

David A. Rothrock: An early member of the Indiana Section

Fall, 2016

Rick Gillman

Dr. David A. Rothrock was a native Hoosier who was actively involved with both the founding the Mathematical Association of America and of the Indiana Section. Rothrock was born in Milltown Indiana in 1864, and graduated from the Northern Indiana Normal School (now Valparaiso University) in 1887. Overlapping this period of study, during the years 1881 to 1891, he also taught at several high schools in Indiana and Illinois. He earned his A.B. in 1892 and his A.M. in 1893 from Indiana University, whose faculty he immediately joined. Promoted to assistant professor in 1895, Rothrock continued his studies at the University of Chicago and the University of Leipzig, from which he was awarded a Ph.D. in 1898.

The attached picture shows him circa 1901.

Rothrock spent the remainder of his professional career at Indiana University, finally retiring in 1938. He served as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences from 1920 to 1937, and as Director of Admissions for his final year before retirement. Before becoming dean, Rothrock was active in the mathematics department, publishing books mostly for secondary schools. Titles include Essentials of Algebra for Secondary Schools (1904), Solid Geometry (1909), and Logarithmic, Trigonometric, and Other Tables (1914).

Dr. Rothrock was at the organizational meeting of the Association in December of 1915. He was also at the organizational meeting of the Indiana Section of the Association in the spring of 1916, although he did not take a leadership role in the new section.

This is likely because, at the organizational meeting of the Association, he was named to the new editorial board for the American Mathematical Monthly. In particular, he was named editor of the "News and Notes" section of the monthly.

Like News and Notes sections in the current newsletter, Rothrock's part of the Monthly included information about hirings, promotions, moves, and deaths:

Miss Gertrude I. McCain has been appointed professor of mathematics in the Oxford College for Women at Oxford, Ohio.

Mr. C. Garlough has been appointed instructor in mathematics at Wheaton College, Illinois.

Professor Eva S. Maglott, for the past thirty-two years professor of mathematics at Ohio Northern University, died during the summer vacation.

There was also an international perspective on the news and notes. The very first news item in re-organized Monthly was the announcement, in January 1916, that

Professor Paul Painlevé, of the department of mathematics in the University of Paris, is minister of education in the present French cabinet.

The death is announced of Professor J.W. Richard Dedekind, of the technical school of Brunswick, Germany.

The News and Notes section contained a wide range of material. The mathematical summer course offerings at many major universities were shared. Here we can find that Dr. Rothrock taught Fourier Series and Differential Equations in the summer of 1916.

The news and notes section ran short bits about publications of books and articles in other journals, reported on meetings of a variety of organizations including the American Mathematical Society, chapters of the National Teachers Association and on many of the flourishing high school and college math clubs. Items in the section ran from two line bits like those above, to full length paragraphs, to 500 word essays.

American involvement in World War I impacted everything and the News and Notes began to include short notes about faculty being called into service. An early example of such a note is

One of the charter members of the Association, Mr. H. S. Card, assistant professor of mathematics and physics in Lombard College, Galesburg, Illinois, is now “doing his bit” as a sergeant in the First Regiment, U.S. Engineers. This regiment is for the present stationed at Washington Barracks, D. C., having only recently returned from service on the Mexican border.

In September 1917, Rothrock seems to have begun experiencing the same tribulation as other editors of newsletters: a dearth of news. That news and notes section of that issue of the Monthly contained the following appeal.

AN APPEAL TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION:

Please report to Professor Rothrock...all items within your knowledge, appropriate for the news column of the Monthly...It is desired to make this column of genuine interest and value to the members, and to this end universal cooperation is needed.

The following year, in the 25<sup>th</sup> volume of the Monthly, there as a different editor for the News and Notes section in the March issue, and the section was not included in the December issue of the Monthly. D. A. Rothrock is listed as the News and Notes editor for the January 1919 (Vol 26 #6) issue of the Monthly, but never again after that. No explanation is given for this seemingly random resignation; maybe there were problems at Indiana University that needed resolution, as Dr. Rothrock became dean the following year.

## References

1. David A. Rothrock Papers, 1885-1910. Archives Online, Indiana University.
2. Cairns, W., The Mathematical Association of America, *The American Mathematical Monthly*, 23(1).
3. Rothrock, D., News and Notes, *The American Mathematical Monthly*, 23(8).
4. Rothrock, D., News and Notes, *The American Mathematical Monthly*, 24(7).
5. Rothrock, D., News and Notes, *The American Mathematical Monthly*, 24(6).