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CONTENTS

BROWNTOWN: EARLY INDUSTRY ON LYNCHES RIVER

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Between Lynches Lake and the river of the same name, which flows into the Great Pee Dee River about five miles below Johnsonville, is a family community, in some respects resembling an English village, that retains many marks of pioneering ingenuity and industry. This is Browntown. Its origin can be traced to 1768-69 and three royal grants to one Moses Brown.[1] His name appears on the petit and grand jury lists for Prince Frederick's Parish, 1778, and on the parish church rolls. He was elected Overseer (of the poor) in 1769 and 1772, at which time the financial record states, "Allowed the Widow McElroy, to assist her and 4 children twelve month . . ., including Two Cows and Calves Bought for her by Moses Brown and William Forester 100 [pounds]. . . ."[2]

The last record in the "Register Book" is dated Jan. 21, 1778; by that time many members had withdrawn and united with Black Mingo and Indiantown Presbyterian Churches. Among these were Moses Brown and his wife Mary,[3] who took up his grants for 400 acres on the "waters of Lynches Creek and Lynches Lake" about eight miles east of what became Graham's Cross Roads, later Lake City. The development of this isolated homestead, or "plantation," was probably delayed by Brown's service in the American Revolution, as he was at the fall of Charleston in 1780.[4] About 20 years later he was disposing of slaves and land, perhaps in anticipation of death, to his sons William and Robert, and his daughter Mary, wife of John Morris.[5] Robert became the Browntown, or Lake, Brown, while William settled at Indiantown among his wife's people. He had married Martha McGill Wilson.[6] Both retained their ties with Indiantown Presbyterian Church, Robert's family fording five

* A resident of Hemingway and author of *The Promised Land.*

1 South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, Deed Books, Vol. 16: 354, April 29, 1768, vol. 18: 222, Feb. 15, 1769 and vol. 18: 586, Oct 31, 1769.

2 *The Register Book for the Parish Prince Frederick Winyah, ANN: DOM: 1713* (The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America, 1916), pp. 198, 207, 212.

3 William Willis Boddie, *History of Williamsburg* (Columbia, 1923) p. 57.

4 *American Revolution Roster, Fort Sumter (Later Fort Moultrie) 1776-1780* (Charleston, 1976), p. 101.

5 Sumter, Sumter County Court House, Deed Book B, pp. 213-218.

6 Hemingway, Indiantown Presbyterian Church, Cemetery records.

Present Pulpit Area and Ark in K. K. Beth Elohim Synagogue. The open ark contains Torahs (the Five Books of Moses) adorned with silver *rimonim* (finials) and plates.

streams of Lynches Lake to worship there. The Robert Brown family later bridged these streams, and "Brown's Bridges," all five of them, still appear on county road maps.[7] During the 1850s the Browntown Browns united with Prospect Methodist Church, Methodism having swept the area like a hurricane, drawing to itself not only the unchurched, but toppling "Presbyterianism Regnant" from its throne.

The only record left by Moses Brown in Williamsburg County Court House is that of the first trial held there. Along with three Eaddys, he was tried and fined for assault and battery. They "had a good old Irish discussion with sticks, paid their fines, and no doubt considered the money well spent." [8]

At Browntown Robert Brown developed a plantation system that made use of the land, forests, and waters as sources of food, shelter, and clothing; however, he added something perhaps unique in his place and time—industry. He and his sons extended the original grants to more than 10,000 acres.[9] At the most suitable locations they established a brick kiln, grist mill, cotton gin, lumber mill, retail and wholesale mercantile business, and a school for their growing families.

The crude clay chimneys and wood block foundations that were common in the dwellings of the backcountry were replaced at Browntown with somewhat irregularly shaped kiln-dried bricks, as soft and mellow in tone as the earth from which the clay came. Their neighbors who could afford them bought the Browns' bricks and improved their own homes. The bricks were carried by flatboat from the kiln up or down the creek, unloaded, and often transported by wheelbarrow from the creekside to their final destination. Several old homes in the area, in addition to those at Browntown, have been found to rest on founda-

[7] A Map of the Province of South Carolina with all the Rivers, Creeks, Bays, Inlets, Islands, Inland Navigations, Soundings, Time of High Water on the Sea Coast, Marshes, Ferries, Bridges, Swamps, Parishes, Towns, Townships; County Parish District and Provincial Lines Humbly Inscribed to the Honble. Rawlins Lowndes Esq. Speaker & the Rest of the Honble. The Commons House of Assembly of the Province by Their Most Obdt. & Faithful Servt. Jam[e]s Cook . . . Thomas Bowen SCULP. 1773.

