

## **An Account of James Miller Brown**

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Address to the Nanaimo Historical Society on May 12, 1971

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William Barraclough

The following recorded article made this 12th day of May, 1971, was prepared and presented by Miss Audrey Alexandra Brown of Nanaimo. The subject is an interesting account of her grandfather's life, James Miller Brown, who was a pioneer citizen of Nanaimo. James Miller Brown arrived in British Columbia in 1862. After working a time in the Cariboo gold fields, he moved to Nanaimo in 1863, where he took up farming near to the city. In due course, he established himself in a business of his proper [avocation], that of a tailor, where he became noted for his excellent work in that profession. It is all pleasure to present Mr. Brown's granddaughter, Miss Audrey Alexandra Brown. This is W. Barraclough speaking.

Audrey Alexandra Brown

My grandfather, James Miller Brown, was born at Donnington, Gloucestershire in 1830. In his later years, since he had long forgotten the day of his birth, his family used to keep it on the 25th of February. A likely date, as his baptismal certificate shows that he baptised on the 7th of March. He was christened James only, but took the name of Miller, his forebearers having been Millers, to escape the confusion caused by so common a Christian name and surname.

Orphaned while very young, his father, he said, broke his neck in the hunting field. He and his younger two brothers and sister were given a home by their paternal grandparents, who lived, he once told me, in a very old building which had originally been a priory and had partly fallen into ruin.

Young James seems to have been born with a really adventurous spirit. When he was only six years old, having somehow got hold of a blunderbuss and the powder for it, he assembled his playmates and fired it off on the village green. No one was the worse for this escapade, but understandably, it did not meet with the favour of the authorities, who waited on his grandmother, and informed her that in future she must keep her eldest grandson under stricter control.

She replied that she was unable to do, so and solved the problem by apprenticing him at seven years old to a tailor, a Mr. Gordon who lived at Stratford-upon-Avon. I used the old fashioned form of this name because my grandfather always did. There he spent the next seven years of his life. He has told me that as a small boy, he used to peep in at the door of Shakespeare's birth place. And this early association inspired him with a love of Shakespeare's poetry which was to endure all his life. On his 90th birthday, I heard him recite 15 passages from Shakespeare in the course of the evening.

After serving his apprenticeship, he still kept in touch with his former mentor, Mr. Gordon. When word of the great California gold strike of 1849 spread like wildfire in England, Mr. Gordon wrote proposing that he, his two sons, the younger of whom was my grandfather's age, and my grandfather should form a party and set out for the New World to seek their fortunes.

This they did in 1850, my grandfather being then 20 years old. They embarked on a sailing ship, the *Excelsior*, and were landed in New York after a voyage lasting 60 days. From New York they went by train and canal boat to Pittsburgh, Louisville, and Evansville, a town in Indiana. And here they encountered a medical phenomenon which is a matter of history, although it has never been explained.

The Yellow Fever, that deadly disease of the tropics, came up the river into Indiana. The people on one bank went unscathed, the people on the other bank, sickened and died, among them Mr. Gordon and his elder son. The surviving son had had enough. He decided to return to England, and proposed that my grandfather go with him. But James Miller Brown was not a man to turn back. Without a penny in his pockets, or a friend in the New World, he went on.

At first, he took odd jobs for his board. Later he was employed by a tailor, and so became acquainted with a contractor, John Kennedy, who had made over ten thousand in the construction of the Wabash and Erie Canal. Mr. Kennedy was getting together a party to leave for the goldfields of California, and my grandfather was an eager recruit.

The party left Evansville with 275 head of cattle, 16 head of horses, and 10 wagons. Among the [train?] were several women and children. The journey took seven months. On their way, they passed through Omaha, Nebraska. And here my grandfather had a stroke of luck. The company, who had just forded a river, which proudly created a thirst for something other than water, saw a sign reading: "Ohio Whiskey - \$5 per gallon".

"When we left Indiana", my grandfather told the story, "whiskey was selling for 17 cents a gallon, if you bought it by the barrel, and 25 cents if you bought a single gallon. Kennedy, the leader of our party, saw the sign, and said he would like a gallon, but he'd be damned if he'd pay \$5 for it. However, he offered to shoot at a target with any man in the outfit, the loser to pay for the whiskey."

"I had never shot out of a rifle in my life, but for some reason, my companions chose me as the man to shoot against Kennedy. A piece of wagon tire was put up as a target, 60 yards away. And Kennedy shot first. When we examined the target, there was no sign of a bullet hole, so I shot next. For some unknown reason, I managed to hit the wood two inches from the [mark?] and Kennedy paid for the whiskey."

The [ox team] plodded on. Indians stalked their trail, never seen by day, but evidenced by the smoke of their campfires on the horizon at sundown. Every night, a man must

stand guard over the wagon train. One man thought this an unnecessary precaution. He fell asleep at his post and they buried him the next morning.

