

Interviewee: Doris Huestis Speirs

Interviewer: Charles Hill

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CHARLES HILL INTERVIEW WITH DORIS SPEIRS

October 15th, 1973

And as I walked along St. Clair Avenue going to my home, going back to my home, which was near St. Clair Avenue, I heard something up in a tree. It sounds just ridiculous, but this was it: "You're going to paint." Like, a voice that said that. I seemed to hear it with my outer ear: "You're going to paint."

Doris Speirs in conversation with Charles Hill, October 15th, 1973

Doris Huestis Mills Speirs (1894 – 1989) was a member of the Art Students' League of Toronto, and was known for her involvement in the Toronto art scene in the twenties and early thirties. Speirs is also remembered for the significant contributions she made as a naturalist, to ornithological literature. In conversation with Charles Hill, Speirs describes her introduction to Canadian art at a Tom Thomson memorial exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto, at which time she had the opportunity to meet Group of Seven members at the renowned Studio Building. Encouraged by J.E.H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, and A.Y. Jackson, Speirs taught herself to paint without formal training. With a select number of other young Canadian artists, Speirs eventually exhibited, by invitation, with the Group of Seven. Her paintings also circulated with various exhibitions across Canada and abroad. Speirs recounts her experiences as a young artist during the twenties and thirties, including her trips to New York City, where she became acquainted with Georgia O'Keeffe, Rockwell Kent, and Hill, Speirs describes her introduction to Canadian

1

art at a Tom Thomson memorial exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto, at which time she had the opportunity to meet Group of Seven members at the renowned Studio Building. Encouraged by J.E.H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris, and A.Y. Jackson, Speirs taught herself to paint without formal training. With a select number of other young Canadian artists, Speirs eventually exhibited, by invitation, with the Group of Seven. Her paintings also circulated with various exhibitions across Canada and abroad. Speirs recounts her experiences as a young artist during the twenties and thirties, including her trips to New York City, where she became acquainted with Georgia O'Keeffe, Rockwell Kent, and Katherine Dreier. Speirs also describes how she was influenced and inspired by Lawren Harris, with whom she developed an enduring friendship. Throughout the discussion, Speirs provides many anecdotes and personal stories concerning the artists she befriended, revealing her lifelong conviction to and promotion of Canadian art.

[Start of Clip 1]

HILL: Interview with Mrs. Doris Speirs, October 15th, 1973. Well, perhaps we can just simply start with how you first met the people involved in the Group of Seven.

SPEIRS: Yes. Well, Lucille Taylor was a member of my church. It was the First Church of Christ, Scientist on St. George Street in Toronto, and she knew that I was interested in literature and interested in art. And she said to me one day, I think at church, "I would like to take you to the Tom Thomson exhibition. It's a memorial exhibition. He died, and there's going to be an exhibition at the Art Gallery of Toronto, and I'd like to take you with me." And I knew nothing whatever of Tom Thomson, and I knew nothing whatever of Canadian art. And I had been sent when I was seventeen, with my music teacher, my mother sent me over to Europe and I spent the summer going through art galleries, and I had accumulated a lot of sepia prints and such things, you know. And I was very interested in the Old Masters, and I had read a lot about the Old Masters, and that's just about all I knew. I knew nothing whatever about Canadian art, but I loved nature and I went with Lucille Taylor and my eyes were opened. And I saw my own country in a new way, and I was just absolutely thrilled with his wonderful painting. It just brought you right straight there, and I saw nothing strange about it, you know, the simplification.

It just seemed to be the way that I often saw things myself, so I was very, very thrilled, and we had a lovely time at that opening. So then Lucille said to me, “Well, I happen to know a lot of these artists. I know Lawren Harris.” Lawren Harris was painting her portrait, by the way, and that is owned by the National Gallery, I think, the portrait of Mrs. Oscar Taylor.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: Lucille Taylor, yes, and, “I’ll take you to the Studio Building, 25 Severn Street, and I’ll introduce you to the artists.” So one day she took me, and first of all she said, “Now, Mr. MacDonald, his son Thoreau is in our Sunday school of First Church and Mrs. MacDonald teaches in the Sunday school.” They were Christian Scientists, and, “I’ll take you first to the MacDonald studio because it’s on the main floor.” So she took me in and introduced me to this tall Mr. MacDonald with his red hair and soft voice. And his very shy son stood in the background with his hands folded in front of him, and then also Mrs. MacDonald I was introduced at the church. And I met this sweet, beautiful little lady who became a dear, dear friend of mine. And then we went upstairs, and Lawren Harris was there. And such a dynamic person, a great thrill then. Further up—whether this all happened the same day, I don’t remember—to A.Y. Jackson, and I met A.Y. Jackson. And so I became very, very interested and very interested in what they were doing and Lucille explained to me what they were doing. So shortly after this, I think, I started getting in touch with Bess Housser because Fred Housser was a very great friend of my first husband, W. Gordon Mills, and they were great, great friends. They shared an interest in literature especially, but also an interest in art. And before long, Bess, Lucille, and I decided to start a little circulating gallery of pictures. That is, we went to Lawren and we said, “Could we rent three of your pictures for a year? And we will circulate them. I’ll have them three months, and then Lucille will have them, and Bess will have them, you see.” “Why, certainly you could!” I think \$1.50 for six months, something like that, very, very cheap, you see. We rented three of his sketches. We chose them and rented them. We went to Arthur Lismer. He wasn’t there; we contacted him. We rented three of his, three Jacksons, and three MacDonalds. So we had those wonderful lot of pictures. And so I would

have four, you see, one of each artist, and for three months. And then I'd send them on to Bess, and then to Lucille, and then I'd take hers, don't you see? And we continued this and this was the very first time, I believe, that they had thought of renting pictures and circulating pictures. And the Star was very, very amused at this and had quite a big write-up. Laughing at us, just roaring at us for doing this, and I mean just not very nice at all, not a bit nice. For one thing, they thought the Group of Seven were simply absolutely terrible, and the idea of people renting these pictures, you see, and circulating them, just amazed them. But however, I wrote to the Christian Science Monitor, and told what we were doing and this got interest. There was interest immediately, and Mr. E. [sic] Lewis Hind who is a writer, an English writer, he was writing then under the—as "Q.R." in the Monitor once a week, on an artist or on—either an artist or a poet or a writer. And I started reading these, and I had been reading these for some time. And I mention this especially because this was one of the greatest influences that started me to be so keenly interested in art. It gave me a background. First of all, going to Europe and seeing the artists, then finding out more about them from Q.R.'s articles. Well, Q.R. came to Toronto. I met him, and I looked after him all day, and we had a perfectly marvellous time and a wonderful talk. He was so interested in everything that was happening here. So then it wasn't long after that, I was just feeling this art so keenly. I can hardly tell you my experience. Turn this off, or shall I tell you?

HILL: If you want.

SPEIRS: Tell you, and you can eliminate it because it sounds so strange. But to Ernest Mac-Millan, not knighted at that time, he was giving a César Franck organ recital on a Saturday afternoon at Timothy Eaton Memorial Church, and I loved music very much and I loved his playing. But I didn't know César Franck's music, and I went all by myself, and I went up in the gallery and this music started. It was just marvellous. It was just marvellous, and the final [sic] that he played just seemed, just, just take me up to heaven. I remember I just felt just enraptured by this. And as I walked along St. Clair Avenue going to my home, going back to my home, which was near St. Clair Avenue, I heard something up in a tree. It sounds just ridiculous, but this was it: "You're going to paint." Like a voice that said that. I seemed to hear

it with my outer ear: "You're going to paint." I thought, this is ridiculous. If the voice said I'm going to compose music I wouldn't be surprised, but to paint? I can't paint. Well, I came into our living room and here were the four Group of Seven pictures that I had rented on the wall. And it was just as if scales had been taken from my eyes, and I saw exactly how they did it. Never before had I seen how they did it, and I rushed upstairs. I had a baby, and I had crayons and I had some water-colours, and I got something and I started drawing the MacDonald very fast, you see. Drawing it, it just looked like it. And drawing the next picture and the next, and I saw how they did it and I even began to see how they painted them. How they put on the paint, so this was a tremendous thing that happened to me. Well, outside looking into the garden was a great big old oak tree, and I thought I'd like to paint it. But I don't know anything about it. What paints do you get? What do you paint with? So I went to A.Y. Jackson and I said, "Mr. Jackson—" "I didn't tell him my illumination—" "I want to begin to paint. Now, what do I do?" So he said, "Telephone to Eaton's, and I'll give you a list of colours, and you just buy these colours and ask for a sketch box that will take—" I think it was "10 ½ by 13 ¾ size. That's just a nice size for you. And then get some panels and just simply start." But I told him I wanted to do this big tree, and it was rather big. "Oh, that's a good idea," he said, "To do something big. Because don't niggle!" he said, "Don't niggle!" He said, "All right, start on something big." Well, then he said, "Get a piece of canvas, whatever size you like, and just start on it." So he—but I said, "How do I mix my colours?" "Ah," he said, "That's for you to do. You do your own mixing." So he gave me, say: flake white, and vermillion, and ruby matter, and chrome orange, and chrome yellow, and yellow ochre, and viridian green, permanent blue, cerulean blue, burnt sienna, and raw sienna, and zinc black. And I wrote those down, and I telephoned to Eaton's and I got them, and I started in. That's how I started. I started right in, because he wouldn't—you see, I just had to try to draw myself. I had to mix my colouring myself, I had to feel the thing, and then I started right straight in. And so that's how I got started. Well then, when Mr. MacDonald saw what I was beginning to do, he said, "Well now, I've got this great big store-room here, just full of all this junk. I'll clean it all out for you, and you can have this as your studio." And he rented it, oh, for a song. I don't remember how much.

