CHAPTER 13

BROWNSVILLE CLOSE-UP:
GRANT BROWN AND BILL JOHNSON

I recently spoke with retired pharmacist William F. Johnson and his wife Margaret, who live on Pearl Street in Brownsville. I wanted to learn more about the late Grant E. Brown. Bill Johnson had a long professional relationship with Grant Brown, who was a well-known Brownsville pharmacist, local history buff, and owner of the "Grant Brown Collection" of historic photographs of old Brownsville.

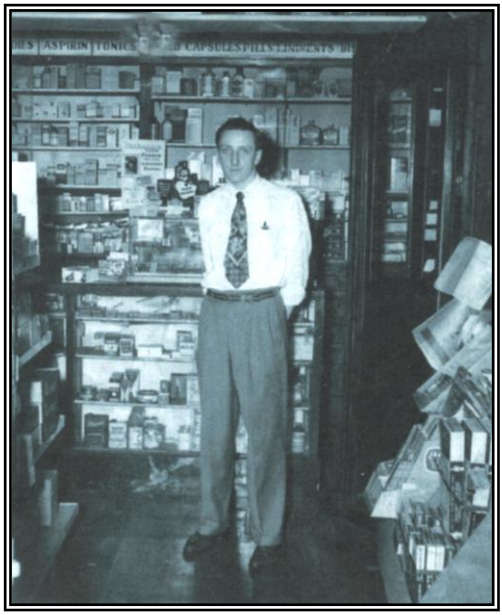
As I talked with Bill and Margaret, I realized that the lives of Grant Brown and Bill Johnson are inseparably entwined. Much of the story of one is also the story of the other. It is a small-town parable of competitors who developed a lasting friendship and mutual respect for each other.

Grant Brown, 1960

Brown Drug Store was located at 105 High Street in downtown Brownsville. It was in the Crawford Building, which still stands on the southeast corner of High and Bank streets. The building, currently housing the Antique Grill, is directly opposite the former National Deposit Bank, now National City Bank. There were three commercial tenants on the ground floor in the 1940s. On the left side was Greenfield's Market, in the middle was a restaurant, and on the right was Brown Drug Store. Beyond the Crawford building to the right was an alley, and to the right of the alley was the Bison Theater building. The front-left corner of the Bison building was occupied by Yoho Jewelers.

Grant Brown, owner of and pharmacist at Brown Drug Store, was a graduate of Washington and Jefferson College and the University of Pittsburgh School of Pharmacy. He had a brother, Bill, who was a job printer, and a sister, Lois, who was a school teacher at Prospect Street School. Grant and his wife, the former Evelyn S. Sprouse, had three children: Grant Jr., Ned, and Carol.

The family lived at the top of High Street hill in a house presently occupied by the Dascenzo family. Grant often walked down the hill to work in the morning, had lunch in town, and went home for dinner. His store, which for many years operated from eight a.m. to eleven p.m., was open seven days a week.



Bill Johnson, 1949, newly graduated pharmacist in Brown Drug Store

Bill Johnson was born and raised at 250 Bank Street in Brownsville. In 1940, fourteen-year-old Bill went looking for a part-time job. His search took him to 105 High Street, the Brown Drug Store. He was hired for "good money," twenty-five cents an hour, to do whatever Grant told him to do.

For years, Grant was the store's only pharmacist. With the store open seven days a week, I wondered if he had ever had a chance to relax. Bill recalled that on a holiday, they would often head for the mountains.

"I do remember one time when Grant, his son, his dad, and I went up to Dulany's Cave (now Laurel Caverns). We went up there several times, spent whole days, going into the cave in the morning, then coming out, maybe going back in again."

Bill worked at Brown Drug Store through high school and graduated from Brownsville High School (on High Street) in 1943. He entered the School of Pharmacy at the University of Pittsburgh, but the next year he was drafted. Returning to Brownsville in 1946 after a two-year stretch in the navy, Bill went right back to work at Brown Drug Store. He worked part-time there while riding the train to attend classes

in Pittsburgh.

