

the University of Maryland, which operates it today as the Donaldson Brown Conference Center. In 1968, three years after Brown's death, VPI constructed the Donaldson Brown Center for Graduate Education.

It is highly plausible that some of FDB's progressive thoughts on education for blacks came from events at his *alma mater*. In 1953, Irving L. Peddrew, III, enrolled in electrical engineering, and in 1958 Charles Yates received a degree in mechanical engineering. These two young men became the first African-American students to study at and graduate from a historically-white, four-year, public institution in any of the eleven states of the former Confederate States of America.

Pamphlet 0009 concluded that Charlie Burkett, Donaldson Brown's chauffeur, most likely played a role in persuading the General Motors executive to help the efforts of Havre de Grace's black community to obtain better learning opportunities for their children. This pamphlet contends that FDB's decision to become involved may also have been influenced by the leadership his *alma mater* exhibited by being the first state-operated college in the South to

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integrate its student body. The pamphlet further maintains that Brown's decision was also influenced by the importance he placed on education in his life and his recognition of the negative effects the lack of education placed on the house staff at Mount Ararat Farm.

Next week's publication, the final pamphlet on Frank Donaldson Brown, Sr., will describe other events that reveal FDB's caring and compassionate personality. In particular it will describe the socially conscious Brown's intimate involvement with the life of his servants and the well-being of their children.

Greta Brown Layton's book Memories, privately published, 2005, served as a basis for this pamphlet. Peter Wallenstein's article, "The First Black Students at Virginia Tech, 1953-1963," also provided information as well as Sarah Rhodes July 8, 2011 article "... youngest freshman ... philanthropist..." posted on VPI's Office of University Development blog.

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Bringing Communities Together Through Sharing History



The previous pamphlet described how Frank Donaldson Brown (FDB), part of America's first post-Civil War generation, built close friendships with the children of black servants in his parents' household. As a lad growing up on North Avenue in West Baltimore in the late 19th century, Brown was originally home-schooled by his older siblings but later attended Baltimore public schools. This was during the Gilded Age, a period of rampant industrialism following the Civil War, and a time when the education of blacks was of little concern to the nation. Were the black children living in the Brown household also home-schooled by the Brown children? It's possible. Whether they were or not, this might have been when the issue of basic instruction for blacks first arose in the mind of Donaldson Brown.

In his adult years as he rose in the world of business, FDB hired house servants for his estates in Wilmington, Delaware (1916-1920); Irvington, New York (1920-1936); and Port Deposit, Maryland (1937-1965). The Brown Family made a point to develop a close and caring relationship with their domestic workers. In Delaware and New York, the house staff was racially diverse, skilled, and well trained. The house-

hold, filled as it was with six children, required staff members of a higher education, including nurses able to provide a nurturing environment for their young charges. At Mount Ararat, Brown's 500-acre Cecil County estate, the house servants were local African-Americans with little education. The house staff, responsible for the cooking, laundry, and housekeeping, likely resembled the house staff of Brown's childhood on North Avenue. The issue of better public education for blacks might again have stirred in the mind of Mr. Brown.

Donaldson Brown's own advanced learning played a very important role in his personal life and business career. In 1898, John Willcox Brown, FDB's father, facing economic reverses, had reasoned that he would send his sons to college while he could still afford it. So the 13-year old Donaldson, and his 15-year old brother Thompson, went off to the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College and Polytechnic Institute, popularly known today as Virginia Tech. Donaldson Brown earned a degree in Electrical Engineering in 1902 at age 17, and remains to this day one of, if not, the youngest person ever to graduate from that college.

In the years after his graduation FDB remained close to VPI. In 1929, the nationally recognized executive, delivered the commencement speech and received an honorary degree from his *alma mater*. As a regularly supportive and generous alumnus, Brown chaired the first Alumni Fund, and was among the first recipients of the Distinguished Alumni Citation, now known as the Alumni Distinguished Service Award. Started by a gift made in the late 1940s, the Donaldson Brown Endowment now allows each year, dozens of students to follow their dreams of success. The retired executive also donated his aircraft to the college prior to his death in 1965. Shortly afterwards, the Blacksburg,



Donaldson Brown at VPI, Class of 1902 (l), 1929 commencement speaker (r)

Virginia university, a beneficiary of his will, was unable to accept the *Ark at Mount Ararat*, which was to be used for educational purposes. The family then granted the mansion and 20 acres to