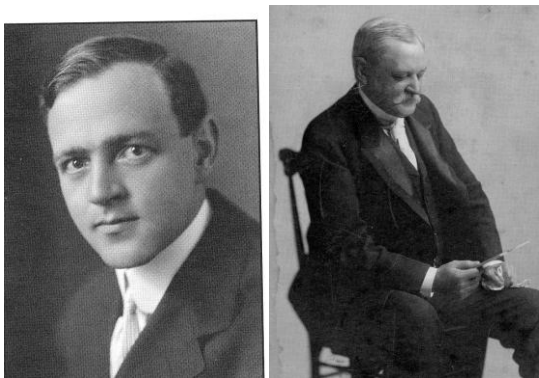


with his wife, at his daughter's cottage in Afton, Virginia. Here he would engage in serious games of chess with his young adult son, Donaldson Brown. The games were so intense that, one time while playing on the porch, neither player realized until after the chess match was over how sooty their faces had become from the kerosene lamp. The bond between father and son was intimate and consequential, and the father's life story became the son's treasured heritage.



Donaldson Brown and father,
John Willcox Brown

Growing up on North Avenue, FDB witnessed firsthand the limited life his family's servants led. Usually in large wealthy families such as the Browns, it is the children who build the closest bonds with the servants. FDB would have been aware of any significant changes in the lives of servants as they transitioned from

enslaved persons to freemen. At the family summer cottage in Glencoe, West Virginia, the Brown siblings would fish, swim and play with the children of the slave descendents. The youngsters appreciated each others' company, and they considered themselves good friends. But the black children knew that white adults regarded them as subordinate to their white playmates. For a young Brown, however, reflections on his ordinary interactions with the servants and their children most likely helped him in later life to develop an understanding of the situation faced by the black community in his adopted northeast Maryland home.

To be continued next week

Greta Brown Layton's book *Memories*, privately published, 2005, served as a basis for this pamphlet.

John Thompson Brown's 1832 speech is published and can be found online at archive.org

Author: Jerome L. Hersl, Jr.

Reviewed: Jim Chrismer, Joan Wiggins

AAH Committee: Evelyn Clayon, Sarah V. Robinson, Sarah Smith, Ann Waters

Contact: harfordcampaign42@gmail.com

African American History of Harford County, Maryland

A Weekly Publication

Donaldson Brown

(1885 – 1965)

Part 1

Pamphlet 0012

March 25, 2016



Bringing Communities Together Through Sharing History



This and the next few pamphlets are about a white man and the impressions he developed of black people in his early life. The narrative will also delve into how his relationship with African-Americans evolved over his life time. In the end, the man reflected on the importance of African-Americans in the United States, developed a better understanding of the struggles of Black Americans, and realized that proper education could make a difference in any person's life, but especially among a community's more downtrodden citizens.

The boy, born in 1885, grew up at 110 West North Avenue in Baltimore City. He was the eleventh of thirteen children of a family that had relocated in 1869 from war-devastated Richmond, Virginia. Four of the children died in infancy, including the boy's twin sister. Both sides of the family were from Virginia's wealthy, genteel, and privileged slave-owning upper class society. After the Civil War, the families' wealth diminished considerably. However, the boy's parents were able to raise their children in a large house along Baltimore City's northern border that had a beautiful wide avenue with a parkway going down its

center. A number of servants, from the mother's family, descendants of enslaved persons, attended to the needs of the household. The basement was set up as a school room where the older children would teach the younger children.

The boy, Frank Donaldson Brown (FDB), eventually became one of the wealthiest men in Maryland. But for purposes of this pamphlet, what is more relevant is that he was part of the first generation of Americans born after the Civil War. From childhood until early adulthood, young Brown heard in his father's voice and saw in his father's eyes, the emotions that resulted from experiencing war first hand. Without a doubt the father, a Confederate Civil War Officer, conveyed to his impressionable son the strength of southern pride; the agony, despair, and heartache of war; and the need to rebuild and move on.

Donaldson Brown's Confederate ties went deep. His father, John Willcox Brown (b.1833-1913), enlisted in Petersburg, Virginia, on April 19, 1861, served in the 12th Virginia Infantry, and eventually rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. John Willcox's younger brother, 29-year old Colonel John Thompson Brown was killed in action May 6, 1864 during the



John Willcox Brown

Battle of the Wilderness. FDB's paternal grand-father, the elder John Thompson Brown (1802-1836), was a member of the Virginia House of Delegates. The politically ambitious Brown delivered numerous speeches on controversial issues, including an anti-abolition speech in 1832 after the Southampton slave uprising. The assembly-man died at an early age of 34, and his wife and sons continued living with her father, John Vaughan Willcox. The very wealthy Mr. Willcox (FDB's great grandfather) prospered in the tobacco trade, and was one of the largest land owners and Confederate war bond holders in the state of Virginia.

Later, in his seventies and retired, John Wilcox Brown, a financial banker, was at the time bankrupt for the third time in his life and residing