

# **Brown's Drops, "The Old Sutton Remedy"<sup>1</sup>**

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*Brown's Drops*, a medicinal formula registered as No 17522 under the Patent Medicine Act, was manufactured in Sutton, Quebec, by the *Brown's Drops Medicine Company*, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

The following story is meant to bear witness to the lives of men and women who preceded us in the 10 mile by 10 mile territory called "Sutton Township", one of the 95 squares of a geographic chessboard known as The Eastern Townships. Reflecting on our past is also a way to partially answer the perennial question of mankind as we ponder the meaning of our lives and the uncertainty of our future.

## **From Scotland to Sutton via the American Revolution**

The history of the panacea alternatively called "*The old Scotch Remedy*" or "*The old Peacham Remedy*" is better known after the marriage of Ann Otterson, daughter of James Otterson of Chester (now Hooksett), New Hampshire, to Joseph Brown, also of Chester, about 1740. Before becoming the best kept secret of the family it is named after, the famous formula seems to have been prepared and sold in New Hampshire, by Ann's father, "Dr" James Otterson, of whom little is known, except that he was of Scottish descent.

To better follow the story of the "Brown" remedy after the merger of the Otterson and Brown families, some basic genealogical data is in order.

On the Otterson side, James, his daughter Ann and his brother Andrew are said to have arrived from England and settled in Chester, New Hampshire, about 1723. According to the same source, James lived to be 103 years old and Andrew 102. Ann, who was 12 when she arrived in America, died "in a delicate maternal condition", from fright and overexertion after an incident between the settlers and the first occupants of the land<sup>3</sup>.

On the Brown side, Joseph is said to be one of three "staunch brothers", originally from Scotland, who came to Chester via Ireland "somewhat prior to the struggle known as the *French and Indian War*", i.e. before 1754 and more likely about 1730. The

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<sup>1</sup> Une version française de cet article est également disponible.

<sup>2</sup> see [www.granby.net/~d\\_lag](http://www.granby.net/~d_lag); most of the material used as reference in this paper was provided by Mrs Elizabeth Mc Cann, grand-daughter of William Brown Jr. whose scrap-books were graciously made available for this research.

<sup>3</sup> Most of the following genealogical data is from a succinct family history left by William Brown Jr. who refers to information written by Mary Brown on "June 9, 1867"; ancillary data is given in the Appendix.

other two were William and Samuel Brown, but we will focus on Joseph's lineage since the fate of the *Brown's Drops* unfolded on that branch of the family tree.

Joseph Brown and Ann Otterson had five children but "only two survived to mature years, viz. Joseph Brown (II) (1748-1808) who married Elizabeth Curry of Canterbury, N.H., and Ann Brown who married Robert Cochran of Pembroke, N.H. and, after his death, James Knox of the same town."<sup>4</sup> Joseph Brown (II) and Elizabeth Curry initially lived in Chester, on land later known as "W.F. Head's Mill Field", and both Joseph's (I and II) have served all through the American Revolution (see Appendix). They eventually moved to Peacham, Vermont.

To Joseph (II) and Elizabeth Curry were born eleven children<sup>5</sup>: 1) Ann who lived 11 months; 2) Elizabeth who married Asel Jerrold of Greensboro, Vt. and, after his death, John Towle of Craftsbury, Vt. in 1808; 3) Robert who married Sally Bushwell of Hampkinton, N.H. and later lived in Peacham, Vt.; 4) Annie, who died in early years; 5) Sarah, who married J. Bean of Hartford, Vt. and moved to Wisconsin; 6) **Jacob (1783-1851), who married Polly Ayer of St-Armand, Lower Canada (now Prov. of Quebec)**; 7) James, who married Nancy Meader of Newsbury, Vt. in 1824; 8) **Mary (1786-1871), who never married**; 9) **Joseph (III), also referred to as "Dr Brown"**, who married Sally Currier of Warner, N.H. and lived in Lee, N.H.; 10) Samuel, who died young and unmarried; and 11) **a last child whose name is not known and who is said to have died young**. In Elizabeth Brown-Curry's testament, dated May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1828 in the Probate Court at Danville, District of Caledonia, Vt., the children and grandchildren explicitly named as her heirs are: Mary Brown ("*daughter and executrix of my last will testament*"), William, "*son of Jacob Brown of St-Armand, Lower Canada*", Joseph Brown ("*my grandson Joseph Brown, son of Doctor Joseph late of Hopkinton Newhamshire*"<sup>6</sup>), Betsey Towl and Sarah Pease ("*my daughters*"), Robert, Jacob and James ("*my sons*"<sup>7</sup>). Jacob Brown "of Dunham, Batchelor and Farmer" married Polly Ayer (1801-1822) on January 11, 1821. Polly died while giving birth to their son William Ayer Brown (1822-1896) who married Betsey Courser of Glen Sutton (1828-1889). One of their six children was William Brown Jr. (1856-1935) who married Annie E. Booth (1864-1899) with whom he had three daughters and one son (Hildred, Bessie, Hazel, Reginald). After Annie Booth died of consumption William Jr. married Annie Stevens (1869-1929) and, after her death, Hilda Poulton. William Jr's daughter, Hazel Lowder, is the

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<sup>4</sup> See note 3

<sup>5</sup> The names more closely related to the *Brown's Drops* are in bold.

