

# Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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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