

Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

Sites of the AMS Headquarters

Naturally enough, as the successor to the New York Mathematical Society the AMS was housed initially in New York City. Everett Pitcher, in his history book, writes succinctly, “During its first fifty years and beyond, the business and editorial office of the Society was at Columbia University in one of several locations. The move of the office of the Society from New York to Providence was connected with three problems of the Society, office space, library, and finances.”

The history book by Raymond Archibald gives some perspective on this description. He writes, “For many years the office of the Society was on the top floor of East House at Columbia University. But since the fire hazard there seemed great, arrangements were made for removal to another building, thought safer, where the U. in 1913 provided, and partly furnished, an office. This was destroyed by fire on the early morning of 10 October 1914, with complete loss of files and records and a considerable stock of volumes of the *Bulletin* and *Transactions*. The first ten v. of the *Bulletin* were completely destroyed and also the Council minutes from 1907 to 1914.”

The AMS library was begun in 1891, and early volumes were acquired by gifts and by exchanges for the *Bulletin* and *Transactions*. Notable among the gifts were about 500 volumes from J. E. McClintock (second president, 1891-1894) and the first 65 volumes of *Comptes Rendus* from G. W. Hill (third president, 1895-1896). As of 1950 the library was still housed in Low Library at Columbia and had grown to about 13,000 volumes. The library required staff and space, and the AMS was short of office space. The thought was to solve these problems by giving ownership of the library to Columbia in return for more office space. Negotiations with Columbia went slowly.

In 1950, as Pitcher says, the “Council went on record in favor of the purchase of a building, not necessarily in New York, adequate for all the offices of the Society.” Brown and Yale were added to the list of universities near which the AMS might relocate. In 1951 the Society sold its library to the University of Georgia for \$66,000 and moved to a building at 80 Waterman Street in Providence that was owned by Brown University.

Over the next twenty-three years the Society headquarters moved four times, always in the vicinity of Brown University. In 1968 the AMS moved into a building where it had an option to buy but a few years later chose to build instead. Pitcher writes, “The Society built a one-story building of about 22,000 square feet at 201 Charles Street in an area of redevelopment in Providence and occupied it on 15 May 1974. In an effort to keep the cost down, the structure was not planned to allow for a second story, a decision that one has come to regret. Subsequent enlargements have included two wings totaling 2700 square feet completed in 1978. The interior has been repeatedly remodeled through the use of modular cubicles to accommodate people more efficiently and assure freedom from distraction in working conditions.”

In the early 1990s the AMS headquarters building underwent substantial renovations. The warehouse, which had been in one of the added wings, was moved



off site to Pawtucket, a city just north of Providence. The transformation of that wing into offices helped considerably to ease space problems. The entrance of the building was moved, and the lobby substantially enlarged. The building now has several small conference rooms for meetings, including one named in honor of Einar Hille (29th president, 1947-1948). To complement the interior design, the Society purchased several works of art and commissioned one, a painting by longtime AMS employee and well-known Rhode Island artist John Riedel. A detail of the painting, which features mathematical themes, appeared on the cover of the September 1999 issue of the *Notices*.

—Allyn Jackson and Anthony Knap