For my Family:

Zena, Alia, Javed, and Saara

Contents

A slight thing, like a phrase or jest, often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall.

—Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*

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Cover Photo: Dr. W. Line, OBE; Col. E. Bullis; John R. Seeley; CMHA President, Dr. J. Griffin. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) Archives, CMHA fonds.

Prologue

For almost twenty years I trudged down the halls of the Clarke Institute toward my psychiatrist's corner office, the very halls that Seeley once walked, hoping this time I would make the final breakthrough. In the early sessions, I rejected the medication that was recommended. In fact, I made it a condition of my participation in long-term psychotherapy that there would be "no drugs." Eventually, I came to regret this naïve pride in my freedom. I threw myself into psychotherapy, and as much as I attended my sessions dutifully, I studied the works of Freud, Jung, Kohut and other writers in the psychoanalytic tradition. Freud said that all psychoanalyses come to some form of tragic ending. My experience of this was to learn that, while the process itself was therapeutic, no particular insight or *temps retrouve* would bring an end to my suffering. My psychiatrist once applauded my efforts by saying that my success in coping with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) by therapeutic means alone was worthy of academic publication. But it was the hope of a final cure that drove me on. Such hope is a cruel master. It is no wonder hope was the last affliction to fly from Pandora's box.

Yet, through it all I made certain beneficial changes in my life. I abandoned the political ambitions that had once driven me from the London School of Economics to Law School at McGill University. The more self-contained career of a high school history teacher proved an effective antidote in my case of what Seeley would refer to as "floating anxiety."[1] As I settled into teaching, I became convinced that the techniques of my psychotherapist might prove useful in the classroom. Moreover, mental health in schools had become a central public policy issue during the course of my career which began in the 1990's. For example, the CBC reported on October 7, 2014 that recent studies in the field of pediatric psychiatry suggest "there may be a need for a national strategy to address the

mental health needs of children in schools." In fact, mental health is now a strategic priority of the School Board where I work as head of a History Department.

Like so many people whose activism is motivated by a desire to solve the problem that besets them, at least for the sake of others if not themselves, I too set out in search of a cure for mental illness as part of my work in the field of education. I served on many character education and mental health committees. I wrote-up committee reports and spoke at professional learning conferences, but none of this satisfied me that I was making a difference. For one thing, it soon became apparent that there is no consensus about what should be done. As a Superintendent of Schools once said to me, "Character education *is* rocket science."

I turned to a more academic approach and began a doctoral program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). At the time I was teaching History and Philosophy classes, so I entered the now defunct program in the History and Philosophy of Education. If my ambition to make a theoretical breakthrough in the field of mental health education was a wash-out, at least I would improve my teaching skills. When I asked my doctoral dissertation supervisor David Levine whether I should study Anna Freud and the "matchbox school" in Vienna as an exemplar of mental health pedagogy, he quickly put an end to my ambitious plans.[2] I could not speak German, he pointed out, and the financial cost of such a study would be formidable. Instead he suggested that perhaps something was going on in Toronto in the early days of psychoanalysis that would be more accessible.

I began to rummage through the archives at the Center for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto and stumbled across a file entitled, "The Forest Hill Village Project." To my surprise this had been a major federally funded mental health project conducted in the schools of Toronto between 1948 and 1956. Forest Hill Village is a wealthy suburban community in north Toronto set along the crest of a ridge overlooking the city. The project was organized by the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in co-operation with the University of Toronto (U of T) Department of Psychiatry. It had introduced a version of group psychotherapy in the classroom and psychiatric clinics in schools. John R. Seeley, a sociologist with the U of T Department of Psychiatry, who also carried the title "Director of the Forest Hill Village Project," was its leader.

I was shocked to learn that there was a directly relevant history here in Canada to what has been presented in the media and institutional discourse, in my experience, as a new frontier in social policy. At the same time, however, I was relieved to discover an historical model of preventive psychiatry in Canadian schools which might lend perspective to the efforts of today's policy-makers, if not in my own practice as an educator. Then the question became whether a trail of historical documents leading back to this overlooked episode in the history of mental health in Canada could be found? This problem was solved by the rather prolix writings of the leader of the project, John R. Seeley.

