

# FOCUS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MATHEMATICAL ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

VOLUME 5 NUMBER 1

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1985

## From the MAA President . . . Retrospect and Prospect

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**N**ow that my term as President of the Association is coming to an end, I'd like to make a few remarks about the recent past and our aspirations for the future.

The MAA is fortunate in having a clear and important goal to work for, namely to assist in promoting the interests of mathematics in North America, especially in the collegiate field. Some of the founders of the organization seventy years ago feared that it might be in danger of "degenerating into a pedagogical debating society, whose discussions might all evaporate into futility." The Association *has* been strongly interested in the promotion of good teaching, but the danger mentioned has been avoided by focusing primarily on the content of the mathematical curriculum, not pedagogical methodology.

One way to view the Association is as a vast information exchange. It is clear that none of us can survive as successful college or university teachers, or in any career in the mathematical sciences, over a thirty or forty year span without broadening our horizons far beyond our studies in graduate school, however excellent they may have been. Here then is a basic role of the Association, to enable all of us to keep up with the changing times in the world of mathematics and its teaching.

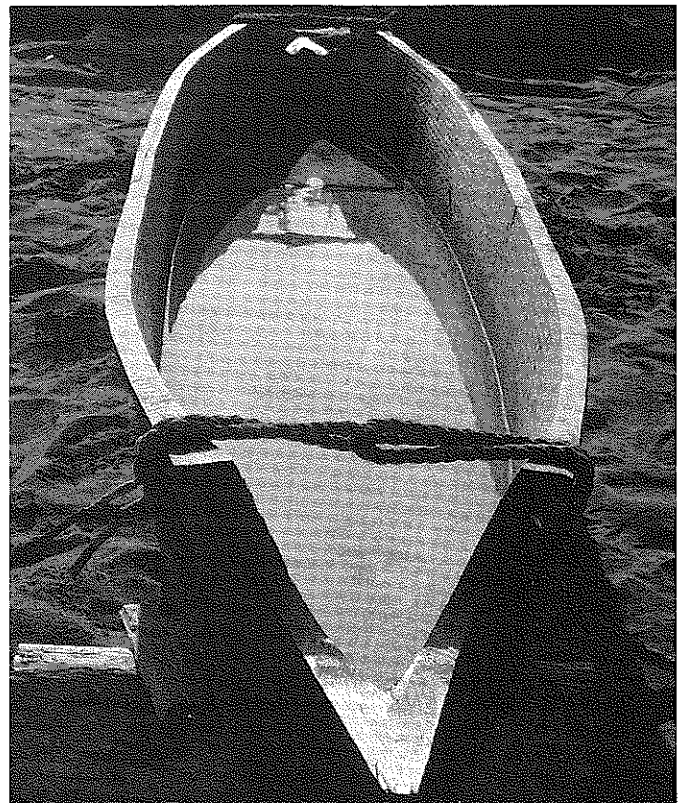
Turning to the current scene, the past three or four years have brought a vast outpouring of reports of boards and commissions on the state of education at the precollege level. The general theme of these recent reports, clearly indicated by such titles as "A Nation at Risk," is that the country is lagging in its educational effort. Terrel Bell, the U.S. Secretary of Education in President Reagan's first term, sounded the alarm about "the educational foundations of our society . . . being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity." A center of attention in all these reports, if not *the* center, is the adequacy of programs in science and mathematics.

The Association, with its various programs and its hard-working committees, is ready for the challenge. We are moving forward on various fronts, for example:

- **Mathematical competitions.** We have continued to encourage and reward excellence in mathematics through our nationwide high school contest program, which culmi-

nates in the USA Mathematical Olympiad and the International Mathematical Olympiad. This series of competitions is currently being expanded to include a competition for junior high school students.

- **Career information for students.** The MAA has distributed to secondary school students literally hundreds of thousands of pamphlets on careers in mathematics and on *(continued on page 2)*



Construction of this 200-pound, ocean-going canoe by the centuries-old tradition of the Makah Indians is used to illustrate problem-solving techniques in *Challenge of the Unknown*, a new seven-part film series on mathematics for young people. See the article on page 4 of this issue.