

Oto Obůrka

News and Notices. Professor Jiří Klapka dead

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PROFESSOR JIŘÍ KLAPKA DEAD

OTO OBŮRKA, BRNO

On February 12, 1976 a distinguished Czechoslovak mathematician, professor RNDr. Jiří Klapka, doctor of physical-mathematical sciences, professor emeritus of the Technical University in Brno, holder of Order of Labour, fellow of merit of the Association of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists, died in Brno at the age of 76.

Born as the youngest of three children in a teacher's family at Skuteč, he knew since his early youth the atmosphere of social struggles own to the region where for many people the only way of earning life was hard and insufficiently paid work in granite quarries and in shoe industry. After leaving the secondary school he studied at the Charles University in Prague and in 1921 took up the post of lecturer with professor J. Vojtěch at the Czech Technical University in Brno. In 1925 he obtained the degree of doctor of science and in 1928 he habilitated for descriptive, analytical and differential geometry. His habilitation thesis¹⁾ dealt with a topic he had been working on for several years at the instigation of professor E. Čech and he treated later in a deeper and larger way. His position of private docent without salary and his post of lecturer did not provide a satisfactory economic basis for a three-member family and for this reason he took up the post of professor at a grammar school in 1930. Nevertheless, he went on lecturing at the Technical University. In 1937 he was appointed professor without salary and a year later he left for the newly founded Technical University in Košice where he was appointed professor. At the beginning of 1939, an unfavourable political situation brought Klapka back to Brno.

After the Czech Universities had been closed in November 1939, he spent the period of the most cruel Nazi terror in Žamberk. He stayed there till the end of the war. In January 1945 he was assigned by the authorities the job of mathematician in Škoda Works in Hradec Králové and was given the task to work up a nomographic solution of thermodynamic computation of steam-boilers. This work was completed only after the war in 1946.

¹⁾ „O asymptotické transformaci ploch zborcených a o fleknodálních a komplexových čarách na zborcených plochách čtvrtého stupně“ *Práce Moravské přírodovědecké společnosti, sv. IV, spis 6, 1927, 189–225.*



Professor Jiří Klapka

After the liberation of Czechoslovakia by the Soviet army J. Klapka, appointed full professor, devoted all his endeavours to the edification of the Technical University in Brno, particularly of its Institutes of mathematics and descriptive geometry. In 1952 he became head of the Chair of mathematics and descriptive geometry at the Building Faculty a function he held till his retirement in 1971.

Throughout his career professor Klapka focussed his interest on research work. His particular sphere of activity was differential geometry of line manifolds. With his papers in the theory of line surfaces and congruences he ranged himself among distinguished specialists in this field on world scale. His papers were listed and analysed in detail by O. Borůvka and K. Svoboda in *Časopis pro pěst. mat.* 85 (1960), 377–384 and by J. Vala in *Časopis pro pěst. mat.* 95 (1970), 223–226. His last paper on Wälsch invariant, mentioned by J. Vala, appeared in the editions of the Faculty of Science in Brno under the title Об инварианте Вэльша конгруэнции прямых трехмерного проективного пространства P_3 и об их преобразованиях Лапласа, *Arch. Math.* 1, *Scripta fac. sci. nat. UJEP Brunnensis*, VIII: 57–62, 1972.

Professor Klapka led also the members of his Chair and all those interested in research work to a systematic study in the field of differential geometry of line surfaces and congruences. He was always ready to suggest a working topic and to give helpful advice.

The proof of his endeavour to encourage a systematic study of this field is the seminar of differential geometry professor Klapka organized in Brno. Under his twenty years' direction this seminar became a place where people from various Czechoslovak institutions could get acquainted with modern theories in geometry and find inspiration for further research activity. A large number of papers intended as theses for obtaining scientific degrees or presented for publication were reported and discussed in the seminar. It may be said that in this way professor Klapka put into effect a fruitful cooperation between his seminar and the Commission for scientific degrees whose chairman he was.

Time-consuming conscientious direction of an important Chair, heavy commitments in research as well as in organization and administration of scientific activity, membership in Commissions for scientific degrees, capacity of coordinator of State research projects, refereeing and reviewing of papers, continued education of graduate students and last but not least his own direct teaching activity involved many hours of exhausting labour throughout his professional career.

The lectures of professor Klapka were noted for a perfect methodic approach and clarity of exposition. This made them popular and well attended by students. A plastic and systematic exposition characterizes also his textbooks and teaching texts in descriptive geometry, his textbooks of analytic geometry used on nation scale and his monographs of scientific-popular type – to start with his vector calculus for electrotechnicians.

For many years professor Klapka took a very active part in the organization of mathematical activities in Brno. He was chairman and later vice-chairman of the

Brno branch of Association of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists and, at the Congress of the Association held in 1969, he was elected its fellow of merit.

However, his main concern was the Chair with its staff for whom he endeavoured to provide the best working facilities. As a teacher devoted to his socialist country he also studied the relations of mathematics to the Marxian philosophy, reported on this topic at a scientific Conference organized by the Faculty and contributed to its Proceedings. Till almost the last period of his life professor Klapka took part in activities of the Regional Peace Council whose aims he fully supported.

In recognition of his research work the Government Commission for scientific degrees conferred upon professor Klapka the degree of doctor of physical-mathematical sciences in 1956. The rector of the Technical University in Brno appreciated the research and pedagogical activity of the distinguished teacher as well as his contribution to the edification of the University by awarding him the Golden Medal of the Technical University in 1965 and a Golden Commemorative Medal in 1974. The highest reward for the life-work of professor Klapka was the Order of Labour presented to him in 1970.

Since 1921 the life of professor Klapka was tied up to Brno. He devoted half a century to its Technical University and remained faithful to this institution though at a time he was offered a post of professor of analytic and differential geometry at the Charles University in Prague, whose orientation was nearer to his professional interest. Let us recall on this occasion a close friendship of professor Klapka to the late professor E. Čech, who at that time had arranged everything for Klapka's move to Prague and who served him as model of a socialist scientist with a profound erudition in philosophy.

In the 60's professor Klapka was taken ill with a treacherous diabetes, which he managed to maintain on a bearable level through a disciplined way of life. Nevertheless, a retina affection resulting from this disease reduced his working ability and finally made any activity quite impossible.

The last appreciation of professor Klapka's life-work was made on the occasion of his 75th birthday. There was a special meeting of the Association of Czechoslovak Mathematicians and Physicists where his contribution to the development of mathematical science was shown. His thoughts and inspiring ideas are developed by his collaborators; in the course of his long teaching career he provided numerous students with knowledge of mathematics, important and necessary in all fields of engineering research and practice.

All his friends, collaborators and students will keep alive the memory of professor Klapka as a scientist and as a man.