

The Burke Library Archives
Union Theological Seminary

Finding Aid for

William Adams Brown Papers, 1865 - 1938

Finding Aid prepared by: Daniel Sokolow, August, 1995

Summary Information

Creator: William Adams Brown, 1865 - 1943
Title: William Adams Brown Papers
Inclusive dates: 1865 - 1938
Abstract: The collection consists of the papers of the Brown family , including W A Browns parents, wife and children. It consists mainly of scrapbooks, correspondence, lectures and sermons.
Size: 15 boxes, 7.5 linear feet
Storage: Onsite storage
Repository: The Burke Library
Union Theological Seminary
3041 Broadway
New York, NY 10027
Phone: 212-280-1502
Fax: 212-280-1456
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Administrative Information

Provenance:

Access restrictions: The collection is unrestricted.

Copyright:

Preferred Citation: item, folder number/title, box number, William Adams Brown Papers, UTS Collection, The Burke Library Archives, Union Theological Seminary

Biography

William Adams Brown was born in 1865 in New York City, the son of John Crosby Brown and Mary Elizabeth Adams. His father was a merchant banker and partner in Brown Brothers and Company. The Brown family had been involved with Union Theological Seminary almost since its inception. James Brown, William Adams' grandfather, was a financial patron of the school, and John Crosby Brown continued the association, joining the Board of Directors soon after his son's birth. The connection continued on his mother's side, as his grandfather William Adams was later named president of the Seminary in 1873.

Brown was educated privately at first, then he went to St. Paul's Preparatory School in New Hampshire. This was followed by four years as an undergraduate, then an additional year of graduate study at Yale University. He continued his schooling at Union Theological Seminary, where he graduated in 1890. He then began two years of graduate study in Germany, where he studied with the historian Adolph Harnack. Upon his return to the United States in 1892, Brown was appointed to the faculty of UTS as an instructor of Church History. He joined the staff at the height of the great controversy of the time, the heresy case against Charles A. Briggs. Less than a year after his initial appointment, the school asked him to shift fields and teach Systematic Theology. Despite little training in the field, Brown accepted the change and was named Roosevelt Chair of Systematic Theology only five years later.

Brown worked in causes outside the Seminary as well. He was deeply involved with two outreach ministries in New York City around the turn of the century. As chairman of the Presbyterian Church's Home Missions Committee, Brown helped organize and run the American Parish on the Upper East Side in upper Manhattan and the Labor Temple in the East Village section. Both were designed to bring the ministry into close contact with poorer, mostly immigrant populations. The latter situation became a source of controversy, as conservative Presbyterians deemed it a breeding ground for radical Socialists.

Brown was also instrumental in the founding of Union Settlement in East Harlem. The settlement movement began in the 1880's as a way to improve the lives of people in poorer communities. Union Theological Seminary's Alumni Association decided in 1893 to open a settlement, and Brown was named to the site committee. Their choices were narrowed down to Hell's Kitchen and the Upper East Side, and they chose the latter, mainly for its proximity to Union. The Settlement, opened in 1895, provided education,

health, and other community services, often using Seminary students as volunteers. Brown's role aside from site selection included president of the Union Settlement Association, and he was largely responsible for fundraising.¹

Union Settlement continues to this day to provide services to East Harlem. Brown's difficulties over the Labor Temple were not his only brush with the conservatives of Presbyterianism. In 1910 he delivered a speech at Harvard entitled "The Old Theology and the New." His critics charged that he and the Seminary both promulgated heretical beliefs. The situation came to a head in 1913 at the Presbyterian General Assembly in Atlanta, where Brown was accused of heresy. He was not allowed to respond, but on the next day the Seminary president, Francis Brown, delivered an address that swayed enough of the Assembly to prevent formal charges. Francis Brown successfully defended the Seminary and its professor of Systematic Theology the following year at the Assembly in Rochester, and the matter was dropped.

Brown was married in 1892 to Helen Gilman Noyes. They had four children; John Crosby, (1892), William Adams Jr., (1894), Winthrop Gilman, known as Bob, (190?), and Helen Gilman, changed to Helen Adams (1910). Tragedy struck the family in 1928 when daughter Helen contracted infantile paralysis as she was about to enter Vassar. Her condition deteriorated over six days, and she died. Brown wrote about his daughter and the family's experience in a manuscript entitled "Eighteen Years and After", which does not appear to have been published.

While the family lived permanently in New York, they maintained a summer home on Mount Desert Island in Maine. They befriended many well-known people there, including Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard, Seth Low, president of Columbia and later Mayor of New York, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

Brown's involvement in politics was not limited to the friendship with Seth Low. In 1904 Brown joined others like Charles Parkhurst in the fight against the corrupt political machine of Tammany Hall. Brown was also invited to join the Committee of Fourteen, a group that was formed to fight commercialized vice. They worked to end prostitution in the city by cutting off the supply of liquor, with the open participation of the liquor distributors themselves. The Committee had some success, and Brown served as chairman for a short period.

