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Arthur “Art” Carr’s interview
on

Memories and Music

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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G.P. This week my guest will be Art Carr and we'll be talking about four individuals of certainly significant importance in the newspaper industry of Northern Ontario - Jimmy Orr, Colonel W. J. Cressey, W. E. Mason, and James Y. Nicol.

(MUSIC)

G.P. Welcome to the interview portion of Memories and Music. Art Carr is our guest today. Art Carr has been on the program a number of times this year. Mr. Carr was born in 1912 in Sudbury, been associated with the newspaper business for a large number of years and up until recently was the publisher/editor of the Palmerston Observer. And I think, Mr. Carr, you gained your experience in the Sudbury area through association with the Sudbury Journal and the Sudbury Star. As I indicated at the onset, on our program today we'll be talking about James Orr, Colonel W. J. Cressey, Bill Mason, and Jim Nicol - four individuals again who have had a major role to play in the newspaper industry. In terms of Jimmy Orr and Colonel Cressey, Mr. Carr, I think your association probably began in terms of the late 1920's when you started to work for the Journal.

A.C. Yes, I was a teenager at the time, and Mr. Orr wasn't directly affiliated with the Journal then, but he was an almost daily visitor, and I can recall him coming in and entering that little glassed off cubical that Colonel Cressey used as an office. These two long-time friends would sit down and chat together. Of course, one was not aware of the topics under discussion but no doubt they were interesting to these men. Mr. Orr impressed me very much. He was a tall man, immaculately dressed, derby hat, the dark blue overcoat with the velvet collar,

the cane which was used more as a swagger stick, - black with a silver head on it, - and spats, pearl-grey spats over immaculately shined shoes. Yes he looked the part of an erudite editor of a newspaper, and you would almost see him just blistering someone or other in an editorial and winding up with a quotation in Latin that no one understood other than it gave him tremendous stature among the learned folk. And I could picture Jimmy doing this although I didn't know the man well you'll understand. Of course Colonel Cressey was indeed a Colonel. Quite a military bearing, I'll say a leonine face. And he was a Colonel in the Algonquin Rifles, I think, during the Great War. And he was also a great man in the Masonic Lodge, in the chapters, in the lodges, and up into the Shriners, I do believe. He obviously was respected by everyone who knew him. I was his employee, and though the pay was not great, he was a wonderful man to work with. Profanity was absolutely unknown to him. When he was deeply moved he would say, "rats."

G.P. That was the extent?

A.C. Yes, and when he was very deeply moved he would say, "folderol, folderol, rats." And I never quite understood what it meant, but it sure gave him a safety valve, and I'm afraid, - well I know, that I on several occasions, when I goofed off on some job that probably cost a dollar, ten, or fifteen dollars worth of expensive cover stock; by doing something absolutely stupid, he wasn't swearing at me, he was swearing at the funds he had lost I do believe. Of course, Colonel had the total loyalty of his staff and the total loyalty of his sons. I don't think a union organizer would have even got to home plate, up to bat. I think we would have bodily thrown a union organizer out because we knew the Colonel was doing the best he could, and that was good enough for us.

G.P. Was it a family operation in the true sense of the word?

A.C. Oh yes, definitely, definitely.

G.P. Both sons were working?

A.C. Both sons were working there, and the third son was with the Crane Plumbing people. I have very fond memories of Old Bill the Dutchman, and if a girl whose maiden name was Lillian Cornthwaite happens to be listening, Gary, she'll get a smile at her reminiscences of Bill. And I could go on and on of stories about the Journal Printing Company but we better move on.

G.P. Before we move on, what was your salary when you began working for the Journal?

A.C. I think I got nine dollars a week....

G.P. Nine dollars a week.

A.C.which sounds unusual. And it was a nine hour day and you didn't get Saturday afternoons off, you worked a seven-day week and eight to six. Would that make it nine hours?

G.P. Eight to six.

