

AMS in the Twentieth Century

This is a series of nine essays that appeared in the editorial column of the *Notices of the American Mathematical Society* during 1999 and 2000. The authors are Allyn Jackson (J) and Anthony W. Knapp (K). The titles and dates of publication are as follows:

May 1999, Maxime Bocher, (K).

August 1999, The *Bulletin* and the Start of the *Proceedings*, (K).

September 1999, Frank Nelson Cole, (K).

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January 2000, The Start of the New *Notices*, (K).

April 2000, A Different Era of Advertising, (J).

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Notices

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Editorial

The AMS in Retrospect

At this time toward the end of the century, some publications are reviewing the past hundred years to see what can be learned, while others are predicting the future, always a hazardous thing to do. The *Notices* has already published some predictions about mathematics in the coming century, and now it undertakes a small project of review, highlighting some of the giant figures and activities of the AMS during the past one hundred years. This column and some future ones between now and the end of 2000 quote from two history books: *A Semicentennial History of the American Mathematical Society 1888-1938* by Raymond Clare Archibald and *A History of the Second Fifty Years, American Mathematical Society 1939-1988* by Everett Pitcher, both published by the AMS.

—Anthony W. Knapp

AMS in the Twentieth Century

Maxime Bôcher

We begin our series about the important figures and activities of the AMS during the past century with Maxime Bôcher (1867-1918), in whose memory the Society created the Bôcher Prize. This prize, given every five years, was recently awarded to Demetrios Christodoulou, Sergiu Klainerman, and Thomas Wolff (*Notices*, April 1999).

Maxime Bôcher was the tenth president of the Society, 1909-1910, and an important mathematician, but we describe only his role in connection with the *Transactions of the AMS*. We quote from the *Semicentennial History* about his work as editor, a post he held during 1908-1909 and 1911-1913:

"He was a fine critic, ever free with constructive suggestions. For many years he served as an assoc. ed. of [*the Annals of Mathematics*]. He was never very strong, and long he had to combat ill health...."

The founding of the *Transactions* is described elsewhere in the *Semicentennial History*: "Prof. W. F. Osgood's [editor of the *Transactions*, 1910, and eighth president of the AMS, 1905-1906] vivid reminiscences of events... may be inserted here.

"Toward the end of the nineties the need of a journal for the publication of mathematical material became more and more pressing. The *American Journal of Mathematics* [published by Johns Hopkins University] inclined naturally enough to the European groups from which its contributions had come in the past, and although in financial straits, failed to discern new strength in young mathematicians of this country....

"Finally a meeting was called in New York by Fiske [founder and seventh president of the AMS, 1903-1904] to consider the project ... with Fiske in the chair, Dr. McClintock [second president of the AMS, 1891-1994] on his right and Bôcher on his left....

"Bôcher was a man with a passion for fair dealing and with extraordinary insight and judgment. ... [H]e turned to McClintock and said: 'Will Doctor McClintock be so good as to state his views for us?' In substance Dr. McClintock said that he should consider the founding of a journal which would be a rival or competitor of the *American Journal* unfortunate, and that such a step would be of the nature of an unfriendly act toward The Johns Hopkins. Here was opposition with a vengeance, for Dr. McClintock was one of the strongest mathematicians among the older men, and he had been President of the American Mathematical Society. It was a most unpleasant difficulty that now suddenly confronted us. And then, with something akin to genius, Bôcher's great powers of diplomacy came to the rescue. With all the grace and dignity and charm which were a part of his simple and direct nature he said: 'Would Doctor McClintock feel it improper for the Society to publish its *Transactions*?'

"No, certainly not. Any society may publish its *Transactions*. With that formula, the one word 'Transactions' replacing an opprobrious word like 'Journal' or 'Annals' or 'Acta', the whole opposition collapsed and good relations were established. The power of a word!

"... [In April 1899] the committee reported to the Council that towards the support of the publication of the *Transactions*, the subscriptions of one hundred dollars a year for five years had been practically guaranteed by representatives of each of nine institutions; a tenth was added to this list before the first number (96 p.) was published in January 1900."

—A.W.K.

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

The *Bulletin* and the Start of the *Proceedings*

This is the second in a series of columns about important figures and activities of the AMS during the past century. It is based on histories of the first and second fifty years of the AMS, written by Raymond Clare Archibald and Everett Pitcher, respectively. The first column in the series discussed Maxime Bôcher and the founding of the *Transactions*.