And so I started then, right in. And I had, I think, a maid at that time. Perhaps—at least one maid, yes, so that when the baby was comfy or having a sleep, not to disturb the little ones, you see, I eventually had two little children. Then I'd go down to the studio and I'd walk down, usually. And I walked down to the Studio Building from my house, which was quite near St. Clair Avenue, and I would start painting. And so then I just started right straight in, and I would go out—then I had a car, learned to drive a car so I could go out and down to the Ward. I did all sorts of little houses at the Ward, you know, and I painted all around. And then we went—in the summer we went to Georgian Bay and I painted. We went to Bon Echo and I painted, you see. And then in 1926 I went out to the mountains, and Lawren and Mr. MacDonald told me exactly where to go, to go up. To ride up by horse to O'Hara; there was no road up then. You had to ride up by horse and I had to, the first time on a horse in my life, I had to stay on it for four hours (laughs). And when I got off, I wanted to get off so gracefully. I just fell right on the ground (both laugh). My legs were bowlegged, stuck.

HILL: You must have been stiff!

SPEIRS: It was terrific. But every day there I'd get a sandwich, and with my field glasses over my neck I would go up, and climb up there and do a sketch. Every single day I did there, when I was there for, say, the two weeks. So I had about fourteen sketches when I came back, you see. And then I could come back to the studio, and then I could start to paint them up. And so I got close to Lawren Harris, close to J.E.H. MacDonald, to Thoreau MacDonald, to Mr. Jackson, those especially. And then Mr. Lismer would come in, always so joyous, a wonderful person. And he would come in and I would see him too. And he would come and he would look at my work too, and then I think I told you that Bess and Lucille and I went, in very early stages, we went to see—I guess it was 1923—to Mr. Varley, to see whether he'd give us lessons. He said, "I won't touch you at all, but I'll let you draw some fruit and I'll let you draw some Greek casts," or something like this. And we took—we arranged for ten lessons, but we just took nine because he was called to Vancouver or something. He had to go away. So we just had the nine lessons. But that was very interesting, very interesting with Mr. Varley. So that was my contact

with Mr. Varley. Mr. Casson, I didn't meet at all for a while. Nor Mr. Carmichael, which I knew very, very little except that he was a very nice person, but Frank Johnston I knew very, very well. Because he was Christian Scientist, and he went to First Church and I saw him every Sunday. And we'd stand on the church steps and powwow about art. And he was always very enthusiastic and—very happy and enthusiastic.

HILL: Well, do you know why he left the Group of Seven?

SPEIRS: Yes, I know exactly why he left the Group of Seven. It was purely financial. It was because he was supporting his family, and because he felt that he would—I think he felt he would have to do potboilers, a bit. That he would have to do that in order to support his family. And he knew that there were certain pictures of his that everybody fell for and liked, don't you see, that would sell more. And so, of course, the Group were very disgusted about him. Very upset about it, you know, when he left. Because I think they realized it was financial, you know. It seemed not idealistic enough.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: But on the other hand, Frank felt he had to support his family, and that he couldn't do it by just having an exhibition once a year with the Group of Seven, and showing with the Group of Seven. He wanted to be able to have a one-man show, all by himself, you see. And he was—he did, of course, his very best work when he was with the Group of Seven, I think.

HILL: Oh definitely.

SPEIRS: Didn't he?

HILL: Yes.

SPEIRS: His Algoma work and others, he did his best work then, but that was really the reason. It was because—purely financial. He felt that he had to. He had to break away and be by himself, and he had to show—have a one-man show and go to

other galleries or something else, you know. Try to sell more, and that was the reason.

HILL: You went to New York. I think we figured out it was October '24.

SPEIRS: Yes.

HILL: And you saw which shows there?

SPEIRS: Yes, well, when I went—I went to the Wildenstein. I went to see two things. I wanted to see Rockwell Kent's work, and I wanted to see Georgia O'Keeffe, those two especially. There were other people; Walter Pach I met. I got to know Walter Pach very well. I have his books, you know, and there were other artists too, that I saw. And none of them were in [sic] speaking terms with any of the others, and so that none of them knew that I knew the others too (laughs). And I wanted to go to the Roerich Gallery. I was terribly interested in Roerich's work too.

HILL: As early as '24?

SPEIRS: Yes, I would think so.

HILL: Where had you heard about Roerich?

SPEIRS: Oh, from Lawren Harris.

HILL: He knew Roerich that early?

SPEIRS: Yes, yes. It must have been about that time, but perhaps a little later. Lawren Harris was extremely stimulating and a very advanced person, you know. And he had discovered Roerich, and of course you can see the relationship, can't you?

HILL: Mhm.

SPEIRS: With Roerich's work, with Lawren Harris.

HILL: Well, what do you think they have in common?

SPEIRS: Oh, a spiritual approach, I think, a wonderful sense of design, simplicity and power. I feel they have all those in common. The love of the snow and not afraid of snow, you see. The high places of the world, and Lawren, from the time I knew him, he was tremendously interested in the masters of the Far East, which probably got him into theosophy. His mother was a Christian Scientist and a member of our church, and I knew his mother very, very well. Lawren was rather interested in Christian Science. But he was more interested in Buddha, I would say. In the philosophies of the East, and he was reading.

HILL: What was he reading at that time?

SPEIRS: Now, I think I have discovered just recently—it's just astonishing how gradually you discover things—I think I discovered exactly the books that he was reading: *The Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East*. Can you wait a minute while I get one of the volumes?

HILL: Sure.

SPEIRS: Lawren Harris was very, very interested and thinking a great deal about the masters of the Far East, and it's only recently that I discovered it. Somebody told me about this book published in 1924, which would be just about that time. And from the things that he said to me, made me sure that that must have been exactly the book that he was reading. Now in 1947, when I went to a meeting of the Cana-

dian Group of Painters at the Heliconian Club, and Lawren was in the chair, and I wrote this down, that Lawren said: “I would like to renew my youth every five or six years, to the further next ten thousand,” he said. I thought that was very, very intriguing. That is what he said. Now the book shows the masters of the Far East, how they lived and lived, because they constantly renewed their youthfulness. That one of them said something like this, if I can remember the wording, “After every new experience we should be younger, stronger, and more loving.” “After every new experience,” and Lawren was full of this, of this sense of eternal youthfulness by renewing your mind with fresh thinking all the time. And he imbued this thought to our minds too, so that he was very, very dynamic. The person Eric Aldwinckle said at that meeting: “Our collective happiness is having Lawren in our midst,” that night, and that was just it. Because I can hardly express to you just what Lawren meant to us, and just what he brought to us in inspiration. And so when he spoke of Roerich and when he showed some of the pictures of Roerich’s work, you see, I immediately wanted to go to New York and see the Roerich museum and see his work. Don’t you see?

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: Because I knew it meant so much to Lawren.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: And I also wanted—whether Lawren had heard of Georgia O’Keeffe. He certainly knew Stieglitz’s marvellous photographic work, and he knew that the Intimate Gallery was where Georgia showed her work. The Intimate Gallery, it was called, and there were several—that was one of the exhibitions that he had, that Stieglitz put on. Of Arthur Dove, you know, and several others, and Georgia O’Keeffe was one of them.

HILL: Was John Marin one of them?

SPEIRS: John Marin was one of them, yes. And so we went—I went with Bess, you see, to this exhibition and that’s how I met dear Georgia O’Keeffe, and that’s how I got to know Georgia O’Keeffe. Did you want me to say something more about Georgia,

or was I getting away from what you asked me there, about Lawren's philosophy?

HILL: No, I'm interested in this trip, and I'm also interested to know that he was so familiar with this work. And then Rockwell Kent, you suggested that he didn't—

SPEIRS: No, not at all, no, no. Rockwell Kent didn't know Lawren Harris, but Lawren Harris knew Rockwell Kent, yes. And so I went—

HILL: Lawren Harris knew Rockwell Kent?

SPEIRS: No, no. Just knew the work and seen reproductions, you see.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: Because by that time, the Metropolitan Museum had bought one or so of Rockwell Kent's, and we had seen it, you know, in, say, the Studio magazine or something, reproductions. So we knew. So that was another perk: we must go there, you see. So that I went to the Wildenstein Gallery, and Rockwell Kent had a one-man exhibition. And Gerald Kelly, who became Sir Gerald Kelly, and became the president of the Royal Academy of Art down in London, England, later on. But he was just there as an assistant, in the Wildenstein Gallery there. And so I got to know him too, and when I went around with Rockwell Kent and looking at all the Rockwell Kent pictures, I was tremendously interested and I said, "Well, of course you people must know Lawren Harris's work. You simply must know." They had never heard of Lawren Harris's work. "Well," I said, "He's a Canadian but, oh, you're sort of spiritual brothers!" I would say Rockwell Kent and Lawren Harris are just spiritual brothers. Astonishing, the feeling, the feeling: "But of course, Lawren Harris has only seen very, very little of Rockwell Kent's work, but he'd be fascinated if he saw this exhibition." So I really had some lovely talks with Rockwell, and with Gerald Kelly there at the gallery, and looking at everything, and very enthusiastically. And that was the time that I was there with my mother, and that was the time that he wanted very much—he was going on to Alaska, and he wanted me to go—he was being given a goodbye party, I think, that evening by a lady on Fifth Avenue. A very wealthy woman, and it was going to be a

tremendous party. And he said, “You’ve got to come as my guest. You’ve simply got to come.” And I wouldn’t go. I just felt I couldn’t—I wouldn’t go at all. And I didn’t go, you know. I suppose I missed a wonderful opportunity. But, however, I wouldn’t go with him. But we did have some wonderful talks about art and about design, about the whole feeling of art. So I said, “Well now, I think we’ll have to bring you to Toronto. That’s the only thing to do. We’ll simply have to bring you to Toronto.” Well, the time he came to Toronto was the time that Arthur Lismer had become head of the Saturday morning class. And why I especially remember that was when he came to Toronto it must have been about 1931, I think, when he came to Toronto, actually, because I had done my picture of the Spurwink Church, which you’ve seen in our dining room.

HILL: Mhm.

