

**MS  
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**William and Wilma Brown World War II Letters and Photographs**

Gift of Jeff and Bernadette Brown, 2020 and 2022

**Dates:** 1942-1946

**Extent:** 3 boxes; 0.53 meters

**Biographical Note:**

William “Bill” Eberts Kenneth Brown (December 8, 1917-April 15, 1948) was born and raised in Toronto, Ontario. He graduated with an engineering degree from the University of Toronto. During the war, Bill served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Engineers, where his chief function was building Bailey Bridges, used to transport Allied troops over rivers when retreating Germans had bombed the original structures. He also worked on constructing roads that had been bombed out, but much preferred the challenges of bridge work.

Wilma Marion Brown (née Perry) (March 11, 1921- November 20, 2003) was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She received training in nursing at the University of Manitoba and served as a Lieutenant in the Royal Canadian Medical Corps, where she was a Physio and Occupational Therapist.

Bill and Wilma met aboard the S.S. Bayano, a 6800-ton banana boat converted to transport troops from Halifax, Nova Scotia to Britain, in November 1943. The Bayano travelled in a convoy with corvette escorts due to U-Boat attacks and had been retrofitted with a two-pound gun on the stern and a machine gun on each side. The boat carried approximately 100 Canadian Army troops, of which 25-year-old Bill Brown was one, and a handful of Canadian Army nurses, including 22-year-old Wilma Perry. The journey took upwards of two weeks to complete, during which time Bill and Wilma met over bridge games, likely meaning they were playing partners.

Bill and Wilma were stationed in different parts of Europe but stayed in contact by mail over the next two years and occasionally managed to arrange to meet on leave in England. The letters do not specifically state their postings as such information was forbidden in wartime, and each letter had to be stamped as cleared by the Censor to be delivered. Wilma’s postings included Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, England, and Italy. Wilma and Bill were engaged to be married on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1945, four days before VE day.

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**William and Wilma Brown World War II Letters and Photographs**

Most of the correspondence in this collection consists of letters written from Bill to Wilma almost daily in the months following their engagement, from May to July 1945. The daily letters ceased on July 22, 1945, as Bill was sent to convalesce after his bout of tonsillitis at the Roman Way Convalescent Hospital, where Wilma had recently been stationed. The couple were married in Chichester, England, with an honour guard of R.C.E. officers on August 25, 1945. Bill served 1,500 days before being discharged on March 16, 1946.

Upon their return to Canada in 1946, the newlyweds settled in Val d'Or, Quebec, where Bill worked as an engineer at the East Sullivan Gold Mine. They had one child, a son named Jeff. Bill was killed in a mine accident on April 15, 1948. Wilma continued her education, receiving a Ph.D. and excelling in her career as a Professor of Anatomy at the University of Toronto, where she retired from in 1985. She passed away November 20, 2003, after never remarrying.

**Scope and Content:**

*Contains series:*

- 1) Photographs and miscellaneous items
- 2) Photo albums & bible
- 3) Correspondence

**Custodial history:** Donated to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library by Jeff and Bernadette Brown in 2020 (letters) and 2022 (photographs and photo albums).

**Notes:**

Full transcriptions of the letters are available.

*Languages:* English

*Restrictions on access:* None

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William and Wilma Brown World War II Letters and Photographs

<b>SERIES 1: Photographs and miscellaneous items</b>			
<b>BOX: FOLDER</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>DATE(S)</b>
1:1	Holiday Greetings Card	Card from Free Press, signed Fred Harper.	1941
1:2	Training.	Loose scrapbook page. 4 photographs of training activities.	194[?]
1:3	Brockville, Ontario.	Loose scrapbook page. 3 photographs of Brown and others (military) in Brockville, Ontario.	February-April 1942
1:4	John Coumbs	2 photographs of John Coumbs, Royal Canadian Engineer.	1942-1943
1:5	Petawawa and Brockville O.T.C.	10 photographs of military training in Petawawa and Brockville.	1942-1943
1:6	Bailey Bridge	20 photographs of construction and dedication of Bailey Bridges, in Petawawa Ontario, and Holland.	1942-194[?]
1:7	Battle of the Bridges/Bridges Vital to Winning Campaign/Bridges Vital to War	3 Canadian Army Overseas Photographs with captions, depicting the official opening of a Bailey/Walsh Bridge in Holland, featuring General Crerar, First Canadian Army Commander.	March 28, 1945
1:8	Statement of War Service Gratuity	Department of National Defense, Statement of War Service Gratuity for William Eberts Kenneth Brown	1946