The *Bulletin* was the original publication of the Society, and the *Proceedings* grew out of it. Concerning the founding of the *Bulletin* in 1891, Archibald writes, "President McClintock reported...that the proposed bulletin should...contain, primarily, historical and critical articles, accounts of advances in different branches of mathematical science, reviews of important new publications, and general mathematical news and intelligence. ...The *Bulletin* started out with the title, *Bulletin of the New York Mathematical Society. A Historical and Critical Review of Mathematical Science*, and the only change in title during the next thirty years was the substitution of the word 'American' for 'New York', beginning with the fourth v[olume]." This change occurred in 1894 at the time of the renaming of the Society, and the numbering of the volumes was started again from 1, the new volumes being called the second series. The subtitle was dropped in 1931.

Archibald writes about the early editors of the *Bulletin* and the quality of the articles: "For the 45 v[olumes] of the *Bulletin*, 1891-1936, there were only three editors-in-chief [T. S. Fiske, the Society founder; F. N. Cole; and E. R. Hedrick]; with Hedrick's resignation this term was changed to 'managing editor'." Archibald reports that the first seven years of the *Bulletin* included eight articles by M. Bôcher, six by L. E. Dickson, four by J. E. McClintock, fourteen by G. A. Miller, seven by E. H. Moore, four by W. F. Osgood, and one by F. Klein. As to Cole, he writes, "The minute care and wisdom exercised in...editing is noticeable in every volume." He continues, "During Hedrick's administration the standard for the acceptance of material became necessarily high, and the effective presentation of the complex contents notable. The Society's debt to Hedrick in this regard alone is great, calling as it did for an enormous amount of personal attention to details. By order of the Council the *Bulletin*, v. 44, 1938, was dedicated to him, and has his portrait as frontispiece."

Pitcher takes this volume as a typical one from the point of view of its content: "The volume 44 of 1938...contained reports of meetings, book reviews, notes on conferences, appointments and deaths, abstracts of contributed papers, and research papers. There was a list of contributed papers (i.e. abstracts) with bibliographic information on subsequent publication, and an index. Finally, the list of officers and members, the bylaws and the report of the treasurer were a part of the volume in a separate issue."

He continues, "In 1930, the journal had been separated into gray issues, consisting exclusively of short papers, and green issues, consisting of everything else, though the color differentiation of the cover did not appear until 1931. The supplement constituting the membership list was covered in a bright yellow. ...After World War II, the volume of material offered for publication increased and so did the backlog of the two journals [the *Bulletin* and the *Transactions*]. ...An Emergency Publication Committee...was appointed. ...With some modification [its 1949] report was adopted by the Council and the committee discharged. There were two sets of recommendations.

"First, the gray issues of the *Bulletin* were to be published beginning in 1950 as a separate journal known as the *Proceedings of the American Mathematical Society*. The green issues were to continue as the entire content of the *Bulletin*. ...Second, a new publication called the *Memoirs of the American Mathematical Society* was to be created."

These recommendations were approved and were implemented partly in 1949 and partly in 1950. Pitcher continues, "With the year 1950, the gray issues of the *Bulletin* assumed independent identity as the...*Proceedings*... Volume 55 from 1949 is the last volume of the *Bulletin* with the dual character. In 1950 the editors of the *Proceedings* reported that their backlog had been reduced but was still large and requested additional pages for the coming year. By the end of 1951, the *Bulletin*, the *Proceedings*, and the *Transactions* all stated that their backlogs were small."

—Anthony W. Knapp

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

Frank Nelson Cole

Frank Nelson Cole (1861–1926) was secretary of the AMS and editor-in-chief of the *Bulletin* for more than twenty years. In his honor the AMS Cole Prize is awarded twice every five years—once in algebra and once in number theory. The most recent recipients are Michel Raynaud and David Harbater (in algebra in 1995) and Andrew Wiles (in number theory in 1997). In the November 1997 *Notices* one reads, "The original [Cole Prize] fund was donated by Professor Cole from moneys presented to him on his retirement, was augmented by contributions from members of the Society, and was later doubled by his son."

Cole's research was largely in finite groups and in the application of Galois theory to polynomials of the fifth and sixth degrees. He was a master lecturer. It is said that his 1903 address "On the factoring of large numbers" to the Society was met with a standing ovation after he lectured without saying a single word, multiplying two large integers and verifying that their product was $2^{67} - 1$, a number that Mersenne had thought should have been prime.