SPEIRS: And it was hanging then, in a Group of Seven exhibition. In the Long Gallery at the Art Gallery, it was on the right hand side of the Long Gallery, and on the left-hand side was my picture Old House at Thornhill that Napier, B. Napier Simpson Junior, who’s a young architect and a nephew of mine, I gave it to him because he liked it so much. So they went there and Arthur called me one day to the studio, and I think it was when Rockwell Kent was actually there, and he said, “Come to the back, to my office, Doris. And come and see how many school children have copied your picture, Saturday morning class.” He said, “I have ever so many more than of anything else in the whole exhibition. I don’t know why, but children especially like Spurwink Church, more than anything else.” Well, it was the simplicity of it, I think. It was so simple, or something like that. So he took me, and he had a huge portfolio. And some were enormous drawings and some were tiny, tiny little tight drawings. And sometimes the church was very high and sometimes it was very low. But it was fascinating, and he had this whole portfolio just of Spurwink Church done by these children. Well, Rockwell Kent came into the gallery, went around to Arthur Lismer, grabbed my hand and said, “This is an old girl of mine, Doris,” you see, and I blushed. I was so embarrassed because I thought, what will Arthur think with Rockwell Kent’s reputation, you know (laughs). He thought I

was an old girl of his. Well, anyway, anyway, Rockwell gave a marvellous, marvellous lecture. I think at Eaton Auditorium.

HILL: Yeah, I think so.

SPEIRS: And it was greatly—everybody enjoyed it so much. And then he had—he brought a lot of his pictures and we had them at the gallery. And I received—I remember we gave a wonderful—the gallery gave a lovely reception for him, and I had to receive because I was the person who knew him, you see. And I wished we could have bought one of his pictures. I could have bought young Rockwell. It was his son Rockwell, standing beside a tall mullein, and I just thought it was just marvellous, and I wish I had bought it. I wish I had sold anything and bought that picture because I loved it so much. It was a wonderful picture. But then he got to know Lawren Harris. He went to Lawren's studio, and they became great, great friends. And that friendship lasted right, right straight along, I think, for a long time. I have a letter from Bess written, well, after they left. I guess it was after they had got out to Vancouver, and they were coming East for a while, and she wrote and said, "Doris, have you got Rockwell's recent address? Is he still where he was in New York State? Because we thought we'd like to run in and see him." So the friendship kept on right through their life, you see, which was very, very nice.

HILL: Right. In the early twenties, did Lawren Harris have any contact with the Société Anonyme at that point, with Katherine Dreier?

SPEIRS: Yes, he did. Katherine Dreier came to Toronto.

HILL: When?

SPEIRS: And Katherine Dreier was very, very taken with his work. And as you know—I have the book. Do you want to see it? I have it right here.

HILL: Which book?

SPEIRS: Yes, will you wait just a minute? The only one that was put in that particular catalogue of the Société Anonyme.

HILL: This was the twenty-six.

SPEIRS: Is that it? Yes.

HILL: Do you know when—well, did she come up to Canada—

SPEIRS: She came up to Toronto—

[End of Clip 1]

[Start of Clip 2]

SPEIRS: —yes, and she saw the Studio Building. She had a perfectly wonderful time.

HILL: How had she heard about the Studio Building? Why did she come to Toronto? Do you know?

SPEIRS: I think she'd heard about Lawren Harris. Would she have heard from Lawren Harris from Rockwell Kent, possibly? I don't know. I don't think that she was especially interested in Rockwell Kent. She was very interested, of course, she was one of the very first people to know Kandinsky, wasn't she, and to love his work very much, and to understand him.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: And she was a tremendously marvellous woman, and I got to know her very well, and when I went to one of my New York trips, I had hours with her at her home.

HILL: Do you remember when that was?

SPEIRS: At her home by myself.

HILL: Do you remember when that was?

SPEIRS: Yes, yes, I'm trying to think. I'm trying to think when that was. Again, I don't have the date. Around—after this exhibition. Some little time after this exhibition.

HILL: Well, is that how Lismer heard about Cizek, through the Société Anonyme too?

SPEIRS: Perhaps that was how. That may have been. I don't know; I don't know about that. But she was, in a way, was ahead of her time and she was rather a prophet. She had a great, great feeling. She introduced me to all the ones who were doing “ultra-

work.” I mean, work that wasn’t generally accepted, that she saw the beauty. She saw what they were getting at, you see. There’s a chapter on her in this book, *The Proud Possessors* by Aline Saarinen. Do you know of it?

HILL: No.

SPEIRS: *The Proud Possessors*, oh, it’s a marvellous book by Aline Saarinen. The great Saarinen’s wife, I think. You know the Finnish architect? Yes: “Propagandist Katherine Sophie Dreier,” and it’s a fascinating chapter on her, and of course I had such a lovely time with her, a beautiful time. She was so interested in Duchamp, and Klee, and Brancusi, you know, et cetera, and Picasso, when people weren’t. She was one of the first to see.

HILL: Right. Well, Lawren Harris’s first contact with Katherine Dreier was probably just prior to the exhibition?

SPEIRS: Yes, it would be. Yes, it would be.

HILL: And it was after your trip to New York when you first met Rockwell Kent?

SPEIRS: Yes, after, I think so. Yes, I think so, after that.

HILL: So between maybe around ’25–’26?

SPEIRS: I think so, yes. I think that would be the time.

HILL: Did he know the work of Kandinsky at that time?

SPEIRS: Well, yes, he was—he knew through Katherine Dreier, I think, about Kandinsky. But I think he already knew about Kandinsky. I think he did. I think he thought very highly of Kandinsky, because of course I imagine that it was through Lawren that I learnt about Kandinsky and got interested in him too. It would be through Lawren, probably.

HILL: Was Lawren still interested in German literature and German culture at that time?

- SPEIRS: He never mentioned German literature and German culture. Isn't it interesting? I never remember him mentioning it at all. Yes, I never remember that coming up.
- HILL: Did he ever talk about his experiences in Germany?
- SPEIRS: No, he didn't. No, he never mentioned it. His uncle, of course, his darling uncle that he went to Dartmouth to be near, you see. He was such a lovely person. He had really gone to join his uncle, hadn't he? He'd been there with his uncle.
- HILL: In Germany?
- SPEIRS: Yes, in Germany. Yes, because his uncle was there and later became a professor of German at Dartmouth College, as he was for years and years, you see.
- HILL: Well, it's interesting, I mean, he had an uncle who was a professor of German. He knew Barker Fairley, who was a professor of German—
- SPEIRS: German, yes, isn't that interesting.
- HILL: And Lawren Harris must have spoken German, to a certain extent.
- SPEIRS: Yes, you'd think he must have, and yet I never remember anything German to do with Lawren. Isn't that interesting? I don't remember that at all.
- HILL: Well, in the mid twenties, what other artists were—how did Bertram Brooker come into the circle?
- SPEIRS: Oh yes. Well, Bertram Brooker was a very dear friend of all of ours, and say we were at the Harrises—the Houssers, the Houssers. Fred Housser, and Bess Housser, and Bertram Brooker, and Rill Brooker, Rill, you see. And Lawren would be there and I would be there, you see. And we'd listen to music and then Bert would talk to us. Bert was very, very fond of music. He had a great understanding. That's why he started to do these wonderful drawings of what he heard, these unusual drawings, and so we got to know Bert very, very well. And then he did his Elijah book. You probably know it, do you?
- HILL: Yes.

SPEIRS: I've got it right here. Do you want to see it?

HILL: No, I've seen it before.

SPEIRS: Yes, you've seen it. Yes, well I have a copy, right there on the table there, yes. And he did the Elijah book and I've got it inscribed to me in his handwriting too, you know, this copy. Because I was so thrilled with what he was doing about Elijah. And he was one of our first Abstractionists, wasn't he, really? Bertram Brooker was.

HILL: What do you think the inspiration for those first abstractions was? What sort of things—

SPEIRS: Well, he was a designer wasn't he? He was in advertising.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: And he used his pen so much, you know. It was done mostly very, very fine pen work, wasn't it? It may have been started from the laying out of book covers, or all these kind of things. I don't know what got him into it, but he got very, very interested in doing abstract drawings.

HILL: Was he interested in Kandinsky?

SPEIRS: I never heard him mention that, if he was or not. Perhaps he was.

HILL: Was he interested in theosophy also?

SPEIRS: No. I think he was very, very spiritually minded, but I don't think he became a theosophist. Lawren, of course, said whatever he thought right out to us, you know, all the time (laughs). He had no inhibitions with us at all. He just said everything that came, and he said things that were very, very perhaps hard—any materialists couldn't grasp in the slightest what he was saying, you know. But, however, we were all very receptive to what he was saying, because we felt that he was perhaps seeing a little—he was interested in Ouspensky very much, you know. He was interested in oriental philosophy, and I think Madame Blavatsky was Russian, wasn't she?

HILL: Yes.

SPEIRS: And that may have been, in a funny way, that he got interested in Roerich. But I just don't know whether it was that he saw the wonderful design, and felt so much in common with Roerich.

HILL: Well, then in '27 Lawren Harris brought up the Société Anonyme exhibition, although his own work wasn't in it. Did he have any difficulty with getting that show up, or—

SPEIRS: Of that, I can't remember how much. He probably had difficulty. He was constantly running into difficulty, because at that time still, people were very much against the Group of Seven and against anything modern, and they still were like that, you know.

HILL: But do you think that in this period—was he a theosophist, in fact, at this time in the mid twenties?

SPEIRS: He was working around towards it, I think. He was getting there, yes.

HILL: Right. Do you think in such works as North Shore, Lake Superior, the great big stump—

SPEIRS: Yes.

HILL: That there's a sort of symbolism or—

SPEIRS: Yes, very much so. I have a poem I wrote on that. I wrote a poem on that North Shore, Lake Superior, about that. Giving my feeling that there were—and by the way, he gave me Above Lake Superior. I had the original sketch and I loved it. Well, when I had finished cataloguing his work, he said—he'd already given me five or so of these early works, you see, but he said, "Now then," of his really best things, "What would you like? Because you can have anything." And I took Above Lake Superior; that's what I took. And I had that for years and years, and then when Mr. Vaughan, Mr. J.J. Vaughan—he became a director of the Art Gallery—and because my first husband had worked under him in the Eaton Company, if Mr. Vaughan wanted something that I had, I felt I should more or less give it to him.

HILL: Oh dear.

