

James Brown
A Brief Biography
By Bill Poole

James Brown was the grandson of **Joseph Brown** the youngest of the eleven children of John and Esther Makepeace Brown. It is interesting and frustrating that the births of Joseph's 10 siblings are recorded, but I have not found the same for Joseph.

"John Brown and Ester Makepeace daughter of Thomas Makepeace of Boston were married 24th—2nd month by Capt. Humphrey Atherton."¹

Joseph is thought to have been born in Marlborough, MA in 1677, but his name does not appear within the vital records, nor does Charles Hudson mention him in his *History of Marlborough*, although he missed the names of two other children born to John and Esther in Marlborough.²

Children of John and Esther Makepeace Brown.

The births of their first four children are listed in the vital records of both Cambridge and Lexington with slight differences in notation.

1. Cambridge—Joseph Feb 8, 1655/56 Jno and Hester; Lexington—Joseph Feb 8, 1655/56 John and Esther
 2. Cambridge—Elizabeth March 26, 1657 Jno and Hester; Lexington— Elizabeth March 25, 1657 John and Esther
 3. Cambridge—Sarah July 18, 1661 John and Ester; Lexington— Sarah July 18, 1661 John and Esther
 4. Cambridge—Mary Dec 19, 1662 John and Ester; Lexington— Mary Dec 19, 1662 John and Esther
- The remainder of their children were born in Marlborough, MA and appear in the Vital Records there.
5. Deborah April 20, 1663 John and Hester
 6. John Nov, 27, 1664 John and Esteher
 7. Hester Dec 11, 1667 John and Esteher—Hester, d. John and Hester, buried Dec. 15, 1667
 8. Ruth Dec 8, 1668 John and Esteher
 9. Thomas March 16, 1670/71 John and Hester
 10. Abiga(i)l March 9, 1674/75 John and Esther (Hester)
 11. Joseph 1677 (Marlborough)? Does not appear in the Marlborough records.

In the Marlborough records the following appeared: "Joseph, s. John, Sept. 24, 1671. Was slayne with a cart." With the death of their first son, Joseph, John and Esther honored him by naming their last child Joseph, which it was customary to do in those times.³ Although the record of Joseph's birth was not found, he was mentioned in his father John's will, dated November 20, 1696 and probated December 14, 1696⁴

Joseph Brown, the grandfather of James, the subject of this essay, settled in Watertown Farms, now Weston, MA. There he was chosen one of the three town constables for 1701-02 and was cited on March 16, 1701/02 for not delivering his accounts. Apparently he settled the matter for he was chosen as a Selectman 1707 to 1709 and Sealer of Leathers in 1709. "The leather sealer was the town officer who had authority to see that all sales of leather were made honestly as to quality and quantity. The sealer of leather was authorized to put his 'seal' or stamp of approval on items he inspected, tested and certified."⁵

Joseph married **Ruhamah Wellington** in Watertown on November 15, 1699, born about 1680, probably in Watertown, died July 1, 1772 in Lexington, age 92, daughter of Benjamin and Elizabeth Sweetman Wellington. Their first four children were born in Watertown: 1. Ruhamah, born July 15, 1701; 2. Daniel, born December 21, 1703; 3. John, born May 5, 1706; and 4. Joseph, born September 2, 1708.⁶

Joseph and Ruhamah moved to Lexington sometime between 1709, when he sold a piece of property in Watertown, and Mar 10, 1711, the baptism of their son Jonas in Lexington. Ruhamah and Joseph were admitted to the Lexington church on May 31, 1713. Joseph served in Lexington, as assessor in 1714. 1715, 1721, 1722 and

1726. He was a selectman in 1722, 1724, 1725 and 1727. He was chosen Deacon of the Lexington church in 1727 and held that office until his death. He was frequently referred to as “Deacon Joseph.”⁷

Joseph and Ruhamah had their 5th through ninth children in Lexington: 5. Jonas, baptized in Lexington May 20, 1722; 6. James, baptized July 26, 1713; 7. Josiah, baptized August 21, 1715; 8. **Benjamin, born June 30, 1720, the father of James, the subject of this essay**; and 9. William, baptized April 28, 1723. Ruhamah had her first child when she was about 21 and her last when she was about 43. Despite bearing nine children, she lived to age 92, dying July 15, 1772. Joseph had preceded her dying January 11, 1764 in his 86th year. They were both buried in Lexington’s Old Burying Ground.⁸ It was unusual to have nine children and have them all survive to adulthood.



