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## Harold Gordon Skilling fonds

**B2012-0005**

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**Biographical Sketch**

Harold Gordon Skilling (February 12, 1912 – March 2, 2001) was born in Toronto to Alice and William Skilling, and was the youngest of four boys.

In 1925, Skilling registered at Harbord Collegiate Institute where he excelled academically and became involved with several extracurricular activities, such as serving as president of the Literary Society, the associate editor of the *Harbord Review*, the battalion commander of the cadet corps, and playing basketball on the junior team. Skilling managed to graduate with twelve firsts in twelve subjects and was also awarded the Gundy-Doran scholarship in Canadian history, which helped to secure funding for future studies at the University of Toronto.

Skilling went on to study at University College at the University of Toronto. Here, too, he excelled academically and was first in his class in all years except his final year. He was likewise still involved with extracurricular activities, including the University College Literary and Athletic Society (of which he became president in his final year), associate editor of the *Varsity*, the Historical Club, pledged to the Psi Upsilon fraternity, and continued with studying the piano at the Toronto Conservatory of Music.

Skilling credits his time at the University of Toronto as bringing about significant changes in his way of thinking. He had begun to move away from the religious faith of his childhood and become increasingly supportive of socialism. A hitchhiking trip through North America during the summer of 1933 helped to crystallize his politics as he saw the effects of the Depression first hand. Returning to school in the fall of 1933, Skilling helped to organize and became the president of a Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) club at the University of Toronto. As his interest in politics grew, he became increasingly interested in and committed to Marxism. He graduated from the University of Toronto in 1934.

In the autumn of 1934, Skilling left for Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar where he studied at Christ Church College and focused on interdisciplinary studies of philosophy, politics, and economics, as well as modern history and international relations. Skilling took this as an opportunity to travel throughout England and Europe. During the summer of 1935, Skilling made his first visit to Central Europe and Yugoslavia [Yugoslavia]. Beginning in Vienna, he took a boat along the Danube through Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Serbia, Romania, and travelled further to Turkey, Greece, Macedonia, Bosnia, and Croatia. This would be his first introduction to the complex ethnic, cultural, and political landscape of the region.

Back in England, Skilling was first introduced to Sally Bright on November 2, 1935. Bright was an accomplished scholar herself, and studied sociology and economics at Barnard College in New York City and was studying at the London School of Economics when she was introduced to Skilling. They were married in Prague on October 16, 1937.

Skilling received a Masters degree from Oxford in 1936, and soon after decided to focus his studies on Central and Eastern European studies with a primary interest in Czechoslovakia. He moved to London to pursue a doctorate under the guidance of R.W. Seton-Watson at the University of London's School of Slavonic and East European Studies. Skilling focused on studying the Czech language and researching Czech history, and began work on his doctoral thesis in May, 1938. Skilling's doctoral thesis was completed and approved in 1940. It was recommended for publication by the examiners, however, due to wartime pressure, this did not occur.

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**Biographical Sketch**

Increasing tensions throughout Europe—including the Spanish Civil War, Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, and increasing German aggression—strengthened Skilling’s commitment to socialism and convinced him to join the Communist party in 1937. He secured work at the Czechoslovak Broadcasting Corporation in May, 1938, which allowed him to witness firsthand the troubling events in Czechoslovakia in 1938-39. After further travels throughout Europe, Skilling and his wife returned to England only one month before war broke out.

In July 1940, Skilling and Sally returned to Canada, and Skilling took up an assistant position at the United College in Winnipeg, followed by a position as assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin in 1941, and, in 1947, a position at Dartmouth College, where he and his family remained for the next twelve years. Skilling began work in 1946 to revise his doctoral thesis and to extend it to include the period up to 1914 with the intention of eventually publishing the finished work. The new title for the revised thesis is “The Czech-German Conflict in Bohemia, 1867-1914.” Skilling worked on the revision up until at least the 1970s, when it was rejected for publication by the University of Toronto Press. Throughout these years, he also travelled regularly to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. In 1958, he accepted a position of head of the Department of Political Science and Economics and a full professorship at the University of Toronto, and in 1962 became the Director of the Centre for Russian and East European Studies (CREES)—a position that he held until 1974. Through his involvement with CREES, Professor Skilling worked to develop exchange programs with the Soviet Union.

