

## **Tribute to Richard Sampson..... David Haines**

**(Editor's note:** By way of Sarah Mabrouk, I received the following tribute to Richard Sampson, retired professor of Mathematics from Bates College, who died recently. The tribute was written by David Haines who is also from the Mathematics Department at Bates College on October 21.)

Any mathematician who in the last half of the Twentieth Century attended more than a few meetings of the Northeast Section of the MAA couldn't avoid getting to know Richard Sampson. A graduate of the Bowdoin class of 1944, with additional degrees from Boston University and Tufts, Richard taught for 38 years at Bates. After his retirement in 1990 he taught at Northeastern University and at the University of Southern Maine. Richard's mathematical roots were in New England and few New England mathematicians didn't know him.

Richard delighted in mathematics and the society of mathematicians. He always was working on a problem. Often he would crash into my office uninvited, put his problem on the blackboard and, despite my attempts to ignore him, tell me to help him. He usually succeeded in drawing me into an hour-long session of what he knew we both enjoyed more than anything else, mathematics. I once saw this happen on a plane full of mathematicians. Richard, struggling with a problem, couldn't keep the challenge to himself and began pacing up and down the aisle accosting other mathematicians, several of whom soon clustered intently around us, to the annoyance of the flight attendants trying to get us ready to land.

Attending the Annual Meetings with Richard was an event. He seemed to know everybody. Many of the famous mathematicians of his generation greeted him by name; however Richard proudly refused to acknowledge those he deemed too arrogant. But he made a special effort to befriend the tiny handful of African-American mathematicians at that time.

Richard saw mathematics everywhere. He couldn't discuss velocity without telling about flying into hurricanes to measure wind speed. ("Damn, it was noisy when the plane got hit by lightning!") He loved to tell about throwing dry ice out of an airplane to punch holes in a cloud so his colleagues on the ground could estimate the velocity of the cloud. He used to describe using the Mean Value Theorem in the jungles of British Guyana: To compute the average temperature over the last 24 hours he cut along the temperature recorded by a pen on a piece of uniform density paper and then weighed it.

Richard was revered as a teacher, but had little use for student course evaluations and even less for faculty who tolerated misbehavior from their students. Bates Faculty were accustomed to Richard's screams of "Damn!" from the third floor classroom, followed by the clatter of chalk and erasers being hurled at the student who dared to sleep while he was teaching. Richard developed and taught his own course in geometry, an area close to his heart. He was also a sailor and created a course in celestial navigation, in which students went out on the campus and used astrolabes, compasses, and sextants to transport themselves around an imaginary world.

Richard's students, his colleagues, and the Northeast Section have all benefited from Richard's infectious enthusiasm for mathematics. He will be missed.

Memorial contributions in Richard's name may be made to the Richard W. Sampson Mathematics Lecture,

Office of College Advancement, Bates College, Lewiston, Maine 04240.