

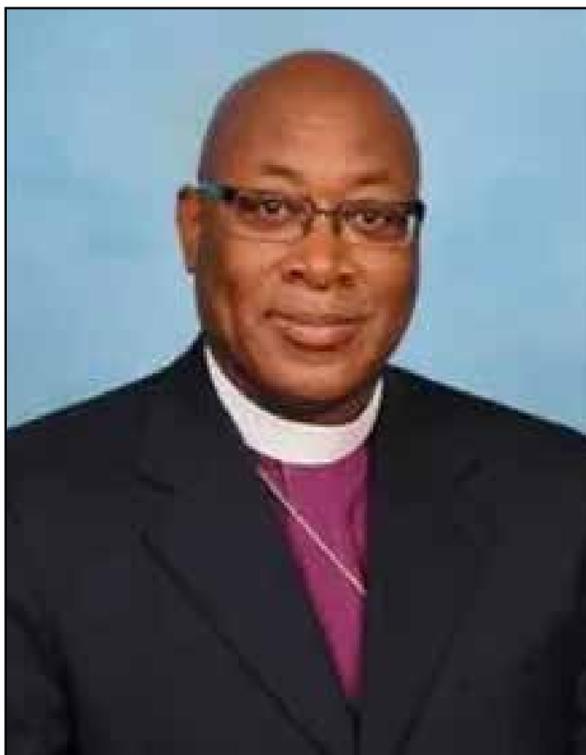
# Thomas L. Brown Sr.

## From Oakland, Mississippi To CME Bishop

The year was 1968 I believe, when I first heard the oratorical voice of Thomas L. Brown. He was delivering a campaign speech at a state meeting of the Hi-Y and Tri-Hi-Y organization in Winona, Mississippi. I learned that he was from Oakland, a neighboring town in my home county – Yalobusha. I had never heard anyone so young speak with such power and authority. The state president at that time, Doris Isaac was equally impressive. Then there was a girl named Marilyn Winbush, who went on to win Miss Mississippi a few years later. I remember feeling quite inadequate and decided I needed to take my education more seriously after hearing these articulate young people. When I got home, I wrote about my experience, and I still have the program from the event. I might share once I dig it out and read it.

It was not until 1972 that I ran into Thomas on the campus of the University of Mississippi. I was a sophomore and he had transferred from Northwest Junior College as a college junior. By then he was married to Louise Baker from Coffeerville, another Yalobusha County township. He and I shared a close relationship with the late Reverend Wayne Johnson, who is responsible for Thomas enrolling in seminary in Atlanta in 1973.

Reverend Johnson was the first black student advisor at Ole Miss. He also ran a food cooperative, a community tutorial program and a newspaper. Reverend Johnson played a key role in my and Thomas' lives and that of many, many other black students who came to Ole Miss in the late sixties and early seventies. At its reunions the UM black alumni association presents The Reverend Wayne Johnson Community and Civic Award to one of its mem-



**Bishop Thomas L. Brown, Sr.**

bers and did so again at its recent March 2022 reunion. I moved to Atlanta in 1981. However, Thomas and I did



*By Dottie  
Chapman Reed*

*Reed is a native of Water Valley and graduated from Davidson High School in 1970. She published a series of articles in the North Mississippi Herald from August, 2018, through July, 2020, sharing the stories of unsung black women who made or are making a difference in Yalobusha County. This is part two of the project that features black men. Reed can be reached at (678) 825-2356 or reed2318@bellsouth.net*

[www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com](http://www.blackwomenofyalobusha.com)

not reconnect until the early 2000s.

If his name – and story – sound familiar, articles about his wife, Dr. Louise Baker Brown, and his sister, Beth Brown Whiting have been published in this column. And those articles are posted on my website. Thomas and Louise are the parents of Charisa Nicole Brown-Jefferson and Thomas, Jr. His immediate family also includes his daughter-in-law, Jessica, and six beautiful grandchildren, Ariel, Kingston and Alana Jefferson and Orlando, Tyson and Judah Brown.