Skilling’s position at the University of Toronto allowed him ample time for travel and research. In 1961-62 while on sabbatical, Skilling moved his family to Vienna as he travelled through the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Four years later, in 1966, he returned to the Soviet Union to discuss an exchange program. During the summer of 1967 Skilling visited Czechoslovakia, East Germany and Poland. He returned to Czechoslovakia in May 1968 to witness the Prague Spring and again in the autumn of the same year. In 1969 Skilling again visited Czechoslovakia as well as Yugoslavia in order to gain insight into Yugoslav attitudes toward the events in Prague in the previous year. He would return to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union several more times throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as well as travelling extensively throughout North America for conferences and to give lectures. Professor Skilling also became increasingly active in advocating for human rights in Eastern Europe during this time.

In 1981, Skilling stopped teaching and was awarded the rank of professor emeritus. Several other honours soon followed: in 1981, Skilling was awarded the Innis-Gérin medal from the Royal Society of Canada and was made a life member of the Canadian Association of Slavists (CAS) and of the Czechoslovak Society of Science and Art (SVU); in 1982, the University of Toronto awarded Skilling with an honorary LL.D; in 1985 he was awarded the Masaryk Award from the Czechoslovak Association of Canada; in 1987 the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies honoured Skilling for his distinguished contributions to Slavic studies (he had also been elected to the board in 1981); and in 1992, on Skilling’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, President Havel awarded him with the Order of the White Lion—the highest honour for non-citizens. Several other honours and awards followed, some of which are listed below in Series 3.

Professor Skilling passed away on March 2, 2001 at his home in Toronto at the age of 89.

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**Harold Gordon Skilling fonds**

### **Scope and Content**

Textual, graphic, artifacts 1917-1997, 1.8 m.

The material consists of the personal records of Professor Skilling and focuses primarily of Skilling's academic work, and includes research notes and drafts of his doctoral thesis, *The German-Czech National Conflict in Bohemia, 1779-1873*, as well as notes and drafts supporting the revision of this thesis, which Skilling worked on for several years. There is also some correspondence with other scholars in the field of Eastern European studies, as well as publishers and editors.

The accession also contains some of Professor Skilling's personal belongings and awards, such as medals, honorary degrees, and photographs and slides of his personal and professional life.

It has been divided into the following series:

1. Academic work
2. Personal life
3. Awards and recognition

**Access:** Open

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**Harold Gordon Skilling fonds**

**Series 1: Academic work**

[1930?] – [197-?]

0.6m ; 5 boxes

Textual

This series consists of Professor Skilling's academic work, including research notes, materials related to his doctoral thesis (*The German-Czech National Conflict in Bohemia, 1879-1893*), and materials related to the revision his doctoral thesis (*The Czech-German Conflict in Bohemia, 1867-1914*). These three kinds of academic material have been identified by headings within the file list. All file titles are provided by Skilling's own filing system, unless otherwise indicated by square brackets.

The research notes were likely used to support the writing of Skilling's theses. Some of the notes have been organized by Skilling according to subject, whereas others are organized by date. The notes organized by dates have tabbed subjects inserted into the research notes; however, these subjects have not been listed in the finding aid. All notes refer to Central and Eastern Europe. Although the research notes are not dated, they are assumed to correspond with his theses and have been dated accordingly.

Records relating specifically to Skilling's doctoral thesis consist of drafts, notes, and research material. The thesis was titled "The German-Czech National Conflict in Bohemia, 1879-1893," was completed between 1936 and 1940, and was approved in June of 1940.

Records relating to the revised thesis, *The Czech-German Conflict in Bohemia, 1867-1914*, consist primarily of notes and drafts contributing to the revision. There is also correspondence between Skilling and several other academics and publishers, much of which deals with publication of the finished thesis and requests for research material that would be available in North America ["Thesis Revision 1946," /005(01)]. There are drafts and correspondence with Henry L. Roberts, the editor of the *Slavic Review*, regarding the publication of an article by Skilling entitled "Social and Economic Aspects of the Czech-German Conflict in Bohemia in the Late Nineteenth Century." The subject of this article corresponds to the second chapter of Skilling's revised thesis. Skilling worked on the revision beginning in 1946 and up to at least the 1970s, when it was rejected for publication by the University of Toronto Press. The records have therefore been dated as such.

Box	File	Title	Dates
<b>B2012-0005</b>			
<b>Research notes</b>			
/001	(01)	Research notes: Czech and Austrian history – 1848 - 1867	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(02)	Research notes: Czech history to 1790 - 2	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(03)	Research notes: Czech history 1792 - 1848	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(04)	Research notes: Czech history - Odložilík	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(05)	Research notes: Bohemia – Labour and social democracy	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(06)	Research notes: Bohemia – Economic and social setting	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(07)	Research notes: Austria-Hungary (general commentaries) 1867 - 1914	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(08)	Research notes: Austria-Hungary 1867 - 1914	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(09)	Research notes: Seton Watson seminars	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(10)	Research notes: 1879 – 1880 [1 of 2]	[193-?] ]-[197-?]

