



Fair Acre house in Wellington

Growing Up Dorland

2012 CFHA AGM Keynote Address

By Avery Dorland

This article is written as a summary of a presentation I gave for the 2012 Annual General Meeting and Conference of the Canadian Friends Historical Association (CFHA) held at Isaiah Tubbs in West Lake, Ontario. This isn't a verbatim summary but an article written from the notes and conversations I prepared for the day.

My great grandfather Arthur Garratt Dorland was an active member in the Religious Society of Friends. He was an historian, clerk, writer, teacher and first chair of the CFHA. His personality and wisdom also had a lingering impact on his family with vivid impressions being made on his grandchildren, nieces, and nephews who were in his presence while alive and further impressions on his great grandchildren and relatives who have come to know him through family stories and his writings. These family stories have not been made public, though, and to an outside researcher, the stories of Arthur Dorland stop where his published autobiographies end.

The purpose of my presentation to the

CHFA and this article is to share some more of Arthur Dorland's memory and to provide some insight into further generations of what was an important Quaker family in Canada.

I will not go into many of the details of Arthur's life that can be found in his two autobiographical books, *Former Days and Quaker Ways* and *Along the Trail of Life*, the latter of which was published in 1979, the year of his death. Details about the life of Arthur's father John can be found in the Biography *John T. Dorland* written by W. King Baker in 1898. Though I have read the books mentioned, the research for my presentation was drawn from interviews with surviving Dorland family members and a large family collection of letters. These letters have survived because of the meticulous nature of Arthur and his son, my Grandfather, Terry. I was very grateful to be able to access great stacks of family journals, notebooks and fragile letters written between generations of Dorlands. Letters between Arthur and his children still survive as do his daily journals. Arthur preserved not only letters



Arthur and Nellie Dorland, 1961

and journals from his father, John, but also correspondence between John and his wife, Lavina, and between John and his mother-in-law. Though they were often separated by geography, the correspondence between John and Lavina was always warm and preserved in notes that they had written each other beginning soon after meeting at the West Lake Boarding School and Pickering College. This contradicts previous and limited work published by Daniel Nelson which questions John T Dorland's sexual orientation.

1979 is a good time to pick up Arthur's history, it was the same year that *Along the Trail of Life* was published and Arthur gave his endorsement to CFHA's commencement. Arthur's wife Nellie had passed away some years earlier and, at the beginning of the year, he was residing in Toronto after not being able to make the trip to his summer home called Fair Acre in Prince Edward County the year before. It was especially telling that Arthur was not able to travel to Fair Acre in either 1978 or 1979, for it was at Fair Acre that he recharged and drew his vitality. My own father, Joe, recalls Arthur saying, "I exist in Toronto, but I *live* in Prince Edward County." The winter dragged on in Toronto and, by the time spring had arrived, Arthur had fallen ill and was moved to a hospital where he slipped into a coma. This was very close to the time that I was born on March 26. My mother, Karen, recalls her last letter from Arthur being about my impending birth and the fact that my father would likely be away on work assignment in the Arctic. Arthur related his own struggles at being away finishing

his studies in the United States while his child was born in Canada. Arthur was hospitalized in Toronto and visited regularly by family and almost daily by his grandson, John, and his children until his passing on June 26.

The house called Fair Acre was central to Arthur's life and, indeed, to most of the stories that were relayed by his descendants. Fair Acre was built in the 1860s for Arthur's father, John. Arthur's mother, Lavina, lived in the home throughout her life. After Lavina's death, Arthur's sister inherited and lived in the house. While Lavina was alive and living in Fair Acre she had a cottage built on the same property for her children to occupy when they visited. Arthur and his wife Nellie moved into this cottage on a permanent basis when Arthur's sister had moved to Kingston and let out Fair Acre to renters. The renters did not treat the house very well and Arthur purchased it from his sister, moved in with Nellie and restored it with the help of his son, Terry, who was home from university. From that point on, at the very least, Arthur and Nellie spent summers at Fair Acre for the rest of their lives. As had occurred in the previous generation, Arthur and Nellie's children would visit them from the cottage next door, just as Arthur had visited his own mother. Arthur's son, Roger, came to own the cottage and Arthur's son, Terry, (my grandfather) came to own Fair Acre and, when we visited there, we explored the house and the family history that went along with it. Both homes are still owned by the Dorland family and the tradition of summer visits and family stories continues for a sixth generation with my own children.

Even the vegetation at Fair Acre carries Dorland family history: a lilac bush planted there is rumoured to have been brought with the Dorlands when they emigrated from New York to Upper Canada. Family members have taken cuttings with them from that same plant and planted it in their own gardens across Ontario. The same history is maintained with knowledge of which family member planted which particular tree as a child eighty and ninety years ago.

One of the Fair Acre traditions that Arthur had with his grandchildren and great



Four generations of Dorlands, from eldest to youngest: Terry Dorland, (Arthur G. Dorland's son, deceased), Joe Dorland (Terry's son), Avery Dorland (Joe's son), Parker Dorland (Avery's son).

grandchildren was individualized family visits. Each grandchild and subsequent great grandchildren would have their designated evening to spend visiting with Arthur and Nellie talking about life, religion, poetry, looking at photo albums or learning etiquette and manners. Each child counted the days until their next visit as their own special time and this was fondly recalled by Arthur's niece, Joanne, and nephew, John.

Joanne recalled a particular story from her son Todd who, when visiting Arthur one evening, asked "Great Grandpa, where is your dishwasher?" Arthur replied "You're looking at him!" At five Todd thought this was one of the greatest pieces of humour ever told, but it also fit with Arthur's subtle wit. Both Arthur and Nellie had a way with words and were able to quote their favourite authors and poets word for word. The evidence of both of their poetic ways can be found in notes and letters that still exist.

Arthur had a presence when speaking that family members still recall in stories. His diction

was excellent and extensive and he was captivating when he spoke. My father, Joe, recalled how fascinating it was to drive with Arthur around Prince Edward County for impromptu history tours and my mother recalled that Arthur's wisdom was inspiring to receive.

One may notice a lack of mention from Arthur's descendants about meetings, minutes, Quakers or meeting houses. This is one of the interesting wrinkles of history in the Dorland family. Arthur was so involved in the Religious Society of Friends, but of his children did not cultivate those same connections. Arthur's son, Albert, was a regular attender in eastern Ontario and his daughter, Ellie, married into the Montgomery family which was socially connected with Quakers. His older sons, Roger and Terry, ended up in far Northern Ontario where there was not even a Quaker meeting to attend, even if they had been interested. His children were all very aware of the history of the Quakers in Canada along with their role in shaping Prince Edward County. Arthur's children then passed that knowledge onto his grandchildren. Those family members interviewed had no rationale as to why they had not been involved in the Quaker faith and could only guess that they moved away from places with meetings or had been raised in the religion of more popular churches.

Even my first attendance at a Quaker meeting was not until my late twenties in the United States; this led me to the same meetings attended by my Great Grandfather in Newmarket and Toronto. The connection with the Society of Friends certainly lent a greater understanding of my Great Grandfather and his writings as well as providing a rich context to the history I learned and read about my own family while growing up and visiting Fair Acre.

On a final note, the members of the Dorland family I interviewed for this presentation were appreciative to the CFHA for honouring Arthur's memory and the efforts being made to continue his work of documenting and preserving Quaker history in Canada, and by virtue much of Arthur and the Dorland family's history.