

A WESTERN ROMANCE, or  
CONSEQUENCES OF A JEFFERSON DAVIS DECISION  
Lewis V. Spencer  
April 1996

INTRODUCTION

Athenaeum talks this year have often been about ancestors. And these ancestors have usually lived and worked here in Christian County, and are well known to many of you.

I can make no such claim. My mother was born in S. Dakota, my father, in San Francisco. Mother's mother was born in NE Pennsylvania, Mother's father in Hamilton, Ontario.

Dad's mother was also born in the San Francisco area, his Father in Ohio. But my parents met and married in Hamilton, New York. Later Dad served as president of Hillsdale College in Michigan and followed that with 15 years as president of Franklin College in Indiana. So I was born in Michigan and grew up in Franklin, Indiana.

GRANDPARENT FAMILIES OF DOROTHY BURNS

Mother Dorothy Burns' family was unusual enough that I thought you would find it an interesting story. Mother's mother was MARY BROWN, daughter of the Rev. Samuel Franklin Brown, who lived in northeast Pennsylvania (Fig. 1).

Despite his age, and heart problems as well, Rev. Brown, at a Methodist conference in the early 1880s volunteered to become a missionary to settlers in Dakota territory. (Mrs. Brown cried all that night.) But he took her and his younger children to Walworth Co., S.D., and spent the rest of his life building Methodist churches in Northcentral S.D. Daughter Mary Brown worked in the Post Office, and also recorded documents in the Courthouse in Bangor, the county seat in the early 1890s, and eventually served as postmistress.

Mother's father was WILLIAM BURNS, son of Patrick Burns, an Irish immigrant to Canada during the Potato Famine of the 1840s. The Patrick Burns family came from the O'Byrne clan (Byrnes) who lived south of Dublin, Ireland in the Wicklow Hills. This family settled temporarily in Hamilton, Ontario, where Will Burns was born in 1848. Patrick and his family were evidently iron workers, and he with other Irish immigrants migrated to Chicago in the early 1850s to work on Great Lakes ships. His wife died in the mid-1850s, while Will was still young.

When Civil War became a reality Patrick made arrangements for the care of his 3 younger sons and a daughter and enlisted in the Union army along with Thomas, the eldest son. Will was placed in a military school in Alton, Illinois.

## WILL BURNS AND THE CIVIL WAR

In 1864 Will and many classmates quit school and enlisted in the Union Army. It was May 9, and Will claimed to be 21 years of age although he was only 16.

After a month or so of training how to march, take orders, and load and shoot guns, his unit, the 140'th Illinois was sent to Sherman's army in Georgia, then fighting Gen. Johnston's army for Atlanta, GA. Will fought all that summer, starting with the Battle of Kennesaw Mtn and ending with the Battle of Atlanta. You will remember that Sherman against Johnston was really one long battle, with almost no pauses. (Years later Will would have nothing to do with postwar veterans' organizations, saying that had these men seen any real fighting they would avoid such nonsense.)

In fact, if Jefferson Davis had not replaced Johnston with Hood, Johnston's army, like Lee's at Richmond could have torn up Sherman's army in the Atlanta trenches and very likely my grandfather would have been a casualty. Then someone else would be making this talk!

Will told my grandmother of one soldier nearby in the same trench, whose head was barely creased by a bullet as he raised up and who said, "Was I really hit?" But the man was dead within a week.

Fortunately, after about 5 months, when just going on 17 years of age Will (Fig. 2) was mustered out of the army on Oct. 29, as Sherman rid his army of troops he didn't need for his march to the sea, and sent some home to vote for Pres. Lincoln.

## THE FIRST TRIP WEST, TO DENVER, THEN WEST TO STAY

Young Will Burns immediately went West, to Denver, where he stayed through much of 1865. We have a quilt which was made for him by some kind Denver ladies.

Then he returned to Chicago and earned a law degree at the old U. of Chicago. At this point, his family expected him to marry a sister of the Chicago banker John Walsh and settle down. But he had left the Catholic Church; and as he later told my grandmother Chicago always gave him catarrh--sinus trouble.

