

## **Benjamin Franklin Strong Brown / Brown family biography**

The Brown family had been prominent in Monmouth County since the Revolutionary era. Benjamin's father, Cornelius Hardenburg Brown, worked in masonry and made his fortune building in Matawan, Holmdel, and, he claimed, "over three-fourths" of the buildings in Keyport, where he raised his family.

Benjamin Brown was born in Keyport in 1856, and attended the Glenwood Collegiate School in Matawan. He learned the printing trade at the *Keyport Weekly* and then studied law at a local Matawan firm. His true passion, however, was the newspaper trade. He was employed at the *New York Herald Tribune* and spent a summer at the *Asbury Park Press* before purchasing the *Matawan Journal* in 1890. He purchased the *Keyport Weekly* in 1906, consolidating publication in Keyport after which he modernized with innovative new printing equipment. He established a number of other local papers throughout Monmouth County, which he both edited and published. He was also a member of several publishing industry organizations.

In addition to his newspaper interests, Brown was employed as a real estate and insurance agent. He married Jeannette Selleck in 1884, and they had seven children. The Browns lived on Main Street near the commercial district until 1904, when Brown purchased the Burrowes Mansion, which he willed to his daughters Mabel and Mildred. Mabel lived in the home with her husband until 1974.

Benjamin was also prominent in a variety of other endeavors in Matawan.

- Served on the town's board of education, and was partially responsible for the establishment of its graded school system.
- Appointed postmaster in 1897.
- Helped found and organize Monmouth County's first power plant, helped establish and promote the Matawan Water Plant, and sat on a committee which promoted area commerce and industrial development.
- Interested in the development of a national inland waterway system, and received several appointments to a national commission on the subject by the State of New Jersey.
- Enlisted in the New Jersey National Guard in 1877, and served on the executive committee of the Raritan Guard Library and Military Association.
- Helped establish a library in Keyport, where his sister Josephine was the town librarian.
- Served on a number of fraternal and benevolent organizations, including the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.
- Worked locally on Teddy Roosevelt's "Bull Moose" presidential campaign in 1912, during which time he mounted his own (unsuccessful) run for U.S. Congress.

Around 1920, he purchased a substantial collection of books for the town library from Asbury Park. This gift aided Matawan in its push toward the establishment of a free public library. He later served as president of the Matawan Free Public Library's board of trustees. Benjamin Franklin Strong Brown remained a vital presence in the Matawan community until his death in 1920.

After his death, Brown's daughter Mabel assumed her father's duties as newspaper publisher. She also served on the library's board of trustees for 40 years (1923-1963), much of that time as president. The children's wing built in 1971 was named in her honor. The Brown family continued publication of the *Matawan Journal* until it ceased publication in 1973.

**Sources [Chicago Style format]:**

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