A.C. Yes. And you walked. I walked from the location of the Journal which was well passed mid-downtown, up Kathleen Street, rain, storm or what. And mother would give me sixty-five cents if I had to eat uptown. Sixty-five cents bought a full course meal in the Montreal House, complete with Boston cream pie for dessert.

G.P. Sixty-five cents?

A.C. Yes.

G.P. That was fairly close to where you were living wasn't it? It wasn't that far away. It would be on the way home.

A.C. Well Montreal House was opposite the post office on Elm Street.

G.P. That's where City Centre is located today?

A.C. Well there was a railway crossing next to it at time.

G.P. It's changed considerably.

A.C. Oh yes.

G.P. When you, - talking about James Orr and Colonel Cressey, how would they complement each other? In what ways?

A.C. Well I always felt that probably the Colonel was the printer who saw to it that the machinery operated and operated it himself and that Mr. Orr was probably the editorial brains or should we say the contact man, because in Sudbury in the years that Mr. Orr would be active, it would be just a small, small town, and the editor would do much more than write editorials. He would cover council meetings. He would be conversant with everything that went on in the town. And he would be a welcome visitor in the retail outlets, not only to talk to the general manager, or the owner, the proprietor, but also to the staff. And they would probably advertise, small ads I grant you, and, on today's scale, rather

hackneyed things. But they would probably compose those just to guarantee Mr. Orr's coming in next week, and keeping him abreast....(unintelligible)

G.P. When I look at the ads of the Sudbury Journal during the 1890's I view them as being quite imaginative, you know. I think that the layout of those ads, - I don't know whether it was unique or not for newspapers of that time, but certainly there was a lot of skill employed.

A.C. Well, printers weren't considered more or less artists, and, though horribly handicapped with what they had to work with, they took pride in the typefaces selected, and they tried for legibility which is something that I decry today. They wanted to present the story as best they could. A coal dealer's ad would be very black. Perfume or jewellery would be employing elegant light-face type scripts and so on. Ads to appeal to the feminine sex were indeed feminine in structure. Ads to appeal to men were just masculine.

G.P. In a real sense they were an art....

A.C. Yes they were.

G.P.that we're talking about. Looking back upon Jimmy Orr, Colonel Cressey, you view both of them with fond memories.

A.C. Oh I do indeed.

G.P. Very much so. Alright we're going to take a break at this point. When we return, we'll talk about Bill Mason, a name that I'm sure everyone will recognize in our listening audience.

(MUSIC)

G.P. Today on Memories and Music, our guest is Art Carr, and in the last section of the program, or the last segment of the program, we talked about Colonel W. J. Cressey and James A. Orr, both associated with the Sudbury Journal. When one thinks of the early history of the Sudbury Star, Bill Mason's name immediately comes to mind and you began working for Bill Mason....

A.C. Oh yes, I started....

G.P.back in the 1920's?

A.C. Yes 1925. I was a wee lad in stove-pipe pants. Bill Mason was childless. He and his wife were never blessed

with children. Although I didn't realize it at the time, probably I served, in a small way, as a surrogate son for Bill. Although I know that many people will burst into profanity at the mere mention of the man's name, I had a certain amount of admiration for him. I can recall for instance when Bill Mason was not quite an out-patient, but almost. He went into St. Joseph's Hospital to have all of his teeth extracted. And Jack Hall, a member of the composing room staff and I were walking around the streets on a Saturday evening and we were bored, and we thought we'd go up to the hospital and spend a few minutes with our boss, Old Bill as we called him. It was rather, - well I hardly know how to explain it, - it was deeply moving because when we appeared in the hospital room, Bill Mason, this man old enough to be our father, burst into tears. Actually sobbed. And when he got it under control he was horribly embarrassed and then he told us, that of all his acquaintances and friends in the city of Sudbury, and his staffs, and I mean staffs, because he operated the Grand Theatre, the Sudbury Transit Company, Sudbury Realty and Holding Company, I believe he was deeply interested in the Sudbury/Copper Cliff Suburban Electric Railway, - no one had come to visit him, other than these two kids, Jack Hall and I.

G.P. He was moved by that.