06:49

[tape stops and restarts]

"In those days", my grandfather said to a reporter many years later, "a young man took his orders from his elders, and the elders were not slow to impose on the youngsters. Many a time after a hard day's work I was forced to stand guard all night and then resume my place driving an ox wagon." One day he fell asleep, was jarred out of the driver's seat, and the front wheel of the wagon went over his leg. Because of the softness of the ground, the bone was not broken, but he had to lie up for a few days. In spite of the pain, he told me once, "I almost welcomed it, I was so tired."

He spoke of the time they came on a caravan of Mormons, all of whom had either been massacred by the Indians or died of thirst. "There were only their bones", he said, and I remember the look in his eyes as he said it; he was over 90 then. "Only their bones, and the long hair of the women, stirring a little in the breeze."

Once, he strayed from the wagon, and before he knew it, was lost in the desert. At first he panicked, and ran wildly about. It began to rain a little, turning the red dust into clay so slippery, that he had several falls before his natural good sense asserted itself. "I realized that I was only exhausting myself and probably getting farther and farther from help," he told me. "I knew my best chance was to sit down and stay where I was."

And that is exactly what he did. He had no food with him, and every day he took his belt in another hole. He had tightened it by three holes when a search party from the wagons found him. They were horrified, seeing him plastered with the red clay, which they took to be dried blood.

At last they entered California. At Placerville, my grandfather went to work for his board, and after three months joined a prospector. In only three days, they found enough gold to raise what my grandfather described as "a nice sum". His share of which he seems to have spent very enjoyably. After all, he was young, barely of age then.

70 years later, he was to say to me, "I have known what it is at some times in my life to be so desperately in need of money that I can never bear now to see it thrown away."

Perhaps it was while he was having his fling that he visited Sacramento, then a booming town. The proprietor of the one hotel, intoxicated with prosperity, had sent all the way to England for a billiard table, a luxury unknown in the West. Alas, my grandfather arrived in town to find the proprietor tearing his hair; a tipsy patron had ripped the baize tabletop with his cue, making the costly importation unusable.

My grandfather examined the tear, and told the proprietor that he believed he could repair it so perfectly that the table would be as good as ever. The point to remember here is that a billiard table's pitch has to be absolute. An expert has to set it up, and once it has been set up, it must never under any circumstances be moved again. This being so, how could it be possible to mend a tear in such a way as to leave not the slightest unevenness? The place was soon full of miners hanging over my grandfather while he worked and laying bets for and against, one imagines mostly against him. But he did it. He was always a master of the needle.

He travelled as far south as Panama. It didn't appeal to him. "When people eat down there," he told me, "they had to have a slave standing behind them with a feather fan, to brush the flies off the meat before they could put it in their mouths."

He made a brief return to England, but the New World was now in his blood, and he decided to come out to the west coast of Canada. In 1862, his ship docked after a long and hard voyage. They had been six months at sea. And, as he told me, some of the sailors were so overcome on landing that they fell on their knees and kissed the green earth under them.

My grandfather never gave way to undignified displays of emotion, but he admitted to me that no place had ever looked better to him. Even a mild attack of small pox, which he suffered soon after his arrival, didn't discourage him. As soon as he recovered, he joined a party bound for the Cariboo.

He went as far as Richfield and worked on a claim at William's Creek. He became well acquainted with the famous Cariboo Cameron, who brought a caravan of mules loaded with gold down the Cariboo road, spent the money in the east, and returned to die a pauper in Cariboo.

My grandfather also worked on the celebrated Black Jack Tunnel on William's Creek. The adjoining claim was owned by a man named Ned Stout, who died at Yale aged nearly 100 in the early 1920s. However, my grandfather made no vast fortune in the Cariboo. We read of the tremendous strikes that were made, but probably most of the miners were no luckier than the man my grandfather saw panning gold on a riverbank.

"How are you doing?" my grandfather asked.

"Pretty well," the man replied.

"Have you been at it long?"

"Three weeks."

"Have you found much gold?"

"Enough to make a ring with."

Returning to Vancouver Island, my grandfather met and married his first wife. He was then 33, his bride 20. She was Miss Leah Westwood, the daughter of Mr. William Westwood, who had brought his family, including his own father, out from England not long before. Leah had been born in Evesham, Worcestershire, which is only eight miles from Stratford, where my grandfather had spent his boyhood. It seems curious that as children they had lived only eight miles apart. Yet they had to come all the way to Vancouver Island to meet and marry.

James was a handsome young man with a pleasing tenor voice and repertoire of songs which he accompanied on the guitar. It is no wonder than my grandmother fell in love with him. The Westwood family at first lived in Victoria. Someone who had known my grandmother as a girl, but was an old lady when I knew her, told me that she had had a lovely soprano voice. And that she had sung in the choir of the First Christ Church cathedral, the little humpy-looking wooden building that burned many years later.

### 13:26

James Miller Brown and Leah Westwood were married, as he has recorded, on the 13th of December, 1863, at the farm, later, but not originally, known as Ashlar Farm. They were married in the log cabin which he had built for his bride on land about three miles north of Nanaimo on the Comox Road.

