



# Jones County

## Historical Review

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# Ingenious Scot starts county's first factory

by C. L. "Gus" Norlin  
Editor's note

I had often heard the story of Jones County's first "factory of an iron work," i.e., a factory the product of which was patented, assembled and shipped worldwide. It was not the first factory, as such, in the county, for that honor belonged to J. J. Tomlinson of Canton, who had a furniture factory in conjunction with his saw mill at that place.

Tomlinson started his furniture factory in 1846, but then, in that day and age, almost every saw mill site also produced furniture — and coffins.

Jones County's first "real factory" was located near Scotch Grove in Section 12 of Wayne Township, in the SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 12.

Very few persons of whom I inquired about this factory could give me any information, for very few living now ever had need of the product produced there. And while many of the machines could have been found in the general area (mostly stored in machine sheds) prior to World War II, the junk men had gathered them up and they were melted down to become part of the vast arsenal of weapons needed from 1942 to 1946.

I combed the area looking for one of these machines, and finally, when convinced there were none around, I advertised in a national publication. My ad said: "Wanted: The mechanical device for grubbing and pulling tree stumps, known as the JAMES MILNE & SON, OR SCOTCH GROVE "GRUB AND STUMP MACHINE." These machines were produced at Scotch Grove, Iowa, from 1885 until 1893. I had one reply to the ad, from an old Amishman in Pennsylvania, who sent a picture along with his letter, which read, "I have a stump puller that I still use, but there is no name on it. Can you identify the puller in the enclosed picture?" Well, it wasn't a MILNE STUMP PULLER, that I knew, for even with scant knowledge of Milne's puller, I had a general idea what it looked like.

The ad however did bring me information on the stump puller manufactured by Milne and Son after they had moved the plant to Monmouth, Illinois in



MILNE FAMILY members, from the left, front row, Mrs. James Milne, James Milne, Helen Milne Bray; back row, Agnes Blanche Milne, James W. Milne and Edna Milne.

1893. It also brought much information on this remarkable family, the old patriarch JAMES MILNE, and the discovery that descendants of James Milne still live in Jones County, and very near the site of the original plant.

Here in brief is the whole story.

Researched and written by  
C. L. "Gus" Norlin

James Milne was born in Scotland in 1821. As he said it, "Oi was burne in the Heelands O'Scutland." In his late teens he migrated to eastern Canada where there were relatives who had preceded him, undoubtedly having come there with Lord Selkirk. James found Selkirk's promises regarding the new country hollow, and he did not like what he found in Quebec, for the soil was rocky and conditions only somewhat less harsh than those he had left in Scotland. He knew that earlier Scottish immigrants had gone south into the states, around an area called Dubuque.

James had married Helen Hunter, also a

native of Scotland, in 1852. In 1854 they came to Jones County, Iowa, but not before James had ventured without Helen into the Scotch Grove area. We find that he journeyed afoot most of the distance from Quebec to Dubuque, then he "swum" across the mighty Mississippi with a heavy pack on his back. He acquired land 40 miles northeast of Cedar Rapids, built a crude living quarter, then went back to move his wife and a few belongings to the new home.

The prairie lands were comparatively free of timber — but in some areas the clearing of trees to permit cultivation was a problem. It was easy enough to cut the trees — but the stumps — now that was a real stumper. James determined there must be a way to remove these stumps easier than the age-old "grubbing 'em out with an axe." Some way must be found, for James and his wife needed more ground to cultivate. The family was growing. Joseph J. had been born in 1858, Hector A. came

(cont. on page 2)

# Need for stump puller was great—

(cont. from page 1)

along in 1860, Elizabeth Ann showed up in 1863, and little Jimmy (who died in infancy) made a brief appearance in 1866.

Helen Hunter Milne died in 1868. She is buried at the "Four Horn" cemetery west of Scotch Grove, along with infant son Jimmy, and Elizabeth Ann, her third born and only daughter.

James Milne the widower remarried Elizabeth Barr in 1870. To this union we find the issue of Helen, born October 9, 1871, Agnes Blanche, born June 23, 1873, Jmaes W., born January 18, 1875, and Edna E., born August 27, 1877.

Now getting additional land cleared was a must, so the enterprising James set about inventing a "Stump Puller." The machine was a success, was constantly being borrowed, so James contracted to have the hooks, capstan and swivels cast by a foundry and shipped to Scotch Grove on the early railline. Steel cable, an important part of the device, was purchased and also shipped to Scotch Grove. From the rail dock in Scotch Grove, it was all transported by horse team and wagons to the farm's "barn," which served the two-fold purpose of housing livestock and being the assembly plant for the stump puller.

