
Guide to the

Otis and Onetta Brown Papers 1900-1958

.7 linear ft.

Accession Numbers: 85-2, 85-9, 85-10, unnumbered

Collection Number 9

**Prepared by Kevin Kendro
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CITATION: The Otis and Onetta Brown Papers, Collection 9, Box number, Folder number, Irving Archives, Irving Public Library.

Biographical Sketch

Otis Brown was born October 6, 1879, in southern Ohio. As a young man he took a job as a "rod-man" on a survey crew working for the Rock Island Railroad. In 1902, the crew, headed by Julius Otto Schulze, was assigned to survey a ten-mile stretch of land between Fort Worth and Dallas, Texas, from just east of the Dallas-Tarrant County line to a point near Record Crossing on the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. While undertaking the task, the survey crew boarded at the farm of Henry Britain, which was located midway along the ten-mile line. Later that fall, Onetta (Netta) Barcus, began boarding with the Britains while she taught school at the nearby community of Kit.

Onetta Barcus, born April 21, 1880, was the daughter of William Franklin and Katye Barcus. The Barcus family settled in the Western Heights section of Dallas in 1886. W.F. Barcus served as editor of "The Christian Messenger" and preached in the Church of Christ. In 1890, he opened a bookstore in downtown Dallas. Barcus was elected Dallas County Commissioner in 1904.

After attending Dallas schools, Netta Barcus graduated and received a teacher's permit. She began teaching in Western Heights, then took a position teaching in the Kit community (located approximately one mile east of present-day downtown Irving). It was in late 1902, while teaching at Kit and boarding with the Britains, that Netta Barcus met Otis Brown.

In 1902, while working on the survey, J.O. Schulze suggested to Otis Brown that the area would be an excellent site for establishing a town. The two negotiated the purchase of 80 acres from Henry Britain, Dave Britain and Dave's wife Clara. The two men spent 1903 completing the work for the railroad and preparing a townsite and lots on a portion of the newly purchased land.

On June 24, 1903, Otis Brown and Netta Barcus were married at the home of a Barcus relative in Dallas, Texas. The couple built their house in Irving, which was the first house constructed at the new townsite. In December of 1903, Schulze and Brown held an auction at which approximately twenty townsite lots were sold and the town of Irving was established.

In April of 1914, the town of Irving voted to incorporate. Otis Brown was elected Irving's first mayor during the same election. Brown served as mayor during 1914, then was re-elected to serve a two-year term in 1915. Years later the Browns' youngest son, Irving Lynn Brown, would serve as mayor of Irving from 1959-1967.

Between 1904-1914, the Browns had six children: a stillborn daughter, followed by five sons. Through the years, Otis Brown sold property in Irving and the surrounding area, built homes, owned a dairy, bred cattle, farmed, owned a golf course, and worked as a surveyor. Netta Brown served as chairwoman of the Irving Chapter of the American Red Cross during World War I and assisted Otis Brown in showing properties to prospective buyers.

Onetta Barcus Brown died at the age of seventy-seven on April 4, 1958. Otis Brown died three months later on June 28, 1958, at the age of seventy-eight.

Sources:

Rice, Joseph. *Irving: A Texas Odyssey*. Chatsworth, California: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1989.

Otis and Onetta Brown Papers.

Series Description

Series I. Personal Papers, c. 1901-1958, (bulk 1908-1949). .3 linear ft. (11 folders).

The material includes three ledgers, one diary, and other personal documents. The ledgers are arranged chronologically followed by the diary. The personal documents are arranged chronologically. The information in the ledgers relates to real estate dealings, personal finances, and other business matters. The diary was kept by Netta during the first half of 1944.

Series II. Scrapbook, 1914-1949. .1 linear ft. (1 folder).

Material includes a scrapbook kept by Otis Brown. The scrapbook consists of newspaper clippings and letters to the editor written by Otis Brown.

Series III. Photographs, 1900-1950s, bulk 1900s-1920s. .2 linear ft. (one photo album).

Materials include photos taken in and around the Irving area.

Scope and Content

The Otis and Onetta Brown Papers are housed in one manuscript box, one flat box, and one photo album totaling .7 linear ft. The collection is arranged in three series consisting of 11 folders, one scrapbook, and one photo album.

Series I, Personal Papers, consists of three ledgers, a diary, and some personal documents. Ledger 1, with a cover title "Field Book," encompasses the years 1906-1926, with the bulk of

entries between 1913-1923. This ledger contains lists of property sold by Otis Brown from c. 1906-1924. It also contains lists of the assessed values and taxes due on Brown-owned property from c. 1907-1920. The properties are divided into two groups: "Irving Town" and "Brown Addition."

In addition, this ledger contains a list of abstracts Otis Brown sold during 1919, payments on real estate notes to Brown, figures on his orchard production (1923), figures on his hog and cattle business (1921), and figures on the amount of grain and seed purchased (1920). Also listed are the names of his cows and bulls, his planting dates (1922), and formulas for curing meat and pork, ridding cattle of lice, and making hollow concrete blocks. Also included are the names and birth dates of Otis and Netta and their children, as well as a list of song titles arranged alphabetically as though it was some form of game.

The ledger is in very fragile condition. The binding is broken, and some pages are loose. Due to its fragile condition, no photocopying is allowed.

