E.C. DRURY: AGRARIAN IDEALIST

In a fiercely fought provincial election in 1919, a new political movement came to power in Ontario. The victorious party was the United Farmers of Ontario. Its leader, Ernest Charles Drury (1878—1968), became the province's eighth premier.

Idealistic agrarian reformer, staunch temperance man, free-trade advocate, Simcoe County 'yeoman,' and progressive populist, Drury was a man of the people and of the land, inevitably tagged the Farmer Premier. In this biography, Charles M. Johnston follows the career of Drury through agrarian activism and partisan politics, and explores the personal and ideological forces that directed him.

Drury began his career in the farm movement as leader of the Dominion Grange and Farmers' Alliance. He went on to act as the driving force behind the Canadian Council of Agriculture, and then co-founded the UFO in 1913. Activist though he was, Drury as premier sought no dramatic departures from established political procedures. When others of his party did, notably J.J. Morrison and W.C. Good, Drury disavowed their class-consciousness and their formula of group government. Instead he advocated the creation of a people's party, based on what he called Broadening Out–an appeal to all citizens, regardless of class, occupation, or political stripe, who were seen to share the farmer's desire for a more humane, moral, and progressive society in the wake of the First World War.

The question of Broadening Out was a controversial one within agrarian ranks, and it led to dissension among the leaders. This weakening of the party combined with the shrewd tactics of Howard Ferguson's Tories to bring about the Drury government's downfall in 1923. During its four years in power it had enacted some solid social welfare legislation, but its defeat was resounding. With it came the effective end of Drury's political career.

Johnston offers a revealing study of a brief chapter in Ontario history and of the man whose principles and ideals shaped it.

CHARLES M. JOHNSTON is Professor of History at McMaster University. He is the author of The Valley of the Six Nations, Brant County: A History, and the two volumes of the history of McMaster University, *The Toronto Years and The Early Years in Hamilton.*

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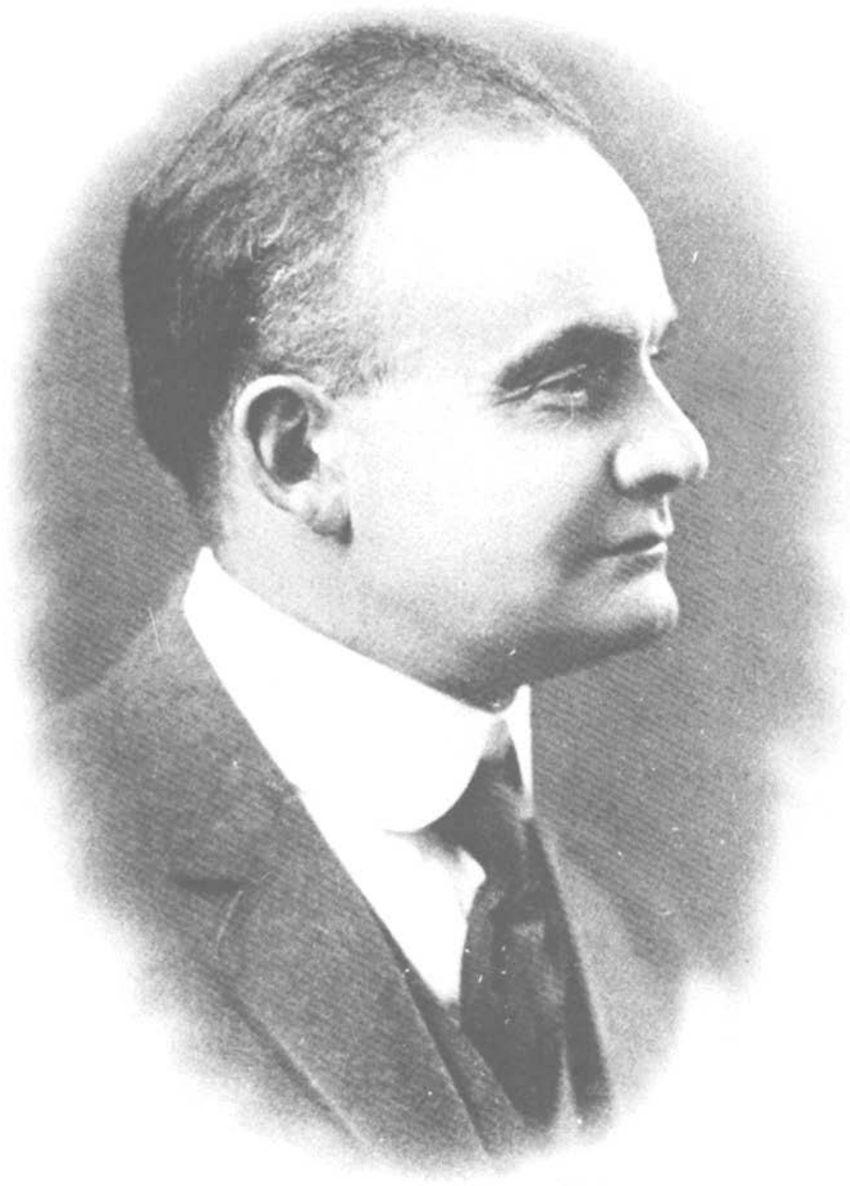

Premier E.C. Drury: a studio portrait taken in August 1922

CHARLES M. JOHNSTON

E.C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist

Published by University of Toronto Press
Toronto Buffalo London
for The Ontario Historical Studies Series

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ISBN 0-8020-3432-2

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Johnston, Charles M., 1926–

E.C. Drury: agrarian idealist

(Ontario historical studies series, ISSN 0380-9188)

Includes index.

