

HALLER, Mary E. June 15, 1901–June 16, 1970.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (BA 1924, MS 1931, PhD 1934).

Mary Elizabeth Haller was born in Cumberland, Maryland, the second of at least four daughters of Winifred (Buckey) (b. 1875) and William Henry Haller (b. 1875), both of Maryland. Her elder sister, Elsie C., was three years older than she; her younger sisters were Isabella, about three years younger, and Winifred R., about eight years younger. Her father worked for the railroad, as a clerk in 1900 and as a telegraph operator in 1910.

Haller attended public schools in Cumberland, Maryland, and graduated from Allegany County High School in 1916. The next two years she was enrolled in the Frostburg State Normal School (now Frostburg State University) in Frostburg, Maryland, from which she graduated in 1918. She taught in elementary schools for the next five years. She was an instructor in the public schools in Maryland 1918–20 and in Renton, Washington, 1920–23. While teaching in Renton, near Seattle, she attended the University of Washington and in 1924 earned her bachelor's degree in education with a major in mathematics and a minor in economics. The next five years, 1924–29, Haller taught in the high school in Renton and, after successfully teaching and demonstrating professional growth, earned the Washington State Life Diploma.

In 1929 Haller returned to the University of Washington, where she was a teaching fellow in the mathematics department 1929–31 while she worked toward her 1931 master's degree with a thesis in projective geometry and a minor in physics. While continuing her graduate work at the University of Washington she was an associate in mathematics 1931–34 and a Loretta Denny fellow 1933–34. She received her PhD in 1934 with a minor in physics and with a doctoral dissertation in algebraic geometry directed by R. M. Winger, who also directed her master's thesis.

In 1934–35 Haller was professor and dean of women at Gooding College in Idaho. At the time she was there the college was under pressure to offer non-academic subjects; it closed three years later. It appears that she studied at the University of Chicago in the summer of 1935. After her year at Gooding, Haller returned to the University of Washington where she was instructor 1935–41, assistant professor 1941–49, associate professor 1949–65, and associate professor emeritus after her retirement in December 1965. Haller was among fourteen faculty members whose teaching was recognized in "Class Acts" in the September 1999 issue of *Columns*, the University of Washington alumni magazine. A tribute from a student describes his experience in about 1947:

The "Doc," as she was known, had a reputation for working students to death and I was more than apprehensive about attending her lectures.

About 20 students arrived at the first scheduled class meeting . . . All of a sudden, here comes an imposing figure of a woman without the least bit of friendliness on her face. She wrote her name on the blackboard, turned to the class and said in firm tones, "My name is Dr. Mary Haller and I want you to be advised right now that all of you will do twice as much work as any other class, you will not miss a class unless you are near death, if you even drop a pencil

during one of my lectures, you might as well transfer to another class. Now, those of you who don't like my terms are free to go without prejudice."

At the end of her announcement, at least 10 of the assembled group left the room without even a glance to see who was crazy enough to remain. When the door to the classroom finally closed, "Doc" turned to us and with a great big smile said, "Now that we've ridden ourselves of the quitters, let's get started. I assure all of you that surviving this class will be a feather in your cap, and you will become good engineers." True to her word, our class became as one and lifelong friendships started. (House, "Class Acts: Mary Haller")

In 1945 Haller's signature was one of eighteen on a petition asking for the formation of the Pacific Northwest Section of the MAA, and during the 1950s she attended many of the section meetings. Her continued interest in physics was demonstrated the summer before her promotion to associate professor when Haller attended a three-day symposium on electro-magnetic theory at MIT that was sponsored by the AMS, the American Institute of Electrical Engineers, the American Institute of Physics, and the Institute of Radio Engineers.

In addition to the organizational affiliations listed below, Haller belonged to Zeta Mu Tau, a local mathematics honor society; Sigma Pi Sigma, a national physics honor society; and Pi Lambda Theta, a national honor and professional association in education. She was also a member of the American Society for Engineering Education. She was a Methodist and a member of the Wesley Club and Kappa Phi, a club for Christian university women.

Haller remained in Seattle after her retirement and died as a consequence of heart disease at Swedish Hospital in Seattle in 1970, the day after her sixty-ninth birthday.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA, AAUW, Phi Beta Kappa, Sigma Xi, Pi Mu Epsilon.

Thesis and dissertation:

1931 Sextics invariant under the icosahedral group and its sub-group the dihedral group of order ten. MS thesis, University of Washington, directed by Roy Martin Winger.

1934 Self-projective rational octavics. PhD dissertation, University of Washington, directed by Roy Martin Winger. See also **1936**.

Publication:

1936 Self-projective rational octavics. *Tôhoku Math. J.* 42:38-53. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 62.0764.01 (E. A. Weiss); *Zbl* 014.22603 (E. G. Togliatti). Presented to the AMS, Seattle, WA, 18 Jun 1936; abstract: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 42:346 #249.

References to: AmMSc 6–8, 9P–11P; WhoAmW 1–2.

Other sources: PhD dissertation vita 1934; Owens questionnaire 1937; communication with University of Washington Archives; "[History of the Pacific Northwest Section of the Mathematical Association of America](#)"; Thomas E. House and R. B. Kieburz, "[Class Acts: Mary Haller](#)" *Columns*, September 1999; Robert A. Pedersen, "Haller Revealed," [Columns](#), December 1999; US Census 1900, 1910, 1920 MD, 1930 WA; Washington death certificate.