

MEMORIAL OF HUGH SWAINE SPENCE



HUGH SWAINE SPENCE
November 30, 1885 – March 13, 1978

One of the last classical mineralogists in Canada, Hugh Swaine Spence, died on March 13, 1978.

Hugh Spence was born in the small town of Honiton in Devonshire, England, on November 30, 1885. He received his early education at Allhallows School there, and it is recorded that at a very early age he became an avid collector, interested in natural history. His interest later took him to the Royal School of Mines in Freiberg, Saxony. There he obtained his mining engineering degree, but more importantly, became associated with an international group of scientists with whom he maintained contact throughout his long life. After graduating from Freiberg he worked for a year in the tin mines of Cornwall. About 1910 he was encouraged to travel to Canada, where he joined the staff of the Mines Branch of the Department of Mines in Ottawa.

In 1912 he married Kathleen Keeley. They had three sons, two of whom died very young. The third, Neville S. Spence, later also joined the staff of the Mines Branch, becoming head of the Nuclear and Powder Metallurgy Section before he retired in 1976. Interestingly, a grandson, Hugh John Spence, has followed his forebears and is now with the Atomic Energy Control Board in Ottawa.

During his active career, Hugh Spence's specialty was the field of industrial minerals. His particular interests were graphite, mica, the phosphates, pegmatites and their constituent minerals. When pitchblende was discovered at Great Bear Lake in 1930 he was quick to visit the locality, and the astonishing collections that he made in those early days are now priceless. From that time on he also became intensely interested in rare and unusual minerals, especially those possessing the property of fluorescence, and in the radioactive and associated minerals. I can recall many stimulating discussions with Hugh Spence during the 1930s concerning methods of extracting radium when I was studying the complex pitchblende ores of Great Bear Lake microscopically. After retirement in 1949, his interest never flagged, and he conducted an active correspondence with many of his associates and those with similar interests right up until shortly before his death.

He was honored with life memberships in the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, the American Institute of Mining Engineers and the Mineralogical Society of America. A bibliography of reports, papers and articles bearing his name would number well over forty, covering the period from 1912 to 1949.

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