My father, who loved the cabin, described it to me as a child, and even drew a pen-and-ink sketch of it, now alas, long lost. It must have been something quite out of the ordinary, for it had a central part, flanked by a wing on either side. My grandfather told me that he'd built it single handed, and working for the most part in [four?] feet of snow. He made chinks in the wall to shoot from, and spared a large fir tree about six feet from the door and in a direct line with it, as cover to fire from in case of an attack by Indians.

As he had no plaster for the interior of the cabin, he covered the walls with fine, white canvas, stretched smooth and taut. He built a Dutch oven, in which the family's bread was baked. My father used to declare that no bread ever tasted so good as that baked in the Dutch oven.

Garden seeds were in short supply, but my grandmother had her garden in which she sowed Sweet Williams and the rosy English double daisies. Her husband planted apple trees, some of which were still alive 60 years later, long after the empty cabin had been destroyed by fire. My father used some of this apple wood in the pipe organ which he built around the turn of the century. It is possible that the cabin later had a duplicate across the sea. In those days, when Esquimalt was one of Britain's worldwide naval bases, many young officers spent their leave hunting on the Island.

Among them was a mid-shipman, Lord Charles Beresford, who was later to rise to great distinction in Her Majesty's government. He was then a lad of 19. "Such a merry boy," my grandfather said. He spent some days at the farm, and my grandfather acted as his

guide. On leaving, he told my grandfather that he would have a replica of the cabin built to use as a hunting lodge when he came into possession of his estate in Ireland. Whether he did or not, who knows?

In this cabin were born James William, 1865; Joseph Miller, 1867; Leah Elizabeth, 1868; and Clara Emma, 1869. Though christened Clara Emma, this second daughter was called by the name of Bernice all her life. My grandfather told me with a twinkle, that that had been the name of an old sweetheart of his. His wife does not seem to have minded. She had no need to; he loved her devotedly all her too short life, and did not remarry until 17 years after her death.

Everyone who knew her seems to have loved her. She was the gentlest creature, yet she could shoot as well as a man. A very necessary accomplishment in those days. My father has told me that when his father had gone into town for provisions, if he was late returning, she would slip a pistol into her pocket and taking him and his elder brother by the hand, she would walk as far as she dared down the Comox Road to meet her husband.

My grandfather met with one adventure which his young family never forgot: he was going hunting one day and asked his wife to shut up the dog, as he did not want it with him. Nevertheless, when he had got some distance into the wood, a dim shape slid out of the trees and followed him. That day he got no deer. Returning home, he was just opening the gate when his wife came out to meet him.

"Why didn't you shut up the dog?" he asked her.

She answered, "I did, he's in the shed."

Then what had been his companion? He looked over his shoulder, having followed him in hopes of its share of the kill he did not make, the dim shape now realized it would get no dinner. It sat back on its haunches, threw up its muzzle to the stars, and that of the unmistakable howl of the wolf.

17:51

[tape stops and restarts]

This wolf seems to have been a semi-sociable beast, but my grandfather had another encounter with wolves which was more alarming. He was a Freemason, a founder and charter member of Ashlar Lodge, the first Masonic lodge in Nanaimo, and always punctilious in his attendance. On his way home from a lodge meeting one night, he heard the howling of wolves nearby. This was about where the Comox Road cemetery is now. He was unarmed, but picking up a stout stick, he swung it 'round his head and shouted as he walked. The howls stopped, but he heard his pursuers loping behind him. Putting on a burst of speed, he managed to get through his fence just as the wolves crashed into the bars behind him. For some time they hung about, howling.

Later, my grandmother looked out, and by the light of the then risen moon, she saw five large wolves within a few feet of the fence. Next day, my grandfather told his experience to his neighbour, Mr. Benjamin Westwood, who put out poison. As a result, for many years afterwards, Mr. Westwood's cabin boasted five fine wolf skin rugs.

But living three miles from town posed worse dangers than wolves. It was because of the murder of his nearest neighbour under peculiarly brutal circumstances, a story I have told elsewhere, that my grandfather decided to move into Nanaimo in 1871. He set up his tailoring business in a shop on Front Street, which was, I believe, still standing in the early 1920s.

Here more sons were born to him: George Stanley, 1872; Benjamin David, 1874; and William Henry, 1875. William Henry died in the bitter winter, but he had lived long enough for his father to remember him as "a little fellow with long, light curls, always laughing." Last came John, 1876. His mother died an hour or so after his birth. She was only 33 years old and had had 9 children, the eldest a girl, stillborn. John must have been a strong child, for he lived five weeks and two days. He was buried with his mother and his little brother William in the pioneer graveyard on Wallace Street.

Shortly afterward, my grandfather heard that this cemetery to be closed and a new one opened on the Comox Road. He had his wife's coffin moved in haste, but he told me, "I forgot the babies. I was always sad about this. I knew she wouldn't have forgotten." There was every excuse for him, however. He told me that for two weeks after her death he was scarcely in his right mind and had little idea of what was going on around him. He was left with eight children, the eldest not 11, the youngest two years old, single-handed, he brought them up.

