WELLS, Mary Evelyn. August 20, 1881–October 7, 1965.
Mount Holyoke College (BA 1904), University of Chicago (MS 1907, PhD 1915).

Mary Evelyn Wells was born in LeRaysville, Pennsylvania, the second of three children of Delphine (Whitford) (b. 1854) and William Henry Wells (b. 1851). Her older brother, George E., was born in May 1879; her younger sister, Anna M., was born in May 1885. Her parents and siblings were born in Pennsylvania, where her father was listed as a farmer in the 1880 census. In 1900 her parents had been married twenty-five years, and the family was living in Naugatuck, Connecticut, where her father was a carpenter. In 1910 her mother was widowed, living with her other daughter and son-in-law in Naugatuck, and working at home as a dressmaker.

Mary Wells received most of her elementary education at home and in the public schools of Brushville and LeRaysville, Pennsylvania. She attended a little over a year of grammar school and four years of high school in Naugatuck and graduated from the academic course in the Naugatuck high school in 1900. That fall she entered Mount Holyoke College, from which she graduated four years later as a mathematics major. She stayed at Mount Holyoke as a department tutor in mathematics for a year after her graduation. She was later elected a Mount Holyoke alumna member of Phi Beta Kappa.

In the fall of 1905, Wells entered the University of Chicago, where she studied for three quarters in each of the years 1905–06 and 1906–07. She was a fellow the second year and received her master's degree in 1907. She became an instructor at Mount Holyoke College that fall and taught there for five years before returning to the University of Chicago as a graduate student in 1912. She stayed at Chicago two years, with a fellowship from Mount Holyoke 1912–13 and a fellowship from Chicago 1913–14 during which she taught one quarter. While at Chicago for her master's and doctoral degrees, she studied under E. H. Moore, H. Maschke, L. E. Dickson, H. E. Slaught, A. C. Lunn, and E. J. Wilczynski in mathematics and under F. R. Moulton and W. D. MacMillan in astronomy. Her dissertation was supervised by E. H. Moore, and the PhD degree was awarded in 1915. Wells had also served as a reader in mathematics for the College Entrance Examination Board in New York City from 1908 to 1913.

During 1914–15 Mary Evelyn Wells was an acting associate professor at Oberlin College, as a temporary replacement for Mary Sinclair, who was away for her first sabbatical. In the fall of 1915, Wells joined the faculty at Vassar College, where she remained except for leaves until her retirement in 1948. She was instructor 1915–20, assistant professor 1920–22, associate professor 1922–28, professor 1928–48, and emeritus professor after 1948. From 1936 to 1948 she was chairman of the department. According to Benjamin Lotto at Vassar, her teaching included a secret course in cryptography for the navy during World War II; the course was taught from about 1943 until the end of the war and had been requested by the navy in order to train women with mathematical and language skills.

Wells traveled abroad in the summers of 1922 and 1924, with records showing her returning to New York by ship from Southampton and Hamburg, respectively. She then had a leave of absence from Vassar from 1926 to 1928. During the first year, 1926–27, she was an exchange professor and head of the department at Women's Christian College, University of Madras, India. The next year, 1927–28, she studied at the Istituto Fisico of the University of Rome, where Vito Volterra was professor. She had corresponded with him in 1925, before she left for India, and in 1928 she published a translation into English of Volterra's 1926 paper that describes his famous theory on population growth. This paper appeared in a journal published in Denmark by the Conseil international pour l'exploration de la mer. Four letters Wells wrote to Volterra are in the archives of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei.

According to her faculty file at Vassar, Wells translated other works, most notably Bernhard Riemann's "On the hypotheses which lie at the foundations of geometry," which appeared in *A Source Book in Mathematics* by David Eugene Smith (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1929; reissued New York: Dover Publications, 1959). That translation is credited to H. S. White, and a note in her faculty file indicates that "Miss Wells said her name was omitted by mistake."

During 1936–37, Wells had a leave of absence from Vassar and returned to Women's Christian College, University of Madras. She served as a trustee of the University of Madras from 1930 to 1937 and again after 1948. She was also a director of St. Christopher's College in Madras 1928–37, of Women's Christian College in Madras 1927–37 and after 1948, and of Women's Christian College in Tokyo 1930–37. In May 1940 she wrote to Helen Owens that she had "published in India and Denmark" (Owens Papers). The latter publication presumably refers to her 1928 translation of Volterra, but her Indian publication remains a mystery.