SPEIRS: And so that's why I sold him so many of my loveliest things for very, very little. A hundred dollars for this or that, you know. A Tom Thomson for, I think, two hundred and fifty dollars, which is worth what? Many thousands of dollars now. But if Mr Vaughan telephoned and wanted something very badly, I'd think I must let him have it at some very, very cheap amount, you see. And so, he wanted it, so he got Above Lake Superior. Yes, and I regret very much—

HILL: Where is it now?

SPEIRS: I don't know where that sketch is now. I don't really know, and I wonder who does have it.

HILL: Does he have any children?

SPEIRS: His wife, by the way, his wife was a first cousin of my mother-in-law's, yes. And she was not the least bit interested in art. Not the least bit interested in art, so that he would say, "If you telephone me about anything, don't mention pictures to my wife, will you?" (laughs). He had to be terribly careful, and so she was not interested in the collection at all, but he was very, very interested. And so I'm sorry, I don't know where Above Lake Superior is, who has it now.

HILL: Was it this concept of survival that Lawren Harris was interested in, or merely the stump as a symbol of the North?

SPEIRS: Yes, you know, the cover of the book on Lawren Harris has that marvellous picture of the stump.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: That's one of my favourite pictures. Don't you love it?

HILL: Yes, I think it's gorgeous.

SPEIRS: Yes, absolutely. I love it. I think that that was just rugged, and has come through a lot. I think that appeals to Lawren Harris. If we turned off that for a minute, I have—"To L.S.H. The exquisite agony of sorrow sweeping in your heart. The

throb pain of the world beating and pulsing within you. Touching vibrant chords of feeling within you. Tearing your sensitiveness apart. Laying aching hand fingers hot on your breast. The sensitiveness of the poet open to all. Watching all: aches, and weariness, and pain, and world-tired children numb with crying. The poet touching all with cool, white fingers: soothing, quieting, calming all, saying, 'There's more than this coming, and here.' Speaks with cheer and conviction and a smile on his lips. His own heart bleeding within him." That was written on September the 7th, 1922.

HILL: Well, this side, this suffering side of Lawren Harris, do you think—what did that derive from? I mean, this sort of—

SPEIRS: Well, you know, going back into his personal life, Lawren was brought up in Queen's Park, Toronto, of very wealthy parents. And Trixie Phillips was born in Queen's Park in Toronto, of very wealthy parents. And they met as boys and girls at parties. And she was a nice, gay little thing, and he was, I suppose, full of vim and vigour. And they fell in love with each other and they got married. But Lawren went deeper and deeper and deeper. He was in the war, you know.

HILL: Did he have a nervous breakdown?

SPEIRS: But it was something like that, I think. And he went very, very deep and Trixie just stayed where she was. She didn't grow. She was just a nice, nice woman but she didn't grow, and she couldn't possibly follow him. She couldn't follow what he was doing. She couldn't follow what he was thinking. She couldn't do it, and it meant that at home there was no one very close to him, you see, not really close. And I think that must have been very, very hard. And you know, he started going down to the Ward, and he started painting these poor little houses and everything, of course, doing them so wonderfully, didn't he? And when he went to Newfoundland he was just torn, wasn't he, about the poverty in Newfoundland.

HILL: When did he go to Newfoundland?

SPEIRS: He suffered terribly. I would have to look up, according to his pictures. Elevator Court, what was the date of Elevator Court? Then you could find out—

HILL: About '21–'22.

SPEIRS: Something like that's when he went to Newfoundland, and he was torn. And although, as I say, a wealthy young man, he saw so much that distressed him so terribly. You get it in his poems. In the book *Contrast* you get it very, very much. He was frightfully sensitive, very, very sensitive. And I felt this in him very much, from the very beginning. There was something gay, happy, joyous about him, as I said in the poem, you know: "speaks with cheer and conviction," you know. And yet, you felt underneath there was this great sadness and great sorrow. I think he would like to have been able to reform the whole world. At first when I knew him, he used to smoke. But then as he started studying the masters, he stopped all smoking. He stopped all drinking. He said that no alcohol should ever touch your lips, you know, and things like that. Well, as a matter of fact I've followed that up and never have had a drink in my life, and don't smoke, and I followed—I mean, Lawren was very strong on that, you see, at the time. Well, I don't know if this life went on. When he got to Vancouver I think he slid back. I don't know about that at all—what he did, exactly. But during that time he was a great idealist. He wanted to be so pure that the wings of God would sweep straight through him and find no obstruction at all, and he was just like that. And of course, that inspired us so much, as you could understand. In a way, we sat at his feet and I would take my sketches up to him and say—now, he never, never criticized my sketches. He never told me something was wrong, or, "You ought to do this." He never did. He would look at them and he'd say, "Very nice. Very nice." Or, "Go on, keep on going," you know, or, "Oh, I like that." You know, things like that, always encouraging. Always encouraging, but then we'd get on to what he was reading, what he was thinking: "Oh, I read the most wonderful book. You must get a copy, you know." And then he'd go on about this, very enthusiastically. He was very enthusiastic about everything he did.

HILL: Can you remember any other writers he was reading at that time? You mentioned Blavatsky—

- SPEIRS: Yes. Yes, he was. Well, I'm trying to think of the one that is mentioned—I'm sorry, but I cannot at this moment think of what his name was. But there was—he thought—a very, very great seer that he was reading at that time. But the name has just gone from me. I remembered of course at the time. I heard it quite often. Just this moment, I can't recollect it exactly.
- HILL: Well, maybe it will come back.
- SPEIRS: Yes, it will come back to me.
- HILL: Well, then he—but he turned away. Like I mean, he did those series of works of the houses, but even in the houses one doesn't really get an overriding concept of outrage at poverty. It's more an awareness of beauty in poverty.
- SPEIRS: I know, didn't he? Yes, he'd show the autumn leaves and how lovely they were, the bright red little house, or the red door, or something. It was charming and beautiful, and you could see something so lovely about it, couldn't you? Is that Peter coming in?
- HILL: No, no, no. I was just wondering, I think there's a—it's the wind blowing in.
- SPEIRS: Yes, well look, he was coming to do our dishes and I haven't given you lunch. Can't I make you lunch right now? Or shall we go on with this?
- HILL: It's as you wish.
- SPEIRS: Yes. I mean are you getting hungry?
- HILL: No, I'm okay.
- SPEIRS: All right. Well, if you want to go on I can go on and then we'll have lunch.
- HILL: Okay, that would be great.
- SPEIRS: Yes, all right. All right.
- HILL: Well then, you know, he turned—how long did he continue to do these house paintings: right through the twenties?

SPEIRS: Yes, I would think so, right through the twenties. It must have been. From 1937 on I got back to writing diaries. I wrote a diary when I was a child, and I wrote a diary almost until I was married, my first marriage, you see. Well then, unfortunately, I was so happy and everything, I just didn't write a diary all through those years and that is just a great, great shame. But ever since 1937, I've written a diary. I write every single day to 1973 now. I write one every single day and so I can always look up and tell you everything (laughs) since 1937. But all those crucial years from when I started to paint at twenty-three, you see. Or from '20, when I first saw that show, it's too bad. I don't have anything on it, which is very sad, except the back of paintings or something. When we painted that, or when that was done, or when I did that because of some paintings.

HILL: Well then, he really almost—although maybe the house things continue to appear right through the twenties—he turned away from the urban environment to the country. And he had always been doing the country landscapes of the North Shore, Lake Superior. Did he talk about his reaction to this country?

SPEIRS: Oh, very much so.

HILL: What did he say?

SPEIRS: Oh yes, he did. He did indeed. Oh well, he just felt that Canada was so tremendous. And when he got off the north shore of Lake Superior and looked up at those great headlands, it gave him such a sense of proportion. And the place of man and the universe, and the lights and the stars, and the wonder of it all, was so tremendous to him.

HILL: Was it more the isolation of man within a total nature? Or not isolation, but the fact that man is more part of it rather than dominating nature, is that the—

SPEIRS: Yes, he liked that. He liked that thought. I think he was working around—I never talked about ecology to him. Too bad, because I'm so interested in ecology, and I'm so interested in the relationship of everything to everything else. I'm so interested in that, but I never actually talked ecology to Lawren Harris. And yet I would say

that he wanted to see the relationship of man in his environment, and towards everything else, just exactly.

HILL: Did he talk, at that time, about the differentiation between the northern climate and the southern climate?

SPEIRS: Yes, yes. He thought the northern climate was so wonderfully good for your soul, you know.

HILL: In what way?

SPEIRS: He thought, well, it was so invigorating. It was so un-sensual, you might say, while the south is the opposite, you see. And that's why he just loved the north country. And also, incidentally, when he would get to the Rockies: why he loved the Rockies and why he became a mountain climber? Because he wanted to go up so high, you see, into the mountains. He couldn't get up too high. He just wanted to go right straight on up.

HILL: Well, how did he react to the painting of somebody like J.E.H. MacDonald or A.Y. Jackson, where there's much more sensuous—

SPEIRS: Yes.

HILL: Especially in J.E.H. MacDonald, you have light and the sensuousness. I mean, did that—how did he feel about that?

SPEIRS: Well, I certainly never heard him ever criticize any of the Group of Seven in any way at all. They just saw things differently.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: Jim, as he would call him, just saw things differently. Jim—J.E.H. MacDonald—he was a poet. He was a poet, you know, also very, very sensitive. Very sensitive.