Perhaps this was why he chose instead to go West again, suddenly appearing at old Fort Sanders, where soldiers were guarding those building the Union Pacific transcontinental railroad. This was 1868, and we think he served as a guard against Indian attacks--they were glad to have Civil War veterans. Even Calamity Jane served as guard there at about that time.

## PROBLEMS WITH SOURCES OF INFORMATION

I have been telling some of Mother's stories to this point. She said that her father had average height, but very broad shoulders. When I asked what he did after the railroad builders had moved on, Mother said that she didn't know. Her father died when she was only 10. And her mother had never quizzed him about his past, lest she learn things she didn't wish to know. My mother thought he had been in the Indian wars, but she knew only a few disconnected stories about his life after 1868, for the next 20 years and more.

Hopeful for some clues I wrote for a copy of the pension application he submitted in 1904, which asked, "WHERE HAVE YOU LIVED SINCE DISCHARGE? GIVE DATES. On the two lines allotted Will Burns included Fort Sanders '68-'71, Laramie, Wyoming '71-'78, Sydney, Nebraska to '80, Chamberlain, D.Terr to '83 and LeBeau to '89, and Bangor, S.D. to 1904.

If you read Western stories you've heard about Sydney, Chamberlain, and LeBeau, all famous for cowboys, freighting, and ranches. Laramie, Wyoming is different; it was adjacent to Fort Sanders and it was incorporated after railroad work proceeded further west.

If Will Burns moved into Laramie from Fort Sanders then he would have been an "original settler" in Laramie. So I wrote the Laramie genealogy Society and received back a nice note: "Yes indeed. The very first city directory, in 1876, advertised a Carriage Repair and Blacksmith shop under the name William Burns, located in the middle of their famous "Old Town."

On telling this to Mother, she remarked that he was a most unhandy man with tools when she knew him--but it was possible if the family had been blacksmiths in Ireland and iron workers in the Chicago shipyards.

## INDIAN WARS, CATTLE DRIVES, BANKING

With this information, Mother's stories, and with what an old friend said about him in his obituary, it was possible to trace Will Burns' career in rough outline.

One of his stories that Mother related, evidently from the Indian wars, was about an Indian girl casualty whose rifle was "too hot to hold" from firing. And his obituary noted that he "fought with Crook as a lieutenant of the regulars." This incident probably occurred in Crook's big drawn battle with the Sioux not long before Custer's unit was wiped out.

Mother also said that when her father's dreams gave him a problem sleeping he would comment to Grandmother that he had been "freighting" again. In the early 1880s he took part in freighting supplies from Sydney and Chamberlain to the Black Hills. In fact, one of mother's Brown cousins wrote a short story, "One night in old Deadwood," featuring "Will Burns" as a spokesman for his freighters.

Mother also related that when her father went to "Old LeBeau" it was to start a bank, with a friend; but later his so-called "friend" absconded with the funds, leaving him only the building. And he did admit in a letter to Mary Brown that he had been subjected to a trial once, for striking a man in LeBeau (possibly his "friendly partner.") In Old Lebeau he also ran for District Attorney, but was defeated.

#### JUDGE WILLIAM BURNS and MRS. MARY BROWN BURNS

Grandfather moved to Bangor when the county seat of Walworth Co. was moved there, the year S. Dakota became a state. And there he won the election for County Judge. So it was "Judge" William Burns, 45 years old, who courted Miss Mary Brown, 27 years old, in the Walworth Co. Courthouse and Post Office, in Bangor, S.D., using surreptitious, hand-delivered letters, in the spring and summer of 1893. (See Figs. 3 and 4.)

The wedding took place on Sept. 12, 1893, and grandfather was so late arriving that it was almost called off. He gave two explanations for this, perhaps both true. The first, that deep in reading some book he forgot to check the time. The second, that he had promised to wear a particular gift tie to his wedding, and couldn't locate it.

After one miscarriage my grandmother bore a girl in 1895. She was named Dorothy at about the time that Frank Baum's young friend Dorothy died, perhaps 30 miles away. Finally also Judge and Mrs. Burns had another daughter, born in 1899 and named Ellen for the beloved sister of Judge Burns. Fig 6 shows the family at home about 1900. (Both daughters died here in Hopkinsville at the age of 93. William Turner can add these connections to his list.)

