



Arthur Lower and Sister

Interview

June 23, 1973

Length: 1 hour, 51 minutes and 28 seconds

[*The interviewer is not introduced.*] Professor Arthur R.M. Lower was a long time history professor at Queens University. He now resides in Collins Bay Village [*in Kingston*] which is where the interview is taking place. J.S. Woodworth*, whom Professor Lower knew very well in Winnipeg, could hardly be called a Simcoe County man but he had a blood connection to the area. He was a brother in law of Charles C.B. Sissons* who was a well-known professor of Classics in Victoria and author of the biography of Edgerton Ryerson. The plight of the Canadian historian is that he is overwhelmed with the innumerable duties that confront him. He has to keep abreast of the local affairs and township affairs. They must also know something about the city because it is the dominating influence. No historian can be ignorant of provincial affairs politically and that is a tremendous field in itself. Above all, and in Professor Lower's case particularly, he must know Canadian history as a whole and what goes on in Ottawa. Anyone that has lived as long as Professor Lower and has lived through two world wars cannot ignore what has happened in the rest of the world as well. For example, one of Professor Lower's interests was the 1930s and years leading to the Second World War and Canada's position in relation to that. Today there is another tier with the United Nations and what goes on there. No historian worth their salt can be ignorant to these areas, but he can't be a specialist in more than one or two fields. Then there is the question of time. Most students today believe that the world was created within the last 10 to 15 years. He has done a lot of work in medieval history and feels that we cannot understand our lives today without medieval history, particularly British.





Professor Lower is a Simcoe County son and was born in Barrie on August 12, 1889. There are very few men that he knew in his life that are still alive today; he is beginning to feel like a lonely figure. However, while he may be weak in the knees, his memory is still clear and his mind is strong. Barrie was a nice place to be brought up in. His memory goes back clearly to when he was five years old and he can give a year by year account of his life since that date. In those early days, Barrie and its surroundings were very attractive and had the assets of Lake Simcoe and Kempenfelt Bay. Later on in 1902, Professor Lower entered the Barrie Collegiate Institute and it was an important stage in life. Immediately he ceased being Arthur and was called Lower by the teachers. All the girls around him lost their names and were referred to as Miss. In other words, they were becoming young adults and were treated as more than mere children. Now it is different; Professor Lower has never been able to get accustomed to casually using just first names like young people do now. The Barrie Collegiate Institute's principal was T. H. Redditt. Redditt graduated from U of T and went into the newspaper business but transferred into teaching high school. He did not have formal training as a teacher but was a better teacher than any of those who were trained. He was an excellent linguist in French, German, and Latin. He also had a fine taste of English literature. Professor Lower feels something should have been written about T. H. Redditt. In those days before democracy and education, schools had an interesting group of men who were not scholars but were cultivated; they read a lot and were careful of their English. Today, unfortunately, men like that in schools are rare.

Professor Lower and his siblings were brought up in the Collier Street Methodist Church. His family lived close by on the corner of Collier Street and Clapperton Street in a big, white stucco house. At the other corner lived Dr. Wells who was mayor at the time. The church was almost as potent of a force in the education of young people as the school itself. One of Professor Lower's early memories of the church was during a service. There were three rows of pews and they were arranged like an Anglican church with the pews at a right angle to the wall. The honourable Charles Drury (the minister of agriculture at the time) was occupying a pew with his son Ernest Drury. Just behind them sat Jonathan Sissins* with his wife and son Charles B. Sissins*. At that time, the Sissins* had just given up farming on Penetang Road because Jonathan





had been made governor of the jail. Later on, Charles Sissins* was about the same age as Professor Lower's brother Fredrick Charles Lower and they went to high school together. They were 10 years older than Professor Lower.

