

Marcellus Waddill

Marcellus Waddill is Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at Wake Forest University where he taught for thirty-five years, retiring in 1997. He received his B.A. from Hampden-Sydney College and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. He was Secretary-Treasurer of the section from 1990-1996. Waddill received the 1996 Section Distinguished Service Award and the 1999 Meritorious Service Award.

Marcellus Waddill sent written answers to submitted interview questions in July 2011.

MAA SE: Where were you born?

MW: North Garden, VA (near Charlottesville).

MAA SE: What was your earliest experience with mathematics?

MW: The earliest I recall was in third grade. I was in elementary and secondary school (11 grades) 1936-1947.

MAA SE: Have you always liked mathematics?

MW: Yes!

MAA SE: Who was your greatest mathematical influence when you were young?

MW: He was my high school plane geometry teacher.

MAA SE: What hobbies or other interests did you have? Do you still have them?

MW: None to speak of. We have lived in Winston-Salem since 1962. I always enjoyed and worked in our yard, garden and flowers. Now that I am physically unable to do that, I really miss it.

MAA SE: What undergraduate school did you attend? What was your major?

MW: Hampden-Sydney College, VA which in those years, 1948-52, did not offer a major. I had 4 years of mathematics (8 semesters) however which was all they offered.

MAA SE: What were your favorite subjects in undergraduate school?

MW: I liked all the subjects which I took. I especially liked mathematics, foreign languages, English and history.

MAA SE: How did you decide on a career in mathematics?

MW: Somewhat by chance. I was in the U.S. Navy (Korean War years) and while serving in the Navy I determined to attend law school. The problem was that the Navy would not release me until November and law school started in September. From November until June, I joined the faculty at Hampden-Sydney College and taught mathematics. Following this year (1957-58), I entered graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh from which I graduated in 1962 with a Ph.D. in mathematics.

MAA SE: Who would you consider your mentor(s)?

MW: At the University of Pittsburgh; John C. Knipp and Louis Sacks (both deceased) and at Wake Forest; Ivey C. Gentry, also deceased.

MAA SE: What graduate school(s) did you attend?

MW: University of Pittsburgh.

MAA SE: Why did you choose those schools?

MW: For their excellent academic reputation and their best financial aid offer.

MAA SE: Where was your first job?

MW: Wake Forest University, also my entire career.

MAA SE: Why did you choose that job?

MW: Because of Wake Forest's (Dept. of Mathematics) excellent reputation and due to the excellent faculty in the Department of Mathematics and the Administration.

MAA SE: When and why did you first join the MAA?

MW: In 1960 at the University of Pittsburgh. I decided that it would be in my best interests to belong to MAA and I was encouraged to do so by a number of faculty in the Department.

MAA SE: When and why did you come to the Southeastern Section?

MW: Wake Forest University is located in NC, one of the states in the Southeastern Section, and the Departmental faculty members were members of MAA.

MAA SE: Who or what inspired you into service for the MAA?

MW: Ivey Gentry, Departmental Chairman of Mathematics. He was instrumental in my first attending meetings of MAA, Southeastern Section. I liked and respected the people in the Southeastern Section and continued my interest and participation. As I became acquainted with the leaders in the Section, I was encouraged to become involved in the work of the Section.

MAA SE: What leadership roles have you had in the MAA?

MW: I am having trouble recalling the many committees I served on. I was Secretary-Treasurer of the Section from 1990 through 1996.

MAA SE: What accomplishments are you most proud of with regard to the MAA?

MW: I can't recall anything earth-shaking that I accomplished. I suggested and supported dividing the office of Secretary-Treasurer and adding a Committee on Programming with a Chairman and duties to produce and published the programs for the Section [Meetings]. During my terms as Secretary-Treasurer, the Section began to produce and distribute to the membership a Section newsletter which was well received. It is now produced biannually.

MAA SE: Who were the Southeastern Section "stars" when you first joined the Section?

MW: John Neff, Billy Bryant, Trevor Evans, Ivey Gentry, Henry Sharp, Jr., John Kenelly, Jim Ware, J.R. Wesson, Lida Barrett.

MAA SE: Do you have any favorite anecdotes about MAA Southeastern Section people, places or things?

MW: None that I recall now. (I retired 14 years ago.)

MAA SE: How has the section changed since you have been a member?

MW: It has changed, of course. Attendance is up in numbers. There are more student and junior college participants (a good thing) but fewer participants from the larger universities; for example, University of NC at Chapel Hill, NC State, Duke, [University of] Georgia, [University of] Alabama, Vanderbilt, [University of] South Carolina. During my years in the Section, Florida seceded from the Section and formed a new section in 1965.

MAA SE: Is there anything else you would like to add?

MW: This may be of interest; I was awarded the Section Distinguished Service Award in April 1996 at the Spring Meeting and the MAA Meritorious Service Award in January 1999 at the National Meeting in San Antonio.