Wells joined the AMS in 1908, about a year after she received her master's degree, and from that time until 1942, except when abroad, she normally attended several meetings a year of the society. In about 1940 she described herself as an Episcopalian whose favorite recreations were skating and climbing. Other favorite leisure activities were reading, walking, and gardening. Under religious activities, she mentioned that she was on a community church board for several years.

For many years Wells maintained a home in Southport, Maine, where she spent some summers. In 1957 Wells was living in Naugatuck, where her widowed sister, Anna, a former teacher, made her home. Wells described her main avocation as work for the Women's Christian College in Madras. In November 1958 she moved from Naugatuck to Wethersfield, Connecticut. It appears that she was living in Vermont by about 1959. At various times she used addresses in Rutland and nearby Pittsford, near her nephew.

Mary Evelyn Wells died at age eighty-four in 1965 at a nursing home in Rutland, Vermont, after a long illness and was cremated in Troy, New York. She was survived by her nephew in Pittsford, several grandnephews, and a grandniece. The Mary E. Wells and Gertrude Smith Fund, honoring Wells and another long-time mathematics faculty member, was established at Vassar for students demonstrating excellence in mathematics.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA (charter member), AAAS (fellow), AAUP, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi.

Thesis and dissertation:

1907 Concerning the motion of a homogeneous rigid bar under the attraction of a non-homogeneous sphere. MS thesis, University of Chicago. Typescript.

1915 On inequalities of certain types in general linear integral equation theory. PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, directed by Eliakim Hastings Moore. Private edition, 1917, distributed by the University of Chicago Libraries, reprinted from *Amer. J. Math.* 39:163–84.

Publications:

1917 On inequalities of certain types in general linear integral equation theory. *Amer. J. Math.* 39:163–84. Published version of PhD dissertation. Review: *JFM* 46.0653.06 (O. Toeplitz).

1918a Review of *A First Course in Higher Algebra*, by H. Merrill and C. E. Smith. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 25:72–74.

1918b Review of *Plane Trigonometry with Tables*, by E. H. Barker. *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 24:491–93.

1928 (Translator from the Italian) Variations and fluctuations of the number of individuals in animal species living together, by Vito Volterra. *J. du Conseil* 3:3–51. Reprinted as an appendix to *Animal Ecology: With Especial Reference to Insects* by R. N. Chapman, 409–48. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1931.

1929 Review of *Short Course in Spherical Trigonometry*, by P. Sperry. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 36:394–95.
1933a Review of *Mathematical Excursions*, by H. A. Merrill. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 40:602–03.
1933b Review of *Totarum: The Story of a Village Boy in India Today*, by I. M. Bose. *Vassar Quarterly* November 1933, 393–94.
1934a Review of *Brief Course in Plane and Spherical Trigonometry*, by H. A. Davis and L. A. Chambers. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 41:98–99.
1934b Review of *The Geometry of Repeating Design and Geometry of Design for High Schools*, by A. D. Bradley. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 41:99–100.
1937 Review of *Lectures on College Algebra*, by S. B. Dandekar. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 44:649–50.
1938 Review of *Plane Trigonometry*, by J. B. Rosenbach, E. A. Whitman, and D. Moskovitz and *Plane and Spherical Trigonometry*, by J. B. Rosenbach, E. A. Whitman, and D. Moskovitz. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 45:182.
1943a Henry Seely White, 1861–1943. *Science* 98 (2534): 76–77.
1943b Henry Seely White–In Memoriam. *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 49:670–71.

Reference to: AmMSc 4–8, 9P–10P; AmWom 1935–40; WhAm 6.
"Naugatuck Woman Ends Trip Abroad." Unidentified newspaper clipping.
"Dr. Mary E. Wells, 84." (Obituary) *New York Post*, 8 Oct 1965.
"Dr. Mary Wells, Retired Professor." (Obituary) *Poughkeepsie (NY) Journal*, 8 Oct 1965.
"Dr. Mary E. Wells." (Obituary) *New York Times*, 11 Oct 1965.

Other sources: Master's thesis vita 1907; PhD dissertation vita 1917; Owens Papers; Mount Holyoke College Archives; Vassar College Archives; communication with Vassar College Archives; "Cryptography Course Concealed!," *Vassar, the Alumnae/i Quarterly* (Winter 2002); US Census 1880 PA, 1900, 1910, 1920 CT, 1930 NY.

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