



Image. WL Brown portrait. (Source: The Miami News, 1981).

William and Martha Brown

William and Martha Brown were Black farmers who owned at least sixty acres of farmland in Brownsville between about 1900 and 1921,¹ in the area bounded by NW 27th Avenue, NW 46th Street, NW 31st Avenue, and NW 50th Street.² In 1916, they platted twenty acres of their farmland as Brown's Subdivision, with small farming plots and home lots for Black property owners.³ Brown's Subdivision became the namesake for the neighborhood, which was called Brown's Sub by residents, and later evolved into the name Brownsville in the late 1930s with the creation of the Brownsville Improvement Association in 1938.

William and Martha Brown were born as slaves, around 1848 and 1852, respectively. By the end of the Civil War, they were teenagers and became adults during the Reconstruction years of 1865-1877. They arrived in Miami before 1900 and were established farmers in the Allapattah Prairie by that time, living alongside other Black and White farmers, most notably the German-born Fritz family who owned a large farm near NW 27th Avenue and NW 36th Street.⁴

William and Martha Brown are notable for their economic success, having been born as slaves, and going on to own a large farm in Allapattah and becoming real estate developers. William Brown is also notable for his civic involvement and his advocacy for his Black community. He advocated for the first school for Black students in Allapattah in 1909 (the precursor to the Allapattah Colored School at 4801 NW 25th Avenue) and Dade County appointed him as the school supervisor.⁵ He was a registered voter between 1870 and 1910, in spite of County-wide voter disenfranchisement in 1908.⁶ In 1910, he bravely signed a petition support an Independent movement of the Lemon City Precinct, of which his farm was a part. At that time, his name was removed from the petition by election officials on the grounds that he was a "negro."⁷

In 1916, William Brown continued to be politically active in an effort to improve the value of his real estate holdings, and was involved in a petition to improve

1 US Census Information, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920

2 Real Estate Transactions and Tax Reports, published in Miami newspapers 1910 - 1919

3 Brown's Subdivision plat, 1916, Miami-Dade County Clerk of Courts

4 "United States Census, 1900," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3S3HY-6W93-QKF?cc=1325221&wc=9BWQ-MJS%3A1030551201%2C1030823201%2C1030831301> : 5 August 2014), Florida > Miami-Dade > ED 32 Precincts 3-4, Lemon City, Coconut Grove & Precinct 7, Miami Miami city > image 54 of 74; citing NARA microfilm publication T623 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

5 The Miami News (Miami, Florida) · Tue, Aug 10, 1909 · Page 1 www.newspapers.com/image/298835545 Accessed 28 October 2022.

6 "Names Stricken from the Registration List" Miami Morning News-Record, 20 Oct 1908, Tue · Page 4 <https://www.newspapers.com/image/615754189/?terms=%22A.C.%20lightburn%22> Accessed 28 February 2023.

7 "Lemon City Politics." The Miami News, 20 Oct 1910, p4. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/298827335/> Accessed 28 October 2022.

Know All Men by These Presents
In witness whereof the said W.L. Brown and Martha Brown,
his wife, have hereunto set their hands and seals this 30th
day of May, 1916.

W.L. Brown
Martha Brown (X)

Executed in the presence of
J.R. Brown
E.E. Harvey

SPECIAL NOTICES

NOTICE to all colored people who
want to buy land in the upper Ev-
erglades, call or write W. L. Brown
(colored), Belle Glade, Fla.