Charles Drury had married a second time and moved into Barrie. There was Mrs. Drury, the son Ernest, and the daughters Connie, Mariam, and a younger one. The younger one was the same age as Professor Lower's younger sister. Mariam was a bit older than Professor Lower but they were close friends. Mariam Drury used to have good talks and once she told him that she had a job reading to an old gentleman who had gone blind in his old age. The man was Sir James Gowan* who started as a judge and then became a senator. Eventually, in the Laurier regime, he was given his knighthood. He then lived quietly on the shores of Lake Simcoe, to the east. Professor Lower would like to go back and speak about Ernest Drury. He left home to pursue his career so any personal relationship he had with Ernest was gone at that point, although he would still hear from afar about Ernest and his political career and how the farmers elected him as a leader. Professor Lower remembers the Drury house very well on Crown Hill Road*. They had a big farm there and were close to the Sissins*. He remembers Ernest saying that the Penetang Road was settled by the finest English yeoman stock. Professor Lower does not know their family history before Simcoe, but thinks they came from New Brunswick and says that there is another Drury family out in Vancouver. He believes that it is an English family and that the spelling of Drury sets them apart from the family in Winnipeg that spells their name Drewry. Ernest had values that Professor Lower easily identifies as being the result of Collier Street Methodist Church. There was a family in Barrie named Ardagh and they were part of the old group that came in from the north of Ireland and were miners. The class lines in Barrie during Professor Lower's youth were very clear. Sir James Gowan* was the paternal deity of those people, so to speak. One of Professor Lower's earliest memories is of a famous murder case about a man named [name is inaudible] who had been murdered by an Irishman. The allegation was that [inaudible] was having an affair with the Irishman's wife and was murdered because of it.





They now speak about religious sects. The [group name is inaudible] were Anglican but one had branched off on a tangent and were [inaudible] Old Judge Gowan* was an interesting character around town. He had been a sturdy Anglican and attended Trinity English Church. There was a rector who came along and put a cross on the altar. Gowan* was an Irish Protestant so you can understand what that would mean. Gowan* then shook the dust of the Trinity English Church off his feet, went down the road, and built his own church called the Reformed Episcopal Church. It was a small church the size of a private house and picked up a following of a group of men and ex-military chaplains; it had a small congregation. On Sunday morning you'd see people walking all different directions to their respective churches. The church lasted for quite a while before fading out. It later became a garage but Professor Lower does not know if it is still a garage or not. The class line had as much an effect on Ernest Drury as it did on Professor Lower.

Professor Lower recalls his brother telling him about immigrants coming to Barrie inquiring about land and being told to go see Sheriff McCounty* because he had some land for sale. This was another aspect of family compacting because many people had gotten in on the ground floor. The shores of Kempenfelt Bay are lined with people that were either English or Irish by birth or by descent. He is speaking of the Gowans*, the [inaudible], the Strathies*, the Rakes*, Colonel O'Brien at Shanty Bay, and Dalton McCarthy. Dr. McCarthy (Dalton McCarthy's brother) lived next to Collier Street Methodist Church and was a militia officer. He remembers seeing him in his uniform during parades. His son was Layton McCarthy who was well known as Mr. King's ambassador to Washington. Layton was the nephew of the great Dalton. Dalton had a son as well but he did not do very well in politics. Professor Lower vaguely remembers Dalton's funeral. Something he remembers well is something that was mentioned in Ernest Drury's book about Simcoe County. Ernest describes a Wild West Show and Professor Lower can remember the show himself. It was held on the top of Penetang Street in a vacant field; there are probably houses there now. He thinks he saw the show in 1896 when he was seven years old.





They go back to discussing class divisions and how it is an important point in Canadian social history. It is also important in understanding society today. Professor Lower says that Canada has never been the wide open democracy that they have had in certain sections of the United States. Ontario and Nova Scotia (in respect to class divisions) are more similar to Virginia than to South Dakota in the sense that there are distinct class lines. In many older towns in Ontario, there were distinct class lines. In Kingston, it was reinforced by the military. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] [*Inaudible*] monopolized the professions as well. The amount of lawyers and doctors they produced was remarkable. They would have nothing to do with the non-conformists. Presbyterians (of the right stripe, not of the Free Church) could come in under the same covers as the Anglicans; they were at least tolerated and questionably respectable. They were members of an established church and they had to be accepted. The people that he is talking about were Irish with some English on the fringes of what they called county families. They had a stranglehold on the valuable things like judgeships, county offices, and the professions. The Drurys were not in that milieu, they were in the same milieu as Professor Lower which was humble Methodists. He thinks that gave Ernest Drury his outlook and ethics. As a young man, he remembers being teased by Anglicans saying that Methodists were a bit uncertain and hypocritical. The Methodist Church was balanced by all sorts of fine and simple people who tried to be honest, good men. The Drurys were part of this class of excellent yeoman stock.