A.C. He was deeply moved by that. And believe me I was. Then you've asked me to mention James Y. Nicol.

G.P. We'll get to that actually in a few moments, but in terms of Bill Mason, what adjectives would you use to describe him?

A.C. He had to live unto himself I believe. Not that he didn't trust other people, but in the position that he was in, as the sole newspaper publisher, in Palmerston, - er, in Sudbury, he was sort of a dictator. He rode a monopoly and that is a very difficult role to play, believe me. If people wanted to advertise or wanted publicity in the city of Sudbury, they had to go through Bill Mason, and that little fact in itself is enough to make people hate him. And I think he was a victim of this, and also a victim of this "kill the messenger syndrome" to which all journalists, - from which all journalists suffer. I think these combined to give Bill maybe a rather jaundiced outlook. I believe the man was basically sensitive. I believe he wanted to be loved and admired, but by God he wasn't going to buy it with his wealth, he was going to earn it, and in my opinion he did earn it. For years and years, he gave Sudbury an outstanding daily newspaper. He attracted the very

best brains in Canadian journalism to that funny, little semi-weekly that he was operating and, of course, as soon as he could, he moved it into a daily. I think the city of Sudbury owes that man a terrific debt.

G.P. mmhh. You mentioned some of the jargon of the newspaper industry, - I assume it's of the newspaper industry, "kill the messenger syndrome." Not everyone in our listening audience might be that familiar with that term.

A.C. Oh well, I'd have to take you back to the Crusades.

G.P. We can't go back quite that far.

A.C. When the court would send a messenger far off into the holy land to tell the king, who headed this crusade, that his queen was fooling around with the court jester and in a rage the king would chop the head off the messenger, and that is "kill the messenger." And we, the media, in all its branches, suffer from this. The news is bad. We tell the people that the news is bad and they hate us for it. If the news is good, they forget about us and accept it, but today there's so much bad news. You know if a young person gets into trouble with the police the newspaper should publish it. It's part of the penalty, but the parents hate that newspaper for ever more. If a newspaper misspells a name, they'll carry that little grudge for years and years. I have a nephew with an odd name, and I know his home town newspaper in Southern Ontario, and I commented on it as being an excellent newspaper. "Never read the damn thing, do you know how they spelled my name?" It was eleven years ago that they misspelled his name and he still carries a grudge. And this is a well educated, seemingly rational fellow. I wonder about these people.

G.P. Although would you now accept the fact that now and again, the newspapers are open to criticism? There are two sides to the coin.

A.C. Oh yes. Oh yes, we have our bad apples.

G.P. We'll get onto that a little later. In terms of Bill Mason, when you were working for him in the 1920's, certainly I don't think he was the success that he was later on, he was not a man at the top, can I assume that? He was a very powerful man later in life?

A.C. The man at the top.

G.P. I'm using a....

A.C. He was at the top of the Sudbury Star. The Sudbury Star was the focal point of communications in that small city,

and that was an isolated city, what ninety miles roughly from North Bay? Two hundred from the Sault? And what lay in between? It was indeed isolated. He was a man at the top.

G.P. In terms of major recognition in other communities?

A.C. Much to my surprise, a very good friend of mine, a young woman, Marian Duke, editor of the Listowel Banner for seventeen years, was made citizen of the year in Listowel this year. I think Jesus once said that's easier for a camel to enter the eye of a needle, than a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. I would say that it would be easier for the camel to enter the eye of a needle than an editor of a newspaper to be elected citizen of the year. So....

G.P. The critics surround them.

A.C. Yes.

G.P. The point I'm endeavouring to get at, is the fact that how would you account for the success of Bill Mason? The reputation that ultimately is associated with the man.

A.C. He was in the right place at the right time with the right talent.

G.P. Is it that simple....

A.C. And he....

G.P. Right place....

