

# Brown, John Lewis

## (1888–1972)

### THE BRAZILIAN WHITE CENTER – UNASP

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John Lewis Brown

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John Lewis Brown was an Adventist pastor, missionary in three continents, pioneer in El Salvador and the Amazon region of Brazil, promoter of Adventist publications, and church administrator.<sup>1</sup>

### Early Years

John Lewis Brown was born on September 7, 1888, in Pasadena, California, United States. He was the third son in a family of ten.<sup>2</sup> As a child he worked in his father's field. At the age of ten he accepted Christ and became a member of the Mennonite Church. The message about the Sabbath came to his family in 1904. In 1905 he

attended with his father an Adventist camp meeting in Los Angeles, California, where he listened to Ellen G. White. At the end of these meetings John was baptized by J. W. Adams with his brother Henry in the Adventist church on Carr Street, Los Angeles. At the age of 17 he decided to receive Christian education in San Fernando Academy, California, and went canvassing to pay for his studies. He also helped his siblings Kate, Sue, and Henry so that they could study too.

## Missionary Service in Mexico, Spain and Central America (1908–1918)

In 1908 he accepted the invitation to work through publications in Mexico, along with three other young people.<sup>3</sup> He learned Spanish and did a successful job. In 1910 he met his future wife, Esther Alma Janlowiski, adoptive daughter of the North American missionary couple Lulu and Abel Landers Gregory.<sup>4</sup> The Gregorys were missionaries in Brazil when Esther was born, and then they went to serve in Argentina. Dr. A. L. Gregory was in charge of the Adventist clinic in Guadalajara, Mexico, when Esther met John Brown. Esther knew four languages and studied in Foreign Missionary Seminary and Washington Sanitarium and Hospital, in the United States.<sup>5</sup>

General Conference Mission Board proposed to Brown to move to Spain and lead the canvassing work. From 1911 to 1912 he organized literature evangelism in that country.<sup>6</sup> He worked in such places as Barcelona, Tarrasa, Zaragoza, Vigo, Palma de Mallorca, Sevilla, etc. John and Esther married on August 8, 1912, in Berna, Switzerland. They had a son, born in Spain: Walton John Brown (1913–2001).

Along with his family he did a pioneering job in El Salvador, in Central America, where there were no missionaries or church members. Brown distributed Adventist literature and did Bible work, while Esther served as a nurse. Brown baptized 14 people and organized the first church in the country on October 21, 1916, in San Salvador (capital of El Salvador), with 19 members. He also opened a church school. Soon he organized another small church in Santa Ana, the second city of the country, as a result of the evangelistic meetings he conducted. The Browns's ministry was not without challenges. They went through many difficulties and diseases, such as malaria. John L. Brown was ordained to the ministry in 1916. After four years in El Salvador, health problems made it impossible for him to stay any longer. Henry F. Brown, John's brother, came from Honduras to take his place. In 1918 he spent some time resting in California until he was healed of malaria. At this time he had the opportunity to attend to a General Conference session for the first time.

## Experience in South America: Chile, Brazil, and Argentina (1918–1943)

In this same year he was sent to Chile, on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, in South America. He was a pastor in the city of Valparaíso (1919–1921) and made friends with missionary Enrique Balada's family. Esther also put her talents at the service of the church: she played the organ, took care of the sick, helped in childbirth, conducted choirs, taught at the Sabbath School. At the same time, they suffered from deprivation and physical weaknesses. Esther got tuberculosis. Brown helped move the Pua Training School to a more convenient place near Chillán.

After five years in Chile they chose to continue their ministry in Brazil in search of a healthier climate. In 1923 the Brown family settled in Juiz de Fora, state of Minas Gerais, where John was superintendent of East Minas Gerais Mission. In the new country, Brown had to learn Portuguese. The years spent in Minas Gerais were precious.

A new destination awaited them in the Amazon rain forest of northern Brazil (sometimes called “great green hell”). Brown was sent as a pioneer to the Lower Amazon region, along with two excellent canvassers: the Scottish widower André Gedrath (1875–1963), and the German Hans Mayr (1905–2004), with his wife Johanna L. Bräuer.<sup>7</sup> Brown was the predecessor of Leo Blair Halliwell (1891–1967) and his wife, Jessie Rowley (1894–1962) in the Amazon, Brazil. John L. Brown was the founder and first president of Lower Amazonas Mission.<sup>8</sup> The team of missionaries traveled for 11 days from Rio de Janeiro to Belém, Pará, between May 18 and 29, 1927. Walton, son of John and Esther, was 14 years old. In August 1927 the boy traveled to the United States to continue his studies at La Sierra University, California. From there he went to Pacific Union College, where he graduated in 1934.<sup>9, 10</sup>

Brown initially worked in Manaus, Amazonas State, where he distributed publications and made missionary contacts. He visited Maués and the Indigenous Village Cinco Quilos [Five Kilos].<sup>11</sup> In Centenario Farm, Maués, the family of José Batista Michiles accepted the Adventism, and the first Adventist group of Amazonas was formed. In October 1927 Brown directed meetings in São Luís, Maranhão, baptizing a dozen believers and organizing a small church of 15 members. It was the first one in this field.<sup>12</sup> Brown suffered from sunstroke and got malaria again, so he had to leave the Lower Amazonas Mission in June 1928. He took a five-month furlough in the United States, the first in ten years.