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<b>SERIES 2: Photo albums &amp; bible</b>			
<b>BOX: FOLDER</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>DATE(S)</b>
2:1	"Army Life, Canada-England"	Photo album by Wilma Brown, featuring images of life around army hospitals and on leave.	March 1943- July 1944.
2:2	"France, England, Italy, England, Holland, England."	Photo album by Wilma Brown, featuring images of life around army hospitals and on leave.	August 1944- August 1945
2:3	Holy Bible.	Front fly-leaf inscribed "this was the official Bible of the Fifth Fold Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, during the Second World war, 1939-1945. W.E.K. Brown, England, 15 <sup>th</sup> January 1946."	1946

<b>SERIES 3: Correspondence. Full transcriptions available.</b>			
<b>BOX: FOLDER:</b>	<b>AUTHOR</b>	<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>DATE(S)</b>
3:1	Bill Brown	Poem "The Zombie: Answer to a Question." By Lt W.E.K. Brown, First Canadian Army, Fifth Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers.	1944

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3:2	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Hopes she arrived at her destination safely, discusses possibility of leave, describes a few days in England, needing to buy a new wallet as his is too small for English notes.	23 November 1943
3:3	Bill Brown	ALS to Mrs. Eberts Brown, Bill's mother. Written on board ship waiting to go ashore after the Invasion of Normandy. Describes what he can see, confidence that attack will be successful.	6 June 1944
3:4	Bill Brown	ANS to Wilma Perry. Season's greetings postcard.	25 December 1944
3:5	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Describes weather, a nine-day leave in England in January, New Years Eve plans, seeing friends.	24 March 1945
3:6	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Describes returning to camp after getting engaged that day, congratulations from 'the boys', being interrupted by news flashes about surrenders in Germany, Denmark, and Holland.	4 May 1945
3:7	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions drinking with Bus and Fergy, who will be delivering the letter, hoping to arrange a trip to Nijmegen [Holland] and see her, Colonel has decided tomorrow is V Day and they will have a Church parade.  ANS in same envelope: sending candies with Bus.	5 May 1945
3:8	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions platoon will have the day off Wednesday, hoping to go to Nijmegen, news that two more German armies have surrendered, mentions playing the piano, doing "tiresome" road work.	6 May 1945

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William and Wilma Brown World War II Letters and Photographs

3:9	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions it is VE Day Eve. Discusses how commanding officer mistakenly broke the radio, that road work will continue tomorrow, and disbelief the war is over. Will see Wilma Wednesday in Nijmegen.	7 May 1945
3:10	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions his High Command gave everyone a half holiday today and a full one tomorrow, listening to Churchill's speech. Looking forward to seeing her tomorrow.	8 May 1945
3:11	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Expresses great disappointment at missing her in Nijmegen [Wilma sent to Brussels], discusses events of day leave. Mentions returning to Nordhorn [Germany] and VE Day celebration on Tuesday night.	10 May 1945
3:12	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions weather, planning an officer's dance in Oldenzaal, rumors that everyone will be home in three months.	14 May 1945
3:13	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Hopes she is settling into new hospital in England, mentions letter from his mother written on VE Day, filling out questionnaire asking next steps in the army, seeing an ENSA show.	15 May 1945
3:14	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions entertainment, filling out a new questionnaire about future in the army, hoping to receive mail from her soon.	16 May 1945
3:15	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions unit censorship is now discontinued, waiting for photographs to be ready, mail not arriving.	17 May 1945
3:16	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says O.C. has received a letter from her before him, glad she has arrived in England, preparing for party in Oldenzaal.	18 May 1945
3:17	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions still missing mail from her, will be going to the party in Oldenzaal. Discusses how he is now O.C. on road work.	19 May 1945

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**William and Wilma Brown World War II Letters and Photographs**

3:18	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses lack of mail, getting his mother to potentially purchase an engagement ring in Toronto, the party in Oldenzaal.	20 May 1945
3:19	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses finally receiving four letters from her in the mail, her settling into Sussex, England, the engagement ring, the weather.	21 May 1945
3:20	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions receiving more mail from her, friend Bus returning from leave.	22 May 1945
3:21	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Now receiving regular mail from her again, requests her mother's address. Discusses road work, new schedule with afternoons off, plans for a smoker where he will have to play piano, the arrival of new second-in-command.	23 May 1945
3:22	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses the ENSA show, unit having to attend lectures on future in the army. Mentions plan to turn unit into a 'school' for the troops.	24 May 1945
3:23	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says he will be teaching Algebra and Physics at the new 'school', mentions today being their third anniversary, getting a new pair of boots.	25 May 1945
3:24	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses engagement ring, general news from friends and possibilities for next leave, drinking with Bus.	26 May 1945
3:25	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions having a hangover, preparing for giving a lecture, attending the smoker tomorrow.	27 May 1945
3:26	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions heading to the smoker, describes the lecture he gave, the weather.	28 May 1945