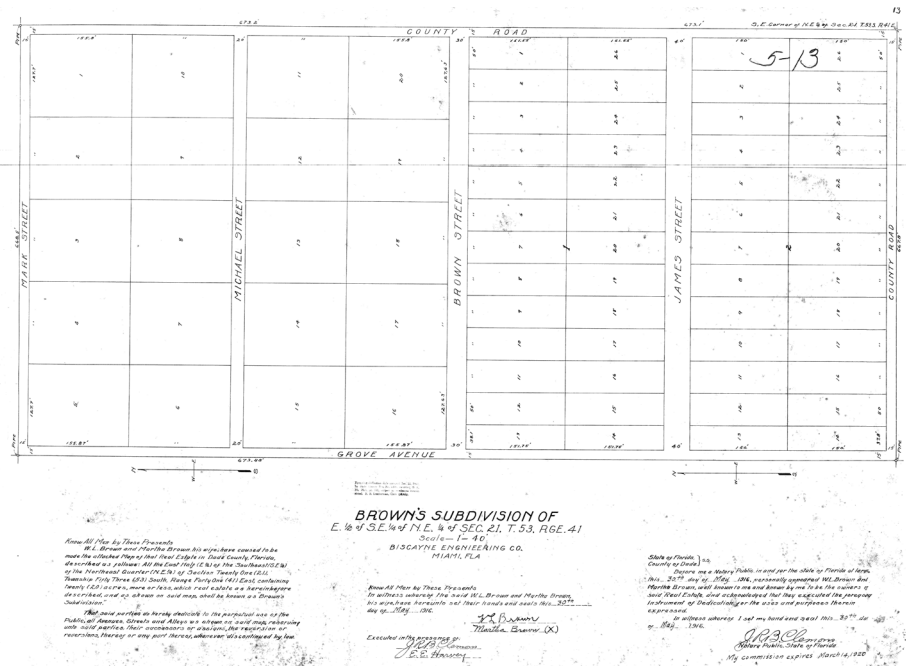
A petition from patrons represent-
ing fifteen children of school age
was received, asking for a school for
colored pupils at Allapattah. It was
ordered that four months be made
the term, and an appropriation of
\$25 was made, patrons to furnish the
school building. W. L. Brown was
appointed supervisor.

Image. 1916 Brown's Subdivision Plat
Map. (Source: Miami-Dade Clerk of
Courts).

Image. 1916 Brown's Subdivision Plat
Map signed by both W.L. Brown and
Martha Brown. (Source: Miami-Dade
Clerk of Courts).

Image. 1924 advertisement for
Everglades land. (Source: The Miami
Herald).

Image. 1909 article about Allapattah's
school where W.L. Brown was appointed
supervisor by Dade County. (Source: The
Miami News)



Dade County roads.⁸ In 1917, W.L. Brown was listed as a member of the Dade County Guard during World War I, alongside pioneers such as concrete block manufacturer C.J. Rose, tax assessor and Everglades developer J.F. Jaudon, State Senator F.M. Hudson, architect Walter de Garmo, and author Kirk Munroe.⁹ In 1918, W.L. Brown joined the patriotic effort of World War I by planting half a bushel of castor beans on approximately 7 acres of his property in order to provide castor oil as a much-needed lubricant oil for airplane machinery for the war.¹⁰

William and Martha Brown sold most of their land holdings in Brownsville by 1921, and moved to Okeelanta, near Lake Okeechobee, where he continued to work in real estate development.¹¹ ¹² They later moved to Fort Lauderdale where they died in the late 1920s. They are buried in Lincoln Memorial Park Cemetery.

⁸ The Miami News (Miami, Florida) · 14 Jun 1916, Wed · Page 7 Accessed 14 September 2022.

⁹ "New Dade County Guard will ask Recognition" The Miami News (Miami, Florida) · Mon, Dec 31, 1917 · Page 8 <https://www.newspapers.com/image/298524803> Accessed 28 October 2022.

¹⁰ "Staple Crops for Dade County Will Combat Adverse Conditions Agricultural Bureau of Chamber of Commerce." Miami Herald, vol. 8, no. 34, 6 Jan. 1918, p. Pag e [One]. NewsBank: Access World News - Historical and Current, [infoweb.newspapers.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A114CF48AE24B9638%40WHNPX-11627703D77E9E30%402421600-11627704A4EE8760-116277058CF3AC80](https://www.newspapers.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A114CF48AE24B9638%40WHNPX-11627703D77E9E30%402421600-11627704A4EE8760-116277058CF3AC80). Accessed 7 Feb. 2022.

¹¹ "United States Census, 1920," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GR6W-Q13?cc=1488411&wc=QZJG-YWZ%3A1036469901%2C1038487301%2C1038515301%2C1589332346> : 10 September 2019), Florida > Palm Beach > Okeelanta > ED 137 > image 11 of 12; citing NARA microfilm publication T625 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

¹² "Special Notices" Miami Herald, 25 Mar. 1924, p. 26. NewsBank: Access World News - Historical and Current, [infoweb.newspapers.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A114CF48AE24B9638%40WHNPX-14D6054322F9FACD%402423870-14D10D52EDF1398B%4025-14D10D52EDF1398B%40](https://www.newspapers.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A114CF48AE24B9638%40WHNPX-14D6054322F9FACD%402423870-14D10D52EDF1398B%4025-14D10D52EDF1398B%40). Accessed 7 Feb. 2022.