Returning on the afternoon train after a day of classes at Pitt, Bill would go straight to the drug store and work until closing time, usually eleven p.m. Bill completed his degree in pharmacy at Pitt in 1949, and Grant welcomed him as a new full-time pharmacist. For the next seven years, the two men manned the prescription counter at Brown Drug Store.

"What did the inside of the store look like?" I asked Bill.

"There was a wooden phone booth at the back end of the store," he recalled. "Behind the booth there were stairs that went to the cellar and stairs that went up to a balcony above the back part of the store."

"So you could look down on the rest of the store," I said.

"Yes. And the back part of the store, on that second floor, was where the prescription room was, where he did all his prescription orders.

"He had a soda fountain in there," Bill continued. "On the right side forward of the telephone booth, there were about three booths, then the fountain, with about six or eight stools at the fountain. You could buy ice cream, Coca-Cola, sundaes, ice cream cones, things like that. Most of the drug stores then, even over on the other end of town at Bush and Marsh, had a soda fountain."

I said, "I hadn't thought about it before, but what was it that put drug stores and ice cream counters together?"

"I think then it was an attraction just to help bring people into the store," Bill said. "Gradually, a lot of those counters developed into places where you could get sandwiches and things like that. Grant had regular recipes and formulas that we used to make up the syrups for the fountain. At that time, we made all of them ourselves."

Bill's wife, Margaret, then produced a fancy framed certificate attesting that William Johnson was officially certified by the Borden Company to serve Borden's ice cream.

"You needed to be certified to serve Borden's ice cream?" I couldn't believe it.

They both laughed. "It was just a promotional thing for Borden's," Margaret said.

Brown Drug Store was prospering, and in the late 1940s, the store expanded.

"Someone decided to put a new restaurant in between Greenfield's Market and the drug store," Margaret explained. "Then Grant took that over. Grant and Bill moved shelving around, took out a section of wall and moved the soda fountain into the restaurant."

"At that point," said Bill, "we had a cook in the kitchen, and girls, a

lot of whom were high school girls, worked at the fountain and in the restaurant. We got some older women to work for breakfast, waiting on booths and counters."

"They opened around six o'clock in the morning," Margaret said. "Mrs. Louise Mortland Goe was one of the first cooks that was hired down there."

Brown Drug Store shared the corner building with Greenfield's Market and Francis Restaurant.

Louise succeeded other cooks such as Inez Johns, Hazel Pringle, and a lady she remembers as Mrs. Newell. Louise, still a Brownsville resident today, says she would arrive at work at three a.m. to get the pies baked before the restaurant opened at six a.m. Her husband Lyn helped her, as did her daughters Shirley Mortland Murray, Vivian Mortland Endsley, Bonnie Mortland, her son Lynford Mortland, and her sister Wanda Rosgony. Keeping the customers satisfied were waitresses Rose Marie King Cross, Julia King Kovach, Grayce Johnson Stevenson, Marie Angelo Hudak, Louella Keplar, Christine Murphy Amos, Tess Durschlag and Mildred Stipkovich. Shortly after Louise left the restaurant in the early 1960s, it was sold to Gus and Pauline Francis, and the wall between the restaurant and the drug store was closed again.

Serving food was not the only creative way to bring customers through the front door of the drug store.

"When Bill was working for Grant, it was Bill that got Grant into cameras," Margaret told me. "Grant never took a picture, but Bill was into photography. He developed a photography trade, and people would go to Bill to fix cameras."

"And the Russell Stover candy," she continued. "Bill talked Grant into taking that line on. Holiday season, Valentine season, that was a busy time."

"Right after World War II," Bill said, "we bought the Gene and Boots candy for many years, all the handmade things that they had, we really did a terrific business with that."

"You have to remember," he pointed out, "at that time, certain things that you bought were drug store items. You couldn't buy them in

a grocery store. Most of your cosmetics, you had to go to the drug store for them. Grocery stores for the most part didn't sell toothpaste, toothbrushes, combs, brushes, deodorants. Cameras were drug store items too, for the most part."

"It was the small, independent stores that made Kodak what it is today," said Margaret.