Some information about Cole may be found in a book on the history of the first fifty years of the AMS, written by Raymond Clare Archibald. Archibald writes, "After two years under Klein at Leipzig, Cole spent the next three years at Harvard, where his career as an undergraduate had been so brilliant. Aglow with enthusiasm, he gave courses in modern higher algebra, and in the theory of functions of a complex variable, geometrically treated, as in Klein's famous course of lectures at Leipzig in 1881–82. He was the first to open up modern mathematics to Prof. Osgood, as a student, who characterized the lectures as 'truly inspiring.' Another student, M. Bôcher, as well as nearly all members of the Department, attended his lectures. He received the doctor's degree from Harvard."

Thomas S. Fiske, founder of the AMS, took on the combined roles of the first secretary of the AMS and founding editor of the *Bulletin*. Archibald writes, "[Cole] was appointed prof. of math. at Columbia U. and Barnard C. in 1895, and immediately relieved Fiske of his burden as secretary of the Society; two years later he became an assoc[iate] editor of the *Bulletin*. In the following spring Fiske was appointed chm. of a comm[ittee], whose recommendations later led to the founding of the *Transactions*. Work on this comm[ittee] demanded so much of his time and thought, that he resigned as editor-in-chief of the *Bulletin*, and Cole assumed this office in Feb. 1899 and continued as both secretary and editor to the end of 1920....

"Cole's twenty-two years of joint service as secretary of the Society and editor-in-chief of the *Bulletin* began just as the decision had been made to publish the *Transactions*, twenty-one v[olumes] of which were issued during his régime, and added not a little to the load that he carried as secretary.... Except for changes which would naturally result from [thirty years of increasing mathematical activity], the general style of the *Bulletin* was simply a continuation of the features so thoughtfully developed by Prof. Fiske. Cole (as Fiske before him) suppressed any reference to himself as editor-in-chief, and put in one group the names of assist[ant] editors and members of the committee of publication....

"Beginning with 1921, a period of many changes was initiated. The tremendous load carried by Cole was...divided between Prof. Richardson, the new secretary, and Prof. Hedrick, the new editor-in-chief of the *Bulletin*....

"The frontispiece of the AMS *Bull[etin]*, v. 27 (1920–21) is an excellent likeness of Cole at that time, and the Council ordered that the v[olume] be dedicated to him, 'in appreciation of his devotion to the Society during his twenty-six years as Secretary and in recognition of his leadership in the editorial work of the *Bulletin* for the past twenty-four years.'"

—Anthony W. Knapp

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

The Start of the *Notices*

In his book on the history of the AMS from 1938 to 1988, Everett Pitcher writes, "From the beginning of the Society through 1953, preliminary announcements and programs of meetings were issued as separate.... In 1954 the *Notices* began as a periodical. One purpose was to take advantage of the favorable postal rates allowed to periodical publications...."

"In addition to preliminary announcements and programs of meetings, the *Notices* contained notes on appointments and news about publications in mathematics. Announcements of fellowships, grants, and conferences appeared in increasing numbers. Abstracts of contributed papers were moved from the *Bulletin* to the *Notices* effective in 1958.

"Letters to the Editor were a frequent subject of disagreement in the development of the *Notices*.... Not until 1958 did Letters to the Editor become a feature.... The [first] letter was followed by this note:

The purpose of this new department is to provide a forum for discussions of the programs of the Society, and a method for communicating information of interest to the membership. Questions concerning matters of scholarship, such as those relating to the location of primary references, will be welcomed.

The Council has instructed the Editor of the *Notices* not to allow the new department to be used for quick publication of mathematical results, and not to accept criticism of *specific individual papers* or of *specific individual reviews in Mathematical Reviews* or elsewhere....

"The last paragraph of the note corresponds to the fact that the editor [who was then the executive director, J. H. Curtiss] was solely responsible for the acceptance of letters."

Letters were a controversial subject both for the range of the allowable content and for the power to decide which particular letters were acceptable. A "forum for discussions of the programs of the Society" offered the potential for a conflict of interest on the part of the person deciding about letters, and various schemes were tried over a period of time to get around this problem.