From Death's arrest no Age is free
Memento mori
Here lyes Buried the
Body of Mr JOSEPH BROWN
who having for many years
used the office of a Deacon
well in the Church of Christ
in Lexington, purchased to
himself a good Degree and
great Boldness in the faith which
Is in Christ Jesus, who departed
this Life January ye 11th A D 1764
in the 86th year of his Age.



Memento Mori
Here lies the Body
of Mrs. Ruhamah
Brown wife of
Deacon Joseph
Brown, who depar-
ted this Life July
15th 1772. Aged 92 years.
*Tis but a few whose days amount
to three score years and ten;
And all beyond that short account
To sorrow toil and pain
from death's arrest no age is free*

Joseph's will was Dated November 22, 1757 and probated February 6, 1764. He made bequeaths to all seven sons and to his two grandchildren John and Joseph Comee, children of daughter Ruhamah and David Comee, but he left the homestead and lands to Benjamin.

Item. My will is that the whole of my sd homestead or Messuage or Tenement whereon I now dwell both Lands and Buildings, with ye Orchards, Pastures, Plow Land, Wood Land and Enclosures, with all ye Properties, Privileges, Amenities(?) and Conveniences belonging or in any way appertaining to my sd Homestead lying on both sides of Concord Road containing about one hundred seventy acres be it some more or less, Be and Remain to my Beloved Son Benjamin Brown to have the Hole to him ye Sd Benjamin Brown his Heirs and Assigns forever; Saving to my Beloved Wife her rights, Powers and Improvements in ye Same as aforesaid.⁹

Benjamin Browne, father of James, the subject of this essay.

Benjamin was certainly a well-respected citizen of Lexington, Like his father, Joseph, he was a Deacon of the church, held a number of offices in town and served the community in a number of ways. Charles Hudson in his *History of Lexington*, wrote the following:

He was chosen Deacon of the church 14 Oct. 1768, was a member of the Committee of Correspondence, 1773, 1778; Justice of the Peace, 1775; representative to the General Court, 1783-86. On 10 Dec. 1787, Benjamin Brown was chosen delegate to the State Convention to ratify the Constitution of the United States. At a town meeting held 4 Apr. 1791, he was elected on a committee to present a memorial to Congress, asking them to erect a monument over the remains of the persons who were slain at Lexington on the 19th of April 1775. He was also in office as a selectman, assessor and town treasurer, and served in the militia during the Revolution.¹⁰

Hudson may be mistaken in his statement that Benjamin "served in the militia during the Revolution." He did accept wages for the service of his sons, James and Solomon, but I have not found a record of actual service for him. He was not among those who stood on the Common, and *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors* does not have a record of his service at a later date.¹¹

Benjamin married on December 23, 1742 in Lexington, Sarah Reed, born January 3, 1724/25 in Lexington, died in Lexington December 24, 1774, daughter of William and Sarah Poulter Reed. Sarah and Benjamin had eleven children: 1. Benjamin, born January 1, 1744; 2. Thaddeus, born March 12, 1745/46; 3. Sarah, born March 24, 1747/48; 4. Eunice, born January 24, 1751; 5. Oliver, born July 1, 1753; 6. Solomon, born January 15, 1757; 7. **James, the subject of this essay**, born October 3, 1758; 8. Ruhamah, born April 23, 1761; 9. Susannah, born June 17, 1764; 10. Nathan, born September 5, 1766; and 11. Lucy, born January 17, 1770.¹²

Benjamin died March 4, 1802 and Sarah on December 24, 1774. Their deaths are not listed in Lexington's Vital Records, nor do they seem to have gravestones in any of Lexington's cemeteries.¹³

However, Benjamin did leave a will.

