

The Brown House: An Elegant Victorian Residence

Family and Land History:

Originally located behind the Stouffville Flea Market, the Brown family owned the land on which the house stood from about 1819. William Brown was the first to live on the property. His sons, James and William Jr., divided the land. James bought the land in 1852. Assessments records from 1857 and 1858 show a \$2,000.000 jump in value of the, suggesting that a building was constructed on the land around this time.

James Brown died in 1882 at the age of 69. In his will he left his estate and all farming implements to John Johnson his only son. There were conditions, however, that provided for his widow Barbara. John Johnson Brown was to pay \$150.00 per anum to his mother, supply firewood (split and piled in the woodshed) as long and she may desire to live in the house. She was to also receive one mare, colt, cow and buggy, "all furniture, books, etcetera" and the entire remainder of the estate. Two rooms on the main floor of the house were reserved for her use, the front and back parlour and two upper rooms. She was to share the hallway kitchen and cellar areas. If Barbara Brown was to leave the house, she was to receive seven cords of split wood delivered to her new home if no further than Stouffville. If she moved further she would receive the value of the wood in dollars. Whether she stayed or moved she would also receive one third of all fruit in the garden and orchard for her natural life. Barbara was considered in the will "my dear wife" by James. Barbara remained in the home until her death in 1899 at the age of 74. Both daughters were to receive \$2,000.00 upon their mother's death free from control or debts of any husband.

John Johnson made his living by farming. He married Anne Elizabeth Hunter (1863-1945) around 1884. They had four children:

- Morley, b. 1886
- Cora, b. 1888
- William Ross Edward, b. 1889
- Mary, b. 1898

Members of the Brown family continued to live on the property until the 1950s.

Architecture:

Some of the architectural features of the Brown House reveal the practicality of the family who constructed it. The built-in closet in two of the upstairs bedrooms are a unique feature. The closets fit into the eaves of the home, giving the upper rooms almost full walls without the usual sloping ceiling of a one-and-a-half story home. Homes with a full second storey were taxed at a higher rate.

One of the most striking features throughout the main floor is the dramatic framework. The material that surrounds the doors and composes the baseboards appears to be an expensive dark wood, such as mahogany. In fact, the builder has used a less expensive light-coloured wood. It has been painted a darker colour and treated with wood graining tools to look like a more luxurious material.

The History of the House in the Community:

Many significant events and important moments in the town's history took place against the backdrop of the Brown House. In June of 1867, a Grand Temperance Celebration was held on the property. The celebration included a patriotic picnic, a concert by the Sharon Band and a parade that started and ended on the Brown farm. A party was held at the house following the parade. Also, the Incorporation of the Village of Stouffville papers were signed in the dining room of the Brown house in 1877. The house served as a rallying point in the community.

The History of the House at the Museum:

The Brown House was originally located behind the Stouffville Flea Market and was donated to the Museum in 1984 by the developer who had purchased the property. The second story had to be dismantled when the house was moved in order to allow the building to pass freely under the power lines along the way. The Brown house has been restored to represent a typical farmhouse from the 1880s – a home that was owned by a rural family that had prospered over generations of farming on the same property. Many of the artifacts in the house were donated by William McArthur in 1986. The building was officially opened in 1991 after seven years of research and restoration work.

Brown, Victory Gordon, and Letitia Brown. “Early Memories and Stories Told to Marie Brown Jack by her Grandparents, Ann and John Johnson Brown and her Father Ross Brown”. In *The English Browns of Markham and Uxbridge Townships*. Brantford: V. G. Brown and L. M. Brown, 1985.

“My grandfather was a very devout and learned man who held family prayers each morning and often took the services at the Disciple Church when there was no minister. He was one of the leaders of the community, serving on the School Board, Creamery Board, etc. He was known as the local “Peace-Maker” and was often called upon to intercede when disputes arose. One the problems of the day was caused by consuming too much alcohol. There were eight taverns within a distance of two and a half miles. Many wives and families often took refuge at the farm, Lot 2, Concession 10, Whitchurch Township, which was well known for its hospitality. It was also a meeting place for religious, political and social gatherings. The family were fierce Loyalists and “Reformers”, which is now the Liberal Party of Canada.”

“Because of his expert penmanship, John Brown was asked to draw up many important papers and documents, one being, the Incorporation Papers for the Village of Stouffville in 1877.”

“The area of York celebration for the Confederation of Canada in 1867 was also held there, attended by farmers, tradesmen, businessmen and politicians of that time. It began with a large torch lit parade which travelled to town, returning later to the farm for a social get-together. The first “Old Boys and Girls Club” of York used the farm house for their annual meetings. This association was for everyone born in York County before 1867.”

“The farm was bounded by the Tenth Concession of Whitchurch on the west side and the Uxbridge-Whitchurch town line on the east, the lane running from one concession to the other. I can remember when the lane was used as a short cut to town by the farmers to the north and east...”

“The farm house was built close to the town line and from the bush to the house both sides of the long lane are still flanked by majestic hard maple trees, planted by my grandfather John Johnson Brown and William Ross Brown, my father, in 1895. I remember the tapping of these trees every spring and the boiling of the sap in one of the largest iron kettles I have ever seen! There was also a log smoke house at the bottom of the orchard still in use when I was young.”

“William Brown, brother of my great grandfather James, owned the adjoining farm to the south and the farm next to that separated by the Stouffville Road, was owned by a cousin, Philip Brown. Philip’s great grandson, Ira Brown now lives in a house he built on the corner of that farm.”

“The families were very good musicians. Philip and his son Joseph, being renowned violinists, gave command performances for the visiting Prince of Wales, who became Edward VII, King Edward later.”