

SILVER JUBILEE ADDRESS

A Brief History of Our Society

Mr. Chan Kai Yau

I am very happy and honoured to be given this privilege to deliver the first address of this Colloquium to celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Society. Some of us here present this morning have been associated with the Society since its inception and many of our well-known citizens were once junior members of the Society.

2. Our Society, first known as the Malayan Mathematical Society, was formed about 3 years after the establishment of the University of Malaya. The inaugural meeting was held on 1952 June 20 and the motion before the house, proposed by R. K. Guy and seconded by K. M. R. Menon, was "That a Society be formed in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya to stimulate interest in Mathematics and its Teaching". The first Committee was:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| President | : Prof. A. Oppenheim (Professor of Mathematics, University of Malaya) |
| Hon. Secretary | : Mr. R. K. Guy (Lecturer of Mathematics, University of Malaya) |
| Hon. Treasurer | : Mr. K. M. R. Menon (Well-known Mathematics teacher in Raffles Institution) |
| Librarian | : Dr. P. H. Diananda (Lecturer of Mathematics, University of Malaya) |
| Committee Members | : Mr. R. E. Ince (Deputy Director of Education, Singapore) |
| | Mr. Garfield Woods (Deputy Director of Education, Malaya) |
| | Miss. J. M. Holland (Assistant Director of Education for Girls, Singapore) |

Mr. G. P. Darke (Assistant Director
of Education for Chinese
Schools, Singapore)

Mr. Tharam Singh (Well-known
Mathematics teacher in Raffles
Institution)

Mrs. P. Sheridan Lea (Well-known
Mathematics teacher)

3. The Committee decided to model the Society along the Mathematical Association of the United Kingdom and to join the International Mathematical Union the following year. The activities and areas of interest of the Society were: the special need of the primary classes, annual symposium, problem solving bureau, publication, reading room and library, talks on teaching of elementary mathematics, circulation of teaching notes and loan of mathematical models.

4. A set of simple rules was adopted. The objective was "to effect improvements in the teaching of elementary mathematics and to provide means of intercourse between students, teachers and others interested in mathematics and its teaching". Later this objective was enlarged to include the phrase "to maintain the status and advance the interests of the profession of mathematics". This objective is equally relevant today as it was 25 years ago. There were four categories of membership: honorary (for distinguished mathematicians and teachers), ordinary (for adults), country (for adults living more than 20 miles away from our usual meeting place - Singapore), and junior (for full-time students). Institutional members were classified as ordinary members.

5. The Society was very active during its early years. Tribute must be given to the dynamic leadership of Prof. A. Oppenheim, Prof. J. C. Cooke and Mr. R. K. Guy, the indefatigable secretary. Though it began with only 19

members in June of 1952, the membership swelled to 190 by December. The Society held 7 talks/meetings during that first 7 months. It launched into many activities in 1953 - 17 talks/meetings, the publication of the *Bulletin of the Malayan Mathematical Society (BMMS)*, Vol. 0, No. 1 on Feb. 2, the establishment of the problem solving bureau, the organisation, in conjunction with the Education Department, of a three-month mathematics course for teachers, the formation of a textbook committee (at whose first meeting C. V. Durell spoke on mathematics texts for Malaya and Singapore), and a two-man exhibition-cum-lecture tour of Malaya and Singapore. In the next 3 years the membership grew rapidly (537 in 1956), the *Bulletin* was published regularly, the meetings were held monthly and refresher courses for teachers were run annually. Local branches were also formed, both in Malaya and in Singapore. In 1954 the Science Society of Malaya was formed and in the following year the first joint symposium with our Society was held. In 1956 the Society started the Inter-school Mathematical Competition and many winners of this and subsequent Competitions are now staff members of the mathematics departments in both our universities.