When Professor Lower was preparing to go overseas, there was a commission from England saying that they wanted to find men who had experience on the water to join the navy. Commander Armstrong was sent to Toronto to conduct interviews. Professor Lower was teaching in his first year at U of T at the time. There were many people anxious to be taken in (Professor Lower included) and it was announced that Commodore Aemilius Jarvis of the Royal Canadian Yacht Club would hold classes of instruction in navigation for anybody wanting to take them. Professor Lower attended the classes and notes that he was a good instructor. Professor Lower was already skilled in handling a small boat but had no formal navigational





knowledge before this. Aemilius Jarvis seemed to be a very good man and was a descendent of the Jarvis family in Toronto (which a street is named after). When the Drury government broke up and Jarvis was accused and sent to spend a term in jail, Professor Lower was very surprised. However, he does not claim to know much about the inner workings. Professor Lower says he would find it hard to believe that Aemilius Jarvis and Ernest Drury were anything less than honourable men.

Years ago there was a good history written called A History of Simcoe County by A.M. Hunter. Professor Lower remembers first meeting Mr. Hunter in Ottawa at a meeting of the Ontario Historical Society. Professor Lower regards this county history book as one of the best history books about the area available. Ernest Drury and Charles Sissins* were also good historical writers. A. S. Woodhouse was not exactly a Simcoe County man because he was not born there but he attended Barrie Collegiate Institute, did all of his secondary schooling in Barrie, and went on to become head of the English Department at a school in Toronto. Woodhouse had a very good book called the Army Debates which was a study of the debates in Cromwell's army in the 1640s when they were trying to decide what to do with [inaudible] Professor Lower lists himself as another historian and explains that the Barrie area has been successful in creating historians. Professor Lower used to know Leslie Frost and heard about the tactics he used in his office. He would be very polite and talkative and then, towards the end, he would send people on their way. During their discussion, Professor Lower told him that the only thing wrong with him was that he was from Orillia. That broke the ice and they had a nice interview after that.

Professor Lower has another point to make about Drury. Professor Lower was back in Barrie at one point after the death of his brother. He was meeting with Sheriff Ernest Drury who was known at that time as Sheriff after he ceased to be the Premier of Ontario. They talked about buying on an installment plan. Ernest said that thousands of people don't own the beds that they sleep on; he was against installment plans. Ernest spoke about his family and his grandsons. One grandson took over the farm and represented the fifth generation to run it. Ernest was a widower and said he would never remarry because his first marriage was so perfect.





Professor Lower feels that he knows the Drurys well because they grew up in a small place (Barrie had a population of 5000 at the time) and knew them for so long. He would like to add that he thinks the environment of north Simcoe had an influence in directing people's interest and pleasure in history (and ultimately in producing so many historians). He thinks most young men and women from the area would be fairly familiar with the story of Huronia and Champlain's visits. This is not the case for other towns where the history is not right in front of them. *[Tape cuts out]*

[At 59:32), an interview begins with one of Professor Lower's sisters. The interviewer and speaker are not introduced. For the purpose of the summary she will be referred to as Ms. Lower.]

[Tape resumes] [inaudible] Clapperton Street and the younger three members of the family were born in that house; they were Arthur, Geraldine, and Jessie [it can be assumed that they are speaking about the house that their family grew up in, in Barrie]. [Tape cuts out and then resumes] She then lists the names Bonnie, Lily, and Charles [it can be assumed this is a continuation of her listing her siblings]. She and her brother [assumed that she is referring to her brother Professor Arthur Lower] are the only siblings still living. The interviewer notes that her brother (Professor Lower) speaks very highly of the education they got at the Collier Street Methodist Church. She says her mother believed in old fashioned virtues; you did what you were told and certain things were expected of you.*

She tells a story about Mrs. Drury going to the Queen's Hotel by horse and only tipping the worker two cents. She went to school with Marion Drury who was the eldest in that family. The Drurys came to Barrie when most of the girls were in high school, except the youngest girl. The youngest girl went to public school with Ms. Lower's younger sister.