<sup>6</sup> From that quote, one can conclude that there were actually four successive Joseph Brown's, of whom only Joseph (IV) seems to have been still alive in 1828: Elizabeth Brown-Curry's husband (Joseph II, 1739-1796), his father (Ann Otterson's husband), his son ("Dr Joseph Brown late of Hopkinton") and the latter's son ("my grandson" in Elizabeth's words).

<sup>7</sup> One will have noticed variations in names: Betsey's husband is a "Towl" in Elizabeth Curry's testament and "Towle" in Wm. Brown's genealogical notes, whereas Sarah's husband's name changes from "Pease" to "Bean"... genealogical trees sometimes undergo sudden and drastic genetic mutations !

mother of Elizabeth Mc Cann who provided most of the documents used for this research.

The main actors having been placed in time and space, the story of *Brown's Drops* can now more easily be followed.

The elusive "Otterson" phase of the history of the Old Remedy comes to an end when Ann, daughter of Dr James Otterson, marries Joseph Brown, also of Chester, New Hampshire, probably in the 1740's. Ann's husband surely obtained the secret formula from his father in law, from whom he may also have borrowed the much coveted title of "doctor". It is unclear under what name the remedy had been sold before, "*Otterson Drops*" is a possible, yet unsubstantiated, name. From then on, it will alternatively be known as "*Brown's Fit Drops*", "*Brown's Drops*" and "*Brown's Liniment*". One cannot but be impressed by the number of occurrences of similar names in the American pharmacopoeia of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The list of "Brown" remedies -with no known link with *Brown's Drops*-- is indeed amazing. A simple search on Internet produced, for instance, a "*Brown's Indian Herb Bitter*" (patented in 1868), a "*Brown's Household Panacea*", a "*Brown's Iron Bitters*", a "*Dr Brown's Magic Liniment*", a "*Brown's Instant Relief for Pain*", a "*Dr C. F. Brown's Young American Liniment*" (Philadelphia, 1861), a "*Dr. Brown's Shaker Fluid Extract of English Valerian*", a "*Brown's Mixture*" (advertised in the *Texas State Gazette* in 1865 as containing opium), etc. Old bottle collectors are very active on the Web where several elegant bottles, labels, Victorian cards and posters bearing the "Brown" name can be viewed<sup>8</sup>. It is somewhat difficult to believe that absolutely no connection existed between these various remedies: if the active ingredients seem to have had little in common, the fame of a "Brown" formula may still have influenced the choice of name for the others as is still the case in today's commercial wars ("cola" comes to mind).

Little is known of the first two Joseph Brown's involvement in manufacturing and promoting *Brown's Drops* but, considering the fact that they were both enrolled as patriots during the American Revolution (see Appendix), they probably had little time to do so, except, maybe, among their peers. One of Joseph (II)'s 11 children referred to as "Doctor Joseph Brown" in Elizabeth Curry's testament may have been involved but other children of Joseph (II) and Elizabeth, namely Robert, James and, above all, Mary seem to be responsible for establishing the formula's reputation in Peacham.

Until the end of the 1860's, Mary had indeed a good grip on the family business. Private family papers describe her as "a woman of eccentric and quaint character who paid trifling attention to the conventionalities of modern society". In a promotional document for *Brown's Fit Drops*<sup>9</sup> she is called "the Proprietress", a rare feminine

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<sup>8</sup> See for instance <http://members.tripod.com/~bloodhound/patent.htm> or <http://www.antiquebottles.com/medicine/fame.html>

<sup>9</sup> Fits was a generic name for all kinds of sudden attacks of fever, cough, fainting, convulsions, spasms, etc.

attribute in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and the sure sign that she was an entrepreneurial spinster. She introduces herself as “*great grand-daughter of Dr. James Otterson, the original inventor of this Medicine*” and, curious detail probably meant to stress her almost exclusive filiation to the inventor of the formula, “*the only great grand-child excepting her sister now living*”. The eighth child of a family of eleven, she was therefore also a survivor. And as we read her promotional document further, her firm handle on the family business becomes clear : “*All genuine Fit Drops will be signed by MARY BROWN, in her own hand writing. Sold, wholesale and retail, by the Proprietress and her General Agent -- S.P. Redfield, Montpelier, and by their Agents, Dr. E. Brewster, Craftsbury; Peck & Spear, Burlington; Jeremiah Elliott, Canterbury, N.H. ; John M. Martin & Co., and Isaac Watts, Peacham; and Oliver Warden, West Barnet.*”<sup>10</sup> A stamped portrait of Mary Brown, dated 1870, is featured on some of the undated promotional documents pertaining to *Brown’s Drops*, but it may have been produced later from a photograph about which more will be said later, by her grand nephew and business heir, William Brown Jr. (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Mary Brown in 1870

Several testimonials dated between 1840 and 1860 praise the Brown’s remedy as a sinecure for a broad range of painful conditions ranging from fractures to strained muscles, burns, cuts, etc. The list of conditions healed or improved by the remedy becomes longer and longer in promotional documents issued in later years, and one obvious common denominator of these claims is that they all point to strong analgesic, anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties. From what is known of the ingredients of *Brown’s Drops*, such properties are well within what can be expected as we shall see below.

