

In Memoriam: H. G. Brown, 1880-1975

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DR. HARRY GUNNISON BROWN, member of the editorial council of the *American Journal of Economics & Sociology*, a member of its founding board of editors and a collaborator in this scholarly enterprise since 1941, died on March 18 at the Boone County Hospital in Columbia, Missouri, where he had made his home. He was 95 years old.

In his passing we lose more than a valued co-worker, although he was one of the chief contributors to our work even in the year before we started when we began the research that assured the success of our effort. We lose a close friend, one who always had encouragement for us, one who was ever willing to aid us, no matter how onerous the demand we made upon him.

Harry was a native of Troy, N.Y., the son of Milton Peers and Elizabeth H. (Gunnison) Brown. He was graduated from Williams College in 1904, studied at Ohio State University and then took his Ph.D. at Yale in 1909. At Yale he became a protege of Irving Fisher, one of the pioneers in the development of mathematical economics and econometrics in this country.

Thirty or forty years ago Irving Fisher invited me to a lecture he gave on the history of econometric research in the United States. If I remember correctly, Fisher applied econometric methods in the analysis of public utility rates as early as 1904. Only a few years later Harry Brown did the same, under Fisher's aegis, in the analysis of transportation rates. The research led to Brown's first book, published in 1916, *Transportation Rates and Their Regulation*.

Harry Gunnison Brown taught in the Yale economics department, under Fisher, from 1909 to 1915. During the period Dr. Brown became interested in the theories of Henry George and he became an advocate of land value taxation. Older and wiser heads in the field warned him that he was jeopardizing his career by adopting so radical a position on tax reform. Fisher, on the other hand, allowed himself to be persuaded by Brown's logic and he gave qualified but steadfast approval to the idea of taxing land and buildings at different rates, with the heavier emphasis on the site. Irving Fisher never shrank from path-breaking.

Dr. Brown also published in 1916 his *Principles of Commerce*, a pacesetter work that opened the way for basing business administration on principles derived from economic analysis. But it was after he went from Yale to the University of Missouri in 1915 that he produced his classical works on land reform. The first was the *Economics of Taxation*, published in 1924; eight years later he produced his principal work, *The Economic Basis of Tax Reform*. Those, like myself, who were brought up on the works of Edwin R. A. Seligman and Henry Rogers Seager welcomed Brown's book in 1932. Ten years later Brown wove it all into a textbook, *Basic Principles of Economics*, which went through several editions.

One of Harry Brown's admirers was the late Harold Hotelling, the distinguished mathematical statistician and biometrician. Harold once told me of the influence Harry Gunnison Brown had exerted on his own thinking. He said that Harry Brown had a faculty that was rare among economists. Professor Brown, he said, thought about the problems of economic analysis that interested him in mathematical ways. When Brown had solved them, he reported his findings in terms of rigorous traditional logic. Thus he kept his understandings accessible to the broad masses of his students and followers.

At Missouri Dr. Brown became chairman of the economics department, and for a number of years, dean of the College of Administration and Public Affairs. Around the time of his retirement from the Missouri faculty in 1950 his first wife, the former Fleda Phillips, whom he married in 1911, died.

Our collaborator, the late Alvin Johnson, was testing out a theory that some of the best teachers were being lost to education by compulsory retirement policies and he invited a group of the top men to teach at his New School for Social Research in New York. Harry Brown was one of them. The experience launched Harry on a second career.

From the New School he went to the University of Mississippi. There he met and in 1953 married his second wife, Elizabeth Read, a librarian at the university. Elizabeth Read Brown became a collaborator in all his undertakings, including services to this *Journal*, and the success of their endeavors undoubtedly explains the enjoyment he got out of his long life.

After six or seven years at Mississippi, he retired again and the Browns went on to Franklin & Marshall College in Lancaster, Pa., where this *Journal* is printed, for another two years. While there they became interested in promoting tax reform in the towns and municipalities of Pennsylvania, and they devoted a number of years to acting as consultants to local administrations concerned with modernizing their tax structures. Then they returned to Columbia, Mo., not to retire but to carry on an active career of research and writing. When Harry was in his 90s the University of Missouri held a conference in his honor at which scholars from various parts of the country and the world took part, some of them doctoral students whose studies he had supervised.

Professor Brown was an active collaborator in the work of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation. A meeting of the foundation's executive committee on March 26 was dedicated to his memory. Present at it were Lancaster M. Greene, Oscar Johannson, Gabriel Kerekes, Thomas M. Larkin, Isadore Platkin, the foundation's executive secretary, Violetta G. Peterson (Mrs. Malcolm Graham), and the committee's guest, Roy A. Foulke Jr.

Most of the members had known Dr. Brown personally and were intimately acquainted with his work. His accomplishments and dedication to the ethical democratic principles of Henry George were recalled with affection; his unflinching courage and faith in the ultimate triumph of the libertarian and democratic ideas of American liberalism were discussed with deep gratitude for a life well lived. The following resolution was adopted unanimously:

"The members and directors of the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation mourn the loss of Professor Harry Gunnison Brown, their friend and counselor for half a century, who died on March 18, 1975 at the age of 95.

"Harry Gunnison Brown was a man of sterling principles, one of those rare individuals of whom it can be said that he never deserted that in which he believed. Fame came to him as a teacher and as the author of many outstanding books and articles, but he sacrificed the greater fame that awaited him had he chosen to serve his principles less well. For this we can only say at this time of parting, 'Well done, good friend, well done.'

"A staunch believer in the doctrines of the American economist and philosopher Henry George, Dr. Brown strove throughout his lifetime to advance those doctrines in his classrooms and in the world outside, lecturing, writing and talking with a zeal

born of his own convictions. He is immortalized now in the lives of the many who, through his efforts came to share his convictions with him. As the living, vital force he was and is still, we shall remember him with reverence and the deepest affection.

"To his beloved wife, Elizabeth, his daughter, Cleone Elsa Luckey, and his sons, Professor Phillips Hamlin Brown and Richard Flint Brown, we extend our heartfelt sympathies."

Our sympathies are also extended to his brother, Professor Arthur Milton Brown of Sarasota, Fla., his nine grandchildren and his six great grandchildren.

A memorial service was held at the Columbia Unitarian-Universalist Church on March 23. Our collaborator, Professor Pinkney Walker, who succeeded Dr. Brown in the chairmanship of the Missouri economics department, delivered the eulogy.

Harry Gunnison Brown's passing leaves us with a deep sense of loss. Our consolation is that all of us are the better for having known and loved him; all the generations in which he lived are the better for his life and work. His was a full, rich life in which he exemplified John Dewey's dictum that "theories are plans of action;" Harry Gunnison Brown was a theorist who was a man of action. Our dear friend and collaborator Elizabeth Read Brown enabled him to work at his highest level of productivity to the end of his days. To her especially we offer our deepest condolences. May she find solace in the knowledge that in our own time his plans for fiscal and governmental reform, thanks to their mutual efforts as a highly effective team, may come to full fruition.

WILL LISSNER

Experiments in Public Finance

THE 45TH AMERICAN ASSEMBLY, held at Arden House, Harriman, New York from April 18 to 21, 1974, made what is for the field of public finance a revolutionary proposal. It was that one of the ways to confront the problems of planning for rational land use in America would be to undertake controlled experiments in several areas.

One of the areas was urban taxation. It recommended shifting the base of the property tax from both land and buildings to heavier taxation of land as against buildings, or to land only, as an incentive for better land use. This is a highly commendable recommendation. It is time that the specialists in public finance who have studied this policy should be heard.

W. L.