



Forest History Society, Inc.

109 Coral Street, Santa Cruz, California 95060 / Telephone (408) 426-3770

Oral History Interview

Charles A. Cary

with

Roy R. White
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Family Jones

ORAL HISTORY II TENVILW

Mr Charles A. Cary

October 14, 1959
Wilmington, Delaware

White:

Mr Cary, will you tell me of Dr Cary's family?

Cary:

The original family derivation was English. The first ancestor came over to the Massachusetts colony in the 1630's. John Cary. And either a brother or a cousin, Miles Cary, went to Virginia and started the Cary family in Virginia. Those were the two branches of the family in this country. Along about 6 or 7 generations after in Massachusetts two brothers moved to downeastern Maine sometime in the early 1800's. One settled up inland at Cooper and my uncle's grandfather, Caleb Cary, settled at East Machias. He married a Sally Jones Tolbert, ~~xxxxxx~~ Cary's father was a business man in East Machias, Maine. They lived in the house which the original Caleb Cary built down there I think. The house dates from about 1808. He was born and brought up in that house. His mother was a first cousin of his father and a daughter of the brother who went to Cooper, Luther Cary. There were two older children as I remember, who died fairly young. He was born in 1865 and my father was 2 years younger, born in '67. I think there was one later child who died. So as they grew up there were only the 2 brothers. Their mother died when they were 8 or 10 years old. My grandfather married again. The lady he married was somewhat of a social climber (you don't have to put this in your thesis) but it led to a disturbed household. The story goes that my uncle started his highly individualistic career very early. He was in constant rebellion against her attempts to keep him dressed up "in the pink" and so forth. So that household situation where he was'nt too happy as a boy in his teens probably had some influence in shaping his characteristics in later life, because through college, although he was a brilliant student, he was somewhat of a lone wolf. His anti-social characteristics were probably an offshoot of ~~xxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ some of that lack of understanding as a boy. He graduated from Bowdoin in 1887 at the head of his class. His father died during his college course so that he and my father and the widow had a reasonable competence to split between them. They had sme money so tht they were reasonably independent. I don't have the statistics of the situation at that time. I can't quote chapter and verse but my uncle I believe was an instructor in college for some of the following year. He studied entomology at Johns Hopkins and Princeton and apparently in those few succeeding years his health bothered him considerably, even as a young man, in the late 1880's and early 1890's. I don't know what his trouble was, whether it was just a nervous upset or what. He was troubled with insomnia some end at one stage, in the early 1890's, the doctor recommended he take outside work where he could get physically tired and sleep. He actually shipped on with some banks fishermen just to get vigorous outside exercise and try to overcome this insomnia. I have a book here. Did you ever see it? It covers an interesting interlude and although it has received some public notice it is'nt widely known. But in 1892, I think it was the summer of 1892, Bowdoin College organized a scientific expedition to Labrador, which was then pretty well off limits. They

had heard about these famous falls of the Grand River which no white man had made a recorded trip to but was known through Indian legends and so forth. In connection with this expedition, which was to explore the fauna and natural characteristics of the Labrador post under the direction of Professor Lee who was head of the department of biology at the college and had already had some experience with expeditions (I will leave the book with you) that was rather a distinctive accomplishment. There were four of them on this expedition that sailed up to Labrador in this Schooner. They took two rangley boats with them and undertook to go up the Grand river to discover these falls. One of them got an infection on the way up, an infected cut or something of that sort, and two of them had to turn back. My uncle was leader of this up-river expedition an account of his experience in the woods and in river work and he and another man named Cole kept on going. It was a terrific trip up the river and the boats were really not suited for ~~the~~ tracking up those rapids. They would have been better off if they had had canoes. But they managed to get up to the foot of the canyon and they cached their boat there and went some 20 miles through the woods up along the rim of the canyon and discovered the falls. That is a matter of record. They left a record in a can at the falls and it has been recorded by later explorers and is a matter of complete record. The canyon below the falls still bears the name of Bowdoin Canyon. They got back to their boat and they found that their campfire, which they thought had been thoroughly put out, had crept through the peat and burned their boat, and a large part of their supplies. They were two hundred odd miles from civilization there in the middle of the Labrador wilderness. They managed to get their way out by walknig, building rafts to get down the river where they could. I've forgotten just how long it was. They survived by getting a squirrel or two and a few things like that and with what meager supplies they had they finally reached a point down near Northwest river at the mouth of the Grand River at Porcupine Creek. There they found a trapper's cabin, a French-Canadian by the name of Joe Michelin. I happen to have a letter here from Joe Michelin to Dr Cary. They kept in touch over the years. This story you will find in several books. Henry Van Dyke in one of his books had mentioned this episode. He knew Joe Michelin There's another book, I think its True North or some such name as that. It is a rather famous accomplishment in the annals of exploration and from the view od hardship and of escape from a terrible predicament it was really quite outstanding. You will find the whole story in that account, written by ~~one~~ not one of the men who went to the falls but by one of the men on the schooner. They got down to the Northwest river at the mouth of the Grand River just at the last day the schooner would wait for them. So that they got back all right