[inaudible] Many years later when Ernest Drury ran for Premier, he was against the liquor laws. They once had a banquet for him in Barrie and they performed a skit in which they sang, "Ernie, Ernie, I've been thinking, what would you and [inaudible] do if all the citizens of this country drank [inaudible]". W.A. Boyes, who was a great tennis player at one time, was a*





lawyer in Barrie. He was also a Member of Parliament in Ottawa and was never defeated [inaudible] Boyes*, Creswick*, Dr. Mornton*, Judge [last name is inaudible], Sir Gowan, and the McCarthys were prominent citizens of the town [inaudible] People from Barrie would tend to stick together if they met in places like Toronto. The interviewer asks if she remembers the Sissins* and she confirms that she does. One of the Sissins* boys was quite a historian [inaudible] Ms. Lower's family took quite an interest in politics. The Conservatives never gave credit to Ernest Drury for working for the farmers. She thinks he did a good job as Premier. When all the trouble came up about his government, her mother said she didn't care what they said about him, he was an honest person. Her father taught the sons to swim, but not the daughters.

The interviewer asks if she can remember anything about the political meetings she attended in the early days. She says she remembers Mr. Flannigan* interrupting Mr. McCarthy when he was speaking. They were good speakers. McCarthy was a conservative and then branched off to be a McCarthyite. After Charles Drury died, his wife brought her daughters into Barrie to live which is when Ms. Lower became acquainted with them. She never even met Ernest Drury [inaudible] Some of the lumber barns in Barrie were owned by the Burtons, Diamonds, and Cundles.

Ms. Lower's mother tells lots of stories about the early days in Barrie. She would say that on the front street, every place had a verandah over it. There was a big fire which was carried from one place to the next through the verandahs [inaudible] When Barrie was laid out by the English people, Collier Street was to be the main street instead of Dunlop. At that time, the railroad didn't come into Barrie that way. It ran from Allandale and came up by Bayfield Street. The forefathers of Barrie practically gave the lakeshore away to the railroad company [inaudible] The interviewer notes that Ms. Lower's work on the Tweedsmuir history must have put her in contact with all the farmers in the area. She would get one member of the farm to do the layout and then she would revise it. She has many little stories that they've told her [inaudible] They settled along the Wye River and found this area to be a great section of land for farming. In 1812 and 1814 they got land grants on the Penetang Road. Then one man found the river, followed it with other men, and settled along it [inaudible] with [woman's name is inaudible] urging her, Ms.





Lower took the position of District President and later the position of President of the County of Simcoe. It was quite an experience and she met many people. [*Tape cuts out*]

[*Tape resumes*] If there was any vacancy it was advertised. The interviewer says that in 1915, as he remembers, if there was a job opening the senior man could vouch for you to come up. The interviewer asks what changes she sees today in Barrie. She says there are very few people now that she recognizes in Barrie. The Simmons* are the only ones she knows now from the early days. The Simmons* have been around in Barrie for about four generations; they originally came from Germany.

Naval people had a lot to do with the settling of Barrie. Many streets like Bayfield, Mulcaster, Dunlop, Codrington, and Collier are named after them, as well as Kempenfelt Bay and Lake Simcoe. Many settled on the Penetang Road such as Copeland* and Rake* [*much of this part of the discussion is inaudible*].

[*inaudible*] Barrie had three weekly newspapers when Ms. Lower was young: The Advance, The Examiner, and The Gazette. Their family got The Advance and The Gazette. The Gazette and The Examiner were more liberal and The Advance was more conservative [*inaudible*] Ms. Lower believes that women and young people should have a voice in politics. Her brother [*Professor Lower*] is not as understanding of young people nowadays. The interviewer notes that Professor Lower spoke strongly of his beliefs in old fashioned virtues. She doesn't disagree with him but thinks that there are some things that you can look at from different angles. You have to move with the times, not oppose them [*inaudible*] With her husband working with the railroad, The Depression didn't affect them very much.

The interviewer asks Ms. Lower how housekeeping has changed since she was younger. She says she would not want to go back to the early days in that regard. Although, they always had water when she was young; Barrie was known for its good water. They heated their house using wood and coal stoves. They had gas power in their house in as early as 1878. [*Tape cuts out*]

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