John L. Brown kept serving the church as publication director of South American Division, based in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He was also the Sabbath School and Missionary Work Department director. Brown returned to Brazil, now as president of South Brazil Union, and later as East Brazil Union Mission president. He promoted the creation of Silvestre Adventist Hospital in Rio de Janeiro and a missionary medical boat program on San Francisco River. Missionary Paul Seidl and his wife worked on that project for 14 years. The boat *Luminar I* began its work in 1946 on the São Francisco River, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

In May 1943, due to a loud buzz in the ear that particularly affected him when he was under pressure, John decided to leave the South American Division.<sup>13</sup> He worked for 11 years in Brazil and 25 years in South America in total.

## Service in the Later Years (1943–1972)

In 1943 the Browns returned to the United States to work in the Inter-American Division, based in Miami. He was the president of the Central American Union in Costa Rica, based in San José. In 1949 the missionaries returned to their home country. They lived for a while in Glendale, California, and also in La Selva Beach, over the Pacific

Ocean. John Brown was 72 years old when he retired, after 51 years of service. They built a house in the Santa Helena Sanitarium area. In those years he was often invited to preach in the churches.

Over the years Esther had to overcome several health complications: pneumonia, cancer, tuberculosis, malaria, scorpion sting, surgery, and a heart problem. Similarly, John suffered from various diseases. John Lewis Brown died on August 8, 1972, at age 84, in Santa Helena, California, United States.<sup>14</sup>

John Lewis Brown left a legacy of fervor in the service and willingness to pioneer missionary work in places that required sacrifice and dedication. He was a missionary overseas for 41 years. A positive attitude was one of his high points, along with a good sense of humor. The Browns appreciated and cultivated good music. Both John and Esther Brown were brave and determined in their dedication to evangelism.

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## NOTES

1. Barbara Luvern Osborne Westphal, *John the Intrepid Missionary on Three Continents* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1968). See also the information by Dr. Walton J. Brown, in Enciclopédia da Memória Adventista no Brasil [Adventist Memory Encyclopedia in Brazil]: [http://www.unasp-ec.com/memoriadventista/enciclopedia/8/039b\\_brown\\_john.htm](http://www.unasp-ec.com/memoriadventista/enciclopedia/8/039b_brown_john.htm). Accessed on July 25, 2018.
2. His siblings were Katie, Abe, Susie, Henry, Gearhart, and Harold.
3. The young canvassers were welcomed by G. W. Caviness, in charge of the Adventist work in Mexico. They received the help of Nelson Z. Town. They used to sell the book *The Coming King*, written by James Edson White, and magazine subscriptions *Signs of the Times* and *Our Little Friend*, in Spanish.
4. A. L. Gregory was a North American physician and dentist who traveled to Brazil in 1902 with his wife as a self-support missionary.
5. Esther's family had moved to Gaspar Alto, Santa Catarina State, Brazil, where an Adventist school was opened. Esther was eight years old when her parents died.
6. The North American missionary Walter Bond worked in Spain between 1903 and 1914. Another missionary who served in this country was the Peruvian Eduardo Francisco Forga. The Browns had a narrow friendship with both families. After his departure from Spain, Brown was replaced by H.A.B. Robinson.
7. Oliver Montgomery, "First World From the Lower Amazon," *ARH*, September 15, 1927, 11, 12. Walton J. Brown, "Letters," *ARH*, September 22, 1977, 3.
8. L. M. Stump, "New Church at Maués, Brazil," *ARH*, September 23, 1948, 15.
9. Walton John Brown (Ph.D.) taught in San Angelo, Texas, United States. He married Doreen Throgmorton in 1936, and they had two children: John and Betty. Together they went to Brazil. In Rio Minas Mission he was secretary of Education and of Missionary Volunteers. Later he was president of Petropolis Adventist Academy, in Rio de Janeiro state (1942–1943). Then he was director of River Plate Academy in Argentina (1946–1951). He then presided over the Sandia View Academy, near Albuquerque, New Mexico (1953–1955). He was the president of Antillian Union College in Santa Clara, Cuba (1955–1960). He acted as secretary of education for the Inter-American Division and later in the Department of Education for the General Conference (1974–1980).
10. Floyd Greenleaf, *Terra de Esperança: o crescimento da Igreja Adventista na América do Sul* [Land of Hope: The Growth of the SDA Church in South America] (Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2011), 291, 292, 352; John L. Brown, "A Coisa Vae" [The Thing Goes], *Revista Mensal* [Monthly Review], August 1927, 10, 11; John L. Brown, "Missão Baixo Amazonas" [Lower Amazonas Mission], *Revista Mensal* [Monthly Review], year 22, August 1927, 11; J. B. Johnson, "Abrindo Novos Territórios no Norte" [Opening New Territories in the North], *Revista Mensal* [Monthly

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11. Rubens Lessa, *Construtores de Esperança: na trilha dos Pioneiros Adventistas da Amazônia* [Builders of Hope: On the Trail of the Adventist Pioneers in Amazon] (Tatuí, SP: Brazil Publishing House, 2016), 32–35; Greenleaf, 353, 354.
12. Lessa, 80. E. H. Wilcox, “A colportagem na União Este Brasileira” [Canvassing in East Brazil Union Conference], *Revista Mensal* [Monthly Review], November 1928, 12.
13. John Lewis Brown's Biography (Collection of the Ellen G. White Research Center, UNASP-EC, Engenheiro Coelho, SP), 68.
14. See: “Informativo Nacional” [National Newsletter], *Revista Adventista* [Adventist Review] 67, no. 12 (December 1972): 29.

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