

### OMOND McKILLOP SOLANDT (1909-1993)

On 12 May 1993, Omond McKillop Solandt died at the Stevenson Memorial Hospital, Alliston, Ontario, some 20 km from his residence of many years in Bolton.

Born in Winnipeg on 2 September 1909, Omond Solandt moved east and enrolled in 1927 as a undergraduate in biological and medical sciences at the University of Toronto. On graduation with an M.D. in 1936, he received a Gold Medal and was named an Ellen Mickle Scholar, the highest honour bestowed by the U. of T. Not only was it a portent of a distinguished future, it was an award that in time would benefit the university. When Dr. O.M. Solandt was installed as the 23rd chancellor of the University of Toronto in 1965, he stated in his address that this function would give him the opportunity to repay his debt for the education he had received there.

In 1932-33 Solandt, as a graduate student, carried out research in physiology at the U. of T. under the supervision of Dr. Charles H. Best, co-discoverer of insulin. Dr. Solandt continued medical research in 1936-37 at Cambridge University, England, on a Lucas Walker Studentship. After serving a year of internship at the Toronto General Hospital, he became a lecturer in mammalian physiology at Cambridge University, a position he held from 1939 to 1946.

During World War II, Dr. Solandt was involved in medical research and in related activities that required immediate attention, such as his work as director of the South-West London Blood Supply Depot, where a transfusion service was developed to serve the victims of the blitz. Upon discovering the reason why crews in army tanks fainted following the firing of the gun (the gases from the powder were not ventilated), he became a senior advisor in 1943 to the British Army on scientific research and its application to the military.

In February 1944 Omond Solandt enlisted in the Canadian Army with the rank of lieutenant-colonel and shortly after was promoted to colonel. He remained in London as deputy superintendent of the British Army Operational Research Group. Cambridge University recognized his scientific achievements during World War II by naming him a Fellow of Trinity Hall in 1946. At the request of the British War Office, Dr. Solandt travelled to Japan in 1945 as a member of a team investigating the effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

With such a distinguished overseas record, it was not surprising that the 36-year-old Solandt was invited to return to Canada to head a new government organization: the Defence Research Board. The suggestion to appoint Dr. Solandt as the first chairman of DRB had been made jointly by Dr. Charles H. Best and Dr. Chalmers J. MacKenzie, former dean of engineering at the University of Saskatchewan and acting president of the National Research Council of Canada during the war years. The meeting at which the appointment was discussed took place on 4 December 1945 in the office of C.D. Howe on Parliament Hill. This illustrates the level at which Dr. Solandt's scientific achievements had become known.



Omond Solandt at a meeting; University of Alaska, Anchorage, 11 September 1982. Photo by W.O. Kupsch.

During the years between 1947 and 1956, when Dr. Solandt directed so capably the work of DRB, he not only fostered research by the board in northern Canada but also personally became involved in matters pertaining to the Arctic and Antarctic. In 1948 he was one of the charter associates of the Arctic Institute of North America, was elected a Fellow of AINA at the annual meeting in 1959, and served on the Board of Governors from 1960 to 1965. Thus began a long and fruitful association between an influential, effective and dedicated manager of public and private organizations and Canadians interested in the development of their country's northern lands and the social welfare of its Native peoples.

Anyone who served as a member of a committee or board chaired by Omond Solandt can attest to his skills in directing a group of people toward clearly stated objectives. Those meetings that I attended will never fade from my memory. Here was a chairman detecting problems, defining issues, summarizing what had been placed before him, making sensible recommendations and solving controversies with great sensitivity, fairness and common sense. He carried out his duties with superb efficiency. He enjoyed being leader as well as servant, as those associated with him discovered during social gatherings after formal meetings. It was a time for telling stories, recalling past events and discovering the goals for Canada as visualized by Omond.

Dr. Omond Solandt received a dozen honorary degrees. It was the one awarded him in 1968 by the University of Saskatchewan that has a special significance for me. Directed

to the graduates, his convocation address was a disclosure of his vision for the future of Canada: a nation united with reasonable material wealth and a high standard of education, having eliminated ignorance and poverty, brought full citizenship to the aboriginal people, and dealt effectively with racial and religious discrimination.

In 1956 Dr. Solandt resigned from DRB to become vice-president of Research and Development of Canadian National Railways. From 1963 to 1966, he held a similar position with de Havilland Aircraft and Hawker Siddeley of Canada Ltd. Once again, it was no surprise to those familiar with Dr. Solandt's ability as a research organizer when he was selected the first chairman of the Science Council of Canada, established in 1966. He held that position for six years.

The broader interests of many Canadians in their country, and northern Canada in particular, were a special concern of Omond Solandt. In February 1963, he became president of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. He was the founding chairman of the Northwest Territories Science Advisory Board and directed its affairs from 1976 to 1982. His contribution to the organization of local science in northern Canada was recognized in 1983 when he received the NWT Commissioner's Award for Public Service at the highest level and was presented with a medal and scroll by Commissioner John H. Parker. It was an honour greatly

cherished by Omond Solandt as it was distinctly Canadian and came directly from a small group of its people.

Only a few of Dr. Solandt's many recognitions for distinguished service can be given here: the Order of the British Empire (1946); the United States of America Medal of Freedom with Bronze Palm (1947); the Gold Medal of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada (1956); the United States of America Antarctic Service Medal (for contributions as a consultant to the U.S. National Science Foundation in the Antarctic, 1969); and the C.D. Howe Award of the Canadian Aeronautics and Space Institute (1988).

Dr. Solandt was an honorary member of the Engineering Institute of Canada and of the Academy of Medicine. He was a foreign honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Science (1976). In 1948, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and named a Companion of the Order of Canada in 1970.

In company with many Canadians whose lives he touched, I feel privileged indeed to have known Dr. Omond M. Solandt.

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