

## The Birth Date of Francis Marion Brown



First among the mysteries surrounding him is the date of his birth. It probably should not be so since a date of birth is very clearly inscribed on his gravestone, located all by itself on a small site in Henderson County, Texas. The gravestone clearly states that he was born 5 August, 1808.

Why there is a question about this is the fact that other information suggests that he might have been born at a different time. Chief among the items that suggest a different date is a very worn but clear document that reads, "**F.M. Brown was borned [sic] in St. Clair County, Alabama the 5<sup>th</sup> of August of 1833 come to Texas in 1845.**" This handwritten document was written by his second wife, Ophelia Alice Jones Brown, and it includes birthdates for each of their children.

Had he been born in 1808 as his gravestone reports, he would have been ninety-two at the time of his death. Conversely, if he were born in 1833 as written on his wife's "ledger," he would have been only sixty-seven, old for the period in which he died, but by no means unusually so. Yet it was reported in the *Athens [TX] Weekly Review* of December 14, 1900, "Last week just as we were going to press, we heard of the death from heart failure of Mr. Brown of Catfish country. Mr. Brown was **one of the oldest citizens of our county.**" It does not seem to follow that someone sixty-seven years old would be one of the oldest citizens of Henderson County in 1900, but someone ninety-two would certainly qualify for that recognition.

Although notorious for their inaccuracies, federal census records provide another source for examination to corroborate or to refute "Shanghai's" age.

Census Year	Reported Age	Computed Birth Year	Comment
1850			Supposed to be in Texas, but none found
1860	30	1830	These three census records seem to support his having been born in 1833, but who knows who furnished this information and what that person really knew about "Shanghai's" birth?
1870	38	1832	
1880	47	1833	
1900	77	1822/3	Census says he was born July, 1822

One last thought about "Shanghai's" age... He married Ophelia Alice Brown on 1 January, 1889, and over the next six years he fathered five children. This is not unusual for a man whose age was from 56-62, but it might be considered extraordinary for a man who was 81-87.