ISBN 0-8020-3432-2

1. Drury, E.C. (Ernest Charles), 1878–1968.
2. Prime ministers – Ontario – Biography.
3. Ontario – Politics and government – 1905–1919.*
4. United Farmers of Ontario. I. Title. II. Series.

FC3073.1.D78J65 1986 971.3'03'0924 C86-094468-9

F1058.D78J65 1986

PICTURE CREDITS

All photographs have been provided by the Drury family with the following exceptions:

Ministry of Agriculture, Guelph: Charles Drury

Archival Collections, University of Guelph Library: Ontario Agricultural College; graduating class OAC 1900

Ontario Archives: first United Farmers of Ontario cabinet; W.E. Raney; Peter Smith; Frank Biggs; Beniah Bowman; Manning Doherty on steps of legislature; Premier Drury in 1922

This book has been published with funds provided by the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.

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The Ontario Historical Studies Series

For many years the principal theme in English-Canadian historical writing has been the emergence and the consolidation of the Canadian nation. This theme has been developed in uneasy awareness of the persistence and importance of regional interests and identities, but because of the central role of Ontario in the growth of Canada, Ontario has not been seen as a region. Almost unconsciously, historians have equated the history of the province with that of the nation and have depicted the interests of other regions as obstacles to the unity and welfare of Canada.

The creation of the province of Ontario in 1867 was the visible embodiment of a formidable reality, the existence at the core of the new nation of a powerful if disjointed society whose traditions and characteristics differed in many respects from those of the other British North American colonies. The intervening century has not witnessed the assimilation of Ontario to the other regions in Canada; on the contrary it has become a more clearly articulated entity. Within the formal geographical and institutional framework defined so assiduously by Ontario's political leaders, an increasingly intricate web of economic and social interests has been woven and shaped by the dynamic interplay between Toronto and its hinterland. The character of this regional community has been formed in the tension between a rapid adaptation to the processes of modernization and industrialization in modern Western society and a reluctance to modify or discard traditional attitudes and values. Not surprisingly, the Ontario outlook is a compound of aggressiveness, conservatism, and the conviction that its values should be the model for the rest of Canada.

From the outset the objective of the Board of Trustees of the Ontario Historical Studies Series has been to describe and analyse the historical development of Ontario as a distinct region within Canada. The series as planned will include some thirty volumes covering many aspects of the life and work of the province from its original establishment in 1791 as Upper Canada to our own time. Among these will be biographies of several premiers, numerous works on the growth

of the provincial economy, educational institutions, minority groups, and the arts, and a synthesis of the history of Ontario, based upon the contributions of the biographies and thematic studies.

In planning this project, the Editors and the Board have endeavoured to maintain a reasonable balance between different kinds and areas of historical research, and to appoint authors ready to ask new questions about the past and to answer them in accordance with the canons of contemporary scholarship. Nine biographical studies have been included, if only because through biography the past comes alive most readily for the general reader as well as the historian. The historian must be sensitive to today's concerns and standards as he engages in the imaginative recreation of the interplay between human beings and circumstances in time. He should seek to be the mediator between the dead and the living, but in the end the humanity and the artistry of his account will determine the extent of its usefulness.

This biography of Ernest Charles Drury is the eleventh volume in the Series to be published. It depicts the life and times of the first and only Farmer-Labour premier of Ontario, whose administration has been described as 'an unforgettable interlude' in the political history of the province. Drury and his colleagues were committed to 'the creation in some way of a new order of things,' but when they were driven from power in 1923 many of their hopes and aspirations were still largely unfulfilled. We believe that this study illuminates the ideals and the objectives of E.C. Drury and his movement, and that it will deepen our understanding of an important aspect of the political and social development of twentieth-century Ontario.

The Editors and the Board of Trustees are grateful to Charles Johnston for undertaking this task.

Goldwin French
Peter Oliver
Jeanne Beck
Maurice Careless, Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Toronto
18 August 1986

Preface

The published memoirs of Ernest Charles Drury, Simcoe County native and eighth prime minister of the province of Ontario, carry the simple title *Farmer Premier*. On the face of it any other would have been absurd. His rural background, agricultural pursuits, professional training, and protracted labours on behalf of the farm movement in Canada make the title a particularly apt one. Co-founder of the United Farmers of Ontario, leader of the Dominion Grange and Farmers' Association, and a moving spirit behind the organization of the Canadian Council of Agriculture – these were the highlights of Drury's career as an agrarian activist. To clinch matters, he was called upon in the wake of the Ontario election of 1919 to head the so-called Farmers' Government after UFO candidates had startled the community by winning the largest block of seats in the legislature. No other leader in Ontario's political experience had been placed in the position of forming a government that did not draw its support from either of the old-line parties. No other leader had come to the task with so little formal political training.

However, E.C. Drury was not the first, nor certainly the last, 'son of the soil' to occupy the premier's office at Queen's Park. Others also brought a rural view of the cosmos to their understanding of the challenges of government in Ontario. It should be borne in mind as well that agrarian activist though he was, Drury sought no dramatic departures from the established procedures of Ontario politics. From the very outset he worked assiduously toward what he dubbed 'Broadening Out.' Without jettisoning the party system as such, he would urge his legislative followers to reach out to other citizens, urbanite and non-urbanite alike, who were seen to share his desire to fashion a more humane, moral, and progressive society in Ontario.

