Notices

of the American Mathematical Society

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AMS in the Twentieth Century

The Development of the New *Notices*

The January 2000 column in this series described the start of the new *Notices* in 1995, following a recommendation of the Committee to Review Member Publications and action by the Council in 1993. The goal was "to serve all mathematicians by providing a lively and informative magazine, which contains news about mathematics and mathematicians, as well as information about the Society and the profession." The new *Notices* was to "communicate information and commentary on the discipline, the profession, and the Society and its activities; be a privilege of membership in the AMS; and serve as the journal of record of the Society." It was envisioned that "the journal will contain significant sections on mathematics, ranging from brief, timely paragraphs on new breakthroughs (tentatively called Research News), through expositions of some of those breakthroughs and their context, to broad discursive surveys of the status of contemporary mathematics."

All of this, to some degree, came to pass. But the details of the implementation have morphed over the intervening years. Originally there were to be thirteen issues annually, the editor was to have "full editorial responsibility" for the entire issue, and the *Notices* was to continue to publish the scientific programs of meetings in addition to its new coverage of mathematics.

The relentless pace of thirteen issues annually had dropped to twelve by 1995 and to eleven by 1997. It was recognized that the editor's mandate to provide a lively and informative magazine occasionally came in conflict with the need of the *Notices* to publish some of the things appropriate for a journal of record, and pieces of the *Notices* became the responsibility of different people: the front cover and much of the narrative part of the issue were the responsibility of the editor, the formal record was the responsibility of the AMS secretary, the information about meetings was the responsibility of a group of people, and so on. The scientific programs of the sectional meetings disappeared at some point, for reasons explained by the AMS secretary in this space in February 2000.

There were other changes as well. The editor and editorial board were always charged with having "responsibility for content within the broad guideline of communicating information [about] the discipline, the profession, and the Society and its activities." This charge has been used as a license to try new approaches to old problems. Memorial articles for eminent mathematicians became more systematic and began to be used as devices to showcase important mathematics from a different point of view, as well as to highlight some of the profession's role models. The coverage of prizes and other news expanded and took on more of an international character. And a book list and systematic book reviews began to give readers a glimpse of what the general public gets to see about mathematics.

Over time the reputation of the *Notices* as an informative magazine about research mathematics has increased. Consequently, it has become easier to persuade leaders in the field to write feature mathematics articles; balance across different areas of mathematics has been maintained with the help of a broadly knowledgeable editorial board. The result has been that the ensemble of feature articles now can give readers some kind of overview of contemporary mathematics. For the future we can look to further strides in these directions, and the *Notices* can look forward to a role in bringing together the international community of mathematicians.

—Anthony W. Knapp

To Err Is Human

True Confessions

Not long ago a *Notices* editor received a letter from an amused reader who pointed out the following phrase, which appeared in a recent issue: "Sold at Christie's auction house for $2 million, this priceless manuscript…".

Fortunately, most such absurdities are caught before they make it into print. Years ago the *Notices* received an article discussing the notion that the mathematics profession is segmented into horizontal "layers" that prevent the integration of three main activities of mathematicians—teaching, research, and service. The original title of the piece, "The Horizontal Profession", was changed when a *Notices* staff member realized that readers might equate the phrase with "the oldest profession".

Alas, some absurdities are not caught. In the deep, dark past of the *Notices* (we like to think these things are behind us), a staff member inserted into the annual index a placeholder phrase designed to be a glaring reminder to double-check the obituary list: "Will No Great Mathematician Die This Year?" This one made it into print, in an issue whose identity shall be withheld.

—Allyn Jackson