I am delighted to share more of his story in his own words that includes memories of his father, Mr. Stephen Brown, as examples of “good black men of Yalobusha County.” Bishop Brown’s biography from the CME website is included here along with excerpts from a scholarly piece he wrote about his journey in the ministry.

### Biography

Bishop Thomas L. Brown, Sr. was elected the 54th Bishop of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church on June 28, 2006 in Memphis, Tennessee. Upon his election, the General Conference assigned him to the Fourth Episcopal District which encompasses the states of Louisiana and Mississippi. At the 2018 General Conference, Bishop Brown was assigned to the Sixth Episcopal District. He is the Chair of the Department of the Department of Christian Education.

Bishop Brown was born June 21, 1951, in Oakland, Mississippi, the eighth child of Stephen and Lillie H. Brown. His elementary and secondary education was attained at Walker High School in Oakland from which he graduated as valedictorian of his high school class. He attended Northwest Junior College, Senatobia, Mississippi; and earned the Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Mississippi (Ole Miss) in 1973. He matriculated at the Phillips School of Theology at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, where he earned the Master of Divinity degree, with honors, in 1976. Bishop Brown also earned, with honors, the Doctor of Theology degree in Pastoral Counseling from the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in cooperation with Candler School of Theology/Emory University and Columbia Seminary in 1991. He is a member of Theta Phi Honor Society.

The ministry of Thomas Louis Brown, Sr. began during his junior year at Ole Miss when he answered the call to Christian Ministry. In the fall of 1973, he was admitted on trial in the Mississippi Annual Conference by Bishop Joseph A. Johnson, Jr. and was assigned to pastor Rice Chapel in Durant, Mississippi. In 1975 and 1976 respectively, Bishop Joseph C. Coles Jr. ordained him Deacon and Elder and admitted him into Full Connection in the Georgia Annual Conference.

Bishop Brown’s itinerant ministry in the C.M.E. Church has been extensive and thorough. In addition to Rice Chapel, he served Murray Memorial, Covington, Ga.; St. James, Columbus, Ga.; Butler Street, Atlanta, Ga.; and College Park, College Park, Ga. He was the organizing pastor of the Good News Community Church in Lithonia, Ga. From June 1990 until July 2006, Bishop Brown served with distinction as the sixth President/Dean of the Phillips School of Theology at the ITC. During his tenure, more than 95 students graduated. It was under his leadership in 1996 that the Annual C.M.E. Pastors’ Conference was established.

The 54th Bishop is a noted scholar, lecturer and preacher. He has served as adjunct professor of CME History and Polity as well as pastoral care; lectured at Candler School of Theology, (Emory University) and Columbia Theological Seminary, and Princeton Theological Seminary; and regular teacher and preacher with the Institute of Church Administration and Management (ICAM). He is in national demand as a preacher both within and outside the CME Church.

Moreover, Bishop Brown has represented the church exceptionally well. He was a delegate to the General Conference of the CME Church from 1978 to 2006; and was a delegate to the World Methodist Conference in Nairobi, Kenya and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He was a founding member of Concerned Black Clergy of Atlanta, an advocate for the homeless and persons on death row. Civic participation includes the NAACP, SCLC and Urban League.



**A class photo of Thomas L. Brown, Sr., from Walker High School in Oakland. He was valedictorian of his class.**

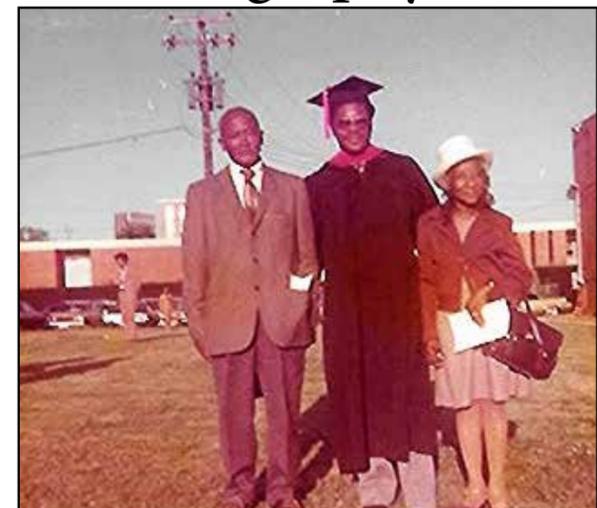
## Excerpts From ‘My Journey in Ministry - An Autobiography’