Drury did not seek to restructure the Ontario parliamentary system so much as to launder it, hang it out morally to dry, and make it more presentable and responsive to the community. And for him community embraced people and interests drawn from every walk of life and from every political quarter who

were nonetheless united in a common desire to cleanse society of the imperfections that had been allowed to accumulate in Ontario's unhappy political past. But for the radicals in the farm movement, this attempt to create a so-called people's party would merely end up duplicating the evils of the thoroughly detested party system and do nothing to ease the full-blown political crisis that all were agreed was facing the province and the country at large. They urged instead a system of group government whereby democratically elected occupational or class blocs would collaborate or compete in a restructured legislature. Only this departure, they argued, would undo the 'plutocratic interests' that had long manipulated the political process in Ontario. In the end the struggle between group government's champions and Broadening Out's supporters would help to dig the Farmer Government's grave in 1923.

At the same time, Drury's passionate dedication to the rural ethic made him less than credible in the eyes of many an urban voter. His article of secular faith that 'the farm is the bulwark of the land ... , the simplest, truest, and sweetest social life of the nation' would command little respect in those circles that equated the city with the blessings of modernization and the delights of civilization. The more Drury railed against urbanization and its supposed evils, the more remote he was perceived to be from the mainstream of progress.

Yet the fact remains that the bugbears of the Ontario farm movement – rural depopulation and its concomitant, the lure of the city – were for Drury and the UFO very real dangers to the world they were anxious to preserve. Nor was it just a case of Drury's overlooking the countryside's shortcomings and blaming the city dweller for all its woes. He clearly realized early on that life on the concession lines must be made more palatable, stimulating, and rewarding, through educational reforms and advances in agriculture, if farmers' offspring were to stay content with life down on the farm.

On the other hand, one must concede Drury's preoccupation, indeed obsession, with free trade as a cure-all for the nation's varied ailments. If only protection could be done away with, he thundered over the years, the whole of society would be immeasurably improved and a new and more liberal age ushered in. The crusade for free trade ranked with prohibition as an all-embracing panacea for Canada's ills. And throughout, Drury left few in doubt about his almost pathological dislike of the selfish businessman who fattened on the benefits conferred by high tariffs. This was a species of economic man that symbolized for Drury the cynical, unethical, and corruptive attitudes and practices that were polluting the Canadian market place. Yet, in spite of all this, he was no simple Luddite out to dismantle the economic structure of Ontario, even though some critics of his Hydro policy might have been excused if they thought so.

Similarly, Drury was not other-worldly when he gave expression to his religious commitment. He spurned the anti-intellectualism and the sectarian nostrums of the fundamentalist just as forcefully as he lampooned the sophisticated complexities of theological debate. For him religion constituted a personal endeavour

to live by the golden rule of a 'simple functional Christianity' that would be sensitive to the needs of his fellow man and responsive to the problems of his society. At times admittedly he affected a smugness and a moral arrogance that were unwarranted by inconsistencies in his own behaviour and that laid him open to legitimate charges of being stuffily self-righteous. For the most part he shrugged off such recriminations as he went happily about the task of reminding his and subsequent generations where their flaws and faults resided.

This, then, in part was the Ernest Charles Drury who was invited to form Ontario's government in the fall of 1919. For all his lack of formal political and parliamentary experience, he came to the task reasonably well equipped. Years spent actively in varied and exacting branches of the Canadian farm movement, his own family's taste for politics, both local and provincial, and his enviable gifts as an orator, debater, administrator, and spokesman gave him formidable weapons with which to wage what he considered to be the good fight at Queen's Park after 1919.

A special vote of thanks is owed to the editors of the Ontario Historical Studies Series, Goldwin French, Peter Oliver, and Jeanne Beck, who were perceptive and sympathetic guides and constructive critics of the work as it progressed. And when it did not progress, because of other commitments, their forbearance was nothing short of remarkable.

The work of research was eased immeasurably by the cheerful exertions of a host of archivists and librarians, all the way from the Public Archives of Canada and the Archives of Ontario to a variety of local repositories and the collections that flourish on university campuses in this province. I had a particularly happy and productive association with Peter Moran and his colleague, Su Murdoch, at the Simcoe County Archives. The annual spring excursions that my wife and I undertook to their picturesquely situated treasure trove will always be memorable. Ed Phelps of Western's Regional Collection demonstrated his inimitable informality and unfailing ingenuity when he sought out and put at my disposal vital documents and theses. The same kind of co-operation and expertise marked the response of archival staffs at other institutions, which included the universities of Guelph, Queen's, Toronto, McMaster, Waterloo, and Brock. In the early stages of the research I received commendable assistance from Michael Woods, a former student, and I am happy to acknowledge that assistance in these pages.

And then there were the people who uncomplainingly took time out to be interviewed or to answer questions. Topping the list is the Drury family. Harold Drury and his wife Marion gave unstintingly of their time and hospitality, and allowed me to examine family letters that had to do with their father's later writings. On one occasion, Harold's sisters, Beth and Mabel, attended a gathering at the home farm in Crown Hill and shared with me colourful reminiscences and reflections. In turn Varley and Margaret Drury invited my wife and me to their Southampton home and told us what they remembered of Ontario's farmer pre-

mier. R.O. Biggs of Waterloo, the son of F.C. Biggs, Drury's highways minister, provided a number of welcome insights, and Robert Nixon, MPP, followed suit with recollections of his father's political career as Drury's lieutenant. Similarly Beth Good Latzer, the daughter of W.C. Good, graciously augmented what was known about her father's relationship with Drury. Allan Ironside of Orillia and Pete McGarvey of Toronto, both unabashed Drury admirers, added substantially to my understanding of the closing stages of his long life. They also supplied documentary items and tape recordings of his speeches.