Mary Brown (1786-1871) is thus the first champion of the “*Old Peacham Remedy*” whose biography is relatively well known and whose hand written signature has been preserved<sup>11</sup>. In 1868, the octogenarian Mary left Vermont to join her nephew, William Ayer Brown (1822-1896) in Glen Sutton where her brother Jacob (1783-1851) had kept a farm after spending a few years in St-Armand as a settler. She died at the venerable age of 85, and her old mended tombstone still stands in the Glen Sutton cemetery as a testimonial to a great precursor of the women entrepreneurs of years to come. Before dying, Mary transmitted the formula to her nephew, but in later documents, we learn that Wm. A. Brown allowed the manufacture of *Brown’s Drops*

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<sup>10</sup> Brown’s Fit Drops flier, supplied by Mrs Mc Cann, with copy to Heritage Sutton.

<sup>11</sup> On the label of a bottle of *Brown’s Fit Drops* preserved by Mrs Mc Cann.

“to stand still for a term of years”. His son, William Brown Junior (1856-1935) (Mary’s grand nephew and James Otterson’s great great great grandson), was to become the new champion of *Brown’s Drops* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Things started quickly since, as *The Palladium* put it on September 6, 1900, “William Brown of Sutton has recently closed twenty years for the C. P. R. as time keeper<sup>12</sup>. He is now making preparations to manufacture and place on the market a medicine for the cure of fits”. And what an entrepreneur he was, this William Junior, if one judges by another announcement in a local paper dated December 13 1900: “Wm. Brown received 240 dozens of bottles for the use of his business the past week. His medicine is meeting with a good reception...”<sup>13</sup>. Orders are soon reported to roll in, not only from the Sutton area but from Manitoba, Dakota, Alberta and the Northwest Territories!

William Jr. also operates a maple sugary at Glen Sutton. As the Richford Journal puts it, on January 21, 1909 : “Mr. William Brown has ordered 50 more tin buckets to his sugary at Glen Sutton. This will make him 400 trees that he will tap another Season at Crystal Spring Camp. [...] For the benefit of some of the Journal readers who may have been unacquainted, we will say that Crystal Spring Camp is situated one mile south east of Glen Sutton railway station at the base of Bald Mountain. Here he has erected a comfortable cottage in which to live, a good sugar house with modern improvements, and our friend takes solid comfort making the beautiful syrup and sugar...”<sup>14</sup>. A letterhead from “Sutton, Que., Subscription Agency”, followed by the names of 28 newspapers and magazines also introduces William Brown as “Agent of this Branch Office of the Sherbrooke Daily Record”. William Jr. was therefore well informed and well connected<sup>15</sup>. On March 9, 1898 William Brown represents Sutton (with E.A. Dyer, Dr. Macdonald and John Draper), at the meeting of the Brome County Historical Society when the decision to proceed towards legal incorporation is taken.<sup>16</sup>

In January 1901, the remedy is already patented and the name *Brown’s Drops* has become a trade mark<sup>17</sup>. The *Brown’s Drops Medicine Company* is directed by William Brown Jr. and Jas. (Jim) W. Murphy, his associate. A second office is soon opened at Richford, Vermont, to handle business in the USA and the letterhead common to both offices proudly announces “The oldest medicine in America, first compounded in England by a great physician in 1710”. The trade mark of the company (Fig. 2) measures one square inch, like Mary Brown’s logo, and represents a compass-card with the word BROWN’S (above) and DROPS (below). At the centre, both initials B and D are interlaced inside a circular crown bearing the hardly legible ESTABLISHED

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<sup>12</sup>.The time keeper’s duty was to keep a log of the hours worked by each employee to calculate their pay.

<sup>13</sup>. William Brown, *Scrap-book*, No 12, p. 21

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, No 12, p. 41

<sup>15</sup>. Document No 73-45, Brome County Historical Society, Knowlton, Que.

<sup>16</sup>. William Brown, *Scrap-book*, No 11, p. 162

<sup>17</sup>. Ibid, No12, p. 63

1750. On both sides of the compass-card, a shaded area vaguely resembling the wings of a butterfly is marked TRADE (on the left) and MARK (on the right). Very legible on the yellow boxes used for the bottles of *Brown's Drops*, these words are only visible with a magnifying lens on promotional flyers.



Figure 2: *Brown's Drops* Trade Mark

The retail price of *Brown's Drops* was 25 cents for a 1 ounce bottle, 50 cents per 2.5 ounce bottle and one dollar for the 4 ounce bottle. In today's Canadian dollars, the price of the 4 ounce bottle is roughly equivalent to 21 dollars<sup>18</sup>. One may have noticed that two 2.5 ounce bottles (i.e. 5 ounces in all) cost the same as the 4 ounce bottle : this is probably due to the higher cost of the more fancy 4 ounce bottle<sup>19</sup>. A quick calculation shows that these retail prices were quite comparable to those of today's remedies since the average Canadian salary at the time was about 27 cents per hour<sup>20</sup> whereas the 2 pound loaf of bread was sold for 6 to 10 cents and fresh butter for 20 to 35 cents per pound<sup>21</sup>. In other words, it took about an hour of work at the average salary to purchase 1 ounce of *Brown's Drops*, just as it takes today about one hour of an average salary to purchase about 15 dollars worth of medicine. Newspaper clips of the time, carefully screened by Subscription Agent William Brown and pasted in his voluminous scrap-books, often mention his many business trips to St-John (St-Jean-sur-Richelieu), Farnham, Montreal, Boston, New York, etc. <sup>22</sup> to promote and sell the remedy as well as to purchase the "purest imported goods" about which more will be said below.

