

The Brown Girls and Cross Border Shopping

Many immigration stories are based on individuals leaving home to find their fortune or some seeking safety and security or perhaps they were only searching for adventure. For the Gawn Brown family, “crossing the line” (the American / Canadian border) was a recurring event and going in one direction did not mean you had to stay. In this story are family members who left Canada, or the U.S.A., until circumstances changed and they were drawn back, always knowing that there would be someone to welcome them at their destination. Many of these tales feature young women for whom the outcome was a marriage. Jane Ann Brown and her sister Ellen Brown and their cousin Sarah Lindsay set out in their teens and each found that the new setting included a husband. Likewise, the youthful widow Olive Brown and not forgetting the two young divorcées, who came from ‘over the line’, in the early twentieth century. For each of them, did their hope for fortune, security and adventure centre on finding a husband or was that just how it turned out?

I have followed members of the Brown family of Rawdon Township, Lower Canada and their travels. My friends John and Gloria Weafer of Kitchener, who are my cousins, have shared some of the story of their descent from Jane Ann Brown, daughter of Gawn Brown who was a brother of my great grandmother Susanna Brown Parkinson.

Let us begin with the first great trip for Gawn Brown, taken with parents and siblings. They were from County Antrim, a place that faces Scotland across the North Sea and is linked to it by the Giant’s Causeway, the result of a battle between the Irish giant Fionn MacCumhaill [pronounced Fan M’cool] and Benandonner, his Scottish contemporary. The Browns knew about the giant and would say “big as Fan M’Cool” to describe a very large person; my father and his siblings learned the expression from their father, a son of Susanna Brown. She left Antrim around **1823** and perhaps spent a winter living in Montreal before they settled on their four, hundred-acre grants at Rawdon, in **1824**. One each to father Robert Brown and sons Gawn, William and James; aged 18 to 10. The female head was his wife Margaret McMullen, with daughters Jane, Elizabeth, Susanna and Agnes (Nancy), aged 13 to 6. Our "grandma who came from Ireland" said to her grand children that the boat was so small she could reach out and touch the water. Regarding the first winter, she told another granddaughter of freezing her finger tips because she had no gloves and only a cloak to wrap herself in going to school during their first winter.

In **1831**, Robert Brown was shot and killed by a neighbour. He was only 48 and what is known of his demise does not reflect well on him – one suspects drink and definitely bullying was involved. His widow and sons, despite this, made the little farms on the Lake Morgan Road leading to Kildare prosper.

Gawn Brown is noted in George Copping’s Journal several times in **1837** and these entries are recounted in UP TO RAWDON¹ but do not always paint him in the best light – perhaps a man with a temper but also ambitious and community minded. He married Margaret Finlay from County Cavan whose father Richard had settled on Rawdon’s Second Range; Margaret’s brother and uncle were named Cornelius Henry and she so named one of her sons. The baptism of Margaret’s seventh child, in January **1842**, was the last event at Rawdon for the couple because

by that September, Gawn was settled in Montreal and recorded on the city census. Lovell's Montreal Directory **1842** locates "Gaun [sic] Brown: Tavern and Grocery, St. Lawrence, corner Lagauchetière Street". Gawn inhabited one house and was building three more. There were fifteen residents – family, servants and tenants – nine were born in Ireland; ten were, like the Browns, "Church of England and Ireland" and five were members of the "Church of Rome".

On 31st January **1844**, when Gawn's youngest sister, Agnes, married at Trinity Chapel, Montreal, the witnesses included father and daughter Gawn Brown and Jane Ann Brown who each witnessed in strong handwriting. Shortly after this, the family left Lower Canada. The details as to how and why are uncertain but there was a great wave of immigration from that province west to Upper Canada and south and west to the United States. The Quebec newspapers were filled with stories of the prospects outside Lower Canada for those who were not comfortable with the politics, language, religion or climate at home. We know that Jane Ann married in Upper Canada in **1845** and her father remarried in **1847** in Wisconsin; for clarity, instead of chronology, the story here breaks into two parts.

Jane Ann's and Ellen's Stories

The route they followed and the reasons for their choices must mostly be speculation. However, I will begin with Jane Ann's story as she was the first to settle away from Rawdon and Montreal. She may have travelled to Upper Canada with her family when they left Quebec, or possibly she started alone.