HILL: Well, was Lawren Harris interested in Whitman or Thoreau or—

SPEIRS: Oh, very, very interested in Walt Whitman. In fact, it was he who got me to read Walt Whitman. I had never read a word of Walt Whitman, and as a matter of fact,

as a very, very shall I say orthodox little girl, when I got on some passages of Walt Whitman, my hair stood absolutely right on end. And I could hardly go on reading the book, but then I thought, now, Lawren Harris sees something quite different. He isn't looking at this at all, you see. Now, I must get what he's really getting from Walt Whitman, and then I began to get the ocean surge in Walt Whitman, and the greatness of Walt Whitman, you see. And I really grew to love Walt Whitman too, but until Lawren Harris I didn't know anything about Walt Whitman. Well now, Thoreau, of course, was the one that Mr. MacDonald named his only child, Thoreau. And Mr. MacDonald used to have a very small group once a week to his house. Especially when he was in Toronto, you know, when he lived up in north Toronto on a little street there. And I used to go every Monday night, because my husband then had a director's meeting that he had to go to every Monday night. And so every Monday night I would go up to the MacDonalds, and Mr. MacDonald would read. And he would read Henry Thoreau so beautifully, and he'd sit there under the lamp, and his red hair glowing under the lamp, and we few—Thoreau, Mrs. MacDonald, and one or two others, would sit there and listen and it would be, say, it would be a Henry Thoreau evening, or it would be somebody else: Katherine Mansfield evening, perhaps, or it would be about Brahms, the life of Brahms, perhaps. He'd tell us something about Brahms's life and read certain things, perhaps from Brahms's letters. And each week, he would have another author to introduce us to. It might be Emerson; it might be one of his lovely essays. It might be Thomas Carlyle. So that you can imagine how marvellous it was to me, in my early twenties, to be introduced to all these wonderful writers and poets and musicians. And I would sit and imbibe all I could.

HILL: Was Jackson interested in these people too?

SPEIRS: Yes he was, but he didn't talk so much about it. He was very, very quiet about what he read. He would say, well, I remember reading a letter of his where he said, "Sitting up in the boxcar at night, we all talked about theosophy and Christian Science until about midnight (laughs). Especially Lawren and Jim," he'd say, you know,

something like this. Or Frank Johnson too, he'd be entering in but Alec would mostly be listening, just quietly listening. But he was quite philosophical too, you know. He was a deep-centred thinker, a very marvellous person.

HILL: When was the first talk of the Group saying, you know, the artists starting to say, "Well, we've accomplished our mission. Maybe we should disband or form a new group." When did they start?

SPEIRS: Oh well, I'll tell you what happened, really. It was when Mr. MacDonald died. After Mr. MacDonald was gone—that was 1932, November 1932, you see—I think when he had gone the Group just seemed to break up. They started talking about: now, we ought to have our show. Well, you know, they were beginning in 1926 to bring invited contributors in—just as I had eight pictures in the 1926 show. I mean, they just simply came into my studio and said, "We want this, we want this, we want this for this next show," don't you see? And then they went to the other people that showed at that show, you see, and got these things. They decided—it was very, very marvellous of them, really. Thoreau MacDonald, in his last little book on the Group of Seven, you know, he says that it was a shame that they ever brought in invited contributors. But the Group had this great, big, broad feeling of encouraging young artists, of trying to see who is producing something that's worthwhile. Let us give them all encouragement, you see, and that's why they did it. They were very, very big and broad. They didn't want to just hog things themselves. They were beginning to be more accepted by that time. They weren't really accepted then, not even at that—

HILL: But at that time, they weren't sort of saying—well, what do you think was the immediate instigation to inviting contributors?

SPEIRS: Well now, look. I'll tell you why. Partly, now, perhaps I was partly to blame. My studio was right next door to Mr. MacDonald. He saw everything I was doing. He gave me my first one-man show in 1925. He took everything out of his—I mean he put everything back. He invited all his friends. He said, "You've got to see what this girl is doing." And he hung them all beautifully with Thoreau's help, you see.

[End of Clip 2]

[Start of Clip 3]

SPEIRS: Well, then Mr. MacDonald started to say, “Now, our next show we’ve got to” — see, that was 1925 — “We’ve got to have these things. We’ve got to show these to a wider public,” you see. And there were others that knew — I’ve forgotten who were those people of that first show. Who were they? I’m not too sure who they were.

HILL: It was probably the Montreal people.

SPEIRS: Yes, some of the Montreal people, yes, because they were doing some wonderful work. And there were a group of wonderful women doing work in Montreal, you know.

HILL: Kathleen Roberts —

SPEIRS: Yes!

HILL: Or Kathleen Morris and Sarah Robertson.

SPEIRS: Oh yes, yes. Oh yes, and Sarah Robertson. They were doing some fine things, you know. And they were very interested in that, and they were interested in the young women who were painting in Canada too. And, well, I know that Mr. MacDonald said, “Well, I think we’ll simply have to have some of these in our next show that’s all about it,” you see. Well then, I think Thoreau showed because he showed that Madonna, you see. Thoreau had several things. I had my portrait of Thoreau MacDonald in that show that the National Gallery now has. Have you seen it?

HILL: Your portrait of Thoreau? No.

SPEIRS: Yes. The National Gallery own my portrait of Thoreau MacDonald. Mhm. Yes, well anyway it’s — I don’t know where it is in the National Gallery but they just got it last year, because of my one-man show. It was showing at my one-man show, yes. Anyway —

HILL: Well, then they did expand and they brought in more people —

- SPEIRS: Yes, they brought in more people and then—
- HILL: Oh sorry. Excuse me.
- SPEIRS: I think you better go on, because then you were going to ask something important.
- HILL: Well, in December '31, the last major Group show, Jackson said—apparently there was a party at Lawren Harris's after.
- SPEIRS: Yes, there was.
- HILL: And Alec Jackson said, "This is the last show. The Group is disbanding, but we're going to form a larger group."
- SPEIRS: Yes.
- HILL: That's December '31, and yet in '32, they invite FitzGerald to be a member officially.
- SPEIRS: That's right. They did too.
- HILL: Why did they—what was the sort of hesitation, this—
- SPEIRS: Yes, isn't that strange that they did that. They did invite FitzGerald. I don't know. I was at that meeting at Lawren Harris's. I stood there. I mean, I was there when Alec Jackson said that: "We're going to disband," you know, "We're going to disband." But then they didn't. They didn't right away.
- HILL: They didn't.
- SPEIRS: No, they didn't right away.
- HILL: Why do you think that there was this hesitation?
- SPEIRS: Well, they were partly fond of being a group, I think. You know, they sort of loved each other and they loved being a group. And by this time, they were getting awfully well known as the Group of Seven. Actually, they weren't the "Group of Seven" by this time at all.

HILL: Right. It was nine at that point.

SPEIRS: Yes. Yes, they were nine about by that time, you see. It was extending itself, and so it couldn't any longer be the Group of Seven. So then the next thing was the Canadian Group of Painters.

HILL: And that was, do you think, instigated primarily because of J.E.H. MacDonald's death?

SPEIRS: Oh, I think so. Oh, I think definitely so.

HILL: Do you think also that involved in that was an effort—that that was exactly the same time of the big attack on Eric Brown by the RCA?

SPEIRS: Yes it was.

HILL: Do you think this was a force in making a decision to expand as a nationwide group?

SPEIRS: I think it was, that they felt that it should be nationwide, rather than just the one group. And of course, Eric Brown was the stalwart one who did understand the Group from the very, very beginning. And when he had that Group of Seven exhibition in Ottawa, he invited me to come and spend the night at their place, and be there for that opening night, and I was there. I was very fortunate. It was just a wonderful experience, you know, because I had stood for the Group in fighting for the Group and everything, you know. And it was so wonderful to be there with Eric Brown, and to talk to Eric Brown. And a marvellous evening I had at Eric Brown's before the opening, the night before, because I was there and he read some of his wonderful writing. He was a wonderful writer, you know, too. And he was such a huge man and such a darling, and I loved his wife, and it was a really memorable evening to me all together, you know. And the next wonderful day of the opening, Government House coming and everything (laughs).

HILL: What really—going back a bit to the late twenties, they started going out to the West Coast. First it was A.Y. Jackson and Holgate, and then Lawren Harris started going to the Rockies.

SPEIRS: Yes.

HILL: Paintings like Mountain Forms: do you know Mountain Forms?

SPEIRS: Yes, I do indeed.

HILL: There are several called Mountain Forms.

SPEIRS: Yes, yes, but I think I know the one that you're speaking of.

HILL: It's one with a sort of luminescent rounded crest, very luminescent.

What was, do you believe, the sort of concept behind these?

SPEIRS: Well, I think he tried to get the inner feeling of that whole mountain. He tried to grasp what that mountain was saying, and to show its intrinsic form. That's what he was trying to do. Eliminating detail, just trying to show what that mountain is saying. Oh, he told me, he said, "Doris, when you go to the mountains, you know, the mountains they don't want man. They don't want man. They're resisting man. They're pushing man away. They're pushing man away, and I just warn you about that, because you feel the antagonism of the mountains towards man, because they're afraid what man might do to the mountains. And you will feel this." And you know, when I went up above Lake O'Hara to paint, and I climbed way up there, and a big snowstorm came. And I had to go into what looked like a bear's cave until the snow was over in order to get up there to where I wanted to paint. And when I got there and I was in all the stillness, and I tried to completely "unself" myself, absolutely quiet so the mountains couldn't resist, couldn't dislike me. And then you'd hear something coming rolling down, pumping down into the lake, you know, just as if stones were being hurled in your direction. It was quite frightening. It was quite frightening up there, all alone painting. And I knew exactly what he meant. But he tried and tried and tried to get himself so that he was in tune with the mountains, and so the mountains weren't resisting him. Perhaps Lawren had what I would call a pantheistic sense about nature. You might say god in nature, or in everything. In the rocks and the mountains and everything.

HILL: How would he get himself in tune with the mountains?