When I began my search for more information about Seeley, I found that his importance as an author and educator was not to be underestimated. Many of his academic colleagues thought very highly of him. For example, Professor Leonard Duhl, M.D., of the University of California, Berkeley, wrote of his career in the following superlative terms:

> John R. Seeley is superb. He is truly a Renaissance man with deep perceptions, understanding and scholarship in vast numbers of fields ranging from philosophy to mathematics to sociology. He is a social critic and teacher with little competition. In fact, I can find nothing but superb adjectives to describe the mind, the heart and the soul of this man. Any place that gets him as a professor will be getting one of the outstanding people in the world.[3]

His protégé Clayton Ruby, a Toronto lawyer famous for his defense of Guy Paul Morin and Donald Marshal Jr., both wrongfully convicted of murder, claimed that Seeley was a "leading figure in Canadian education." Similarly, Professor Morris Schwartz, of Brandeis University in Massachusetts, wrote of Seeley: "He is the most gifted all-around social scientist I know (and I do not make such statements lightly). His book *Crestwood Heights* is the most sophisticated study of a community extant."[4]

Indeed, the scholarly consensus remains that *Crestwood Heights*, Seeley's sociological study of the community of Forest Hill where he conducted his mental health project in schools, was a significant literary achievement:

> David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), John R. Seeley's, *Crestwood Heights* (1956) and William H. Whyte, Jr's, *The Organization Man* (1956) were classics of 1950s social science that had a major impact on social

> thought. Repeatedly referenced, they introduced new ways of understanding what was happening in the postwar period. This work left a lasting imprint because it helped to shape the terms of discourse about American society, not only in the 1950s but for decades to come.[5]

Lionel Trilling, a leading twentieth-century American literary critic, went so far as to suggest that these sociological works threatened to "take-over from literature one of literature's most characteristic functions, the investigation and criticism of morals and manners."[6] However, as was always the case with Seeley, high praise was mixed with some controversy.

Seeley's more famous friend and mentor from the University of Chicago (U of C) David Riesman, author of the *Lonely Crowd*, complained in his introduction to *Crestwood Heights* of an *excessive* moralism, saying that he wished Seeley "had the novelist's insouciance, as well as the novelist's sensitivity to anxiety and other forms of mental suffering among the well-to-do."[7] This sharp criticism of a book that arose out of a mental health project, and of a friend who was well-known to Riesman to be a strong proponent of psychoanalysis, calls for explanation.

Riesman also felt that the book was "not sufficiently allusive."[8] It is remarkable, for example, that Seeley's critique of the culture of the suburbs repeated, without acknowledging, many of the Lynd's observations in *Middletown;* an important community study set in Depression era Muncie, Indiana, which Riesman considered a foundational text. Seeley claimed, in a footnote to *Crestwood Heights*, that rather than "repeating in essence a type of study that had already been outstandingly well done, for example the Lynds," he adopted a "loose method," in order to "secure materials that might have a more general interest and importance."[9] Nevertheless, he returned to the same theme, first articulated by Weber in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* that the "care for external goods" in American society has become an "iron cage."[10] We might note, however, that for Seeley the consumerism decried by the Lynd's is no longer just an "American Dream" but a "North American Dream." Seeley defined this as a dream of "a material heaven in the here and now, to be entered by the successful elect through unremitting struggle and sacrifice."[11] Perhaps it is true, as Riesman suggested, that Seeley's interest in popularizing sociological theory came at the cost of academic density, but why would someone of his talent, who had won recognition for

his "catholic knowledge of the social sciences," expose himself to such criticism?[12]

Riesman also noted a lack of "differentiating" or "comparative" material in *Crestwood Heights* that might have better elucidated the sociological significance of the uniquely large Jewish population living in Forest Hill in comparison to towns like Muncie.[13] Again, it is surprising that Seeley referred to the population of Forest Hill as "comparatively homogenous" even though half its population was Jewish, and in the process of integrating a large influx of Holocaust survivors.[14] But the Lynd's had also overlooked the relatively large population of African Americans living in Muncie when they wrote *Middletown*. This may have been more understandable in their case because they were themselves "white" Americans, whereas Seeley's identity confusion as a non-Jewish Jew raises more questions.

