

# Mathematical Society

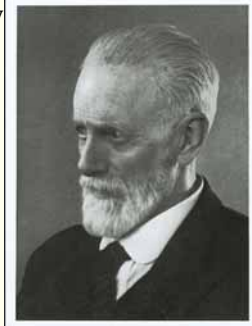
## Some history (excerpt)

by Bent Birkeland

[The summary of the society's history below is not a direct translation of the Norwegian page [Historikk](#) (also by Bent Birkeland).]



The first attempt to create a mathematical society in Norway was made in 1885 by Sophus Lie, who was at that time professor in Oslo. This was a time when similar initiatives took place in many European countries. Moscow Mathematical Society was founded in 1864, London in 1865, the Finnish, French and Danish ones in 1868, -72 and -73, respectively. In Norway, however, the mathematical community at that time was too small, and the venture broke



down when Lie moved to Leipzig the following year. But a series of reforms in the high schools and at the university (less Latin and Greek, more modern languages, science and mathematics) during the second half of the 1800's led to a marked expansion of that community, and a formal organisation became necessary. In particular the need for a Norwegian mathematical journal was felt. The difficulty was of course to find financial support for it, and to find persons able and willing to take on the editorial work.

In 1918 the time had come. Preliminary discussions took place in the early autumn. **Arnfinn Palmstrøm** (photo left), who at that time worked as an actuary, and from 1919 until his untimely death in 1922 was Norway's first professor of insurance mathematics, secured financial support from the major insurance companies. Government sources also responded positively, and the Danish mathematician Poul Heegaard, who had just been appointed professor of geometry in Oslo, was willing to edit the journal. He had valuable experience from editing the Danish Mathematical Journal for a couple of years. Finally, on the 2nd of November 1918 (incidentally, Heegaard's birthday), the Norwegian

Mathematical Society was born. The purpose was stated broadly as "– connecting mathematically interested persons from all over the country"; the first more specific task was to start a national mathematical journal. Professor Carl Størmer was elected the Society's first president, Palmstrøm became its secretary, and the more arduous task of editing the journal was taken on by Heegaard for the mathematical side and Anton Alexander for the didactical one.

The "founding fathers" were university mathematicians, leading school teachers, actuaries, officers (mainly from the Geodetic Service), and students. At least two of them came to follow the Society closely for more than sixty years. The number theorist Viggo Brun (1885-1978) became a university professor, Fredrik Lange Nielsen (1891 - 1980) became a leader in the insurance world in Norway.

Reference:

<http://www.matematikkforeningen.no/enghist.html>