**By Thomas L. Brown, Sr.**

As I reflect on my almost half century of ministry, keeping the windows open to my inner self has been an ongoing struggle. There are two dramas that picture this dilemma for me. First, a few days before my second birthday, my baby sister, Ollie Beth, was born. The family story is that at the time I possessed a little red wagon. According to my mother and some cousins, I placed what few belongings I had in the wagon and proceeded to run away from home. Secondly, I had a dream that has served as something of a symbolic dilemma for me. I dreamt that someone had broken into my home. It happened that I saw the person running away from my home. My response was to pursue the burglar and invited my neighbors to join me in apprehending the person. Eventually, I came to discover that I was the burglar – there is a part of me, seeking to avoid conflict, choosing to try to run away. Yet, the good news is, while a part of me may run away, I will eventually retrieve that part of myself. This revelation has been a great source of self-awareness and commitment to become a more integrated self.

Contextually speaking, my view and approach to pastoring is colored by my agrarian upbringing in north Mississippi. I was born on the eve of the Civil Rights Movement. My years as a youth and young adulthood lived in the throes of the fight for integration. My self-concept was influenced by the stories and struggles of the Emmitt Till, Medgar Evers, James Meredith, Fannie Hamer, Ross Barnett, George Wallace and certainly Martin Luther King, Jr.

These were the years when our community, indeed our nation, was caught between the temptation to despair and the determination to hope. Yet, one might describe the posture of the Black community where I grew up as “passive aggressive.” This term has been classically ascribed to a type of behavior or personality characterized by indirect resistance to the demands of others and an avoidance of direct confrontation”. In the world of psychology, “passive aggressive” is attributed to a negative default in one’s personality. However, every word or phrase that suffers from the demeaning of others always has redeemable qualities. Given the dynamics of the Black/white community in much of the South, in particular, “passive aggressive” behavior was worthy survival tactic employed by much of the Black community. White violence, born out both the fears and deficit of self-appreciation, has taught many in the Black community that such a posture was redemptive as a survival strategy. The styles of behavior, dynamics and the surrounding culture of racial hatred, prompted many in the Black community to adopt the “passive aggressive” posture. I would push to this a little further to intimate that “nonviolent” social action shares great kin-



**Thomas graduating from ITC, and is pictured with parents, Stephen and Lillie Brown.**

ship with this type of behavior in its most positive light.

These years of my childhood and teenage were gut wrenching decades of struggle to overcome racial hatred and segregation, my sense of purpose and passion are wrapped up in the commitment to restore the walls of witness of our families and churches. I distinctly recall that my sense of call to pastoral ministry grew out of my disgust with the state of our community and our churches. Much like some in the pew and pulpit, my early awakening as a teenager focused on my criticisms of leaders of the church and community who could never rise above their own egos to see the bigger picture of opportunities that were staring us in the face. My turning point, in hindsight, began as I witnessed my father go from behaviorally afraid of what White people might do to him to boldly leading a campaign of voter education and registration in my home county of Yalobusha.

Because my father, Stephen Brown, did not possess license to drive nor own a vehicle from the time of my birth in 1951 to 1968. Thus, he required me to drive him, mostly at night after school, to various places across the county; I witnessed firsthand his determination to change the landscape of Yalobusha County. In fact, it was my father who would file the lawsuit against Yalobusha County seeking integration of our schools. Little did I realize at that time that I was unconsciously being emboldened to take on a leadership role. I witnessed my father go from being a very timid leader in addressing publicly issues of race to being courageous enough to file that petition against Yalobusha County.

