

## Milne brothers made their mark

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One of Victoria's first physicians and his businessman brother made important contributions when Victoria was still in its saloon-and-sawmill phase of development.

**W**hat's the connection between a building in Old Town, the site of a Dallas Road condo development, and a distinctive turreted home not far from Mile 0? They share one thing in common: the name "Milne."

Alexander and Isabella Milne brought their three boys across the Atlantic to Canada in 1856. Alexander settled his family in Meaford, Ontario, where he took up business as a merchant and grain dealer.

His schooling finished, son George studied medicine at the University of Toronto. He graduated in 1880 and went to Kansas City. This was intended as a long-term venture, but two factors conspired to change his mind. First, his landlady wouldn't let him hang out his shingle. Second, a fellow physician warned him that Kansas City, at the junction of two rivers, was rife with malaria and that its treatment required large doses of quinine. Balking at the prospect of having to ingest equally large doses himself, Dr George decided to move on.

At San Francisco, he boarded the SS Mexico and arrived on Vancouver Island in late 1880. Victoria was still a city of saloons and sawmills, but a railway line was set to march across the country from the east coast to the west, telephones were ringing for the first time, and soon there would be electric light. The 7000-strong population was growing. There would always be room for another doctor.

Two of George's brothers were already well established here. Little is known of John, other than that he worked at Joseph Spratt's Foundry. Alexander (A.R.) had travelled overland in 1863 to try his luck as a general merchant in the Cariboo, then moved to Victoria in 1874 to take up a position as an appraiser with Canadian Customs. Now he was Collector of Customs for the Port of Victoria.

An active Freemason and Knight Templar, A.R. was also a keen developer. A few years after the arrival of the E&N Railway focused attention on the foot of Johnson Street, A.R. asked Thomas Hooper to design a fine new building for him nearby. Completed in 1891, the Empire Hotel and Restaurant, with its distinctive central fourth storey and arched upper windows, proudly proclaimed (as it does to this day at 546-548 Johnson) its owner's name: "MILNE."

A.R. didn't take part in public affairs, preferring to concentrate his energies on the Masonic fraternity and benevolent societies. He and his wife Annie lived for many years on Queens Avenue until his death, at 65, in 1904. Annie died in Vancouver in 1919.

Dr George, meanwhile, had moved to James Bay. Married since 1882 to Nellie Kinsman, he had first set up home and a medical office on Douglas Street. In 1885, he was appointed medical health officer for Victoria. Seven years later, after a difference of opinion with the provincial health officer over management of the 1892 smallpox epidemic, he resigned.

Other activities quickly filled his time. He had been instrumental, with others, in starting the Jubilee (later Royal Jubilee) Hospital, and now served as registrar and secretary of the BC Medical Council. In



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The Milne building on Johnson Street, built originally as the Empire Hotel and Restaurant by developer A.R. Milne.

1903 he became Dominion Medical Inspector for the Immigration Service, responsible for examining new arrivals and protecting the health of the local population.

A member of the school board, he was also involved with Victoria's tramway system. Elected to the provincial legislature in 1890, he was President of the BC Liberal Association for many years, but failed in his 1896 bid for a Dominion Government seat.

Dr George bought a home at 618 Dallas Road (now 617 Battery Street). Built by wealthy lumberman W. J. Macauley in 1890, the tall, pointed tower of the Queen Anne-style home he called "Pinehurst" dominated the James Bay skyline. A driveway curved up from Dallas Road to the entrance. Tiled fireplaces, wood panelling and hand-painted ceilings graced the interior. A huge porch afforded expansive views across the Strait toward the Olympic Peninsula mountains.

The Milnes lived at Pinehurst until Dr George died, at 82, in 1933. A few years later, Nellie too was gone. Today, their James Bay home, a condo development on the site of the old Immigration Building where Dr George once worked, and A.R.'s Johnson Street structure are all that's left to remind us of the Scottish brothers who made a name for themselves in Victoria in days gone by.



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