Judge Burns died in 1906 after 13 years of married life, the last few were clouded by increasing deafness and the kidney ailment that claimed his life.

His obituary, written by an old friend, included the following notes: "Judge Burns .... was in 1889 elected (and re-elected) county judge ... and from 1896 to 1900 served as states attorney. Deceased was a man of wide information, and ... a host of friends. He leaves a wife ... and two daughters."

The frontier town of Bangor also died about the same time, and the reborn town of LeBeau died again a few years later.

#### GRANDMOTHER "MAY" MOVES

I'll briefly sketch Grandmother's subsequent actions. First, she went back to work in the Post Office, moving to the new county seat in Selby. Then, she sold her house and household goods, drove with the young girls in a horse and wagon south the full width of S. Dakota--to Tripp Co. (see Fig. 5) and lived for a year on a claim. With money from sale of this land she moved the family back East, settling in Hamilton, New York, where Colgate U. is located. There Dad, teaching in the high school, met and later married Dorothy Burns, Judge and Mary Burns' beautiful older daughter, my mother.

## APPENDIX. Two Dakota Stories and a 1969 Trip

### ELEMENTARY EDUCATION in 1910

In 1910 in Tripp Co. Grandmother found an elementary school class which was only a short pony ride from the house, so that her younger daughter Ellen (my aunt) could enter school.

According to my Aunt, on the first day the teacher asked the class, "From what city did Columbus sail on his first voyage to America? On hearing no "correct" answer the teacher said "Columbus sailed from Paris. And in what country is Paris?"

Thoroughly cowed, no student dared try an answer, so the teacher added, "Why, Paris is in Spain!"

Having found this class dreadfully wanting, the teacher began each day thereafter by having the class repeat together, "Columbus sailed from Paris, a city in Spain."

Aunt Ellen always related this story with relish, but I don't think my grandmother found it funny.

### THE "BAND OF FOOLS"/"CRAZY BAND"

When Mother was about 5 years old the whole town of Bangor turned out to attend a meeting in honor of several old Sioux Indians. At this meeting the spokesman for the Indians told a story through an interpreter. In the middle of his talk the spokesman spied my mother, who had worked her way to the front. He walked over to her, picked her up, and held her so everyone could see. Then he put her down, holding her hand, and went on with his story.

The story turned out to be about events in late November of 1862, along the Missouri River west and north of Bangor, about a group of young Indian men. The people of Bangor called them the Crazy Band. Other Indians called them the Fool Soldier Band.

In 1862 the Sioux Indians were very bitter about a treaty by which much of the state of Minnesota was opened to white settlement. On a hunting trip, four young braves got into an argument about some chicken eggs that belonged to a white settler, and this resulted in the murder of the settler and his wife and children. Afterwards the Indians rode quickly to a nearby Indian village. There a meeting of Indian Chiefs decided that since soldiers would come anyway as a result of these murders, the Indians had nothing to lose by a large attack on Minnesota settlers.

So in August Indians entered hundreds of homes, murdering men, women, and children. Nearly 500 people were killed the first day of the attack. Then, in expectation that soldiers were coming the Indians fled westward, with occasional captives.

In response to the plea for help, Pres. Lincoln sent Gen. Pope, fresh from the battlefield of 2nd Bull Run. Gen. Pope succeeded in rounding up 307 Indians, including ringleaders of the attack. After a trial, all the captured Indians were sentenced to be hanged.

But Pres. Lincoln had ordered Gen. Pope to submit to him detailed records on each person tried. Please recall that early in 1862 Shiloh took 24,000 casualties, north and south combined. 2nd Bull Run had just cost another 24,000 casualties. In September Antietam cost just under another 24,000. In December Fredricksburg was to cost another 18,000. Then came Chancellorsville, Gettysburg and Vicksburg.

Well, between Antietam and Fredricksburg Lincoln was spending time studying Pope's records on the 307 captured Indians. He finally permitted execution of only 38 of the 307, the ringleaders and the most murderously inclined.

During this uprising a Chief named White Lodge killed most of the settlers in a community in southwestern Minnesota. Then he fled northwestward with a number of captives--women and children, eventually reaching the point along the Missouri River about where it crosses into what is now North Dakota.

