



William Little (Dr.)

Interview

April 10, 1974

Length: 46 minutes and 8 seconds

Jack Coleman introduces himself and Norbert Moran who are at the County Archives on Highway 26 in Midhurst with Dr. William Caruthers Little [*Bill*] of Barrie. He is known to most people in Barrie as Dr. Bill. He is possibly the best known person in the area. Dr. Bill served the Barrie area for 52 years; he served his country and his church. Bill was born in Churchill on September 14, 1895. His father was Alfred Thomas Little and his mother was Gene* Maude Rose Armson. His brother was John Caruthers Little and he is deceased. His wife was Catherine Haas Ford and they married in June 1923. His immediate family is Catherine Joyce and William Ford Little. Jack asks about the history of his father's side of the family. Bill's grandfather (whom Bill was named after) came to Canada in approximately 1842 and settled at Little's Hill, which is just outside of [*place name is inaudible*]. He was a conservative member in Ottawa from 1867 until 1882. Jack asks about his mother's side of the family. Bill's great grandfather William Armson came from England (near Nottingham) to Canada in the 1820s. He settled at Middleton just west of Bradford and became first Warden of the County from 1845 to 1852. Bill's grandfather named different places in Innisfil. He changed the name 'Victoria' to Stroud and named Painswick, Holly, and [*inaudible*] he named those towns after places near his home in England. His place was called Kite's Nest* because there was a farm on their estate in England which it was named after. As mentioned before, Bill's grandfather on his father's side was a member of parliament. Bill was once asked to stand in the Conservative party.

Bill was finishing his third year of medicine in university when he enlisted in March of 1915. Bill enlisted in the 26th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery. He went to France in January





1916, went to England in 1917 for a commission, and returned to France with that commission in 1917, and stayed there until he left France in September 1918 to finish his medical course. Besides his service medals for participation in World War One, he received a military medal for valor on The Somme. Bill was a charter member of Branch 147 of the Royal Canadian Legion (which was formed in 1928) in Barrie and is currently the only living charter member. Bill was recognized by the Legion and given an award called the Citizen of the Year. This was a few years ago but Bill cannot remember the year; he believes it was 1969.

Bill was the jail physician for about 20 years and took the job when the previous doctor died in 1927. Bill was a coroner in approximately 1924 and resigned in 1960 because he was fed up with it. Bill explains that he resigned because he was getting called on Sundays and holidays and when other coroners were away.

Bill's Uncle Edward Little was an MPP for a riding composed of Simcoe and Dufferin. He was there in the 1890s to 1906 and was appointed Registrar of the Surrogate Court and held that until his death in 1934. Bill's dad was a doctor (Dr. A.T. Little) who graduated in 1886 and started a practice in Churchill. He moved to Barrie in 1906. Bill started his practice in Barrie in March of 1922. Jack asks Bill about the changes in medical practice over the years. Bill is the oldest living doctor in Barrie. Bill remembers that cars were put away in the fall and on blocks. During this period, they used a horse and buggy in the mud and then used a car in the snow. His office was on Maple Avenue and he lived in the building as well. His father lived across the street. Bill remembers that he used to make a lot of house calls and still makes them today but most people today do not. He explains that it is easier for people to get to the offices now because of cars and snow plowing. Bill remembers doing immediate surgery but anything highly specialized required doctors from Toronto. Bill's fees used to be charged directly to the people whereas today it goes to OHIP. Office hours have changed as well. When Bill first started to practice he was open every day, usually until about 10pm. Saturday night was the worst because they got into a few mix ups; he remembers farmers showing up at the office at midnight.





Bill's father died in 1938. He was the Medical Officer of Health in Barrie but Bill did not follow him in that position. They wanted Bill to take it on but he refused. His dad put through the first pasteurization by-law in Barrie and put in the recording thermometer. Barrie was the third place in Ontario, following Toronto and Ottawa, to [*inaudible*] for children. Jack notes that Bill's father helped getting underprivileged kids free milk at school.

Norbert asks Bill if he had to assist in any hangings in his position as jail physician. He says that unfortunately he had to help with two hangings, pronouncing the men as dead. In addition to Maple Avenue, Norbert asks if Bill had offices elsewhere. Bill says that he, Harold Smith, [*first name is inaudible*] Taylor, and Allen Ray* founded the Simcoe Medical Group on 47 Collier Street. They continued at that location until the medical arts building was built and moved there. When Bill got married, his father moved in across the street but then moved north of Ross Street on Maple Avenue. That house was used purely as a living space and not an office. Some doctors who were practicing at the same time as Bill were Drs. Lewis, Hart*, Treble*, Fred Ross*, Simpson, Oates*, his father, [*last two names are inaudible*]. Each of these men had their own practices. Some had assistants but not all of them did. Bill never went to Camp Borden on-call except for a few times during the last war when he did a few surgeries there on weekends because he was the local DBA representative. Bill says that Barrie had so many doctors because even though it was not a large town, there were not a lot of doctors in the surrounding areas. The doctors would go into those areas doing house calls.

