

The author of this article lives and works on unceded territory of the Multnomah, Kathlamet, Clackamas, bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla and many other Tribes who made their homes along the Columbia River.

Persons: Elias Brong

Jan de Leeuw

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Introduction

Elias Brong played a significant role in the development of Piedmont and, more generally, Northeast Portland between 1908 and 1920. When Lewis Love died in 1903 his estate was to be divided up into six more or less equal parts between his four children who were still alive (Lewis P. Love, Mary Stafford, Fred D. Love, Green C. Love) and the offspring of the two children that had died (Melinda Shepard, William Love). The will also stipulated that the actual division of the real property, however, would not take place until January 1, 1907.

In 1907 the about 750 acres of the Lewis and Nancy Love Donation Land Claim (augmented with some land north of the Columbia Slough acquired from the Switzlers) was divided into six vertical strips. All strips ran from the Columbia Slough and the Switzler acquisitions in the north to Bryant Street in the south. The strip between Minnesota and Albina went to Melinda's children and became Fairport, the strip between Albina and Kerby went to Fred and became Swinton, between Kerby and Vancouver went to Green and became Lovewood and the Green C. Love Addition, between Vancouver and Rodney went to William's children and became Loveleigh, between Rodney and Union went to Mary and became Love's Addition, and between Union and Eight Street went to Lewis P. and became El Tovar.

In 1908 Elias Brong, the senior partner of the Brong-Steele Company, bought two of the six strips: the one between Vancouver and Rodney and the one between Union and Eight Street. In the same year Brong-Steele recorded the plats for Loveleigh and El Tovar. Just to be clear: the strips were larger than the subdivisions. In the north both Loveleigh and El Tovar ended at the O. W. R. & N. right of way. Brong-Steele also bought the parts of the strips north of the train tracks, all the way to the Columbia Slough and to Mud Lake and Switzler Lake.

A more detailed account of the division of the Love Donation Claim between the heirs, the conflicts this inevitably engendered, is in other chapters of this book. We also describe the platting and marketing of Loveleigh in its own subdivision chapter. El Tovar is east of Union, not in Piedmont, and we largely ignore it. But buying, platting, and selling Loveleigh is what makes Elias Brong important for our history.

Life

We start our biography by simply inserting the somewhat fawning, but otherwise accurate, description of Brong's life and works from Gaston (1911, p 334-336). The photo of Mr. Brong is also taken from Gaston's book.

ELIAS BRONG.

A public-spirited citizen who has assisted materially for more than twenty years in the upbuilding of the city, Elias Brong is clearly entitled to a place in a work which treats of Portland and its leaders. He is recognized as one of the important factors in real-estate circles and his judgment as to values and probabilities always commands respect and is generally found to be correct. A large acquaintance with the real-estate business in all its branches has materially assisted him in establishing a reputation as a safe and conservative adviser and he has a clientage in many parts of the country outside of the northwest.

Mr. Brong was born in Seneca county, Ohio, September 19, 1859. His father, Aaron T. Brong, who is still living, was one of the pioneers of northern Ohio from Niagara county, New York, and his family was the third family to settle in Seneca county, the region bordering on Lake Erie being then very thinly inhabited. The mother of our subject, who bore the name of Lydia Swalley, was born in Pennsylvania. She and her husband removed to Nebraska in 1879 and took up a homestead near Milford, where they still reside. The father has now attained the venerable age of eighty-four years.

Elias Brong was reared upon a farm and possessed advantages of training and education not available ordinarily to the country boy of thirty or forty years ago. He attended the district schools and also became a student in an academy at Republic, Seneca county, the academy of those days being in many respects like the high school of the present time. He completed his studies at Green Spring in the same county. After leaving school he entered the employ of the Big Four Railroad at Green Spring but at the age of twenty years removed with his parents to Nebraska, where for some time he was in the employ of the Burlington Railroad and later engaged in the retail shoe business at Crete, Nebraska.

After spending a year at Glenwood Springs, Mr. Brong decided to make his permanent home in the northwest. Portland presented inducements greater than he could discover in any other city, and here he established his residence in 1889, embarking in the real-estate business. Until the financial panic of 1892-3 he successfully handled a number of suburban additions. The panic almost

wiped out all values in city property and it was several years before the normal condition in city real estate again appeared. During this time Mr. Brong's dealings were confined chiefly to farm properties as farm values were not so greatly disturbed by the derangement in other lines. For three years, from 1905 until 1908, Mr. Brong was secretary of the firm of A. C. Churchill & Company, handling the Williams, Lenox, Middlesex, Essex, Kent and Averill additions during the period named and successfully closing them all out. Withdrawing from the firm, Mr. Brong assisted in organizing the Brong-Steele Company, which platted and is handling the suburban additions of El Tovar and Loveleigh and the Leonard tract. The firm is also about to put on the market a tract of fifty acres adjoining the El Tovar and is interested in farm lands in the Willamette valley. The business of the firm is rapidly growing and it has reached a stage where its patrons are its most enthusiastic friends. This agreeable feeling is due to fair treatment and cordial relations established by a firm which recognizes the value of truthful and moderate representation in all business transactions. By this means the firm has not only made money for itself but has added largely to the growth and prosperity of the city.

