HISTORICAL NOTE

On November 24, 1888, six persons connected with Columbia University, four with the Department of Mathematics and two with the Department of Astronomy, formed a society to meet monthly for the discussion of mathematical topics. This society was the idea of Doctor T. S. Fiske, an instructor in mathematics, who had recently returned from Cambridge, England, where he had studied for a time with Cayley, Glaisher, and Forsyth. In Glaisher's company he had attended several meetings of the London Mathematical Society; from this fact and from a desire for mathematical companionship, stimulated by his experiences in Cambridge and especially by Glaisher's many friendly talks about mathematics and mathematicians, arose his eagerness to bring about the establishment of a society in New York.

A month later, at the second meeting of the Society, it was resolved to adopt the name "New York Mathematical Society" and to invite to membership everyone living in or near New York who might be interested. The young society prospered, its meetings interested those who attended them, and its membership gradually increased. In 1889 its activities were greatly quickened through the accession of Doctor Emory McClintock who was called to New York as Actuary of the Mutual Life Insurance Company. He strengthened the Society not only by his interest in scientific research but also by his administrative wisdom. At the annual meeting in December 1890 he was elected president in succession to Professor Van Amringe of Columbia University.

In December 1890 it was proposed that the Society publish a journal which should contain reports of its meetings, historical and critical articles, general mathematical news, and short original papers. Doctor McClintock pointed out that in order to put this proposal into effect it would be necessary greatly to enlarge the membership of the Society; and at once the Secretary undertook to send to mathematicians all over the country a prospectus of the proposed journal and an invitation to join the Society. In June, 1891, the membership of the Society had increased to 174, and in October of the same year the first number of the *Bulletin of the New York Mathematical Society* made its appearance.

By the beginning of 1894 it was generally recognized that the Society had assumed a national character; and in response to a demand that came from many quarters its name was changed to the American Mathematical Society. A few months later the Society voted to provide funds for the publication of the papers read at the International Mathematical Congress held in Chicago in connection with the World's Fair in 1893.. This was the first book published by the Society. The same year the Society held its first summer meeting in connection with the Brooklyn meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In 1895 Professor Cole was called from the University of Michigan to Columbia University and became Secretary of the Society, in which capacity he continued to serve the Society for twenty-five years, being succeeded by the present Secretary in 1920.

In 1896 at the suggestion of Professor H. S. White the Society arranged for a colloquium to be held in connection with the summer meeting at Buffalo; since then at intervals of two or three years ten colloquia have been held. Beginning with that held in Boston in 1903 the lectures have been published in book form.

To provide for regular meetings at strategic points not on the Atlantic seaboard various sections were established from time to time. In 1897 there was organized the Chicago Section which has since been merged into the parent body, its sessions now being regular meetings of the Society. In 1902 the San Francisco Section was formed and in 1907 the Southwestern Section. The total number of regular meetings held is now 249 beside 99 sectional meetings. From the outset, the field of the Society has included Canada; important meetings have been held in Toronto in the summer of 1897 in connection with the British Association for the Advancement of Science and in the winter of 1921 with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

In April 1899 the Society felt that the time had come to inaugurate a journal which should contain the more important original papers presented at its meetings. This resulted in the publication of the *Transactions of the American Mathematical Society* beginning in 1900 with E. H. Moore, E. W. Brown, and T. S. Fiske as editors. The initial financial difficulties were overcome through the generosity of a number of universities which granted subventions annually during a period of several years.

In 1899, Professor Fiske, who had served for nine years as chief editor of the *Bulletin*, retired in favor of Professor Cole, who after twenty-one years of service was succeeded in 1920 by Professor Hedrick.

Beginning in 1901 the Society entered into an agreement with Columbia University whereby that institution catalogues its library and makes the arrangements necessary for the loan of its books; in return the University makes use of the Society's collection as a reference library. The most recent catalogue of the library issued by the Society is under date of 1925. From the very beginning, Columbia University has been liberal in its hospitality. Not only have half of the meetings of the Society been held in its buildings, but it has provided more than its share of officers and has furnished space to house its activities.

In order to take over problems concerned primarily with teaching and organization of college mathematics and with relations to secondary school instruction, a new organization, the Mathematical Association of America, was founded in 1915. Nearly all the members of the Society are members of this new body and the organizations work together cordially, generally meeting in conjunction.

At the outbreak of the war in 1914, the Society had reached a membership of about 700 and was recognized as one of the great mathematical societies of the world. During that conflict it was so fortunate as to be able to hold its ground but could hope for no growth. At the end of this difficult period, Professor Cole retired, in 1920, after distinguished service rendered for twenty-five years as secretary and for and twenty-one years as chief editor of the *Bulletin*.
It became plain that the war had left many serious problems and that there was a crisis in the financial affairs of the Society. The great increase in the cost of mathematical printing that occurred during and after the war made it necessary for the Society to enlarge its resources if its publications were to be continued.

Accordingly steps were taken to increase the membership, with the result that the latter has grown from 750 in 1920 to nearly 1700 in 1926. An Endowment Fund has been collected; more than thirty sustaining members, comprising some of the great engineering firms and insurance companies of the country, as well as several universities, are contributing annually to the support of its activities; and through the agency of the National Academy of Sciences, the General Education Board has for 1925–26 and 1926–27 granted subventions to aid in printing the journals. The number of papers read before the various meetings annually has grown to aggregate approximately three hundred. The demand for space in both the *Bulletin* and *Transactions* has increased so that they both print in excess of six hundred pages; there is an insistent need for further publication facilities.

Among the events of the past five years are the consummation of a reciprocal agreement with the London Mathematical Society by which the members of each organization enjoy special privileges in the other; the founding of three prizes*; and the establishment of the Josiah Willard Gibbs Lectureship, which provides an annual lecture of a semipopular mathematical nature.