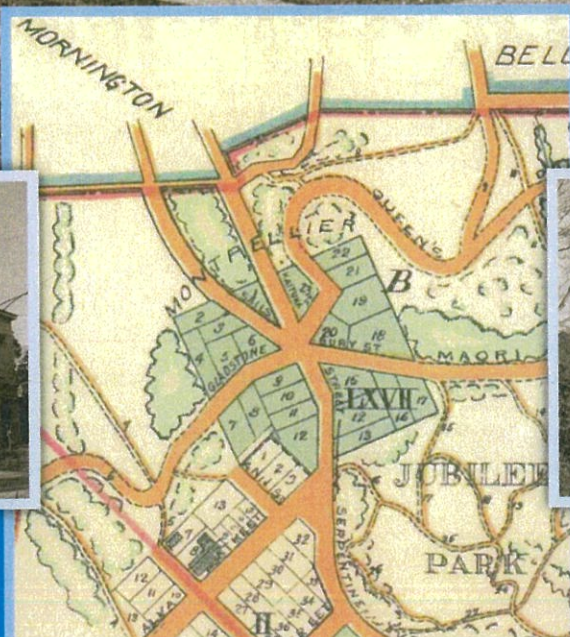


Montpellier

**The Dunedin Cattle Market Reserve
and the
Township of Montpellier**



Mervyn Smith

Lot 20 (56 Maori Road)

This lot was bought by Edwin Alfred Tapper in May 1889. Alfred Tapper had been in business with his older brother in Invercargill as ironmongers and timber merchants and he had become mayor of that town in 1887. After Alfred assumed full ownership of the firm a Dunedin branch of the timber business was established in 1881 and this prospered, soon becoming the largest outlet. The firm extended additionally into general hardware supplies and set up further branches in Gore and Ashburton. According to the *Cyclopedia of New Zealand*, A Tapper and Co, with its numerous saw mills and retail outlets, was for a time one of the largest employers of labour in New Zealand. Tapper also employed his nephews, the sons of his original partner, in the firm. But there were associated family problems. There is a interesting court report in 1890 of a case involving two of these nephews, one claiming the other had misappropriated money belonging to the Dunedin timber company. It was settled out of court, though one of the pair, the accused, returned again to face, and lose, a libel action brought by an employee of the Invercargill branch.



Alfred Tapper
(Cyclopedia of New Zealand)

Tapper, his wife and four children, moved to Dunedin in 1890 to a house in Granville Terrace, Belleknowes. He subsequently (December 1891) became a Mornington Borough Councillor and later (1901) a Dunedin City Councillor. In 1899 he sold all his interests in his sawmills, his timber yards and the hardware shops and set up as a commercial and financial broker, customhouse and shipping agent. He was drowned at St Kilda beach in April 1914 while bathing in the sea.

It is not clear for how long, if ever, Tapper lived in Montpellier. From 1890 Stones Directory always lists him as residing in Belleknowes, never in the Montpellier Township. But with John Hewitt of the adjacent Lot 23, he did write to the City Council in January 1892 complaining about Mornington sewage in the Toitu Stream and requesting that a small culvert be extended across the end of what is now Maori Road. Land records show that in 1896 the lease was transferred to Frederick Smith, the Manager of the Dunedin Savings Bank. This was a formal acknowledgement of an earlier informal arrangement with Tapper, since from 1893 until 1898 Smith is mentioned in Stone's Directory as a Montpellier resident and in August 1892 Smith was writing to the City Council requesting that a footpath be formed in front of his Montpellier house. Tapper's earlier complaints to the Council imply an

interest in the house, so I suspect that about May 1892 he sold the newly-completed house to Smith, possibly because of second thoughts given the difficulty of the stream. The house is rather grander than most 30 year old banking clerks would build, so I think it very probable that Tapper was indeed the first owner.



Alfred Tapper's House

Smith worked for his father at the Dunedin Savings Bank from 1890 or earlier and on the latter's death in 1895 succeeded him as manager. Edmund Smith, the father, had been manager since the foundation of the bank in 1864 and Fred, the son, was to be in charge until 1920. The management of the bank was thus a family affair for 56 years and it should be said that throughout the Smith dynasty the Bank thrived. Fred Smith shifted from Montpellier in 1899, Stones Directory gives his address from that year as Hawthorne Avenue, Mornington, but it is not until December 1901 that the house on lot 20 was advertised for sale. Then it was described as: a first-class, 9-room residence adjoining the Kaituna Bowling Club with bathroom (hot and cold water), scullery, pantry and outhouses in thorough order (all modern conveniences).