(Continued On Next Page)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Friday Dance, Saturday Bingo Scheduled At The VFW

Bingo will be played Friday night, June 17 at VFW Post 4100. The doors open at 5 p.m. and play gets underway at 7. The weekend action continues Saturday, June 18, with Sounds of Tyme taking the stage. The doors open at 6 p.m., dancing starts at 7 and ends at 11 p.m. The post is located just outside of Water Valley at 11535 Hwy. 315.

### Coffeerville Heritage Festival Will Feature Fun For All

The Coffeerville Heritage Festival, formerly known as Coffeerville Day Celebration, is scheduled October 1. Organizers report that the lineup will include food vendors, arts and crafts, a car and motorcycle show and inflatables for the young and young at heart. An added attraction this year will be a 5K Cancer Walk beginning at 8 a.m. There will be entertainment scheduled throughout the day.

### Sheriff’s Department Is Accepting Applications For Camp Deputy

Registration is underway for the Yalobusha County Sheriff Department’s Camp Deputy. The week-long camp for youth, ages seven to 17, is scheduled July 25 through July 30 at the Multi-Purpose Building on Hwy. 7 in Coffeerville. Founded last year by the late Sheriff Mark D. Fulco, the camp was an immediate success as participants from across the county enjoyed classes taught by law enforcement agencies and other officials.

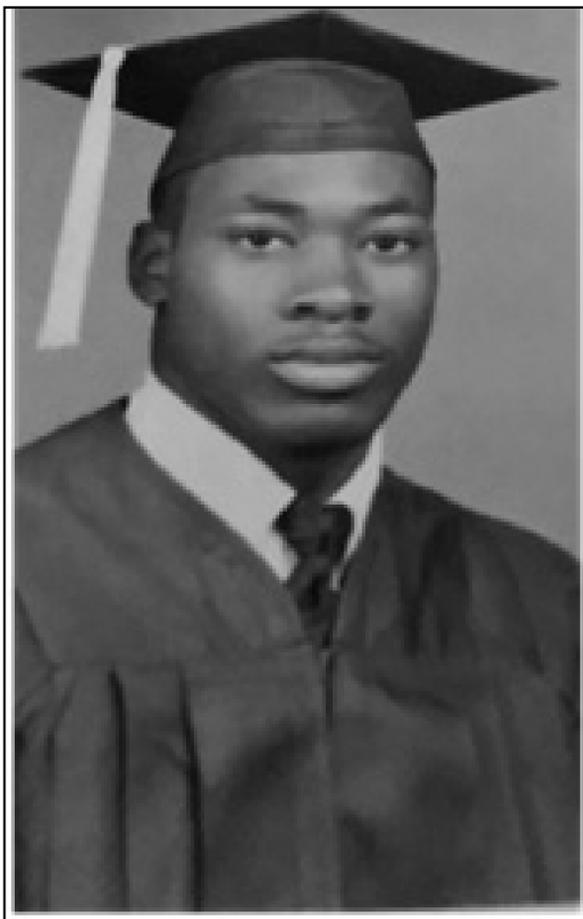
The camp starts each morning at 7 a.m. with breakfast and check-in. Classes start at 8 a.m. and continue until noon Monday, July 25, through Friday, July 29. Lunch is served at noon and pick-up is between noon and 1 p.m. Graduation is scheduled Saturday morning at the Multi-Purpose Building.

Applications for Camp Deputy are available at the sheriff’s office in Water Valley or from deputies. For more information about the camp or to make a donation, contact Sheriff Jerimaine Gooch or Lt. Ralph Horton at (662) 473-3602.

Below are excerpts from a March 23, 2021 interview with Thomas Brown as part of the Black Families of Yalobusha project, a collaboration with the Center for the Study of Southern Culture that grew out of this column. The excerpts provide more information about the contributions his father made to the Yalobusha community. The full unedited transcript of the interview, conducted by UM graduate student Jasmine Stansberry, can be found at <https://www.egrove.olemiss.edu>.