Pitcher continues, "Abstracts of papers presented at meetings or offered by title were printed in the *Bulletin* after the fact for many years. The system was changed so that abstracts appeared currently in the *Notices*, effective with [1958]. This arrangement continued through 1979, at which point the journal *Abstracts of the American Mathematical Society* was started.

"From its beginning [in 1891], the *Bulletin* was the journal of record of the Society. It contained reports of Council and Business Meetings, elections, reports of the treasurer, bylaws, and other items of Society business affecting its membership. The Council of 26 January 1977, in the course of considering the redirection of the *Bulletin*, ordered that the *Notices* become the journal of record of the Society...."

"Abstracts were only the beginning of the appearance of substantive mathematics in the *Notices*. It had always been regarded as a 'throwaway' journal, of little value after the occurrence of the programs listed in it. Already in 1972... a column called 'Queries' was instituted...."

"When the journal became one of record, it was realistic to put articles with mathematical content of more permanent value in it. In 1982, Ronald L. Graham was named associate editor for special articles and the first such article... appeared in the February issue. The new direction was a source of discontent among those readers whose concept was still that of a throwaway."

Twenty-three "special articles" appeared in the *Notices* between 1982 and 1993. By the early 1990s the relative roles of the *Notices* and the *Bulletin* had become a more and more frequent subject of discussion. A Committee to Review Member Publications was established to make recommendations, and it did so in 1993. Those recommendations and their aftermath will be the subject of a later column.

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

The Start of the New *Notices*

The November column in this series told of the inclusion in the *Notices* of occasional “special articles” starting in 1982. These were expository articles intended for a broad audience of mathematicians. Some of the leaders of the AMS wanted to have even more exposition—partly to showcase current mathematical developments, partly to help mathematicians be able to have a broader view of the subject, and partly to move toward communicating about mathematics to the general public. This desire was seen to affect both the *Notices* and the *Bulletin*.

By the early 1990s the content of the *Notices* and the *Bulletin* had become a more and more frequent subject of discussion. Each of these journals had several parts. The questions were whether all of these parts were appropriate in journals sent to all members, whether any parts were missing, and whether some different mix might serve the goals of the AMS better. In the spring of 1992 the Executive Committee and Board of Trustees (ECBT) established the Committee to Review Member Publications (CRMP), with Hugo Rossi as chair. Although this committee studied several AMS publications, it concentrated on the *Notices* and the *Bulletin*. It reported to the ECBT in May 1993, and its recommendations were adopted by the Council in August 1993. An abridged version of the report and commentary by Rossi appear in the September 1993 *Notices*, pp. 843–847.

CRMP sought opinions in various ways from a significant fraction of the AMS membership. The committee agreed that three major objectives of the “member publications” are, in Rossi’s words, “to communicate information to the membership on

- “the current state of the discipline and the directions in which it is advancing;
- “mathematical meetings, activities, and programs, especially...those of the AMS; and
- “the status of the profession.”

Rossi continued, “Mathematicians join the AMS because they support its goals of fostering research, but we found that they join also to have access to this information in the above order of priority. Beyond this, the level of interest and depth of involvement is very highly varied....”

“From the beginning we agreed that the AMS should, through its member publications, become much more involved in the exposition of mathematics....[I]t became clear that we were not talking about exposition in the common sense of presentation of mathematical ideas to lay people...but rather discussion with and explanation for...members of the mathematical community, of new advances achieved together with the new techniques involved, putting it all in an appropriate context within the whole body of mathematics....We also maintain that authors should write, not just for the record, but to an audience. We recognize that because of the highly diverse nature of the membership, there are many selections of an ‘audience’, and this of course will vary greatly from article to article. But the principle to which we hope to see adherence is that the author of each article demonstrates a consistent conception of an intended audience.”

The recommendations of the CRMP included a proposal for an “enhanced” *Notices*, saying, “The goal of the enhanced *Notices of the American Mathematical Society* is to serve all mathematicians by providing a lively and informative magazine, which contains news about mathematics and mathematicians, as well as information about the Society and the profession.”

The recommended purpose was as follows: “The *Notices* shall communicate information and commentary on the discipline, the profession, and the Society and its activities; be a privilege of membership in the AMS; and serve as the journal of record of the Society. We envision that the journal will contain significant sections on mathematics, ranging from brief, timely paragraphs on new breakthroughs (tentatively called Research News), through expositions of some of those breakthroughs and their context, to broad discursive surveys of the status of contemporary mathematics.”

