

## *Judge Addison Brown, Lawyer, Jurist, Botanist and Amateur Astronomer*

Addison Brown started life as the oldest child of a West Newbury shoemaker, and ended not only as a great jurist, but also a great scientist, learned as a botanist and to a lesser degree as an astronomer. Brown was a second cousin to West Newbury's [John Appleton Brown](#), the landscape painter. He was born here on [February 21, 1830](#), to Addison Brown, Sr., and Catherine Babson Griffin, both descended from Massachusetts' earliest settlers.

Addison Brown attended West Newbury's one-room school until at 12 he had exhausted its offerings. In 1843 he began more advanced studies in neighboring Bradford in such areas as Latin, physics, algebra, and philosophy. He graduated from Harvard University (where he roomed with Horatio Alger) in 1852. His Harvard classmates included his [predecessor and successor on the federal bench](#).

Brown became a lawyer by default. In his [Autobiographical Notes](#), Brown said that upon graduation he had a choice of law (about which he knew nothing), medicine (a lifestyle he disliked), and the ministry (which he felt unqualified to pursue). Having graduated from Harvard Law School in late 1854 and shortly thereafter arrived in New York City armed with references from his professors. Manhattan, he decided, offered more commercial opportunity than greater West Newbury. He began by clerking at a law firm, learning about the practice and studying for the bar exam, which he passed in early 1855. At this time he helped make ends meet by serving as organist and choir director at a church on Long Island.

In the succeeding decades Brown became a member of a series of New York law firms and built a successful law practice. And, although he said at the time he was considering careers after college he found a business career not to his taste, inasmuch as he had no interest in "mere wealth" or a "life of money-making," he did participate in business ventures and accrued considerable wealth.

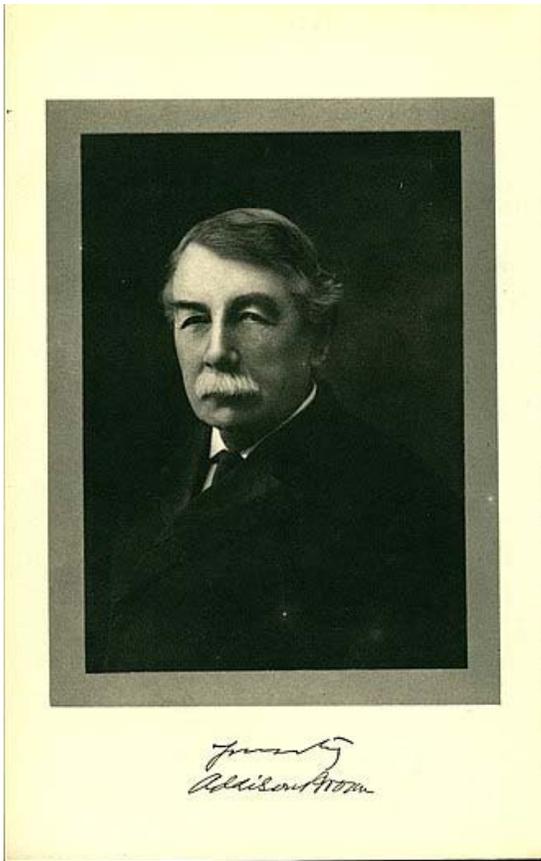
In the late 1850s Brown began investing in and doing legal work for real estate transactions in which large areas of land at the edges of development in New York City were subdivided and sold at considerable profit. His success was such that prosperous individuals such as West Newbury comb manufacturer Somerby Noyes entrusted Brown to invest their funds, providing the investors a 7% return and Brown any amounts over that. This allowed Brown to engage in more real estate ventures, and at the same time expand his law practice.

In 1881, Brown became a federal judge in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York. He was credited as having written as many as 2,000 decisions, most of them concerning admiralty, bankruptcy, and extradition. Due to physical disabilities, Brown resigned from the court in 1901. [The New York Times](#) stated upon his retirement that Brown was "regarded as one of the most hard-working and painstaking Judges on the bench."

