

Personal History, Lois Green Carr

I was born and grew up in Holyoke, Massachusetts, a mill town on the Connecticut river. My father, Donald Ross Green, was a textile manufacturer. My mother, Constance McLaughlin Green, taught history at Mt. Holyoke College when I was little and obtained her Ph. D. in history from Yale University in 1938. I was the oldest of three children. My brother, Donald Ross Green, Jr., was two and a half years younger than I was; my sister, Elizabeth Langford Green (deceased 1970), was six years younger.

In the fall of 1936 I left home to attend the Putney School, a new, coeducational experimental school located on a farm in Putney, Vt. It had been in operation only a year when I went there. Putney was a liberating experience that changed my life. I escaped joyfully and forever from the rigidly ethnically stratified society of a mill town where a tiny minority of Anglo-Saxon Protestants owned the mills and most of the wealth, although upper levels of Irish Catholics controlled the political scene. At Putney, we students worked hard on academic subjects, but we were also taught the value of manual labor. We all worked on the farm several afternoons a week and those who wanted to help care for animals arose at dawn each morning to work in the barn. (I was not among these.) We learned to love outdoor life and the importance of conserving our natural environment. Evenings were devoted to music, drama, arts and crafts and the occasional lecture. With so much to do, we became very efficient in the use of our time, with lasting results.

I had one disappointment at Putney. I went there eager to learn how to milk a cow. (This was before the days of the milking machine.) Unfortunately, over all three years I was there, I had a permanently red throat (it didn't hurt), but Putney had a certified herd; so for all three years I was allowed only to wash the cows tails before milking.

Until I went to Putney, I had supposed that I would go to Bryn Mawr College, but at Putney I made a dear friend whose mother was Dean at Bryn Mawr but whose father was head of the history department at Swarthmore College. My friend was very anti-mother and pro-father at this stage of her life, and persuaded me that I would like Swarthmore better. My parents were dismayed, especially my father, who to that point had never heard of Swarthmore. However, he and my mother agreed that if I could get a tuition scholarship at Swarthmore, I could go there if I chose. I did so choose, and to this day, I think that Swarthmore, with its honors program and co-education, was the best place for me.

Until my senior year, I assumed that I would go to graduate school somewhere, get a Ph. D., and look for a career in research or college teaching. However, through work in the Swarthmore Student Union I had become very interested in public housing issues in Philadelphia and decided to investigate working for the United States Housing Authority. Unfortunately, for me, the Housing Authority was at that point concentrating on persuading college graduates to pursue jobs with their newly organized local housing authorities. I had only to mention that for me the local authority was Holyoke, Massachusetts, and everything rolled to a stop. Everyone said, too bad, but your

connections are all wrong for getting an appointment or being able to carry out the work if you did. Massachusetts was notorious for the politicalization of its housing authority operations and WASPS, even if local-born—perhaps especially if local born—need not apply.

So off I went to Harvard in November of 1943.

I welcomed the opportunity to attend a large university, where, I believed, I was completely unknown. All my life to this time, I had lived in small cities where everyone knew me and had expectations. My first day I walked into the office of Professor Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. to get permission to take his seminar in American Social History, and I could hardly open my mouth before he began by apologizing to me for having refused my mother admission to the graduate program in history in 1932. (That she had ever applied at Harvard was news to me.) He and others had told her that a home with three children 100 miles away would make it impossible for her to do the work. She should go home and raise her babies. But seven years later she had won a major prize for the book she had made from her Yale dissertation: *Holyoke, Massachusetts: Case History of the Industrial Revolution in America*. The lessons for me at the time were 1) the importance of persistence; and 2) the fact that I had no escape hole. I was born with connections and had to live up to the expectations that resulted.

As I grew older, I drew another lesson from my mother's experience. I have never been aware of any discrimination against me because I am a woman. But I came to realize that I had watched my mother endure it. Every one knew her to be an exceptionally talented scholar, but no one in academia ever offered her a tenured teaching appointment. The man in the competition was always appointed. My mother grew up in a time when gender roles were much more restricted than they have been in my day.

In 1946, I married a fellow graduate student, Allen R. Clark. We were both ABD (all but the dissertation). In 1947, after he accepted an instructorship at Barnard College, we moved to New York, where we lived until 1952. In 1949, my husband lost the Barnard job, but taught for a year at the Juilliard School of Music, as I had done for a semester in 1948. In 1950, I began working as an editorial assistant at Alfred A. Knopf in the College Department. And on June 10, 1952 my only child, Andrew R. Clark, was born.

At this point both my husband and I were jobless, so we moved in with my mother, who had just purchased a large house on the waterfront in Alexandria, VA. Two years later Allen was offered a teaching internship at St. John's College in Annapolis. We moved there immediately, and I have never left.

Allen had two years at St. John's, years during which I did some free-lance editing. When his job came to an end, mental instability that had plagued him for many years began to worsen. He had part-time work in a think tank, but by 1961 was unable to work at all. Meantime, our son was developing problems so severe that in 1960 we had finally sent him to the Linwood Children's Center in Ellicott City for treatment and schooling. In the spring of 1962, Allen and I finally separated, an act that produced immediate

improvement in his psyche and led to an excellent think-tank job. For me, the separation led to my introduction to Jack Ladd Carr and our marriage in July 1963. A year later, Andrew returned from Linwood to live with us.

I had returned to employment in 1956, when I accepted a job as junior archivist at the Maryland Hall of Records. This move turned my life around. I had done no work for years on my Ph. D. dissertation because I could not get to New England for needed research, but at the Archives I was surrounded by Maryland court records that no one had yet studied. At the same time, Harvard was beginning to insist on showing progress or getting out. My solution was to ask to change my topic to one on Maryland history. Today I am astonished that the department agreed, but at the time I was so determined not to give up, that the possibility of refusal did not occur to me. In 1961, Professor Bernard Bailyn kindly agreed to take me on as his student, and I finally finished in 1968, twenty-five years after I started!

In October of 1967, I began working as the historian for the St. Mary's City Commission. My work in Maryland is summarized in the enclosed vita, and there are a few comments in the articles I have included. In my view museums have exceptional opportunities for reaching a general public and teaching the value of learning about the past. Since 1948 I have never sought a position in the college classroom. I enjoy teaching through a museum much more.

You probably will not want to use much, if anything, from the preceding pages, but perhaps they make clear that I was born into a relatively privileged life and have had far fewer difficulties to overcome than most people. I can only hope that my work in research and writing of early American history and my efforts to teach its meaning through museum program represent at least a partial repayment for the opportunities that have been handed me.