A.C.built, he built a little empire. He would manage to attract excellent brains around him. He did run a good newspaper. It was a terrific financial investment. Few could start against him. At one time I was approached by a very, wealthy man in Palmerston, to see what it would cost to run a newspaper in opposition to the Toronto Star. They gave me about a month to research it, and when I came up with the money needed to get the basic essentials to produce a newspaper, of sufficient quality to compete with the Star, and projected the losses over a five year period before this paper gets established, they backed off. It was millions of dollars. So you see, Mr. Mason coming out of the little town of Walkerton, he was at the right place at the right time with the right talent and right equipment, peculiar designed, to weather the storms in the city of Sudbury.

G.P. Going back to an earlier comment, it is your view that the community owes him a major debt of gratitude.

A.C. I think Bill Mason, although many would argue with me, did more for the city of Sudbury than any man alive. And I'll include my own father in that, and he was an alderman in the city of Sudbury for, I believe, seventeen consecutive years.

G.P. Bert Carr?

A.C. Yes. So you see, Gary, I wouldn't know. I could sit here with you and tell you little stories about Bill Mason, favourable and unfavourable, but when you throw it all on the balance scale, the good far outweighs the bad.

G.P. We're going to have to take a break at this point. When we return I'd like to talk about Jim Nicol.

(MUSIC)

G.P. Today on Memories and Music our guest is Art Carr, and Mr. Carr, you had association with Jim Nicol a man who I believe you view very highly in terms of the newspaper industry.

A.C. Oh I do indeed.

G.P. He worked for the Sudbury Star?

A.C. Yes he did.

G.P. In what capacity?

A.C. He was, I suppose you'd call him, city editor for want of a better name. It's hard to think of a city editor....

G.P. I think they still have that position today.

A.C.in a small semi-weekly, but Jim indeed was....you know Jim was born just nine miles west of us from where we're sitting at this moment, Gary.

G.P. What community?

A.C. Listowel.

G.P. Listowel.

A.C. His father was Presbyterian minister there. Jim has still fond memories. He's still alive. He retired as managing editor of the Toronto Star Weekly, and I'm sure many people will remember that....

G.P. I'm sure they do.

- A.C.because that was a marvellous publication and I'm sure we all cried when they finally did it in. But you couldn't possibly mention a group of twelve, a dozen, newspapermen in Canada, I mean top-flight journalists, without including Nick as one of them. Nick was city editor of the Toronto Daily Star during the war years. There was a submarine sighted in the St. Lawrence, a periscope was sighted, and Jim got on the horn and he hired every aircraft within a hundred or two hundred miles of the St. Lawrence. He equipped all these civilian aircraft with anybody that could point a box Brownie or owned one. He sewed up the telegraph wires by having the operators send the Old Testament in to the Star, and he spent money like there was no tomorrow, - thousands and thousands of dollars covering this story, - and then it was discovered that it was indeed not a periscope. It was just an old pine stump floating down the St. Lawrence. So he stood in front of Hindmarsh in the morning, - his boss, - with his hat in his hand thoroughly expecting to be fired and said, "I guess I'm in deep trouble," and Hindmarsh snarled at him "not half the trouble you'd be in if there had been a submarine and you hadn't spent the money."
- G.P. Had missed the story.
- A.C. Yes, and that was Jim Nicol. He was a marvellous writer.
- G.P. Did he have a nose for news, to use that phrase that perhaps is over-used?
- A.C. Well, he was born in a small town and I think that develops an interest in humanity that is missing in cities, and, therefore, Jimmy knew people. I think he liked people, although he would deny that, and he knew what people wanted to know. It was just instinctive with him. He operated a typewriter with intense vigor. You know the editorial desks were just little things, room for a typewriter and an old pedestal telephone. Jimmy's telephones were almost totally demolished because he hit the return carriage on his typewriter with such violence that the typewriter would move two and a half to three inches at the end of each line, and after four or five lines, he'd knock the telephone to the floor. And of course he left it there, dragged the typewriter back and started flailing again. Watching Jimmy type was one of the most spectacular performances I can remember, but you knew what was coming out of it was a good story, and of course, most of us lit a cigarette while we re-organized our thoughts. Jim scrubbed his scalp vigorously with the palms of his hands. That was his way of organizing his next paragraph or sentence. I liked the fellow, I liked to think that some of Jimmy Nicol rubbed off onto me.