Mr. Brong was united in marriage, May 20, 1887, to Miss Lillian Boies, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T. W. Boies, of Seward, Nebraska. Her father has been for many years prominently connected with the lumber business in Nebraska. Two children have been born of this union: Aileen, now a student in the Boston Conservatory of Music; and Paul, a student in the Portland High School. The family residence is at Woodmere, an attractive suburb of Portland.

Mr. Brong is a liberal supporter of all movements looking to the welfare of the city. He is a member of the Real Estate Association, Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade. His father is a democrat but the son cast his first vote for James A. Garfield as president and has always adhered to the republican party. He is an advocate of the principles taught in Masonry and is a member of the blue lodge, chapter, consistory and shrine. From his boyhood Mr. Brong has been industrious and faithful in the discharge of his duties, whatever their character, and the success that has attended his career in the city of his adoption has been due to high principles inculcated by worthy parents and exemplified in a life of usefulness and integrity.

These quaint and excruciating local history volumes were produced in large quantities around 1900, in particular by the S.J. Clarke Publishing Company of Chicago. They did contain much useful and colorful local history, but the discussion was not always unbiased and tended to boosterism of the area and its upper crust. The bulk of these often multi-volume works was taken up by the Who's-Who vanity biographies of prominent citizens, who then rewarded the authors by buying multiple copies of the books. Predictably, almost all these prominent citizens have vanished in the mists of time and are completely forgotten. But some of them left more durable contributions than just flattering biographies and are consequently still remembered. The author of the book, Joseph Gaston, by the way, himself was a very, very prominent citizen of Portland, which did result in getting him a [nice Wikipedia entry](#).

Besides the Gaston biography of Elias Brong, there are some later details that are relevant for our story. From the Oregonian of March 9, 1908

A \$1,000,000 oil company has been incorporated by F. M. Batchelor, E. S. Platts and A. J. Stowell. It is styled the Baker and Malheur Oil company and is planning to develop and operate oil properties. Articles of incorporation of the Brong-Steele company, a brokerage and loan firm, have been filed by Elias Brong, S. N. Steele and Otto J. Kraemer. The capital stock is \$20,000.


It very much looks as if the Brong-Steele Company was specifically formed to buy and sell the pieces of the Lewis Love estate. Brong-Steele only lasted until 1913, when it became Brong-Manary, and then, in 1914, it became the Brong Company. No matter what the company name was, they did a lot of advertising and boosting. The Loveleigh chapter gives some examples. Here is another one, from the Oregonian of May 27 1913, in the midst of city council elections.

ELIAS BRONG

Not a **CANDIDATE FOR COMMISSIONER**, therefore have no ballot number, but while "**MY FRIEND DAN**" is up in a balloon, we are selling lots in **EL TOVAR**, located on Union Ave. concrete sidewalks, graded streets, electric lights and gas, on terms of only \$10 down and \$10 per month. Not a more beautiful location in the city for a home site. Salesmen are on grounds Sunday. Take Woodlawn car, get off at E. 6th St., and walk two blocks north, or take Vancouver car and get off at Bryant St., and you are right on the property.

Brong-Manary Co.

507 LEWIS BLDG.
(Paid Advertisement.)



Picturesque Mount Tabor Residence Distinctive Improvement



Recently completed home, erected by E. Brong, at East Salmon and Sixty-second streets, costing \$18,000.

One of the fine new homes that has just been finished in the Mount Tabor district is the residence of E. Brong of the firm of the Brong-Manary company, at the corner of East Salmon and sixty-second street, that has cost approximately \$18,000.

This residence, which was erected under the direction of Architects Root and Hoese is of Colonial type of architect-

ure, with full two stories and attic. There are three rooms and a hall on the first floor and four bedrooms and a sitting room on the second floor.

The first story of this home is red tapestry brick, and the story is shingled. The dimensions are 40x65 feet. The dining room is finished in eastern quarter-sawed oak with beam ceilings and panelled walls with built-in sideboard, china closets and serving tables.

The living room is finished in white, with beamed ceilings, and features an inglenook, and a fireplace of bachelor tile. The hall is finished in white with mahogany trimmings. The kitchen and pass-pantry are finished in white enamel and composition tile floor.

There is a large garage on the grounds, which are surrounded with an artistic brick wall. The house has but recently been occupied.

The company was obviously successful. In the Oregonian of February 16, 1913 we see that Elias Brong of Brong-Manary build a very nice house on Mount Tabor for \$ 18,000. Just for comparison, a house in Loveleigh or El Tovar was typically around \$ 3,000 at that time.

After Loveleigh and El Tovar they branched out and, for example, sold farms and farm land in the Columbia and Willamette valleys. And, of course, the land north of the railroad tracks in the

Love strips. In 1916 Brong teamed up with G. Wynn Wilson to form yet another company that sold logged off lands in western Oregon and Washington, with offices in the midwest and eastern states. And then, in the Oregonian of September 14, 1919 we see

New Concern Buys The Brong Company

The Interstate Investment company has taken over the business of the Brong company and offices have been opened on the sixth floor of the Henry building. Officers of the new concern are: William L. Graham, president; A. B. Christenson, vice president; Clyde E. Carlos, secretary and treasurer. The Interstate company proposes to engage extensively in development work in Portland and at other points in the Northwest.