Jane Ann was born at Rawdon, 7 September 1827, and baptized there three weeks later. Her parents, of Lot 26, Seventh Range had signed the register as did the witnesses and the minister, the Rev. J. E. Burton who (kindly for us) added addresses: Hugh Law (neighbour) of Lot 26 / of 6th Range, Eliza Brown (Gawn's sister) of 28 / of the 7th and Fanny Finlay² of 16 / of the 2nd. Jane Ann had been sixteen at her Aunt Agnes' marriage and was just eighteen when she married Henry O'Brien [sic] by licence, at London, Ontario, 22 October **1845**, the witnesses were a William Stone and Catherine Burke who were not of Jane's family. He was Irish-born, a tailor, 21 years. They lived in a frame house in Ingersoll, Oxford County, twenty miles from London, on the January **1852** Census and had a daughter Margaret O'Brien (and other spellings), who was born c. **1849**.

Jane Ann was widowed sometime in the years after 1852 and before 1861; death information for Henry not known. She appears next on the 1861 census in the home of her younger sister, Ellen Kirkland whose story leads to many questions. Ellen had married James Kirkland on 28 September **1859** in St. Thomas' Anglican Church, Montreal; both were residents of Rawdon. John Kirkland was a witness³. One cannot know why Ellen went back to Rawdon from Wisconsin; possibly due to the death of her father in **1857** or **1858** (which follows below). I had suspected, initially, that she stayed with her aunt and uncle, Agnes and David Kyle who were living there 1852 - 1856 after working and living in St-Timothée, Vermont and Montreal. Ellen named one of her sons for David Kyle, born the year after his death. However, in **1856**, the Kyles had left Rawdon when the railway opened, for Wellington County. Possibly, Ellen went to the

Finlays, her mother's family, who had farms on the Second and Third Ranges which is where the Kirkland family lived and creates a possible scenario for romance.

In **1861**, Jane Ann O'Brien, a widow with a 12-year-old daughter Margaret shared a log house with James Kirkland, husband of her sister Ellen, at Anson Township, Victoria County. This is what is now called 'cottage country' Minden Hills, Haliburton; it was surveyed in 1858. It had a population of about 300 persons⁴ in 1869, but by that date James and Ellen were in Kansas. Their first four children were probably born at Anson but the births were not registered. The eldest, Cornelia, must have died as an infant; the second, born in 1862, was named for Jane Ann (see footnote 6). In **1870**, the family were not on the Kansas census but they are on the 1875 state census at Oakland, Clay County; the two youngest children it is noted were born in Kansas. James may have rented elsewhere before acquiring the land he settled on. A daughter was born in 1873 but Ellen died in **1875** before the state census was taken. Ellen's family are named in the section updating her brothers, below.

Jane did not accompany her sister's family to the USA. For the purpose of telling this story, I must make some assumptions about what happened to fill in the gaps in the line of facts presently available. We know that she was with the Kirklands in **1861**; the census in Ontario commenced in mid January. Ellen's second daughter was born in 1861 - 1862 and two more children were noted as Canadian- born in **1864** and **1868**.

Jane Ann did not stay long in Anson after the census. She was married to John Gowdie [sic Goudie] at St. John's Presbyterian in what would later be called Belwood, West Garafraxa on January 6, **1864**. Her aunts Agnes (Kyle) and Jane (Burns had moved to West Garafraxa in 1856. Also living there was Jane's first cousin, Isabella Lindsay, a daughter of Elizabeth Brown, who moved there after her 1860 marriage to William Robinson of Rawdon whose family was at Garafraxa from after 1852. Isabella may have been a visitor with her aunts and met William there but they returned to Rawdon to marry in their home church.

Jane Ann and John Gowdie [sic] were parents of Ellen Cornelia, born 4 December 1864 and was baptized 6 June 1865. A second daughter, born 4 September 1867 was baptized, Johnanna [sic] Eliza Jane, on 4 February 1868. Both were recorded at St. John's Presbyterian Church in Belwood, West Garafraxa. **1868** was a difficult year for Jane Ann; her husband and second daughter died early in the year, apparently. We do not have registrations for them but Mrs. J. Goudie [sic] placed an advertisement in the Fergus News-Record on 16 March 1868 and again on 29 May 1869 advertising her farm for sale: "the North East half of the South West half of Lot No.11, in the Township of West Garafraxa, containing 80 acres — 40 acres of which are cleared, 25 ploughed, and part of 1 sown with fall wheat. The lot fronts on the gravel road 6 miles from Fergus, log house and stable, and frame barn on the premises. Well watered. Price \$800--cheap."