As fast as the device could be assembled, it was sold. So marketable did it become, that soon it was being shipped all over the United States, and to other countries. It eventually became the largest selling device of its kind in the world. It was extremely simple in construction, but so powerful in relation to

energy input to energy output that only the larger stumps required use of horsepower to the capstan. Medium stumps could be pulled by a man or men pushing the sweep, attached to the capstan, around which would a cable, affixed to the stump to be pulled. Additional anchoring cables would be tied to still-standing trees or unmoved stumps in order to hold the device in line.

The entire process of "stump pulling" was extremely dangerous, for if the pulling cable should snap during the rubbing process, the whiplash could easily sever the legs of horse or man. The ground level anchoring cable could inflict serious wounds if it broke, but generally did not result in a fatality.

As the operation of producing the stump puller grew, it became necessary to warehouse the machines and warehouses were built along the railroad right-of-way in Scotch Grove.

James Milne, remember, was a farmer at heart, and one of his loves was horse-flesh, ponies in particular, and Shetlands above the rest. In 1890 the Milne Shetland Pony Farm was begun on 80 acres of land in section 18 of Scotch Grove township, just a hop, jump and skip up the road from the Stump Puller works, and across the township line. In later years, and at Monmouth, Illinois, this enterprise became known as Milne's Sunnywide Shetland Pony Farm, renowned the world over. The shetland pony farm, while the brainchild of James, was actually started and managed by H.A. and J.J., sons of James.

Hector (H.A.) was also large in dairying while in the Scotch Grove area, was active in the first Scotch Grove creamery, and was considered an authority on good herd management.

When the older boys, Joseph and Hector, grew to manhood and beyond the public school stage, Hector apparently elected to stick to farming, for he sold his interest in the stump puller to brother Joe.

Now James the father was a devout Presbyterian, a member of that church now no longer standing, but located west of Scotch Grove and fondly remembered as the Four Horn Church because of its four spires. He determined that his children would gain a higher education than he by attending a good Presbyterian College. He knew of a good one — in Monmouth, Illinois. Not only that, but there were some mighty fine Scots in the Monmouth area.

Joe went off to college at Monmouth, and there met Margaret McQuiston, the sister of Mel McQuiston of bookstore fame. Maggie, as she was called, may have played a large part in the Milnes moving from Scotch Grove. Maggie was a city girl, and not about to be mired in the mud and loneliness of an Iowa farm, even though the scene was enlivened by the activity of a "Stump Puller Works."

So it was — the Milnes pretty much pulled stakes and moved all enterprises to Monmouth, Illinois, in 1893. James the father and Joseph the son built their first building in Monmouth in which to house the manufacturing facilities. That building

(cont. on page 3)

WIRE ROPE COUPLER

LOW STUMP HOOK

STUMP MACHINE IN GERMANY AT WORK IN A GERMAN FOREST AND ON HEAVY CLAY GROUND

THE OLD WAY

THE NEW WAY

NEW IXL GRUBBER

PULLING WHITE OAK 3 FT. IN DIAMETER ON FARM OF H. MEYERS, WOODSTOWN, OHIO

PALMETTO ROOT HOOK

PULLING SAW PALMETTO ROOTS BY MEANS OF THE PALMETTO ROOT HOOK AT SYLVAN LAKE FLA.

OFFICE OF

JAMES MILNE & SON,

PATENTEES AND MANUFACTURERS OF

Grub and Stump Machines,

PATENT WIRE ROPE COUPLER,

And Machinery and Appliances for Clearing Timber Land,

The Largest Establishment of the Kind in the World.

Scotch Grove, Iowa.

## Milne family leaves descendants in area-

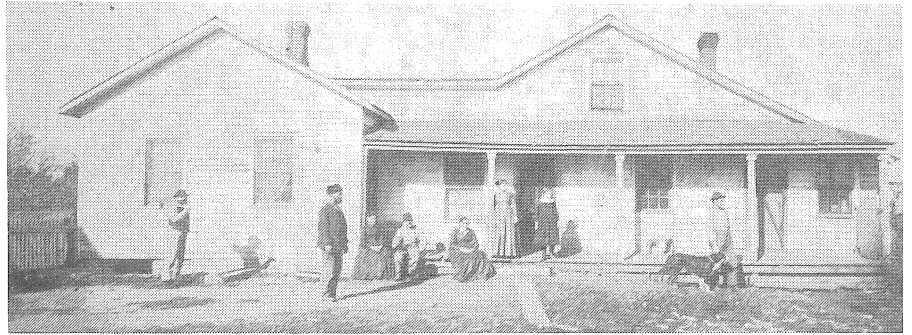
still stands and is today the Warren Illinois County Highway Department headquarters. The original building was 40 by 160 feet. Other buildings and additions followed. The Milnes had purchased the ground upon which the buildings were to stand on November 23, 1892. The new factory was located on the east side of South Ninth Street, just north of the C.B. and Q. railroad tracks.

