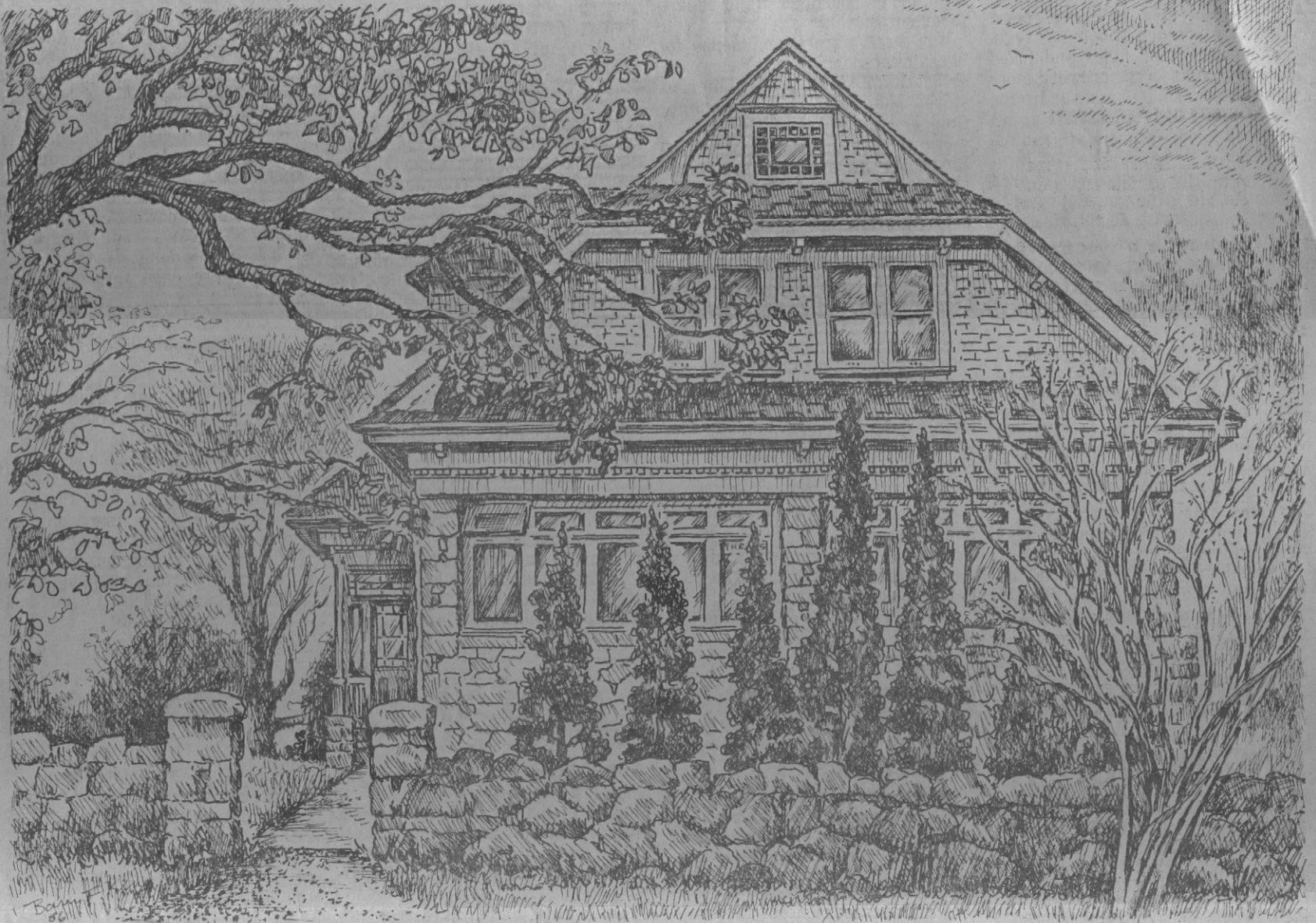


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# opinion



"Thrums," 175 Barrie Rd.

Barry F. King

## LANDMARKS

### Peter Pan link with venerable Gordon Head home

#### Geoffrey Castle

Among the remaining original homes in Gordon Head, few could have such an interesting background as "Thrums," on Barrie (formerly Ash) Road, near Tyndall Avenue.

When George Fraser Watson built his home in 1910, the name he chose for it was taken from *A Window at Thrums*, a story by Watson's cousin, Sir James M. Barrie. As a writer and playwright, Barrie is better known as the author of *Peter Pan*, which he wrote for the five orphans he adopted. "Thrums" was the fictional name for Kirremuir, the village where Watson was born and raised just north of Dundee in Scotland. In Barrie's book, the window was "the square foot of glass where Jess sat in her chair and looked down the brae."

George Watson came to Canada in 1885 when he was only 17 years old. He worked in Perth, Ontario, as a stonemason before coming to Victoria. He possessed a fine tenor voice and was in the choirs of Calvary Baptist Church and the First Presbyterian Church. It was at a choir practice that he met his future wife, Elizabeth,

on the first Sunday she arrived in Victoria to join her brothers, William and James Grant.

The couple moved to Gordon Head in 1903, three years after they were married. They bought the home of Dr. John Ash, who had it built as a retreat from politics. The cost was \$500. With few streets and no house numbers, the doctor had named it "Jersey Hall," for his father-in-law, Sir John Veuille, High Sheriff of the Island of Jersey.

"Thrums" was one of two houses Watson built on the 16 acres of land. The 1½-storey structure featured coursed stone walls with random cut ashlar masonry. It was provided with a built-in sun porch and a bay window facing west. A small, square window in the attic, facing the sea, emulated the window in Barrie's book.

The fine interior wood panelling was the work of pioneer Gordon Head carpenter, Isaac Summers. The four-bedroom house was ample for the Watsons and their three daughters. It was en-

hanced by treed surroundings, the habitat of deer, cougars and bears.

George rode to town on his bicycle where he worked on the stonework of such buildings as the post office at Humboldt and Government, the Carnegie Library on Yates Street and the Gibson estate wall on Rockland Avenue. For 14 years, the conservatory at "Thrums" served as Gordon Head post office and Elizabeth Watson was postmistress.

Still without piped water in the area in 1920, George decided to run for the office of reeve of Saanich, using the slogan "Watson and Water." After two terms as reeve lasting to 1924, Watson drove to Ontario for an extended holiday. Failing in health, George retired, grew strawberries and planted cherry trees and holly bushes. He died in 1930, aged 62.

Today, newer homes crowd around "Thrums" on its reduced lot but it is still a distinctive house, worthy of its famous literary connection.

Geoffrey Castle is president of the Victoria section of the B.C. Historical Federation.