The *Bulletin* was revised too. Research announcements were dropped, and exposition was increased. It was recognized that the *Notices* and *Bulletin* would have overlapping functions and that continuing dialog would be necessary.

The search for a founding editor of the *Notices* led, by a circuitous route, back to Hugo Rossi, who began work in 1994. A completely new design was needed, and professional advice was obtained. After lengthy preparations the first issue appeared in January 1995. The new *Notices* had an auspicious start, receiving an award in 1996 from the Society of National Association Publications for general excellence in a scholarly journal. The state of the *Notices* at the end of the twentieth century is planned as the subject of a later column in this series.

—Anthony W. Knapp

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

A Different Era of Advertising

“Are you looking for mental whetstones?” the advertisement asked. “It is well known that one mind may sharpen itself against another. The results are abundantly evident at Battelle Columbus and Battelle Northwest: Young, untried men work with scientists of established stature. Both gain.”

The advertisement, which appeared in the August 1967 issue of the *Notices*, called for the “truly superior ones” to apply for research positions at the Battelle Memorial Institute. The fact that in the 1960s the *Notices* carried many such advertisements illustrates the impact of the post-Sputnik science boom on the job market for mathematicians. Consulting firms, computer manufacturers, oil companies, defense contractors, government agencies, and others fairly begged mathematicians to apply.

Metaphors like “mental whetstones” seem to indicate a somewhat desperate desire to stand out from the crowd. One full-page advertisement from Douglas Missile and Space Systems Division, which ran in the June 1965 issue, tried to get readers’ attention by displaying two series, $1 - \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} - \frac{1}{4} + \dots$ and $1 + \frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4} + \dots$. “Which series would you select to represent an approach to your professional goals?” the advertisement asked. The question was evidently not rhetorical, for it is answered, “Obviously the one that converges on your goals.” That the question and its answer might leave some readers saying “Huh?” did not seem to enter the minds of the copywriters.

Other advertisements stated the obvious. “Strangely enough, few [employment advertisements] say much about work,” earnestly stated an October 1965 ad from the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA). “Since work is the main purpose of employment, we’d like to say merely that the Center for Naval Analyses of The Franklin Institute employs operations and systems analysts, mathematicians, physical scientists, and research engineers . . .”

The wordiness of many of the advertisements is striking, as is the frank expectation that all candidates would be male. “Westinghouse-Baltimore is seeking a man to lead the mathematics section of the Electronics Division,” reads the opening sentence of an advertisement in the April 1961 issue. Another ad from CNA, in the April 1966 issue, had a photograph of two people doing calculations. In case one does not notice they are both male, the text points this out: “On the blackboard before these men is a part of the mathematical model they are developing . . .”

As the Vietnam War escalated, the fact that many of the advertisers were defense research organizations or contractors began to raise concerns among mathematicians. The advertising section of the June 1967 issue carried an appeal, clearly marked as a “paid announcement”, signed by 43 mathematicians. “Mathematicians: Job opportunities in war work are announced in the *Notices*, the Society’s Employment Register, and elsewhere,” the appeal stated. “We urge you to regard yourselves as responsible for the uses to which your talents are put. We believe this responsibility forbids putting mathematicians in the service of this cruel war.” The appeal was repeated in subsequent issues, and by its appearance in the August 1968 issue there were around 350 signatories. Also by that time the number of employment advertisements was markedly down, though whether the appeal caused the decrease is not clear.

—Allyn Jackson

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

AMS Prizes

In his history book of the AMS from 1888 until 1938, Raymond Archibald makes no mention of any discussion of AMS prizes before 1916. He writes, "In 1916 it became known that, because of the admiration of one of its most loyal members, the Society would one day be able to offer a very large prize By the will of Prof. L. L. Conant (1857-1916), who had been a member of the Society from 1892, the sum of \$10,000 was left to the Society, subject to Mrs. Conant's life interest." It was Conant's clear intention that the income from the bequest ultimately be used for an AMS prize. Conant's wife was still alive in 1938.

Upon the death of Maxime Bôcher (1867-1918), "a committee ... was authorized to receive contributions," Archibald writes, "from members of the Society and others who wished to participate in establishing a suitable memorial." The money amounted to \$1,161.79 by 1921 and was used to establish the Bôcher Memorial Prize in Analysis. The first award of the prize of \$100 went to G. D. Birkhoff in 1923.