Ledger 2, with a cover title "Indexed Record," covers the years 1932-1940, with the bulk including 1937-1938. This ledger contains lists of payments made by Otis Brown for a wide range of items and services, payments made to Otis Brown, and the tax assessment on his properties. This ledger is in good condition.

Ledger 3, cover titled "Cash," encompassing the years 1947-1949 consists of real estate proposals, rough copies of advertisements for various properties, and hand-sketched plats. The volume is fragile, and no photocopying is allowed.

The diary was kept by Netta Brown between January and June 1944, with a few sporadic entries after June 1944. Most entries pertain to planting, the weather, and showing property to prospective buyers. The diary entries are in pencil, and the volume is in good condition.

The series also contains two books of remembrance: one each from Netta's funeral and Otis's funeral.

The individual documents included in the series are:

- An "Invitation to a Gathering." A hand-written invitation to a party at a private home in west Dallas in February 1901.
- Otis and Netta Brown's marriage license, June 1903.
- An Irving Board of Trade advertisement promoting Irving as an excellent great farming area, c.1904.
- A certificate from the American Red Cross to its Irving Chapter for service to men at arms, July 1919.
- A letter of sympathy from Phil Reid, president of Irving State Bank, to Lynn and Loyd Brown after their father's death.
- Netta Brown's obituary from the Dallas Morning News.

For preservation purposes, several of these documents have been encapsulated. The writing on the invitation is fading. A photocopy has been made for handling. The invitation has been placed between two acid-free sheets and put in a Mylar photo page. The sympathy letter was taken from Otis Brown's remembrance book and placed in a folder. Netta Brown's obituary was taken from her remembrance book and placed in a folder.

Series II consists of a scrapbook kept by Otis Brown between 1914-1949. The bulk of the material in the scrapbook consists of letters to the editor written by Otis Brown. There are also some newspaper articles relating to Irving and other matters of interest to Brown. The material is in roughly chronological order. The scrapbook is in very fragile condition. A photocopy of the scrapbook has been made for use in order to preserve the original. The pages of the original have been interleaved with acid-free paper.

Series III consists of 36 black-and-white photographs taken of people and places in and around the Irving area primarily during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Among these are photos of Otis Brown about the turn of the century; a portrait taken at the time of his mayoral election, 1914; a photo of Brown in downtown Dallas; and a photo of the couple in 1953.

Provenance Statement

The material was donated to the Irving Public Library and the Irving Archives in several accessions from 1984-1992. The donors were Lynn and Kay Brown, son and daughter-in-law of Otis and Netta Brown. The photo album, Red Cross certificate, and invitation were donated to the Irving Public Library in 1984 and transferred to the Irving Archives in 1985. The ledgers in folders 2 and 3 and the diary were donated to the Irving Public Library at an unknown date and transferred to the Irving Archives in 1985. The scrapbook was donated to the Irving Archives in 1986. The remembrance books, marriage certificate, and the ledger in folder 1 were donated to the Irving Archives in 1992.

Literary Rights Statement

Permission to publish from the Otis and Onetta Brown Papers must be obtained from the Irving Archives, Irving Public Library.

Note to Researcher

See Archivist for other Brown-related material in the Irving Archives.

Container List

Series I. Personal Papers, 1901-1958

Box 1

Folder

1 Ledger, 1906-1926, (bulk 1913-1923)

Contains lists of property owned (70 lots), and property sold by Otis Brown. Also includes lists of abstracts sold, payments on notes to Brown, planting dates, and grain and seed purchased; information on curing meat, ridding cattle of lice, and creating hollow concrete blocks; song titles; and birth dates of family members.

2 Ledger, 1932-1940, (bulk 1937-1938)

Contains lists of payments made by Otis Brown for various materials and services. Also includes the tax assessments on his properties.

- 3 Ledger, 1947-1949
Contains lists of real estate proposals, rough drafts of advertisements, and hand-sketched lot dimensions.
- 4 Diary, 1944
Contains a diary kept by Netta Brown during 1944. There are very few entries after June 1944.
- 5 Book of Remembrance, 1958
Contains a remembrance book from Netta Brown's funeral.
- 6 Book of Remembrance, 1958
Contains a remembrance book from Otis Brown's funeral.
- 7 Invitation to a Gathering, 1901
Contains a handwritten invitation to a party at a west Dallas home.
- 8 Marriage Certificate, 1903
Contains the marriage license of Otis and Netta Brown.
- 9 Irving Board of Trade Advertisement, c. 1904
Contains an advertisement designed to entice people to move to Irving and farm.
- 10 Red Cross Certificate, 1919
Contains a certificate recognizing the Irving Chapter of the American Red Cross for service to men at arms.
- 11 Sympathy Letter and Obituary, 1958
Contains a sympathy letter from the president of Irving State Bank to Lynn and Loyd Brown after Otis Brown's death and an obituary for Netta Brown.

Series II. Scrapbook, 1914-1949

Box 2

- 1 Scrapbook, 1914-1949
Contains half of the original scrapbook of newspaper clippings and Otis Brown's letters to the editor.
- 2 Scrapbook, 1914-1949
Contains the second half of the original Otis Brown scrapbook.
- 3 Copy of Scrapbook, 1914-1949
Contains a copy of the original Otis Brown scrapbook.

Series III. Photographs, 1900-1950s, (bulk 1900-1920s)

One photo album containing 36 photographs primarily of Irving, its citizens, and the surrounding area. An inventory of the photos is in the front of the album.