G.P. mmhh.

A.C. And I don't know what else to tell you.

G.P. No. What were some of the major stories that he covered?

A.C. Well....

G.P. I think before we began the tape you made reference to Yalta.

A.C. Yes, he covered the Yalta Conference with Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill, and he can tell you wonderful little inside stories, little personal things about these men, his opinion of Churchill and his lurid vocabulary, and his small stature which was what puzzled Jimmy. He also did personal interviews with Chiang Kai-shek in China, and he was absolutely charmed by Madame Chiang, as everyone else was, and he was not a name-dropper. But when my kiddies were very small, let's see, probably ranging from five to thirteen, Jim would occasionally drop by and have a meal with us, and my children were utterly fascinated with this man. He would be talking to Freda and I, but the children would be listening in rapt silence. They instinctively knew that they were in the presence of a most unusual and a delightful man.

G.P. Was he a raconteur?

A.C. Oh yes, and he still is. Jimmy is probably five or six years older than I. He still runs two miles a day at the "Y" in Toronto, and he has an apartment in what was Eaton's College Street. And telling me about this fantastically expensive apartment, he said, "you'll never get in there Carr. The doorman will buzz me and he'll say there's a fellow here says he's Art Carr, and I'll say, hell no I don't want to see that rascal old so-and-so, and he'll throw you out." 'Course Jim wouldn't do that, but it was his way of telling....

G.P. Was he a person with a sense of humour? Was he a gruff individual?

A.C. No....

G.P. Trying to capture some of the characteristics.

A.C.he was, I'll say (unintelligible)

G.P. Is that right?

A.C. Oh yes. He would go to great lengths to get a laugh. You know I mean really work to develop....

G.P. Work at it.

A.C.work at a situation, to develop a situation, to develop a laugh, but he wasn't vicious. I don't think Jimmy would ever intentionally hurt anyone, although, of course, he was among the legions that disliked Bill Mason, and, of course, the reason he disliked Bill, was Bill had to put the brakes on Jim. Why the Sudbury Star would have been constantly in the courts, I would imagine, had Bill not stepped pretty heavily on Jim's columns, you know. I don't know whether we've time Gary.

G.P. What types of stories would result in the Star getting into trouble, and I'm not asking for specifics, but in general terms?

A.C. Well let's put it this way. The Star ran a list of people who allegedly, - I'll use that word, - were living without the benefit of wedlock, and one of the couples mentioned definitely had a wedding certificate, and were prominent in the social and business life of Sudbury, and they were sued.

G.P. And Jimmy Nicol wrote the story?

A.C. Oh yes. Well Jimmy was editor at the time so let's say he was responsible for it.

G.P. So he approved its appearance in the paper?

A.C. And the Star lost in that the complainant was allowed one dollar. But the complainant had to pick up his own cost, and of course the Star's cost would run into the thousands of dollars I guess. But here again you have Bill Mason. Bill would laugh that off. That was good publicity. When I was in the composing room, I made a mistake in the price of wieners, at Eaton Groceteria, and instead of fourteen cents a pound, it came out four cents a pound because I had, in moving the form onto the steam table, sheered the bottom off one and not noticed it and it cost the Star some four hundred dollars between the basic cost and the four cents....

G.P. Right, the difference.

A.C. 'Cause Eaton Groceteria sold them at four cents until their stock had last. And like Nicol facing Hindmarsh, I expected to get it, but Bill Mason came out into the composing room the next day, grinned at me and said, "I guess you cost me a lot of money the other day, boy," and I said, "I sure did," very humbly expecting the axe

to fall. Bill grinned again and says, "Shows they're reading the paper." So you see how can you condemn a man who reacts like that?

G.P. Right. So he would turn it around and look at it from the other point of view.

A.C. Yes.

G.P. Back to Jim Nicol. When you assess the man, it's your view that he certainly ranks amongst the top....

A.C. Oh yes.

G.P.in terms of journalism?