Bill remembered something else about Grant Brown. "You know, you always had to have signs to put in the window and price tags and things like that. Grant made them himself. He had a set of drawing pens, and whether it was a big sign or a little sign, he would get his pens out and he would make his own signs."

Margaret showed me a photograph in which the signs were visible.

"These signs look professionally done," I declared.

"He was good," Bill said.

"He had several different points for his pens," Margaret added. "He had them in a candy box, and he'd get out that candy box with those stylus pens."

The early fifties were successful years at Brown Drug Store. Bill worked for Grant as a registered pharmacist from 1949 until 1956. Then, in March 1956, Bill made a decision that appeared to end his longtime relationship with Grant Brown.

Bill, thirty years old and still single, purchased Central Pharmacy from Charles D'Antonio. Central Pharmacy was on the curve at the intersection of High and Bank streets. It was practically across the street from Brown Drug Store. The relationship between Grant and Bill had now come full circle. Bill had started at the drug store as Grant's fourteen-year-old helper. He had become Grant Brown's co-worker, sharing the pharmacist's duties with him. Now, after sixteen years together, they were owners of competing pharmacies.

And yet it was the friendliest competition you can imagine.

"In fact," said Bill, "for a long time after I left Grant and bought the store across the street from him, in competition with him, I still had the keys to his store. He wouldn't take them back for a long time afterwards. He said, 'You may need something.' That's the kind of person he was."

Though now competitors, the bond of mutual trust and respect endured. Next I will share with you how an unexpected event placed these two Brownsville pharmacists back together once again.

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP REUNITES BROWNSVILLE PHARMACISTS

In May 1956, thirty-year-old Bill Johnson resigned as pharmacist at Brown Drug Store, where he had shared those duties for seven years with owner Grant Brown. Bill purchased Central Pharmacy at the intersection of Bank and High Streets. Bill and Grant, formerly co-workers, now owned competing drug stores across the street from each other.

In 1959, Bill married Margaret J. Fleming of California. Working together to modernize their business, they introduced free prescription delivery service to the Brownsville area in 1960. Margaret delivered the prescriptions in a 1960 Comet purchased from Curcio Motors. Joe Curcio's Mercury dealership was on old National Pike East in a building now occupied by the National City walk-in bank.

People patronized Central Pharmacy for products other than medicine.

"We were selling garden seeds, which had been sold at that store as far back as the late 1800s," said Margaret.

"The seed business goes back to Brosius' time," said Bill. "Charlie D'Antonio had bought Central from Brosius, who had bought it from D. Fred Robinson."

"Spring was a very busy time," explained Margaret. "The bulk seeds, often in fifty-pound bags, were stored in barrels in a garage down near the railroad tracks, near the wharf entrance. We had two or three clerks going steady during the spring. They would carry the seeds to the storeroom and weigh them for the customers, some by the pound, some by the dram. Rebecca Chew, who had worked many years for Brosius, was a great help to seed customers."

When the Western Union office in the Monongahela Hotel closed, the Johnsons operated the agency at Central. Margaret and clerks Thelma Cone and Mary Fleming Saliba handled the Western Union business.

"People would wire money via telegram," Margaret said.

"How did that work?" I asked.

"They had to have a code on the telegram for identification purposes. They'd give you a test question, like your mother's maiden name. It would always be down at the bottom, a 'TQ,' to further identify the person."

Most telegrams could be phoned, but some had to be hand delivered. Margaret sadly remembered delivering notifications of military personnel who had been killed.

"I remember one time, I had to go out to Grindstone. They called

me from Uniontown and told me the telegram was coming, and boy, I never did know how to handle that."

"I thought the military handled that," I said.

"They would come later, but the initial notification came from Western Union. The manager called me from Uniontown. I said, 'How do I do this?' He said the best thing to do is go to a church and see if you can't get a minister to go with you. And so I did."

