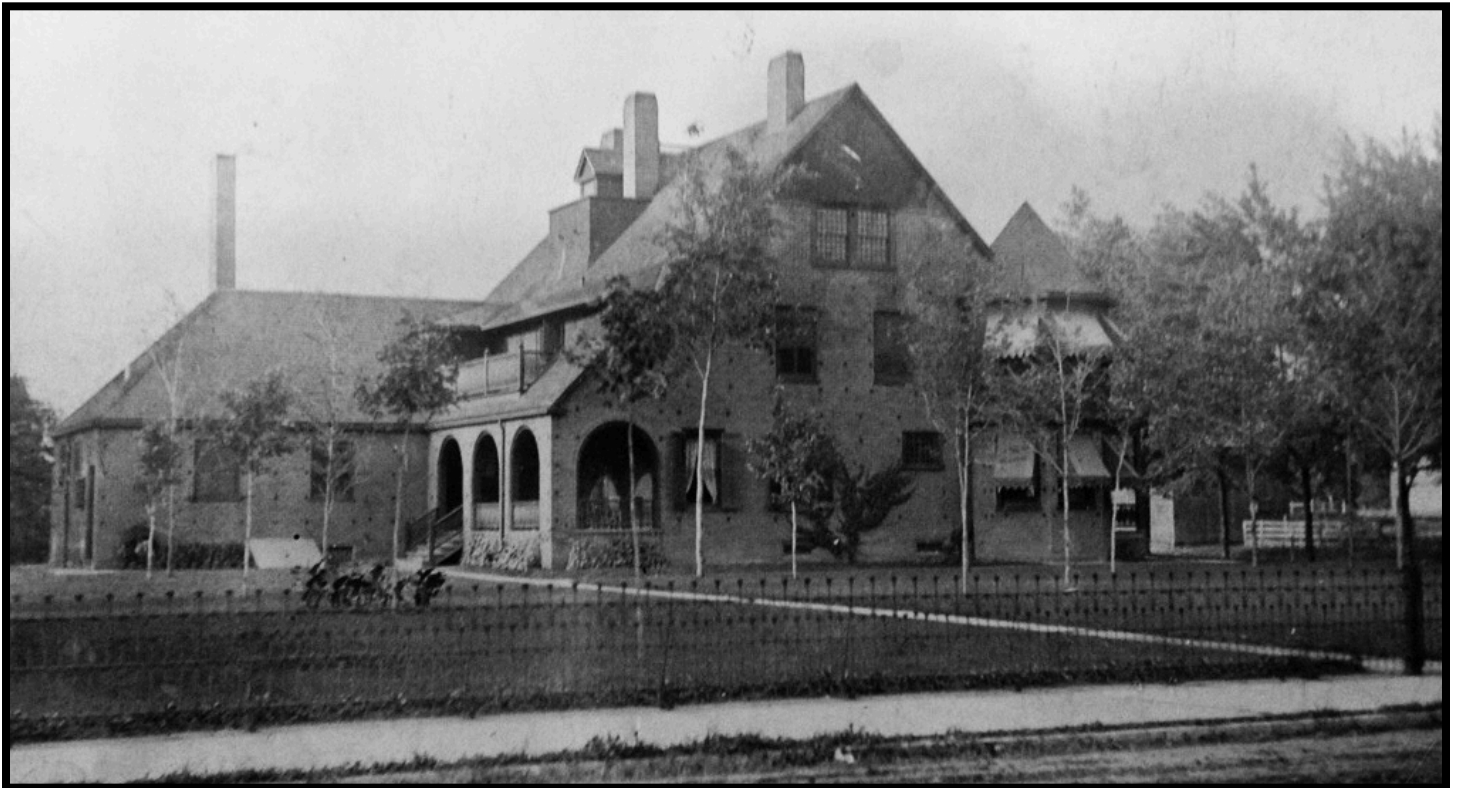


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Name	William M Brown						
Marriage Date	9 Apr 1885						
Form type	Marriage						
Gender	Male						
Spouse	Ella Bradford						
Household Members	<table><thead><tr><th>Name</th><th>Age</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>William M Brown</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Ella Bradford</td><td></td></tr></tbody></table>	Name	Age	William M Brown		Ella Bradford	
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William M Brown							
Ella Bradford							

In 1875, the property on the corner of Union and Walnut Streets had been sold to J. H. Green, Samuel Wagner, and William Michael. On October 22, 1884 Brown bought the property, according to documents located in the safe in Brown's office.



Mary, Ella's adoptive mother, decided to build the "mansion" as a wedding present for Ella and William. It took two years (1885-1887) for the Brown's home at the corner of S. Union and W. Walnut Streets to be built.

It was evident that Mary did not want William to move very far from Galion. William must have made Mary very happy as he viewed their home, Brownella Cottage as his base of operations. Even when he was made "Bishop of Arkansas," he and Ella always returned to their Galion home for at least five to nine months of every year of his life.

Brown's Career

William Montgomery Brown was the Reverend at Grace Church in Galion, Ohio from 1883 - 1891. Because of his hard work to establish numerous missions (St. John's Mission in Bucyrus; Mission of the Good Shepherd in Cardington; Mission of the Holy Spirit in Shelby; Christ Mission in Crestline, Trinity in Upper Sandusky; and Mission of the Transfiguration at Mt. Gilead) near his home town, he was appointed Archdeacon for Missionary Work in the diocese from 1891 - 1897.

