

W. D. Cairns

1871-1955



William DeWeese Cairns was born in Troy, Ohio, on November 2, 1871. After graduating from Troy High School he earned an A. B. degree from Ohio Wesleyan University in 1892. Cairns returned to Troy High School, where he taught physics for two years before enrolling as a graduate student at Harvard University. He received the A. M. degree from Harvard in 1898 and began teaching at Oberlin College the following year.

In 1907, while on leave from Oberlin, Cairns received a Ph. D. degree from Göttingen University in Germany. He returned to Oberlin, where he became professor and head of the Mathematics Department in 1920. He retired from Oberlin in 1939.

Cairns served on the editorial board of the *American Mathematical Monthly*, beginning in 1913. By then, the *Monthly* was being published by a consortium of schools, including Oberlin college, and the editors were looking for an organization to take over the journal. When a call went out to mathematics professors across the country in 1915, soliciting their interest in forming a new organization to represent collegiate mathematics, it may well have been W. D. Cairns who suggested that the organizational meeting be held in Columbus. That meeting was held in conjunction with a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), and Cairns was also a member of the latter organization.

The Mathematical Association of America was founded at Columbus, Ohio, on December 31, 1915, and Cairns was elected Secretary-Treasurer of the Association. He served in that office until 1942, upon which he was immediately elected MAA President. In 1944, Cairns was made Honorary President of the Association for life. He died on July 15, 1955, in Pasadena, California.

Cairns was also a charter member of the MAA Ohio Section and served as its Chairman in 1931-32. He served as MAA representative to the Council of the AAAS for nearly twenty years. He was also a member of the American Mathematical Society and the Ohio Association of Teachers of Mathematics and Science.

References:

“William DeWeese Cairns: In Memoriam.” *American Mathematical Monthly*, 63:3 (March 1956), 204-205.

“William D. Cairns (1871-1955)” Oberlin College Archives. <http://www.oberlin.edu/archive/holdings/finding/RG30/SG100/biography.html>

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