



James / Browne Family

1 message

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Browne family traced back to John James (1623-1690), who was born in Wales, and his wife Elizabeth Norman (1650-1771), who was born in England.

Letter from Louise James to her friend Sarah in NY on Browne Hardware and Seed letterhead. Information below about the letter. Picture of the original James house attached, which figures in the story. Taken around 1890, but not confirmed.

“Browne Hardware and Seed” letter dated August 23, 1931.

This letter was written in 1931, in the middle of the Great Depression (1929-1939). Written to best friend from school, Sarah. The letter epitomizes the Depression era (note the telephone number: 230!) The family had no money; just the farm and the house, both of which belonged to widowed great-grandmother at the time (according to the 1930 Conway City Directory, “James, Mrs. JW” lived at # 811 Faulkner Street; but that is a mistake—it was really # 813). Great-grandmother supposedly never left the house except to go to the bank to withdraw money to pay her son's (grandmother's brother) gambling debts. All three of Conway's banks closed during the Depression, so this must have been when she was in her later years. Apparently she managed to save some money and deposit it in the bank before she died in 1944. Grandfather owned Browne Hardware & Seed at the time, which was left to him by his father. According to the 1930 Conway City Directory, Browne Hardware and Seed was located at 911 Front Street (912 Front Street is now a condo).

Grandfather also ran the farm for his mother-in-law, and when she died, for his wife (who inherited the farm because her brother, even though male, could not be trusted). Grandfather had to manage the farm because his mother-in-law and wife were women and therefore not capable of doing it themselves.

Evidence the letter was written during the Depression:

- 1) She talks about someone losing their home to the bank; almost everyone with a mortgage did.
- 2) She talks about the price of cotton (the farm's main crop) going “down and downer;”

- 3) She talks about fruit being plentiful and cheap. Crop prices fell drastically low during the Depression due to consumers' inability to pay. Grandmother appears to have purchased a large quantity of fruit because it was so cheap, and was busily canning and drying it because otherwise it would go to waste (and to make it last through the winter).
- 4) They will not have to call on the Red Cross this winter if money can be found for underwear and shoes; all other clothing will just have to do.

It is a sign of the times that she felt “compelled to stay at home,” because she was expecting. It was a “much longed-for” son (a preference that was also a sign of the times).

She says that at one time they had 18 or 20 people in the house, including the “colored girls” (another sign of the times). A family story is that great-grandfather bought the house from Governor Donaghy. That is impossible because although Donaghy built a three-story house in Conway, where he lived until he was elected governor in 1908, it was on Western Avenue rather than Faulkner Street. Shortly after Donaghy moved to Little Rock his house on Western Avenue burned. Jo Frauenthal built another house at that location in 1913. The houses look similar but they are not exactly alike. The “Frauenthal House” is a two-story brick building, whereas grandmother’s home had three stories. The Frauenthal House was designed by Charles L. Thompson and exhibits a combination of Colonial Revival, Georgian Revival, and Craftsman styling. The 5,000-square-foot house, with 22 rooms, is currently occupied by the Conway Regional Health Foundation. It was listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

Grandmother’s home has a similar history, however. The original home is believed to have been built in the 1880s. Grandmother and Aunt were born there; father was the first one in the family to be born in a hospital. Grandmother’s house was torn down and rebuilt as a “modern” one story, three-bedroom, two-bathroom house and that they recycled all the wood trim around the doors and windows and kept the ceilings high as they were in the old house. Compare the picture of the old white house with the current house, now painted yellow and home to the Faulkner County Assessor’s office. House across the street from the Faulkner County Courthouse (built by Governor Donaghy), the County Jail (which housed the Faulkner-Van Buren County Public Library), and the Greathouse Log Cabin, now part of the Faulkner County Museum.

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