



position also involved extensive travel and allowed him to give talks on the Faith in Calgary, Regina, Toronto, Montreal, St. Lambert, Vancouver and West Vancouver in the late 1930's. While living in Vancouver he was appointed as Regional Teaching Representative by the National Assembly of the US and Canada, helped establish a Vancouver youth group and incorporate the Vancouver Local Assembly, and served on the Regional Teaching Committee for Oregon, Washington, Idaho and British Columbia. In January, 1938, Rowland visited the United States and gave a talk on World Order in Everett, Washington, assisting early teaching efforts there.

He aimed to pioneer to Guatemala in the late 1930's but was advised to pioneer within Canada by Shoghi Effendi and he resigned from Sun Life and moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, in May 1939. He worked for Emeric Sala's business before securing a position with the insurance company Great West Life. By July 1939 Rowland was teaching a regular study group in Winnipeg which was later enlarged through collaboration with Ernest Court, President of the Phoenix Club which was an adult education group. On October 29, 1939, he gave a talk to the combined Unitarian and Federated Icelandic Churches on the Bahá'í concept of a New World Order in Winnipeg. In 1940 he presented a comprehensive introduction to the Faith to over 300 people across nine meetings in Winnipeg.

In 1941 Shoghi Effendi tasked the North American Bahá'ís with establishing at least one Spiritual Assembly in every State and Province which prompted several Regional Bahá'í Conferences. Rowland assisted in organizing the Conference for the Eastern Provinces of Canada held in Montreal from June 28 to July 2 1941. He conducted a daily Teaching Forum at the conference, speaking at it himself on what the Post-War Teaching Objectives of the community were. Rowland also attended the Regional Conference for Ontario in Toronto in August, 1941, and conducted a Teaching Forum. Following these Conferences Rowland concentrated on establishing the Faith in the Prairie Provinces of Canada and he was appointed to the Regional Teaching Committee of Manitoba & Saskatchewan in 1942. In 1943 he was noted for his intensive teaching in virgin areas, and he had become Regional Secretary for Western Canada.

In 1943 Rowland was appointed to the Committee responsible for preparing celebrations of the Bahá'í Centennial in 1944, excluding the dedication in the Temple. He spoke at the Centenary meeting for the Public at Temple Foundation Hall on May 23, 1944, and his address was published in World Order Magazine under the title America and the Most Great Peace.

In October 1944 he gave a talk on the Faith to members of the Edmonton Muslim community.

In December 1946 Rowland was appointed to Canada's first National Teaching Committee.

In 1947 Rowland remarried to Yvonne Frank, a social worker, in Winnipeg and they moved to Montreal in 1948. They had three children and remained together until 1971 for their sake. Rowland attributed the failure of the marriage to his travelling for work and the Faith.

Rowland was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of Canada in April 1948. By 1951 he was Vice-Chair of the Assembly.

In August 1952 he taught at the Ontario Summer School.

He expressed his willingness to pioneer outside of Canada for the Faith in a letter to Shoghi Effendi in March 1954, but in May 1954 he received a reply advising him to remain in Canada:

"He will be very happy to see you in the pioneer field. However, he considers that at the present time the national work in Canada has been weakened through Freddie's death, Rosemary and Emeric Sala's departure and that of John Robarts and his family. In view of this, he advises you to continue living where you are and helping with the national work, which, if weakened to too great an extent through the departure of all the most active members of the National Assembly, will suffer spiritually, and even endanger, he fears, the success of their part of the Ten Year Plan. Perhaps, at a later date, when the national work is in a stronger position, it will be possible for you to enter the pioneering field."

In June 1954 Rowland was appointed as the first, and at the time only, Auxiliary Board member for Canada and served in the position until 1963. He continued to also serve on the National Assembly after his appointment. In July 1954 he travelled across Canada visiting Bahá'ís in St. John's, Sydney, the Magdalen Islands, Shediac, Charlottetown and Prince Edward Island. By February 1955 he was regularly visiting Quebec to teach the Faith. In October 1955 he visited Bahá'í communities in Ontario and spoke at the Central Ontario Teaching Conference in Ingersoll. In September 1956 Rowland delivered the Dedication Address at the Dedication of the Haziratu'l-Quds of Canada in Toronto.