When Frank Nelson Cole (1861-1926) retired in 1920 as AMS secretary and *Bulletin* editor, he was honored by the Society for his distinguished service. Among the tokens of recognition was a sum of money obtained from small contributions, amounting to \$472.88. In turn Cole presented this money to the Society in 1921, and the money was the beginning of the "Cole Fund". Archibald writes that a committee "recommended, among other things, that the Fund shall accumulate until, by interest and contributions, it reaches the amount of \$1,000; that at the end of every five years thereafter the Council shall award from the available income not more than \$200 as a prize, to be called the Frank Nelson Cole Prize in Algebra." By 1923 the amount in the Fund exceeded \$1,000, and the first award of the Cole Prize was to L. E. Dickson in 1928. The Cole Prize was soon awarded twice every five years, once in algebra and once in number theory.

Everett Pitcher's history book about the AMS deals with the interval 1939-1988. No further AMS prizes were founded until the 1960s. In rapid succession came the Oswald Veblen Prize in Geometry, first awarded in 1964; the George David Birkhoff Prize in Applied Mathematics, joint with SIAM and first awarded in 1968; the Norbert Wiener Prize in Applied Mathematics, joint with SIAM and first awarded in 1970; and the Leroy P. Steele Prizes, first awarded in 1970. The Steele Prizes were well endowed and were to be given annually, but there were no awards in five of the first nine years. At that point the system was changed, and thereafter Steele Prizes were awarded annually for lifetime achievement, for a seminal paper, and for exposition.

Pitcher says, "The Council has always been reluctant to have too many prizes and to subdivide mathematics too finely." Thus subsequent money was often incorporated into funds or used to supplement existing prizes. There were some exceptions in the 1990s, with the establishment of the Fulkerson Prize in Discrete Mathematics, the Morgan Prize for undergraduate research, the Satter Prize for mathematics research by a woman, and the Award for Distinguished Public Service.

But what about the Conant bequest? Conant's wife lived until 1976, and at that time the AMS received \$9,500. That money grew rapidly, and in 1999 the AMS began to address the question of what to do with the Conant Fund. At its January 2000 meeting, the Council voted to establish an annual Conant Prize for Exposition, specifically, for the best article in the *Notices* or *Bulletin* in the past five years. Current plans are for the first prize to be given in 2001.

—Anthony W. Knapp

In This Issue

New Department

This issue of the *Notices* inaugurates a new department called "Inside the AMS". This department will contain information about AMS events and activities of interest to the membership. The name of the "From the AMS" section has been changed to "From the AMS Secretary" in order to reflect better the contents of that section and to avoid confusion with the new department.

—Allyn Jackson

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

Sites of the AMS Headquarters

Naturally enough, as the successor to the New York Mathematical Society the AMS was housed initially in New York City. Everett Pitcher, in his history book, writes succinctly, “During its first fifty years and beyond, the business and editorial office of the Society was at Columbia University in one of several locations. The move of the office of the Society from New York to Providence was connected with three problems of the Society, office space, library, and finances.”

The history book by Raymond Archibald gives some perspective on this description. He writes, “For many years the office of the Society was on the top floor of East House at Columbia University. But since the fire hazard there seemed great, arrangements were made for removal to another building, thought safer, where the U. in 1913 provided, and partly furnished, an office. This was destroyed by fire on the early morning of 10 October 1914, with complete loss of files and records and a considerable stock of volumes of the *Bulletin* and *Transactions*. The first ten v. of the *Bulletin* were completely destroyed and also the Council minutes from 1907 to 1914.”

The AMS library was begun in 1891, and early volumes were acquired by gifts and by exchanges for the *Bulletin* and *Transactions*. Notable among the gifts were about 500 volumes from J. E. McClintock (second president, 1891–1894) and the first 65 volumes of *Comptes Rendus* from G. W. Hill (third president, 1895–1896). As of 1950 the library was still housed in Low Library at Columbia and had grown to about 13,000 volumes. The library required staff and space, and the AMS was short of office space. The thought was to solve these problems by giving ownership of the library to Columbia in return for more office space. Negotiations with Columbia went slowly.

