



**229 ROSLYN ROAD
GATEHOUSE & GATES**



**61 ROSLYN CRESCENT
STABLES**

FORMER NANTON ESTATE

HISTORICAL BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

August 8, 1980

229 ROSLYN ROAD (61 ROSLYN CRESCENT)

NANTON ESTATE

Shrouded in a forest of trees, these two buildings, along with a set of limestone gates, are all that remain of Kilmorie, the massive estate of Sir Augustus and Lady Nanton. Augustus Meredith Nanton grew to be one of the west's biggest developers and financiers, influential in many fields of business and a giant in the local financial scene.

Augustus Nanton was born in Toronto in 1860. Although his parents were of comfortable means, the elder Nanton died suddenly and left a young widow to raise her brood of five. Augustus left school at the age of 13 to work as an office boy for the local brokerage firm of Osler and Hammond.¹ If ever there was a natural genius in a particular field, Nanton was it. At the age of 23, he was made a junior partner of the firm and sent to Winnipeg in 1883 to establish a branch office. Initially, Osler and Hammond acted as a mortgage company for prairie settlers with the principal investors being a group of businessmen in northern Scotland.² The company expanded quickly into direct land development as well as acting as an agency for investment companies. The Winnipeg office grew quickly and the first Osler, Hammond and Nanton block was built at the corner of Main and McDermot streets in 1890. Not long after, the business moved to the corner of Lombard and Main where they erected a large brick building. This occupied a prominent corner in the heart of the financial district, and to heighten the effect of the corner, a rounded design was used with the entrance set in the angle.

Winnipeg was the centre of investment and development activity for the Canadian west. From 1880 to 1914, the halcyon years of the boom, countless fortunes were won and lost. Literally hundreds of development agents and companies chased after the profit dollars, and predictably, some of these were rather shady operations. For Nanton's company to survive in the west for almost a hundred years is an indication of the capability of the company. Generally speaking, a

¹ R.G. McBeth, Sir Augustus Nanton, the MacMillan Company of Canada Ltd., Toronto, 1931, p. 13.

² Ibid., p. 16.

business based on unsound principles simply did not endure. Early in his career, Nanton wrote of his philosophy of business:

In the long run, it will pay better to do our business on proper business principles, and I would not think of falling into the ways of some men in this country.³

As the company continued to grow, new quarters were needed. In 1908, Osler, Hammond and Nanton constructed the Nanton Building on Portage at the northwest corner of Main Street. This handsome steel structure was designed by Darling and Pearson. Although dwarfed somewhat by the Childs Building beside, the Nanton Building is five storeys high. It has a classical style, rendered in a façade of Bedford stone, and finished with fine oak in the interior. The cost was \$150,000, a substantial price in 1908.⁴ Together with the Childs Building, it dominated that side of the famous intersection of Portage and Main, which was appropriate for the influential firm.

Osler, Hammond and Nanton continued to deal in land in virtually every town and district in the Prairies. They handled investments from Europe, eastern Canada and the United States. As brokers and agents, the company also dealt in stocks and bonds, grain, fossil fuels and in later years, did a good business in leases for oil and gas rights.⁵ Their impact was strong and diverse.

Augustus Nanton was also a successful businessman on his own. From 1894 to 1900, he was the Receiver of the Manitoba and Northwestern Railway Company, which was bought up by the CPR. For many years an advisor to Sir William Whyte of the CPR, Nanton replaced him on the Board of Directors of the great railway when the latter died in 1914.⁶ In addition, he was also a director and then president of the Winnipeg Street Railway. He served a term as president of the Winnipeg Board of Trade and was many years the governor of the General Hospital board.

³ Letter to H.C. Hammond, quoted in Ibid., p. 25.

⁴ Construction, December 1909, p. 64.

⁵ Osler, Hammond and Nanton, advertisement, Henderson's Directory for Winnipeg, 1930-1960.

⁶ MacBeth, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

In 1898, he was appointed to the board of Great-West Life Assurance Co. and became the vice-president in 1910. Nanton was also in demand on the boards of several smaller companies such as Manitoba Bridge and Iron Works.⁷ Both Nanton himself and his company were leaders in the development of business in the west. He was a man of great energy, who possessed both a talent and a zeal for business and to his death, business was the main focus of his attention.

