

**The Burke Library Archives, Columbia University Libraries,  
Union Theological Seminary, New York**

**Union Theological Seminary Archives 1**

**Finding Aid for**

**William Adams Brown Papers, 1865 – 1938**



William Adams Brown, 1899-1900. Credit to: UTS2: Union Theological Seminary Records, Series 18C, Box 1, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

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Updated and revised by Brigette C. Kamsler, June 2015 with financial support from the Henry Luce Foundation

**Summary Information**

Creator: William Adams Brown, 1865-1943  
Title: William Adams Brown Papers  
Inclusive dates: 1865-1938  
Bulk dates: 1886-1930  
Abstract: The collection consists of the papers of the Brown family, including William Adams Brown's parents, wife and children. It consists mainly of scrapbooks, correspondence, lectures and sermons.  
Size: 17 boxes, 7.50 linear feet  
Storage: Onsite storage  
Repository: The Burke Library  
Union Theological Seminary  
3041 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027  
Email: [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu)

### Administrative Information

- Provenance:** With no written evidence, it is assumed that the Brown family donated these materials following William Adams Brown's retirement from Union in 1936 or after his death in 1943. The course notes in series 3 box 1 were presented by William Adams Brown's family in 1950.
- Access:** Archival papers are available to registered readers for consultation by appointment only. Please contact archives staff by email to [burkearchives@library.columbia.edu](mailto:burkearchives@library.columbia.edu), or by postal mail to The Burke Library address on page 1, as far in advance as possible. Burke Library staff is available for inquiries or to request a consultation on archival or special collections research.
- Access Restrictions:** The collection is unrestricted to readers. Certain materials, however, are in a fragile condition such as the scrapbooks in series 1, and this may necessitate restriction in handling and copying.
- Preferred Citation:** Item description, UTS: William Adams Brown Papers, series #, box #, and folder #, The Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary, Columbia University in the City of New York.

### 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, and then 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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

denominations and religions were included under its aegis, including Protestant and Catholic, as well as Jewish organizations that 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.

### Sources

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

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

### **Collection Scope and Content Note**

The collection consists of family scrapbooks, containing personal and professional mementos including many photographs and family correspondence mainly with Helen G. Brown, James Crosby Brown, John Crosby Brown and Thatcher Brown.

It also includes materials related to death of daughter Helen A. Brown in 1928 and finishes with a collection of notes for books, lectures, sermons, and courses relating to W. A. Brown's professional activities mainly at Union Theological Seminary.

The collection is divided into four series. Organization is chronological unless noted otherwise.

- **Series 1: Scrapbooks, 1865-1922 (6 boxes, 3.00 lin. ft.)**

This series consists of scrapbooks assembled by the Brown family. Although including both personal and professional items, the bulk of the content is personal. Materials included are correspondence, poems, play scripts, sketches, photographs, pressed flowers and other mementos. The materials in these books are very fragile and heavy.

- **Series 2: Family, 1873-1938 (6 boxes, 3.00 lin. ft.)**

This series contains materials related to the Brown family and has been divided into three subseries.

- **Subseries 2A: Correspondence, 1873-1938 (3 boxes, 1.50 lin. ft.)**

The subseries consists of incoming and outgoing correspondence between members of the Brown family, including W. A. Brown's parents, wife, children, and others. Helen G. Brown traveled extensively and her letters document the various

locations she visited. Folders are arranged alphabetically and items within are arranged chronologically. Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of letters in each file folder.

- **Subseries 2B: Death of Helen A. Brown, 1928; 1930 (2 boxes, 1.00 linear ft.)**  
Materials related to the death of Brown's daughter Helen in 1928. Included are sympathy letters, memorial addresses, mementos, and W. A. Brown's short biography of his daughter. The sympathy letters regarding Helen A. Brown's death are in alphabetical groups by correspondent. Each folder contains a list of the correspondents.
- **Subseries 2C: J.C. and Mary E. Brown, 1918-1922 (1 box, 0.50 ln. ft.)**  
Documents relating to the dispersal of William Adams Brown's parent's estate include correspondence and financial documents.
- **Series 3: Notes, 1890-1936 (3 boxes, 1.50 linear ft.)**  
The varied contents consist of lecture, sermon, course, and book notes by William Adams Brown. Also included are further items related to his professional life at Union Seminary. The term *Kirchengeschichte* in the course notes refers to Ecclesiastical History.

All of series 3 has been transferred to this collection from other Burke Library locations. The relationship between the contents of current boxes and previous call numbers is:

Series 3 Box 1: Cage Tx73 B881 C

Series 3 Box 2: Cage Tx73 B881 L Box 1

Series 3 Box 3: Cage Tx73 B881 L Box 2

- **Series 4: General, 1897-1915 (1 box, 0.25 linear ft.)**  
This series consists of various correspondence and letters sent to and by William Adams Brown. Many of the letters from around 1911 pertain to the heresy accusations. There are letters of congratulations for being appointed professor at UTS, and include reports and copies of articles with the letters. Finally it includes a report of the Pittsburgh Presbytery regarding the heresy charges.

### **Processing**

The collection has been processed by a variety of people over the years. In 2015, it was updated as part of the Henry Luce Foundation grant. At this time, materials were placed in new acid-free folders and boxes.

Series 4 was a later addition from unprocessed material and was added to this set of records in 2015.

Researchers should be aware of the family names used, which may present potential confusion.

John Crosby Brown was the name of both W.A. Brown's father and his son.

James Crosby Brown was William Adams Brown's brother.