The firm reorganized after going to Monmouth, and on December 27, 1894 they incorporated as the Milne Manufacturing Co., with a capital of \$30,000. The incorporators were James Milne, J. J. (Joseph) Milne, and Margaret McQuiston Milne. The 1895 city directory of Monmouth shows James Milne as president of the firm, and living at 117 South Eighth St. J. J. Milne is listed as secretary and treasurer, living at 916 East First Ave. J. J. later built a home at 833 East Second St., a beautiful house, still standing today in 1982.

James Milne, the Auld Patriarc, immediately became an active member of the Second Presbyterian Church of Monmouth. One thing about the structure bothered him, for having a keen eye he soon noticed that a large crack had developed in the stone wall of one side. There had been uneven settling of the foundation, and before long the wall would be in danger of collapsing. Milne and his stump puller came to the rescue of his beloved Church building. He punched holes in the two side walls and pulled a cable through just inside the inner face of the front wall at a level about three feet above the second floor or loft of the building. The cable had fittings on the ends, and these fittings terminated in steel plates and anchors. Pressure was applied to the cable, the same as in pulling a stump, and when everything was back in place, the plates were set, and locked. The cable, painted gold was visible from the top of the two stairs which came up to the second floor from both sides of the first floor vestibule. Installed in the mid-1890's it is part of the structure yet today.

We have tracked the Stump Puller Works down, learned of the ingenuity of James Milne, know of the family success, but we didn't know until just lately that James Milne, though a farmer at heart, investor through necessity, was also engaged in public building projects.

James Milne was the contractor for the still-standing picturesque old iron bridge over the Wapsipinicon River in Anamosa, and also the contractor of the two-span iron bridge to be seen in Grant Woods picture "Stone City." His initials are carved in the stone abutments of both bridges. There are other iron bridges throughout the center of Jones County,



**MILNE FAMILY** members are shown gathered at a house in Monmouth, Illinois: from the left, hired man, J. J. Milne, Helen Milne, Willis Bray, Mrs. J. J. Milne, Blanche Milne, Edna Milne and J. W. Milne.

with the iron plaque affixed bearing the name "Milne."

The Anamosa Eureka, on November 24, 1887, had the following news item in that day's edition.

"The last plank was laid on the new bridge at Doan's Mill (ed. note: the bridge crossing the Wapsie at the state park entrance) Friday, November 15th, just before the first blizzard of the season came.

"Mr. Riddell, President of the Milwaukee Bridge Company, and the county supervisor were on hand to make a careful examination of the bridge. While this was in progress a stranger came along with a double team of horses and was asked to drive across the bridge at a fast trot and he did so without causing any apparent vibration. Mr. Riddell and Mr. Mitchell also examined the abutments, both speaking in high terms of the work, pronouncing it the best job they had ever seen. This is quite complimentary to the contractor, James Milne, but no more than he serves."

Additional information for this article has been taken from addenda dated December 7, 1972, and compiled by Ruth Gladys Bray Yount, granddaughter of James Milne, and Elizabeth Barr Milne, daughter of Helen Milne.

"The bridge at Anamosa is 170 feet long, and cost \$8,222.25. This bridge and dam is one of the most photographed sites in the area at all seasons of the year and many painters have put them on canvas.

"The bridge at Stone City was dismantled in 1971 and a new cement bridge stands in its place over the river. It is noteworthy to record that the stone pillar built in the 1880's by James Milne was utilized to support the new structure."

Additional information, while not pertinent to this article on the "Stump Puller" but of interest to Jones County is also taken from addenda by Ruth Yount.

### Addendum by Ruth Gladys Bray Yount

In 1852, James Milne (my grandfather) married Helen Hunter, a native of Scotland. In 1854, they came to Jones County, Iowa. Their children were:

Joseph J. born in 1858 and buried at

Monmouth, Illinois;

Hector A. born in 1860 and buried at Monmouth, Illinois;

Elizabeth Ann born in 1863 and buried at Scotch Grove, Iowa;

Little Jimmy born in 1866, died in infancy, buried at Scotch Grove, Iowa.

Helen Hunter Milne died in 1868.

In 1870, James Milne married Elizabeth Barr (my grandmother). They had one son and three daughters. Their children were:

Helen (my Mother) born October 9, 1871 and buried at Cass Center, Iowa;

Agnes Blanche born June 23, 1873 and buried at Los Angeles, California;

James W. born January 18, 1875 and buried at Des Moines, Iowa;

Edna E. born August 27, 1877, and buried at Los Angeles, California.

