

## BRUNICK FAMILY HISTORY

*Written by Julia Christina (daughter of Bertha and Christian)*

My grandfather, Anton Brunick, came to the United States with his mother and father, Peter and Ragnild Brunick. They came from Trondheim, Norway and brought the whole family. They were able to stay together except for a short separation. As the family left Chicago to head west to Dakota Territory, my grandfather, Anton, had to run to jump aboard the train as it was leaving the station. He fell and was badly injured. He was taken to Cook County Hospital where he stayed until his leg healed. The doctors severed it above the ankle and a few weeks later farther up his leg. The hospital fitted him with a peg leg. After he had learned to walk satisfactorily with his new peg leg, he joined the rest of his family near Vermilion in the Dakota Territory. This had been a matter of several months, and I'm sure they were anxious months for the family members who had gone on ahead. They often had to wait weeks at a time to hear from Anton.

Anton's peg leg made walking possible, but with great difficulty, and so he decided that fishing would be a better occupation for him than farming. He saved enough money to buy a buggy and a horse. With his new equipment and some fishing nets he set about with his new profession. His fishing trips took him north to the glacial lakes of Albert, Poinsett, and Oakwood. He was able to catch enough fish to sell on his regular route between those lakes and Vermillion.

A frequent stop he made in Vermillion, was at a home where my grandmother Oliva was working doing housework to provide for herself and her three sons Louis, Andrew and Bert. Anton couldn't resist the sparkling blue eyes and gritty determination of that lovely blonde Norwegian. Oliva had moved to the United States from Trokstad Gaard-Verdalen, Norway. The following autumn he asked her to go with him to the Lake Poinsett area. They lived in a dug-out type house the first year, and homesteaded a farm and built a small house by the next year. As far as I know, Anton didn't adopt the three boys, but they were like sons to him and he treated them as such. My Aunt Ann and Aunt Antona told me that Anton was a very kind man, and patient with his children.

My mother, Petra Bergitte (Bertha), was born the following November. She was always proud to have been the first white child born in Laketon Township. All of her children have been proud of it too, and have never passed up a chance to tell a listener of that fact.

My grandfather was a dreamer, planner, and a doer. As soon as was possible he had "proved up" his land and very soon had built a large house and a huge barn on their homestead. Knowing my grandmother as I did, I think she probably did much urging to get things done without delay!

My mother said that her dad liked to be the first one to get what ever was new in the area. She told of the many "firsts" that he bought for the home or farm work. One

purchase he made that really impressed her was an organ he bought so that she could learn to play. Mom did learn. She had to walk several miles for her music lessons but she did it even in very cold weather because she couldn't bear to miss a single lesson. One extra special treat when we were growing up were the times when Mom sat down at our organ and played for us. It was lovely.

The second most important purchase was a beautiful hard coal heater. The heater was definitely a drawing card for the friends and neighbors.

Another early bird purchase he made was a grinding mill--the only one in that area at that time. Neighbors around them for many miles knew where to go to get wheat ground for food and for coffee. My guess is that they toasted the wheat for coffee before grinding it.

This grinding wheat for coffee was a "one-winter" thing. That winter was a harsh and very snowy winter. The snow was so deep that no one could go away for supplies. Even if they had been able to get through the snow, the store would not have had the things they wanted. Trains were unable to get through for many weeks at a time, and there was no other way to transport food and supplies.

The Anton Brunick family loved company and entertaining. They enjoyed being together with neighbors, and when folks came in for grinding wheat it probably wasn't all business. Very likely there were great stories told, and lots of laughing. There were probably even a few good dances, with Bertha furnishing the organ music and her sister Antona doing the singing (with the help of Grandpa Brunick.) The beautiful stove furnished the heat!

Several years later when my dad visited the Brunick farm at threshing time he must have felt a warmness in the home--a warmness that had been missing all those years since his father died and his mother had to leave him in Iowa.

Interesting isn't it how paths cross, and how nicely these crossed paths can become. Grandpa Brunick liked the way my dad pitched right in to get the necessary chores done after a day of threshing. On off-days (rainy weather or machine break downs) Grandpa invited my dad to stay with them. I think it was nice for both of them. My dad needed the friendliness, and my Grandpa needed a strong man's help. I'm sure Mom was delighted with the arrangement! Bertha and Christian were married on February 11, 1897 in the huge upstairs room in the Brunick farmhouse.

Later, when the Brunick family moved to Virginia, Bertha and Christian inherited their beautiful hard coal heater that everyone cherished. I will never forget what a beautiful stove it was--isinglass windows so that we could see the red and blue embers and a tall silver domed top. During the Great Depression we had to exchange it because hard coal became too expensive to buy. It was a real blow to have to use a plain heater that burned wood and soft coal briquettes.

Grandpa Brunick died in 1915 after a long illness two years before I was born. Grandma Brunick died the year I graduated from high school. Her death was as harsh as much of her busy life had been. She was living with an old friend in Arlington. One

night she got up but didn't turn on a light--she wouldn't dream of being that wasteful. She opened the door on the right instead of the one on the left. Instead of going into the bathroom, she stepped directly onto the basement stairs and fell the entire flight. She lived only a few hours. Life is so unfair!

I would like to know how she felt about her living arrangements her last few years. She had always been very independent--her own home--her own decision, etc. Suddenly, after her youngest son, my Uncle Peter was married, she chose to leave that last home that had been hers. She lived with Mark and Henry soon after, but the work and responsibilities of cooking and cleaning for so many men (they always had two or three extra men working for them) was too hard for her. She then moved to Pittsburgh with Aunt Antona for some time. She came back to South Dakota and lived with us for several months. She rode the train to California and lived with Aunt Ann and Aunt Elvina for a while. It was one train trip after another, visiting at one place then another until she finally settled down in South Dakota. Those last years must have been upsetting at times.

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