- SPEIRS: Well, just like you have to. When I go out to our woods, as I want to be receptive to what's there, I go very slowly and I sit down on a stump and I try to, shall we call it, "un-ego" myself to such an extent that I am just receptivity. And then the squirrels come around, and the birds come around, and you're just part of the environment. Well, I think Lawren tried to do that, and he tried to make himself part of it, part of the whole environment. And I think that he saw the mountains, oh, in such a different way than the Bell-Smith you saw out of my studio building.
- HILL: Oh yeah, I like that.
- SPEIRS: Which is more or less a photographic concept of the mountains, isn't it? But it isn't huge and enormously big, is it? Like Lawren Harris's paintings, that you can feel are so tremendous.
- HILL: No, I know. Well, when Lawren Harris was out in the West, did he have any contact with Fred Varley in Vancouver?
- SPEIRS: I don't think Fred Varley was in Vancouver when Lawren was living there, was he?
- HILL: No, no, no. I'm talking now in the twenties.
- SPEIRS: Oh yes, in the twenties. Oh well, I—
- HILL: See, Fred Varley went out to Vancouver in '26.
- SPEIRS: Yes, he did. That's right. No, I don't suppose—I don't think Lawren was in Vancouver very much at all. He might have gone up to the Gallery. Oh no, but he was more in the mountains, you know. He was living at Lake Louise, wasn't he, actually?
- HILL: He may have.
- SPEIRS: We went to see them there. Had dinner there, and I wondered how Lawren could possibly overcome the superficial feeling of tourists in Lake Louise, which was very, very strong, you know. I wondered when he was living there all the time, if it wasn't rather hard for him. He was—

- HILL: When was this?
- SPEIRS: That was when he was with Trixie, and the children were there.
- HILL: When was this?
- SPEIRS: That must have been '26.
- HILL: He stayed there for several months?
- SPEIRS: Yes, they must have stayed there right at Lake Louise, right at the big hotel.
- HILL: Did Varley come back to Toronto after he left for Vancouver? He left in the fall of '26. Did he come back to teach for summers?
- SPEIRS: I don't just remember that. I don't know.
- HILL: Did you know Fred Varley later on?
- SPEIRS: Well, no, I just knew him as his student at that time, and moreover if I ever saw him—the last time I saw him was at the Canadian National Exhibition when he was really an old, old man. And he must have been with a person with whom he was rooming, you know, a lady, had him by the arm, and I came up to him and I said, "Oh, Mr. Varley. Do you remember me? Because I was your student and you taught me charcoal drawing with Bess and with Lucille." He said, "Oh, of course I remember. Certainly, I remember you." And then of course, he remembered that I exhibited with the Group of Seven and everything, you know, but he did remember and he was very sweet. That's the last time I saw him. The last time—I was at his funeral out of the—
- HILL: Was there much talk about Fred Varley, I mean, when he was out there, about his work or was there a bit of an estrangement between Varley and the rest of the Group?
- SPEIRS: I would say there was a bit of an estrangement. I don't know exactly why, but Mr. Varley—the rest of the Group of Seven were sort of extremely angels, morally and everything, you know, weren't they. Mr. Varley was much more of a libertine, you see. It caused a certain amount of estrangement, I think, between them.

HILL: Mhm.

SPEIRS: Though I think they had tremendously high regard for him. And of course, Mr. Varley was interested in oriental philosophy, wasn't he?

HILL: Was he interested in oriental philosophy before he went to Vancouver?

SPEIRS: That I don't know. I don't know, really.

HILL: Do you know why he went to Vancouver?

SPEIRS: Well, I think he was offered a job, wasn't he? A very good job there. Yes, I imagine that's why he went.

HILL: I was just wondering, you know, well, I suspect it might have been because of his own economic problems, you know. Why he would leave Toronto, which was the centre of all this activity, to go to Vancouver.

SPEIRS: I know, exactly! To go to Vancouver—that I don't know.

HILL: Perhaps just going back to the formation of the Canadian Group of Painters, why was the first exhibition held in the United States in Atlantic City, New Jersey?

SPEIRS: I don't really know. I think that they must have been asked to have—I think that somebody must have been interested to show some Canadian paintings at that time. I think that must have been it. Did you know that Mr. Saint-Gaudens, and I don't know his first name, but he was the son of the great sculptor who did Lincoln's [Memorial], you know? He came up to Toronto from the Brooklyn Museum. And he was very anxious to get a lovely show for the Brooklyn Museum, and then to travel all through the New York galleries such as in Rochester, New York, and so forth, and so on, right through New York state galleries.

HILL: Do you know when that was?

SPEIRS: And he came up, and if only we could think—I asked Carl Schaefer if he could remember. He remembered him coming, you know, because he came into the Studio Building and he saw my Glacial Lake painting and he said, "I want this for my show. Now, we've got to have this." So it travelled all that time. I went to see

it when it was at the Albright in Buffalo, to see my painting. He chose—he went right through the Studio Building. He got the Lawren HARRISES, J.E.H. MacDONALDS. He also saw Arthur LISMER. He got the A.Y. JACKSONS, and how many others he got, I don't know. But I haven't been able to trace the exact date of that, except that that Glacial Lake of mine was in a group show, and it was just when it had come back from a group show, I think, that he saw it and he wanted it. So that it must have been around '32, '31-'32 or something like that. Now what was the date it—

HILL: Was that the American Federation of Arts Exhibition?

SPEIRS: Perhaps that was what it was called.

HILL: That was an exhibition that was shown in the States. It opened at the Corcoran Gallery, I think, and then was shown in Washington. Then it was shown at the Grand Central Gallery in New York.

SPEIRS: No, that was not that one because this one started in the Brooklyn Gallery. Then it went—I know it went to the Albright, and as I say, I went with a cousin to Albright on the train, to see it.

HILL: Well, that might—would it be about '28 possibly?

SPEIRS: Had I painted that picture by then? Oh, surely, wait just one second. I suppose it's possible that I showed that there before I showed—it's hardly likely that I'd show it before I showed it in Toronto, would you think?

HILL: I have no idea.

SPEIRS: No, no, I mean you haven't any idea, have you? It would seem to me it would be after '28.

HILL: It could easily be. Well, I'll try and track that down.

SPEIRS: If you can track that down—but the awful thing is that I had written to Buffalo: when was this Canadian show that showed my work? And I can't find it at all, but

I went to Buffalo and I saw this lovely Canadian exhibition, and I also saw where my painting was hanging.

HILL: There was a show in Buffalo in '31. '30—September '30, it would be September—
SPEIRS: In 1930? That's possible, isn't it? That is, it's a possible date. It might be 1930, mhm.

HILL: I don't know. I'll have to find out. This is the list of all Lawren Harris's exhibited works, so—

SPEIRS: Oh really? Really, how marvellous.

HILL: Well, from '29 to '41.

SPEIRS: Yes, oh, have you really? How wonderful.

HILL: Who was Salem Bland?

SPEIRS: Oh, a wonderful minister that Lawren Harris painted. Yes, he was a very wonderful, I imagine Methodist, perhaps Presbyterian minister. And Lawren thought very, very highly of him, and they had lovely talks. Isn't that picture perhaps the best Canadian portrait ever done?

HILL: Oh, I think it's just beautiful.

SPEIRS: So do I.

HILL: I was just interested to know why Lawren Harris would paint him. He painted so few pictures—portraits, I mean.

SPEIRS: Yes, I know. Then you know about my wonderful, wonderful Louise Holden, don't you? That is now at the MacArthurs [sic], Louise Julia Holden, that Lawren Harris painted?

HILL: Yes.

SPEIRS: And she was a reader at First Church. She was second reader, and she was a great friend of Mrs. Reynolds. She had such a beautiful face, and Lawren said, "I'd like

to paint her very much.” And I saw them both. I saw Lawren all the time, I mean, when he was painting her I saw him often because I was painting at that time. I also saw Mrs. Holden often, because she was a dear friend of mine, and she’d say, “Oh, I had the most wonderful talk with Lawren Harris today when I was having my picture painted.” And then I’d see Lawren and he’d say, “Oh, Mrs. Holden is the most lovely, lovely woman. We’ve had a wonderful talk today while I was painting her portrait.” Isn’t that interesting? So afterwards, he gave her the portrait. He didn’t sign it, but he gave it to her. And she had it in her own lovely bedroom, and I saw it there after he had given it to her, and it was so beautiful, you know. Well, anyway, something did say that somehow I was going to own it. Well, I—these funny voices, I can’t—and I didn’t see how I could ever possibly own it. Well then, after she had died and her husband had died and her son had died, all of a sudden one day I got in absolute fits about that picture. I wondered where it was. Now, Bess didn’t know; Lawren didn’t know. They had no idea where it had gone, and I remember stamping up and down this room and all through here. My husband was away at the time. I was having such a fit over this picture. I thought: I’ve got to find it. I simply have to find it. Why, it might be in a junkshop, I thought. How simply frightful, it might be in a junk shop. And I got this feeling that I simply had to go to the Jerrold Morris Gallery, which was then on Bloor Street, high, high up in a big building, office building. And I didn’t know why in the world, because it was just Spanish abstracts, which didn’t interest me. And there was going to be a storm, because it said on the radio there was going to be a storm. And for me to drive into the city, to the Jerrold Morris Gallery on a wild goose chase, I had no idea, but I knew that I was driven to. I had to go. So I went, and I remember coming into the gallery, and Spanish, dark Spanish abstracts, room one. Room two, dark Spanish abstracts. Room three, a great big velvet curtain and Mrs. Holden’s portrait, sitting there on the floor. And I shouted out to the person behind the curtain, “How did you get Mrs. Holden’s portrait by Lawren Harris?” And Mr. Jerrold Morris came rushing out, “Is that it? I was just going by my instinct. I thought it would be a Lawren Harris.” “Do you know where it was found?” “It was just brought to me, I think, yesterday,” he said. “A junkshop!” This had just come to me the day before. That it might be in the junkshop, you know, that I had to find it. I mean, wasn’t it

astonishing? So I said, "Somehow or other I think I must have this portrait." And I told him my experience about it, and he said, "But listen, listen. We're selling it. We're selling it for two thousand dollars to the Hamilton Art Gallery. They want a Lawren Harris portrait, and we've been in touch with them, you know, and we're selling it. We're selling it to them." Well, I came home and I looked up my bank account, and I have several bank accounts, and Murray was away and I couldn't consult him. And I got together all the balances I had in all accounts that I had, and I phoned Jerrold Morris in the morning and said, "I offer you so much under the two thousand dollars. Will you tell that man, when is he ever going to get two thousand cash from the Hamilton Art Gallery? Ask him that. What about accepting this in cash from me, and he'll get it in cash." And he accepted it. Wasn't that marvellous? And so I had it photographed, and he had the photograph ready, and Mr. Jerrold Morris met me with my little car, and helped me in the back of the car with this wonderful picture and I brought it back here. And it hung there right until about two years ago, when I gave it to the McMichael. I hated to give it to the McMichael's, but I felt that I was so selfish having it here, you know. So when I went out to see Lawren with my photograph, I took the photograph out to Lawren and I said, "Lawren, will you sign this photograph for me? Because you can't sign the picture." And he said, "Certainly, I'll sign the photograph." So I have the signed photograph.