I have eight siblings. My father and mother were both married twice. My father had five children from his first marriage and most of them are much older than me. My mother had one daughter from her first marriage and there are three from their marriage. My parents were educators during the time when Blacks in the South could teach without college education. They went to Rust College and Mississippi Industrial College in Holly Springs during the summer to take college courses. They both taught in Oakland, but my mother also taught in other places. In fact, she taught in Lake Cormorant, MS out from Hernando. My dad taught at Oakland until he came to a juncture when they could not teach without college education. Thus, he resorted to becoming a farmer and worked other jobs.

By and large high school, elementary school, was a very excellent experience. I guess when I was seventh grade, thereabouts, eighth grade integration was beginning to take place, and so the whites in Yalobusha County decided that they were going to resist integration and, as a result of that, began to shift resources away



A high school senior picture of Thomas L. Brown, Sr.

from the high schools to other places, such as private schools.

In my last three years of high school, we saw a major shift in terms of our teachers. Our principal left and went to Tunica. Most of our best teachers were recruited by him to Tunica. We were left, basically, with mostly teachers who were brand-new or were really rejects from other places. I, in fact, had one teacher who had not finished college, but they allowed him to teach because they needed teachers and I ended up having to take typing 3 and mechanics to get enough units to finish high school. Oakland was a very impoverished area, and our education was also impoverished. I did somehow finish valedictorian in my class, a very small class of 18. I wasn't the smartest

kid in class by any means. In fact, the current mayor of Oakland, Riley Swearingen was in my class. He dropped out, but he was the smartest kid I'd ever come in contact. Because he left school, I became the valedictorian.

The people who knew my dad in the prime of his life called him professor, Professor Steve. From hearing students who were in his classes, they extol him as a great teacher, very disciplined, a disciplinarian. In fact, my brother, Morris, who is eight years older than I am, was a student of his. And I did not know this until three or four years ago. My daddy flunked him in the first grade. Even though he was supposedly the best student in the class, he didn't come up to my daddy's standard and

my daddy kept him back a year. He was very demanding and believed that education was significant and important. Although there was not a whole lot of that in terms of demanding of us as kids growing up, it was clear to us that our parents expected us to get a good education. I was able to sit with my mother when she taught in a one-room school, I believe it was Bethlehem Church in Lake Cormorant, Mississippi. I vaguely remember her teaching there, and she was the one who taught me how to read and write. I remember those days of her helping me to do that. We grew up in a home where we knew that education was significant. My dad not only taught in school, but he was a strong churchman. I saw him lead in our church where he was the superintendent of Sunday school all my life there.

My dad was what I termed the most up-to-date person in terms of knowing what was to be known of the Bible, and he was a pillar of the community. In fact, he is the one who filed our lawsuit for the segregation for Yalobusha County schools. And my baby sister, Beth Brown Whiting, was one of the first black students to enroll in the integrated school in Coffeeville. I consider my dad to have been a leader in the community.

My mother, likewise, was one of the leaders of a group called the Social Elites, black women in Yalobusha County who mentored young black girls focusing on getting scholarships to go to college. They did a lot of that kind of thing, trying to raise monies to help assist the special girls in going off to college. Both parents were very instrumental not only in our home, but in the community as well.

## My Closing Thoughts

While space does not allow us to include the full interview with Thomas, I hope you will view it in its entirety at <https://www.egrove.olemiss.edu>. While we lived perhaps fewer than 15 miles apart, he describes racial events

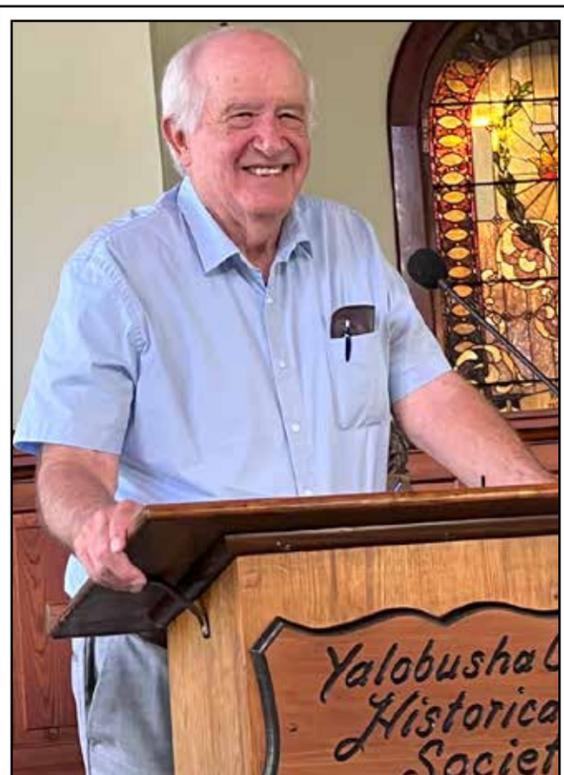
that occurred in the county that I was not aware, such as KKK being written on Highway 51, and about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. being airlifted over Yalobusha County when he assumed James Meredith's march from Memphis to