When the United States entered World War I, Brown joined the General War Time Commission of the Churches as Secretary. The organization's purpose was to coordinate efforts on behalf of the war between the varied denominations. The Commission was to help the army arrange for additional chaplains, and to serve as an advisory on church and religious issues. All denominations and religions were included under its aegis, including Protestant and Catholic, as well as Jewish organizations that

¹ The family's involvement with Union Settlement continued for many years. W. 1. Brown's son John was chairman of the Board in 1949 - 1950, and nephew Thatcher M. Brown, Jr. was Assistant Treasurer, 1950 - 1970.

were all attempting to help the war effort.

Brown spent the years following the war on a number of different projects. He became a Permanent Fellow of the Yale Corporation, and spent a number of years helping his Alma Mater reorganize. He retired as professor of Systematic Theology in 1930, and became instead a Research Professor in Applied Christianity. He turned his attention to issues like the proper education for ministers, the relation of church and state in the U.S., and the role and practice of Christian colleges in Asia.

Brown retired from Union Theological Seminary in 1936, concluding his tenure by delivering the historical address at the centennial celebration of the school. He died in 1943, leaving a trail of accomplishments few could match.

Bibliography

Brown, William Adams. *A Teacher and His Times: A Story of Two Worlds*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940

Handy, Robert T. *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The collection consists of scrapbooks, correspondence, lectures and sermons. It reflects various members of the Brown family, including W A Browns parents, wife and children and is divided into 3 series; Series II has been further divided into 3 subseries. Organization is chronological unless noted otherwise.

Series I, Scrapbooks, 6 boxes, 3 linear ft.

consists of scrapbooks assembled by the Brown family. They include both personal and professional items, but are mostly personal. Materials included are correspondence, poems, sketches, photographs, mementos, and like items.

Series II, Family, 6 boxes, 3 linear ft.

contains materials related to the Brown family. It has been divided into three subseries, arranged as follows:

Subseries A, Correspondence 3 boxes.

consists of incoming and outgoing correspondence between various members of the Brown family, including W. A. Brown's parents, wife, children, and others. Folders are arranged alphabetically, items within are arranged chronologically. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of letters in each file.

Subseries B, Death of Helen A. Brown 2 boxes.

contains materials related to the death of Brown's daughter Helen in 1928. Included are sympathy letters, arranged alphabetically (See note 1), memorial addresses, mementos, and W. A. Brown's short biography of his daughter.

Subseries C, Estate of J.C. and Mary E. Brown, 1 box

contains documents relating to the dispersal of his parent's estate. Included are correspondence and financial documents.

Series III, Notes, 3 boxes, 1.5 linear ft..

consists of lecture, sermon, course, and book notes by William Adams Brown. Also included are several miscellaneous items related to his professional life.

Notes

1. The sympathy letters regarding Helen A. Brown's death are in alphabetical groups (i.e. A-J). Each folder contains a list of the correspondents enclosed.

2. Users should be aware of the use of several names. Both W.A. Brown's father and his son were named John Crosby Brown. Moreover, his brother was named James Crosby Brown. His wife and daughter were both originally named Helen Gilman Brown, although his daughter changed her name to Helen Adams Brown. On the finding aid each will be identified like so:

John Crosby Brown, Father = John Crosby Brown (I)

John Crosby Brown, Son = John Crosby Brown (II)

Helen Gilman Brown, Wife = Helen Brown (I)

Helen Gilman/Adams Brown, daughter = Helen Brown (II)

Users should also bear in mind that his mother was Mary Elizabeth Brown and his sister was Mary Magoun Brown, although the latter was often referred to as May.

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Series I: Scrapbooks

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1	1	Scrapbook, 1865 - 1889
1	2	1	Scrapbook, 1893 - 1903
1	3	1	Scrapbook, 1903 - 1908
1	4	1	Scrapbook, 1909 - 1913
1	5	1	Scrapbook, 1914 - 1918
1	6	1	Scrapbook, 1918 - 1922

Series II: Family

Subseries IIA: Correspondence

2A	1	1	Brown, Helen G.	Aug - Sep 1886 (18)
2A	1	2	"	Oct - Dec 1886 (28)
2A	1	3	"	Jan 1887 (10)
2A	1	4	"	Feb 1887 (9)
2A	1	5	"	Mar 1887 (18)
2A	1	6	"	Apr 1887 (9)
2A	1	7	"	May 1887 (6)
2A	1	8	"	Jun 1887 (1)
2A	1	9	"	Jan 1891 (7)
2A	1	10	"	Feb - Mar 1891 (16)
2A	1	11	"	Apr 1891 (4)
2A	1	12	"	May 1891 (11)
2A	1	13	"	1893 - 1931 (77)
2A	2	1	Brown, Helen A.	1915 - 1928 (48)
2A	2	2	Brown, James Crosby	1901 - 1929 (4)
2A	2	3	Brown, John Crosby (I) Misc.	- 1873 (4)
2A	2	4	Brown, John Crosby (I)	1893 - 1907 (37)
2A	2	5	Brown, John Crosby (II)	1894 - 1926 (14)
2A	2	6	"	1927 - 1932 (41)
2A	2	7	"	1933 (44)
2A	2	8	"	1934 (38)
2A	2	9	"	1935 - 1936 (60)
2A	2	10	Brown, John Crosby (II)	1937 - 1938 (53)
2A	2	11	Brown, Mary E.	1911 (6)
2A	2	12	Brown, Mary M.	1904 - 1932 (20)
2A	3	1	Brown, Thatcher M.	1886 - 1906 (27)
2A	3	2	"	1907 - 1909 (116)
2A	3	3	"	1910 - 1920 (82)
2A	3	4	"	1921 - 1923 (47)
2A	3	5	"	1926 - 1933 (98)
2A	3	6	"	1934 - 1938 (44)