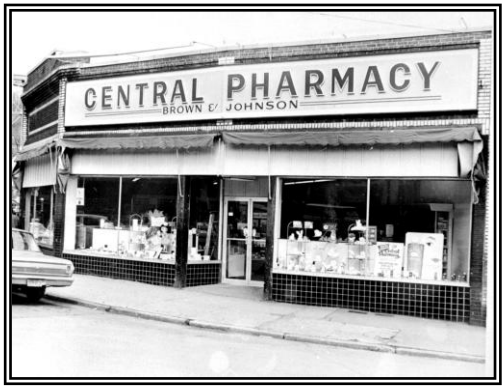
In 1963, the Johnsons purchased a second store, Reed's Rexall Drugs, from Ed Collins, who had purchased the store from Bill Reed, son of the business's founder. Bill Johnson managed Reed's. To manage Central, the Johnsons hired W. Alan Jones, son of Wilbur and Mildred Jones of Stewart Street. Jones, who has since passed away, left Central later when he purchased a pharmacy in Point Marion.

In 1964, fate arranged a reunion between Bill Johnson and Grant Brown, who was still operating Brown Drug Store. Over the Valentine's Day holiday, Grant's wife, Evelyn Sprouse Brown, died very suddenly. Margaret received a poignant telephone call from Grant.

"Grant did beautiful windows," she told me, "decorated with valentines and valentine hearts. Those Russell Stover candies were in beautiful satin and lace hearts, and he would fix up those windows so pretty. Russell Stover candy was franchised at Brown Drug Store and not available elsewhere in town.

"I remember when Evelyn died. He had that store full of candy. He called us and told us to go over and get it, gave us the keys to the store. He told Bill to take it over to Central and sell what he could of it."

Valentine candies in lace and satin hearts were removed from Brown Drug Store's shelves and windows while Grant mourned his wife's passing. Those windows were never again decorated. A few weeks later, Grant called Bill Johnson with a proposal.



"New" Central Pharmacy

"He approached me about forming a partnership and merging his store with Central," Bill said. "I can remember talking to our accountant at the time, and we asked him what he thought. He advised us that partnerships very seldom work out."

But this partnership became the exception to the

rule, thanks to a quarter of a century of trust and respect that had developed between Grant Brown and Bill Johnson.

"It was a good business relationship," Margaret said. "They closed Brown Drug Store and moved the stock into what we called "old" Central. It was a little store between Pittsburgh Plate Glass and Jane Lee clothing store.

"Grant brought the Russell Stover candy franchise with him. Brown Drug Store had also been the only store in town that could fill UMWA prescriptions. That was one of the first third-party prescription plans. He brought that over with him to Central too."

With the newly combined customer base, the little store was badly in need of more space. Bill ran Reed's and Grant ran Central. When Jane Lee, the clothing store next door to Central, closed, the partnership quickly arranged to rent that storeroom, and they soon remodeled and air-conditioned the store.

"Herb Mitchell did the contracting work," remembered Margaret. "Angelo Cole and Sons of California did the heating and cooling, and Joe Baranti decorated it for us. He used to do Kart's windows, Miller's in Charleroi; he did beautiful work."

1927 view of walkway leading to the railroad passenger boarding platform between Bush and Marsh Drug Store (left) and Ford Refrigeration Co. (right) in Union Station, the later site of Reed's Drug Store

A grand opening was held in May of 1965, and "new" Central was born. Clerks included Iola Cameron, Thelma Cone, Mary Fleming Saliba, Connie Musar and Irene Gordon. Still the business kept growing.

In December of the same year, Margaret's uncle, Edward J. Fleming, pharmacist and owner of Bush and Marsh Drugs, became ill. Bush and Marsh was in the Snowdon Building, two doors away from Reed's, which was in the Union Station building. The Brown-Johnson partnership purchased Bush and Marsh in May 1966, merged the store into Reed's, and closed Bush and Marsh later that year. The two clerks, Joanne Twigger and Mary Caporale, were transferred to Reed's, joining Eleanor Musar, Mary Sabol and Emily Bakewell, who already worked there.

"When Bush and Marsh closed," said Margaret, "the telephone business moved to Reed's."

"What was the telephone business?" I asked her.

"People paying their telephone bills. That was the big thing at Bush and Marsh. They were the payment agency for the telephone company for years."

