

PETERS, Ruth M. December 11, 1906–May 12, 1961.

BRYN MAWR COLLEGE (BA 1928, MA 1931), RADCLIFFE COLLEGE (PhD 1933).

Ruth Margaret Peters was born in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the second of three children of Julia (Clutz) (1881–1963), a native of Maryland, and Robert John Peters (b. ca. 1871) of Pennsylvania. Julia Clutz was the daughter of the president (1889–1904) of Midland College in Aitchison, Kansas, where Robert J. Peters was a professor of English 1904–09. Julia Clutz received a bachelor's degree from Midland College in 1899, graduated from Goucher College in 1901, and, it appears, received an MA in 1904 from a different school.

Ruth Peters' brother, Robert, was a year older than she; her sister, Mary (1909–1997), was two and a half years younger. In 1910 the family was living in Pittsburgh, where her father was a college professor. Her parents had been married for five years, this being the second marriage for her father. In the 1920 census her father's occupation was listed as educational secretary; in 1930 he was called an executive with the US government.

Peters attended grade schools in Gettysburg and prepared for college at the Seiler School, a private school in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The family was living in New Cumberland, near Harrisburg, when Peters was in college. As an undergraduate mathematics major at Bryn Mawr, she held the Elizabeth Wilson White memorial scholarship her senior year. She graduated in 1928; the following year, 1928–29, Peters worked for the traffic engineering department of the Bell Telephone Company doing trunk analysis.

In 1929 Peters returned to Bryn Mawr for graduate work in mathematics and physics and studied there as a scholar of the Society of Pennsylvania Women in New York 1929–30 and as a fellow in mathematics 1930–31. Peters received her master's degree in 1931, a year after her younger sister, Mary, received her bachelor's degree from Bryn Mawr and the same year that Mary received her master's degree in chemistry from Radcliffe College.

In 1931 Ruth Peters entered Radcliffe College to begin her doctoral work. While there she wrote a minor thesis on equations of the fifth degree. She completed all her requirements, including her dissertation in Riemannian geometry, and received her PhD in 1933. Her first position after receiving her PhD in the depth of the Depression was as a personnel assistant doing job analysis for the Pennsylvania Emergency Relief Board.

The following year Peters went to Judson College, a small Baptist women's college in Marion, Alabama, where she was assistant professor 1934–35 and associate professor 1935–36. She then took a position as professor of mathematics and physics at Lake Erie College, also a women's college, in Painesville, Ohio. She was there 1936–43 and 1945–47. According to an item in the *Monthly* in 1943, she was granted a leave of absence from Lake Erie College in order to serve as a research mathematician with the applied mathematics group at Columbia University. Sometime prior to June 1943 she submitted a general application for employment to the Bryn Mawr alumnae office listing her address as Lake Erie College; on the form she noted that she was then working as an assistant physicist for the National Defense Research Council at Harvard and was seeking employment in the Boston area teaching mathematics or doing work in physics or statistics. Peters reported later that she was a technical aide in airborne fire control, guided missiles, and rockets for the Office of

Scientific Research and Development at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology 1943–45 and that she did research on the theory of errors in bombing.

Two years after returning to Lake Erie College, Peters went to St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York. She was associate professor 1947–55 and professor 1955–58. While there she served as department chairman for two years. She also held a National Science Foundation faculty fellowship at Harvard the second semester 1957–58 and was president of the New York Lambda chapter of Phi Beta Kappa in the late 1950s. In the mid-1950s, Peters indicated that she was a member of the League of Women Voters and was interested in oil painting and gardening.

In 1958 Peters went to the University of New Hampshire as associate professor. She was there only two years before she had to take a medical leave in October 1960. Peters' mother had lived with her from at least 1953, before Peters became ill. Ruth Peters then moved to her sister's home in Belmont, Massachusetts. She died from cancer in a Boston hospital at age fifty-four in 1961 and was survived by her mother, sister, and brother.

Three years after Peters' death, Mary Fieser, her sister and coauthor with Louis F. Fieser of standard texts in organic chemistry, established an award at the University of New Hampshire in her memory. The award description notes that one of Ruth Peters' prime interests was discovering outstanding students and encouraging their development. The Dr. Ruth Peters Memorial Award is given each year to a student majoring in mathematics who has a deep interest in mathematics and shows signs of creativity.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, AAUP, Phi Beta Kappa, Pi Mu Epsilon.

Thesis and dissertation:

n.d. Equations of the fifth degree. Minor thesis, Radcliffe College. Also listed as "Equations of elasticity."

1933 Parallelism and equidistance in Riemannian geometry. PhD dissertation, Radcliffe College, directed by William Caspar Graustein. Summary: *Radcliffe summaries of theses*. 1935: 115–19. See also **1935**.

Publications:

1935 Parallelism and equidistance in Riemannian geometry. *Amer. J. Math.* 57:103–11. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 61.0800.02 (L. Berwald); *Zbl* 011.08202 (S. Cohn-Vossen).

1937 Parallelism and equidistance of congruences of curves of orthogonal n -tuples. *Amer. J. Math.* 59:564–74. Reviews: *JFM* 63.1243.03 (E. Bortolotti); *Zbl* 017.42204 (D. J. Struik).

References to: AmMSc 7–8, 9P–10P; WhoAmW 1.

"Ruth Peters, 54, a Mathematician." *New York Times*, 13 May 1961.

Other sources: Owens questionnaires 1937, 1940; Bryn Mawr College Archives; communications with Goucher College Archives and with Midland Lutheran College Archives; communication with David Burton, former colleague at the University of New Hampshire; NotAW COMP (Fieser, Mary Peters); US Census 1910, 1920, 1930 PA.

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