

HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY 1888–1938*

RAYMOND CLARE ARCHIBALD

At the present time, throughout the world, there are many mathematical societies, but if we limit our consideration to those which have been in existence at least twenty-five years there are but twenty. This number is reduced to eleven if the minimum age is set at fifty years. Let us then recall who our ten elder sisters may be. The Hamburg Mathematical Society, founded in 1690, with publications issued almost continuously during the past two hundred years, started out as "A Society for Lovers of the Art of Calculation." The Amsterdam Mathematical Society is only 160 years old, but it has been issuing substantial volumes since 1782. The other eight societies are very much younger. The forerunner of the Czechoslovakian Society for Mathematics and Physics, organized in 1869, was the Society for Free Lectures on Mathematics and Physics, founded 76 years ago. This Society with nearly 2000 members is the most affluent of all mathematical organizations, owning its own press and buildings where it transacts an extensive business in texts used throughout the country. The important Moscow Mathematical Society developed in 1867 from a Circle of Lovers of Mathematics, started in 1864. The fifth member of this family of societies, The London Mathematical Society, was born a year later, and its kinship with our own organization will presently be indicated. After two seven-year intervals the Mathematical Society of France arrived in 1872 and the Kharkov Mathematical Society in 1879. The group of ten was completed in 1884 by the delivery of triplets, the Edinburgh Mathematical Society, the Mathematical Circle of Palermo, and the Physico-Mathematical Society of Japan.

These ten societies are in eight countries, and in five of these countries during the nineteenth century great mathematical discoverers were flourishing. France had, for example, Laplace, Legendre, Poncelet, Cauchy, Hermite, and Poincaré; Germany had Gauss, Weierstrass, Riemann, Jacobi, Steiner, and Kronecker; Great Britain had Hamilton, Smith, Cayley, Sylvester, Stokes, and Maxwell; Italy

* This was the first of the ten invited addresses for the Semicentennial Celebration; the other nine have been published as Volume 2 of the American Mathematical Society Semicentennial Publications. Twenty-two portraits on lantern slides, here listed at the end of the address, were used to illustrate this lecture.