[8] Boddie, *History of Williamsburg*, p. 217. The early Williamsburg County equity records are in disarray, and many are missing. The writer has looked without success for the record of this case, and can conclude only that it was in place when Boddie was writing his *History of Williamsburg* in the early 1920s.

[9] South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Land Grants, vol. 67: 205-206, vol. 39: 179-180, vol. 43: 291, vol. 14; 530; vol. 56: 158, vol. 88; 120.

tions of Browntown bricks, with their imposing, soaring chimneys still intact.[10]

The inland plantation system was self sustaining. No money crops were grown, although the farmer did try to market his surpluses. He concentrated on grains, legumes, and livestock. Rice, corn, and wheat were essential for home use, as were cows, sheep, hogs, oxen, mules and horses, and fowl of many varieties: chicken, turkeys, ducks, geese, and guineas, not only for meat and eggs, but for feathers for bedding. Peas flourished in such abandon that surpluses were traded at Georgetown. The Browns' gristmill filled a need both for themselves and their neighbors. Water power transformed their corn and wheat into meal, grits, and a crude but nutritious flour. The flat terrain of the area presented a challenge in harnessing water to furnish power for the mill. It was successful enough to permit the Browns to expand further.

The lumber mill was a natural step. At Browntown were large forests of tremendous virgin long leaf pines, and the mill received orders for shingles and timber precut to various sizes. Freight movements were by cart or wagon drawn by oxen, mules, or horses from depots on railroads and rivers. Draft mules were taxed to make 20 miles a day. In spite of the transportation problems, the mill was so profitable that the Browns once considered using suitable pieces of timber to build a wood track—a tram road—to the nearest shipping point so that heavy timbers could be delieverd more quickly and easily. Although they had both the timber and the mill, they finally abandoned the idea as too expensive.[11]

Perhaps the most remarkable of the Browntown industries was the cotton gin. The gin house is still standing on its massive supports, and its gears and wheels, in their intricate hand carved symmetry, a beautiful example of the patience and ingenuity that built America. Julian D. Brown, age 91, who was born and reared at Browntown, describes its constructions and functioning.

"My great-grandfather was a farmer. He had cotton to gin, as did his neighbors. Familiar with Eli Whitney's idea, he set about building

[10] William Bartell and Jasper Bartell, *Journals, 1823-1867* (photo-copies University of South Carolina, Caroliniana Library). These journals, the originals in the possession of Mrs. Buena A. White, Pamplico, S. C., contain numerous references to Browntown bricks. Bartell mentions transporting them to his homestead by water, unloading to wheelbarrows. The bricks are in evidence in the Browntown buildings and others nearby.

[11] Julian D. Brown, Sr., *Tears to Laughter* (privately printed, Julian D. Brown, Hemingway) p. 63.

a cotton gin. To operate such a machine, he needed a housing unit and wheels and gears that would protect and deliver power to his machine. These parts he made of wood. Being a large land owner, he had ample areas of forest from which the needed parts could be made. Long leaf pines were rich in resin that prevented weathering and termite damage. From such virgin timber he had his slaves work off surplus wood to leave a heart of fat wood for posts that he set five feet into the earth to support his ginhouse. From hickory and oak trees he made wheels and axles. The first floor he set ten feet from the ground, allowing space for machinery. The upper floor housed the gin and cotton bins.

"At the center of the ground floor a journal bearing was set well into the earth to hold the lower end of the king post 20 inches in diameter and long enough to reach anchorage at the floor above. Two feet from the lower end a mortice five by ten inches was chisled through the king post to receive a beam 30 feet long, at each end of which two horses were harnessed to furnish power. This center post acted as the axis of a wood wheel 14 feet in diameter. When the horses were started, this wheel turned to drive the machinery. On the circumference holes were drilled and spaced so as to receive pegs that engaged smaller wheels. On the axes of these small wheels larger wheels were keyed from which belts moved through the upper pulley to the gin pulley." [12]

During ginning season, with the horses plodding in an endless circle, men labored up and down a long flight of steps, carrying up baskets of seed cotton and returning with baskets of lint to put into the press, also handmade.

