

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 one, two, or three years, seventeen 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, in 1902 the San Francisco Section, and in 1907 the Southwestern Section. These sections have now all been merged into the parent body. The total number of regular meetings held is now 315, besides 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 Professors 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 1932. 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. The present quarters, occupied first in 1934, are dignified and commodious.

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 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 enlarge the membership, with the result that the latter has grown from 750 in 1920 to approximately 1800 in 1934. Through the devoted services of a small group in the Society an Endowment Fund* was collected. At one time more than thirty Sustaining Members, comprising some of the great engineering firms and insurance companies of the country, as well as several universities, contributed annually to the support of its activities. The General Education Board and the Rockefeller Foundation have for the period 1925-36 granted generous and substantial subventions to aid in printing the journals. During several years special contributions have been solicited from members.

In the twelve years since 1922, the activities of the Society have been considerably extended. The Josiah Willard Gibbs Lectureship, established in 1923, furnishes to the general scientific public (by means of an annual lecture) an opportunity for appreciation of mathematics and its applications. The Society Visiting Lectureship, the incumbent of which is a distinguished foreign or American mathematician, opens a channel for many universities to hear each year a lecture or series of lectures on some mathematical topic of current interest. Colloquia are now held yearly instead of triennially, with a corresponding increase in the number of volumes printed; prizes** have been established; reciprocity agreements have been arranged with the London Mathematical Society, the Deutsche Mathematiker-Vereinigung, and the Unione Matematica Italiana by each of which the members of one organization enjoy special privileges in the other. And the library has been strengthened.

* See page 6.

** See page 6.

Beginning with 1927 the Society entered into a contract with the Johns Hopkins University by which it shares in the responsibility for the *American Journal of Mathematics*; this agreement, which increases the printing space available by four or five hundred pages, solved for the moment the problem of publication facilities confronting American mathematics.

The number of papers read before the various meetings has grown to aggregate approximately four hundred annually. In spite of rising standards of acceptance, the demand for space in both the *Bulletin* and the *Transactions* has increased so that each prints over nine hundred pages, the establishment by the Rockefeller Foundation of National Research Fellowships in mathematics being in part responsible for this increase.

The present acute financial depression has raised problems for the Society comparable in their seriousness with those of a dozen years ago. The number of Sustaining Members has fallen to less than one-half and, beginning with July, 1936, the subvention from the Rockefeller groups will be discontinued. Active steps are being taken in this crisis to increase the revenue in other directions lest there be a disastrous curtailment of the activities of the Society. New types of membership have been established in which the minimum payments are considerably in excess of the regular dues. During the year 1934-1935 Associate Secretary M. H. Ingraham expects to visit the universities of the country in an attempt to interest them in more adequate financial support of the Society's publication program.

There is still a demand for increasing the channels for publication of research, and the establishment of a journal of applied mathematics and a new periodical under the auspices of a great university have been suggested. These or some other channels for publication should be opened in the near future, but there seems no immediate possibility. In fact, the mathematics of the country will do well if it can keep facilities for publication at the present level.

In 1923 the organization was incorporated under the code of the District of Columbia. In 1938 it is proposed that the Society celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of its founding, and steps are being taken to prepare a worthy program.

STATISTICS

<i>Year</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Papers Presented</i>	<i>Cost of Publications</i>	<i>Total Expenditure</i>
1895	260	24	\$ 556	\$ 862
1900	347	112	2900	3346
1905	488	147	4100	5200
1910	630	145	3300	5000
1915	721	197	3000	4900
1917	732	167	4300	6000
1919	724	187	3500	5200
1921	770	175	5200	8300
1923	1250	266	11600	15600
1925	1542	315	11000	15000
1927	1758	404	24000	28000
1928	1796	439	22000	27000
1929	1926	395	18000	25000
1930	1926	386	25000	31000
1931	1883	374	25500	32000
1932	1882	321	29000	36000
1933	1783	415	23000	30000