A U.S. Army Major coming down the Missouri River, learned of the captives and told about them at a trading post farther on--perhaps where Evarts developed.

Among the Indians living nearby and learning about the captives was a young brave about 20 years old named Charger. Charger and 11 other young Indians had agreed to dedicate themselves to good works only, and were called the Fool Soldier Band by other Indians.

Charger and his friends got on their ponies and set out to find White Lodge. When they found him they bartered for the captives, eventually trading blankets and horses in a bargain that left them with only a single horse. Then, with no blankets against the bitter late November weather of North Dakota, they put the woman who was sick on the one horse, and carried the children as they walked perhaps 30 miles back down the Missouri River to the cabin of a settler.

This was being honored at Bangor 38 years later, with some of the surviving Crazy Band as honored guests. The spokesman was saying that the child he carried was about Mother's size and age.

#### A 1969 VISIT to WALWORTH COUNTY

My brother and I drove Mother and Aunt Ellen to Walworth Co. in the summer of 1969. We visited the small, but at the time well-kept cemetery where both Judge W.H. Burns and Rev. S.F. Brown are buried. There is no other trace of Bangor: the earlier rivalry between Bangor and Selby is described in the Golden Anniversary book (Ref. 4).

The Methodist Church in Selby holds the Rev. S.F. Brown in high honor as the founder of this church and many others (Ref. 7). His family and the Burns family were included in the 50'th anniversary volume about pioneers in the county. And both Mother and Aunt Ellen found old acquaintances still living there.

I inquired about any surviving records of the LeBeau bank, with no success. But my brother had been given a notebook of grandmother's; and perhaps a dozen pages were still fastened together with a rusty pin. On removing the pin, we found the

pages full of ancient money transactions, apparently from Old LeBeau!

When we drove through Mobridge, it was a joy to see the beautiful sign paying tribute to the "Fool Band."

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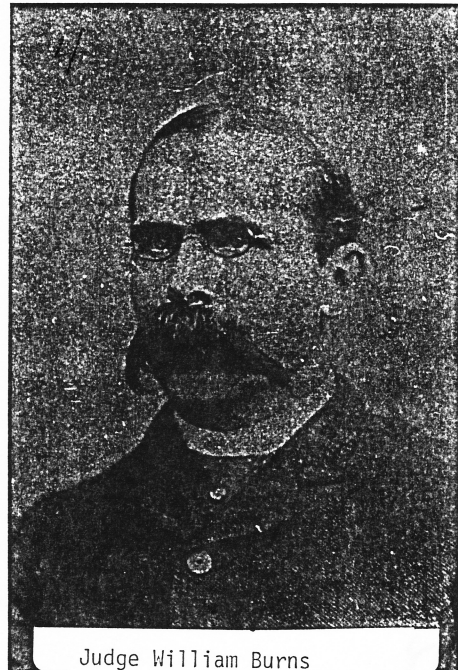
Rev. S. F. Brown



William Hamilton Burns



Mary Alice Brown

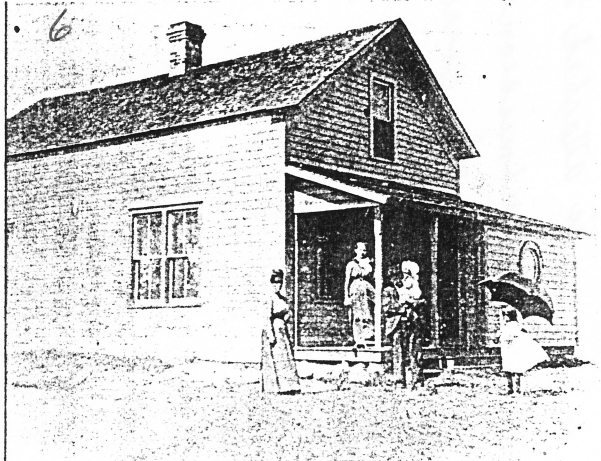


Judge William Burns

*May, 1911. All ready  
to drive 200 mi. to Tripp Co.*



Dorothy, Mary Burns, Ellen



Burns Family Home