Will of Benjamin Brown

I give to my son James Brown and to his heirs the whole of my Homestead messuage or Tenement on which I now dwell both land and all the buildings with the orchards, pasture, plow land mowing land wood land fences and enclosures with all the properties privileges appurtenances and conveniences belonging to or anywise appertaining to the Same lying in Lexington aforesaid on both sides of the country road so called reserving to my Daughter Eunice Bridge the privilege of improving Sum part of my Dwelling House or the other House which is

called the Shoppe as my Son James Brown and my Daughter Eunice shall agree for a time and until she can accommodate herself Sum other way.

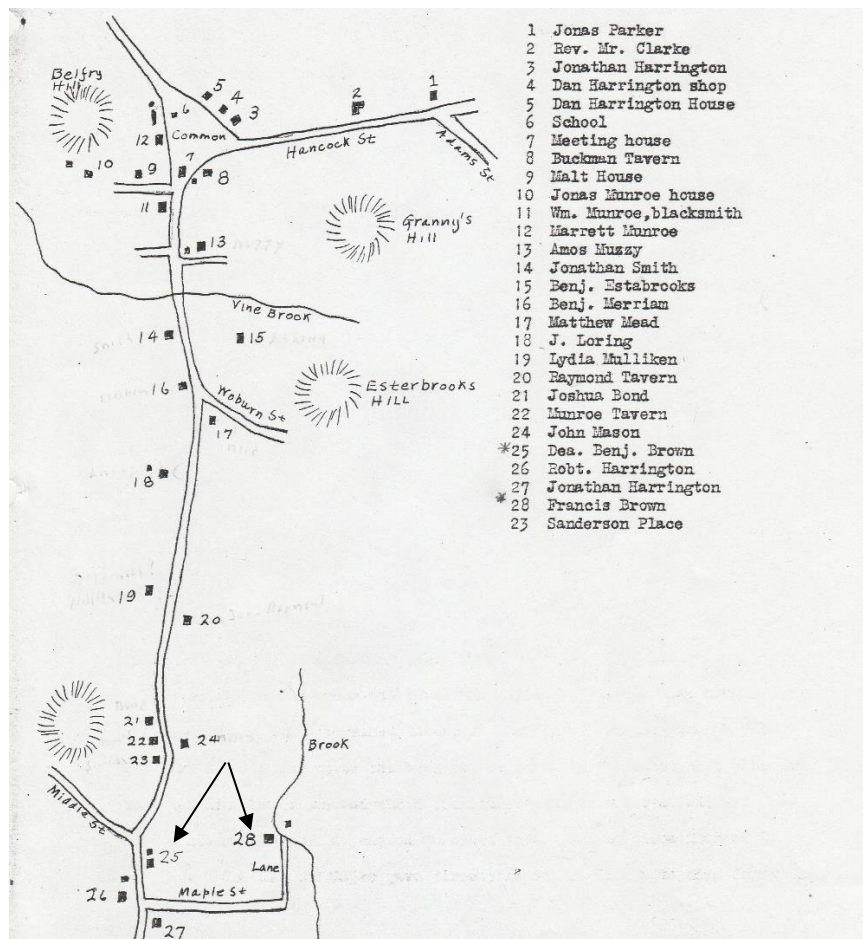
I give to my Son James Brown and his Heirs my Woodlot lying and being in the Town of Burlington also my piece of salt meadow in the Town of Cambridge with all privileges and appurtenances to the Same belonging

I give to my Son James Brown and his Heirs all my utensils for husbandry of what kind name or nature Soever also my Sider mill Press Troughs & measures dry calk Barrels and Tubs belonging to the mill Cellar and to the mill house Chamber

It is my will and I do hereby order and Direct that no Inventory be taken of my estate but that my Executor or Executors give Bonds to the Hon^{abl} —Judge of Probate of wills for the faithful execution performance and fulfillment of this my Last will and Testament according to the True meaning and evident intent Thereof . . .