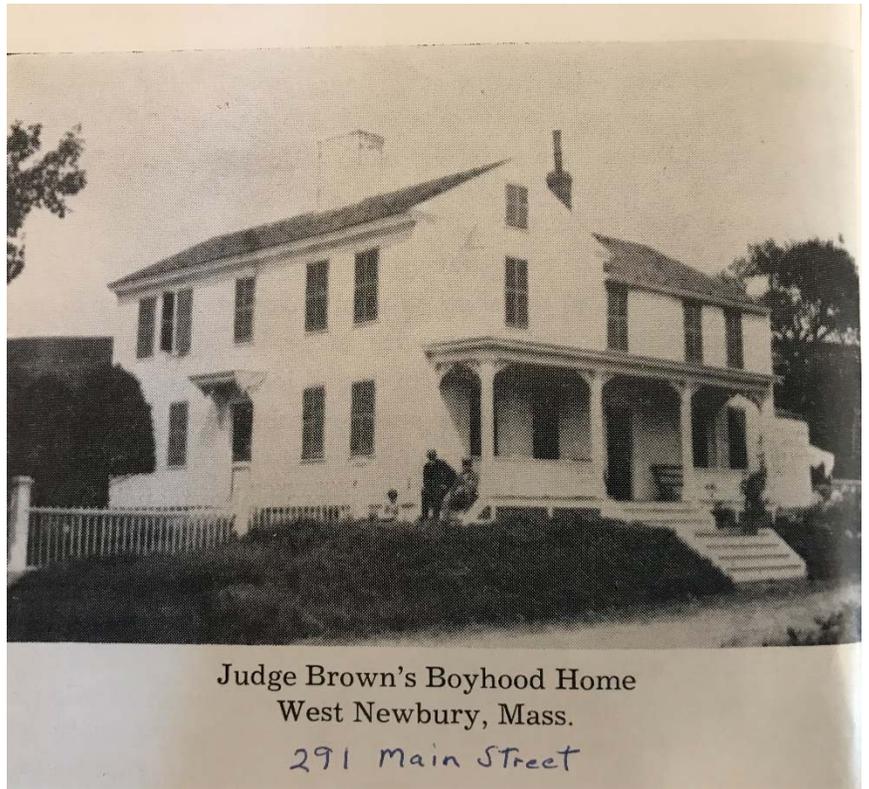
Addison Brown was also a serious scientist. He wrote notes and [books about botany](#) and as president of the Torrey Botanical Club of Columbia College, he became a principal founder of [the New York Botanical Garden](#). Brown also was a founding member of the [New York Academy of Science's](#) astronomy section. His Colorado mountaintop observations of the 1878 solar eclipse were included in a report of the [United States Naval Observatory](#).

When he died on April 9, 1913, Brown left an estate estimated at \$750,000, most of which was held in trust for his children. Of the \$40,000 left to charities, about \$20,000 was left to the Botanical Garden to fund a botanical magazine, [Addisonia](#), published between 1916 and 1964. Significant scholarship funds went to Harvard and Amherst College, and smaller gifts went to organizations ranging from the Tuskegee Institute to the [West Newbury Library Association](#).

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Source: [Wikimedia.com](https://www.wikimedia.com)



Judge Brown's Boyhood Home  
West Newbury, Mass.  
291 Main Street

Source: Brown, Addison (1972). *Judge Addison Brown: Autobiographical Notes for His Children*. Boyce, Virginia: Carr Publishing, Inc.



Plate from *Addisonia* Source: [Wikimedia.com](https://www.wikimedia.com)

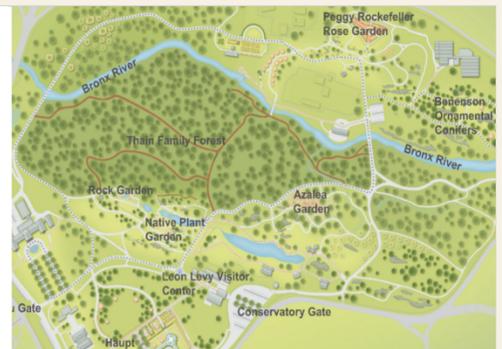
Source: NY Botanical Garden Map [NYBG.com](https://www.nybg.com)

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