HILL: Great.

SPEIRS: Signed by him. Isn't that lovely?

HILL: Incredible experience.

SPEIRS: Wasn't that a marvellous experience, you know: it might be in a junkshop; you've got to find it! You've got to find it! And me being ordered, a voice just saying to me, "Go to the Jerrold Morris Gallery. You must go to the Jerrold—it doesn't matter about the storm. Go!" You know, and there it was sitting there. Wasn't that a marvellous thing, really? Oh, just wonderful. So it's been a great joy. I love it but as I say, I came to the conclusion that I would have to give it to the McMichael. In fact, I've given a lot of art there, to the McMichael. What are you going to do with it?—(

unintelligible). He sat down and wrote me a letter. And the poor handwriting, you know. Oh, it was all so wiggly. But he told Bess, “I’ve just got to write Doris somehow.” And he wrote, and I don’t remember what he said but I knew he’d had a stroke. He didn’t say, “I’ve had a stroke.” But of course I saw his handwriting was so weird, you know, and I saw he’d had a stroke. But it was wonderful that he had years of being able to paint after the stroke, wasn’t it?

HILL: Oh yes.

SPEIRS: You know that he came out of the stroke so well. It was just really wonderful.

HILL: In the thirties, when Lawren left Toronto, do you think it had an effect on the Canadian Group of Painters?

SPEIRS: I think it had a strong effect on the Canadian Group of Painters.

HILL: In what way?

SPEIRS: Oh, I don’t think it had an awfully good effect. That is, I think that Lawren was a great stimulator and enthuser, and he kept stirring up the currents, you know, of creativity among people. He did. So that, well, I don’t know that we exactly felt let down, but it just wasn’t the same. Of course, at this time, remember at this time then I went out—I was in New Hampshire, you see. I was almost two years there, and then there was my own—

HILL: You visited, or did you live down there?

SPEIRS: Oh well, I mean I stayed in those two rooms, you see. In the heart, right near the Harrises, right near the Harrises at Dartmouth at Hanover.

HILL: For how long?

SPEIRS: For nearly two years.

HILL: Oh, you stayed down there?

SPEIRS: Oh yes, I stayed.

HILL: I thought you were just visiting, sorry.

SPEIRS: No, no, well, I mean I stayed there off and on. I stayed there off and on, because the one child was in boarding school, and the other was pretty much on her own by this time. And my husband, you know, was way off in New York City. Living in New York City, and so I was very much on my own then, just by myself. And that was why it was so wonderful to paint down there, and be with them a great deal, that was really lovely. Well then, when I came back to Toronto and took over the house in Rosedale that had been my mother-in-law's when they had died, and lived there, and then I started the work on the evening grosbeaks. But then I started to get away from—pretty much away from the painting crowd, you see, all together. Thoreau was in the Studio Building. Yulia Biriukova was down there, you see, and I hardly ever went near the place at all, and I got very busy with my other work, my research work that I was doing, all through the sort of turmoil that I had to go through. Consequently, that was why I was away from them for so long, and then I went down to the University of Illinois, you see, and I was there after. Murray was taking his doctor's degree. He got his master's in Toronto, and then he wanted to take his doctor's at the University of Illinois. So when we were married then, I went to the University of Illinois. And we lived there, at the university, and we were very active in the university life there. And that was all to do with ecology, and to do with animals and birds, you know, and painting, I couldn't possibly do it at all. Murray felt very badly about it, that I wasn't painting. But I felt, just now I can't, you know. I can't just now, and so very regretfully, I didn't. Well, then when I came back we moved to Ancaster, with the outbreak of war. Which war was it—'39? '40-'41? Yes, and Murray was registered waiting for a call. He didn't know what they'd ask him to do because he has a very bad leg, and he couldn't go overseas or anything but he was—they trained him as a met [meteorological] officer. Well, we were in Hanover. Waiting for the call in Hanover, and then I came in for that meeting. Well, I got in touch again with some of them, Marjorie Meredith I was seeing and a few people like that, you know. And then we went to North Bay, and we were in North Bay for several years. He was for the R[C]AF, really, he was a met for the R[C]AF. Telling them whether it was going to be safe for them to go out and everything, and we were just living on snowshoes and everything there in North Bay. Because you couldn't get petrol or gasoline, and I was writing then, all

the time. I was continually writing, you know. Apart from all of that, I was writing all the time. Seeing pictures but not painting at all. So then from there, when the war was over he went right straight back. Murray went back. He went back to the University of Illinois and then he got his doctor's degree there, you see. And then he immediately was appointed—I don't remember whether it was to—I think to a museum here, first. He was working at the Royal Ontario Museum and the University of Toronto. And then he's been, for over twenty-five years to thirty years, at the University of Toronto, teaching and also doing biological research there. So that was it. Then when I came back here to Toronto, you see, or near Toronto, I started going to the galleries again, you know (laughs) and everything, yes.

HILL: When you were in New Hampshire, do you know what sort of things was Lawren Harris reading or talking about, in New Hampshire? Do you think that, well, perhaps the two questions, before I forget: do you think that the transfer from Toronto to New Hampshire sort of gave him the space to try and—

[End of Clip 3]

[Start of Clip 4]

HILL: —work in abstract art?

SPEIRS: Yes, I think it did. I think very much so. He felt it was a new life. Everything was new, and so he was trying a new form of expression. Everything was changed from the atmosphere in Toronto, so he tried something entirely different. I think he wanted to try something different. He thought the abstract was the expression of this age. That's the way he felt about it.

HILL: Mhm.

SPEIRS: And of course, now we're swinging from abstract to—what do they call it? Magical realism, and some things have been more realistic than ever before; not for years and years and years, you see. Isn't that so? I mean that's the way that the human mind swings back and forth. Yes, it does, which is very, very interesting too. But Lawren—

HILL: What sort of readings was he doing then?

SPEIRS: Yes, I know. I know. If I could tell you instantly I'd be very happy to, but I simply can't. They were in a rented house. They brought quite a few books with them, and they were certainly reading a lot every night, you know. He was still very philosophical in thought. Bess had been very interested in birds, almost as much as I. But he teased us all the time. He made up the most awful names! And he'd roar with laughter over the yellow-bellied sapsucker, which is a real bird name, but he thought it was a scream of a name. So he'd make up the funniest names you ever came across, and yet he didn't want Bess to forget all about birds, you know. And of course, whenever I was in the back seat with them, driving as we were many times, I'd always call out the birds we were seeing, you know. And he'd — "Oh! Oh, what a funny name that is," you know, and he was always greatly amused by it and sort of teased me about it, you know, but in a very kind and sweet way. But in the evenings, I don't think I was ever with them in the evenings, now. Because we would go for drives or we would go and fly kites and these kinds of things, or I'd have dinner with them, and then they'd drop me off. They'd drop me off where I was rooming, you see, near the campus there. A very nice place, and I would be—I was doing a lot of writing, and I was doing a lot of reading. But I was by myself, and so I was reading and writing, and I don't think I ever spent a single evening with them. Isn't that interesting? To know exactly what they were reading.

HILL: Apparently there's some murals by Orozco at the university?

SPEIRS: Oh yes. There are, yes.

HILL: Was Lawren interested in those at all?

SPEIRS: Oh yes. I think he wanted me to see them and everything, yes, oh yes, he was interested. He was delighted they had something so good as that. Yes, he was very interested in that.

HILL: But he wasn't particularly interested in Mexican art himself?

SPEIRS: No, no, he wasn't.

HILL: In these early abstracts, there's a lot of confusion about dating.

SPEIRS: Yes.

HILL: I think there's nothing very definite. No real study has been done. Peter Larisey is doing the first.

SPEIRS: Yes.

HILL: But I was wondering—the one, the work you own. That was '36?

SPEIRS: Yes, yes, '36.

HILL: Well, these spheres that he had in those, what was he trying to say with these spheres and—

SPEIRS: Well, I think he was thinking of the idea of oneness, completion of oneness. I think that was the thought in these spheres. He used that quite a lot, didn't he?

HILL: Mhm.

SPEIRS: And could anybody do a circle as perfectly as he did? You know, with such exactness. One of the things I loved about Lawren's work was the cleanness of his work, the cleanness of his colour and his lines. Beautiful, and I know that my work would show—if I had been influenced—of course I have been, I mean how can you not—I've been influenced more by Lawren Harris, as you can see from my work, than by anybody else. And what I loved in his work was this cleanness in his colour. And I tried to have my colour clean. I wanted it to be lovely and clean, because I felt that in his work. This wonderful cleanness, you know, and it's only fairly recently that I have realized, to the extent that I have been influenced by Lawren Harris. At the time, I didn't know I was being influenced by Lawren Harris like that at all, you see, because I was doing things I liked, the way I wanted them. But when I—the big mountain one that you photographed, you know?

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: I can see the influence of Lawren Harris, although I saw this thing myself and I did it just as I saw it, you see. And yet, would I have painted that if I had never seen a Lawren Harris in my life and never met him? I wonder. Or, would I have done that? Now, perhaps I would have done—but Waterfall, I don't think that shows any influence of Lawren Harris—or does it?

HILL: Well, he's done things similar with Waterfall, certainly similar qualities.

SPEIRS: Oh yes. Yes, he has. Yes, perhaps he has. You see, it's hard to say. You can't say you're not influenced, but certainly it was Lawren that influenced me.

HILL: Yes.