Drury's former subordinates during his years as sheriff at the Simcoe County Court House in Barrie made informative contributions of their own. Amelia Whalen and Greta Harradine, respectively at the time of writing senior deputy local registrar and supervisor of court reporters, joined forces at their interview with John Murphy, who fondly recalled Drury's penchant for political discussion. Leonard Harmon, long active in the Ontario co-operative movement, was good enough to put me in touch with people in the farming community, such as Lloyd Cumming and Hunter Russell of the Barrie area, who enlightened me on Drury's accomplishments as a farmer and rural spokesman. Mr Harmon also furnished an entrée to UFO documentation and other relevant materials in the library of the United Co-operatives of Ontario. Kenneth Kidd, archaeologist emeritus of the Royal Ontario Museum, kindly filled me in on Drury's efforts to recapture the province's Indian past. And one summer day the office staff of Collingwood Terminals good-naturedly spared an hour from a busy schedule to ferret out records of those early times when Drury was actively involved with the firm.

I enjoyed my conversations with my friend and former student, Jim Greenlee of Memorial University, who patiently and stimulatingly responded to my attempts to sort out the problems inherent in this project, particularly when they impinged on his current interest – Sir Robert Falconer and the University of Toronto. I also appreciated the editorial suggestions and formidable typing skills of his wife Joanne, who prepared the manuscript for the editors. A McMaster friend and colleague, Tom Willey, generously bolstered my morale in the dark moments of unproductivity. Finally, the sharp eye, shrewd judgment, and editorial talents of Diane Mew rescued the manuscript from many an infelicitous statement and confusing passage. To all these people I owe an imposing debt of gratitude.

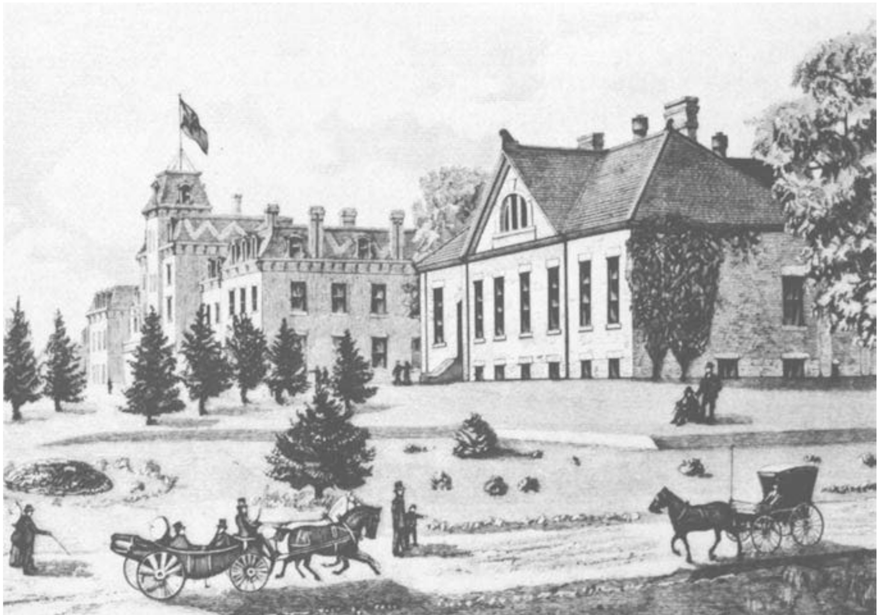
The financial assistance afforded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is also gratefully acknowledged. Their timely award of a leave fellowship enabled me to complete the bulk of the task. As in the past, McMaster University provided encouragement and financial aid, along with congenial surroundings in which to work.

I am, as always, enormously indebted to my wife, Lorna. Her unflagging cheerfulness and interest in the undertaking, together with her eagerness to help with varied research chores, made the labour of preparation much less arduous than it would otherwise have been. Since I have already dedicated one of my books to her, I dedicate this one to my children and grandchildren.

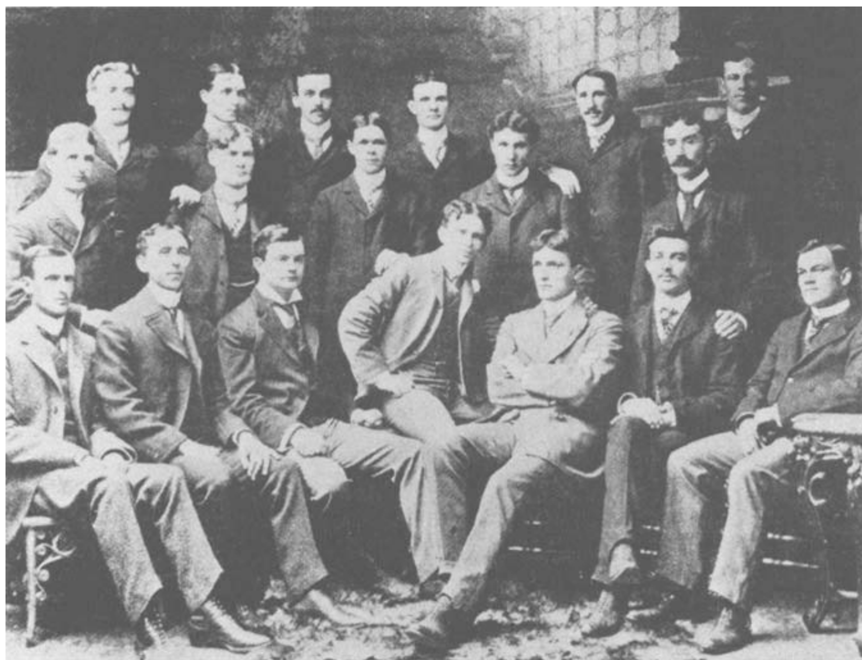
Ernest Drury as a baby

The young Ernest with a friend

Charles Drury, Ernest's father, and Ontario's first minister of agriculture



The Ontario Agricultural College, Guelph, as it was when Drury attended it, 1898–1900



The graduating class of 1900, Ontario Agricultural College. Drury is seated third from the left.