And the Brong Company was no more. On October 7, 1920 the Oregonian tells us

E. Brong Dies After Illness Which He Suffered 2 Weeks

Following an illness of two weeks' duration which ended in heart failure, E. Brong, 405 Larrabee street died this morning at 4:30 o'clock at his home. Brong was about 51 years of age and has been in business in Portland for many years. He is survived by his widow, a daughter, Miss Aileen Brong, society editor of the Portland Telegram, and a son, Paul E. Brong. The funeral services will be held Friday afternoon at 2:30 o'clock at the chapel of Edward Holman & Son, undertakers.

As for the surviving family, as Gaston tells us, the widows maiden name was Lilian Boies. They married in 1884 in Nebraska, as you can see on the following copy of the marriage license.

MARRIAGE LICENSE.						
The State of Nebraska, } ss.			OFFICE OF THE COUNTY JUDGE.			
SEWARD COUNTY.						
LICENSE is hereby granted to any person authorized to solemnize marriages according to the laws of said State, to join in marriage Mr. <u>Elias Brong</u> and Miss <u>Lillian Boies</u> of the County aforesaid, whose ages, residences, etc., are as follows:						
NAMES OF PARTIES	Age	Color	PLACE OF BIRTH	RESIDENCE	FATHER'S NAME	MOTHER'S MAIDEN NAME
<u>Elias Brong</u> Groom	<u>29</u>	<u>White</u>	<u>Ohio</u>	<u>Drum Co</u>	<u>A. T. Brong</u>	<u>Lillian Swalle</u>
<u>Lillian Boies</u> Bride	<u>27</u>	<u>"</u>	<u>Iowa</u>	<u>Seward Co</u>	<u>E. W. Boies</u>	<u>John E. Clark</u>
And the person joining them in marriage is required to make due return of the annexed Certificate to the County Judge of said County within three months, of the names of the parties, time and place of marriage, and by whom solemnized.						
IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Seal of said Court, at my office in <u>Seward</u> in said County, this <u>19th</u> day of <u>May</u> A.D. 188 <u>8</u>						
[SEAL.] <u>Geo. D. Hickey</u> County Judge.						
AND BE IT FURTHER REMEMBERED. That afterwards, and on this <u>16th</u> day of <u>June</u>						
A.D. 188 <u>8</u> , there was filed and recorded herein Certificate and return in the words and figures following:						

Lilian Brong was the only Mrs. Brong there ever was. She died November 22, 1924. Lilian and Elias Brong, unlike the pioneers that came before them, had precisely two children, not more, not less. Some details about Aileen (born 1888) and Paul (born 1895) follow.

Aileen went to the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. After she came back the society pages, the women's pages, the cultural pages, and the church pages of the Oregonian are filled with reviews and announcements of her many musical and theatrical performances over the years. And direction or organization of performances later on. There are recitals, choirs, and the Shakespeare club. She remained unmarried, lived with her parents until they died, and died herself in 1963. Here she is in the Oregonian of July 3, 1910, when she was 22 years old.

**PORTLAND STUDENT AT NEW
ENGLAND CONSERVATORY
HOME ON VACATION.**



Miss Aileen Brong.

Miss Aileen Brong, who is a student at the New England Conservatory of Music, Boston, came home last Tuesday to spend her Summer vacation with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. Brong. Miss Brong is a Portland girl who is fast advancing in her educational work, specializing in music and dramatic art. She is a graduate of the Ladd school and the Lincoln High School of this city, and she afterward studied one year at the University of Oregon, where she made many friends who are interested and happy in her advancement. She will return this Fall to resume her studies in the Conservatory at Boston.

Paul went to Washington High School and early on showed great talent in instrumentation and machine work. From the Oregonian of May 19, 1916.

STUDENT MAKES ACCURATE SCALE.—An apothecary's scale, sufficiently delicate to weigh articles of a fraction of a millegram, and which has been tested and found absolutely accurate, is the work of Paul Brong, student at the Washington High School. The scale is now on exhibition in Superintendent Alderman's office. The scale is one of elaborate design and is mounted inside a glass case. The outfit is similar in appearance and workmanship to that turned out by the best craftsmen.

The Oregonian also mentioned some tickets for underage driving and for speeding, which I guess are also other signs of interest in machinery. Paul married Dolly Lychywek on April 7, 1920 and in 1927 they started the Paul Brong Machine Works, with Paul as President and Dolly as Executive Secretary. As the website shows, the Machine Works played an important role in the birth of the Phillips head screwdriver. Although Paul died in 1952, Paul Brong Machine Works still exists, on the corner of NE 12th and NE Glisan. Check out the website at

<http://brongmachineworks.com>

PAUL BRONG

MACHINE WORKS

421 NE 12th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232
503-232-2171
info@brongmachineworks.com



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Wikipedia: *Joseph P. Gaston*. Retrieved 01/12/2019.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_P._Gaston