

postcards to be returned to Barnett House were included in the kits.

In summer 1976, the kits were updated, and new materials from commercial companies were added, paid for "at cost" by the Council. In 1977, Audrey Brattberg took over as coordinator and reported that kits were moving smoothly throughout the province. It was later recommended that the kits not travel for

the 1977-78 school year, as they needed repair and upgrading. In April 1978, the executive decided to send the updated kits to the ATA library, where teachers and schools would still have access to them. MCATA had handled the circulation of the kits throughout the province for six years, providing a service of particular importance to nonurban teachers and schools.

Metric Missionaries

AS A RESULT OF THE SUCCESS OF the Metric Workshop held in summer 1974 and being aware of the need for metric "awareness," the executive formed the "Metric Missionaries." These teams of teachers traveled throughout the province, with all the necessary materials to put on four-hour Saturday workshops. Fees were \$5 for MCATA members, \$10 for nonmembers (including membership) and \$8 for nonmembers' workshop fee only. Local organizers arranged

for the meeting place, handled publicity and conducted registration. The Missionaries coordinators were Francis Somerville for southern Alberta, Brian Chapman for central Alberta and Joan Kirkpatrick for northern Alberta. The Metric Missionaries operated for two years; there is no report of the number of workshops conducted. However, the minutes of a 1975 executive meeting noted that 71 requests for information on the Metric Missionaries had been received from all over North America.

AD 1489

Johann Widman introduces $+$ and $-$ signs in mathematics.

AD 1545

Italian Gerolamo Cardano publishes *The Great Art, or the Rules of Algebra*.

Italian mathematicians solve problem of cubic equations.

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AD late 1500s

François Viète establishes use of vowels for unknown quantities (variables) and consonants for known quantities (parameters).

AD 1612

Claude Gaspar Bachet de Méziriac publishes book of number games with emphasis on arithmetic recreations.

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Scottish inventor John Napier develops logarithms, a means of performing multiplication and division by addition and subtraction.

Reflections on Metric Missionaries

George Cathcart

1969–71 *Faculty of Education Representative*

1971–73 *Treasurer*

1973–75 *President and Monograph Editor*

1975–78 *Past President*

1980–81 *Newsletter Editor*

1981–82 *Journal Editor*

IN THE EARLY 1970S, MATHEMATICS EDUCATION STAFF AT THE University of Alberta were “taking over” the ninth floor of the Education Building. Our planning included designing and setting up one room as a teacher centre (a popular concept at that time) where teachers could come to interact, participate in workshops, view new teaching materials, make instructional materials and attend other professional activities.

At about the same time, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics established a type of innovative project fund. On behalf of MCATA, I prepared a proposal for the purchase of (nonprint) metric materials¹ to be used in the teacher centre. The proposal was approved and funded to a maximum of \$1,000. Metric bathroom scales, weights, capacity measures, metre sticks, metre trundle wheels and numerous other metric measurement tools were purchased and housed in the teacher centre.

The teacher centre concept never rounded first base. MCATA picked up the slack and formed a number of teams of Metric Missionaries, whose purpose was to “convert” teachers (and others) to the metric system by providing a rationale and hands-on experiences with metric measurement. The metric materials purchased through the NCTM grant were taken to numerous places in Alberta for one-day or half-day workshops.

Footnote

1. The White Paper on metric conversion had been tabled in the House of Commons in January 1970, with the first overt signs of conversion to begin in 1975. Most players on the educational scene were actively preparing metric curriculum materials.