Now I'm not familiar with exactly when his interest in forestry began. I simply do not know.

White:

Were there lumbermen in his family?

Cary:

No, there were no professional logging operators in the family. That is, that I know of. They lived in a lumber town, were brought up in a lumber town, lumber or shipping, so that that was the main livelihood of that part of the country at that time.

He had spent a good deal of time--I think his lone wolf characteristics sort of led him to go up into the woods and into the lumber camps quite a bit so that he was familiar with that kind of life but not professionally engaged with it.

White: Dr Cary prided himself on his own pioneering spirit.

Cary: Well, he was a non-conformist. He wasn't looking for the conventional or prosaic type of activity anywhere.

White: Did'nt he have uncles who operated lumber camps?

Cary: I don't believe so. The uncles up in Cooper were farmers and they probably did a little lumbering on the side, wood lots and that sort of thing, but as far as conventional lumber operators, no. There were none I know of. Rather than a direct family connection with the industry it was just the industry in the country where he was brought up and therefore when he was looking for a field, particularly one that led him outdoors, it probably occurred to him.

White: He was a self-taught woodsman.

Cary: Well, he had no formal training. There was no professional forestry at that time. He was almost a pioneer in the field of professional forestry. Just where the German trip came in I don't know. I have no record of the exact sequence of events. Whether he started to work with the Berlin Mills Co. and the operators before he went to Germany or after I don't know. I know his German trip was early in his varied career. I have'nt any thing on record to show just where or how he got interested in forestry but Newins in his account brings out several contacts he made. One was with Pinchot and with Fernow. Fernow was apparently the man who influenced him as much as anybody to get into it. He was very much on his own. He had no particular close associates or confidants. I remember when I was a small boy he used to visit our house occasionally but he spent most of his time in the woods. He would spend as much as eleven months a year in the woods. My recollections are distinctly fragmentary over that area.

White: Did'nt his sojourns in the woods seem very odd to his family and acquaintances?

Cary: Well, he loved it. I think it gave him the escape that he wanted. He could get out there and work on his own and in a pioneer field. Apparently he did'nt accept the German concept of forestry too well but it did give him ideas of points of attack on forestry. He was always a practical man rather than a theorist. He never believed in fancy theory without knowing how to make it work.

White: What business was his father in?

Cary: He was a storekeeper and a business man and a shrewd investor. One of his bases of confidence as much as anything else was his faith in American greenbacks after the Civil War. When they were at a very substantial discount he would buy them up as fast as he could get them in the faith that they would be redeemed. And

they were. He was a shrewd investor. I have an interesting paper a fellow just sent me recently. It was an appraisal of my grandfather's estate. It was in the tax records of the town of East Machias which a fellow found and sent to me last winter. It's a most interesting document. It shows that for those days he had a substantial investment, when dollars were worth something.

White: Then Dr Cary had a family background in business. He admired business. Would you say he was a good business man.