A.C. Of course, don't we all have tin gods?

G.P. mmhh.

A.C. From these we pattern ourselves.

G.P. Although surely that is not the reason why you emulate them either.

A.C. I don't know whether I emulate them. I don't think I....

G.P. Have high regard for them?

A.C. I don't think I'm in their class. I'd like to be.

G.P. Have high regard for them anyhow.

A.C. I certainly do.

G.P. On that note, we'll take a break. When we return, we'll talk about Art Carr.

(MUSIC)

G.P. Welcome back to the interview portion of Memories and Music. Art Carr is our guest today. On our program today we've talked about Colonel W. J. Cressey, James A. Orr, Bill Mason, and Jim Nicol, - four individuals who've played a major role in terms of the newspaper industry of Sudbury. Mr. Carr, what really makes a successful journalist? What are the characteristics that one looks for?

A.C. I would think, it would be easier to classify the characteristics that a journalist must not have. For instance snobbishness. If you are a snob, and are not going to be bothered with trivia, I would say you haven't

a chance of being a **successful** journalist. You must have a certain love and admiration for fellow man. I think you must be a very patient soul and above all, you cannot be lazy. There are no successful, lazy journalists. The world is, or I should say, the newspaper offices, and of course our electronic media too, have their newsrooms filled with lazy journalists but they are not successful. They will use what comes easy and what comes easy is usually garbage. It's usually public relation handouts from all branches of industry and all branches of government, and it comes in wagon loads to any point in the media. So I would say an absence of snobbishness, being a self-starter and really enjoying your job. It's a marvellous job, you know. You're in a center of all activity. You command a modicum of respect and energy, I think. I think it was best shown in the thirties when journalists on daily newspapers wore a tan coloured trench coat, pearl-gray felt hats with a chunk of cardboard about four inches square behind the band, the hatband, that proclaimed in the world, PRESS. Now that was a five letter word but gosh it carried a lot of weight, and I was proud to wear that at one time. We are a little more inconspicuous today, we don't....

G.P. Advertise.

A.C.advertise to the world what we're doing.

G.P. But your roles really haven't changed?

A.C. No, no, I think our rules are the same.

G.P. The role itself.

A.C. The role itself yes. You see, because good journalists are treasures. Think of your Old Testament. There are two journalists there, I can't remember the one's name, but both tell the Christmas story. But the Christmas story is told by Luke, his I think, the nicest. I think Luke was the best journalist of the two. Now that I'm onto Christianity and religion, it doesn't really matter what religion a person is, but the basis of Christianity which is brotherly love extends into journalism. And a good journalist just can't exist without a huge dose of brotherly love in his make-up. And you may think that a little odd, but I draw your attention to the investigative journalism that precipitated Watergate. Do you think that those young journalists were striving for personal acclaim which they eventually got, or do you think that it was a love of their country and their fellow Americans that goaded them on to turn out this terrible rat's nest that they did? What do you think Gary?

- G.P. It would be my view that it was the latter that, at least, I would assume that that has to be the motivation of a journalist, because acclaim does not always follow with every story.
- A.C. No I would....
- G.P. You can, - one cannot assume that there will be acclaim associated with it.
- A.C. No. I have had people say that it would be very easy to get a tar and feather gang. They suggest about twenty minutes would be required. To get a tar and feather gang out for me. Of course I haven't been active for a few years. But there were times in my history when I had police protection on the way home. And when the Bell Telephone Company threw their.... Not long since gone hello girls would not allow calls to my home after nine p.m.
- G.P. Advantages and disadvantages associated with journalism but when you look back, advantages far out weigh the disadvantages.
- A.C. Oh yes, yes, the advantages of being in the communications media I think are wonderful.
- G.P. Priceless experience.
- A.C. Oh yes. You must be enjoying it in your little feature.
- G.P. Very much so. On that note we're going to have to end our program, and the program today concludes a three-part series on the newspaper industry in Sudbury, and on behalf of our listening audience Mr. Carr, thank you very much for your most informative insight. Thank you.