John's children went to Pennsylvania with members of his late wife Sarah Ann Greenman's family. A son Joseph returned in later years and his son Ernest Goudie farmed at East Garafraxa⁵.

In **1870**, Jane Goudie, a widow, 41 years [sic], born in Canada East lived at Kansas City, Missouri with her daughters Ellen Goudie and Margaret O'Brien, 19, a seamstress born in Canada West but not identified as her daughter.

Between **1870** and **1880**, Jane Ann married John / Edward Capson / Copson. The marriage was short-lived; she was a widow on the **1880** census and kept a boarding house. The tenants included (daughter) Margaret, now married to Oliver O. Towers who was listed as head of house, and her second daughter, Ella Goudie. There were 12 boarders⁶. In **1885**, Jane advertised herself as Ann J. Copson, a nurse at 1617 Cherry Street, in Hoyt's Kansas City Directory.

In **1900**, Jane Ann lived in Kansas City, with her son-in-law Ernest A. Norris (a city clerk, later a realtor) and her daughter, Ella and their daughters Jean and Jessie. Jane Ann confirmed her immigration was in **1869** and that she was mother to four children, with two living. This suggests that she had another child with Henry O'Brien. Jane Ann Brown Goudie Copson did not, as far as we know ever return to Canada; she died in Kansas City, March 16, **1907**.

Ernest A. Norris had been active in the Democratic Party in Missouri and was a friend of Harry Truman. While travelling in Washington, DC, once, the Norris sisters insisted on calling on Truman (it was after 1953 and he was no longer president) to the chagrin of their companion, (who had refused to get out of the car). Truman on seeing who was at the door exclaimed, "It's the Norris girls." They had been popular figures in Kansas City.

Back to Ontario: Between 1904 and 1909, Jean Norris Bell (now divorced from her first husband George T. Bell had visited "relatives" at Garafraxa or Fergus⁷. The Weafer family, in their oral history, remember that Jean Norris Bell and her sister Jessie Norris "were attending a church camp in Fergus when they met W. G. Beatty". They have a photo of young people, from that era, including the aforementioned three in a large group with a minister. The ultimate result – Jean married William George Beatty, in **1909**. He was a partner in Beatty Brothers who made barn equipment and domestic implements. He became president of the company. Jean and W. G. had four children; a grandson Perrin Beatty, became a Progressive Conservative federal cabinet minister (1985 - 1993) and in 2022 is president and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce. Jessie Norris (1885 - 1989) married and divorced, remarried tea merchant Joseph L. Fielding in **1919** and settled at Guelph. Jessie's only daughter died in childhood. Ella Cornelia Norris returned to Ontario in **1919** and lived with the Fieldings. She died at Guelph, 22 February **1936**; her middle name Cornelia is on her death registration and honours Ellen Brown Kirkland's first daughter and marks the connection to the Brown and Finlay families.

Margaret O'Brien consistently concealed her correct age and burial information names her birth on 7 March 1851, which is doubtful; it should be **1849** to agree with 1852 census age. Her first husband, Oliver Towers, was named in Kansas City Directories until 1893 as a "driver". In **1896**, she married Charles Roth. Charles was wealthy and only reported being employed in 1920. He was in real estate, as was Ernest Norris. Charles died in 1929 and Margaret in **1931** and are buried in the Norris plot at Elmwood Cemetery, Kansas City. Margaret did not have children and was never resident in Canada after her childhood there.

Gawn Brown

The earliest evidence for Gawn Brown in the USA is his marriage contract with Olive Holmes, a young American woman from New England⁸, on 7 March **1847** in Rock County, Wisconsin that was registered on 22 March 1847 (Wisconsin County Marriages, 1836-1911). Margaret Finlay's death is not registered in Lower Canada and so, we must assume that she died enroute or after they arrived, in 1845 or in 1846.

