

Jesse Brown

(1768 – 7 Apr 1847)

Brown. On Wednesday evening the 7th instant after a long and painful illness at his residence near this city in the 79th year of his age, Jesse Brown, the well known and popular proprietor of the Indian Queen Hotel for the last 26 years. His friends are respectfully invited to attend his funeral this day at 11 1/2 o'clock from the Hotel.

Goode, James M., Capital Losses: A Cultural History of Washington's Destroyed Buildings, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1979

Brown's Hotel

Pennsylvania Avenue and 6th Street N.W., northwest corner

ca. 1805 -- remodeled and enlarged 1820 and 1850 -- razed 1935

Architects: unknown (ca. 1805 building and 1820 remodeling); John Haviland, Philadelphia (1850 remodeling)

From 1802 until 1933 the corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 6th Street, NW, was continuously in use by a number of hotels, a record exceeded only by the Willard Hotel, eight blocks to the west. But not until hotel manager Jesse Brown, a native of Havre de Grace, Maryland, arrived in Washington in 1820 did the hotel on this corner gain national prominence. Having managed a hotel in Hagerstown, Maryland, Brown had gained additional experience by 1817 when he took over the City Hotel (Gadsby's Tavern) in Alexandria. Brown remodeled and enlarged the old Davis Hotel on the northwest corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and 6th Street, NW, in 1820, raising it to four stories and extending a wing through the rear of the block to C Street. He reopened it in 1821 as the Indian Queen Hotel (not to be confused with hotels of the same name in Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Wilmington, Delaware). Travelers could easily identify the hostelry by a long swinging sign of Pocahontas in bright colors above the entrance.

Here in the early building (formed by joining Federal houses together) the "Star Spangled Banner" was sung publicly for the first time in Washington, in December 1814. Over the years a number of distinguished guests stayed in the landmark—including Abraham Lincoln when he first arrived in Washington as a young congressman in 1847. Louis Kossuth, the Hungarian patriot, and his attendants stayed here in 1851 on their tour of America to raise funds for the liberation of their country. Vice President John Tyler, after a rapid horseback ride from his Williamsburg, Virginia, plantation in April 1841, took the oath as president of the United States here a few days after President William Henry Harrison's sudden death.

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After Jesse Brown died in 1847, the hotel was managed by his two sons, Marshall and Tillotson Brown, until they sold it in 1865. The new owners changed the name at the time to the Metropolitan Hotel, a designation kept until it was razed seventy years later. One of the best accounts of how Jesse Brown made the hotel so popular during the four decades preceding the Civil War is related in the memoirs of Washington journalist Ben. Perley Poore, who recalled that Brown always met his incoming guests at the sidewalk and paid them every possible personal attention.

A glance at the travelers as they alighted and were ushered by him into the house would enable him mentally to assign each one to a room, the advantages of which he would describe ere sending its destined occupant there under the pilotage of a colored servant. When the next meal was ready the

newly arrived guest was met at the door of the dining-room by Mr. Brown, wearing a large white apron, who escorted him to a seat and then went to the head of the table, where he carved and helped the principal dish. The excellencies of this--fish or flesh or fowl--he would announce as he would invite those seated at the table to send up their plates for what he knew to be their favorite portions; and he would also invite attention to the dishes on other parts of the table, which were carved and helped by the guests who sat nearest them.

On the Fourth of July, the 22d of February, and other holidays, landlord Brown would concoct foaming eggnogg, in a mammoth punch-bowl once owned by Washington, and the guests of the house were all invited to partake. The tavern-desk was behind the bar, with rows of large bells hanging by circular springs on the wall, each with a bullet-shaped tongue, which continued to vibrate for some minutes after being pulled, thus showing to which room it belonged. The barkeeper prepared the 'drinks' called for, saw that the bells were answered, received and delivered letters and cards, and answered questions by the score. He was supposed to know everybody in Washington, where they resided, and at what hour they could be seen.

Will of Jesse Brown, of Washington City, D.C. (dtd. Oct. .11, 1841, probated April 20, 1847; Book 6, pp. 127-129; O.S. 2745; Box 18)

All debts paid with exception of what may be owed to friend Edward C. Dale, Esq., of Philadelphia, which may remain a charge upon the property already mortgaged to secure it.

To wife Rosanna Brown, in lieu of her dower and thirds, 1/3/ of rents and profits of estate, after payment of debts, taxes and insurances; excepting from 1/3/ all slaves with their increase.

To wife, slaves and their increase; to be equally divided between three children: Eliza Haw, wife of Henry Haw; Tillotson Brown; and Marshall Brown; except slave man James Thomas who shall be set free immediately upon the death of my wife.

To daughter Eliza and sons Tillotson and Marshall, all remaining real and personal estate; condition that they shall not sell or alienate the Tavern establishment which I now own in the City of Washington.

To grandson George Prentiss, the only son of my deceased daughter, Maria, \$1,000

Exrs.: Rosanna Brown, wife; Edward C. Dale, of Philadelphia; Tillotson Brown, son

Wits.: Phillip H. Minor; James E. Crown; William L. Brent

By Mrs. Rosannah Brown