William Jr. continued promoting the "Old Remedy" until his death, in 1935. His daughter, Mrs Hazel Lowder, subsequently ran the family business as long as her health permitted and his grand- daughter, Mrs Elizabeth Mc Cann, is now the depository of the 3 centuries old formula. The author is much indebted to her

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<sup>18</sup> One Dollar, in 1900, is roughly equivalent to 21 dollars in 2002 according to [http://www.orst.edu/dept/pol\\_sci/fac/sahr/sahr.htm](http://www.orst.edu/dept/pol_sci/fac/sahr/sahr.htm)

<sup>19</sup> Several artefacts related to *Brown's Drops* are on display at he Sutton Museum, especially one bottle of 4 ounces bearing a commercial identification moulded in the glass (BROWN'S DROPS - SUTTON QUE - WM BROWN PROP ), and a large glass bottle used by William Brown Jr. to store *Brown's Drops* before filling the small bottles in which the remedy was sold.

<sup>20</sup> See <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/justice2000/cyb00bot.html>

<sup>21</sup> See: "Canada le pays de l'avenir », a promotional document published around 1910 to help French speaking settlers, at [www.vivrequebec.com/colons.htm](http://www.vivrequebec.com/colons.htm)

<sup>22</sup> A voluminous collection of newspaper clips was kept by William Brown Jr. in his scrap-books and the author is indebted to Mrs Elizabeth Mc Cann who made them available during the preparation of this paper.

enthusiastic collaboration in this account of the adventures of the Old Scotch Remedy in the New World.

In a promotional flyer most likely written by William Brown Jr. at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a historical summary is presented which somewhat simplifies the history of *Brown's Drops*. It is stated for instance that "*The formulae (sic) was brought to America in 1723, and for years the medicine was made and sold in the Old Granite State (New Hampshire)*<sup>23</sup>. *Later it was brought to Peacham, Vt., where it was manufactured and sold with best results throughout Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and the New England States generally, by Drs. James and Robert Brown, and later by Mary Brown, a great aunt of one of the present proprietors, who continued its manufacture and sale up to 1868. Previous to Miss Brown's decease in 1871, at the age of 85 years, she turned the secret of its manufacture over to the late Wm. A. Brown, who (despite repeated protests) allowed its manufacture to stand still for a term of years. He then imparted the secret to Wm. Brown, one of the present proprietors of the Brown's Drops Medicine Co., with a request that its manufacture and sale be renewed.*"

The "Dr James [Brown]" referred to above is probably one of Mary's brothers, but if a James is to be credited he should more likely be "Dr James Otterson" from whom the Brown family inherited not only a daughter (Ann, spouse of Joseph Brown) but also "the first drop" of the Brown's bucket. The early years of the old remedy thus remain shrouded in mystery until some more definitive research is done. The flyer quoted above goes on explaining that "large sums of money have many times been offered by *Wholesale Druggists*, as well as by other druggists and doctors for the secret of the manufacture of *Brown's Drops*, but all such offers have been refused": William Brown Junior thus also qualifies as a pioneer in the resistance of small business to large corporations.

### **Brown's Drops, "the oldest medicine known to man"**

The "Old Scotch Remedy" was initially advertised for both external and internal use, and for man and beast. An instruction sheet for *Brown's Fit Drops* printed around 1860 stated: "*If you have Fits, Gravel, or any Disease of the Kidneys, Bowel Complaint, or any Nervous Disease, buy a bottle of Brown's Fit Drops and you will find immediate relief and permanent cure. They are also an excellent external application for Bruises, Cuts, Sprains, Burns, &c. Also, an effectual cure for Piles.*"

Under the heading "Certificates", several testimonials are provided, dated from 1842 to 1860, and attributed to users from several Vermont communities (Peacham, Cabot, Craftsbury, Barnet, etc). The directions for use state: "*For a man of strong constitution, take sixty drops on going to bed, in a spoonful of wine or brandy, and forty in the morning when you first get up. For a lady, from forty to forty-five drops, according to the strength of the*

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<sup>23</sup> New-England state famous for its granite; the last words of its official anthem are : "We will sing of Old New Hampshire, Of the dear old Granite State".

constitution. A child of one year of age may take several drops, one of four years may take fifteen drops, --but the dose must vary according to circumstances and the constitution of the patient." And then this warning: "Persons taking this medicine, must abstain from milk, butter, cheese and all greasy food."