"You couldn't mail it in?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," said Margaret, "but people were downtown all the time. They walked all over town to pay their bills. The water company was in Gallatin Bank; the gas company office was on Bank Street where the municipal authority is now. West Penn was in the Towne House across the street from Bush and Marsh."

"With Bush and Marsh closing, what drug stores remained in Brownsville?" I asked.

"Thrift, Central and Reed's downtown, plus Robinson's on upper Market Street," said Margaret.

In late 1973, Grant Brown's health began to decline. On April 1, 1974, Grant sold his interest in the partnership to Bill Johnson. Grant continued to work for Bill when he was able, ironically completing the circle begun in 1940 when fourteen-year-old Bill had come to Brown Drug Store looking for a part-time job.

Grant's health continued to worsen, and on January 24, 1975, he died at the age of seventy-two. Buried in Belle Vernon, he is survived by two sons, Grant Jr. of Detroit and Ned of Columbus, and a daughter, Carol Brown Townsend, of West Hampton, New Jersey.

Central's prescription counter was closed in 1974, and Central was renamed "Central Cut Rate." Alonzo Foster, a pharmacist who had worked in both Reed's and Central, now shared the pharmacists' duties with Bill at Reed's. Margaret managed Central as a health and beauty aid store for the next four years. When the roof of that building, which was owned by the Kauffmann-Shure estate, began leaking badly, insurance became impossible to secure.

"We finally closed it out of necessity," said Bill, "because when it rained, it rained harder in some areas inside the back of that store than it did outside. We couldn't tolerate that."

Central closed permanently in 1978. Stock was moved to the bulging Reed's Drug Store. The bulk seed business ended. The Russell Stover franchise moved to Reed's. In the span of fifteen years, Brown Drug Store, Central Pharmacy, Bush and Marsh Drug Store, and Reed's Drug Store had all merged into one store.

To make more room at Reed's, they removed walls. Reed's took over part of the Union Station waiting room, with the pharmacy

department expanding into the station's former women's lounge. In 1986, the Johnsons leased the vacant Orsino Jewelers room next to Reed's to use as an office and stockroom. Bill ran the pharmacy and Margaret was business manager.

Then in May 1996, Bill, who was seventy, suffered a heart attack. Forty years after Bill bought Central, the couple decided it was time to sell. Inventory and prescription files were sold to Eric Amber of the Medicine Shoppe.

On June 29, 1996, the long legacy of four Brownsville drug stores ended when Bill and Margaret Johnson closed the door of Reed's Drug Store behind them for the last time. They now share an active retirement at their Pearl Street home. All of their three children, Dr. William F. Johnson III, Mary Grace Johnson Bohna, and Muriel Johnson, live nearby.

In this saga of two pharmacists, there is one aspect of Grant Brown's life we have left untouched. When I hear the name Grant Brown, I do not think of pharmacies. I think of photographic treasures. Grant had a wonderful collection of glass plate negatives depicting historical scenes of Brownsville. It is that collection, many of which were reprinted in the Brownsville *Telegraph*, which made his name familiar to some area residents.

Who were the photographers who took those pictures? Do all of those glass negatives still exist? Next we conclude this series by seeing another side of Grant Brown, local historian and collector of historic photographs of Brownsville.

SEARCH UNCOVERS FORGOTTEN PHOTOGRAPHER OF GRANT BROWN NEGATIVES

"This photo is from the collection of Grant Brown, Brownsville pharmacist and student of local history."

In the 1960s, those familiar words often appeared in the Brownsville *Telegraph* beneath a historic photograph of Brownsville. A caption describing the scene was usually written by Grant Brown, who frequently loaned glass negatives from his collection to the *Telegraph* for publication.

A few weeks ago, while I was talking with Margaret Johnson about Grant Brown, she surprised me by commenting, "Grant Brown never took a picture." I guess I had not thought about that possibility, since I

had always associated the name Grant Brown with turn-of-the-century photographs of Brownsville.

How ironic, I thought. The man I remember for his collection of glass negatives was not a photographer himself. Then I began to wonder. Who created the images that comprised the Grant Brown collection? I decided to try to determine the identity of the photographer, then trace ownership of the negatives from that person to Grant Brown and beyond. It was not as simple as I had expected it to be.