During World War Two, Bill was an examining physician for about four years at the armories and Camp Borden [*Military Base*]. Bill was the Chief of Staff at the hospital for about five or six years following the death of Dr. Turnville*. To get this position, you are elected by the medical staff and the recommendation goes to the board of directors who then confirm the position. Once elected, the doctor normally remains there until retirement. Any doctor that comes to Barrie has to present certain credentials to the executive committee of the medical staff who looks them over and then recommends them to the Board of Directors. Bill believes they could then either turn them down or give them temporary admission to the hospital. At the hospital, the doctor works under supervision from another member of the staff for a certain





number of months and then elected as a permanent member. The Chief of Staff is head of the organization and has to be diplomatic for things to run smoothly. When there's controversy they have to settle it.

Bill can recall that Ms. McLellan was the Superintendent of nurses when he arrived. Other matrons included Ms. Thompson, Ms. Smith, and Miss Schifley*. Ms. Shanahan* was the Superintendent of Nurses later and became the Administrator of the hospital for many years. When Bill first came, she was in her second year of training. There is still an Administrator of the hospital but there's now a Head of Clinical Work which is close to what a Superintendent of Nurses was. Bill says that there is no longer a resident matron living within the hospital at all times. One of the McArthurs* built a residence for the nurses. Before that they lived on the third floor of the hospital. Norbert asks if the hospital today is used by people from different communities like Collingwood, Midland, or Orillia. Bill says that people do come to Barrie for special services because they have eye doctors, pathologists, nose and throat doctors, and an x-ray service. The hospital at this time is a district hospital, so it's technically not just for Barrie. [Tape cuts out]

[Tape resumes] Bill says that when he first came back from war there was Diphtheria, Typhoid, Pernicious Anemia, Diabetes (Banting, whom Bill went to school with, discovered insulin), and Tuberculosis which were fatal at the time but now are treatable or rare. Bill is asked if he believes there will ever be a cure for cancer based on the advances in medicine he saw in his lifetime. Bill does believe that there will be a cure with all the money being spent on research all over the world. Norbert asks Bill if he thinks the reason more middle aged and young people are coming to the hospital with heart problems, cancer, etc. is because of the increased pressures of today's society. Bill says that the cancer rate in young people has not increased; they just have a better way of detecting it now. He believes that tension, the way of living, and weight has affected the increase in heart attacks. Methods of diagnosis for heart attacks have also improved significantly. Norbert says that Barrie has quite a big hospital for its size. He asks Bill if he thinks there will be a future expansion of the building. Bill thinks that it depends on the growth of the city. If the town grows as much as is expected in the next 20 years, he does not believe that the





current site would be adequate; there will need to be a new hospital built elsewhere in Barrie. Bill believes that the current hospital is reasonably adequate for the current size of the town of Barrie. Many people go to hospitals now when they wouldn't go at all before. This is probably because now OHIP pays for it. Also, with wives working they can't care for their elderly parents so they put them in the hospital to be cared for. Bill says there are approximately 65 doctors in Barrie now and that when he started there were about 10.

Jack asks about Bill's experience as a medical student. Bill started in 1912 as the [inaudible] In university, Bill was a tennis champ and won his weight in boxing. He was the secondary of the medical society in the undergraduate parliament. He was appointed or elected to the alpha omega alpha [inaudible] society which was given for academic standing and undergraduate activities. Bill and Jack Boyes* played tennis together and Jack won the Northern Ontario Championship. They played doubles together also. Dr. Jack Scott was a good tennis player as well.

Norbert notes that Bill witnessed a lot of slaughtering and poor medical standards in the war. He asks Bill if this made him want to come back with renewed purpose to alleviate people's suffering. Bill says when he came home he was appointed to DVA representative (he took over for Dr. Fred Ross when he resigned) and took care of soldiers that returned. He spent a lot of time trying to take care of the veterans that came back. Norbert was a veteran himself and confirms this by saying that it is common knowledge to the veterans in the area that Bill was dedicated to helping veterans and gave a lot of his time. He held many interviews outside the hours of his practice to solve veterans' problems and help them with pensions. Bill says that when he took over the DVA, the veterans had to go to Bill to get their pensions. After World War Two, they could go to any doctor they wanted for pensions but many still went to Bill because he had a lot of experience with it. When he first started, there was no Pensions Bureau so Bill did all the investigation himself.

Norbert says that Bill is being too modest about how much he did for veterans on Sunday mornings and outside his normal office hours. Bill says he made it clear to the Legion that he was free on Sunday mornings to look after the veterans because it took too much time during his





office hours. Norbert says they will be fortunate if they are able to get someone as good as Bill for the DVA. Bill says the average doctor in town doesn't know the system like he does. They also don't have the connections that Bill has at Sunnybrook Hospital; they trust him there. Bill knows he can't do it forever though and has thought about approaching Ross Turnbull* who was a [inaudible] in the Second World War and would be a good fit for the position. Bill says he will continue doing DVA work for as long as he is able to, even if it means doing less work at his practice. Before they conclude, Bill would like to add that he met his wife when she was a [inaudible] nurse at Moses Taylor Hospital in Scranton. Her father was William H. Ford from Philadelphia. He has had a very happy life with her. The interviewers thank Bill for his time. [Tape cuts out]

*Note: * Indicates that the word or name is written as it sounded, and therefore may be incorrect.*