Later, under William Brown's leadership, the style of announcement remains similar, but several testimonials from the Eastern Townships are added which feature several prominent family names such as Mme A. J. Dyer, of Sutton, Rev. J. M. Coffin of Glen Sutton and Dunkin, Garret Safford of Sutton Junction, Mark L. Shepard of Abercorn, Amede (sic) Lebeau of the Phoenix Hotel in Sutton, M. and Mrs Harry S. Boright of Sutton and even an editor of the Cowansville Observer. All these local VIP's highly praise the "Oldest medicine in America" and "the Oldest and best internal and external medicine known."<sup>24</sup>

As a summary examination of the ingredients in the Brown's formula will show, such hyperbola was not totally unfounded. Indeed, let us review the main medicinal properties of the ingredients listed on the label of *Brown's Liniment*<sup>25</sup>, a later version of *Brown's Drops* (the "Drops" were sold for internal or external use, whereas the "liniment" was sold for external use only<sup>26</sup>): *Sublimed Sulphur, Spirits of Turpentine, Gum Myrrh and Olive Oil*.

## Sulphur

The therapeutic use of sulphur is extremely ancient. "Sulphur was used by pagan priests 2,000 years before the birth of Christ. Pre-Roman civilizations used burned brimstone as a medicine and used "bricks" of sulphur as fumigants, bleaching agents, and incense in religious rites. Pliny (23-27 A.D.) reported that sulphur was a "most singular kind of earth and an agent of great power on other substances," and had "medicinal virtues". The Romans used sulphur or fumes from its combustion as an insecticide and to purify a sick room and cleanse its air of evil."<sup>27</sup> Homer in the *Odyssey*, 1000 years before our era, mentions Sulphur in chant XXII when Odysseus, upon returning to Ithaca slaughters the many suitors who, in his absence, courted Penelope. After ordering the corpses removed, Odysseus calls for his old nurse Euriclea to: "bring sulphur, this remedy against miasmas..."<sup>28</sup>. Sulphur was often called Brimstone, because it was found on the brim of volcanoes, and its cleansing properties are referred to in the Bible: "brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation" (Job 18:15). Sulphur combustion produces sulphur dioxide whose fungicide and antiseptic properties have been known from times immemorial and are still widely used in the wine industry to sterilize wooden barrels and vats. Similarly,

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<sup>24</sup> Business stationery, The *Brown's Drops* Medicine Co., Richford, V.T., and Sutton, Que."

<sup>25</sup> Collection of the Heritage Sutton Museum.

<sup>26</sup> Source: Mrs E. Mc Cann.

<sup>27</sup> <http://georgiagulfssulfur.com/history.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Homer, *Odysseus*, chant XXII



the sulphur-based constituents of garlic are responsible for its long established medicinal properties, especially as an antiseptic, vermifuge and blood purifying agent.

In an article he cut in a Boston Newspaper for his scrap-books in 1903, William Brown surely took good note that "In recent years, research and experiment have proven that the best sulphur for medicinal use is that obtained from Calcium Sulphide and sold in drug stores under the name of Stuart's Calcium wafers."<sup>29</sup> . Also worth noting, the article reminisces of "the early days when our mothers and grandmothers gave us our daily dose of sulphur and molasses every spring and fall.". The use of sulphur sublimate in *Brown's Drops*, i.e. sulphur obtained by condensing sulphur directly from vapour to solid state (sometimes called "Sulphur Flower"), is therefore neither odd nor facetious.

### **Turpentine**

In 425 B.C., in Greece, Herodotus described in detail the distillation of turpentine, a natural substance whose therapeutic use is already mentioned on Sumerian clay pads and Egyptian Papyrus. Galen and Hippocrates also knew its healing properties for the lungs, the urinary track, the digestive system and, used externally, as a relief for rheumatism and neuralgia as well as for skin problems. Turpentine has been part of the Chinese pharmacopoeia for centuries as a remedy for the excess of phlegm, bronchitis, arthritis, gum and tooth infection, boils, ringworm and other skin infections<sup>30</sup>. Its toxicity at high doses warrants today's warnings for a moderate and well informed use<sup>31</sup>.

Even at the immediate domestic level, handling turpentine is not without danger. In an article from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century found in William Brown's scrap-books, an incident is reported whereby an Ontario man "suffered excruciating agony by reason of an experience he had at his home... Mr Campbell takes vapour baths. He has done so for years, and finds they are a benefit to his health... The other day, the wife of a physician living in this town suggested that he put a little turpentine into the bath. It would be beneficial, she said. He did so on Sunday. The turpentine exploded through some reason or other, and, as may be imagined, with dire results to the man in the cabinet.. Mr Campbell's body was burned in every part right up to the neck. He suffered terribly and, though he is getting over the effects, all the skin on his body is now peeling."<sup>32</sup>. In the same scrapbook, one learns in an article dated May 17, 1901, that "The fire company was called out on Monday to put out a fire in the "*Brown's Drops*" laboratory where the old Peacham, Vt., or rather where the old Scotch remedy

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<sup>29</sup> William Brown, *scrap-book*, No 13, p.28

<sup>30</sup> Julia Lawless, *The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils*, Element Inc., Maine, 1992

<sup>31</sup> See for instance *King's American Dispensatory* , Harvey Wickes Felter, M.D., and John Uri Lloyd, Phr. M., Ph. D., 1898, digitized at [http://www.ibiblio.org/herbmed/eclectic/kings/terebinthina\\_oleu.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/herbmed/eclectic/kings/terebinthina_oleu.html) and more information about Linimentum Terebinthinae (U. S. P.) at [http://www.ibiblio.org/herbmed/eclectic/kings/terebinthina\\_lini.html](http://www.ibiblio.org/herbmed/eclectic/kings/terebinthina_lini.html)

<sup>32</sup> William Brown, *Scrap-book*, No 12, p. 17

know as “*Brown’s Drops*” is being manufactured. The fire was caused by a pot of the medicine taking fire and for a short time it was feared that the building would go but by the quick turnout of help the fire was quickly checked with slight damage.”<sup>33</sup> Other such fire incidents are reported to have occurred at the Brown’s laboratory, although none as serious as that one.