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**Harold Gordon Skilling fonds**

<b>Box</b>	<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Dates</b>
<b>B2012-0005</b>			
/002	(01)	Research notes: 1879 - 1880 [2 of 2]	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(02)	Research notes: 1880 - 1881	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(03)	Research notes: 1881 - 1883	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(04)	Research notes: 1883 - 1885	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(05)	Research notes: 1885 - 1886	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(06)	Research notes: 1886 - 1887	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
/003	(01)	Research notes: 1887 - 1888	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(02)	Research notes: 1888 - 1889	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(03)	Research notes: 1889	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(04)	Research notes: 1889 - 1890	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(05)	Research notes: "Compromise" (1890)	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(06)	Research notes: 1890	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(07)	Research notes: 1891 - 1893	[193-?] ]-[197-?]
	(08)	Research notes: Miscellaneous	1983
<b>Doctoral thesis</b>			
/004	(09)	Doctoral thesis: Tentative plan of thesis (Czech history to 1914)	1936-1940
	(01)	Doctoral thesis: Chapter 3 – Materials: language	1936-1940
	(02)	Doctoral thesis: Chapter 4 – Materials: university	1936-1940
	(03)	Doctoral thesis: Chapter 4: Education	1936-1940
	(04)	Doctoral thesis: Chapter 5 – Materials: notes	1936-1940
	(05)	Doctoral thesis: Chapter 6: Drafts and materials	1936-1940
<b>Revised thesis</b>			
/005	(01)	Thesis revision 1946	1946
	(02)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapters I - III	1946-[197-?]
	(03)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapters IV - VI	1946-[197-?]
	(04)	Revised thesis: Chapter VI, notes	1946-[197-?]
	(05)	Revised thesis: Chapter VII, notes and drafts	1946-[197-?]
	(06)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapter VII	1946-[197-?]
	(07)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapter VIII [ <i>Slavonic Review</i> article]	1949
	(08)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapter IX	1946-[197-?]
	(09)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapter X	1946-[197-?]
	(10)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapter XI	1946-[197-?]
	(11)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapter XIII	1946-[197-?]
	(12)	Revised thesis: Czech-German Conflict, chapter XIV	1946-[197-?]
	(13)	<i>Slavic Review</i> article: "Social and Economic Aspects of the Czech-German Conflict in Bohemia in the Late 19th Century"	1966

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**Harold Gordon Skilling fonds**

**Series 2: Personal life**

1917 – 1997

0.14m ; 2 boxes

Textual; graphic

This series consists of personal items belonging to Professor Skilling, including address books, photographs and slides, an identification card, and his marriage certificate issued in Czechoslovakia (with corresponding Canadian documentation).

The photographs have been organized according to portraits, personal and family life, early school, professional life, and slides. The majority of the photographs are annotated and dated on the verso, and the slides are numbered and dated. Two photographs in “Professional life” [B2012-0005/001P(04)] that are not annotated or dated show Professor Skilling receiving an honorary degree (LL.D) from the University of Toronto in 1982. He is flanked by President James Ham and Chancellor George Ignatieff.

There are four newspaper clippings related to Professor Skilling. The first is a congratulatory message, possibly published in a newsletter issued by the West United Church, about Skilling having won The Gundy-Doran scholarship [dated between 1929-1934]. The second clipping is a photograph of Skilling and his Harbord Collegiate institute junior basketball team [ca. 1928-29]. The third clipping is an article entitled “Viet Nam situation called threat to unity” [1966]. Skilling is quoted and discussed at length in the article. The final clipping is a profile (in English) on H. Gordon Skilling, published in *The Prague Post* in 1994.

<b>Box</b>	<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Dates</b>
<b>B2012-0005</b>			
/006	(01)	Marriage certificate [in Czech] and notarized Canadian equivalent	1937
	(02)	Address book, labelled “Addresses;” post-it note: “Prague address book”	n.d.
	(03)	Address book, labelled “Addresses”	n.d.
	(04)	Address book, labelled “Direcciones,” post-it note: “International addresses”	n.d.
	(05)	Identification for Skilling in Czechoslovakia	1977
	(06)	Newspaper clippings related to Professor Skilling [4 clippings]	1929-1994
	(07)	Two envelopes with Czech stamps addressed to Professor Skilling and Centre for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Toronto	1973, 1979
<b>Graphic</b>			
/001P	(01)	Photographs: Skilling – Portraits	1934-1980
	(02)	Photographs: Skilling – Personal life and family	1917-1997
	(03)	Photographs: Skilling – Early school	1929-1934
	(04)	Photographs: Skilling – Professional life	1974-1982
	(05)	Tray of slides, labelled “Praha, June, Oct. 1968”	1968
	(06)	Tray of slides, labelled “Prague, October 1968”	1968
	(07)	Tray of slides labelled “Praha, 1969, 1975; Slovakia 1975”	1969, 1975
	(08)	Tray of slides, labelled “1967 – Gdynia; 1968, Oct. – Bratislava”	1967-1968

