

GEORGE WALLIS FIELD, 1914-2002

IN MEMORIAM

George Wallis Field was born March 1914 in Coburg, Ontario, received his early education there and then moved on to the University of Toronto. It was inevitable that he should choose to enroll in Victoria College, first because it was a Methodist institution and that accorded with the family religion, and second because it had been founded in Coburg (in 1836) and only moved to Toronto when it federated with the University of Toronto in 1892. Professor Field maintained a strong and close relationship with the College throughout his life, not only as a professor but as an ardent defender of the educational and ethical ideals it fostered. To the end he came in to the College at least once a week to eat at High Table and to joust with wit and a sharp intellect on any of the many interests that stirred his ever-active mind.

Professor Field graduated in 1935, taught high school briefly in Ontario, then took a post with the Canadian Academy in Kobe, Japan. When war broke out, and even before Japan was involved, he followed the call of conscience and went to India to enlist in the British Army. As a captain in the Royal Artillery he served throughout the war, for the most part on the rugged area known as the North West Frontier. One of Wally's first memories was of the celebrations at the end of WW I and the military aura of that occasions seems to have stuck with him, for he maintained throughout his life an interest in and connection with the army, first as Lieutenant Colonel and Commanding Officer of the U of T Canadian Officer Training Corps and then as Honorary Colonel of the 2nd Canadian Intelligence Company. His disciplined mind and upright bearing reflected that interest.

As a scholar Professor was equally thorough and disciplined. The breadth of his interests is indicated by his publications – a selection of Heine’s poetry, a text edition of Fontane’s *Irrungen Wirungen*, a history of nineteenth century German literature, and articles on Schiller, Goethe, Thomas Mann. But it is as a Hermann Hesse scholar that Wally is best known. His Hesse book in the Twayne World Authors series will always be a preferred reference for scholars and for students as will his many Hesse articles. He visited Hesse in Montagnola and maintained close correspondence with Reinhold Pfau and Martin Pfeifer, Hesse advocates in Germany. Some part of Hesse’s reputation and reception in North America is due to Wally Field’s passionate endorsement.

As a teacher Wally had a strong following. Undergraduates were challenged to investigate and question, and then put forward their best. Sloppy thinking was not acceptable. The best students responded to this and as a result Professor Field has graduate students who are now themselves professors in various Canadian and American universities. One hopes they all remember and perpetuate the strong personal interest he took in their intellectual development.

It is much in character that Professor Field died while swimming in the University pool at the age of 89. He leaves his wife Eleanor, a daughter and three sons. There will be a memorial service to celebrate his life in the Victoria College Chapel at 3pm, January 31st. The Professor G W Field Scholarship Fund has been set up in his memory. Contributions can be sent to: Victoria University Alumnae Office, 150 Charles St. West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1K7.