What remains of Moses Brown's early home, with its scalloped exterior frieze, the intricately morticed heart-of-pine stair rail, random width panelling, and third floor sleeping loft, shows a builder of sensitivity and ingenuity. The kitchen, as was customary for the time, was detached from the house. Near it stood accessory buildings including a smokehouse which survives. A thoroughfare divided the domestic buildings from the neatly arranged plantation complex—cotton gin and grain bin which remain, blacksmith shop, cotton press, cane mill, and others. These were located a comfortable distance from the dwelling house but near enough to allow constant supervision. This group of buildings formed the nucleus of Browntown, which reached its peak of prosperity before the turn of the last century.

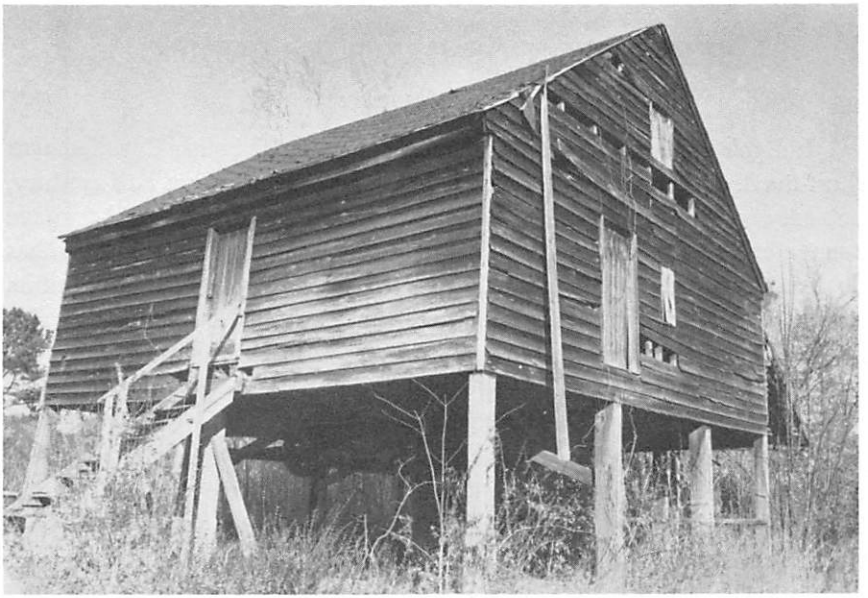
Of the earliest Browntown structures still standing, the smokehouse, cotton gin, and grain bin are so remarkable in their craftsmanship and

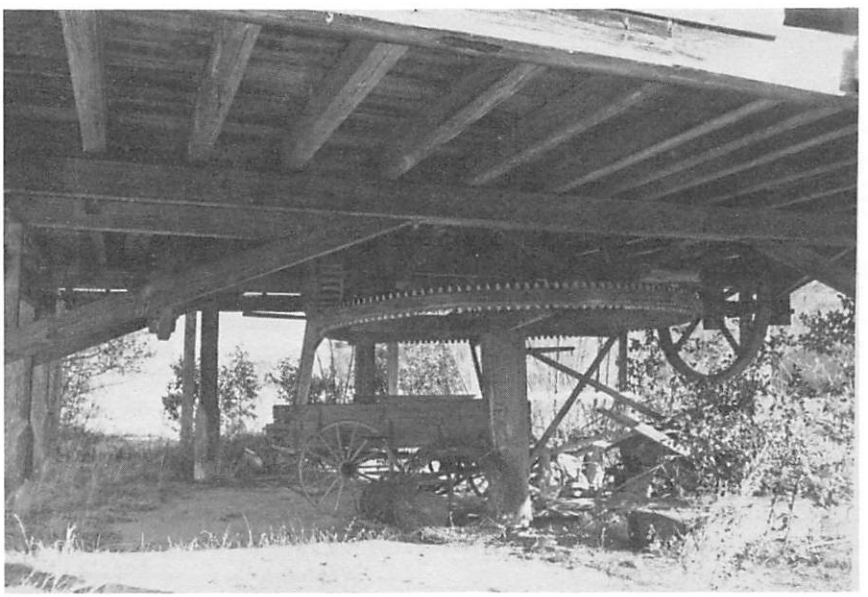
[12] From an unpublished manuscript by Julian D. Brown, a detailed description of the building and operation of the gin and press.

