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**Oswald Hall**  
**1908-2007**



Oswald Hall was born in January 1908, on a farm in Lily Plains, in northern Saskatchewan which, until 1905, was still a part of the Northwest Territories. His father had migrated from a mining area in northern England (County Durham) to be a homesteader.

The local school was very modest, a single room, closed during the winter months. The academic program was restricted to the primary grades. Secondary education was mainly provided extramurally by the Department of Education. After completing grade XI, and having undergone a four-month course in educational philosophy, graduates were granted a certificate to teach in the Saskatchewan schools. As a peripatetic teacher, Hall taught in four areas in northern Saskatchewan.

During this stint of teaching, a school inspector who was a graduate of Queens University persuaded him to enrol as an extramural student at Queens, where he gained credits in Mathematics and Languages. When the Great Depression struck in the droughts of the Thirties, Hall joined the wave of migrants to go East. Eventually he graduated in Economics and Philosophy from Queens and won a fellowship to go to McGill in 1935 to study Sociology. The two years spent there in the Masters' program represented an abrupt shift from the abstract theories of Mathematics and Economics to the realm of empirical studies and field research. From McGill he went to the University of Chicago to gain a PhD degree in Sociology in 1944. At that time the University of Chicago boasted the major department of Sociology in the U.S.

After two years at Chicago, he found a teaching position at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, one of the Group of Ten. The placid atmosphere of an Ivy League college was soon shattered by the Second World War, and the campus was turned into a Navy training program. Anyone with a smattering of mathematics, like himself, was dragooned into service with the task of turning lowly members of ships crews into naval officers. As the war wound down he was offered an administrative position in the Research and Statistics Branch of the Department of Labour in Ottawa. When the war ended he moved back into the academic stream, and in time became chairman of the Department of Sociology at McGill. Meanwhile invitations had arisen on several occasions to teach in the U.S., one of which he accepted at Tulane in New Orleans. After a year there he moved to the University of Toronto to join an attractive department which included Economics, Political Science and Sociology. This was a time of bustling university expansion, and in time the department evolved into three separate disciplines and departments.

After retiring from the Department of Sociology at the University of Toronto in 1973 he spent a decade as a visiting professor continuing teaching and research, as well as positions in the Community Health Department of the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Library Science at the University of Toronto.

Although at Brown University there were few traditions of research, there were for sociologists' large pockets of nearby migrant communities worthy of study. So began a sociological analysis of the ways in which members of such groups - particularly the Irish, Italian and Jewish - found a niche in the field of medicine, and subsequently carried out the adaptations and adjustments that were appropriate to life in a profession. This turned out to be too narrow a focus of research, and it became useful to add the study of career lines of the well-established Anglo-Saxon part of the

medical profession. But soon this area of research expanded to focus on the study of a variety of professions and occupations. Hall was fortunate to come along just when the study of the medical profession and other specialized occupations became a window for the study of society at large. Students of Economics and Politics and Insurance were delving into the study of Health, and sociologists found there a comfortable niche for themselves.

The move to the University of Toronto was a fortunate one for a sociologist with such research interests. There was a warm welcome in various associations for someone with his background. The Canadian Medical Health Association was initiating research. The Drug Addiction Research Foundation was taking form, and sought help from sociologists. In the Government of Ontario the newly formed Council of Health was adding them to its membership.

The American College of Hospital Administrators was establishing programs to train personnel; the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education was using sociologists. And the nearby College of Chiropractic was trying to escape the label of a cult and take its place among the recognized schools of healing. In brief, there was a broad scope for sociologists interested in the various fields of work.

There was also a demand for sociologists to deal with pressing social problems. The Royal Commission on Health Services needed sociologists, among others, to study specific aspects of health care. At the provincial level the Committee on the Healing Arts sought help to assess the educational preparation for the growing bundle of specialized occupations in the health field. And in the realm of Anglophone-Francophone relations, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism called on sociologists as well as other disciplines to study a very murky area of national life. In all of these ventures Hall found a role.

Many of the associations mentioned above used sociologists as policy advisors. They also facilitated and helped finance research. So did the federal Department of Health and Welfare in sponsoring a national survey of the work of chiropractors. Some of the research resulted in books such as *The Utilization of Dentists in Canada*, *The Paramedical Occupations in Ontario*, and co-authored volumes such as *The Transition from School to Work*, *Basic Skills at School and Work*, and *Chiropractors: Do They Help?*

Along with these there emerged a broad range of journal articles, and chapters in books. As an honorific gesture a group of 30 erstwhile students and colleagues published a set of papers in a volume entitled *The Sociology of Work in Canada*.

During his university career, teaching involved three blocks of time - eighteen years at the University of Toronto, a decade at McGill and five years in Brown University in Rhode Island. Other appointments in the U.S. comprised a year at Tulane University as Professor of Industrial Relations, and two sessional appointments at the University of Chicago. Other sessional appointments in Canada involved the University of British Columbia, the University of Calgary, the University of Waterloo, the University of Guelph, Trent University and Memorial University in Newfoundland.

Over the years membership in associations included the Canadian Social Science Research Council, the Canadian Political Science Association, the Canadian Association of Sociology and Anthropology, the American Sociological Association, the International Sociological Association, the Board of Governors of the Canadian Chiropractic College, and eventually the Royal Society of Canada (1977).