Ernest and Ella Drury, 11 January 1905

E.C. Drury shortly after becoming premier

Ella Drury

The first cabinet of the United Farmers of Ontario government, 1919. From left to right: Manning Doherty, Henry Mills, Walter Rollo, Harry Nixon, F.C. Biggs, E.C. Drury, W.E. Raney, Peter Smith, Col. Carmichael, R.H. Grant, Beniah Bowman

Manning Doherty, the minister of agriculture, about to milk a cow on the steps of the legislature to promote the Pure Milk Campaign in Toronto, part of a public health program, June 1921

W.E. Raney, attorney general

Peter Smith, provincial treasurer

Frank Biggs, minister of public works

Beniah Bowman, minister of lands and forests

At home at Crown Hill: Drury in old age, surrounded by his grandchildren and family

E.C. DRURY: AGRARIAN IDEALIST

1

The Road from Kenilworth

Some one hundred miles northwest of London the town of Kenilworth lies in the pleasantly rolling Warwickshire countryside. Despite the heavy inroads made by the twentieth century on that part of England, the charming picture offered by a traveller's guide of the mid-nineteenth century can still be evoked: 'The fine, quiet, old English beauty of the scenery around, so softly undulating in its surface, so calm and hushed in its feeling, as though it had been charmed to sleep some thousand years ago ... '[1] The small community is still dominated by its castle. Built in the twelfth century, it has occasionally intruded on the centre stage of English history, finally being damaged in the Civil War and never restored.

Stories of English history, generated by the castle's imposing presence, were brought to Upper Canada by Joseph Drury when he emigrated to that part of the imperial frontier in 1819.[2] And clearly they were passed down to his great-grandson Ernest, the future premier of Ontario. Ernest took considerable pride in the knowledge that his ancestor was a yeoman farmer, from 'freedom-loving stock' to boot, a point assiduously stressed by his father, Charles Drury, and before him by his father Richard, who had accompanied Joseph to Upper Canada. Many years later Ernest Drury underscored the factor of permanence that these pioneers and their offspring had bestowed on the community: 'of the eleven farms [in the area] four are farmed by the descendants of the first settlers.'[3]

Why had Joseph Drury left the agreeable Warwickshire countryside? His farm of some one hundred acres was only slightly short of the average holding for that time. If he were as shy and insular as most Warwickshire farmers were reputed to be,[4] then it is unlikely that he was lured away to the new world by the spirit of adventure. Perhaps the general depression that stalked England in the aftermath of the Napoleonic War forced him to emigrate to supposedly greener fields. It is more likely that the effects of the parliamentary enclosure movement on the ancient open fields system may have taken their toll of Joseph and other small freeholders, who could not afford to cultivate the profitable new root crops

that enclosure favoured and which were in demand in England's burgeoning industrial towns.[5] Add to these factors the growing promotional literature extolling Upper Canada's advantages, and some plausible picture can be formed of the motivations that spurred him to emigrate. He came with two of his grown sons, Richard and Thomas, leaving behind his wife, and his youngest son, Edmund, until he had established himself and could send for them. In the end his wife and daughter did not join him.

Joseph Drury was drawn to what became Oro Township, Simcoe County, by the possibilities afforded by the new road connecting Penetanguishene on Georgian Bay with York, Upper Canada's capital. Originally used by Indians and European entrepreneurs to tap the fur trade of the upper lakes, this access route had been improved by the British to retain their own dominion in that vast hinterland during the War of 1812. A part of their plan had been the establishment of a naval station at Penetanguishene and the building on the present site of Barrie of a storehouse for supplies and weapons in transit to the northwest. It was this modest rendez-vous, overlooking scenic Kempenfeldt Bay, that greeted Joseph Drury and other English arrivals in 1819. The area's link with the country beyond the lakes would never be severed and would serve to inspire the local tales spun to entertain and educate generations of Simcoe County youth, the young Ernest Drury included. Indeed, his family forged their own tentative ties to the interior. Richard and Thomas Drury briefly offered their services to the expedition organized in 1825 by Sir John Franklin to reach the Arctic Sea.

The area would lead a Janus-like existence, however, for the Penetang Road also brought it within the orbit of the lower lakes and would serve to consolidate York's hold over that part of Upper Canada. In due course the highway would also spawn the villages and hamlets that arose to cater to the immediate and varied needs of the Drurys and their neighbours. Thus Barrie progressed from storage depot to market town as more British immigrants moved in to join Joseph Drury and his sons in this strategic locale.

