

# BROWN

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## Block 8, Lot 3 De Smet Cemetery

The first death in Kingsbury County in January 1881 showed the need of both a cemetery and a cemetery association to oversee it. Thomas Brown wasn't mentioned in the LITTLE HOUSE books, although the circumstances of Brown's death would have been known by all living in De Smet during the Hard Winter. A homesteader living on his claim about six miles east of De Smet and about two miles northwest of Lake Preston, Thomas Brown had filed on the SE 22-111-55 as a tree claim on June 3, 1879. September 7, 1880, he relinquished and re-filed on the land as a homestead. He died of exposure or drowning after apparently falling into a newly dug well on his own claim; his body was discovered several days after he had last been seen by neighbors.

The De Smet Cemetery Association was organized in March 1881, with the Reverend Edward Brown serving as its first president. Charles Tinkham served as the first funeral director and association secretary. Residents who signed the Articles of Incorporation included Edward Brown, Charles Tinkham, John Owen, Visscher Barnes, John H. Carroll, Thomas Power, Charles Dawley, Elwin Dixon, David Gilbert, and Horace Woodworth. Land for the original ten-acre cemetery was purchased from Jacob Hopp for \$150.

It is not known if Thomas Brown was buried on Hopp's preemption claim (Brown's marker is in almost the northernmost corner of the cemetery), with knowledge that the cemetery would be located there; was buried there after the Hard Winter; or if the marker is memorial, with Brown having been buried elsewhere. Note that the marker includes "S.D." not "D.T.," suggesting that the marker was erected after South Dakota statehood in 1889, possibly after Brown's relatives had been found and notified of his death.

## THOMAS BROWN

Block 8, Lot 3 De Smet Cemetery

February 17, 1853 – January 23-24, 1881; died at age 27

*February 24, 1881. Kingsbury County NEWS.*

*A Sad Affair.*

*Thomas Brown Chilled to Death.*

*His Body discovered in a Well, Relatives not Known – The Inquest.*

*On Thursday January 23rd this community was in a state of painful excitement by the announcement that the dead body of Thomas Brown who resided about three miles northeast of Kingsbury Post-office, had been discovered in a well near his house.*

*The circumstances as ascertained at the inquest and otherwise are mainly as follows; Mr. Brown, who was a quiet unassuming young man, sober and industrious, has since last*



Erected to the memory of Thomas Brown, born Sandwich Orkney Feb. 17, 1853 - Died at Lake Preston S.D. Jan. 1881, aged 27 y'rs 11 mo's.

spring been living alone on his claim on section 22 town 111, range 55. He was last seen alive on Sunday afternoon, Jan. 23rd, by Mr. George Leighton, a neighbor who was passing by, and who stopped and had a few minutes conversation with him while the latter was watering his oxen at a well near the road. Mr. Leighton passed on and Brown drove his oxen to his stable near by. It also appears that Mr. A.N. Spence, on the Saturday previous, had called at the house of Brown and agreed to call for him on Monday morning on his way to De Smet. About 9 o'clock Monday morning Mr. Spence in company with D.L. Chase and Mr. Foster called, but found the house empty, the stove cold, the stable door open and the oxen gone.

Concluding that he was away in quest of his oxen they passed on and thought no more about it, though one of the party went within a very short distance of the well where the body was afterward found. From that time until Thursday no one appears to have been on or near the premises, but on that day Mr. F.O. Dunbar who resides a mile east, having for a number of days noticed Mr. Brown's oxen roaming about uncared for, began to suspect that something was wrong, perhaps that Brown was sick as he had previously complained of feeling unwell, went to the house, uncertain the cause; as he approached the house, a young man named Charles Bro, was coming from the opposite direction for a friendly visit.

Appearances indicated that no one had been on the place for several days. While searching the premises they discovered near an unfinished well a pair of boots frozen and covered with clay, a cap, and nearby a pocketbook also frozen and containing money and papers. This well was situated about four rods from the one in use and was about six feet in diameter and nearly six feet down to the ice. Some snow had lately drifted into the well, and although nothing was visible, they were convinced that the missing man was under the ice. The neighbors were summoned, the snow removed, the ice broken and finally the body was found at the bottom nearly five feet under water. The Coroner, W.B.D. Gray was summoned and promptly appeared on the ground. An inquest was held on the following day, the jury consisting of Amos Whiting, Mr. Wilson and C.A. Leighton. Dr. C.S. Dietz was summoned and a scientific examination but found no evidence of external nor internal injury.

Presentation of the evidence indicates that the well was full of water at the commencement of winter, was slightly frozen over and afterward covered with a few inches of snow. Since then, the water has settled away leaving a space of over five feet between the top ice and the unfrozen water beneath. Into this terrible man trap the deceased had evidently fallen and there in water breast deep it was utterly impossible to escape without assistance.

Whether this took place Sunday evening or Monday morning could not be determined. The articles found outside had probably been thrown out to attract attention, his coat too was off and found in the water. He was a man of powerful build and must have made a desperate struggle for life, but no human efforts could long avail under the circumstances and he evidently chilled to death before falling to the bottom.

After a long and searching investigation, the jury returned a verdict that the deceased came to his death from exposure caused by accidentally falling into a well on his own premises between 4 p.m. Jan. 23rd and 9 a.m. Jan. 24th, 1880, and no suspicion of wrong doing by any person.