My aunt Leah has described to me how when she was six, and her sister four, he would dress them for church on Sunday, finishing by standing each of them in turn on a chair while he wound them round and round in a long woollen muffler. "We must," she said, "had been the funniest looking little objects."

The children used to keep his needles threaded while he plied his trade. Sitting cross-legged on his board, he would sew while his second son, Joseph, read aloud to him. He was a magnificent craftsman, all the sea captains came to him when their ships were in port. Not only was his work first class, he also had a stock of the finest woollen cloth, in short supply in the States. He was a strict, even a severe, father, but he loved his children.

My aunt Leah once told me a couple of stories which I think illustrate this. When she was 19, she went to her father and asked him for the money to buy a white dress. He refused it, saying she didn't need one. Argument would have been useless as she well knew. But passing by the half-open door of the warehouse, she caught a glimpse of white within. It was a bolt of [worsted?] lining. Pinching the shears, she snipped off

enough to make the long, [full], white dress. It sounds bizarre, but I can well believe the result was imminently satisfactory. She had a remarkable flare for dress designing.

But my point is, that though her father must have noticed the diminution of his bolt of [worsted?] lining, and must have put two and two together when he saw her wearing the white dress, he never remarked on the incident. I don't doubt that he admired his daughter's spirit.

My aunt also told the story of how she and her sister Bernice slipped out one day and hired a boat for a row on the harbour. It was shortly before Easter, and greatly daring, they had put on their new Easter suits. All went well with them, but another oarsman was not so fortunate. He got into difficulties, upset his boat, and would have drowned if my aunts hadn't managed to rescue him. But in hauling him aboard, they got themselves drenched, which had an appalling effect on the new suits.

Aunt Leah's skirt stretched out, becoming so long and narrow that she could hardly walk, and was forced to hold it up with both hands. Aunt Bernice's skirt shrank from ankle length to half way up her legs. Somehow they got home, and were lucky enough to creep into the house unobserved.

On Easter day, as usual, they accompanied their father to church. And when the congregation dispersed, catastrophe befell. The owner of the boat house had a telescope, and used to divert himself by sitting up in the top of his boat house and keeping an eye on the harbour. My aunt told me that she had once rebuked him for this practice, saying that he might very well see something that was not intended for him.

Now, he rushed up to the girls and their father with outstretched hand, exclaiming, "Mr. Brown, I want to congratulate you! Your daughters are heroines. I saw them save a man's life." Enthusiastically, he told the tale, while the girls stood by, quaking in their shoes.

On the way home, their father made only one comment: "I knew something was up," he said, "when you girls wore your old suits to church on Easter."

#### 24:14

At the time of his death. My grandfather was thought to be the richest man in Nanaimo. He may have been, but his fortune was not earned by the needle. It came from the sale to Robert Dunsmuir of the coal rights of some of his property at Northfield. This property, known in the family as "The Hundred Acres" was never mined, and some of it is still in possession of sons of his second marriage. In connection with this property, it is interesting to note that my grandfather was the only man who ever fought Dunsmuir in a court of law and won.

Dunsmuir wanted to put a right-of-way across the property. My grandfather refused his permission. Dunsmuir took legal action. Everyone in town held my grandfather up to

ridicule. Did he think he could win out against Dunsmuir's millions? My grandfather said nothing, but bought some books on law and studied them. He pleaded his own case and judgement was given in his favour. However, my father, who told me the story, also told me that my grandfather had had his trunks packed. If the verdict had gone against him, James Miller Brown would have left Nanaimo for California.

In 1893, when he was 63 years old, my grandfather married Louisa, second daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Ruming, who'd come out with her brothers from London, England two years earlier. As my father was already married to her younger sister, Rosa, the results, genealogically speaking were rather confusing. By his second marriage, my grandfather had eight sons: Henry, Ivan, Arnold, Godfrey, Victor, Horace, Rupert, and Clarence; and three daughters: Ena, Olive, and Viola. His last child, Clarence, was born when he close to 79 years old. All these children were my half-uncles and half-aunts as well as my first cousins.

He lived with his second family in a large house on the corner of Hecate and Prideaux Streets, in a part of town still known as Nob Hill. The house survives, though it is long since been rented out in rooms. It is stuccoed now, and the little porch where the yellow jasmine used to flower in February has been enclosed.

I remember him first when I used to be taken to see him when I was hardly more than a baby. At that time, our conversation was naturally limited, but he always had a smile for me and a handful of big, brown and yellow striped humbugs from a supply he kept on hand. I did not much care for peppermint, and these were especially strong, but I always ate them because I wanted to please him. At that age, I couldn't appreciate the size of his house, which I found depressing, for the rooms were high ceilinged and rather dark.

My chief memory is of an old, broken back couch he had, which he sometime stretched out on. He kept it, no doubt, because he found it comfortable. But, at my infantile age, I supposed he couldn't afford better. And I used to be very sorry for what I thought was my "poor" grandfather.