Following the death of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 the Hands of the Cause issued a directive that there should be two Auxiliary Boards, one for teaching the Faith, and the other for protecting it from Covenant-breakers. Rowland was reappointed as an Auxiliary Board member for Protection. In 1963 Rowland was replaced by Frederick Graham as Auxiliary Board member, as it was decided that those serving as Auxiliary Board members and National Spiritual Assembly members could only serve in one capacity and Rowland continued to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada. In 1963 Rowland attended the election of the first Universal House of Justice, casting a vote for the body as a delegate for Canada. He gave a talk at the World Congress in London the same year. In 1965 he recited a prayer at the funeral of Leroy Ioas.

Rowland retired from his job in 1971. In September 1971 he attended the North Atlantic Oceanic Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland, which was one of fifteen Conferences called by the Universal House of Justice for consultation on the goals of the Nine Year Plan. He opened the Conference by welcoming the attendees as he was representing the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada which was hosting the event.

He toured Central America and the Caribbean for six months following the Conference, attending the Convention at which the National Spiritual Assembly of the Windward Islands was established in April 1972. Later in 1972 he returned to Canada and assisted Jenabe Caldwell in a mass teaching campaign in Quebec. In December 1972 Rowland remarried to Vivian Taylor, an American Bahá'í who he had first met in 1965 at Green Acre and begun a relationship with at the Windward Islands Convention earlier that year, and they pioneered to Martinique in January 1973 where they devoted themselves to re-establishing Martiniques six Local Spiritual Assemblies, succeeding by Ridvan that year.

In June 1973 Rowland was appointed as a Continental Counselor for Central America for an indefinite term. In February 1974 he taught at a Bahá'í institute in Blackman Eddy, Belize. In 1975 he taught classes at an experimental three month deepening institute in Panama. In 1977 he represented the Continental Board at the first National Convention of the French Antilles in Pointe-a-Pitre, Guadeloupe. In 1978 he consulted with the National Teaching Committee and National Assembly of the Barbados and Windward Islands on their goals for the Five Year Plan and toured the local communities of the region offering suggestions on how individuals could assist in achieving the goals.

In 1980 the Continental Board for Central America was merged with the Boards for North and South America and Rowland's service as Counselor ended. As Counselor he had helped pave the way for the establishment National Assemblies for the French Antilles, the Leeward Islands, the Windward Islands, Martinique and Guadeloupe. He moved to Toronto, Canada, in 1981 for his health and economic situation on the advice of the Universal House of Justice. Vivian died due to cancer in September 1985.

In 1989 Rowland introduced Joan Dunne, a nurse, to the Faith while hospitalized and they married in 1992. They moved to Barbados for three months, then to Vancouver Island back in Canada where Rowland died on March 7, 1993. The Universal House of Justice conveyed the following message after his death:

"We are distressed to learn of the passing of Rowland Estall who rendered distinguished services to the Faith for over six decades, including periods of service as Continental Counsellor, Auxiliary Board member, and as member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada for no less than 25 years. His highly meritorious contributions to the establishment of the Cause also included international pioneering to Martinique as well as homefront pioneering to a number of Canadian cities. He will long be remembered for the outstanding part he played in the initial growth of the Canadian Baha'i community and in the development of its international role. Prayers will be offered in the Holy Shrines for the progress of his soul. Kindly convey our condolences to his wife and children in this time of their bereavement."

## Biography of Rowland Estall

1906-1993

The first time Rowland Estall heard the words of Bahá'u'lláh, he recognized their authority. That was in 1926 during a meeting of the Canadian Fellowship

