

OSWALD VEBLEN

BY DEANE MONTGOMERY

Professor Oswald Veblen died at his summer home in Brooklin, Maine, on August 10, 1960. He was survived by his wife, Elizabeth Richardson Veblen, and by four sisters and one brother. He was born in Decorah, Iowa, on June 24, 1880, and was the oldest of a family of eight children, four girls and four boys.

He was one of the most influential mathematicians of this century, partly through his contributions to the subject and partly through the effect of his remarkable judgment and force of character. He had an unfailing belief in high standards and was prepared to stand for them irrespective of his own comfort or convenience. He contributed in a decisive way not only to excellence in mathematics but to excellence in American scholarship in general. He was one of those mainly responsible for carrying Princeton forward from a slender start to a major mathematics center. There can be but very few who play such a large part in the development of American and world mathematics.

Shortly after his death the faculty and trustees of the Institute for Advanced Study joined in writing of him as follows:

"We are acutely conscious of the loss to the Institute and to the world of learning of a major figure.

"Oswald Veblen was of great influence in developing the Institute as a center for postdoctoral research, but this was only a part of a career extending back for half a century to the time when scholarly work was in its infancy in Princeton and the United States. His effect on mathematics, transcending the Princeton community and the country as a whole, will be felt for decades to come; but his interest and influence went far beyond his own field and he was a powerful force in establishing the highest academic standards in general.

"He loved simplicity and disliked sham. He placed the standing of the Institute ahead of his personal convenience. He possessed the art of friendship, and his assistance was decisive for the careers of dozens of men. His helping hand is remembered with gratitude in many academic communities all over the world.

"We are grateful for his great strength and courage, for his unusual wisdom, for his unflinching integrity and honesty, for his uncompromising ideals, and, not least, for his generous friendship."

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