The main source of turpentine in the United States at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a variety of pine (long-leaf pine, or *Pinus Palustris*) found in abundance from Virginia southward to the Gulf of Mexico and westward to Texas. The harvesting methods were so aggressive and so detrimental to the environment that unless drastic improvements were made, warnings were already in print in 1900 that the virgin woods covering those regions would disappear in less than 15 years<sup>34</sup>. Some things seem to never change: the avid pine reapers of the “turpentine mills” of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century were the descendants of the European loggers who had clear cut most European forests two or three centuries earlier to supply timber to wood-hungry shipyards and other industries.

The pine trees were literally scarred and bled to death. Their resin, mixed with water, was distilled in huge copper worms to condense turpentine. Still, according to a newspaper article from that period, turpentine was “so cheap that 10 cents worth at retail, will keep an ordinary family supplied indefinitely with all that is needed for domestic purposes”<sup>35</sup>. Such purposes were: solvent for paint, stain remover, floor cleaner, etc. Evidently the price of the disappearance of virgin forests was not included in that “cheap” price and the old Scotch Remedy was but a drop in an ocean of turpentine. A drop, one may add, wisely chosen for its medicinal properties.

## **Myrrh**

Myrrh is an oleoresin found in a bush (*Commiphora Myrrha*) growing in East Africa, especially in Somalia and Ethiopia as well as in the Arabian peninsula. Every western child has heard the exotic name of myrrh among the presents brought to the infant Jesus by the three wise men. Some thirty years later on the Golgotha, it is still a mixture of myrrh and vinegar which the roman centurion held at the tip of his spear to Jesus, most likely for its analgesic properties. In ancient Egypt, myrrh was a key ingredient in the embalming of mummies and its use is described in manuscripts almost 4000 years old! To this day it is used in the preparation of perfumes and cosmetics. The Chinese pharmacopoeia uses myrrh against arthritis and to relieve menstrual problems, ulcers and piles. In the west, it is used to fight asthma, mouth infections, common cold, throat infections, etc. It is not considered as safe in high concentrations<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> William Brown, *Scrap-book*, No 12, last page (p.3 of cover)

<sup>34</sup> William Brown, *Scrap-book*, No 13, p.28

<sup>35</sup> William Brown, *Scrap-book*, No 13, p.28

<sup>36</sup> Julia Lawless, *The Encyclopedia of Essential Oils*, Element Inc., Maine, 1992

## Olive oil

“Once upon a time, the gods decided to visit the Earth to assess human behaviour and to ensure that humans worshipped them adequately. They inadvertently arrived in the midst of a lively discussion among inhabitants of ancient Greece who were desperately seeking a suitable name for their new city. Poseidon and Athena both proposed to name the city after them, but Zeus intervened and said that he who would offer the most useful gift to the new city would win. Poseidon started digging the soil with his trident and produced a horse. Athena produced an olive tree and thus demonstrated that food came from the earth and that an olive tree could fulfill many uses. All the women present voted for the goddess of wisdom and she became the patron and protector of Athens, the new city, covering the surrounding hills with olive trees and teaching man the many uses of olive oil.”<sup>37</sup>

Olive is one of the main constituents of the Mediterranean diet (Cretan diet) about which extensive scientific studies have been carried out. The main conclusion of these studies is that olive oil is extremely beneficial to health and longevity. On the web, much data is available on olive oil, especially from the *Librairie médicale Européenne* whose website presents an impressive corpus of scientific data about the benefits of olive oil<sup>38</sup>.

William Brown was a meticulous scrapbook collector and the many articles cut and pasted by him which describe the virtues (and sometimes the perils) of the above four ingredients show that he was well aware of the medicinal properties of the ingredients he used and therefore not so far from the truth when he insisted that his remedy was indeed one of the oldest if not the oldest known to mankind.

## One drop too many : safety issues

Most remedies come at a risk. As far as *Brown's Drops* are concerned, precautionary notices are relatively rare and discreet on labels, boxes and even in the directions for use. Before the replacement of the drops for internal and external use by the *Brown's Liniment*, for external use only, the only statement concerning the ingredients was that *Brown's Drops* contained “neither Opium, Morphine, or other narcotic substance.” We may smile today at such candour, but it is important to remember that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many popular remedies contained opium and other narcotics and that what we call today “drug addiction” or “pharmacodependency” was, for that reason, the very common outcome of many a doctor prescription. To be fair, we must also recognize that although the taboo ingredients have changed, today's prescriptions are still loaded with addictive substances (Valium, Prozac, Ritalin etc.).

