

**COOPER, Elizabeth M.** January 19, 1891–May 17, 1967.

RADCLIFFE COLLEGE (BA 1913), BRYN MAWR COLLEGE (MA 1923), UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS (PhD 1930).

Elizabeth Morgan Cooper was born in Syracuse, New York, the eldest of six children of Jessie Marian (Bagg) (1866–1933) and Henry R. Cooper (1856–1928). Her mother, of Syracuse, and her father, of Woodbury, New Jersey, were married in Syracuse in 1889 and had three daughters followed by three sons. They were Elizabeth, Mary (1892–1983), Margaret (1895–1986), James (1896–1968), Joseph (1900–1978), and Charles (1902–1987). It appears that all of the children later graduated from either Radcliffe or Harvard. Her father was a Quaker and the manager of the caustic soda department of the Solvay Process Company for more than twenty years before his retirement in 1909. In 1910 he was described as a mechanical engineer. Her parents were active in the social life of Syracuse.

Cooper attended the Orchard School and the Goodyear Burlingame School, both private schools in Syracuse, before entering Radcliffe College in 1909, where she held a scholarship all four years. She noted in her dissertation vita that she “was privileged to have in most of her undergraduate work in mathematics, the patient, inspiring instruction of Professor Charles Leonard Bouton.” She graduated magna cum laude in mathematics from Radcliffe in 1913.

During the next seventeen years Cooper taught in private preparatory schools and earned her graduate degrees. She first taught at the Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, for fourteen years, 1913–1927. During 1920–23 she took graduate courses at Bryn Mawr College and received a master’s degree in 1923, having been a graduate scholar her last year there. During 1924–25 she had a leave of absence from the Baldwin School and read mathematics at Newnham College, Cambridge University, England, on a fellowship from Radcliffe College. While there she studied with J. E. Littlewood, among others. She studied at Radcliffe College 1927–28. Cooper entered the University of Illinois in 1928, was an assistant 1929–30, and wrote her dissertation in geometry before receiving her doctorate in 1930 with a minor in physics.

After receiving her PhD, Cooper continued to work in private schools for the next seven years. She was principal of the Buckingham School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from 1930 to 1935. In an obituary written for a school publication she was described as the “principal of Buckingham during the depths of the Depression . . . [and] showed courage, clear-sighted practicality and humor, endearing her to staff and students alike.” She was head of the mathematics department of the Chapin School in New York before becoming supervisor of mathematics and teacher training at Hunter College and chairman of the mathematics department at Hunter College High School in 1937. She remained chairman of the department at Hunter High School until she retired in 1958. While at Chapin, Cooper wrote, but did not publish, a textbook that she called “Algebra for Anne.” Later she worked on a text called “Mathematics Made Plain” and on an article explaining some of her philosophy of teaching called “Mathematics for the Bright Student.”

After her retirement Cooper returned to Syracuse, where she taught some undergraduate mathematics courses at Syracuse University and participated in teacher training seminars. The Buckingham obituary notes that after her retirement she also served as “a devoted tutor in mathematics to privileged and underprivileged

children alike. She was very much interested in anything that would promote better understanding among people of all races.” This attitude was in keeping with her deep involvement with the Quakers. Among her contributions as a life member of the American Friends Service Committee was her service as director in summer 1939 of Sky Island Hostel for European refugees at Nyack, New York. She was also a charter member and chairman of the management committee of a cooperative residence club in New York, which she described in **1944** as a hostel for elderly refugees. In 1948 it became Newark House of the New Jersey Fellowship Fund for the Aged, and Cooper served as its president. She described herself as a Democrat and was also active in the Radcliffe Club of Syracuse.

Elizabeth Cooper died in her home in Syracuse, New York, at age seventy-six in 1967. She was survived by her two sisters and three brothers.

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

**Dissertation:**

**1930** Perspective elliptic curves. PhD dissertation, University of Illinois, directed by Arthur Byron Coble. Printed version, 1931, Baltimore, MD, reprinted from *Amer. J. Math.* 53:555–72.

**Publications:**

**1924** America from within. *Thersites* (Newnham College). Reprint: 1925. *American Women's Club Magazine* (London), July.

**1931** Perspective elliptic curves. *Amer. J. Math.* 53:555–72. Published version of PhD dissertation. Reviews: *JFM* 57.0824.01 (F. Schaale); *Zbl* 001.40202 (E. A. Weiss).

**1939a** Review of *An Analysis of Roots and Solutions of Exercises Used in Plane Geometry Texts*, by H. Pickett. *Scripta Math.* 6:47–48.

**1939b** Review of *Enriched Teaching of Mathematics in the High School. A Source Book for Teachers of Mathematics*, rev. ed., by M. N. Woodring and V. Sanford. *Scripta Math.* 6:47.

**1939c** Review of *General Mathematics*, by H. Crandall and F. E. Seymour. *Amer. Math. Monthly* 46:102.

**1939d** Review of *The Importance of Certain Concepts and Laws of Logic for the Study and Teaching of Geometry*, by N. Lazar. *Scripta Math.* 6:47.

**1941** Review of *A Bibliography of Mathematical Education: A Classified Index of Periodical Literature since 1920, Containing 400 References*, by W. A. Schaaf. *Scripta Math.* 8:255–56.

**1944** Safe and not too sorry: An account of the founding and functioning of a hostel for elderly refugees in New York City. *Better Times*, Dec 1: 7, 16.

**1950** Introducing the multiplication table for signed numbers. *Math. Teacher* 43:420–21.

**1952** Lead friendly light. *Friends Intelligence* 109:90–91.

**1954** Need mathematics be a bug-bear? *Newsletter Assoc. Math. Teachers NY State* 4 (2).

**References to:** BiDWSci, [BioWMath](#).

“Elizabeth Cooper Taught Math Here.” (Obituary) *New York Times*, 20 May 1967. Obituary. *The Buckingham Letter* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1967): 8.

**Related manuscript materials:**

Elizabeth Morgan Cooper Papers, 1909–1967. MC277, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.

**Other sources:** PhD dissertation vita 1930; Owens questionnaires 1937, 1940; US Census 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 NY; SSDI.