

**MAZUR, Miriam F. (Becker).** March 30, 1909–March 5, 2000.

HUNTER COLLEGE (BA 1930, MA 1932), YALE UNIVERSITY (PhD 1934).

Miriam Freda Becker was born in New York, New York, the eldest of three children of Lena (Silverman) (ca. 1885–1972) and Joseph David Becker (ca. 1883–1947). Her mother emigrated from Russia in 1902 and her father from Austria in the late 1890s. They married in about 1908 and lived in Manhattan at least through 1920 before moving to the Bronx some time before 1930. Joseph Becker was a life insurance salesman. They had a son, Emanuel, about three years younger than Miriam, and a daughter, Ruth, about five years younger.

Miriam Becker graduated from Hunter College in 1930 with a mathematics major and a physics minor. She remained at Hunter as a graduate student in mathematics, finished her master's thesis in October 1931, and received her master's degree in 1932. She then entered Yale University, with a university fellowship for mathematics, for further graduate work. While at Yale she was awarded a Susan Rhoda Cutler fellowship in mathematics in 1932 and was elected a member of Sigma Xi in 1933. She wrote her dissertation on relative fields under the direction of Oystein Ore, who had come to Yale in 1927, and received her PhD in 1934.

Becker was appointed tutor at Hunter College in 1934 and taught there three years, including the summer of 1935. Articles in the *New York Times* in late 1937 and early 1938 detail a court battle after Becker was terminated from Hunter College at the end of August 1937 with no charges preferred against her. This particular case was part of a larger issue contested between the Teachers Union and the Board of Higher Education regarding the extension to instructors in municipal colleges of regulations governing tenure for teachers in the public school system. In December 1937 the *New York Times* reported that a state Supreme Court justice held "that instructors in colleges maintained by the city may be dropped only on charges after a hearing if they have served a three-year probationary period." Consequently, the Board was directed to reinstate Becker. In March 1938 the Court of Appeals reversed that decision.

After leaving Hunter College, Miriam Becker spent the year 1937–38 at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. The work she did there led to a joint paper with Saunders Mac Lane, who had held a fellowship at Yale 1933–34. The paper, based on a problem suggested by Oystein Ore, was read by Becker at an AMS meeting in 1939 and appeared the following year in the *Bulletin* of the AMS.

In 1938 Becker returned to New York City and taught at George Washington High School, a public high school in Manhattan. On July 7, 1940, Miriam Becker married Abraham Mazur (1911–2000), a biochemist who had received his PhD from Columbia in 1938. He went from fellow to professor and chair in the chemistry department at City College from 1932, when he received his bachelor's degree there, until his retirement in about 1975. City College, often referred to as CCNY, was the College of the City of New York when he was a student but later became the City College of New York of the City University of New York and is now usually referred to as City College (CUNY). Abraham Mazur was also on the faculty 1941–75 at the Cornell University Medical College, in New York City, and was at one time vice president for research at the New York Blood Center.

After the 1940–41 school year Miriam Mazur was transferred from George Washington High School to Samuel Gompers Technical High School in the Bronx, and

temporarily stopped teaching. The Mazurs had two children, Ellen and Stephen. She returned to teaching in 1954 and spent the next eleven years at Brooklyn Technical High School. While at Brooklyn Tech she directed student teachers and taught advanced placement courses.

In January 1964 Miriam Mazur applied for a position at City College (CUNY) and listed [Jeanette Keston \(Delevie\)](#), a fellow student at Yale who was on the faculty there, as a reference. Mazur was assistant professor from September 1964 until she was promoted to associate professor effective January 1, 1972. She remained in that rank until her retirement in September 1977. At City College, Mazur taught a full range of undergraduate courses from remedial algebra and geometry through elective courses, mainly in abstract algebra and number theory. While an assistant professor she was course supervisor for several remedial and introductory courses; from about 1970 she was course supervisor for elective courses. Since at least 2004 awards honoring Miriam Mazur have been presented by the CCNY mathematics department to undergraduate students for outstanding achievement.

Miriam Mazur had been living in New York when she died in 2000 shortly before her ninety-first birthday. She was survived by her husband, sister, two children, and four grandchildren. Her husband died four months later.

**Organizational affiliations:** AMS, MAA, NCTM, Pi Mu Epsilon, Sigma Xi.

**Thesis and dissertation:**

**1931** [Becker, M. F.] Theory of elementary divisors and applications. MA thesis, Hunter College. Typescript.

**1934** [Becker, M. F.] On relative fields. PhD dissertation, Yale University, directed by Oystein Ore.

**Publication:**

**1940** [Becker, M. F.] with S. Mac Lane. The minimum number of generators for inseparable algebraic extensions. *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 46:182–86. Reviews: *JFM* 66.0115.01 (H. L. Schmid); *MR* 1,198f (N. Jacobson); *Zbl* 022.30402 (C. Arf). Presented to the AMS by M. F. Becker, New York City, 28 Oct 1939; abstract: *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 45:662 #300.

**References to:**

“Rebuffs Teachers’ Union.” *New York Times*, 17 Nov 1937.

“Dr. Becker Reinstated.” *New York Times*, 1 Dec 1937.

“High Court Directs State Police Tests.” *New York Times*, 9 Mar 1938.

“Mazur, Miriam Becker.” (Death notice) *New York Times*, 7 Mar 2000.

**Other sources:** Application for social security account number 1956; Center for Research Libraries College Catalog Collection; CCNY Archives; CCNY *Fellowships Newsletter*, Summer 2004; WhoAm 41 (Mazur, Abraham); US Census 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 NY; SSDI.

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