Jackson because of the high probability of violence in Yalobusha County. He also shares how his family was uprooted to build an interstate highway with little to no compensation from the government.

These are our stories,

our history, let's continue to share them in hopes of making a positive change.

*Note to my football fans: Look for Thomas Brown, Jr. coaching the 2021 Super Bowl Winners, the Los Angeles Rams!*



Charles Sharp

## Sharp Shares Rich History Of Water Valley's Ice Plant

By Joy M. Tippit  
Herald Contributor

COFFEEVILLE – Charles Sharp was the guest speaker for the Yalobusha Historical Society meeting on Sunday, June 12, sharing the history of the fire ice plant in Water Valley. The Sharp family owned the Water Valley and Sharp, Inc., from 1956 - 1977. Sharp shared the rich history based on his knowledge obtained from previous owners.

He reported the first plant compressors were run by steam in 1888. Later they were powered by oil and then electricity. Sharp added that the state's capitol had an ice plant, and Water Valley likely had the third ice plant in the state. It was initially owned by Mr. Kay.

Sharp shared a story about what the early years, when few people were familiar with making ice. It was told to him that a person from Calhoun County saw ice being made in Water Valley. The man went home and talked about water being turned into ice, and he was dechurched by his preacher and the congregation, also known at "put on the mourner's bench."

Sharp read from a schedule of assets – a bedroom suite was valued at \$40, compared to two hogs worth \$50. A five year-old mule was worth \$250. A seven year-old mule was worth \$185. In those early days a bag of coal sold for \$6. Also in 1920 ice was pulled by six employees, and deliv-

ered on wagons pulled by mules.

Sharp shared another story about another owner of the ice plant, Mr. Knight, who had a deaf mule that delivered ice. But the owner claimed the mule could read. Coupons were made for ice wanted and left outside for the mule to read. And signs were posted on the front of houses for the amount of ice to be left. Who is to say the mule could not read?

Sharp also shared that in the later days of the business, a railroad spur was constructed connecting the ice plant to the main line. It was never used until a group of businessmen in Water Valley bought Sharp and Sharp, Inc. in 1977. He also provided many other interesting facts about Water Valley's first ice plant.

The next historical society meeting is scheduled Sunday, July 17.

Other items of interest in the meeting include:

- Debby Hughes called the meeting to order and welcomed members and guests.

- Lawrence Litten voiced the prayer.

- Debby Hughes provided the monthly financial report.

- Barron Caulfield introduced the speaker.

Attendees were Debby Hughes, Emma Hovey, Charles Sharp, Rodney Mills, Joy P. Windham, Norma H. Dunn Herb Hayward, Lawrence Litten, Betty Litten, Sandra Ebertowsk, J.K. Mixon, Julie Mixon, Gene Mixon, Barron Caulfield, Clay Ashland, Julia Fernandez, Joy Tippit and Lisa Johnston.



Tillatoba and Oakland fire departments including Ben Boxx and Rich Ross were dispatched to a hay blower trailer loaded with hay on fire at the 219 southbound mile marker on I-55 last Wednesday. The initial call was for an 18-wheeler on fire, prompting strong response from firefighters across the county. The fire was quickly extinguished with the use of a foam cannon. – Photo provided by Tim Little

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