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# GORDON LOFTIS WALKER

## 1912 - 1988

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Gordon Walker, who retired as executive director of the American Mathematical Society in 1977, died in Providence on 18 December 1988. He had been ill for several months during the spring and summer, and then was convalescing well when he died following emergency surgery.

Dr. Walker joined the staff in 1959. Between that time and his retirement, the number of AMS members increased from 6000 to 16,000, the staff expanded from 45 to 175 employees, and the annual budget increased tenfold to \$5 million. In addition, the publication program, which consisted of five journals and seven book series at the start of his tenure, grew to 14 journals and 17 book series by his retirement. His term as executive director spanned a period of remarkable growth and development in mathematics and related areas.



Dr. Walker's efforts transformed the Society and helped to bring it to its present state of preeminence. Among the developments for which he deserves principal credit were the creation of the office's first computerized financial reporting system and the pioneering work of the Society in the area of

computer typesetting of mathematical texts. During his tenure the Soviet Union signed an international copyright agreement, and he immediately arranged for contracts for the translation of several of the principal Soviet journals. He attempted to computerize the operations of *Mathematical Reviews*, but that was not really feasible in the days of batch processing and Hollerith cards. According to Ellen Swanson, former head of the editorial department, he was the one who persuaded her to write her *Mathematics Into Type*, which has served as the standard reference for the preparation of mathematical manuscripts for many years.

Dr. Walker was instrumental in the creation in 1967 of the Committee to Monitor Problems in Communication, and, as a member of it, he made the Committee aware of modern trends in handling scientific information. One result was the Mathematical Offprint Service, a pioneering effort in the selective dissemination of information. In the late 1960s, he helped to create a Commission on a National Information System in the Mathematical Sciences in order to devise a single system for dissemination of mathematical information. The Commission was an important step toward increasing cooperation in the mathematical community.

Dr. Walker's ability to recognize and develop the potential of his employees was of great benefit to the Society. Most of the present department heads in the Providence office, and many of the other senior employees, flourished under his tutelage. The stability of the Society as a business operation depends on this cadre of senior staff, as they provide the support and know-how that any new director, coming from academia, must always find indispensable.

Gordon Walker was born on 29 October 1912, in Salt Lake City, Utah. He received a B.S. in 1937 and an M.A. in 1938 from Louisiana State University, and his Ph.D. from Cornell University in 1942. Between 1942 and 1954 he served on the faculties of the University of Delaware, Temple University, Purdue University, and Cornell University. His research was in geometry and algebra; his publications include several papers and the book *Military and Naval Maps and Grids* (Dryden Press, 1942; with William W. Flexner).

From 1954 to 1959 he was Head of the Mathematics Section at the Research Center of the American Optical Company. He served as a member of the Board of Directors of the National Federation of Science Abstracting and Indexing Services from 1966 to 1970, and as its president from 1968 to 1970.

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