Nanton did not confine his energies exclusively to business, however. During World War I, he and his family were leaders of the support effort in Manitoba. In the early days of the war, August 1914, Nanton became one of the founders of the national Patriotic Fund, organized to support the dependents of Canada's fighting men. Nanton initiated and led the Manitoba chapter, and when its funds were gathered, it had the largest per capita donation in the country. The Patriotic Fund continued several successful campaigns, and Nanton (never a public man before) came to be known for his leadership qualities and public spirit. It is evident that Nanton was a shy man, disabled slightly by a hearing problem, and reluctant to preside over public functions, but the national emergency seemed to inspire him in this public endeavour. The group raised huge amounts of money, and Nanton himself donated an untold fortune to the fund. Later in the war, he also gave his talent to the Victory Loan Fund, which promoted the sale of general bond issue. Nanton was the organizer for the Prairies, and these three provinces jointly loaned \$246 million from 1917-19.⁸ The per capita figure was 20% higher than that of the country as a whole. For his efforts during the war, Nanton was knighted in 1917, an honour given to few Winnipeggers.

Lady Nanton had organized massive workshops in the massive music room of her home, and women from all over the city came here to create, assemble and ship huge care packages for the soldiers overseas. Their basement was turned over for the recreation of soldiers on leave, who used the bowling alleys, pool and ping-pong tables of the game sets. An average of 30 men nightly were served sandwiches and cocoa in the Nanton's home.

⁷ The Newspaper Reference Book of Canada, The Press Publishing Co. Ltd., Toronto 1903, p. 136. Also, C.W. Parker Who's Who in Western Canada, Canadian Press Association Ltd. Vancouver ca. 1911, p. 296.

⁸ MacBeth, op. cit., p. 50.

Many soldiers returned to recuperate in the hospital on the Tuxedo barracks. The Nantons turned over their summer cottage at the Lake of the Woods for convalescing soldiers. Additional quarters were built and every two weeks, 50 invalid soldiers at a time were guests of the Nanton's in a healthy and relaxed atmosphere. More than 800 men enjoyed this hospitality and Sir Augustus carried the entire cost of this undertaking.⁹

Sir Augustus built the main house of his estate, Kilmorie, in 1900. He and his family had already lived on the east end of Roslyn Road for several years, but Nanton's purchase of five acres west of Osborne marked the development of the western portion. The early Nanton home still remains on Roslyn Road east.

The Nanton property consisted of five acres, bounded on the south by Roslyn Road and on the east by an adjacent property. The Assiniboine River, which turns at the point, formed the northern and western boundaries. The property was heavily treed, and paths and riding trails radiated from the formal gardens and lawns. Always lovers of fine horses, the Nantons kept five handsome horses. Sir Augustus showed the horses in competition, and enjoyed a daily ride through the property and down the road in the semi-rural suburb. To accommodate the horses, a fine stable was built, which remains today converted into a house. The stable consisted of two wings set in an L-shape from a large wooden cupola that served as a ventilator. The horses and a cow were housed in one wing, the tack room was in the centre, and the other wing stored the carriages and sleighs.¹⁰

The groom and coachman, Charles Wright, lived in a small gatehouse situated at the head of the driveway, inside the massive wrought iron gates with heavy limestone bases. When the Nantons changed from horses to motor cars, Wright became the chauffeur and continued to live in the gatehouse until 1931. In later years, he shared the accommodation with Chas. Beavis, long-time gardener and groundskeeper of Kilmorie. In the summer, he was assisted in keeping the gardens; in the winter, he maintained a large hockey rink on the property.

⁹ "Kilmorie, Roslyn Road, 1900-1935", from the photograph collection, P.A.M., September 1972, p. 4.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 2.