In 1897 Brown was elected Bishop of Arkansas and sent to Little Rock. He reorganized the Diocese and continued to raise money for new churches. It was during this time Brown began the process to start a



separate church for blacks in Arkansas. This process led him to write a very controversial book "The Crucial Race Question" in 1907. Brown wanted the General Conference of the Episcopal Church to adopt his plan to establish the separate church for blacks. He was also drawing criticism from church hierarchy for spending 5 months each year from June thru October at his beloved Brownella Cottage in Galion. He wrote a third book in 1910 called "The Level Plan for Church Union" obsessed with the idea of a "united" church of all denominations under the

leadership of the Episcopal Church. His views led to isolation and loss of Church support. As a result, his national reputation and his health suffered.

He left Arkansas in 1911, obsessed with the idea that he held the key to world salvation. He and Ella came back to Galion where he had a nervous breakdown. He was granted a year's leave of absence from his duties in Arkansas. During his recuperation, the Bishop began reading the works of Karl Marx and Charles Darwin. He resigned his position as Bishop in April of 1912 with the understanding that he could keep his seat in the House of Bishops.

A Startling Conversion and Trouble with the Episcopal Church

From 1912 to 1920 Brown underwent a startling conversion process. His acceptance of Marxism and Socialism led to his denial of the mystical quality of the Eucharist and Apostolic Succession. During these years the Browns had to rely on the generosity of Mrs. Bradford who gave them an allowance of \$300 per month, slightly less than a year's income for the average working man. Later, William requested an allowance of \$400 and Mary obliged. Brown's acceptance of socialism and Marxism led him to communism. It was during this time that the prominent Socialist Eugene Debs visited often to ask him for money.

Ella inherited her mother's entire estate when she died in 1918. Among the assets was a half interest in considerable land holdings in downtown Cleveland. When faced with the question as to why he and Ella did not give away their wealth, the Bishop responded by saying he was afraid the money would just go to someone not interested in the working class. The Bishop wanted to use the money to overthrow the economic system that made it possible for him to do nothing and have everything – and also for those who do everything and have nothing.

In 1920, the Bishop began work on a new book that would eventually get him into trouble with the Episcopal Church and cause him to become a nationally known celebrity. It was called "Communism and Christianity". He could not find a publisher to print the book so he used Ella's money to form the Bradford-Brown Educational Company, Inc. In this book, Brown criticized literal Christianity. He accepted "Brother Jesus," not as a real person but as an exponent of ethical ideas. He suggested that Christianity derived from sun worship. He eventually printed 13 editions of this book. Dealing with the question as to why he continued to be a professing Christian, Brown answered that he thought no one really believed that God created the heavens

and the earth in 6 days. He argued that Christian doctrines were good for the world just as Uncle Sam and Santa Claus were a symbol of all that is good for the world, too.

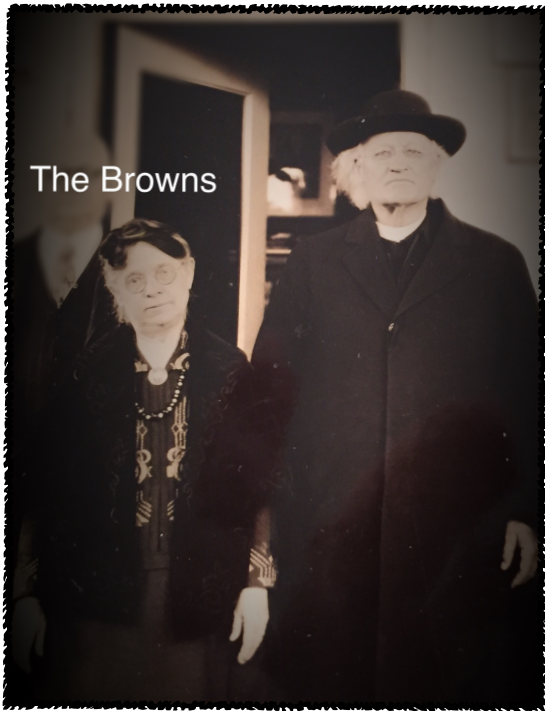
When the General Conference met in 1922, one of the bishops presented a petition to indict Bishop Brown for heresy. Many of the bishops privately thought Bishop Brown was crazy. The House of Bishops tried several times to get Bishop Brown to publicly admit that he was wrong. Finally in 1924, a trial was scheduled to be held in Trinity Cathedral in Cleveland, the very church where the Bishop was baptized, ordained, and married. The trial attracted world-wide attention as no one had been convicted of heresy since the Middle Ages. In the end, Bishop Brown was convicted. A Court of Review upheld the conviction, and in 1925, Bishop Brown was deposed.

Bishop Brown refused to accept the sentence and the authority of the court. He continued to use the title of Bishop and spent his remaining years cranking out more books and speaking.

Later Years

He and Ella continued traveling and returning to Brownella Cottage. They received a large windfall when the Terminal Tower building was built in downtown Cleveland on land that Mrs. Brown inherited from her mother, but Ella held the purse strings tightly. During the Depression, the Bishop would purchase truckloads of food for the poor. Many schoolchildren fondly remembered the kindly old Bishop standing by his fence passing out nickels.

Mrs. Brown died in 1935 and the Bishop spent his remaining years living extravagantly. He bought a Packard automobile and frequented Cleveland where he stayed in the most expensive hotels. The Bishop also kept up a voluminous correspondence with a number of people around the country on his views of communism and



The Browns

socialism. He hosted the head of the communist party in America, Earl Browder on several occasions.

As he grew older, the Bishop suffered from diabetes. His eyesight began to fail him, so he hired high school students to read to him. During his final two years, the Bishop took an interest in aviation. He bought an airplane and paid for flying lessons for the Howard Sayre. They would fly down to Columbus to visit his friend, Miriam Sayre, or to bring her home for the weekend.

For the remainder of his life, the Bishop attended church services in the little church across the street from his home where his ministry had begun. His health took a turn for the worse in the fall of 1937, and he passed away on Sunday, October 31st at his beloved Brownella Cottage.