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**Harold Gordon Skilling fonds**

**Series 3: Awards and recognition**

1928 – 1996

0.79m; 2 boxes

Textual; artifacts

This series consists of awards, diplomas, certificates, honorary degrees, and medals awarded to Professor Skilling throughout his career—many of which are from the Czech Republic. In May 2012, several items were loaned for an exhibition in Prague (and have been returned).

All items in box /007 are oversize materials and were tightly curled. They are now stored in individual folders within a flat document box.

The medals remain in their original cases and have been indicated below. The boxes have not been numbered individually, however they should be identifiable based on the descriptions below. All medals and other artifacts are boxed together.

When appropriate, the original Czech text has been listed along with approximate English translations in square brackets.

<b>Box</b>	<b>File</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Dates</b>
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**Awards and Degrees**

/007	(01)	Award: Československá akademie věd [Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences] for his achievements in the social sciences	1992
	(02)	Certificate of award of Josefa Hlávka medal. (The associated medal is in one of the larger blue boxes)	1992
	(03)	Certificate granting honorary membership to Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Science	1980
	(04)	Honorary <i>Legum Doctoris</i> degree awarded by the University of Toronto	1982
	(05)	Bachelor of Arts diploma from U of T	1934
	(06)	Associate of the Toronto Conservatory of Music University of Toronto	1933
	(07)	Royal Society of Canada, <i>Diploma Aggregationis</i>	1970
	(08)	Dartmouth, <i>Artium Magistrum</i> diploma	1951
	(09)	Czechoslovak Association of Canada, Masaryk Award (accompanying medal)	n.d.
	(10)	American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Award for Distinguished Contributions to Slavic Studies	1988
	(11)	Masarykova společnost [Masaryk Society], Honorary Member	1996
	(12)	Award: University of Toronto, 25 Year Service Award	1989
	(13)	Award: Charles University, Prague, Honorary Doctorate	1990

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Series 3: Awards and recognition

Box	Title	Dates
<b>B2012-0005</b>		
<b>Medals</b>		
/001ART	Chain with two medals: "The Golden Galloway Medal, awarded for mathematics, 1930, H. Gordon Skilling"; University College crest on front; verso, "H.G. Skilling, Pres, 1933-4, Soc. Dir. 193203, 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr. pres. 1931-32"	1930-1934
/002ART	Medal: University College crest enameled on front; verso: "H.G. Skilling, member of Debating Team, winner Robinette Shield, 1930-1931"	1931
/003ART	Medal: "Harbord Collegiate Institute, Toronto"	n.d.
/004ART	Medal, front: image of baseball player, with letters 'T.C.B.L.' [Toronto Collegiate Baseball League?]; verso: "Midget champs 1928"	1928
/005ART	Medal, front: "Tuxis : Trail Rangers : Sapientia : Statura : Sanctitas : Sodalitas" ; "Skilling" scratched on back	n.d.
/006ART	Pocket watch, with etching on back "H. Gordon Skilling, September 1931" and crest of fraternity Psi Upsilon (Skilling was a member of its NU chapter at the U of T)	1931
/007ART	Medal: The Royal Society of Canada, Innis-Gérin (in black box)	1981
/008ART	Medal: Tomas G. Masaryk, "Na pamět 85 narozenin prvního presidenta Republiky Československé [ For the memory of the 85 <sup>th</sup> Birthday of the First President of Czechoslovakia]	n.d.
/009ART	Medal: Edvard Beneš, Československý a Evropský Politik Medal (in light blue box). "Sponzor: Spořitelní investiční společnost a.s. Praha."	1994
/010ART	Medal: K významnému životnímu jubileu Hlavní město Praha, Medal (in red box)	n.d.
/011ART	Medal: Pamětní medaile Československá akademie věd [Commemorative Medal Czechoslovak Academy of Science], (in navy box)	n.d.
/012ART	Medal: Československá akademie věd Za zásluhy o rozvoj společenských věd [Czechoslovak Academy of Science For Contributions to the Development of Social Sciences], (in navy box)	n.d.
/013ART	Medal: from Charles University [in bi-fold case]	1990?
/014ART	Case for Professor Skilling's honorary doctorate from Charles University, Prague [degree has been moved to /006(09)]	1990