SAUNDERS MAC LANE: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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Saunders Mac Lane is born in Tafville, Connecticut, on August 4, 1909, in a family with Scottisch origins. Both his father and his grandfather are Congregational ministers; this has certainly helped to make Saunders Mac Lane the man of utmost integrity and steadfast principles that we have known.

Saunders graduates from school in 1926, at the age of 17. He then goes to Yale where - already during the first year - he wins the Barge prize in a mathematics competition. He graduates from Yale in 1930.

After graduation from Yale, Saunders Mac Lane gets a significant fellowhip to study further in Chicago. There, he is influenced by the strong views of E.H. Moore. It is also in Chicago, during that fellowhip, that he meets Dorothy, who is going to become his wife.

At the next fall, Saunder crosses the Atlantic to join the university of Göttingen, in Germany, where he integrates a very strong group in logic ... and gets married with Dorothy. He presents his dissertation "Abgekürzte Beweise im Logikkalkul" in 1933, under the supervision of Paul Bernays and has his examination with Herman Weyl. After publication of his dissertaion, he gets his D.Phil. from Göttingen in 1934.

But Saunders Mac Lane comes already back to the United States in 1933, with a one year Sterling fellowship at Yale. Then he moves for two years to Harvard where he holds a Benjamin Peirce instructorship. And next a one year instructorship at Cornell, before returning to Chicago as an instructor in 1937. It was during his first stay in Chicago that he met Dorothy: it is during this second one that their first daughter, Gretchen, is born. And then Saunders is called back to Harvard as assistant professor.

1941 is another important year in the career and the life of Saunders Mac Lane. His second daughter, Cynthia, is born during a leave at Yale. And the book "Survey of modern algebra", the fruit of his collaboration with Garrett Birkoff is published. This book has influenced several generations of mathematicians and many years later, after the death of Birkhoff, Mac Lane will publish a deeply revised and up-dated version of it.

After Pearl Harbour, Saunders Mac Lane engages himself in the war effort in Applied Mathematics Group-Columbia. It is also during the war that he meets Samuel Eilenberg, who had esacaped from Poland to the United States. Together they start celebrated works on homology, complexes and their cohomology. And together also, they invent category theory to which - like to the Eilenberg-Mac Lane spaces - their names are rigidly attached.

And after the war - in 1947 - Saunder Mac Lane integrates the university of Chicago as a professor and it is in Chicago that he will develop the rest of his career. Already in 1952, he becomes chairman of the deparment of mathematics.

The influence of Saunders Mac Lane has been enormous on the mathematical life, not only in Chicago, but in the whole of the United States: he has been President of the Mathematical Association of America from 1950 to 1952, president of the American Mathematical Society from 1973 to 1975, Vice-President of the National Academy of Sciences in 1973 and appointed to the National Science Board in 1974. It would simply be too long to list all the awards and distinctions that he has received.

Saunders Mac Lane was known for his breadth of interest and knowledge, his enthusiasm, his incisive intellect, his capacity for orderly and intelligent computing ... and the strength of his teaching. During his careern he had 40 students ... and 1057 descendants.

Saunders Mac lane died in San Francisco on 14 April 2005, with the reconfort of the affection of his second wife Osa.

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