Helen Gilman Brown was the name of both W.A. Brown's wife and daughter, although his daughter changed her name to Helen Adams Brown.

Mary Elizabeth Brown was W. A. Brown's mother.

Mary Magoun Brown (often referred to as May) was his sister.

In the Finding Aid identification will be indicated as follows

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)

### **Further Sources**

The Burke Library offers a number of other collections related to William Adams Brown. An entire record group was named after him in recognition of his service not only to UTS but to the ecumenical movement as a whole. The record group was established in 1945 by the UTS Board of Directors to document the modern ecumenism movement. A list of the finding aids for those collections in the record group are [available online here](#).

The Missionary Research Library Archives offers a William Adams Brown collection related to his commission work in India and Burma. The finding aid for that collection [is available here](#).

## Contents list

### Series 1: Scrapbooks, 1865-1922

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
1	1		<b>[FRAGILE]</b> 1865-1889
1	2		<b>[FRAGILE]</b> 1893-1903
1	3		<b>[FRAGILE]</b> 1903-1908
1	4		<b>[FRAGILE]</b> 1909-1913
1	5		<b>[FRAGILE]</b> 1914-1918
1	6		<b>[FRAGILE]</b> 1918-1922

### Series 2: Family, 1873-1938

#### Subseries 2A: Correspondence, 1873-1938

2A	1	1-14	Brown, Helen G., 1886-1931
2A	2	1	Brown, Helen A. (II), 1915-1928
2A	2	2	Brown, James Crosby, 1901-1929
2A	2	3-4	Brown, John Crosby (I) 1873; 1893-1907
2A	2	5-10	Brown, John Crosby (II), 1894-1938
2A	2	11	Brown, Mary E., 1911
2A	2	12	Brown, Mary M., 1904-1932
2A	3	1-9	Brown, Thatcher M., 1886-1938
2A	3	10	Brown, Mr. and Mrs. William A., Jr., 1920-1931
2A	4	1	Brown, Winthrop G., [1907-1925?]
2A	4	2	DeForest, Amy B, 1911
2A	4	3	Moore, Eliza C., 1928
2A	4	4	Moore, John C. B., 1917
2A	4	5	Morely, John, 1915
2A	4	6	Noyes, Daniel R., 1907
2A	4	7	Saltus, Evelyn and Rollin [1907?]
2A	4	8	Saltus, Lloyd, 1907
2A	4	9	Williams, W. W., 1927
2A	4	10	Unidentified

#### Subseries 2B: Death of Helen G. Brown, 1928; 1930

2B	1	1-4	Correspondence, 1928
2B	1	5	Correspondence, Lists, 1928

**Series 2: Family (Cont'd)****Subseries 2B: Death of Helen G. Brown (Cont'd)**

Series	Box	Folder	Contents
2B	1	6	Memorial Addresses, 1928
2B	1	7	Mementos, 1928
2B	1	8	ShIPLEY School, 1928

**Eighteen Years and After**

2B	2	1	Manuscript, 1930
2B	2	2-4	Draft Chapter I-III, 1930
2B	2	5	Draft, 1930

**Subseries 2C: J. C. and Mary E. Brown, 1918-1922**

2C	1	1	J. C. Brown House Inventories [1918?]
2C	1	2	M. E. Brown Estate: Financial [1918]
2C	1	3-5	Correspondence, 1918-1922

**Series 3: Notes, 1890-1936**

3	1	1	Course Notes: New Testament, Prof. D. Harnack [1891?]
3	1	2	Course Notes: <i>Kirchengeschichte</i> II, Prof. D. Harnack, 1890
3	1	3	Course Notes: <i>Kirchengeschichte</i> III, Prof. D. Harnack, 1891
3	2	1	Address at UTS, 1910
3	2	2	Seminary and Church, 1913
3	2	3	How to Make God Real, 1930
3	2	4	Lecture 2: Humanist's Substitute for God, 1930
3	2	5	Lecture 3: How God Satisfies the Mind, 1930
3	2	6	Lecture 4: How to Make God's Presence Real, 1930
3	2	7	Lecture 5: How to Share God When Found, 1930
3	2	8	Karl Barth, [19??]
3	2	9	Lecture 4: Can One Church Include [19??]
3	2	10	Rediscovering God, 1934
3	2	11	Christianity in the Light of its History, 1912
3	2	12	Objects of Consciousness, 1911
3	2	13	Dynamics of Service, [19??]
3	2	14-15	Introduction to Philosophy, 2-3, [19??]
3	2	16	Fundamentals of Religion, 1916
3	2	17-18	Systematic Theology, 2, 1917; 1925
3	2	19-24	Systematic Theology, #1-2, 3, 6-9, 1926
3	2	25-26	Systematic Theology, #2-3 [1929?]
3	3	1-7	Outline of Christian Theology, Part 1-4 [19??]
3	3	8	Chapter 2 [193?]
3	3	9	Chapter 12: Church in America, 1936



**Series 3: Notes (Cont'd)**

<b>Series</b>	<b>Box</b>	<b>Folder</b>	<b>Contents</b>
3	3	10-11	Partial Bibliography of Devotional Life, 1926
3	3	12	Remarks, 1916-1920
3	3	13-14	News Clippings and Telegrams

**Series 4: General, 1897-1915**

4	1	1	Correspondence from Frances Brown, 1897-1905
4	1	2-5	Correspondence to WAB, 1898-1915
4	1	6	Report of the Pittsburgh Presbytery, 1911