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Series II: Family, cont'd

Subseries IIA: Correspondence, Box 3 cont'd

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
2A	3	7	Brown, Mr. & Mrs. William A., Jr. 1920 - 1931 (17)
2A	3	8	Brown, Winthrop G. [1907 - 1925?] (38)
2A	3	9	DeForest, Amy B. 1911 (1)
2A	3	10	Moore, Eliza C. 1928 (1)
2A	3	11	Moore, John C. B. 1917 (1)
2A	3	12	Morely, John 1915 (2)
2A	3	13	Noyes, Daniel R. 1907 (2)
2A	3	14	Saltus, Evelyn & Rollin [1907?] (4)
2A	3	15	Saltus, Lloyd 1907 (1)
2A	3	16	Williams, W. W. 1927 (1)
2A	3	17	Unidentified (9)

Subseries IIB: Death of Helen A. Brown

2B	1	1	Correspondence, A-I	1928
2B	1	2	“ J-P	1928
2B	1	3	“ Q-Z	1928
2B	1	4	“ Lists	1928
2B	1	5	Memorial Addresses	1928
2B	1	6	Mementos	1928
2B	1	7	Shipley School	1928
2B	2	1	“Eighteen Years and After”	1930 (MS)
2B	2	2	“ Chapter I	1930 (Draft)
2B	2	3	“ Chapter II	1930 (Draft)
2B	2	4	“ Chapter III	1930 (Draft)
2B	2	5	“	1930 (Draft)

Subseries IIC: Estate of J. C. & Mary E. Brown

2C	1	1	J. C. Brown House Inventories	[1918?]
2C	1	2	M. E. Brown Estate - Financial -	(1918)
2C	1	3	Correspondence -	1918
2C	1	4	Correspondence -	1919 - 1922

Series III: Notes

3	1	1	Course Notes by W. A. Brown, 3 v., 1890 - 1891 [Old call # - Cage Tx73 B881 C]
3	2		This box was previously labeled: Cage Tx73 B881 L Box 1
3	2	1	Address at UTS, 1910
3	2	2	The Seminary & the Church, 1913
3	2	3	How to Make God Real, 1930

Series III: Notes, Box 2 cont'd

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
3	2	4	The Humanist's Substitute for God - Lecture 2, 1930
3	2	5	How God Satisfies the Mind - Lecture 3, 1930
3	2	6	How to Make God's Presence Real - Lecture 4, 1930
3	2	7	How to Share God When Found - Lecture 5, 1930
3	2	8	Karl Barth, n.d.
3	2	9	Can One Church Include..., Lecture 4 - n.d.
3	2	10	Rediscovering God, 1934
3	2	11	Christianity in the Light of its History, 1912
3	2	12	The Objects of Consciousness, 1911
3	2	13	The Dynamics of Service, n.d.
3	2	14	Introduction to Philosophy, 2, n.d.
3	2	15	Introduction to Philosophy, 3, n.d.
3	2	16	Fundamentals of Religion, 1916
3	2	17	Systematic Theology, 2, 1917
3	2	18	" ,2, 1925
3	2	19	" #1-2 (1926?)
3	2	20	" #3, 1926
3	2	21	" #6, (1926)
3	2	22	" #7, 1926
3	2	23	" #8, 1926
3	2	24	" #9, 1926
3	2	25	" #3, (1929?)
3	2	26	" #2 , n.d.
3	3		This box was previously labeled: Cage Tx73 B881 L Box 2
3	3	1	Christian Theology in Outline, Part 1, n.d.
3	3	2	" " , Part 2, n.d.
3	3	3	" " , Part 2, n.d.
3	3	4	" " , Part 3, n.d.
3	3	5	" " , Part 4, n.d.
3	3	6	" " , Part 4, n.d.
3	3	7	" " , Part 4, n.d.
3	3	8	Chapter II, n.d.
3	3	9	Chapter 12: The Church in America, 1936
3	3	10	Bibliography of Devotional Life (1), 1926
3	3	11	Bibliography of Devotional Life (2), 1926
3	3	12	Miscellaneous Remarks, 1916 - 1920
3	3	13	News Clippings & Telegrams