Harold P. Fawcett

By David Kullman

Harold Pascoe Fawcett was born in Upper Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada on July 20, 1894. He graduated with an A.B. from nearby Mount Allison University in 1914 and began a high school teaching career in Fort Fairfield, Maine. After serving with the United States Army in France during World War I, Fawcett became a U.S. citizen and was hired as head of the home study division of the YMCA schools in New York. He earned a master's degree from Columbia University in 1924 and continued doctoral work while teaching in Columbia's extension division. In 1937, he received a Ph.D. in mathematics education from Teachers College, Columbia.

Fawcett joined the faculty at The Ohio State University in 1932. He was promoted to full professor in 1943 and served as chair of the Department of Education from 1948 to 1956. He received Ohio State's Award for Distinguished Teaching in 1961 and retired with emeritus rank in 1964. Harold P. Fawcett died in 1976.

During his early years at Ohio State, Fawcett taught at the newly-opened University School and served as Associate Director of that school for three years. Believing that math should be used to teach students to think and solve problems, he designed an experiment which involved communication in mathematics, in particular in his geometry class. Students had freedom to explore geometry and methods of proof while collaborating in groups and teaching themselves and each other. The results of this experiment became the basis for his doctoral dissertation at Columbia, as well as the NCTM 13th Yearbook.

On November 4, 1950, twelve mathematics teachers met with Dr. Fawcett in the Ohio State University Faculty Club. Fawcett had called the group together to consider the possibility of organizing an Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics. That meeting is considered to be the founding of OCTM, and Fawcett was said to have mused, "What we did today was to organize the Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics! You have no idea what impact this will have on mathematics teachers and their students in Ohio." OCTM has indeed had a major impact on mathematics teachers and students, and the Christofferson-Fawcett Award, presented annually to an Ohio mathematics educator for lifetime contributions to mathematics education, helps to remind us how it all began.

Fawcett went on to serve on the Board of Directors of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics from 1952-1955, and he was NCTM President from 1958-60. His best-known publications are the 13th NCTM Yearbook, *The Nature of Proof* (1938), and *The Teaching of Mathematics from Counting to Calculus* co-authored with Kenneth Cummins in 1970. He also authored numerous articles in *The Mathematics Teacher*, from "Teaching for Transfer" (1935) to "The Geometric Continuum" (1970).

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