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3:27	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions missing some letters from her, thanks her for photographs. Says the smoker was 'all right' last night.	29 May 1945
3:28	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Glad she has finally heard from his mother, he will soon write to hers about retroactively getting permission for the engagement, mentions the engagement ring.	30 May 1945
3:29	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions receiving a NAAFI issue of soap and champagne, entertainment.	31 May 1945
3:30	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Comments on Wilma being moved to Basingstoke, England. Thanks her for photographs, mentions friend's returning from leave, playing a volleyball game.	1 June 1945
3:31	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says the postal orderly has gone on leave so there will be no mail. Mentions having a half day off, embarking from Southampton for Normandy a year ago today, bothered by hay fever, preparing for school.	2 June 1945
3:32	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses decision to get his mother to purchase an engagement ring, letter from a friend who learned her brother had been shot a year ago at Vught Concentration Camp, classes starting tomorrow.	3 June 1945
3:33	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses receiving a letter from her mother and sister, school starting and teaching two classes, taking bookkeeping himself. Wishes her a happy one-month anniversary.	4 June 1945
3:34	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions drinking with friends Underwood, Bus, and Leitch, says they are urging them to get their marriage application in.	6 June 1945



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3:35	Bus	ALS to Wilma Perry. Intoxicated letter, says he has set her wedding date in Vancouver, wishes her a 'lousy life' if he is not there for the wedding.	6 June 1945
3:36	Ed	ALS to Wilma Perry. Intoxicated letter, says she should get married as soon as possible, hopes she can visit soon.	6 June 1945
3:37	Jackson	ALS to Wilma Perry. Intoxicated letter, hopes that Bill & Willie will come stay with him and his wife on their next leave, urges them to get married soon.	6 June 1945
3:38	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Hopes the letters from last night were not too shocking, mentions having had a sore throat for a few days.	7 June 1945
3:39	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says he will have to go to the doctor tomorrow, as he has a 'violent chill.'	8 June 1945
3:40	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions he has been taken to the 6 C.C.S. in Almelo, believed he has a slight case of tonsillitis and will be there for a few days.	9 June 1945
3:41	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Complains about army mail, slight improvement in health, discusses hospital life.	10 June 1945
3:42	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses feeling a bit better, Bus thinks it's 'crazy' to go back to the unit as they are a low priority to go home, wants to return as he is currently high on the leave roster.	11 June 1945
3:43	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions Bus coming to visit and bringing her letters, health has improved to where he can eat but his neck is twice its usual size. Bus says the unit cannot expect to be in Canada before June 1946, but rumors abound.	12 June 1945

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3:44	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions temperature being normal again, no visitors today, the weather.	13 June 1945
3:45	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says he may be allowed out of bed tomorrow, can possibly go back to unit on Sunday, neck is still swollen.	14 June 1945
3:46	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Received visitors and multiple letters from her today, unsure when next leave, hoping they can coordinate. Discusses engagement ring, debates getting married soon in England or waiting for Canada.	15 June 1945
3:47	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions writing letters, feeling better, the weather. Expects to go back to the unit tomorrow.	16 June 1945
3:48	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses the weather, doctor says he should stay for a few more days, a friend in the hospital ward.	17 June 1945
3:49	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions leave vacancy is June 22 <sup>nd</sup> , will have to give it up as the two-day trip would make a 'complete wreck' out of him right now. Discusses army is now choosing engineers at random for the occupation force due to lack of volunteers, potentially needs to get married quickly as it would strengthen his position. Suspense is difficult.	18 June 1945
3:50	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions he has passed up leave in favor of the next one, neck is still swollen. Discusses the weather, taking a walk, no more rumors about the occupation force, hay fever.	19 June 1945
3:51	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses heat wave, going to the recreation hall, learned he had to go back to road work upon return to the unit, no more rumors about the occupation force.	20 June 1945