The buyer was George Esther who for many years owned a grocery business in George Street before selling up in the early 1890s to become a financial agent, bill broker and valuer. He was a director of many companies and he was a City Councillor from 1884-1887. At the time of the shift from Royal Terrace to Montpellier his family of five daughters and two sons were all adult. The land lease was taken out in the name of one of Esther's unmarried daughters, Dora Maud, but at the final sale of the house after Esther's death in 1912 it was described as part of the Estate of George Esther.

In 1917 the lease was acquired by Annie Driver who held it for three years until 1920 when it was transferred to Alexander Robert Kennedy. In July 1923 it was sold to Michael George, following an auction advertised as "by order of the mortgagee". Kennedy was the local Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages in the office of the Department of Internal Affairs. I have not been able to find anything more about the previous two owners, other than the implication that Kennedy had financial problems.

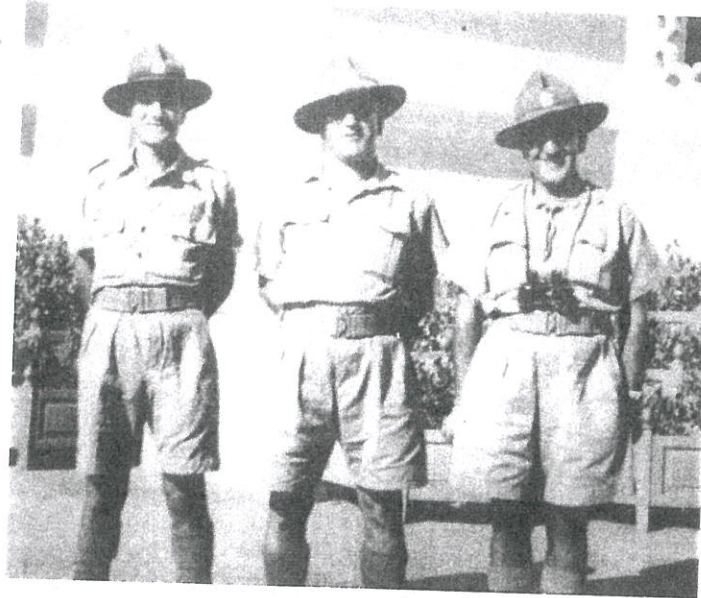
Michael George and his wife Josephine had both been born and married in Lebanon and travelled to New Zealand as a young couple. Their names were anglicised from Mikhail and Zarifie Girius and initially they settled in Walker Street (now Carroll Street) where several other Lebanese families were living. According to a family history, in 1903 Michael and another family bought the Rising Sun Hotel in Carroll Street after its liquor licence had been lost. The building was then shared between the two families.



Michael and Josephine George and their Family (1922)
(the group also includes Michael's brother Joseph- standing second from right)
(courtesy Mrs Diana Kearns)

At the time of the move to Montpellier the Georges had ten children ranging from the eldest, already married, to the youngest who would not yet be of school age. A large house was needed to house the family and coping with domestic needs of everyone would have been a formidable challenge for Josephine. The everyday tasks of meal preparation, washing clothes and linen and keeping the house clean would have left her little time for relaxation, although the older children played a full part in assisting. But according to family memories, there was still time for Josephine to care for others in need in the community and, as well, she and her husband enjoyed a social life by entertaining guests in their home and visiting other families.

Michael George was a traveller, an occupation which necessitated frequent absences from home. He was apparently an astute and successful businessman, but even so, providing for his family would have required much hard work on his part. Again according to family accounts, there was never a time when the family went hungry or lacked essential living needs, even during the difficult years of the depression. Memories of those years are of hard work, but also of a happy supportive environment with everyone contributing to the greater good. Resilience was certainly needed during the war years. This was a worrying time with sons and grandsons serving overseas with the New Zealand armed forces. Then in 1942 Michael died, placing an even greater burden on his widow. Fortunately all the soldiers returned to Dunedin safely, though Tom George contracted malaria in Cairo and came home in a hospital ship.



George Family Members in Cairo with the 2nd NZEF
 (from left: grandson Bert Farr and sons John and Tom)
 (courtesy Mrs Diana Kearns)

Josephine died in 1951 and in the following year the 21 year lease was renewed in the names of Anthony and Francis Stephen George. The house remained in the family for a further twenty years, in 1973 Thomas and Bertie George were listed as the lessees.

The property was sold in 1975 to Kathleen Reid who subsequently transferred it to Beverley and John Reid in 1980 before resuming the lease again in 1993. When the land was freeholded in 1996 the new title was held by Kathleen Reid. In 2002 the property was sold to John and Carol Bryan who carried out an extensive restoration of the surrounding garden including removal of the high macrocarpa hedge which for very many years had obscured the street view of the magnificent old house as now shown in the above photograph.