Seeley's papers reveal that he in fact anticipated much of Riesman's critique in an un-published version of *Crestwood Heights*, but chose to suppress this material because of the politics of the Forest Hill Village Project. This must also be explained. Undoubtedly, *Crestwood Heights* was as much a product of its time as of the personality of its author, but the fact that there is very little written about Seeley despite his importance as an educator, and the tantalizing questions swirling around his work, invites further study which it is the intent of this biographical history to provide. As scholar Brian J. Low wrote, "John Seeley's career is deserving of more careful scrutiny by Canadian social historians."[15]

Of course, I am not the first to raise the "Seeley Question." In fact, this was the title of a *Globe and Mail* editorial published on December 13th, 1974. That year a job offer for Seeley with the Sociology of Education Department at OISE was over-turned at the highest levels of the Ontario government. The editorial concerned the lack of transparency that surrounded this decision: "Accusations are being made, darkly, that now that Dr. Seeley wants to come home again to Toronto after 10 years in California, his foes in the academic community are working behind the scenes to prevent him from getting a job."[16]

The editorial went on to question the propriety of an intervention by then Minister of Education Thomas Wells in the OISE selection process which, in effect, blocked the appointment of Seeley. It is pointed out in the editorial that the Minister acknowledged publicly in

the Legislature on November 7, 1974 that he had passed on "negative information" about Seeley to the Director of OISE; and that he claimed to have done this because he received the information from "senior and respected educators in the province." Of course, the Minister refused to reveal who these "educators" were or what they said. What rumors had spread down the corridors of power in Ontario about Seeley? The editors at the *Globe and Mail* could get no farther toward an answer to "the Seeley question" than to say: "It seems agreed that sociologist John Seeley is a leading, respected but controversial figure in Canadian academic circles."[17]

Though I may not have been the first, therefore, to raise the "Seeley Question"; I am quite sure I was the last to interview "the great man himself" in search of an answer. On Levine's advice, I set out with my family for California in March 2007 to meet Seeley. Cyril Greenland and John Court at CAMH helped me to establish contact with him and supported my application for funding from the Hewton and Griffin Bursaries. This trip was the starting point for the part I was to play in his "Strange Journey."

This was the title, by the way, to a short autobiographical work which I discovered strewn amongst his papers in Los Angeles. Seeley claimed in it that his grandmother inspired him with a sense of destiny:

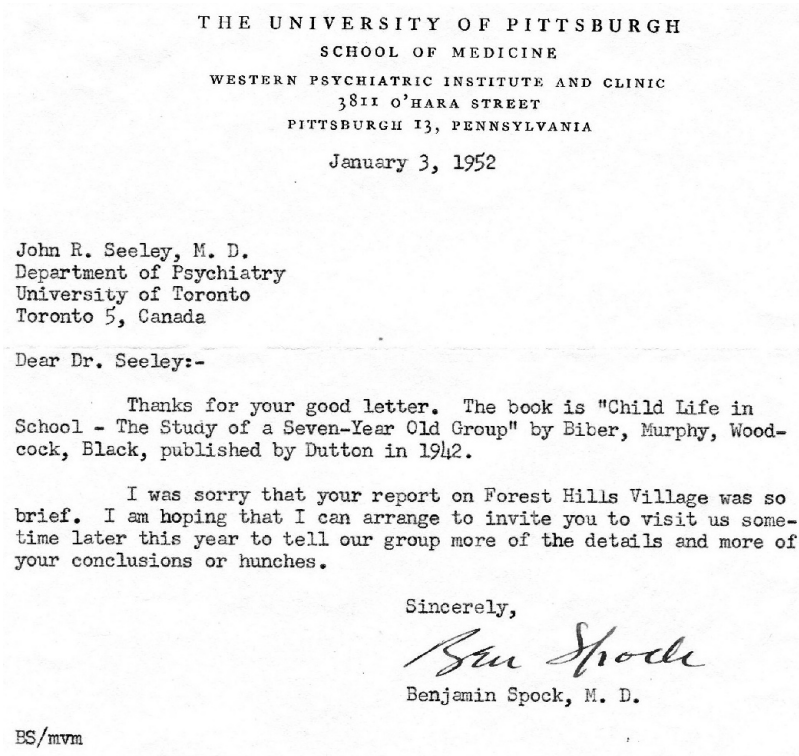
> From her such stories as those of David and Goliath, Joseph cast out from home and rising to full appreciation at the Pharaoh's court, or Moses set adrift in the river, only to be found and cherished by Pharoah's daughter. It was clear to me—though never traceably said—that I was to her the possible, actually potential, David, Joseph, Moses "Little David, he was a shepherd boy, he slew Goliath and jumped for joy, Little David, Little David, Little David, play on your harp Allelu.[18]

