
NEWS AND LETTERS

J. Arthur Seebach

J. Arthur Seebach, Jr., editor of *Mathematics Magazine* from 1976 through 1980, died on Dec. 3, 1996 after a long struggle with complications of diabetes. He was 58 years old and had been a member of the Department of Mathematics at St. Olaf College for 30 years.

Arthur was known to many mathematicians through his extensive contributions to the publication program of the Association, a culmination of his life-long fascination with language and mathematics that has roots in his twin undergraduate majors: mathematics and Greek. In addition to serving as editor of this *Magazine*, he served for fifteen years as Associate Editor of the *American Mathematical Monthly*, beginning in 1971 as Reviews editor, and concluding in 1986 as editor of the Mathematical Notes section. He served as a member and chair of prize committees for the Allendoerfer Award and the MAA Book Prize, as a member of the Board of Governors, the Committee on Publications, and as co-Chair of the Advisory Committee for FOCUS during its initial years (1981–85). For several years Arthur was a member of the writing committee for the Graduate Record Examination in mathematics, serving as chair in 1986 and 1987.

In addition to his role in the MAA publications program, Arthur was an active early advocate for hands-on computing, beginning by building his own computers from Heathkits. Even before the IBM PC and Apple Macintosh came on the market, Arthur helped prod St. Olaf to make plans for a campus-wide network of microcomputers, and served as newsletter editor for CIMSE, the special interest group on Com-

puters in Mathematics and Science Education. From 1983 through 1987 he served on the MAA Committee on Computers in Mathematics Education.

In addition to mathematics, editing, and computing, Arthur maintained a very active side business in antique Studebakers—stocking and reselling parts, editing a national newsletter, and maintaining several cars of his own. He also fulfilled a long-standing interest in music by singing regularly with the Bach Society of Minnesota. All these interests, and more, he connected to mathematics through his passion for seeing patterns in the most unlikely places.

Beginning in 1965 when we both joined the St. Olaf faculty (at that time a department of five, now over twenty), Arthur and I worked together as co-authors, co-editors, and co-conspirators on many projects. The first was a series of NSF-sponsored summer undergraduate research projects that led to the publication of *Counterexamples in Topology*. Arthur always viewed this monograph as itself a counterexample to the view, widespread at the time, that undergraduates could neither do nor even contribute to research in mathematics. Now, of course, MAA and AMS have joint committees and program activities specifically designed to recognize and promote research activities by undergraduates.

By happy coincidence, Arthur and I published a joint article in the *Monthly* at about the same time as Kenneth O. May, who invented the Telegraphic Reviews in 1965, decided to find a successor. Knowing the effort it took to write, single handedly (and without word processors) 2000 reviews in

four years, May and *Monthly* Editor Harley Flanders asked Arthur and me to set up a reviewing service among the many mathematicians at the two colleges in Northfield, Minnesota. This system is still in place, now overseen by Arnold Ostebee, and includes nearly fifty mathematicians at St. Olaf, Carleton and Macalester Colleges.

In 1975, the MAA asked Arthur and me to serve as co-editors of *Mathematics Magazine*, which the Association had acquired in 1961 from its long-time editor, UCLA mathematician Glenn James. To increase the appeal of this little-known publication, we redesigned the format and, with much trepidation, replaced the table of contents on the front cover with eye-catching (but not very professional) artwork—often student-drawn cartoons. Arthur's sense of whimsy, his love of puns, and his proclivity for obscure connections totally transformed the visual image of *Mathematics Magazine*. Cover art, viewed as radical at the time, has since been emulated by other MAA journals, now even by the *Notices* of

the AMS.

Another innovation in *Mathematics Magazine*—a few pages of news and announcements (which in September 1976 included the first published exposition of the new computer-based proof of the four color theorem)—caught the eye of Ed Beckenbach, then chair of the MAA Publications Committee. With Ed's urging, the Association began a newsletter, FOCUS, and asked Arthur and me to serve as co-chairs of the Advisory Committee during its initial years. Arthur's experience as editor and publisher of Studebaker newsletters provided much-needed grounding in reality as new editor Marcia Sward began the daunting task of creating a publication *ex nihilo*. Even then, fifteen years before it became feasible, Arthur dreamed of online electronic distribution. It is indeed a pity that his eyesight failed before he could enjoy MAA Online.

Lynn Arthur Steen
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