Cary: There is a tale that he dissipated a large part of his competency in unwise investments. In the field with which he was familiar he was all right. What happened was that when he was a young man and had this share of his father's estate he was inveigled into investing into Florida lemon groves. He was ahead of his time. That made him pretty sour on paper investments and speculation of any sort. All through his life after that he would have nothing to do with that type of investment. He would say, "I don't want paper. I want real property." He was always leery of business of that sort. He always felt that big business and high finance was a little bit on the evil side and he was always a believer in taggible property

White: Would the money left him have been sufficient to make him financially independent?

Cary: I think he lost most of it. He would have had probably an income that in those days he could have got along on. He probably would have had 3 or 4 thousand dollars a year. That was a pretty good income in those days. But between dissipating some of his capital and losing some of it I don't think he accumulated ever much property during his life. He had some income. And he was the kind of fellow that just refused to worry about those things anyway. The last thing he cared about was amassing a personal fortune. All of his investments and business activities were directed more toward proving some theory of forest management or salvaging waste lands or something of that sort.

White: He spent the winter in the South and went north in the summer. How did he occupy his time in Maine?

Cary: He maintained his residence at Brunswick, Maine., through all his life I think. I don't think he was ever a resident of the South. I think he maintained his voting residence and his legal residence in Brunswick, Maine. He maintained a room there and spent a good deal of the summer there. Of course he was writing a good deal. I remember as a youngster I used to spend summers with him occasionally, when I was a boy, along about 1906 to '10, '12, when he was at Harvard and along in that period. He was writing his book during that time. He would usually get a contract during the summer going to the woods and training timber cruising operations in Maine and that sort of thing. I used to go up there with him, working on those survey crews. Also one summer I remember he was writing the first edition of his manual. I typed the first manuscript. I haven't the slightest idea how much he made out of his manual. I don't think he made any fortune out of it but he probably got some income. Although it was issued in many editions it wasn't the sort of book to mean a fortune in royalties.

White: You mentioned his illness as a young man. Did that continue?

Cary: I don't think he was ever a well man. His health was never particularly good. He was a pretty high strung individual and he worried and fretted and his rather lone world life probably shows that. I know that when he was at Harvard, as I recollect, he seemed to be as well as he was at any time. He enjoyed teaching the boys. ~~xxxx~~ He got a kick apparently out of teaching them. He had sort of a natural flair to see these boys come along. I can remember his enthusiasm in those days. That was one of the few things I ever saw him enthusiastic about. He was a rugged individual physically. He had a reputation of getting through the woods like nobody else. They tell a story of a French-Canadian up in the Maine woods who was bragging one time of how he could get through the woods, that Austin Cary couldnt walk him off his feet. So they sent him out with him one day and at the end of the day he came dragging back into camp somewhere in the rear. They asked him, "What's the matter, couldnt you keep up?" He said, "Hell, that fellow he just run up hill and jump down." So he did run his legs off. He ran the legs off that old French-Canadian. I think he suffered from nervous tensions somewhat during his life. He didnt take opposition easily and from his unconventional a preach to a lot of things he was in conflict with a lot of people quite a bit of the time. He had a constant job of reconciling his personal philosophy to the bureaucratic philosophy of the bureau. And he never did although he had to restrain himself to some extent. His main purpose was somewhat at variance with the official ideas.

White: How much do you recall of his marriage?

Cary: I remember practically nothing at all. At that time I was living in New Jersey, I think. He had been out in the West at Missoula and on the west coast and as I remember the notice came through that he was just going to be married or had been married without any warning at all. We didnt know he had any intentions of doing it. It happened so suddenly that neither I nor my mother or father ever saw them out there during that brief married period. I do know her name was Leila Chisholm and she had been brought up in East Machias and the legend is that she was one of his few boyhood sweethearts. He had always been sort of a social maverick. Even in college he gladly eschewed all social affairs and so forth. So his marriage was a complete surprise to the rest of his family. I don't know if he knew she was on the west coast before he went there or just met her there by chance. Certainly there had been no continuous contact. I had never heard him mention her. She died of tuberculosis as I understand, that she had had it and they thought it had been cleared but after her marriage she relapsed and it carried her off.

White: Did he discuss his political and economic views with you and other members of the family to an extent?

