

George and Clara Rasicot Brunt



George Brunt was born in Christchurch, New Zealand, on September 25, 1876, to George and Elizabeth Burnett Brunt, the third of their seven children. In 1879 the family emigrated to Utah, and in 1885 moved in a covered wagon to Eagle Rock, Idaho. George was just nine years old, and during his growing-up years met many of the early settlers in our area. During their first year here, the family lived on a farm on Sand Creek, and nearly froze and starved to death that winter.

In the spring, they moved to a little shack on an alley in Eagle Rock. The father, George, could not find work, so he boarded a train for Butte, Montana, to work in the mines. Sadly, he died a short while later of an unknown ailment and was buried in Butte. The location of his grave is unknown. By necessity, young George and his older brother William were forced to work to provide for his penniless mother and the family of six fatherless children. The boys rustled coal from the trainyard to warm the house and cook what food they could provide. Their mother, Elizabeth, took in laundry to pay the rent; the boys gathered driftwood and fetched water from the Snake River to help her out. The boys eventually saved their money and built a house for their mother on Canal Avenue.

George never went to school. At a young age he did farm labor, then his first employment began at fourteen, clerking at Dr. Beane's Drug Store. At sixteen he landed a position in a grocery store. After serving an LDS mission which he financed himself, he purchased a bankrupt

grocery store complete with all its stock. Having no money, he applied for a loan at Anderson Brothers Bank with nothing for security but his good name. Robert Anderson reportedly turned to his assistant, Minnie Gibson Hitt, and said: "I've watched George grow up, and I have confidence in him. Honor his overdraft for the amount of the stock."

George first met Clara Rasicot when he was herding cattle for Orville Buck near the school at Jarnigan (later known as St. Leon). Many years afterward, they married and had six children: three girls and three boys. He built a house for his young family just south of the place he had built for his mother. George and Clara Brunt lived on the same block on Canal Avenue until he died in 1956, at the age of 80. His obituary described George Brunt as "a tall, bespectacled pioneer."

A businessman of great renown in Idaho Falls, George was an entrepreneur with impressive credentials. He had an impeccable reputation for honesty, and countless people said he gave superior customer service. He owned grocery stores for many years, operated an auto parts business, and co-owned B.B. Light Company with his brother Joe, supplying power to rural families. He pursued mining and oil drilling interests, owned real estate around town, and a cabin in Island Park where he enjoyed fishing. He led various civic, church, and business groups, serving on committees and boards dealing with roads and irrigation. He served twice by appointment to the Idaho State Legislature; additionally, he was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in 1936.

His family began to enjoy a measure of prosperity. They often went to Heise Hot Springs to stay in a hotel that once stood there. Later, they went to California every winter, and George financed a trip for his mother to visit her homeland of New Zealand. Elizabeth was accompanied by her youngest daughter, Violet, and the granddaughter she raised, Maude Groberg.

George returned to his roots in farming as a founder of the Idaho Development Company. This endeavor opened up farming in the Osgood area west of the river by pumping irrigation water uphill to the fields. In 1920 the partnership sold the project to the sugar factory for beet production for a reported \$1 million. Family history states that George collected \$100,000 for his share—a fortune for a boy who on several occasions had nearly frozen or starved to death.

[This summary was written by Connie Otteson, author of *George Brunt, Young Pioneer of Eagle Rock.*"]