In 1980, the late John Bogorae wrote a story for the *Tribune-Review*. Accompanying the story was a team photograph of the "Brownsville Colored Athletics football team" of 1911. Bogorae mentioned that the photo had come from the "Grant Brown (Pratt - Foster - Williams) collection."


PHOTOGRAPHS

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Who were Pratt, Foster and Williams? John Bogorae identified William Pratt as "a professional photographer" who had taken the team picture. No further information about him was offered, and no clue was given as to the identity of Foster or Williams. Did Pratt take other photos that were in the Grant Brown collection? Did the other two men take some of them?

Seeking some answers, I turned to the "bible" of Brownsville history, J. Percy Hart's 1904 book *History and Directory of the Three Towns*. The index listed neither Foster nor Williams, but Pratt was there. On page 213 were photographs of William D. and Rebecca D. Pratt, accompanied by a biography. As I read it, I felt sure I was looking at the face of the forgotten man who had created many of the photographs in the "Grant Brown collection."

William D. Pratt was born in Smithfield, Pennsylvania, in 1870. A school teacher for ten years, he spent his summers as a carpenter and builder. As a pastime, he studied photography. His love for taking photographs and his success at it as an amateur led him to take it up as a profession.

In May 1899, he purchased an art studio in downtown Brownsville and set up a photographic shop. Hart's book described Pratt's studio as a

"phenomenal success." Hart wrote, "His work ranks among the best in Western Pennsylvania and his studio is the rendezvous of lovers of art from far and near."

In the preface of the book, Hart remarked that with few exceptions, the photographs in the book were taken by William D. Pratt. Hart wrote, "Mr. Pratt has a large collection of negatives of scenery and points of historic interest and allows no opportunity to escape him to add to this collection." Many of those negatives became part of the Grant Brown collection.

My next task was to identify the "Foster" mentioned in the phrase "Pratt - Foster - Williams." Brownsville residents Harold Richardson and Margaret Johnson helped me.

Hal Foster, 1961

"Foster was the fellow who owned the Palace Studio," Harold said. Mr. and Mrs. Foster operated the studio, he told me, recalling that he had his picture taken there as a child.

Margaret Johnson consulted a 1953 telephone book and found a listing for H. N. Foster of Park Avenue, Brownsville. She also discovered an ad in the 1941 Brownsville High School yearbook placed by "Mr. and Mrs. Hal N. Foster, owners of the Palace Studio." Located at 322 Market Street, it was on the second floor above Jay's women's clothing store, next to the Nut Shop. The building was razed in 1971.

Apparently, the glass negatives passed from Pratt to Foster. Did Pratt sell his studio to Foster? It appears likely, but I have not found that evidence yet.

We had identified Pratt and Foster. But who was Williams? A partial answer to that question came from Detroit, home of Grant E. Brown Jr., son of the late pharmacist. We had a pleasant telephone conversation about his father and the glass negatives.

"When did he start collecting historical memorabilia?" I asked Grant.

"About 1950," he guessed. "The merchants were having a promotion in town, an 'Old Time Days' with clerks dressed up in '90s costumes. As part of it, he put some old pictures in the store window,

and people started bringing him pictures."

Margaret Johnson remembered that. "The *Telegraph* would sell ads at special prices during Old-Fashioned Bargain Days," she said. "The paper would run pictures from Grant's collection along with the ads. They also ran them on a weekly basis."

I asked Grant Jr. if he knew how his dad acquired the glass negatives.

"Do you think he purchased them?"

"I doubt it," Grant said. He then mentioned, without my asking, that he thought someone named Williams had given them to him.

J. Park Williams, 1938

"Williams!" I exclaimed. "You may have supplied a missing piece of the puzzle."