Cary: Oh yes, he was quite free to talk of course about it. Do you have a draft of that letter he was going to send to President Roosevelt? That was quite a plain spoken piece. I can recollect I really had a lot of admiration for the stand he took at that time. I thought that from the standpoint of a sincere objective

approach and presentation of his point of view it was a great piece of work.

White: What was Dr Cary's relation to Col Greeley?

Cary: Greeley was in my uncle's class at Harvard and he came to know and like Greeley. He had an admiration for his talents and believed that Greeley shared his views of forestry and the part the government should play in forestry. He hoped that Greeley would be a companion in arms in his crusade. He had tremendous hopes for Greeley but he wanted those hopes to be realized in his own pattern. He suffered a deep disappointment when, in his opinion, Greeley went over to the enemy. He wasn't too tolerant.

White: Was he subject of anger?

Cary: No, he would get exasperated, I would say. But he wasn't a man who would go into anger over controversy. It was more a question of disappointment and frustration. I've never heard him say any thing bitter about fellows. He saved his severest criticism for the out and out bureaucrat and they really got under his skin.

White: Did he keep close ties with his family?

Cary: He and my father were always very close. They corresponded regularly and he used to visit down home whenever he could and there was always a close and cordial relationship. My father was the head of a little country bank down there in Maine until he moved to Portland in 1912 and he was president of the Portland Bank until his retirement. Dr Cary had quite a few close friends up there. He was associated with Deering over at Hollis, Maine in a lumber operation there. Deering was probably the closest associate and friend of his. A man named Jones in Bangor, who was head of the International Paper Companies forestry work, was a close associate of his and he had some friends among the younger fellows. There was a young fellow who was a graduate of the U. of Maine who was sort of a protegee of his. He maintained his connections and sentimentally he always belonged because he maintained his residence up there. He was always close to the college. In fact the beautiful stand of pine there at Bowdoin now is a good deal of it the result of his work. It wouldn't be there now if it hadn't been that 40 or 50 years ago my uncle decided on protecting and planting that land and getting the growth started on it.

White: Do you recall why he gave up teaching?

Cary: No, I don't remember. As far as I know there was no unpleasantness there. It was about the time he went into the bureau. No, he left Harvard to take the job at New York. He took that job and that really broke him because he was completely a fish out of water in that political atmosphere. He had no sympathy at all with the basis on which the public lands were set up which was that you couldn't touch a stick. It was an administrative job. He was a state commissioner. He had a big fancy office in the capitol building and he was completely a fish out of water. He just hated to deal with those politicians and all that rigging going on. He wanted to get out and deal with the lumbermen but

he couldn't do it. I think that was probably the greatest stress he was exposed to all his life. He just practically went out on his ear because he couldn't get along with them at all. It didn't last more than part of a year I think. I know I visited him in Albany at the time he held that job and he was in a real state of dither at that time. He resigned from that job. It was just a hopeless position. Then I think he went down on the Hudson River, down at West Point and stayed with a doctor down there for a while. His health was shot after that experience in Albany. He lost his confidence. He was emotionally upset. He felt he had been a failure and I think that hurt him very seriously. He spent some time with this doctor friend down there to get back on his feet. From there he accepted the government bureau of forestry appointment.

White: How did he seem to feel about the South?

Cary: Completely enthusiastic about it. He had seen the lumber industry in every part of the country, New England, the Lake States, and the Northwest. And when he visited the South and saw its possibilities I can remember him saying way back there, maybe in 1920 or so, that he was convinced that with efficient forest management the South could supply the timber needs of the United States in perpetuity, that there was no place where timber could be grown as a crop as it could be grown in the South.

White: Did he express an opinion on the people, the operators and their attitude?

Cary: Well, he was pretty outspoken at some of their slovenliness but he liked them personally. ~~Probably~~ he probably created the greatest personal loyalty down there he did anywhere because he met them on their own ground and there was no stuffed shirtism about him at all. Although he disagreed with them and could argue with them and fuss with them still they met on a level of mutual respect, which was stronger there than anywhere else possibly. That philosophy of his was one of the most striking things of his whole career I think. He never deserted it and never lost faith in it.

White: Thank you for this information, Mr. Cary.