In 1950, as Pitcher says, the “Council went on record in favor of the purchase of a building, not necessarily in New York, adequate for all the offices of the Society.” Brown and Yale were added to the list of universities near which the AMS might relocate. In 1951 the Society sold its library to the University of Georgia for \$66,000 and moved to a building at 80 Waterman Street in Providence that was owned by Brown University.

Over the next twenty-three years the Society headquarters moved four times, always in the vicinity of Brown University. In 1968 the AMS moved into a building where it had an option to buy but a few years later chose to build instead. Pitcher writes, “The Society built a one-story building of about 22,000 square feet at 201 Charles Street in an area of redevelopment in Providence and occupied it on 15 May 1974. In an effort to keep the cost down, the structure was not planned to allow for a second story, a decision that one has come to regret. Subsequent enlargements have included two wings totaling 2700 square feet completed in 1978. The interior has been repeatedly remodeled through the use of modular cubicles to accommodate people more efficiently and assure freedom from distraction in working conditions.”

In the early 1990s the AMS headquarters building underwent substantial renovations. The warehouse, which had been in one of the added wings, was moved off site to Pawtucket, a city just north of Providence. The transformation of that wing into offices helped considerably to ease space problems. The entrance of the building was moved, and the lobby substantially enlarged. The building now has several small conference rooms for meetings, including one named in honor of Einar Hille (29th president, 1947–1948). To complement the interior design, the Society purchased several works of art and commissioned one, a painting by longtime AMS employee and well-known Rhode Island artist John Riedel. A detail of the painting, which features mathematical themes, appeared on the cover of the September 1999 issue of the *Notices*.



—Allyn Jackson and Anthony Knapp

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All of this, to some degree, came to pass. But the details of the implementation have morphed over the intervening years. Originally there were to be thirteen issues annually, the editor was to have “full editorial responsibility” for the entire issue, and the *Notices* was to continue to publish the scientific programs of meetings in addition to its new coverage of mathematics.

The relentless pace of thirteen issues annually had dropped to twelve by 1995 and to eleven by 1997. It was recognized that the editor’s mandate to provide a lively and informative magazine occasionally came in conflict with the need of the *Notices* to publish some of the things appropriate for a journal of record, and pieces of the *Notices* became the responsibility of different people: the front cover and much of the narrative part of the issue were the responsibility of the editor, the formal record was the responsibility of the AMS secretary, the information about meetings was the responsibility of a group of people, and so on. The scientific programs of the sectional meetings disappeared at some point, for reasons explained by the AMS secretary in this space in February 2000.

There were other changes as well. The editor and editorial board were always charged with having “responsibility for content within the broad guideline of communicating information [about] the discipline, the profession, and the Society and its activities.” This charge has been used as a license to try new approaches to old problems. Memorial articles for eminent mathematicians became more systematic and began to be used as devices to showcase important mathematics from a different point of view, as well as to highlight some of the profession’s role models. The coverage of prizes and other news expanded and took on more of an international character. And a book list and systematic book reviews began to give readers a glimpse of what the general public gets to see about mathematics.

Over time the reputation of the *Notices* as an informative magazine about research mathematics has increased. Consequently, it has become easier to persuade leaders in the field to write feature mathematics articles; balance across different areas of mathematics has been maintained with the help of a broadly knowledgeable editorial board. The result has been that the ensemble of feature articles now can give readers some kind of overview of contemporary mathematics. For the future we can look to further strides in these directions, and the *Notices* can look forward to a role in bringing together the international community of mathematicians.

—Anthony W. Knap

To Err Is Human

True Confessions

Not long ago a *Notices* editor received a letter from an amused reader who pointed out the following phrase, which appeared in a recent issue: “Sold at Christie’s auction house for \$2 million, this priceless manuscript...”

Fortunately, most such absurdities are caught before they make it into print. Years ago the *Notices* received an article discussing the notion that the mathematics profession is segmented into horizontal “layers” that prevent the integration of three main activities of mathematicians—teaching, research, and service. The original title of the piece, “The Horizontal Profession”, was changed when a *Notices* staff member realized that readers might equate the phrase with “the oldest profession”.

Alas, some absurdities are not caught. In the deep, dark past of the *Notices* (we like to think these things are behind us), a staff member inserted into the annual index a placeholder phrase designed to be a glaring reminder to double-check the obituary list: “Will No Great Mathematician Die This Year?” This one made it into print, in an issue whose identity shall be withheld.

—Allyn Jackson