I came to know him better in his extreme old age. I used to visit him whenever I could, and I think he knew I was truly interested in his stories of the past. Much of what I have written here I have heard from his own lips.

On one subject he was reticent. Even his own children knew little of his childhood and antecedents, for he almost never spoke of them. Once in conversation with my father, he dropped a remark which seemed to imply some sort of kinship with the Churchills in Marlborough. Naturally, my father would have liked to inquire further, but came up against a stone wall.

"There's nothing in it," my grandfather said with irritation, "if there had been, I would have told you." He does appear to have been related in some way to Lord Stanley, who has been immortalized by Vancouver's Stanley Park. He gave his third son the second

name of Stanley on this account. One of his daughters used to declare that he sometimes received letters with a crest on them. But all this was a sealed book to his family; on this subject he never opened his lips.

He had been a great walker in his time, thinking nothing of the hike up Mount Benson when he was in his 70s. But for the last ten years of his life, he almost never went out. His legs had once failed him suddenly, and he had fallen down in the street. He was in some respects, a very proud man, and he would never risk a second such humiliation. He used to sit with his pipe in front of a blazing fire, and he told me once that he was never bored, he had had an exciting life, and his memory was so good that the past was like a book to him - he could turn up any page and relive it at will.

A photograph taken around the time of his second marriage shows him as a fine-looking, Aquiline featured man. I remember him as of middle height, well-made, with noticeably small hands and feet. He had a short beard, and very thick hair, which never turned white, but remained the metallic grey of silver. In his old age, he had a look of porcelain. Anyone less like a rip-roaring 49er, it would be impossible to imagine.

Though he already had over a score of grandchildren, he always had a welcome for me. He told my father once that I had, as he put it, "A profile of a lady." My father was very pleased by this compliment. And so was I, for I knew that he did not bestow his praises lightly. As a matter of fact, I have owed him a great debt all my life, and one he was never conscious of. Always a reader himself, while his second family was young, he subscribed to an English publication, *My Magazine*, edited by the famous Arthur Mee. Whenever he saw my father, he would hand him one of these for us. Of course, we got only the intermittent copy, but this continued over about five years, and to me, it was a godsend. It contained thrillingly written articles on all the achievements of art, literature, and science. I read it from cover to cover, and got all my early education from it.

One of my grandfather's traits was a strong dislike of playing cards, which he would not permit in his house. A younger son of his, however, has told me that in his day, the family did play cards occasionally, but always with a newspaper handy to throw over the cards should my grandfather walk in on them unexpectedly. This was not Puritanism on his part. In California, he had seen men shot dead over the gaming table and he never forgot it.

Another characteristic of his was his refusal to buy on credit. He always dealt in cash, it being his opinion that a man who buys what he hasn't the money to pay for isn't honest. Though not an abstainer, my grandfather had never been too [inaudible], and this, taken in conjunction with his frugal habits, for he always lived very simply, gave rise to an idea among his fellow townfolk that he was [close?]. This was not true. I know of one man who applied to him for a loan when his business was in difficulties. My grandfather examined the books, for he did not believe in throwing good money after bad, and finding them satisfactory, lent him \$15,000, with the stipulation that the borrower should repay it without interest, when he was able.

This loan saved the business which became exceedingly prosperous. The borrower came to my grandfather and offered either to repay the loan or give him a share in the firm, which would actually have been more profitable. But my grandfather would accept only the return of the sum which he had lent. There were probably other instances of the same kind, but I mention this, because it is one of which I have personal knowledge.

It is a permanent loss that the story of my grandfather's life was never written in detail. Even in his own day, this was realized. An old acquaintance of his, who had the reputation of being the stingiest man in Nanaimo, once explained to him, "You know, you should write a book. Why, if you did, I wouldn't mind paying a dollar for it myself." The family rightly felt that this was the ultimate tribute.

On his 94th birthday, my grandfather was interviewed by *The Press* [*The Daily Free Press*] and a reporter wrote of him: "During Mr. Brown's narrative he frequently illustrated certain points with apt quotations from Shakespeare, and so clear is his memory, he can without the least time for thought, quote passages from the *Bible*, recite poetry, or talk on current events of the day as well as, or better than, many man who have not yet reached the 50 mark."

At 96, however, he was nearing the end of the trail. He had always dressed without assistance and come down from his room ready for the day. One morning, he appeared as usual, but by mischance he had put on his coat inside out. His wife drew his attention to this lapse, and he said with a kind of groan, "It doesn't matter." When we heard this, we knew that he was nearing the end, for such things always mattered to him; they were part of his self-respect.

I recall his saying to my elder brother, it was on his 90th birthday, "When a man gets so he can't do for himself, he's better dead." And I knew he meant it. True enough he lived only about two months longer. He said he would like to see Christmas once again, and he did. Christmas had once been the happiest of times for him. There used to be a party attended by all his grandchildren, and he would beam round on them like a patriarch of old.

