

On My Trip to Europe, August 1–9, 1989*

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My daughter Anne brought me to Boston's Logan Airport to catch the Northwest plane departing 8.20 P.M. for Amsterdam. A few hours in the air and we heard that one of the engines had become naughty, and so we returned to Boston. Better late than dead. After an hour at Logan we departed again and arrived at Schiphol (Amsterdam) at 2.15 P.M. (instead of at 8 A.M.). A peeved nephew with wife and child was waiting; he had already been at the airport since 8 A.M. I was also peeved, and so we cancelled our peevishness against one another. Henkjan Struik, wife Betty, and son Thomas (aged 10) received me hospitably in their home in the inner city.

I spent one day and a half in Amsterdam, saw my sister-in-law Truida, now twice a widow, in her pleasant apartment on the Nassaukade. She had to sell her old home on the Bloemgracht for a good price; the house is now beautifully restored with two ornamental lanterns and an old-fashioned gable-stone "De Eenhoorn" (The Unicorn). It is part of a general restoration of ancient houses in Amsterdam, quite successful. On August 2, Wednesday, I met Joop Morrien, of the CPN paper "De Waarheid" (Truth, Pravda), and we saw restorations and the building in which the paper is produced. I was of interest as an old timer, probably the only still surviving charter member of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (founded 1918). Morrien, I find, has given me a nice write-up in the paper.

In the afternoon I took the train to Utrecht, where after some search in a suburb I found the publishing house "Het Spectrum." Last winter I prepared a new Dutch translation of the *Concise History of Mathematics* at the request of Het Spectrum. I talked with editor De Jong who told me that they had little trouble with my handwriting (who can type Dutch in Boston?) and I may expect printed proofs in September. And so I hope for the best, since one of my Utrecht colleagues has kept an occasional eye on this business.

Early in the morning of Tuesday, August 3, I boarded a train to Hamburg. I love such train rides with glances here at Deventer, Osnabrück, and Bremen. At the Central Station in Hamburg, arriving at 2:15 P.M., I met by appointment my friend David Rowe—he is the colleague who prepared that interview published in *The Mathematical Intelligencer* (New York) and *NTM* (Leipzig). He was with Karin Reich, from Stuttgart, whose work on the history of differential geometry I know.

* From a letter distributed to family and friends shortly after returning to the U.S.

Rowe had a car, brought me first to the Harbor Hotel, then to the conference in the Kongress Zentrum. The meeting was the XVIIIth International Congress on the History of Science. In the morning my award, the Kenneth O. May Prize, had already been announced; I got it together with Professor A. P. Yushkevich from Moscow. Since this was known, I was received at the session on history of mathematics with polite jubilation. Pleasant.

In the evening we went boatrip on the Alster, a tributary of the Elbe that flows through Hamburg. Miserable rainy weather, and we saw nothing of the Alster except its gloomy water. But it was the occasion for the award, which Joe Dauben of New York presented with a nice flourish—it was in the form of a framed certificate. I expressed my appreciation in well chosen words, applauded cheerfully, the more enthusiastically since it lasted only five minutes. Yushkevich did the same. I spoke in English, he in French (see *Historia Mathematica* **17** (1990), 382–384). Two hours' further entertainment was, I hope, enjoyed by all—about 150 guests perhaps. I enjoyed meeting old friends and colleagues and making new acquaintances. Next day was occupied by sessions with a wine and cheese party at the end.

On Saturday, August 5, David Rowe, with wife and son, called on me for a two day ride to Munich. The son is a lively lad of two years and soon called me Onkel Dirk—we early slipped into German. First we went North into Holstein to visit an aunt of Mrs. Rowe; we had noonday dinner there. It struck me how much house and meal reminded me of parts of the Netherlands. The cauliflower was prepared in the same delicious way my mother did it (especially the thick sauce).

Dodging Hamburg, David Rowe drove south on the Autobahn—superhighways. There is no speed limit, you are free to kill yourself. Rowe is a skillful driver and his often 80 miles an hour (still more impressive expressed in kilometers) was only agreeable.

In Hamburg we had been told that an excursion to Wolfenbüttel with its famous old library could easily be made, and so we arrived in Wolfenbüttel just in time before the Bibliothek closed—the collection dates back to the 16th century. The Herzog August Bibliothek flanks a large lawn, then bathed in afternoon summer sun. Opposite is a castle, one that belonged to those mostly petty, dissipate dukes of Brunswick (some of them sold their young men to England as Hessian mercenaries, but one of them also paid for young Gauss's education), and here is also the 18th-century house where G. E. Lessing spent the last years of his life as librarian (he died in 1781). Here he wrote *Nathan der Weise*, and a modern statue of this wise Jew adorns the lawn. Wolfenbüttel itself is one of those sleepy beautiful German towns full of half-timbered (*Fachwerk*) houses. All in all, a nice interruption.

We stayed overnight in Göttingen, in a house belonging to a friend of Mrs. Rowe. David and I walked through the town where Ruth and I had studied in 1925–1926, and looked at the inscriptions on the houses, indicating the worthy professor who had lived there. In two of them, those of Hilbert and of Landau,



David Rowe and Dirk Struik in the Rathskeller, Göttingen, August 5, 1989

Ruth and I had actually been guests. We ended up, David and I, in the Rathskeller. When we were leaving we met the manager and in passing told him that I had not been there for 63 years. “Aber bitte, setzen Sie sich”—please take a seat—he cried, brought us Pils and took a photo of us sitting there. Five minutes later we got our picture, Pils and all, nicely framed.

Next day from Göttingen to Munich. Here some trouble with my lodgings. The organization responsible for housing had, in its wisdom, assigned a hotel to me way out in a suburb. Why it wanted me out of the way I do not know. But David Rowe is resourceful, and with some talk with the lady at the Congress counter I got a room right in the Deutsches Museum where the conferences took place.

The Deutsches Museum in Munich is one of the largest in the world with exhibits on science and technology, a research center, 200 employees. I attended sessions there, and on Monday afternoon gave my own lecture on some sociological problems in the history of mathematics. There was no discussion, to my regret, though there must have been a hundred listeners. Another session was in commemoration of J. D. Bernal, whose book on the *Social Function of Science*—that great testament and polemic, writes C. P. Snow—had appeared just 50 years ago.

Luncheons and dinners were with friends and colleagues. On an excursion into the beautiful old town I came to the central square with the ancient Town Hall. Its tower chimes were singing in the 5 P.M. hour. Sitting around on the square were some hundreds of visitors gaping at the tower. And true enough, there, high

up, began a moving set of 16th-century dancers turning around, very prettily. It reminded me of another summer day years ago in Belgian Malines (Mechelen), where a similar crowd on a similar central square was listening to an organist playing the carillon in the tradition of the late Josef Denyn.

On August 9, however, I took the plane and arrived back in Boston around 5 P.M.