I do hereby Constitute and Appoint my two Sons Thaddeus Brown and James Brown the Executors of this my Last will and Testament with full Power and authority to Execute the Same and I do also hereby disallow, revoke and Disannul all other wills by me made Confirming this and no other to be my Last will and Testament

Witnesses: William Munroe Jn^o Mulliken Jn^o Harrington J^r Probate April 6, 1802¹⁴



Massachusetts Avenue in 1775

In 1775, there were three Brown family houses located on the north side of Mass. Avenue between Maple Street and where Marrett Avenue (then called Middle Street) intersected with Mass Ave. The two nearest the road, were owned by Benjamin who lived in one of the homes, while an elder son or a married daughter may have lived in the other. The third was owned by Francis Brown, sergeant in the militia and nephew of Benjamin. The Benjamin Brown and Francis Brown homes are starred in the list above and indicated by arrows.

I am extremely indebted to Mike DaRu for determining the precise location of the Brown family homestead and the details of its sale at auction following James's death, and for his collegial cooperation and friendship. The land was valued at \$6,000, a lot in Burlington at \$750 and a half acre of salt marsh in Cambridge assessed at \$100. There was also a half pew in the Meeting House appraised at \$60.¹⁵

James Brown

James was the fourth of the Brown family to serve as Deacon of the Lexington Church. He also served as assessor, 1834, 1836, 1837, justice of the Peace and Selectman 1794, 1802.¹⁶

On April 19, 1775, James, at just age 16, rallied to Lexington Common along with his brother, Solomon, and his first cousins, John Brown, and Sergeant Francis Brown. We do not know if any of them stood near to one another for support, but given the hurried nature of getting into formation the others, like Solomon, may have become separated. Sgt. Francis probably took up a position in accordance with his rank. Perhaps cousins James looked to his older cousin, John, for encouragement. If so, he would have seen John killed at the first fire.

The British appeared and rushed onto the Common before Captain Parker's company was fully mustered, some were still coming into rank when the firing began. The first fire was scattered, but was followed by a crushing volley that stuck the retiring militia, and was followed by a continuous fire until all the militia had left the Common except the wounded dead and dying. John Brown was "killed by the first fire," and the rest of the militia including his cousins fled the Common. Perhaps they did not even see him fall, or if they did they would never forget the agony and terror.

James was one of a group of fourteen of the Lexington militia who signed a joint deposition describing what they had seen and experienced.

We (fourteen names) of Lexington, in the County of Middlesex, and colony of Massachusetts - Bay, in New England, and all of lawful age, do testify and say, that on the morning of the nineteenth of April instant, about one or two o'clock, being informed that a number of Regular Officers had been riding up and down the road, the evening and night preceding, and that some of the inhabitants as they were passing had been insulted by the officers, and stopped by them ; and being also informed that the Regular Troops were on their march from Boston, in order as it was said, to take the Colony Stores then deposited at Concord, we met on the parade of our Company in this Town; and after the Company had collected we were ordered by Captain John Parker, who commanded us, to disperse for the present, and to be ready to attend to the beat of the drum: and accordingly the company went into houses near the place of parade. We further testify and say, that about five o'clock in the morning, we attended the beat of the drum, and were formed on the parade. We were faced toward the Regulars, then marching up to us, and some of our Company were coming to the parade with their backs toward the Troops, and others on the parade began to disperse when the Regulars fired on the Company before a gun was fired by any of our Company on them; they killed eight of our Company, and wounded several, and continued their fire until we had all made our escape.¹⁷

There are two entries in Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War for James' other service:

BROWN, JAMES. Private; detachment of Capt. John Parker's (Lexington) co.; service from May 6 to May 10, 1775, 5 days, at Cambridge, by order of Committee of Safety.¹⁸

BROWN, JAMES. Lexington. Private; list of men returned as serving on main guard under Lieut. Col. Loammi Baldwin, July 3, 1775; *also*, Drummer, Capt. John Wood's (5th) co., Col Loammi Baldwin's (late Gerrish's 38th also given 37th) regt.; muster roll dated Aug. 1, 1775; enlisted May

8, 1775; service 2 mos. 25 days; *also*, same co. and regt.; list of men in need of blankets dated Medford, Aug. 9, 1775; *also*, same co. and regt.; pay abstract for Sept., 1775, dated Chelsea; *also*, company return [probably Oct. 1775]; *also*, receipt for bounty coat or its equivalent in money dated Medford, Dec. 28, 1775.¹⁹