Gawn's family would have travelled by boat from Montreal to Toronto or Hamilton or Buffalo; it was before there was rail travel from Montreal to Upper Canada. Buffalo seems most likely because steamship lines based there carried over 93,000 passengers in 1845, most of them on the daily runs to Detroit, Lake Erie and Lake Michigan ports. Travel to Chicago was frequent and usually took three to four days⁹. They needed to reach Lake Michigan to connect to the Rock River, Wisconsin, a tributary of the Mississippi, that was approximately 299 miles (481 km) long, and ran south through the states of Wisconsin and Illinois to the Mississippi.

The London and Gore Railroad from Hamilton to London became the Great Western Railway (in 1845). It may have been how Jane Ann reached London but it is unlikely that her family accompanied her there on their journey to Wisconsin.

Gawn arrived in Rock County at a period of growth and development¹⁰. As the county seat, Janesville was a center of government. Early prosperity was based on the development of the Rock River for water power. In the 1840's dams, bridges, lumber, grist, and woolen mills were built along the Rock River¹¹. Gawn married Olive Holmes at Janesville in March **1847**. In **1850**, Gawn and his wife Olive had an infant son and with them were the six remaining Rawdon-born children. Ever the entrepreneur, Gawn was then a boatman on the east side of the Rock River. By the state census in **1855**, the family had begun to scatter. Information is sparse; there were three males (we assume this was Gawn, his youngest Rawdon born son, Gawn, junior and Olive's baby William James) and three females (assumed to be Olive, Ellen and one female not identified, perhaps a servant or did Olive and Gawn briefly have a daughter?)

I am unable to trace any of the Rawdon born sons in **1860**. Olive lived at Janesville with William and George D. (c. 1857). She is not identified as married or widowed but we have assumed that Gawn died c. 1858. I have written about Olive and her sons at the close of this article.

Update Information on the Brown Children:

Richard Finlay Brown was not traceable for a number of years and there is no record of Civil War service. He was married and living in the San Francisco area when a son was born in November **1867**, where he was a deputy sheriff in **1870**. He was a teamster / waterman at Bodie, CA in **1880**. He died in **1881**; His wife and children remained in the Alameda area. The family, years later, re-interred his body at Reno, Nevada. It appears from public trees on Ancestry that his descendants still in California,

Ellen Brown (aka Eleanor) was discussed with her sister Jane Ann in the opening section concerning her marriage to James Kirkland, who was an Ontario farmer, in **1861**; they moved to Kansas in **c. 1870** and he was a farmer at Oakland, Clay County, Kansas in **1875**.

Children of James Kirkland and Ellen Brown

Cornelia Kirkland, less than one year in 1861, who died as a child before 1875.

Jane (Jennie) Kirkland c. 1862 in Canada.

James Kirkland c. 1865 in Canada.

David Kyle Kirkland c.1868 in Canada (named for his great uncle, husband of Agnes Brown). He Married Myra Pace 1890. Parents of **Annie Ellen Kirkland** 1892, **John**

Anthony Kirkland 1893-1960 his children were **Ellen Kirkland** 1915, **John Anthony Kirkland** 1919.

Duncan Kirkland June 1871 in Kansas, died August 1928 in San Francisco, CA

Ellen Kirkland 1873, Clay County, Kansas and died 28 October 1888 of typhoid fever.

Ellen Brown was deceased for the Kansas State Census of **1875**. A tombstone in Pleasant View Cemetery at Oakland, marks her death that year and the burial of James Kirkland in **1910** and their daughter Ellen, 1888.

Cornelius H. Brown enlisted in the Union Army at Janesville, Wisconsin, a private, in the Wisconsin 12th Light Artillery Battery, 20 August **1862**. See more at [From Union Jack to Union Blue](#). He lived in San Francisco in **1870** and in Chicago with his wife, in **1880**, where he died 20 October **1889**. He was buried in Kansas City, Missouri by his executor, the husband of his niece, daughter of Jane Ann Brown (details are in part one of this essay).

Gawn Brown, junior (identified as G. N. Brown) was a mill employee at Gold Hill, Storey County, Nevada in **1870**; it had a population of about 8,000 working on the Comstock lode of gold and silver. He may have lived in Washington Territory and California **1871 – 1878**; details are included in [From Union Jack to Union Blue](#), following his brother Cornelius. He does not have a Civil War service record.