6. Owing to the absence of the Hon. Secretary, there was a reduction in the Society's activities in 1958 and 1959. It held only 8 talks/meetings and the attendance was not good, some local branches became moribund and membership dropped to 231. In 1960, the Society organised its 4th Inter-school Mathematical Competition, changed Volume 7 of *BMMS* to Volume 1 of *NABLA*, and had a different Committee. In the mid 60's the Society gained in membership (419 in 1964), but faced problems with its publications - lack of contributions and printing facilities. In 1967 its name was changed from Malayan Mathematical Society to Singapore Mathematical Society for obvious reasons. From 1966 to 1970 the Society went through a critical

phase: it had an average of 2 talks/meetings a year, less than 1 issue of *NABLA* a year, it had to reduce its subscription from \$10.00 to \$5.00 for ordinary members and its membership stayed below 80 for 4 years.

7. However, things began to brighten up in 1971, the school sub-committee managed to run 2 very successful courses for teachers, and the number of talks/meetings increased. In 1972, 10 talks/meetings were held, 2 courses were organised for teachers, membership increased to 420, but again there was no publication of *NABLA*. However, it decided to publish the *Mathematical Medley* in 1973. This new publication contains news about mathematics, expository articles on mathematics, mathematical education and problems. Since then, the Society has retained its drive and momentum. It averaged 14 talks/meetings a year, 3 issues of the *Mathematical Medley* a year, and 1 issue of the bulletin, *NABLA*, every 2 years. It felt strong enough to increase members' annual subscriptions from \$5.00 to \$10.00 for ordinary members and from \$2.00 to \$5.00 for junior members. As a result, it suffered a temporary drop in membership. But this is picking up steadily and, hopefully, by the end of this Colloquium, the membership should again reach the 400 mark. In 1975, when the Singapore National Academy of Science changed its constitution to enable it to admit institutional members, our Society became a member. Currently, it is exploring the possibility of rejoining the International Mathematical Union.

8. Most of the founder members are no longer with the Society, some of the very active institutional members such as CHIJ, Victoria Street, Penang Free School, MBS, Penang, Govt High School, Kota Bahru, ... , are no longer members of the Society, but 2 early members, Prof. Diananda and Assoc. Prof. Wicks, are still with us. The names of some of the junior members who joined the Society in the first few years provide interesting reading. They

are, just to name a few,

1952: R. D. Amarasingham, Chan Kai Yau, Chan Khee Kok, Chan Pheng Yuen, Chong Yean Joo, Ch'ng Beng Hon, Chua Choo Lim, F. J. D'Costa (who received a book prize for his contributions to *BMMS*), Raymond de Cruz, Giam Choo Seng, Goon Cheng Huat, V. Kandasamy, Koh Beng Thiam, Lau Liat Cheow, Lee Keng Hoon, Lim Chin Beng, Lim Ewe Jin, Lim Ho Hup, Lim Kok Swee, Grace Liok, Loke Fook Seng, Peggy Loo, I. C. Menon, Quah Chen Kong, L. Rajaratnam, V. Selvarajah, A. K. Sigamoney, Chatar Singh, Sng Ewe Min, P. Supramaniam, Tan Chin Huat, Teh Hock Heng, Wong Ha Hee, Yong Man Fong.

1953: Cheah Tat Huat, Chye Kooi Ngan, Sim Wong Kooi, Teo Chye Poh.

1955: Teh Hoon Heng (who received a book prize for his contributions to *BMMS*).

1956: Lim Kim Woon.

1957: H. Hochstadt, Oon Lay Yong.

9. Now that we have traced the Society's brief history in the last 25 years, let us look forward to the next 25 years. May I suggest that we should aim at

9.1 Strengthening our activities and publications, targetted mainly at school mathematics teachers;

9.2 Maintaining a steady series of both new and refresher courses for teachers;

9.3 Increasing our membership, so that we can claim a majority of our mathematics teachers to be our members;

9.4 Improving our library service, as most members ought to keep themselves up to date in their profession.

We can all do our bit to help achieve these goals thereby attaining the objective of our Society.