of Youth for Peace, when an attractive sixteen year- old girl named Mary Maxwell encouraged the group to consider the aims of "a Persian philosopher of our times," who, as recorded by Professor E. G. Browne, had said, "We desire but the good of the world and happiness of the nations." Rowland studied the Faith during the months that followed and became a Baha'i in 1927. He served the Faith for the next sixty-six years, with the adjective "first" frequently associated with his name. Rowland was one of the founders of the first Baha'i youth group in Canada; he served on the country's first Local Spiritual Assembly;<sup>27</sup> he and his wife were Canada's first homefront pioneers; he was deeply involved in the first Baha'i radio broadcasts in Canada; he was the first resident Baha'i of Winnipeg, Manitoba; he helped establish the first Canadian Baha'i summer schools; he was on the first National Teaching Committee; he and two others published the first Canadian Baha'i News bulletin; he was elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada; he was one of the first Auxiliary Board members appointed for Canada;<sup>28</sup> and he participated in the first election of the Universal House of Justice and attended the first Baha'i World Congress. Born in London, England, on April 27, 1906, of English and Huguenot ancestors, Rowland was the middle of five children. The Estalls were a religious family; his father was a lay reader in the Church of England. They lived in very modest circumstances, and in 1920 the family migrated to Canada, settling in Montreal.

When Rowland was eighteen years old, he got a job as a wireless operator in the merchant marine, and for the next two years he traveled up and down the coasts of the Americas. It was an important period of his life he later explained. He studied comparative religion, learned to meditate, and became a "true seeker." "I used to climb up on the lifeboat covers at nighttime under the Caribbean stars and pray silently to whatever was out there to reveal something of the mystery of life, which I felt was available to me if I could find it." <sup>27</sup> Having formed in 1922, the first Local Assembly in Canada was in Montreal. Rowland was elected to it in 1928.

<sup>28</sup> Appointed with Peggy Ross in 1954.

Mary Maxwell, Rowland, and Emeric Sala (who entered the Faith shortly after Rowland) formed the original Montreal youth group. It wrote to Shoghi Effendi and was advised by him to study the Writings and not to rely unduly on the interpretations and representations of the older believers. They were greatly encouraged by Elizabeth Greenleaf, whom Shoghi Effendi had asked to go there to help with the teaching work. Rowland came to consider Elizabeth as his "spiritual mother." Mary Maxwell had introduced him to the Faith, and her mother, May, had been his teacher, but it was Elizabeth who spent hour after hour teaching him to turn to the Writings of Baha'u'llah when he had questions.

Elizabeth arranged with the Local Assembly for the youth to use the Baha'i center for "the independent investigation of truth." They deepened their knowledge and invited other youth to study the new religion with them. This was unusual at the time, contrasting with the prevailing "Flapper Era" values of the youthful society. It was also unusual for the Baha'i community. A Baha'i

youth group had been started in California in 1912, but the Montreal group was the first in North America to systematically study the teachings-an exercise that had a long-lasting influence on the development and growth of the Baha'i community in Canada and elsewhere. Members of the group would later distinguish themselves as some of the best known teachers, administrators, pioneers, and writers of the Baha'i Faith. On October 16, 1928, Rowland and Emeric were elected to the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Montreal. Both Rowland and Emeric married young women they had met through the youth group; Rowland married Stella Delanti, an actress, and Emeric married Rosemary Gillies, a school teacher.

Rowland had wanted to be a journalist and had enrolled in Sir George Williams College in Montreal. However, the first year arts program had seemed rather dull, and truth be told he needed a job. His younger brother was working for the Sun Life Assurance Company, and Rowland had the good fortune to be introduced to a man in charge of research into employee benefits-pensions and profit sharing and retirement plans. "I was fascinated by this," Rowland claimed, "and it became my career purely by accident." He would become an expert in the then-new field of group insurance and pensions, and his work would enable him to travel extensively for the Faith. He showed a remarkable ability to combine his daily life with Baha'i activities. Traveling teachers were the primary instruments for spreading the Faith, and Rowland joined May Maxwell, Elizabeth Greenleaf, and later Mabel Ives as highly effective teachers of the Cause in Canada. Rowland was a very attractive man, meticulous in his dress, and proper and dignified in all facets of his life. He was also an excellent and knowledgeable speaker. However, as Leroy Ioas explained:

It became clear also that the previous methods of extending the Faith into new areas by itinerant teachers, lecturers, and limited follow-up were not sufficiently effective, but that the only method whereby lasting results could be achieved was through the settlement plan.

Rowland and Stella were the first Baha'is in Canada to answer the call for homefront pioneers [29 Leroy Ioas, *The Baha'i World*, "Teaching in North America," vol. IX, p. 202] moving to Saint-Lambert, a suburb of Montreal, in 1934. Early in 1935 Rowland was able to transfer within the Sun Life company to Vancouver, the only other Baha'i community in Canada at that time.