There is no record of Jane Ann in the United States until her emigration from Canada in 1870. Despite this, she had a warm connection to her stepmother, Olive Holmes Brown, who was about five years her elder, and she must have invited her to come to West Garafraxa. Olive left Janesville and moved there in the 1860s. She married on 24 December **1868**, in Jane Goudie's home, near Belwood, to Matthew Stewart, a Scottish widower from East Garafraxa with ten children; there were six, aged 11 to 23, with them in 1871. The witnesses were John Burns and Mrs. Burns, brother-in-law and sister of Gawn. We know that Olive's son William James Brown either accompanied her or joined her subsequently and lived in Ontario for several years. George D., the younger boy is not found in documents after 1860 and I think it fair to say he may have died before 1868. In **1881**, Olive was living with husband Matthew Stewart at Arran, Bruce County North, Ontario but they are not found thereafter.

Around **1872**, in Ontario, William James Brown married Euphemia McMullen, who was born in Scotland c. 1852. Her surname curiously, is the same as the grandmother of her husband, Margaret McMullen. He was employed as a labourer and carpenter at Owen Sound, Stratford and London and lived at London in **1881** with four sons – William James, George Allen, Oliver Dougal, Cornelius Henry. They left soon after that for Chicago where his half brother Cornelius Brown was living; a fifth son Stanley C. Brown was born there in 1889.

William J. senior was a gravel roofer and died in **1921**, in Chicago. His older sons married and succeeded in that city. Cornelius Henry Brown was the last to die in **1974** and another lived and died in Los Angeles. Details are in text updates <https://uptorawdon.com/>. I have not found descendants of any members of William James Brown's family, unless a granddaughter, Euphemia Brown, married and had heirs. Her sister Olive was unmarried and died 20 September **1978** in San Diego, California.

¹ <https://uptorawdon.com/> was published by the author in 2013. Reference is to Part One pages 49 and 50.

² The register can be misread as #11, which was an unoccupied lot at this time. Frances (Fanny) Finlay was Margaret's sister and their father Richard Finlay held Lot 16 of Second Range from 1823 with Letters Patent issued in 1827.

³ The Kirkland family were recorded on the 1861 Ste-Julienne Census, it is a parish of the old Rawdon Township. James' parents were James Kirkland and Jane Walsh, John was his 25-year-old brother. It seems that James was born "on sea", which claimed on some censuses, some four months before his baptism in Montreal. Their sister Margaret Kirkland was Mrs. John Hamilton, my grandmother Mary Kinsey Hamilton's adoptive parents. (UP TO RAWDON pages 474-475.

⁴ <https://www.ontariogenealogy.com/Haliburton/ansontownship.html>

⁵ Gloria Weafer discovered that one daughter was ill and remained at Galt with the Diggins family and died in 1871. Joseph's death registration named his mother Jessie O'Brien. He was born 14 November 1855 and predates Jane's marriage by nine years. Did Ernest, when registering Joseph's death in January 1933, mistake his stepmother Jane Ann who was O'Brien by her first marriage as mother? Ernest stated she was born in the United States, which is where Jane Ann had lived after the death of John Goudie.

⁶ Jennie Kirkland, an 18-year-old "servant / waitress" was Jane's niece Jane, in Kansas City, on the 1880 census.

⁷ The visit that prompted a return to Canada may have been with the family of her great aunt, Agnes Kyle, whose wedding her mother witnessed. Agnes's grandson Dr. Norman Kyle of Fergus, was a popular veteran of World War One or perhaps the visit was with the family of Jane Ann's cousin, Robert J. Brown, whose business was as a manufacturer of carriages and other vehicles at Belwood. His son Oscar Blyth Brown was later involved in sales for Beatty Brothers. Jane Ann and Ella also kept contact with step-son Joseph Goudie at East Garafraxa.

⁸ Possibly she was born in New York, because there was a Holmes family from that state on the 1850 Janesville census. Her birth was named as Massachusetts on the 1860 Janesville Census. Vermont was said to be the birthplace of William's mother, in 1900 Chicago Census. On the 1871 Wellington census, Olive was born in the USA and her origin was German.

⁹ <http://history.buffalonet.org/1840-50.html>

¹⁰ Janesville was a settlement of less than 300 persons in 1840; in 1847 it was 1,458, with 3,000 persons in 1850 and by the 1870 census it was 8,789.

¹¹ <https://www.janesvillewi.gov/about-janesville/history-of-janesville>