Every one of them, from the eldest to the youngest, who if he were very young indeed, would be stood on the little, red footstool, so that he could be seen over the table, was expected to say a piece before the distribution of presents from the tree. I remember the last of these celebrations, Christmas 1913, and how his eldest grandson and namesake, James Miller Brown, the second, stood up, pulled a lock of dark hair down over his forehead and recited, "I am my father's spirit, doomed for a space to walk the night."

It was my grandfather's own favourite quotation, how he laughed and applauded, crying, "Well done! Well done!" We had no way of knowing that before the next Christmas rolled around all the elders of that merry company would be scattered. All served their

country in the 1914 to '18 war. Two of them, my eldest brother and James Miller Brown, the second, died in it, and are buried beyond the sea.

### 35:10

After Christmas 1925, my grandfather failed rapidly. He seemed to have lost interest in living. Of all the people I have ever known, he had the least fear of death. He had sometimes spoken of it to me with complete detachment, saying that he had had a very interesting life and had enjoyed it, but death was the next step. "It's natural," he said. And he looked forward to finding that interesting too.

He was well prepared for death, yet physical death came hard to him. It was as if his spirit had been housed in that outborn body too long to be parted from it readily. Mercifully, his last illness was brief. He died in the early hours of the 16th of January, 1926. It was a fearful paroxysm that took him. One that raised him in his bed and lifted all the hairs on his head.

When he fell back, his wife bent over him, asking, "Are you better?"

He answered in less than a whisper, "Better." And died.

As he had always intended, he left no will. "Wills," he said, "could be contested and set aside." If he died intestate, the government would see to it that his estate was divided equally among his family. And so it was, though four years had to pass before the estate could be settled, as his youngest child was only 17 at the time of his death. 15 children, 26 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren survived him.

He was buried in the suit of evening dress which had been the last work of his needle. And in a coffin of solid oak, which seemed a fit resting place for him. His fellow Masons conducted the ancient rites at the graveside.

In setting down this record, which has been a labour of love, I have tried to depict him as he was, so that he may live to those who never knew him as he will always live to me.

Audrey Alexandra Brown. Nanaimo, B.C. 1971.

### 37:13

William Barraclough

Miss Brown, I see you have another article here, which I think is of historic interest to Nanaimo. I wonder if you would be kind enough to record it for us? The story is about the murder of James Hamilton.

Audrey Alexandra Brown

From 1860 to 1871, my grandfather, James Miller Brown, lived on his farm about three miles north of Nanaimo, on the Comox Road. His neighbours were few and far between. The nearest, on the opposite side of the road, was James, better known as "Jimmy", Hamilton. Hamilton was a genial Irishman, a bachelor. He often dropped in for a chat, and had a real affection for the two eldest of my grandfather's family, James William and Joseph Miller, then aged five and four. He used to take them on his knee, and had said, that as he had no living relatives, he meant to make a will and leave them all his property. As it turned out, he died intestate.

There was an Indian of the Nanaimo band whose reputation was so bad that even his own tribe had as little to do with him as possible. His name was Kwinnum - five in Chinook. He was surly when sober, a demon when drunk. And at all times, totally untrustworthy. But he was by no means deficient in brains, and he was an excellent sawyer. His way of life was to take on a job, get paid, and spend the money in a huge binge that went on until he was penniless.

In the autumn of 1871, the town baker, Mr. William Webb, offered Kwinnum the job of cutting up his winter supply of cordwood. Kwinnum agreed. As it takes two to work the cross cut saw, he went to an Indian of his acquaintance named Euclawtaw Jim, and proposed that Jim be his partner. Jim was only half Nanaimo. His mother had been one of the Euclawtaws, a westcoast tribe. Because Jim was simpleminded, Kwinnum had often found him useful.

Jim was willing enough to be Kwinnum's partner, but said, "We have no saw."

Kwinnum told him, "I know where we can get one."

Some distance up the Comox Road, there was a little general store kept by a man named Smallbones. On a night when Kwinnum knew that Smallbones and his son were in Victoria getting supplies, Kwinnum and Jim broke into the store. They were put in a bad mood by discovering that the bottles of whiskey on display were for display only; they held nothing but cold tea. They found enough genuine liquid though on which to get drunk and consequentially, dangerous.

In spite of this, Kwinnum was shrewd enough to tear some pages out of the shop's ledger, so it would look as if a debtor of Smallbones had been responsible for the burglary. They finally left, carrying Smallbones' saw between them. It was a dark night, and they were befuddled enough to have lost their bearings. Seeing the light from Jimmy Hamilton's cabin blinking through the trees, Kwinnum suggested that they go up and ask him to bring his lantern and light them to the road.

As the glow from the lantern fell on what they were carrying, Hamilton said idly, "That looks like Smallbones' saw."

