

SYDNEY HENRY SIMPSON

The following account is written by his daughter, Shirley Callard



Infant Sydney
Henry Simpson

Sydney Henry Simpson was born on April 8, 1890, in Battleford, before the area was known as Saskatchewan. His dad, Sydney Seymour Simpson had emigrated from northern England and his mother, Margaret Ann Speers, had moved with her family from Ontario. They met at the Indian Residential School, Battleford where they were both working.

Dad was the first born. He was brought up on a Reserve, where Grandpa Simpson was the farming instructor, and later on a farm that Grandpa had acquired near Battleford.

From all accounts, Dad and his brother Harold were talented at getting into mischief and playing practical jokes. I believe Dad's growing up years left time from chores to explore nature and to absorb and gain a lifelong appreciation of its ways.

He left school after passing grade eight. At age 16, he joined the bank as a junior (I don't know what bank; I believe in Saskatoon. Wages \$16.00 per month).



Lieutenant Sydney Simpson in
army uniform

With the outbreak of World War I in August 1914, Dad responded by enlisting the following month. He loved and was so proud of Canada that I surmise that patriotism was one, but not the only motivation for going to war.

The first contingent of the First Canadian Division shipped out from Valcartier (where we later lived) on the SS Lapland for England on October 4 that same year. Dad was among them. He saw action in France, spent some time in hospital in England with bronchitis and was back in Canada as a private in May of 1916. His total earnings for the period were \$668.76, from which he sent \$15 a month to his mother. (Pay rate was \$1 plus 10 cents for overseas duty per day.) His discharge papers from the Lord Strathcona Horse indicate his behavior was very good and that he was to be promoted to lieutenant.

My understanding is that he was to be a recruitment officer during a time when casualties were high and before conscription was enacted. The puzzling thing is that he returned in the spring and wasn't sworn in as an officer until December 1916. Why the delay? I wonder what he did during those nine months? He took his discharge in 1917.

He rarely talked about the war and anything I heard was about the plight of horses trapped in muddy fields, some of which had to be shot. I now conclude it was easier to talk about horses than the horror humans experienced.

What he did next, I know not. It appears that he worked at the Bank of Montreal in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba, at some point.



Sydney back in
civilian life

He took a position with the Federal Government as Clerk at the Indian Agency in Battleford.(probably in the mid-20s), He was proud to be a public servant. In 1936, Dad was transferred to the Duck Lake Agency where he was promoted to Indian Agent the following January.

He respected the First Nations People and was far ahead of his time in defending their culture and language, bemoaning their lack of opportunity and railing against the residential school system. Like the First Nations people he served, he respected their Great Manitou and their association with nature. His own faith was Christian and strong and he lived by “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

We moved to File Hills Agency near Balcarres in 1943. By this time, Dad’s heart condition was becoming more serious. He spent weeks in hospital – the accepted treatment at that time – drawing on his patience and mother’s dedication to relieve the boredom. He was transferred to the Touchwood Agency in Punnichy in 1949. Dad’s health forced early retirement and they moved to Victoria in 1949. He died on March 31, 1950.

Cecilia Emily Ridington was born in Foxwarren, Manitoba, on August 11, 1901 the second daughter and third child of William Richards Ridington and Emily Louisa Day. Both her parents had emigrated from England: William from Cornwall, Emily from London.

William had a farm and operated a builder's supply business in Foxwarren. He moved to Lloydminster, Alberta, where he was the government agent assisting in settling the Barr colonists. He later transferred to the Dominion Land Titles Office in Battleford and he was appointed Sheriff in 1913. He retired in 1935 and he and Emily moved to Victoria.

Cecilia attended grade and high school in Battleford and graduated from grade 11. I believe she went immediately to work as an office assistant to Paul Prince, the owner-manager of one of the two general stores in the town (and later a member of the Saskatchewan legislature).

There was a wide network of family friends, known to those on the inside as "the Battleford crowd" Mother enjoyed an active social life. Nonetheless, she was left "on the shelf" not having married by the marker age of 29. Someone suggested she date Syd Simpson, who was one of the crowd. "Not that old fool" she quoted herself as saying. That old fool became her partner on May 24, 1930 in a quiet ceremony in Saskatoon witnessed by her sister Florence (Wassie) and Mr. Moyer. Dad adored mother, and she reciprocated. They were physically close, temperamentally opposite. Dad's calmness contrasted with Mother's quick temper. They were socially compatible and devoted to each other.



Cecelia, Sydney and daughter Shirley

Dad was a member of the Masonic Lodge. Both he and mother were members of the Order of Eastern Star, each taking various offices. Mother was active in the local Anglican women's group in Duck Lake (She was raised in the United Church.)

After Dad died Mother returned to work at the age of forty-nine, having been out of the work force for nineteen years. Times had changed. Mother coped despite some discouraging experiences. She settled into a job at Simpson's mail order office. It wasn't long before she had brought her organization skills to improve the routines, but she didn't find the job very fulfilling and

the pay was meager. A better opportunity came her way at the Naval Dockyard where she became the chief clerk in the Central Tool Crib. It was her turn to become a Public Servant. She loved tools and was intrigued by their application. She was working in a man's world where she gave as good as she took in the way of teasing. Now she had a challenge worthy of her talents: improving the system to keep track of tools that were loaned out for various specialized work at the naval base. A tool librarian, if you will.

In 1958, she left this job to marry Jack Light, who had been one of the Battleford crowd and with whom she became reacquainted when he was a frequent visitor to Victoria in 1956 and 1957. She moved to the Peace River country where Jack had a home. The match proved disastrous and they soon separated.

Mom returned to Victoria and her old job at the dockyard, from which she retired in 1968. She died on June 11, 1987.