After filing the customary petition on 4 November 1819, indicating that he had the 'means to cultivate a new farm,'[6] the middle-aged Joseph was given a 'location ticket' for one hundred acres comprising Lot 30-1 in Oro Township. According to family lore he had some difficulty obtaining the necessary legal title, a problem that was not resolved until shortly before his untimely death in a raging snowstorm late in 1823.[7] From the beginning, Joseph relied heavily on his two energetic teenaged sons who, like able-bodied offspring elsewhere on the Upper Canadian frontier, were highly important economic assets. In 1820 the two men branched out on their own and were given title to an adjoining lot, with Richard occupying its northern half and Thomas the southern. Sometime after Joseph's death his other son, Edmund, came to Canada and settled on his father's property. While clearing and working their bush farms the older brothers

also hired out their labour to neighbours and built a number of corduroy roads in the Barrie area, the remains of which were still in place over a century later.[8]

Thomas, who was to outlive his brother Richard by nearly twenty years, became actively involved with public affairs in the locality, as Oro Township councillor and reeve, and finally as sheriff of Simcoe County, an office that virtually became a family preserve. He appears to have had a reputation as a harsh dispenser of justice, particularly when he dealt with miscreants in Barrie's small black community.[9] Richard, on the other hand, when he served the public, refused to stoop to such questionable behaviour. Whatever their virtues or shortcomings, the Drury brothers carved out a tradition of public service that first Richard's son Charles and later his grandson Ernest would find difficult to ignore. There is also a hint that Richard and Thomas Drury may have covertly supported the rebellion in Upper Canada in 1837. Their grandson once claimed in an interview that just after the turn of the century he had been shown a book containing the names of local settlers who had helped to underwrite William Lyon Mackenzie's uprising. 'I was astonished,' he recalled, 'to find the names of many people I knew ... including [those of] my grandfather and great-uncle.'[10]

In 1831 Richard Drury brought out to Upper Canada a Warwickshire girl, Elizabeth Bishop, to be his bride, and over the years she bore him twelve children, six boys and six girls. Richard's home reflected the taste for reading he had inherited from his father. In the homestead he built in 1836 were to be found books Joseph had brought with him to Canada: a Shakespeare, works by Milton and Thackeray, Pope's *Homer's Odyssey*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Alison's *History of Europe*, and Bloomfield's *Poetical Works*, which dealt with English farm life. Tucked away in the collection, which Richard had augmented, was a copy of Macaulay's *History of England* and an edition of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, the classical treatise on political economy that would later become one of Ernest Drury's secular bibles. As well, there was a bound set of the English publication, *The Family Herald*, in which he first read of the stirring battles of the Crimean War and the complex vagaries of Victorian politics.[11]

Not surprisingly, education was a major priority in Richard Drury's household. He had been among the small band of trustees who in 1847 contracted to pay the teacher assigned to the community's original log schoolhouse where his son Charles would be tutored.[12] When the time came, Richard also saw to it that Charles went on to Dr Gore's District Grammar School, established in nearby Barrie in 1849. This was in keeping with his conviction that the emergent yeomanry of old Ontario should be properly schooled in the verities so that every farm would have, in his words, an 'educated man behind the plough handles.'[13]

To further this end Richard helped to launch the Oro Agricultural Society. Like its counterparts elsewhere in the colony, it sought to acquaint its members with agricultural innovations and the need to adapt to new challenges, brought

on by the demand for more mixed farming and the large-scale production of root crops. During the Crimean War Britain was forced to import more heavily from her granary colonies, guaranteeing profitable returns for those local producers who could fill the bill for cereals and foodstuffs. Accompanying the profits of this wartime boom were the advantages promised by the 1854 Reciprocity Treaty with the United States. Deemed the last triumph of the agricultural order in British North America, it would remain for the Drurys an exemplar of the commercial policy the emergent Canadian nation should follow.

The home market was also showing signs of life. The colony's fledgling cities and towns were being galvanized into action by the first tentative steps toward industrialization and by the arrival of the railway, which brought new initiatives in commerce and manufacturing in its wake. Barrie was one of the first communities in the province to benefit from this technological marvel. In 1853, the very year the town became a separate municipality after its divorce from Vespra Township, the Ontario, Simcoe and Huron Railway (the future Northern Railway) was linked with nearby Allandale. 'Before this a journey to Toronto took two or even three days,' an early history of Barrie exulted, 'but by the opening of this railway ... the journey could be made in one day and a return the next.'[14]

Clearly Richard Drury was influenced by these changes, but he died before their full effect registered on the community. Even so, he had made his own enduring contribution to the beautification of his estate by planting trees: Lombardy poplars, beach locusts, mountain ash, and apple trees – Talman sweets, northern spy, a red astrachan, and a crabapple. But it would be his son Charles and his grandson Ernest who would benefit most from the transformation of Ontario's landscape after the mid-century. A new attitude to that landscape emerged with the arrival of second and third generation Ontarians who had not known of the forest or of the long struggle with the land.[15] This outlook was given architectural expression as well when Charles Drury built close by the old farm home a new red brick residence, appropriately named 'Kenilworth.' Clearly Richard's son was qualifying as a member of that substantial class of farmers which a government publication reported as having been long settled in Simcoe County and whose property was worth something of the order of $80 an acre.[16] Meanwhile, the farming community that the Drurys and other English immigrants had fashioned in that part of the township had taken the name of Crown Hill. According to a story told by Charles Drury, the name had been conferred by a visitor inspired by the 'decent church' that topped the 'neighbouring hill.'[17]

It was also a time for fresh approaches to those matters which touched the spirit and the moral health of Canada's late Victorian society. Charles Drury broke away from the Church of England over the liquor question and took refuge with the Methodists, the most voluble advocates of prohibition.[18] Anglicans in Canada soft-pedalled the need for such a measure, arguing that drinking was a private matter that ought not to be legislated against, a point of view that found

no favour in the Drury household. So strongly did Charles Drury feel on the question that he and his brother William refused to sell their barley if there was the faintest hint that it might be corrupted into beer.[19] Charles's spiritual migration, his active membership in the Sons of Temperance, and his labours on behalf of the Crown Hill Methodist Church had a lasting effect on his son.

