

### The LaVergne M. Brown and Lois L. Spenner Educational Scholarship

The Brown family is one that has ties to Starke County since the time of the Civil war, and the family has always been passionate about the community and education. LaVergne Brown and her daughter, Lois Spenner, matriarchs of the Brown Family, both had a passion for education and both overcame obstacles to pursue degrees and become teachers in Starke County.

LaVergne was born in English Lake in May of 1895. In a time when few people graduated from high school, LaVergne was determined to pursue her education. She would travel by train to North Judson every Monday and stay with a family friend throughout the week, returning home by train on Friday night.

After graduating in 1912, LaVergne attended Valparaiso University and Indiana State Teacher's College to obtain her teaching degree, an impressive feat at the time, and later began teaching at the Ora Schools. During those times, teachers were not allowed to marry, so LaVergne and her future husband, Cecil Brown, were forced to take a train to Elkhart to be married in 1917. They then had to hide their marriage from the school system until LaVergne put her teaching career on hold in order to raise her two children. She later returned to teaching in the 1940s in the North Judson Schools.

For the remainder of her life she was a farmer's wife, helping on the dairy farm, raising chickens, and cooking for the men in the fall during harvest and wheat threshing time. She was also fond of card games, particularly bridge, and was a wonderful baker. She was also member of the North Judson Women's Club and the Methodist Church.

LaVergne's daughter, Lois, definitely inherited her mother's passion for education. Lois was born in February of 1919 and went to San Pierre Schools. After graduating from high school in 1936, Lois attended Ball State Teacher's College and in 1938 received a teaching license to teach first and second grade.

Lois married Walter J. Spenner in the 1940s. After marrying, Lois and Walter lived in South Bend for several years where he brokered potatoes, but they eventually moved his business back to the area. The couple never had children. Instead, Lois spent much of her time caring for her nephew and niece, Phil Brown and Leta Chaney, with whom she was very close.

Sadly, Walter passed away in 1977. Several years later, Lois married a friend from high school, Herb Spera. The couple lived in North Judson for the rest of their lives.



**LaVergne M. Brown**



**Lois L. Spenner**

Lois was a very unique person to the North Judson area. Though she grew up on the family's farm, she never fell in love with the farming life. Instead, she loved high society. Throughout her childhood school years, she looked forward to summertime when she traveled to stay with a family friend in Lafayette, Ind. She always dressed in the latest fashion, wore lovely jewelry, and had freshly manicured nails. She also loved to entertain friends at her Bass Lake cottage.

Lois was the Secretary of the Library Board and a Girl Scout Leader for many years, and she enjoyed traveling to Florida and to the Kentucky Derby each year. Like her mother, she too later returned to teaching in the North Judson Schools.

Sadly, LaVergne passed away in January of 1988, and Lois passed away in December of 2005. Shortly after Lois's passing, Phil Brown and Leta Chaney decided to start a scholarship fund in memory of their beloved grandmother and aunt. Phil and Leta were very close to both LaVergne and Lois. The two women lived very close by and visit among the family were frequent. Phil fondly remembers Lois making him lunch each day throughout his school years.

Through this scholarship, Phil and Leta are able to honor LaVergne and Lois and their belief in the importance of education, while also helping other students to accomplish their educational goals.

Phil and his wife, Kathy, are both very involved in the community of North Judson and enjoy giving back to the community's students. They both enjoy attending the scholarship receptions each year, presenting the awards, and receiving thank you letters from the recipients. The two own and operate Phil Brown & Sons Farm, along with their two sons, Josh and Jared.

The farm was established in 1864 after Cyrus Carnes, Phil's great-great-grandfather, returned from service in the Civil War with the 58<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry's Company E. He was part of Gen. William T. Sherman's March to the Sea.

Carnes bought 115 acres in Starke County and expanded that to more than 500 acres of farmland. His daughter, Euphie (Phillip's great-grandmother), stayed involved with the farm, even after she married a railroad worker.

"My grandparents got married in 1916," Phil said. "She raised chickens, and he raised dairy cattle from 1922 to 1956. They kept feeder cattle for another ten years and then began concentrating on cash grain farming."

The farm was passed down to Phil's parents, and then Phil became very involved as a young man. One of his first responsibilities was mowing grass.

He said, "By the time the job was finished, I took Sunday off and started all over again. That's job security."

Phil, Kathy, and their two sons continue to work in and contribute to the Starke County community, just as LaVergne, Lois, and their other ancestors did for so many years. With a scholarship fund through the Starke County Community Foundation, the family not only gives back now, but they have made an impact on our community that will last forever.