SPEIRS: But you know, it's funny, the one that the Art Gallery also own of mine, which is the J.E.H. MacDonald cabin in the Rocky Mountains, and it's about this big, quite big, and they have it. Because they thought they would like to show it to the school children. Now this is the actual cabin where he was, and this was the view he had. Because if you saw the painting, you would see that this was the view. You can remember. You've seen the sketches, you see, and that thing. But I took that out to the McMichaels and —[recording interrupted]. Now, Lawren Harris was not an organizing artist. Jackson was an organizer. Yes, Jackson was a wonderful organizer. Lawren was the enthusiast. He was the one that had the great vision for Canadian art. He had a tremendous vision for Canadian art, you know: "This must be art such as there isn't in any other country in the world." Well, actually, the Group of Seven is something that there's no other country in the world that has just that. Isn't that so? And if you had known the spirit that was present at that time, if you had any idea of the spirit, it was inspiring beyond words. It really was. It just—it was just simply so wonderful. And it broke through whatever barriers I might have had. Even if the organ recital hadn't done that, I think I would probably have ended up a painter anyway.

HILL: In 1930 Lawren Harris went to the Arctic with A.Y. Jackson.

SPEIRS: Yes.

- HILL: Did you hear his comments? What were his reactions to the North?
- SPEIRS: Oh, he loved it. He loved it.
- HILL: As much as the mountains?
- SPEIRS: In a different way from the mountains. He said the colour was unbelievable, that you couldn't believe it. "It's almost like living in a rainbow," he said. The colour was so marvellous. The blues and the pinks, the saffrons, the yellows, he never had seen anything like it. And then the great, great iceberg forms thrilled him, you know how they did, that wonderful picture out at the McMichael's that the Clarks own, or gave, recently. You know, she was Miss Breithaupt.
- HILL: Right.
- SPEIRS: Yes, yes. Of the Guild Inn.
- HILL: Well, do you know—well, this is difficult to say—do you know about how many Arctic canvases Lawren Harris did, large ones?
- SPEIRS: I would have thought about three, but I don't know. I don't know. Perhaps you can tell from the book, can you? Have you got a list at all, then?
- HILL: Of all his works?
- SPEIRS: Yes, of all his works. No, you haven't at all? You don't know what's out in that studio, do you? You don't know what is at the—in Vancouver?
- HILL: No, no. It's been divided up between the three of them.
- SPEIRS: Oh, it's all divided up is it?
- HILL: Yes.
- SPEIRS: Mhm. Some day, that will have to be done.
- HILL: Peter Larisey wanted to go out and have a look at stuff. Mrs. Knox said he couldn't take any notes. He could go in and look, but he couldn't take any notes or photographs.

- SPEIRS: He couldn't now?
- HILL: I don't know. Maybe this time he will be able to; this was before.
- SPEIRS: Oh, I hope so. Well, if the estate has been definitely divided by now, surely it ought to be all right.
- HILL: I hope so.
- SPEIRS: Well, Bess spoke to me quite a little bit when I was out there, about "These are for the children," you see, "We're saving this up. This is like Lawren's estate for the children. These pictures are for the children, because they'll get the money out of these pictures." That's what she said to me, different times. So that that's the way he felt. That this was his estate that they would sell. But I don't know how many are going to buy the abstracts, do you?
- HILL: Eventually they will.
- SPEIRS: Oh, they will eventually. Yes, of course they will because of—
- HILL: Do you know if A.Y. Jackson did many Arctic canvases?
- SPEIRS: I think he did quite a few.
- HILL: Do you know where any of them are?
- SPEIRS: No, I don't know where any of them are. Mr. A.Y. Jackson, up until very recently, had a phenomenal memory of everything. Did you know that? He was just simply marvellous. And you know, only when the opening of the sort of new entrance place that they have at the McMichael, and I went to it and it's the first time that he asked me who I was and didn't know me. And I was so shocked, because the time before, which is only several months ago, he said, "Oh, she's always smiling." About me, you see, and he called Marty by name, you know, Dr. Speirs. I mean, he remembered his name and everything; it was wonderful. He called me Doris. "How are you, dear?" He gave me a big kiss and he was so sweet, and his memory was still—Mr. Casson said, "Ask Alec about almost any detail and he'll tell you." When my sister Marion died, I waited for quite a while before telling Alec. This

is only about two years ago she died, and Lawren had said that Marion, when he was away, could rent his studio if she would like to do so, you see. Well then, Marion was in and out of my studio, and I taught Marion to paint. And she started painting awfully, awfully well, so that one of her pictures went to Wembley. I mean it was chosen to go to Wembley.

HILL: What was her name?

SPEIRS: Marion, yes, she was Marion Miller.

HILL: Marion Miller?

SPEIRS: Yes, and at that time, well, I think she simply signed herself Marion Huestis, perhaps. I'm not sure. But it went to Wembley anyway. It was awfully good. And Marion went down to South Carolina with father, and she painted a lot of sketches of South Carolina. And darling Alec, when I wrote Alec and told him about Marion's death, Alec in his awfully funny writing, because it is awfully funny, it was awfully funny two years ago. I think it was exactly two years ago. Before his birthday or in October, September or October, he wrote and he said, "I was so in love with Marion," and he said, "I was crazy about Marion." He never showed that. Marion had no idea in her life, and he said, "I always thought, I thought that Marion should have had published her South Carolina sketches." Now, think of him remembering up till the last two years ago that Marion did those wonderful sketches in South Carolina, which I think is simply amazing. But I took Marion the last time she was here. Say it was three years ago. And we went up to the McMichael, and Alec was there sitting in this chair, in this chair, you know, a little old man, and I went over to him. Marion was in the background, and I said, "Alec, Marion is here." "Oh!" he said, and he began shaking like this. "I was just crazy about her, you know. I was just crazy about her. Where is she? I'm all jittery; I'm all shaky." He was shaking like anything. So Marion came over, and he hadn't seen Marion since thirty years or so. And he just took her hand, and I thought he was never going to let go of her hand. And Marion said, "I didn't know how I was ever going to get my hand out of Alec's!" And they talked, "Oh, it's so nice to see you Marion. Oh, it's so wonderful to see you, Marion!" After all these years, you know.

She was awfully pretty at that time. Oh dear, she was so sweet, but anyway he just had a lovely time with her. But that was sweet, wasn't it. And think of his memory being like that. That he remembered her South Carolina sketches, and thought they ought to be published. I thought that was just wonderful, just wonderful. So that he had this astonishing—

HILL: Perhaps we could just go through the questionnaire and you can make the comments that you've written down here, if you'd like.

SPEIRS: Yes. Well, you ask what were the reasons for the Group's expansion and eventual dissolution? I said, "To give encouragement to those who thought along the same line." And I thought the death of J.E.H. MacDonald in 1932 had a great deal to do with it.

HILL: Yes.

SPEIRS: You said: The role of the Art Students League in the Toronto arts scene? I was the first paid-up member of the Art Students League. Isn't that funny? Edna Breithaupt told me that, you know. She was a prime mover in that. Just a wonderful person, and the last time I saw her before her death, I think it was at Massey Hall for a meeting of the Voice of Women, and Edna was there, and Edna saw me and came across and said, "Oh, Doris, I'm so glad to see you. I always think of you, my first paid-up member." Isn't that interesting? That she thought of that. But the Art Students League, we had a wonderful time and I was very active in it. And we painted at the Bluffs because the Breithaupts owned what is now the Guild Inn, you see. And we painted the Bluffs themselves, and I wish I had some of those sketches, which I gave. I remember one person I gave it to. She's passed on. I don't know where the sketch is, but we'd sit there painting the Bluffs and discussing everything. Doris McCarthy was there too, at the same time. She was the other Doris. We were the two Dorises, mhm, and so Doris McCarthy was another one. You say: the reason for the 1932 RCA attack of the National Gallery? Well, of course it was Eric Brown's bias towards the Group of Seven. There was no doubt of that, yes. The reason for the formation of the Canadian Group of Painters? Who was involved, and the role of the amateur artist in the Group? Again, I think it was

probably through Lawren—this general sense of bringing in some of the younger artists, to give them encouragement.

HILL: Later on, when Lawren left Canada, did it seem, I mean, did the Canadian Group lose some of its dynamism? Do you think that it changed after he left?

SPEIRS: I think it lost a lot of its dynamism. I think it did. I think that he was a battle cry to the heights, you might say. All the time he was here.

HILL: Well, did A.Y. Jackson take over after?

SPEIRS: Yes. Yes, he did, and he did in a very conscientious and very loving and very wonderful way. Because he has a marvellous spirit, I think, A.Y. Jackson, just a marvellous spirit. After the 1926 Group show in which I had paintings, he wrote me one of the most beautiful, beautiful letters you ever read. He was so sorry that I wasn't written on in the papers. He was so sweet about it, and I couldn't get over it. This marvellous painter sitting down and writing to this young artist, such a kind and loving letter. I just couldn't get over how kind it was. He was such—a very, very big individual. He is a very big individual.

HILL: His role towards—I mean, how did he react to Lawren Harris's abstractions?

SPEIRS: Do you know, he never commented to me about them. So I don't imagine he liked them.

HILL: No?

SPEIRS: I have that feeling he didn't. But then he'd say, "Well, then, that's Lawren," you know.

HILL: Right.

SPEIRS: Alec, at Lawren's funeral, you know, Lawren and Bess, you know they were buried out at the—and I was there and he was there with his nurse, A.Y. J. And so we walked along together afterwards, and he took my arm and we talked and he said, "Lawren would have thought this was too long" (both laugh). Well! So characteristic, you know. Would you like to see the picture I have, that I took of A.Y. J. that

year? I'll quickly get it—He lived in New York City, and his housekeeper's book will tell all the details about it.

HILL: Bernard Berenson's housekeeper's book?

SPEIRS: Yes, housekeeper's book.

HILL: Well, it would be very interesting if one could find out what happened to Carl Hunter's collection, or to his property.

SPEIRS: Wouldn't it be true? Oh, if you could only find that out. I'd give anything to find that out.

HILL: Well, perhaps then we can just quickly go through some of the other questions if we have time? Or do we have time?

SPEIRS: Yes, yes. Well, I don't know that we very soon have to be getting—

HILL: Okay, well—

[End of Clip 4]

[End of Charles Hill Interview with Doris Speirs]