I told him about the "Pratt - Foster - Williams" phrase. Grant replied that he felt that Williams may have been associated with the Palace Studio. That clue jogged Margaret Johnson's memory. Her digging revealed that J. Park Williams was a photographer who had worked with the Fosters at Palace Studio. A good friend of Grant Brown, Williams spent a lot of time at the drug store with fellow photographers Alonzo Cozard and "Red" Giles. Williams died in 1955. If Grant Jr. is right about Williams passing the negatives on to his father, Grant had them by 1955.

Grant Brown kept the glass negative collection at Central Drug Store, where Margaret Johnson recalls first seeing them in the 1960s. She remembers Grant identifying some of them for Dan Goss of the *Telegraph*. Grant also worked with John Matta and later John Bogorae when selecting negatives to publish in the newspaper. Grant wrote the captions himself.

"I can see him yet," said Margaret, "standing at the typewriter. He never sat at the typewriter. He was short. There were two prescription counters. There was a short one for him and a tall one for Bill." She laughed. "I can see him leaning over that counter, thinking and writing and typing."

I asked, "Was he drawing mostly upon his own memory, do you

think? Was he a student of local history?"

"Oh yes," she replied emphatically. "He knew all about the town. People would come in and start reminiscing about different things with him. And he knew where a lot of the places were."

On January 25, 1975, Grant Brown died following a lingering illness. Born in Fayette City in 1903, he had been a South Brownsville resident since 1913. Even after his death, he continued giving to his community.

Grant's son told me that the glass negatives were given to the Brownsville Historical Society.

"I carried them up to Bowman's Castle myself," he said. Historical society member Harold Richardson volunteered to have some of the negatives printed for the society. Harold told me that he and William Patterson, another Brownsville native, sorted through the negatives to decide which they should print.

"There were an awful lot of them that were practically the same image," Harold remembered, "except maybe a slightly different angle. We picked out about 135 of them, and Bill Patterson printed them. We donated the prints to the historical society."

So the well-traveled negatives had come to rest at the historical society. I thought my research was finished . . . but it wasn't.

Let us not forget who created much of that wonderful collection. It is photographer William D. Pratt to whom the community owes a true debt of gratitude. The story of Mr. Pratt, who died half a century ago, has an unhappy but important lesson to teach us. For there is something I have not told you about Mr. Pratt.

William Pratt lived in a big house at the top of Baltimore Street. He died at home, and when his widow later passed away, Charlie Watkins and his wife Jane purchased the property. Behind the house on the same property was a two-story barn-like structure. On its ground floor were garages where Pratt repaired Indian motorcycles and sold Black Jack gasoline. Above the garages, Pratt had set up a second photographic studio. Many years after he died, still sitting abandoned in that upstairs room were hundreds of glass negatives.

J. W. Kisinger was president of the Brownsville Historical Society in 1980. Kisinger had always wondered if there were any photographs that Pratt might have kept to himself. One day, Charlie Watkins told him about the negatives in the barn.

As Kisinger later explained to John Bogorae, he (Kisinger) had been making "every effort to acquire anything in the collection stored in the barn, but hadn't been able to set up an appointment, since Watkins said he wanted to go through it himself." Kisinger continued sadly,

"Unfortunately, before anything could be worked out, the barn caught on fire in May of 1980 and was partially destroyed." Following the fire, Watkins told Kisinger to "come by and pick up the collection or he would throw it out."

Kisinger said, "I was able to salvage about fifty or sixty good glass plates stored in four or five cardboard boxes containing possibly three or four hundred plates." He gave them to the historical society. The rest were unsalvageable, the emulsion partially melted on the plates by the fire, the glass plates stuck together by the heat and water. Regina Lilley, Charlie Watkins' daughter, told me that some of those negatives may also have previously sustained water damage from a leaky roof.

There is a lesson here that bears repeating. Fire has destroyed the pre-1927 *Telegraph* archives. The Jesse Coldren notes and manuscript have vanished. The First Methodist Church records have burned. The neglected Pratt negatives were damaged by water and fire.

Please. If you have any vintage photographs or precious historic documents, see to it that a quality copy is made of each and is stored separately from the original. Fortunately, the good-hearted willingness of Grant Brown to share the William Pratt photographs with the entire community will enable our grandchildren to see lost Brownsville as it once appeared.

Thank you, Grant.