MORRIS KLINE (1908-1992)

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Professor Morris Kline of New York University's Courant Institute died 10 June 1992 after a long career of bringing mathematics in various aspects to a wide public. He was born in New York 1 May 1908 and spent most of his academic life there. He considered himself an applied mathematician and his contributions to research fell under that heading. To the general public, however, he represented mathematics as a whole.

Kline consistently tied mathematics to other themes in his popular writings. His *Mathematics in Western Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1953) discussed mathematics as part of the general intellectual milieu of Europe. *Mathematics and the Physical World* (New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1959) addressed subjects dear to the author's heart and was subsequently reprinted by Dover Publications. Perhaps his most famous work was the polemic *Why Johnny Can't Add* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973), an assault on the shortcomings of the 'New Math' in the public schools. Kline's observation that the students in schools where the 'New Math' curriculum was flourishing were neither learning the traditional skills nor understanding the new ideas may have helped to curb the curricular excesses. His later *Why the Professor Can't Teach* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1977) indicted mathematical education in a liberal arts setting. It caused concern in the mathematical community, where some said that it could be used as ammunition by legislators seeking to cut funding of universities.

The two books of Kline of most interest to historians of logic are *Mathematical Thought from Ancient to Modern Times* (Oxford University Press, 1972; 3-volume paperback edition, 1990) and *Mathematics: The Loss of Certainty* (Oxford University Press, 1980), which soon appeared in a Russian translation (Moscow, Mir, 1984). The former he intended to deal with ideas, not men, and he announced in the preface that he supported a historical introduction to mathematics as one of the best ways to acquire an understanding and appreciation of the subject. He dealt with the earlier material primarily at secondhand, but for the post-calculus period usually cites the original papers. Carl Boyer in a review in *Isis* (65 (1974), 104-106) paid tribute to Kline's 'excellent surveys' and 'attractive, vigorous, and hard-hitting manner.' Although he did observe some 'unseemly hyperbole' and 'very occasional lapses,' Boyer predicted that the book would become a standard reference,