The family's draconian approach to the liquor question bemused the Anglicans in Barrie, who twitted the Drurys on their puritanical ways. It may be that the issue was a class one, with the 'humble Methodists' opposed to the professional and business elite who for the most part congregated in Anglican and Presbyterian pews and who, according to their squeamish critics, were prepared to wink at social excesses. Unquestionably Barrie, like a good many Ontario communities, was a town with a distinctly British flavour and well-defined class lines. Indeed, any exaltation of the high and mighty, together with a dismissal of the righteous but supposedly lower orders of society, seldom sat well with any Drury. Charles and his Crown Hill neighbours derisively turned their backs on the pretentious urban residents of Barrie, a posture that characterized other rural communities before the turn of the century. They looked upon their pristine community of Crown Hill as a shining example of the society so glowingly described by a president of the Ontario Agricultural College, in whose native village 'everybody worked. There was no idle or leisure class. There were none wealthy and none improverished. There was little snobbery. The hired man of today bade fair to become the farm owner of tomorrow. Petty attempts to establish social superiority were derided.'[20] These themes were reinforced by a government brochure which asserted that the

> typical [Ontario] farmer ... is a temperate and moral man and a law-abiding citizen ... [who] may not always occupy so good a social position as the British farmer, nor so well as the dignity of his calling entitles him to. This may to some extent be attributed to the system arising out of the custom of earlier times, under which the farm hands he employs, become practically members of his family ... living in the same house and eating at the same table.[21]

For that matter, Crown Hill in the late nineteenth century was not yet totally dependent on the growing market and supply centre of Barrie. A wheelwright, a pump-maker, and a blacksmith provided essential services along with a three-storied steam mill built and owned by Charles Drury and his brothers, William and Thomas, in partnership with another local family. Self-sufficiency was not achieved, to be sure, but a large degree of material independence and cohesiveness was bestowed on Crown Hill by these simple but vital operations. Into this unpretentious and rustic setting, colonized by his great-grandfather some sixty years earlier, Ernest Charles Drury was born on 22 January 1878.

2

Growing up in Simcoe County

Ernest Drury's arrival was accompanied by tragedy. His mother, Marion Varley, daughter of a Yorkshire family settled in Barrie, did not survive the birth of her first child, a stark event all too common in those days. Deprived of a natural mother he never knew, he was taken over and affectionately raised by Aunt Bessie, his father's unmarried sister. Bessie Drury found time to provide not only the mothering he needed but inculcated in him the family taste for reading. She shared with him such classics as *Oliver Twist* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, in spite of the disapproval of a local Methodist preacher, who took less than kindly to novel-reading by women, even if it were done for the entertainment of children.

The time that Charles Drury could devote to the growing boy was limited by his farming tasks and his activities as a public servant. The farm was some four hundred acres, half of it ploughed land. Operated in partnership with his bachelor brother William, it was stocked with about fifty head of cattle and thirty sheep, a sizeable inventory for that day. Although the chores Charles assigned to his son were arduous and time-consuming, they brought him into daily contact with his father and uncle and furnished him a sound education in what then passed for enlightened farming. His responsibilities also provided insights into the pressures, challenges, and opportunities that made up a farmer's life. On one occasion, shortly before he graduated from elementary school, his father learned that wheat prices had begun to rise. 'We had more than a thousand bushels in the bins,' Ernest Drury recalled,

> and I was given the job of selling and delivering it ... I sold my first load on the Saturday before Easter at something more than ninety cents a bushel, and followed the same program every day of the next week. It was fun, for every day the price was higher and the buyers more eager ... I sold my last loads on the following Saturday ... for $1.25 a bushel. When I brought in the second load [the buyer] asked me if we had any more left, and I told him we had a little, not quite a load. He advised me to bring it in that evening,

for he had received a wire that afternoon telling him that the market was about to break. So I ... brought it in and unloaded it ... into a freight car on the siding. Next Monday our daily paper reported that the market had broken and wheat was back to its old price, about ninety cents a bushel.[1]

In those days there was also time for leisure on the farmstead. Lazy afternoon picnics and special holidays like Victoria Day were welcome distractions. In time they were to be rudely shortened, or abandoned altogether, when more intensive methods of farming were introduced. It was ironical that mechanization, while it took much of the drudgery out of farm work, also expanded the work to be done.

In the late 1880s Ernest had his first taste of the new order when his father bought a Massey self-binder, after he had taken his son to a demonstration of the contrivance at a nearby Kempenfeldt farm.[2] At about the same time horse power was being replaced on many farms by steam power. These innovations, though they would be dwarfed by the technological wonders that came later, nonetheless dramatically set off that turn-of-the-century generation from the pioneering times of young Richard and Thomas Drury. In the latter's heyday no implement-makers apart from blacksmiths and small foundries had even been listed in the census returns, yet by the time Ernest Drury reached adolescence there were over two hundred such firms of every conceivable size and description scattered across central Canada.[3]

All the same, in spite of these refinements the farming community still remained innocent of such future commonplaces as chemical fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides, and effective means of controlling insects and other pests. Animal husbandry was still plagued by a woeful ignorance of bovine tuberculosis, mastitis, and Bang's disease – or contagious abortion – which reached epidemic proportions every other decade. Yet for all this ignorance, the farmer of Charles Drury's generation could, with forgiveable pride, catalogue the improvements and the rising living standards that had transformed country life in the last half of the nineteenth century.