Rowland, working with Doris Skinner, formed a Vancouver Baha'i Youth Group, and by applying the same teaching method as he had in Montreal, he was successful in seeking out like-minded organizations and securing Baha'i membership for their most active leaders and members. He was also instrumental in achieving the incorporation of the Vancouver Spiritual Assembly.

Rowland was deeply involved with the first formal use of radio programming to inform the Canadian public about the Faith. In 1937 a series of fifteen-minute broadcasts under the theme "The World at Home" was developed. The Baha'is would invite their friends into their homes for a discussion-hour based on the social principle introduced by the radio program to which all would listen. For others

a Baha'i would go to a listener's home as a discussion leader. At the conclusion of the series, the Baha'is set up study classes for forty-five people.

Rowland's marriage to Stella dissolved before he moved to Vancouver, so he felt free to pioneer. He corresponded with the Latin American Teaching Committee about moving to Guatemala City, but when he wrote to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian recommended that he move to one of the unopened provinces of Canada. The first Seven Year Plan had been launched calling for, among other objectives, the formation of at least one Local Assembly in every province of Canada. Rowland gave up his excellent job as Sun Life's group manager for the West Coast and moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, an area economically and socially devastated by years of drought and the Great Depression.

Several days after he arrived in Winnipeg in 1939, Emeric Sala arrived to establish a branch of his business. Rowland worked for him until he could find a job in his own field. Meanwhile the two of them followed up on efforts made earlier by an American traveling teacher who had met Ernest Court, founder of an adult education group called the Phoenix Club. Ernest invited Rowland and Emeric to give a talk to his group about the Baha'i Faith. Three years later, when the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Winnipeg was formed, five of its members had learned of the Faith through the Phoenix Club. Rowland established another youth group in Winnipeg, which attracted a number of students at the university. Meanwhile Rowland found a job with Great West Life (insurance) and became its supervisor of group sales—a position that required him to travel throughout the prairies. He was appointed to the Regional Teaching Committee and again was able to combine his professional work with Baha'i service. In his memoirs Rowland tells of the opening of the prairie provinces during the last years of the Seven Year Plan. The response of the local people was so limited that most of the members of the first Assemblies were Americans who had moved to Canada at the request of the National Teaching Committee of the United States and Canada. He remarked on "the deep and profound love which bound together those early pioneers."

The war years brought an unexpected development in the Baha'i community in Canada. Government restrictions on foreign currency exchange reduced the attendance by Canadian Baha'is at the Green Acre and Geyserville summer schools in the United States. After the 1941 National Convention Rowland was charged with the start-up of Baha'i summer schools and conferences in Canada. With the financial help of Siegfried Schopflocher, the first such gathering took place in Montreal from late June to early July of that year. A month later the Ontario Baha'is hosted a summer school at Rice Lake, and a summer session took place in Vernon, British Columbia. From then on summer schools became a regular feature of Canadian Baha'i life. In 1946 Rowland met a young New Yorker named Yvonne "Penny" Frank who, as a social worker and research assistant for William E. Mann while he was working on his book *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta*, had studied and had become attracted to the Faith. She declared, and in the autumn of 1947 she and Rowland were married. They had three children: Elizabeth, Judy,

and Timothy.

Penny met and married Rowland in Winnipeg, a city she considered to be "the end of the earth." Rowland was not averse to the idea of leaving. There were now twenty-six Baha'is in the community, and after nine years as a pioneer, Rowland felt that they could leave. He wrote to the Guardian and received his consent, so the Estalls moved to Montreal early in 1948. Rowland found work as a consultant for a local brokerage firm, and Penny got a job as a social worker.