Sir Augustus and Lady Nanton raised six children in the rambling house at Kilmorie. The ground floor of brick structure had a library, sitting room with an open fireplace, a huge and formal 'music room', a dining room, sunroom, nursery, kitchen and pantry facilities, and the maids' sitting room. There was a large veranda across the main entrance. On the upper floor were four bedrooms, each with a private bath, a sitting room, a veranda, the children's rooms, a linen room and storage rooms. The top floor, lit by dormers and windows in the gables, contained the four maids' rooms, a sewing room, bathroom and additional bedrooms. The photographs included in this report show the interior to be sumptuous and elegant.

The house was a centre of hospitality among the wealthy citizens of Winnipeg. Then, during the war, the 27th Battalion Working Guild met continuously in Kilmorie while the men used the basement for evening recreation. On two occasions, the Prince of Wales came to dinner to Kilmorie,¹¹ and this was followed by a dance attended by 180 people. During Nanton's time on the Board of Directors of the CPR, the President and the directors were guests at Kilmorie in their annual inspection trip across Canada by train. The British Medical Association held its annual meeting in Winnipeg one year and were entertained at a garden party on the Nanton estate. Nanton, a low-profile Conservative, hosted a meeting between the newly-elected leader of the party, R.B. Bennett, and members of the Young Conservatives from across the country.¹²

In 1924, Sir Augustus was called by his life-long association with Edmund Osler, to become the president of the Dominion Bank. Nanton had been a director of the bank since 1907, and upon the death of his business partner in Osler, Hammond and Nanton, he assumed the leadership of the institution.¹³ The bank had its head office in Toronto, which necessitated a move for the Nanton family. They were reluctant to leave their home of so many decades. Testimonial dinners, receptions and articles expressed the regret of Winnipeg's citizens at the loss of the Nanton family. Lady Nanton was presented with a letter of appreciation signed by the "Women of Winnipeg", 41 pages of signatures in all.

¹¹ October 1924. There is a reference to a second visit in *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹² "Kilmorie, Roslyn Road", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹³ MacBeth, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

It was a fitting finale for the family. Six months later, in April, 1925, Sir Augustus Meredith Nanton was dead. His widow and the children still at home returned to Kilmorie and lived in it for another ten years.

Lady Nanton must have found the maintenance costs for Kilmorie quite staggering. The house alone gobbled up a ton of coal in heat a day in cold weather and the taxes on five acres of city property had soared. In 1935, she had the big house demolished and moved into the old gatehouse, or “The Lodge” as it was called.

Architect Herbert Moody redesigned the gatehouse and made a substantial addition to it. A foundation on concrete was laid for the new wing and a superstructure of brick with stone facings was erected.¹⁴ Cameron and Gibson, the general contractors on both the demolition and the addition, removed some of the fine interior woodwork and other materials from Kilmorie to add to the Lodge.¹⁵ The fine oak panelling (which can be seen in its original state in the photographs included) was removed and stored. Quarry tile, hardwood flooring, cut stone fireplace facings, steel sash windows, lighting fixtures and special hardware were also carefully removed. The gatehouse was meanwhile stripped of much of its interior finishings while the wing was being added.

The exterior of the original building was a frame structure with a brick veneer to a height of six feet, with pebble stucco above and an overlay of fake half-timbering under the gable. This was all removed and a uniform brick surface was overlaid, with cedar weather board now used under the gable.¹⁶

The interior support system was entirely updated. From a simple square living room-dining room plan, the gatehouse gained a large living room with a high roof, trussed and raftered with cedar timbers, the heavy carved oak wall panels from Kilmorie and a fine stone Tudor fireplace.

¹⁴ City of Winnipeg Building Permit No. 3485, 1 August 1935.

¹⁵ Herbert H.G. Moody, “A remodeled Cottage on Roslyn Road”, Western Canada Contractor, November-December 1935, p. 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 9.

Georgia pine panelling, wrought iron hardware and red quarry tile grace the front hallway. The woodwork from the library in Kilmorie was given to the dining room, and an oak buffet and china cabinet was built in. Maids' quarters were added near the kitchen. Large bathrooms and bedrooms with built-in furniture were installed on the second floor. A flagstone patio was added to the yard, and a landscape artist from Boston designed the yard features.¹⁷ The total cost of the work was estimated at \$5,000 on the building permit, but costs seem to have climbed much higher.