We will conclude the story on James Milne and his "Stump puller," but not before we make further note of the "Shetland Pony" enterprise. While (as mentioned earlier in this article) the pony farm was the brainchild of James, and became the business of H. A. and J. J. at Scotch Grove, it became world-renowned after the move to Monmouth, Illinois. At one time, the Sunnyside Shetland Pony Farm, contracted with the publishers of the Saturday Evening Post, whereby the "Post" offered to anyone selling a given number of subscriptions to this magazine, a pony free of all charges. The ponies were supplied by the Milnes.

From another page of the addenda by Ruth Yount, we read the following:

### Sunnyside Shetland Pony Farm

by Ruth Gladys Bray Yount, 1972

Sunnyside Shetland Pony Farm was established in 1890 by H.A. and J.J. Milne, sons of James Milne, on a farm near Scotch Grove, Iowa, with a small number of purebred Shetlands.

In 1894 the business was moved to Monmouth, Illinois, and located at the end of West Broadway, one-fourth mile from the city limits. By 1894 the pony business had grown until the farm had over 300 ponies for sale at all times. The Milnes also dealt in miniature surreys, pony buggies and carts, traps — 2 seated with back-to-

(cont. on page 4)

# Shetland pony farm gains fame—

(cont. from page 3)

back harness, saddles and pony blankets. A notation from their advertising states

## President's message

Dear Reader:

**"The best laid plans of mice and men often go astray." — Robert Burns**

The winter past certainly helped Burns' famous saying apply to me. With everything we (the Society) had in store to accomplish from closing date last fall to opening date this spring, old man winter with his lack of any moderate days put the kibosh to outside work at the museum.

It appears now, however, that we might be off and running. On Sunday afternoon, April 25th, Society members met for the annual pre-tourist clean-up spruce-up of the museum and grounds.

Our really big undertaking for the 1982 season is getting the "Whittlin Joe's Carvings & Animations" on tour. For those of you who have not heard, the JONES COUNTY, IOWA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, was chosen over many applicants in Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska to give this unique display a permanent home. It will go on tour of fairs and other celebrations beginning the first part of June, 1982. It is housed in a 60 foot by 12 foot custom-built, air-conditioned trailer, and contains over 600 wooden hand carvings depicting farm and circus life at the turn of the last century.

The entire display is owned by a man now semi-retired and living in Hawaii who wished to find a group interested in giving this unique display a permanent home, while realizing a profit for this undertaking. The Society was first tipped off about his search for a home from the Anamosa Chamber of Commerce who had received a questionnaire from the owner.

The Society will not own this bit of Americana, but will be in charge of it. It will be manned by hired help, and this first year will tour an area from 50 to 100 miles distant from Jones County. There is no admission fee, only a free-will offering. Over 300 of the carvings are animated. I hope all of you have a chance to see it this season.

We need as much help at our village and museum complex as we can get. We have no paid people at the grounds or museum; everything is volunteer.

The next issue of the "Review" will be coming to you shortly, now that spring has sprung, and we can start getting things done.

Sincerely,  
Gus Norlin, President,  
Jones County  
Historical Society

"Hector A. Milne, who is in charge of the farm will always (Sabbath excepted) take pleasure in showing the ponies, especially to children who may ride or drive to their heart's content."

Hector A. Milne specialized in training several of the cute little horses and ponies to do tricks for visitors to the farm.

The ponies were shipped to all parts of the U.S. by express, carefully crated and with feed enough for their journey. The law designated that they were to be taken out to rest on long trips.

A tiny pony whose hoofs matches a fifty cent piece in size was sold to Ringling Brothers circus in 1904.

And so again through the medium of this publication the people of Jones County and those interested in the county's history learn of the ingenuity and industrious nature of its earlier settlers.

Before the advent of the mammoth tractors we now operate so easily to till the soil, or to clear the timber ground, or to excavate, came those industrious pioneers such as Cyrus McCormick, John Deere and James Milne. Their genius changed man's way of living, and made it possible

so that today every tiller of the soil is able to not only raise enough food to feed himself and his family, but to feed an additional 55 people. Men such as these lived by the old axiom, "Necessity is the mother of invention."

**Editor's note:**

Much help in researching this story came from the Reverend Chester E. Chandler of Monmouth, Illinois, Ralph B. Eckley, a retired newspaperman of Monmouth, Illinois, and from an early historical publication of Warren County, Ill. The pictures of the Milnes are by courtesy of Mary Louise (Yount) Helgens, wife of Vernon Helgens, of Scotch Grove, great-great-granddaughter of James Milne.

Certain portions of the story as mentioned earlier are from family research done in the very early 1970's by Ruth Gladys Bray Yount, mother of Mary Helgens. Others of the Yount family in addition to Mary Helgens, are her sisters, Virginia Yount (Mrs. Edman Vernon) living at Morley, Iowa, Lucille (Yount) Kester, of Edina, Minnesota, and Wilma (Yount) Pieratt, of Waterloo, Iowa, and Eugene Bray of Anamosa, Iowa.

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