Like David, Seeley was a small man, described by his friend Beatrice Fischer as "fey," but he thought of himself as a conqueror, and the power of symbols to work their way through the life of a man should never be underestimated. He wrote in *Strange Journey*, "It was not just that I knew about David—I had been David once." And so, unbeknownst to me, I had set out on the "road to Damascus" to meet a man whose greatness was possibly of biblical proportions.

When I arrived at his humble bungalow just off Pico Boulevard in Los Angeles, Seeley was on his death bed at the age of 94. Despite the rather unkempt environment of his home, into and out of which roamed a few of his sons, grandsons and Hispanic nurses, a glimmer of the charisma for which Seeley had been noted by his colleagues in Toronto in the 1950s still shone through his aging body. His skill in articulation and his intellectual versatility were an experience in themselves. We talked for hours at a time over the course of my week-long visit. Though Seeley took little interest in me, it was clear that I was to attend to his place in history with much the same level of care that his nurses were expected to pay to his social calendar.

After a few days of interviews, I was so impressed I asked Seeley if I could write his biography. He said yes. This was the pact between us though I underestimated how serious he was. In the moment, he complimented me for the way I had been able to articulate the "central direction of his career." What he meant was that he appreciated my growing recognition of the importance of his childhood and of his personal struggles with mental illness to his adult projects. When I was not interviewing Seeley, I turned to the task of digging through the piles of old junk in the alleyway garage behind his house. I slowly dug through to the filing cabinets, like an archaeologist in some remote cave. Actually, I had to break into some of them because the keys had been lost.

For all the miserable searching and sorting, pushing and pulling, it was of course the very first file I came across which proved most useful. It was marked, "Crestwood Heights: Staff Memos."[19] There were some other files I felt were really interesting, like the correspondence I came across between Seeley and Canadian philosopher George Grant. However, I regret to say that I left them there because they did not seem chronologically relevant to my topic. The Seeley–Grant correspondence took place in the sixties, sometime after the Forest Hill Village Project, as did the letters he exchanged with Anna Freud. This was my first mistake as a novice historian. Of course, I never did return and have since learned not to be so linear in my approach to historical research. But I did make one exception, which was to keep a letter from Dr. Spock because it illustrated Seeley's presence at the epicenter of the early psychoanalytic movement.



THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
WESTERN PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTE AND CLINIC
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PITTSBURGH 13, PENNSYLVANIA

January 3, 1952

John R. Seeley, M. D.
Department of Psychiatry
University of Toronto
Toronto 5, Canada

Dear Dr. Seeley:-

Thanks for your good letter. The book is "Child Life in School - The Study of a Seven-Year Old Group" by Biber, Murphy, Woodcock, Black, published by Dutton in 1942.

I was sorry that your report on Forest Hills Village was so brief. I am hoping that I can arrange to invite you to visit us sometime later this year to tell our group more of the details and more of your conclusions or hunches.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Spock, M. D.

BS/mvm

Letter from Dr. Spock to Seeley, 1952. Seeley Papers, Los Angeles, California.