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<sup>37</sup> See [http://www.saveurs.sympatico.ca/ency\\_8/8huihist.htm](http://www.saveurs.sympatico.ca/ency_8/8huihist.htm)

<sup>38</sup> See <http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/prom/olive/medinfo/fr/index.htm>

One may read with a touch of cynicism and humour the following testimonial of a druggist from North Troy, Vermont, in a promotional flyer: *“Those buying Brown’s Drops never come back and grumble it is no good ...”*.

On a more serious note, a clear warning reads: *“The dose, as a rule, should not be repeated oftener than night and morning.”* And as far as the purity of the ingredients is concerned, one often reads in *Brown’s Drops* documentation that *“it is made from the purest of imported goods and the public can rest assured that its high Standard of Excellence will always be maintained.”*

### **William Brown, please call home ...**

No adventure is complete without a touch of mystery and drama. The story of the old Scotch Remedy is no exception.

In the handwritten notes left by William Brown Jr. of Sutton, now in the possession of his granddaughter Elizabeth Mc Cann, reference is made to a history of the Brown family in America being prepared by Henry B. Brown, an industrialist from East Hampton, Connecticut. In several letters dated between 1897 and 1901, Henry Brown asks William Brown Jr.’s for any information and documents he may have in his possession about his grandfather Jacob and the other children of Joseph Brown (II) and Elizabeth Curry. In two of these typed letters signed in his hand, Henry B. Brown also sent a small photograph of himself, one captioned *“Your co-worker, For God, Home and Humanity”*, the other *“You may be interested to see “the counterfeit presentment” of your correspondent”*. The summary biographical data quoted above about the 11 children of Joseph Brown (II) and Elizabeth Curry from William Jr.’s handwritten notes is found verbatim for 6 of them in one of these letters dated March 13, 1897. It may have been compiled by William Jr. from that letter or from a sketchy family history left by Mary Brown. For the genealogy enthusiast who may want to pursue this research, these invaluable pointers are quoted again, this time from Henry B. Brown’s letter to William Brown Jr.: *“Elizabeth who married Asel Jerrold of Greensboro, Vt. and, after his death, John Towle of Craftsbury, Vt.”; “Sarah, your grandfather’s next older sister, who married J. Bean of Hartford, Vt. and moved to Wisconsin”; “James, next older to your grandfather who married Nancy Meader of Newbury, Vt.”*<sup>39</sup>, who also *“joined the Mormons, early in their history, and went with them in Illinois”; “Joseph 3<sup>rd</sup>, another and younger brother, next child after Mary.”* Henry B. Brown adds: *“Aunt Mary Brown [...] left a short sketch of the family, which has helped me very much in my work of writing the History and Genealogy.”*<sup>40</sup> Mention is also made of a picture of Mary sent by William Jr. to Henry B. Brown and of the difficulties they faced to produce copies of some documents by hand

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<sup>39</sup> If William Brown’s list of the 11 children is accurate, “next older” means here “born immediately after”.

<sup>40</sup> To the author’s knowledge, Henry B. Brown’s book was never published although significant drafts may still exist that would be most interesting to read.

and to exchange them by mail. Such words as photocopy and e-mail were, of course, not even found in fiction literature at the time.

Henry B. Brown's letters to William Brown Jr. had been sleeping in a folder for over a century when modern technology gave an unexpected twist to this attempt to tell the story of the old Scotch Remedy. A transcript of the Spooner's Journal of Windsor, Vt, posted on Internet by Linda M. Welch of Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH, brings us back to Peacham, in 1817:

*"The subscriber humbly solicits all friends of parental and brotherly affections to give him information, if any can be obtained, relative to the residence and life (if living) of a young man by the name of William Brown, who is about twenty-two years of age and about six feet high with black eyes, black hair, and dark complexion. He is a shoemaker by trade and served in trade in Peacham, Caledonia County, Vermont in the Spring of 1815, after which time the subscriber is informed the said William left that place, but cannot obtain any information in what place he has since lived or what part of the United States he may have traveled, which has excited every tender feeling in the breast of a fond and loving mother incident to a parent's heart in the loss of a child and as moved the parental and anxious feeling of brothers and relatives. The subscriber therefore requests all friends of humanity to give him (as brother to said William), information by letter, if any can be had, as to where the said William is residing, by the public's humble servant, -- Joseph Brown, Peacham, Vt., 28 Jan., 1817."*<sup>41</sup>

According to that notice, the missing "William Brown" of Peacham was about 22 years old in 1817, thus born about 1795. Mary Brown was then 9 years old. When her father Joseph (II) died in 1796, the missing William was in a crib. When the same William vanished "after the spring of 1815", he was 20 years old. Was he Mary's brother?

If he was one of the 11 children of Joseph (II) and Elizabeth Curry, one cannot be surprised that among his siblings, it would be his brother Joseph (III), also known as "Dr Brown", who would sign the public notice to find his whereabouts. But, as indicated above, there is no William Brown in William Jr.'s hand written list of Joseph (II) and Elizabeth Curry's 11 children... Or is there ?

