

valued his service and his ability to fix their vehicles. The children's only regret is that their Dad sacrificed his dreams to make a better life for his family. Willie never purchased a Cadillac, but after his death on September 3, 1973, they ensured that he rode to his resting place in the comfort of a Cadillac.

The 15 acre plot that Willie and Sarah purchased in 1941 not only fed the family and served as a place of business, but also contributed to many fond memories of reunions, weddings, and other family gatherings. After Willie's death, Freda leased the garage as an automotive repair shop. In 2000, the building suffered fire damage and underwent renovations. Today, Metal Mechanics and Muffler Center leases the facility.

In October 2009, Harford Community College purchased the Brown's property from Freda, and granted her lifetime rights to the property. In 2015, the College honored the request of the Brown Family to place an historical sign in memory of Willie E. Brown on the north end of the property facing Thomas Run Road. Soon thereafter, on January 7, 2016, Freda went home to join her beloved Willie.

To his many children, Willie Brown left

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a legacy of resourcefulness, a strong work ethic, and a sense of positive family values. Twelve of the fifteen children (stepson included) are still living. Ten of those children still reside in the area as productive citizens of Harford County.

### About the Authors

Gladys Brown-Pace is the oldest child of Willie and Freda Brown. After 36 years with Harford County Public Schools, she retired as a principal at Aberdeen Middle School. In 2010 she was inducted into the Harford County Educators Hall of Fame.

William James Brown, the third oldest son of Willie and Freda Brown, retired as a civilian employee from Dover Air Force Base and from the U.S. Air Force Reserves. He presently works at Solvay Industries in Havre de Grace.

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## **African-American History of Harford County, Maryland A Weekly Publication**



**Willie Edward Brown  
(1905-1973)**

**Pamphlet 0028  
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**Bringing Communities  
Together Through  
Sharing History**

*Cover: Picture of Willie Brown and Sarah (2<sup>nd</sup> wife)*

Willie Edward Brown was born on June 11, 1905 in Somerset, Maryland, the oldest of George and Ella Brown's three children.

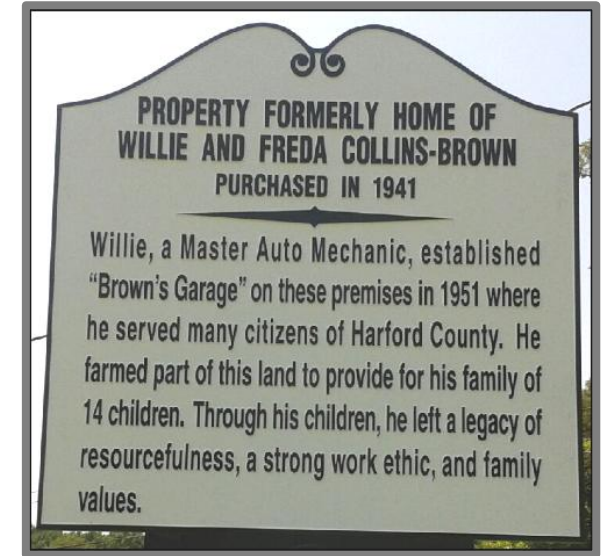
In 1930, Willie moved to Salisbury, Wicomico County, Maryland, where he worked as a laborer in an automotive garage. During that time he married Evella (maiden name unknown), and they raised a family which included Evella's son from a prior marriage and two children of their own. After the death of Evella, Willie met and married Sarah Christopher. The couple later migrated to Baltimore, Maryland, and then on April 18, 1941, Willie and Sarah purchased 15 acres of land in Harford County, located on Thomas Run Road opposite Robert H. and Anne Heighe's renowned Prospect Hill Thoroughbred Farm (now the campus of Harford Community College). Willie and Sarah's fifteen acres included a two-story home and a smaller, adjacent tenant home.

In 1942, Sarah died in a car accident. Willie's sister, Beatrice Respass, known as Addie, along with her husband, and daughter relocated to Harford County to give Willie assistance in raising his young family. Addie and her family resided in the tenant home. In order to

feed his growing family, Willie manually farmed vegetables and raised pigs, chickens, and a cow on a portion of his 15 acres.

In 1944, he helped to build Kalmia Garage on Rt. 1, and worked as a mechanic in partnership with John F. Collins. This arrangement, however, proved to be unworkable. In 1947, Willie married John's daughter Freda, with whom he had nine children over a 26 year marriage. In 1948, with only an eighth grade education, Willie secured a job at Aberdeen Proving Ground where he established himself as an avid and skilled automotive mechanic. In 1955, Willie built and opened his own business, Brown's Garage, on the front portion of his property. His well-known welding ability and overall expertise with cars brought him a steady supply of loyal customers from all over Harford County. Folks often said "Willie can listen to a vehicle running and tell you what is wrong with it". Willie and Freda's son Albert started helping out in the garage at age nine. As an adult, Albert followed in his father's footsteps and became an excellent mechanic at APG and in the private sector. Many family members still rely on Albert's automotive skills in maintaining their vehicles.

During this era in Harford County, Jim Crowism and racial discrimination were the norm. Segregated practices in movie theaters, restaurants, stores, housing,



*The Historic Marker above is located on Thomas Run Road just north of the Harford Community College traffic circle*

schools, and other public places constantly reminded Willie and other blacks in Harford County that they needed to "stay in their place." Unfair policies in hiring and banking also limited opportunities for minorities. None of these, however, stopped Willie from building a viable business to support his large family. His children often heard him say "I would love to own a Cadillac one day, but I would probably lose a lot of my business." Despite the racial attitudes of the times, most of Willie's customers were white, and many enduring relationships developed between them and the Brown Family. Willie Brown's children know their father's customers, black and white, came to him because they