so unique in design that only careful scaled drawings can do justice to them for historical records. In the use of native woods and the originality of their application exists a singular bit of Americana. Also remarkable is their present state of natural preservation after nearly two hundred years of usefulness in one form or another. The grain bin contains storage still; the smokehouse, while not hanging with cured meats as in the past, could easily be pressed into service; and with a few minor repairs and a pair of mules, the tiny cotton gin on the second floor of its housing could turn out fluffy lint as it did shortly after Eli Whitney revolutionized Southern agriculture.

Other relics of this unusual community still standing are houses, scattered on both sides of the lake, representing several periods of architecture. They were erected for sons bringing their brides home. Perhaps the earliest structure, a log house, became the core of a later building. Although its age is disguised, the oak draped lane signifies great age. Other houses, most now occupied by sharecroppers, and some abandoned, are adorned with handsome hand wrought hinges, locks, and other hardware hammered out in the plantation blacksmith shop. Wooden pegs or hand cut nails join the timbers. Chimneys and foundations display the typical Browntown bricks. Proportions show a feeling for harmony and balance not at all usual in backcountry architecture, which at best was no more than utilitarian.

The qualities that created Browntown were bound to bring prosperity, and with it education. One of Robert Brown's sons became a teacher. Soon a doctor was produced there, and as the young people began to drift away, Browntown began to wane. Yet it remained in Brown ownership, as much of it still does, and retained much of its past. Only now is the twentieth century eroding the once proud village through which every traveler passed between Lake City and Johnsonville.





The Gin House at Browntown *(above)* was set 10 feet above the ground allowing space for the power mechanism underneath. Two horses were harnessed to these wheels, which were made on the place of native wood. The central wheel is 14 feet in diameter.

1976 photo by Buzz Elliott

REPUTATION OF CAROLINA INDIGO

JOHN J. WINBERRY *

Indigo's role as a commercial crop for colonial South Carolina was short-lived. Production of it extended over approximately a half century, but only in the decade prior to the Revolution could it be said to have been a major export staple. Renewed study of the crop's history has dealt with various topics, but the question of the reputation of Carolina indigo in the London market has not been considered. This paper also focuses on other factors associated with the crop's rise and decline.

Development as a Staple

The revival of indigo production in Carolina traditionally has been ascribed to the work of Eliza Lucas Pinckney. Though her and her husband's contributions to the renewal of production were important, the familiarity of French Huguenots with the crop, early plantings of indigo in North Carolina and Georgia, and the role of pamphlets and newspaper accounts are increasingly cited as major elements in the crop's history.[1] The renewal of production in the 1740s, however, does not explain why indigo became a major export staple some twenty-five years later. Traditionally, the Parliamentary bounty of 1749 has been cited as the cause of success, but its role has been increasingly downgraded in favor of that of war and other government manipulations of

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[1] The French Huguenots had grown indigo at the end of the seventeenth century and undoubtedly were familiar with the crop's production, perhaps growing limited quantities during the eighteenth century. "Letters from John Stewart to William Dunlop," this *Magazine,* 32 (1931): 21; Arthur H. Hirsch, "French Influence on American Agriculture in the Colonial Period," *Agricultural History,* 4 (1930): 8-9. Although production is not definite, indigo was mentioned in early accounts for North Carolina and Georgia, William L. Saunders, ed., *The Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1886-1888), IV, 392; Allen D. Candler, ed., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia,* 25 (Atlanta, 1915): 97. For early newspaper accounts, see *South-Carolina Gazette* for October 8, 1744, October 22, 1744, October 29, 1744, April 1, 1745, November 4, 1745, November 11, 1745, December 2, 1745, and December 9, 1745. See also David L. Coon, "Eliza Lucas Pinckney and the Reintroduction of Indigo Culture in South Carolina," *The Journal of Southern History,* 42 (1976): 61-76, and David L. Coon, "The Development of Market Agriculture in South Carolina, 1670-1785," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois (1972), pp. 215-68.