Farm work, no matter how agreeable Ernest may have found it, was forced to make way for education. Ernest was sent to the school on the Penetang Road, a successor to the one his father had attended; it was framed with clapboard rather than logs and set against a 'beautiful grove of second-growth pines.'[4] Although the neighbourhood industries commanded much respect as symbols of accomplishment, it was the schoolhouse that was the community's pride and joy. The local control of educational institutions, though weakened elsewhere in rural Ontario by the growing independence brought on by urbanization and improved transportation facilities, was still very much alive in Crown Hill while Ernest Drury was attending school. Not only this, he and his school chum

neighbour, Charles B. Sissons, were fortunate in their teachers. One of them, Andrew Kerr (who received $550 annually for his efforts), was reputed to have provided a quality of schooling 'denied to pioneers and even the sons of pioneers in North Simcoe.'[5]

On the other hand, observations on Drury's appearance and deportment as a schoolboy were at times not so flattering. Although some teachers and fellow students remembered him as the 'dark eyed boy with the firm jaw,' others freely disclosed that 'when he first started to school he had an awful temper and he would kick ... and go into all kinds of antics ... [However] he was a good natured fellow as long as you didn't interfere with what he wanted to do.'[6] Another former classmate, Arthur Lower's sister, recalled gigglingly that young Drury, given his facial features, was widely known as 'Catfish.'[7] The boy with the unflattering sobriquet built up a reputation as a quick learner who usually stood at the head of the class.

In his own recollections Drury was less complimentary about the school than his contemporaries; among his complaints was that there was no school library (to match his father's, presumably). One cause of the primary school's meagre offerings may have been the inauguration in the 1870s of the high school entrance examinations. By reducing if not eradicating the overlapping nature of the high school and the elementary school, it led, so critics charged, to the decline of advanced work in the local public school.[8] Even so, Drury's interest in history was aroused, but not as a result of the formal instruction he received. 'In the schoolhouse in Crown Hill,' he recollected, 'a boy sat across from [me] whose family had lived in California ... [He] had an American History book about England. It was full of anti-British sentiment. Probably not a good book but it had life in it and interest ... I read it surreptitiously under my desk (the teacher would have licked me if she had caught me).' 'Because of it', he claimed, 'I became a reader of history, a student of history.'[9] And yet, for all the shortcomings he recorded, he eventually conceded what his friend Sissons rejoiced in – that this particular country school did, on the whole, 'very good work':

> By the time we reached the Fourth class we could read and read aloud, fluently and with expression. We could spell correctly and had a fairly broad vocabulary; we knew English grammar and the parts of speech and could parse and analyse. In the Third and Fourth readers we had been given a taste of the best of English literature, poetry and prose. We had in short been given an efficient key to further education, and sometimes the desire to use it, and perhaps this is all that education, higher or lower, can do.[10]

The slim reading materials at the Crown Hill school were thankfully supplemented by the books his father supplied at home, notably those of Daniel Defoe, Jules Verne, and Rider Haggard, though not the stirring imperial tales of G.A. Henty, which Charles Drury might have thought too chauvinistic. When the time

came for Ernest to graduate, there was no question in the household that he should follow in his father's footsteps to Barrie Collegiate Institute. This was a step that comparatively few young people in Crown Hill could take at that time. A contemporary recalled that given Charles Drury's education and standing in the community, 'Ernest was perhaps just a little bit better than the rest of us.'[11]

For the country student in particular it meant financial sacrifices for the family, even Charles Drury's. Well aware of this, Drury and similarly situated collegiate classmates were for the most part serious minded, purposeful, and self-reliant. Although most of his school friends would expect to go on to solid professional and business positions, Drury was one of the exceptions. In keeping with family tradition, he submitted to education mainly for education's sake. 'Very early,' he recalled, 'I had made up my mind to be a farmer.'[12]

Unlike the socially oriented and more 'relevant' curricula that began to come in after the Great War, the tutoring he received at the BCI was totally academic, a more sophisticated version of the instruction his father had received at the old grammar school, whose building the collegiate occupied. Latin and mathematics, which embraced Euclid and trigonometry, would be the bane of his existence, though in later years he took up the reading of Virgil in order to improve his knowledge of English.[13] On the other hand, English literature and composition, history, ancient and modern, and science, particularly botany and zoology, would prove more attractive. The academic limits to which Drury and his classmates were pushed were outlined in the examination questions set for them by BCI teachers: 'What evidences, independent of recorded history, have we of a Roman occupation?' 'Account for the Latin elements in our language'; 'Give the cause of the Hundred Years' War'; and 'Explain the causes of the changes of the seasons.'[14] Drury was peppered with these and other queries during his five-year stint at the BCI.

Yet his time there was not taken up entirely with a mixture of classroom stimulation and drudgery. Although he had the physique and stamina for organized athletics – he stood some five foot eleven and weighed about one hundred and eighty-five pounds, which he distributed on a broad frame – he lacked the desire to play or compete.[15] When he wanted to test his considerable strength or find an outlet for his energy he usually did so not on the school's football field or baseball diamond but on the farm where he enjoyed the hard physical work of clearing bush and pitching hay. When he sought extracurricular diversions in high school he joined the literary society and the glee club. He also became a regular contributor to the high school paper, which was written in longhand and read aloud every week to the literary society. Public speaking opportunities and singing with the glee club in Barrie's Music Hall, for which he had been prepared by a travelling tutor from Barrie, gave him a confidence and presence that he would put to good use later in his career.

Meanwhile, when the chores were done at home, he ransacked his own family's