William L. Russell, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry of the Cornell University Medical College and Medical Director Emeritus of the New York Hospital-Westchester Division, White Plains, New York, and formerly Psychiatric Director of the Society of the New York Hospital, died of a heart condition in Santa Barbara, California, on March 31, 1951, at the age of eighty-seven.

Of English and Scottish ancestry, Dr. Russell was born in New Brunswick, Canada, July 24, 1863. He received his early education in Canada and came to this country for professional study, receiving the degree of Doctor of Medicine from the Medical College of New York University in 1885. He served his internship in the Jersey City Hospital and had his first psychiatric experience in the New Jersey State Hospital at Morris Plains, New Jersey. He entered private practice in New York City in 1888 and remained there until 1897.

In 1897 Dr. Russell accepted an appointment as First Assistant Physician of the Willard State Hospital. There he became interested not only in clinical psychiatry but in the broader aspects of community needs, psychiatric administration, and training.

In 1903 Dr. Russell was appointed Medical Inspector on the staff of the New York State Hospital Commission. He visited and inspected all the state hospitals and licensed private institutions for the mentally sick. He early became interested in the training of nurses for psychiatric hospitals and gave much attention to the organization of the schools for training in the state hospitals.

Dr. Russell was impressed with the need for improved methods of caring for patients prior to their admission to state hospitals from their homes and was active in transferring by legislation this responsibility from the superintendents of the poor and other officials to the medical health officers of the communities.

His interest in mental hygiene came early. He realized the problem of mental health could not be solved by the hospitals alone. He was interested in the action of the State Charities Aid Association in undertaking aftercare service for discharged patients, and he became a member of the first mental hygiene committee of the State Charities Aid Association. Later he became an active member of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene and was chairman of the executive committee, and also Vice-President of that organization.
In 1910 Dr. Russell was transferred from the position of Medical Inspector to that of Superintendent of the Brooklyn State Hospital.

On July 1, 1911 Dr. Russell became Medical Director of the New York Hospital-Westchester Division, then known as Bloomingdale Hospital. With the support of the Governors of the hospital, Dr. Russell entered immediately upon a program of improving and advancing the various services of the hospital. Under his direction the hospital became a center for the training of psychiatrists and other workers in the field. The plant was completely renovated, many additions were constructed, and in 1916 the first of the buildings for the program therapies was completed, the building for occupational therapy for men. The following year a library for patients was established. Before the other occupational therapy building for women and the two gymnasia were built, the departments of occupational therapy, physical education, and physiotherapy were organized and staffed with trained workers. The grounds were developed including walks, play fields, and a golf course. Later a staff house, cottages for physicians, and a nurses’ residence were completed. After bringing to pass the dreams of the founders of the hospital, he became interested in the establishment of a psychiatric department in the City of New York, and in 1926 he was appointed General Psychiatric Director of the Department of Psychiatry of the Society of the New York Hospital. He devoted much of his time to the planning and organization of the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic of the New York Hospital, which was opened in 1932. He continued in active service until his retirement in 1936. His interest did not wane and in addition to his many community and committee activities, he compiled a History of the Psychiatric Service of the New York Hospital, which was published in 1945.

Dr. Russell was Professor of Psychiatry at Cornell University Medical College from 1928 to 1932. He was Consultant in Psychiatry to the New York Hospital, to Grasslands Hospital, and the Burke Foundation.

He was a member of the American Medical Association, the American Psychiatric Association, of which he was President in 1931, the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, the New York Psychiatric Society, of which he was President in 1914 and 1915, the New York Society for Clinical Psychiatry, the Medical Society of the State of New York, the Medical Society of the County of Westchester, of which he was President in 1919, the Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Diseases, and a Fellow of the New York Academy of Medicine. He was a Diplomate of the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. He was also a member of the National Arts Club.

Dr. Russell was a member of the Advisory Committee to the National Institute of Mental Health of the U. S. Public Health Service.
His many publications in scientific journals showed his broad interests in administration, teaching, and mental hygiene.

In 1888 Dr. Russell married Addie Lewis, who died in 1935. He is survived by two sons, Dr. Ernest F. Russell, a psychiatrist of Santa Barbara, California, and Mr. Blake Russell of New York.

Dr. Russell was a strong and vigorous leader who was loved and respected by all who knew him. He had great vision and a firm grasp of all that was good and constructive in the intensive treatment of the sick and troubled. A diligent student, he learned from those who preceded him and from those with whom he worked. With the courage of his convictions, unstinted devotion and indefatigable energy he accomplished much for the State, the communities, and the hospitals he served so long and well. Ever mindful of the trust and responsibilities of his positions, and with the generous support of those who believed in him, he was able to advance the psychiatric services of the New York Hospital, living reflections of his ideals, ability and life’s work.

James H. Wall