Actually, one name is missing in that list. About the last child it is only said : "11, Died young. \_\_\_\_\_ (last)". One cannot therefore rule out that the child whose name is missing did not actually "die young" but left Peacham at the age of 20 never to be seen or heard of again by his family. Losing trace of any child would have indeed "excited every tender feeling in the breast of a fond and loving mother", especially so if he was her youngest, born hardly one year before the death of her husband Joseph (II). Writing her testament in 1828, thirteen years after the departure of her William, Elizabeth expresses (transfers ?) her affection to another William Brown<sup>42</sup> when she writes: "I give and bequeath the equal one half both in quality and quantity [of two lots of land of 50 and 10 acres respectively, located in Peacham] "to my grandson William Brown, son of Jacob Brown of St. Armand Lower Canada [...] when he arrives at the age of twenty one years."

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<sup>41</sup> See <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~lmfwelch/html/look1811.html>

<sup>42</sup> Who became William Ayers Brown of Glen Sutton, the father of William Brown Jr.

In the Abbott's Corner cemetery, which is located south of the village of Frelighsburg, not far from the Quebec-Vermont border, the inscription from a grey gravestone reads: *In memory of Polly Ayer, Consort of Jacob Brown, who departed this life 8<sup>th</sup> of December A.D. 1822. Aged 21 years, 6 Mo's.*

William Ayer Brown of Glen Sutton, born on December 8, 1822, thus bore as a relic the name of a mother he never knew. The 11<sup>th</sup> child of Elizabeth Brown-Curry and William Ayer Brown, the son of Jacob Brown, of St-Armand, Lower Canada, beside their likely identical first names, thus had also in common a similar "dent" in their early childhood: the former had lost his father in the crib, the latter his mother before he even made it to the crib. It is mere coincidence if Elizabeth singles out two grandsons in her testament, William, son of Jacob, and Joseph, "son of Doctor Joseph Brown", when one is named after Joseph (II), Elizabeth's departed husband, and the other, in all likelihood, after her "departed" child? May a genealogy enthusiast publish, some day, a much delayed but symbolic reply to Joseph Brown's 1817 enquiry on the whereabouts of his brother, William Brown, the estranged shoemaker of Peacham, "on behalf of a grieving mother...".

Their legacy inspires us and, in T.S. Eliot's words:

*"We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time."*

## Appendix : Ancillary data

### 1- The Otterson family

A James Otterson from Hooksett, Merrimack County, New-Hampshire, is listed as an "American Revolution pensioner", aged 83 in 1840 (i.e. born about 1757). He was probably a descendant of "Dr James" who arrived in America with a 12 year old daughter in the mid 1720's, thus probably at least 30 years old at that time<sup>43</sup>. An independent genealogical research mentions a "William Otterson, the grandfather of the Hooksett Ottersons", who "is said to have been in the army and drowned in crossing Lake Champlain in 1760"<sup>44</sup>. Although no age is given for this William, he must have been of the same generation as Dr. James Otterson who, according to later documents about *Brown's Drops*, was the "great physician who first compounded the remedy in England in 1710". A second William Otterson, (William H.) is reported as having joined the army on August 9, 1762.<sup>45</sup>

### 2- Joseph Brown (I) and (II): father and son patriots of the American Revolution

Private "Joseph Brown", Ann Otterson's husband, is listed as an American Revolution patriot in service between 1775 and 1783<sup>46</sup>. His date and place of birth are given as "about 1739, ST" (i.e. Scotland) and he is said to have died in "1796, NH". In the same list, Private Guard Joseph (II), husband of Elizabeth Curry, is said to have been born in 1748 and to have died on February 27, 1808 in Vermont. Joseph (I)'s year of birth, given as "about 1739", is thus certainly in error since his son Joseph (II) was born in 1748. If Joseph (I) was approximately the age of his wife, Ann Otterson, who is said to have been 12 when she arrived in America, about 1723, both were about 37 years old when Joseph (II), one of their five children, was born. Thus 1739 is more likely the year Joseph (I) arrived from Scotland or the year he married Ann Otterson, then about 28 years old. Only 2 of their 5 children survived and, as explained above, Ann died "in a delicate maternal condition", from fright and overexertion after an incident with the first occupants of the land.

### 3- Whose powder horn ?

The powder horn on display at an exhibit organized for the centennial celebrations of Sutton Township in 1902, courtesy of William Brown Jr. (Joseph (I)'s great great grandson), was reported to have been carried by "Jos. Brown at the battle of Bunker Hill in 1777". It may indeed have belonged to one of the 2 patriots, Joseph (I) or (II), but the battle of Bunker Hill took place in 1775 and if the date "1777" engraved on the powder horn is that of its manufacture, neither of the two men could have carried it at Bunker Hill.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See [http://www.usgennet.org/usa/topic/colonial/census/1840/1840nh\\_mp.html](http://www.usgennet.org/usa/topic/colonial/census/1840/1840nh_mp.html).

<sup>44</sup> See <http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/nh/rockingham/history/chapter21.txt>

<sup>45</sup> See [http://www.geocities.com/nh\\_heritage/Genealogy/38.html](http://www.geocities.com/nh_heritage/Genealogy/38.html)

<sup>46</sup>. "DAR Patriot Index - Centennial Edition" (DAR: Daughters of the American Revolution), see [http://www.browfamily.org/HTML\\_Files/BrownJ-K.html](http://www.browfamily.org/HTML_Files/BrownJ-K.html) and <http://members.tripod.com/~searchn/BrownJ-K.html>

<sup>47</sup>. William Brown, *Scrap-book* No 13, p. 47