Kwinnum fell behind and whispered to Jim that they must kill him. For when the theft was discovered, he would report them to the police. At the fence by the road, Kwinnum drove his knife into Hamilton's back. He did not die at once. He was alive when they dragged him back to the cabin and threw him on the bed. He was alive when Kwinnum drenched the floor and the bed with coal oil. He pleaded with them not to burn him, but they set it alight.

The next morning the sheriff rode up to my grandfather's store with the news that Jimmy Hamilton had been burned to death in his cabin. My grandfather went with him to examine the scene of the supposed accident. And he did not share the sheriff's conclusion that Jimmy Hamilton, who was known to like his drop, had knocked over the lantern and been too drunk to escape the resulting blaze. He'd noted that the fire had burned only one corner of the cabin, as if, he thought, it had been set. Also, near the fence by the road, he saw marks of a scuffle, and some stains that looked like blood.

But the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of accidental death. And here the matter would have rested, but that sometime later, a drunken Kwinnum boasted to some klotchmen that he had killed two white men in his time. He and Euclawtaw Jim were put on trial. Kwinnum turned Queen's evidence. After describing the murder, he testified that on their way home that night, he and Jim had stood in the road outside my grandfather's cabin and debated breaking in and killing him and his family. But Kwinnum had decided against it, on the grounds that as my grandfather had several young children, some of them might escape in the confusion and afterward tell the tale.

My grandfather then remembered that on the night in question, he had heard voices in the road outside the cabin. The dog had barked, and he had heard stone thrown at it. This narrow escape convinced him that his farm was too isolated to be safe, and he moved into Nanaimo.

As a result of the trial, Euclawtaw Jim, probably none too clear in his mind as to what it was all about, was hanged. Kwinnum was set free. There are two versions of his end. One: that he died a natural death. The other: that his fellow tribesmen blinded him and left him to starve.

The other murder which he had claimed to have committed, was never investigated. It was that of a bedridden man who had a cabin on Front Street. According to Kwinnum, he, Kwinnum, had crept into his house one day and strangled him. Because Jimmy Hamilton died intestate, and was, as he had said, alone in the world, his property went to the government. Had he made the promised will, little James William and Joseph Miller would each have inherited \$25,000.

William Barraclough

I have a paper here from the *Victoria Daily Colonist* for Sunday, January 24th, 1971, it's entitled: "My father built a pipe organ" and this is by Cuthbert Miller Brown. This is a brother of yours Miss Brown?

Audrey Alexandra Brown

My elder brother.

William Barraclough

All right. I'll just read it, the first paragraph:

"Joseph Miller Brown was born just three miles from Nanaimo in a log cabin at Ashlar Farm, on March 31st, 1867. The farm was just off the old highway, Comox Road, down a winding lane, to the right, just as you topped the first hill, entering Northfield. Here, amid the pleasant surroundings of the fields, meadows, trees, and Scotch broom, planted by his father, James Miller Brown, he spent his childhood."

Now, the picture, there's a picture here, Miss Brown, of that pipe organ, that your father built. I remember seeing that organ, as a matter of fact, I've heard your mother playing it. And I wondered if you could just give us a little further information on it, because it's a very important item.

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Yes, I feel it's very important. I'm afraid I can't give you the details, which my brother has given. I have photographs taken by my father of the organ. But of course, I don't need a photograph to recall it to my memory. We all grew up with the organ. It took up most of one wall of our sitting room, which was never used for any other purpose than to house the organ.

William Barraclough

That was on Kennedy Street?

Audrey Alexandra Brown

That was in the house on Kennedy. But, my father had begun to build it when we were living on Irwin Street, in the house which my father, with a brother-in-law built before he married. I was born in that house. It's 217 Irwin. But at the time, we moved from there when I was three years old, the houses had no numbers. I only found out quite recently my actual, the address of the place where I was born.

William Barraclough

There's also a nice picture of your father here, Joseph Miller Brown. He was a fine looking man.

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Yes. I always thought so. That picture, by the way, was taken on a quite historic occasion, when Mr. Victor Birch Harrison, I think it was in his first incumbency of mayor of Nanaimo, he invited a group of men, all of who had historical associations to the council, to an oyster supper, down at Mr. Philpott's in the Pioneer Cafe. And afterward, they were all taken to Mr. Schwarze's and their pictures taken. That picture is the reproduction.

I remember that besides my father there were: Mr. F.G. Peto, who had been... wasn't he city clerk for years?; and oh, of course, a number of the old-time aldermen, but my father was included because he was the youngest alderman Nanaimo ever had, and I think he must have been one of the youngest aldermen that was ever elected anywhere. He was only 22 and a half years old when he was elected to the Nanaimo council.

46:56

[tape stops and restarts]

I remember that in connection with the organ, that of course he had begun to build it before I was ever born. And I remember my mother saying that it was such a terrific labour, there was so enourmously much to do, that it began to pray on his mind, and he would get up at 3 o'clock of a summer morning, and go to work on it. So, mother had to hold him back a little.

William Barraclough

Then the organ went to Ladysmith?