When it came time to take my leave of Seeley after a week of interviews, I introduced him to my family. Despite being hooked up to the intravenous and suffering the after-effects of pneumonia, he threw out his arms in welcome to my children. He regaled them with yarns about how big the waves were, and he shared chocolates with them. He advised my wife not to be too strict with our son's potty training, no matter what the "inconvenience." Then I was subjected to the onerous tests of his son John Jr., who insisted on checking every document to be borrowed. His father suggested that I should not read too much into this last-minute search because his son was "very protective." Unsure what to make of this, I left Los Angeles with a backpack full of files which I came to refer to as the "Seeley Papers."

Not long after my return to Toronto I was surprised to be confronted with subtle threats from Seeley by phone in regard to the "Seeley Papers."

Apparently, he had expected me to maintain regular contact with him. He demanded a return of the documents and suggested that he would be forced to find another biographer to work on his materials if I failed to make faster progress. I perceived a need for reassurance that I would be loyal to my assignment. I began to make regular phone calls during which we further explored the themes we had begun to take-up in Los Angeles.

Seeley's gentleness and his charm came through more clearly once we had re-engaged in a conversation about his career. He confided in more honest ways about his past in what ended up being the last few months of his life. But there were features of his life-story that he did not fully develop. For example, he told me that his father's last name was Friedeberg, which suggested to me that Seeley was Jewish, but he would not say this directly. Rather, when I asked about his father's name, he said, "I am quite sure he was not Christian."

Sadly, Seeley reported to me that his father died in Germany when he was only ten years old and attending school in Heidelberg. Why were they living in Germany, I wondered? The assumption in our conversations had always been that he was English. He also said that his father had been from a family of wealthy grain merchants, and that he had often boasted that Napoleon's armies had run on their supplies. But if Seeley was wealthy by birth, why were there not signs of this in his home?

His psychoanalysis was also a source of intrigue, especially in relation to his own methods as a mental health worker in schools. However, having already borne the brunt of his anger, I was afraid of becoming too intrusive. When I told him this he said, "No, I think it's lovely."[20] Finally, in a strange twist of fate during one of our telephone conversations, Seeley directed me to visit his friend Beatrice Fischer. As we were exploring the remaining unanswered questions about his past, Seeley decided that the best place to look for more information was the Fischer's. He told me that Beatrice was the wife of the man who had been his analyst when he lived in Toronto, Martin Fischer. Seeley said he was still in touch with Beatrice Fischer and she would be happy to share with me what she knew. As it turned out this was our last conversation. A month later he died.

It was just after the news of Seeley's death that I first met Beatrice Fischer in her impressive Forest Hill mansion. I was ushered by the Filipino servant Beth into the library where I found Beatrice sitting in a chair under

a large poster-style photograph of Freud. The chair was draped with the same kind of blanket as one can see thrown over the Freud's famous couch in Vienna. She gestured to the photograph above her head to introduce her husband, because she said she "thought of him that way."[21]

Martin Fischer was a contemporary of Freud who had also grown up in Vienna. She said that he had worshipped Freud, which I could see as I glanced at the bookshelves lined with his collected works. Beatrice recalled that her husband would sit in that chair when he was still alive and read from Freud's works and quote out loud to her from humorous passages. Martin had actually met Freud one day, she told me, to sell him tickets to a show being held to raise money for a Jewish Charity. As I listened to these stories, I began to feel as though I had found my way back to *fin-de-siècle* Vienna after all.

In this, our first of many conversations, Beatrice Fischer talked fondly about Seeley both in terms of his charm and foibles. She expressed particular frustration that his sons had not contacted her at the time of his death because, "he loved me, and I loved him," she said. Eventually, she invited me to search through her basement to see if any records remained of the correspondence between her husband and Seeley. She drew a little sketch so that I could make my way through the labyrinthine cellar to where she thought such files might be found. Again, like an archaeologist descending into some long forgotten tomb, I managed to find my way to a closet-room jammed with a century full of things. Much to my amazement the first filing cabinet I opened contained a collection of files entitled, "Seeley."[22] They were full of letters, poems, articles, drafts of essays and notes which I have come to refer to as the "Fischer Papers." We had discovered a private correspondence that had occurred between two friends over the course of their life-long partnership. I suddenly realized that it had been Seeley's dying wish that the truth about his life, in all of its wonderful complexity, would finally be revealed.