

Potpourri

Archives Yesterday: A Glimpse at the Enthusiasms and Tribulations of Sir Arthur Doughty

A visit to the Public Archives of Canada fifty years ago occasioned the writing of a letter full of insights into the character and enthusiasms of Sir Arthur Doughty. Although his term as Dominion Archivist from 1904 to 1936 witnessed the systematic acquisition of private manuscripts to complement the collections of public records and the opening of support offices in London and Paris, Doughty was no mere keeper of records. A prolific historian, published poet, and genuine man of letters, he was well-known in his generation as a public figure and cultural leader.

The author of the following letter, Louise Cockburn, belonged to a noted Scottish family. Her great-grandfather was the famous Edinburgh jurist, Henry, Lord Cockburn, a co-founder with Sir Walter Scott of the *Edinburgh Review*. Then on her first visit to Canada, she was staying with her uncle, the late Mr. F.J. Cockburn, at that time the Assistant General Manager of the Bank of Montreal. She later married Mr. Raleigh Parkin, the son of Sir George Parkin, and now lives in Montréal.

Following her tour of the Archives, Louise Cockburn wrote a long and perceptive account of her observations to her mother, dated 27 January 1925:

Then we drove to the Archive Building to see Uncle Frank's old friend, Dr. Doughty. That was just fascinating — the things he showed us, I mean, & he himself was delightful. He is the Dominion Archivist, & interested me chiefly because he's the only Canadian I've met so far who has a mind above business & thinks other things of more importance. He is a very small little man with a big nose & soft voice & a rather vague manner. He's very simple but I think a shade embittered by having constantly to struggle with his archives & treasures, the only person who appreciates them. He is only paid \$15.00 a day to spend on buying fresh things for the archives, etc., & it must be heartbreaking work when you *know* & feel how wonderful a thing is, to be always dealing with people who think you are not getting your money's worth.

He was very vague at first & I thought would not show us anything but I think he was waiting to see if I was just a girl who was dragged along by Uncle Frank & was boredly wanting to get away again. When he found that I really

appreciated the things & handled them reverently he opened out & we spent nearly two hours there.

He is a wonderful person for cajoling things out of people & has got from Lord Rothermere nearly \$25,000 worth of old manuscripts (Russian seal) hand stamped.

The most interesting things he has are Wolfe's Order Book — with all his orders to his officers for the taking of Quebec, also his last letter written before the battle when he was killed. He also has a whole set of military books from Wolfe's library. . . . Then he showed us Montcalm's letters, masses of them, which are the only signed ones to be had — no other place has any. . . . He has too an order signed by Oliver Cromwell for the taking possession of Newfoundland (I think) or anyway some forts there.

Also the draft (original) of the sermon preached in the chapel of the Ursuline Convent in Quebec after the battle by Rev. Dawson. This man must have been something of a humourist as his text was: "We will give thanks unto Thee, O Lord, & praise Thee among the heathen."

He also showed us a letter written by Voltaire to the grandson of Cardinal Richilieu suggesting that peace would be better than trying to hang onto Canada.

What was so delightful was that none of these things were in cases but all piled up anyhow & so one could take them & handle them. I never saw such a casual way of keeping things. He says that none of the girls who are his secretaries have the least idea of the value of the things & leave them all anyhow; but I think his own vagueness must help. When we asked to see Wolfe's letter, he turned to a safe & rummaged, producing an old sweater of his own, some copies of the "Sketch" & "Graphic", & finally the letter!

. . . He came to lunch with us & gave us many & various amusing accounts of himself. The one which struck me as most amazing & worthy to rank with the very big stories was of how he printed his History of Canada.

The Government would not pay him anything in advance (I imagine they had asked him to write it) but promised to buy 100 copies when finished. He was so poor that he could only afford to buy enough type for 30 pages. He wrote his 30 pages, sent them to the printer who returned the proofs & generally demanded them back in 24 hours time in order to get them done & the type re-set for the next thirty pages. He printed the whole history (*six volumes*) in this way. In the end he could get no payment from the Government for 18 months & had to borrow money to pay the printer. Meanwhile the Government took the 100 copies they had agreed for. It cost \$40.00 a copy. When however he started to try to sell copies on his own account, he was told by nearly everyone he tried that they had already bought copies for \$25.00 or \$30.00 — in no case more than thirty — & so he made nothing out of it.

It wasn't until 15 years later that he discovered what had happened. Then one day a newspaper man he knew came to him (or met him at a dinner) & said: "Dr. Doughty, I've always been kind of grateful to you for some help you once gave me." Dr. Doughty, bewildered, asked him how & the man explained. Knowing that the Government had distributed the 100 copies of the History which it had bought among the Members of Parliament, he went round to the members & said: "Look here, you don't want that history — you'll never read it & I'll pay you \$5.00 (or less) for it." They had sold it to him & he had then sold the 100 copies at anything from \$25.00 to \$30.00 apiece. "With the proceeds", he told Dr. Doughty, "I built a nice little summer cottage in the country for myself & my wife."

Can you imagine a more tragic tale . . . of the poor man toiling at his history & then . . . getting nothing himself, but the other brute getting

everything & *daring* after 15 years to tell him what he'd done. It is refreshing though to find someone out here who is not self-seeking & engaged the whole time in seeing that he isn't being "done". The delightful thing too was that he bore the man no grudge, but merely said sadly that it just showed you oughtn't to undertake things you're not capable of carrying through.

He goes over to England at times searching for old things which deal with Canadian history. His power of extracting things from people is so well known that Queen Mary said to him one day (I suppose at a levée): "There's nothing movable here that you *can* take, Dr. Doughty, everything's nailed down." "I thought so too", he said, "but I found the only movable thing", & . . . produced from his pocket the Band programme.

He also gave an amusing account of when King George (then Prince of Wales) was in Quebec. Dr. Doughty (among others) was lunching with him. During lunch the Prince said to him: "We are going to the Montmorency Falls this afternoon; will you come too?" — & Dr. Doughty said: "I'm very sorry Sir, but I promised to go to the Plains with so-&-so."

After lunch an A.D.C. came to him in a great state & asked him if he realised what he'd done, & he said no. All the A.D.C. could get from him was: "But I'd already engaged to go with so-&-so", & he went with so-&-so in the end.

He had an awful Minister over him once who would never let him spend a thing on buying things for the Archives (he evidently was of the kind who believed in getting sensible things for the money, not pictures and manuscripts). Finally one day he wanted Dr. Doughty to sign some document which involved about \$4.00 & he wouldn't, & said he would rather resign. The enraged Minister asked if he would resign over a matter of \$4.00? "I'd do it over 50 cents", said Dr. Doughty; & when the Minister further enquired if he had no pride in his position as Archivist, he said briefly: "None whatever. I'd sooner be a waiter."

I think that was what was so nice about him — absolute simple directness & no fear, with a sense of humour.¹

Submitted by Terry Cook
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¹ Public Archives of Canada, MG 30/D100, Raleigh Parkin Papers, volume 1, file 7. Quoted with the permission of Mrs. Parkin of Montréal.

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