In April 1948 the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada was formed, the ninth pillar of the future Universal House of Justice. Rowland was elected one of its members. Rowland's love and respect for the Baha'i Administrative Order was perhaps the most memorable aspect of his life. His humility, his unfailing grasp of principle, and his reverence had a profound and enduring effect in shaping the development of the National Spiritual Assembly, which he served for twenty-five years. He also served from 1954 to 1963 as an Auxiliary Board member for Canada. During the Ten Year Plan Rowland continued to serve on three or four national Baha'i committees and on the Local Spiritual Assembly as well. On April 21, 1963-the one hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Baha'u'llah-Rowland was among the delegates present in the House of the Master in Haifa voting for the first members of the Universal House of Justice. At the end of the three-day convention, he traveled to London, England, for the first Baha'i World Congress. He had been asked by the Hands of the Cause of God to give a talk on the unfoldment of the Divine Plan and spoke on "The Vision of 'Abdu'l-Baha".

In addition to his Baha'i work Rowland maintained a busy professional life. In 1952 the oldest insurance brokerage firm in North America asked him to set up employment benefits departments for their four Canadian branches. He accepted and stayed with the firm for twenty years. By the time he retired in 1971 he was a vice president. He later said that all of his Baha'i work and the traveling he did for his company "was all wrong for family life." He and Yvonne remained married for the sake of the children; but when he went to Reykjavik, Iceland, in September 1971 as general chairman for the North Atlantic Oceanic Conference, he went alone. His second marriage had ended.

Rowland spent the next six months on a tour of Central America and the Caribbean. At Ridván 1972 he attended the Convention held in Barbados for the election of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Windward Islands, and there he met 30 In 1963 Auxiliary Board members who were also serving on National Spiritual Assemblies were asked to choose between the two fields of service.

Vivian Taylor, an American Baha'i and pioneer, to whom he had been introduced at Green Acre in 1965. The two began to develop a relationship. Rowland returned to Canada where the numerical expansion of young believers made the first concerted teaching activity in francophone Canada possible in 1972. The National Spiritual Assembly asked Jenabe Caldwell from Alaska to help with a mass teaching effort in Quebec, and a team of about thirty to forty Baha'i youth was formed. Rowland, as liaison for the National Assembly, traveled with

them. The success of this project led the National Spiritual Assembly to sponsor another youth teaching team, this time four young men and women coordinated by Poova Murday of Mauritius. The team spent five weeks from December 1972 through January 1973 in Martinique and Guadeloupe, and through its efforts, nine new Local Assemblies were formed, and nearly a thousand new believers enrolled. Rowland and Vivian married in December 1972 and offered to pioneer to the Caribbean. Asked to go to Martinique for "crisis consolidation," they arrived on January 31, 1973. Virtually every day for the next two and a half months they traveled from village to village calling on the people who had enrolled. Meetings were held, commitments were deepened, and at Ridván all six of the Martinican Assemblies were re-formed-a major achievement. On June 5, 1973, the Baha'i world was thrilled by the announcement from the Universal House of Justice of the establishment of the International Teaching Centre. Three days later Rowland was stunned to learn that he had been appointed as a Counsellor for Central America. "I became busier than I had ever been in my life," he stated. During his seven years as a Counsellor, he helped to lay the foundations for the formation of the National Assemblies of the French Antilles, the Leeward Islands, the Windward Islands, and Martinique and Guadeloupe and for the Anis Zunuzi School in Haiti. He and Vivian returned to Canada in 1981, advised by the Universal House of Justice to better attend to the needs of their health and economic future. They settled in the Toronto area where Vivian was treated for cancer before her passing in September 1985. Rowland remained in their home until he needed care. During a hospitalization in 1989 he befriended his Irish nurse Joan Dunne and began to teach her the Faith. She declared late in 1991, and early in 1992 they married in Toronto. They spent three months in Barbados before moving to Duncan on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Rowland passed away there on March 7, 1993.

Upon learning of his death the Universal House of Justice wrote on March 10, 1993:

We are distressed to learn of the passing of Rowland Estall who rendered distinguished services to the Faith for over six decades, including periods of service as Continental Counsellor, Auxiliary Board member, and as member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada for no less than 25 years. His highly meritorious contributions to the establishment of the Cause also included international pioneering to Martinique as well as homefront pioneering to a number of Canadian cities. He will long be remembered for the outstanding part he played in the initial growth of the Canadian Baha' f community and in the development of its international role. Prayers will be offered in the Holy Shrines for the progress of his soul. Kindly convey our condolences to his wife and children in this time of their bereavement.

- From tributes written by Jameson Bond and Michael Rochester and research by Will van den Hoonard

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