

Forgotten mathematician Henry Lowig (1904–1995)

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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph was written in 2010 and 2011 at the Department of Mathematics Education, Mathematics and Physics Faculty, Charles University and the Institute of Applied Mathematics, Faculty of Transportation Sciences, Czech Technical University in Prague. It is dedicated to the life and work of Henry Lowig (1904–1995), long forgotten mathematician from the Czech lands, whose complicated life story and scientific career paralleled the evolution of our nation during the 20th century.

The initial inspiration for this work was the discovery of personal and professional correspondence between Henry Lowig and Vladimír Koříněk (1899–1981), held in Prague at the Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic. The second impulse was making contact with Ingrid Jackson (née Lowig – Henry Lowig’s daughter) and Libuše Lowig (Henry Lowig’s wife), who live in Sydney, Australia and who with extraordinary interest and willingness enabled the study of family archives.

Henry Lowig (respectively also Heinrich Löwig and Jindřich Löwig) was born in Prague of a German Catholic family with a Jewish-born father, attended the German grammar school in Liberec and studied at the Faculty of Science of the German University in Prague. In the 1930s he was worked as assistant teacher and interim teacher at various German secondary schools in Bohemia and Moravia. He was also a private docent of mathematics at the German University in Prague, where he taught a foundation mathematics course and gave optional lectures in “modern mathematics”. Henry’s promising scientific and teaching career was interrupted by World War II and the gruesome Nazi race laws. Even after the war, he was still not able to obtain a suitable teaching position at a secondary or tertiary institution, as under the laws of the new Czechoslovak Republic he was considered a German, and hence an “unreliable” citizen. That is why in 1948 he accepted a lecturing position at the University of Tasmania in Hobart, Australia, leaving Czechoslovakia for good. He decided to live abroad and, after the February communist coup, never returned to his native country. In 1957 he moved to Edmonton, Canada, where he was appointed tenured professor of mathematics and taught until his retirement in 1972, thereafter staying as emeritus professor.

We note that Henry Lowig was ashamed of his German origins and all that the Germans had done during World War II, so he officially changed his name to avoid being identified as German and he rarely ever spoke in German again. His family communicated only in Czech and upheld Czech customs and traditions. He did not forget Bohemia, the Czech nation and culture, and throughout his life corresponded with Czech friends and colleagues; his letters written in perfect Czech show his deep interest in the development of our mathematics.

This monograph seeks to recall Lowig's life story, to evoke his personal, moral and ethical views which rightfully deserve our attention, respect and admiration, and to evaluate his mathematical work.

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The first part of this monograph describes in detail Henry Lowig's life story, the lives of his father, mother, sister and his own family, and his educational and scientific work of which almost nothing is known in our mathematics community. We evaluate his professional work and place it in the context of the development of mathematics in Europe and the world. This section was written on the basis of archival research and study of material in books, journals, professional monographs, textbooks, published works and newspaper articles.

The second section of the monograph contains factual appendices. These consist of a list of Lowig's publications supplemented by reviews of those works, a list of reviews written by Lowig and Lowig's revealing personal memoir of the difficult time he spent in German labour camps.

The third section contains reproductions of contemporaneous documents and photographs. The work concludes with an English synopsis and an index.

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I extend my thanks to all my colleagues who over the last three years discussed with me the life and work of Henry Lowig. These conversations provided valuable suggestions and ideas. It is my agreeable duty to express thanks above all to Professor Vlastimil Dlab, Associate Professor Jindřich Bečvář and Dr. Antonín Slavík, who analysed and evaluated Lowig's work and achievements in algebra (lattice theory, theory of algebra), linear algebra and functional analysis (dimension theory) and mathematical analysis (difference and differential equations).

For the challenging work of translating the first chapter devoted to Professor Lowig's life story, the translation of his labour camp memoirs, help with translating the factual appendices, proof-reading and editing all chapters and careful perusal of the whole manuscript, I thank Ingrid Jackson (née Lowig) of Sydney, Australia, without whose help and support the English edition of the book would not have been possible.

Thanks also to Professor Ivan Netuka and Dr. Zdeněk Pouta for careful review of my manuscript and suggestions which contributed to its completion and to Dr. Jan Škoda from the Prague City Archive for assistance with sourcing archival and book materials.

I thank all those working in archives and libraries who helped me with archival and literature research. The work required particular materials from the following institutions: Archive of the Czech Technical University in Prague, Archive of the Charles University, Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the

Czech Republic in Prague, National Archives of the Czech Republic in Prague, Prague City Archives, Archive of Security Forces (Prague), State District Archives Liberec, State District Archives Pardubice, Military History Archive in Prague, National Library of the Czech Republic, Library of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, Charles University, Library of the Mathematics Department, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Library of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic in Prague, J. A. Komenský Library in Prague.

Finally I thank the University of Tasmania, Australia and the University of Alberta, Canada for endorsing this book about Professor Lowig who dedicated many years to teaching and working at those universities.

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