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3:52	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says he is 'definitely scheduled' to go back to the unit tomorrow. Discusses the weather, not looking forward to road work, the election results.	21 June 1945
3:53	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions he is back to the unit, the arrival of photographs from Brussels, going to the cinema.	22 June 1945
3:54	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says he will be in England to see her on Sunday. Mentions going out and drinking with Bus.	23 June 1945
3:55	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Thanks her for the photograph, mentions seeing her in Basingstoke on the upcoming Sunday. Discusses neck is swelling up again, potentially hives, and a formation regatta tomorrow.	24 June 1945
3:56	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions his mother will be sending the ring in a few days, writes plans for upcoming eleven-day leave. Says Bus and Ed have been put on Repat draft, and Al has been drafted in the occupation army, rumors abound, making it 'the war of nerves all over again.'	25 June 1945
3:57	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says he is back at 6 C.C.S., expecting to move to No. 1 hospital, neck is swollen 'something terrible.'	27 June 1945
3:58	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Arrived at No. 1 hospital by ambulance last night, doctor says he will be leaving for base tomorrow- Bruges or Ghent, is going to try to get to England. Mentions seeing some old friends.	28 June 1945
3:59	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Has arrived at No. 12 in Bruges by hospital train. Mentions inquiring about getting to England, seeing an old friend who has volunteered for the occupation army.	29 June 1945

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3:60	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions 'feeling blue', as he was supposed to see her today. Discusses how the hospital is dull, making a game with another patient on the ward judging the nurses' needle giving abilities to pass time, writes Wilma a list of questions to answer.	1 July 1945
3:61	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Hoping mail will catch up with him soon. Discusses doctors saying his case is 'very unusual.' Describes activities and unideal writing conditions.	2 July 1945
3:62	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions the weather, neck is subsiding is bit but still has 'four sizes' to go. Remarks nurses change a lot, hoping mail will show up tomorrow.	3 July 1945
3:63	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions reading a lot, being stuck in bed, neck is less swollen, and pain is gone, wishes he was leaving for England, hopes he will get some sick leave.	4 July 1945
3:64	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses discovering two old friends among the hospital staff.	5 July 1945
3:65	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Describes receiving two letters today from her, believes she was unaware he was not coming on leave as planned, apologizes. No longer feels they will evacuate him to England.	6 July 1945
3:66	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions receiving eight letters from her today, discusses engagement ring, her trips up to London, news from his mother and friends. Says his neck is slowly improving, situation complicated by hay fever.	7 July 1945

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3:67	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Mentions being taken off penicillin and sulfadiazine, discusses mutual friends, the weather.	8 July 1945
3:68	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses how the ring is too tight and presents options to get it enlarged, mentions being bedridden, the weather.	9 July 1945
3:69	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Lost letter has arrived [about Bill not being able to make leave]. Discusses getting permission to go outside, neck is still swollen.	10 July 1945
3:70	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses the weather, reading material, a friend who has been injured. Mentions his future is uncertain, believes he will be in hospital & convalescent depot for the next three weeks.	11 July 1945
3:71	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Describes the weather, seeing an Army show, being let down by the Postal Corps.	12 July 1945
3:72	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Discusses being 'much disturbed' by the mention of drafts, has told the medical officer again he wants to go to England quickly-may go next week. Has sent a message back to the unit to pack his important things.	14 July 1945
3:73	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Describes the weather, responds to news from her letters, mentions receiving a letter from Bus that the unit is now in Hengelo [Holland]. Says his name is now on the evacuation list for England, but his neck is improving.	15 July 1945
3:74	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Expresses excitement she is transferring to the Roman Way Convalescent Hospital, as he is bound to end up there after a few days in	17 July 1945

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		the General Hospital. Unsure when he will be able to get sick leave. Describes daily activities, hopes they will be together in ten days.	
3:75	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Responds to Wilma's letters, mentions rumor that they will not be leaving soon, discusses the weather, reading material.	18 July 1945
3:76	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Says his ward has filled up, should be leaving at the beginning of the week. Mentions Colonel thinks he needs three weeks at the convalescent hospital, discusses the weather and reading material.	19 July 1945
3:77	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. No word yet on when he will be leaving for England.	20 July 1945
3:78	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Perry. Expresses he will be leaving for England tomorrow, should be at Roman Way on Tuesday.	22 July 1945
3:79	Wilma Brown	AN to Mrs. M.M. Perry, Wilma's mother. Card announcing Wilma and Bill's marriage, proof that "we got the knot tied!"	25 August 1945
3:80		Two photographs of Bill and Wilma's wedding.	25 August 1945
3:81	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Brown. Asks how she is feeling about her operation tomorrow. Mentions arriving in Hertfordshire, describes the mess and schedule.	19 November 1945
3:82	Bill Brown	ALS to Wilma Brown. Hopes her tonsils came out okay, describes the mess and meals, started taking down huts and making a scaffold. Hopes Bill Parsons will be up soon, so he can find out the outcome of a meeting on the officer repat situation.	20 November 1945