James married in Lexington on May 30, 1780, Betty Reed, born in Lexington December 12, 1757, died November 2, 1837, daughter of Hammond and Betty Simonds Reed. They had nine children, all born in Lexington:
 1. James, born April 23, 1781, probably died on November 6, 1784; 2. Betsey, born June 30, 1783; 3. **James** (named in honor of the lost child), born October 4, 1786; 4. Leonard, born January 3, 1788; 5. Elias, born September 4, 1790; 6. Nabby, born June 27, 1793, died September 1794; 7. Nabby, born June 12, 1708, died October 10, 1822; 8. Hiram, born February 12, 1798, died October 10, 1822; 9. Madison, born May 1, 1802, died February 27, 1838.²⁰

Two of their children died in childhood, James, at less than four years old, and Nabby, at nine months. Two others died too soon as well, Hiram at 25 and Madison at age 35.

James died October 3, 1821 on his 63rd birthday. He died intestate, that is without a will. We often are advised to write a will so that the estate does not have to go to probate. James was a prime example of that. His probate record is 60 pages long.²¹ Betty died on November 2, 1837 at age 80.

Hiram, Madison, James, and Betty, are buried side-by-side in Lexington's Old Burying Ground²²



In Memory of
Mr. HIRAM BROWN
Who died
Oct. 10, 1822
Aged 25

In memory of
MR.
MADISON BROWN
who died
Feb. 27, 1838

ERECTED
In Memory of
Dea. JAMES BROWN
who died,
Nov. 2, 1821,
Aged 63

In memory of
MRS. BETTY
Wife of Dea. James Brown
who died
Nov. 2, 1837
Aet. 80

Footnotes

- ¹Boston, MA: Births, Baptisms, Marriages and Deaths, 1630-1699, Report of the Record Commissioners, Volume, Boston, 1883, page 52.
- ²Hudson, Charles, *History of the Town of Marlborough, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, from Its First Settlement in 1657 to 1864, with a Brief Sketch of the Town of Northborough & Genealogy of the Families in Marlborough to 1860, and an Account of the Celebration of the Two Hundredth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Town*, Boston, Press of L.E. Marvin & Son, 1862
- ³Vital Records of Marlborough, MA to the End of the Year 1849 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Marlborough/>
- ⁴Middlesex County File Probate File Papers, 1648-1871, Volume Middlesex Cases 2000-2999, pages 3064:1 to 3054:6
- ⁵Vital Records of Watertown MA to the End of the Year 1849 at <https://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Middlesex/Watertown/>
- ⁶*Ibid.*; Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913, Volume II, *Genealogies*, p. 63; Vital Records of Watertown, MA.
- ⁷Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 63-64.
- ⁸*Ibid.*; *Lexington Vital Records*; Brown, Francis M. M.D., *Lexington Epitaphs, A Copy of Epitaphs in the Old Burying Ground of Lexington, Massachusetts*, The Lexington Historical Society, 1905, pp. 15-16.
- ⁹Middlesex County Probate File Papers , 1648-1871, Volume Middlesex Cases 2000-3999, pages 3101:1 to 3101:10.
- ¹⁰Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 65.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*; *Soldiers and Sailors*
- ¹²Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 65.
- ¹³*Ibid.*
- ¹⁴Middlesex County Probate File Papers, 1648-1871,, pages 2959:1 to 2959:7, April 6, 1802.
- ¹⁵ Middlesex County Probate File Papers, 1648-1871, Volume Middlesex Cases 2000-3999, pages 3051:1 to 3051:60; Albert W. Bryant, "Lexington Sixty Years Ago," *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society and Papers Relating to the History of the Town*, Read by Some of the Members, Volume 2, pp. 23-24, 47-48, Lexington, Mass. Published by the Historical Society, 1900.
- ¹⁶Hudson, *History*, pp. 457-65.
- ¹⁷Kehoe, Vincent p. 89-90
- ¹⁸Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War Volume 2, p. 631.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*
- ²⁰Vital Records of Lexington; Hudson, *Genealogies*, p. 67.
- ²¹Middlesex County Probate File Papers, 1648-1871, Volume Middlesex Cases 2000-3999, pages 3051:1 to 3051:60.
- ²²Brown, *Lexington Epitaphs*, pp. 13-16.