Lady Nanton continued to live in the gatehouse for several years but the stables appear to have been vacant until 1940 when they were purchased by Robert Moore, a partner to Herbert Moody who redesigned the gatehouse in 1935. Moore worked with contractor H.E. Gibson. The stables had already been converted into a garage when Sir Augustus traded in his horses for several fine automobiles. New windows and doors were cut into the brick veneer walls, and some of the old entrances were sealed. New dormers opened up the upper floor for living space and an entire plumbing and wiring system had to be intact along with the new partitions. An actual garage was left in the building, but fire regulations required a metal-lined wall to separate it from the living quarters.¹⁸

It is not yet possible to determine the extent of the change in the stables to its present appearance, but certainly some of the features such as the central cupola section are much as they were. The essence of the original character remains, but the modification has been substantial.

By May 1940, the main work on the stables was completed. Robert and Donna Moore lived in the stables for almost 40 years. The building was sold ca.1978 and is still a single-family dwelling. After Lady Nanton's death in the mid-forties, the former gatehouse was occupied by several different people. It is presently the home of Rupert Whitehead, the former director of the Manitoba Safety Council and now president of Wingate Properties.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁸ City of Winnipeg Building Permit No. 176, 7 February 1940.

The wrought iron gates with the limestone bases are still up. The Nanton estate has been subdivided into private homes and high-rise apartments along the river. The old stable has its address on Roslyn Crescent. The yard around the gatehouse and stables is overgrown, which secretes the old structures away from public view. No evidence of the old mansion remains.

There can be little understating the role of Augustus Nanton in the business development of Western Canada; he was a giant in his field. His role had impact across the nation and within the City of Winnipeg. Osler, Hammond and Nanton continued as a force in the business community. The buildings of the Nanton estate have been substantially altered but retain the character and dignity of old Kilmorie.

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Plate 1 – The main house at Kilmorie, the residence of Sir Augustus and Lady Nanton, 1929. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Foote Collection.)



Plate 2 – A side view of Kilmorie, 1924. The exterior was a light brick on a limestone foundation. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Foote Collection.)

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Plate 3 – The hallway and a sitting room in Kilmore, ca.1924. The oak panelling has a trefoil pattern. The stone fireplace and some of the fixtures were removed before the demolition of the house in 1935 and added to the former gatehouse. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)



Plate 4 – An Adams treatment of the dining room, with glass doors leading into the sunroom, ca.1924. From the sun room came the red quarry tile used in the gatehouse alterations. This style of columns and arches was used in several houses in the immediate area and one can presume some borrowing of ideas among the architects. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 5 – The main gates, gatehouse on the right and roof of the stables in the centre background, 1924. The driveway curved to the west (left) and up to the main house. The original design of the gatehouse façade can be seen here. The bell-cast upturn to the gables roof seems to be a fanciful flair that is not repeated in the other buildings. The additions to the gatehouse erected a cross-gable effect. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Foote Collection.)



Plate 6 – A view of the extensive grounds of Kilmorie, 1924. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Foote Collection.)

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Plate 7 – An early view of the Nanton Building on the northwest corner of Portage and Main (arrow), ca.1910. It was designed by Darling and Pearson and erected in 1908. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N1487.)

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Plate 8 – Lady Nanton (middle) and friends, 1924. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Foote Collection #730 [N2330].)



Plate 9 – Music room of Kilmore converted into a work room for the 27th Battalion Working Guild, ca.1916. (Courtesy of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.)

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Plate 10 – The gatehouse and gates, 1980. The gable end on the right is the original structure; the addition is to the left. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)



Plate 11 – The front of the gatehouse, 1980. The surface is painted brick. The bay window is in the dining room and the upper windows were in Lady Nanton's room. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)

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Plate 12 – A view of the south-east corner of the gatehouse, 1980. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)



Plate 13 – A window grate on the gatehouse, 1980. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)

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Plate 14 – The former stables, now converted to a house, 1980. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)



Plate 15 – The stables seen from the main gate, 1980. (City of Winnipeg Planning Department.)