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Yes, it went to... After his death, he was concerned about that when he was dying, he asked me what I thought would happen to the organ. And of course, I did not then know. But the Saint John's Church in Ladysmith heard of it and made an offer for it. They had always wanted an organ in their church and left a space for it, a pipe organ, but had never been able to afford one. They paid what they had been able to save toward it.

And it was dedicated by the then Bishop Sexton. I was not present at the dedication, but my youngest brother and sister were. And I have heard that Bishop Sexton, who had met my father, spoke very beautifully, saying that he felt sure that it would have given Dad great pleasure to know that his organ was playing in a church.

Unfortunately, they tried to adjust it to electricity, but it had not been, you have to remember that it was even, by then, it was many, many years old, and it wouldn't stand up under that kind of pressure.

William Barraclough

Miss Brown, your father was instrumental installing the large clock that was for so many years in the post office. I think, what was the proper name of it?

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Well, it wasn't the name of the clock really, it was the name of the bell: Great Frank. It was named after Mr. Frank Shepherd who was a Conservative Member of Parliament in the federal government for Nanaimo, for he was instrumental in securing it for the city.

William Barraclough

Oh, it was the bell, not the clock. I see.

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Yes, the clock was installed by him with the help of my eldest brother, Albert Harris Brown, who died in the Great War of wounds received at the Second Battle of Ypres. They installed the clock in the tower, and I remember that it was set going on the stroke of midnight 1913.

William Barraclough

January.

Audrey Alexandra Brown

January the 1st.

William Barraclough

Now, we have here also a native son of Nanaimo that has known Miss Brown since a long time ago, we'll put it that way. Mr. Philip J. Piper, would you like to ask Miss Brown a question.

Phil J. Piper

Miss Brown, I would be interested to hear you relate just what happened to that clock that your dad made, as we're all aware was a genius. And he manifested this clock that went down an incline. And all the people of Nanaimo used to stand in front of his window there and watch in amaze at that. Can you inform us just what happened to that?

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Well, that's a matter I would rather not speak of...

50:19

[tape stops and restarts]

...really. The clock, I am afraid is no longer in existence.

William Barraclough

You've already told us that your father had his first place of business on Front Street, but I remember him having a clock and watch establishment, am I right, on Wesley Street? That's right? Wesley Street?

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Yes, he built the store on Wesley Street. He was, you could say I suppose, that he was a clockmaker, but I don't recall his ever making a clock. I think they were, would have been rather too simple for him. But he did make every kind of watch, up to the most complicated and accurate possible, which is a pocket chronometer.

He had, when he was only a boy at school, and you have to remember in those days, boys left school at 12 years old; their education was finished then. They were expected to do a man's job, earn their own living. So, he must have been younger than 12 when the fellow, a school mate of his, who had a watch, when a watch went out of order, my father took it to pieces and put it together again so that it went. And from that time on he was sure that watchmaking would be his career.

So, his father sent to England for books on it. He studied them, and that was the, he founded his business on that. It's interesting to note that he had his own business license when he was only 16 years old.

51:59

[tape stops and restarts]

And at the time of his death, at the age of 76, the *Free Press* reported that he was the senior trade merchant of Nanaimo.

52:10

[tape stops and restarts]

William Barraclough

Miss Brown, the item concerning your grandfather, I would like to refer back to. It is a personal mention. In the summer of 1923, I had an interview with your grandfather, James Miller Brown, at his home on Nob Hill. He would then be 93 years of age. Hearing he was the oldest living Mason in this area was the reason of my calling. I remember him very well. It was a most rewarding interview. A kindly looking gentleman who spoke clearly and decisively. He certainly did not appear to be his age. I also remember items in the room, as white doilies placed here and there, on several objects.

53:00

[tape stops and restarts]

We just can't let you go without mentioning the various awards that you've had as a poet and author. You were awarded the Lorne Pierce Gold Medal for poetry by the Royal Society of Canada in 1944; the Centennial Medal in 1968, and the Service Medal of the Order of Canada in 1968, for distinguished service to the Canadian nation.

These are honours well bestowed, Miss Brown.

53:38

[tape stops and restarts]

Now, could you favour us, as a last item, with a verse of one of your favourite verses?

Audrey Alexandra Brown

Well, I've written so much in my time, it's hard to tell where to make a choice. But this is a little poem that is only about two months old actually, and since it deals with old age, it might seem fitting in connection with my grandfather.

Start up silver and rich, red gold,  
may gladden a man until he grows old.  
But he cannot comfort with fire or food,  
the ache in the bones, the chill in the blood.  
Only within material things,  
that he has gathered from fifty springs:  
the whistle of robins making merry,  
in a hundred trees of affluent cherry;  
the smell of the sun,  
of the rain starred clover;  
the shadow of the white cloud,  
passing over,  
can warm the creeping cold in the vein,  
can coax the heart to blossom again.

William Barraclough

Thank you, Miss Brown, for this excellent interview we've had this afternoon in the Centennial Museum at Nanaimo.

54:59

[sound recording stops]

56:57

[tape recording ends]