



H. C. Christofferson

By David Kullman and Johnny Hill

Halbert Carl Christofferson was born on January 5, 1894, in the rural community of Racine, Minnesota, just south of Rochester. His parents had emigrated from Norway, and Hal grew up speaking both Norwegian and English. He graduated from high school with honors, after attending for only three years, and began teaching in a country school. His summers were spent working on a farm and in a machine shop.

In 1914, Christofferson enrolled at the University of Minnesota and earned an A. B. degree, with membership in Phi Beta Kappa, after only three and a half years. He would go on to earn a Master of Arts degree from the University of Chicago in 1923 and a Ph.D. from Columbia University in 1933. In the meantime, he continued his career as a teacher, principal, and superintendent of schools in several Minnesota communities before accepting a position as head of the Mathematics Department at the Wisconsin State Teachers College – Oshkosh in 1923.

Five years later, Christofferson was hired as a Professor of Mathematics and Director of Secondary Education at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. The 1930 yearbook shows him as Head of the Mathematics Department, Treasurer of Phi Beta Kappa, and a member of the education honor society, Kappa Delta Pi. A history of Miami's School of Education names him as "one of the most recognized" faculty during the 1940s. He also served as acting Director of Admissions in 1946 and Director of Student Teaching for a couple of years.

Soon after arriving in Oxford, Dr. Chris joined the recently chartered Kiwanis Club. He served as Kiwanis Club President in 1931, and three years later he became the first Kiwanis Lt. Governor to be elected from Oxford. As a Kiwanian, he was a strong supporter of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, helped lead the efforts to establish Hueston Woods State Park, and worked toward the building of a retirement home in Oxford. He also served as an elder in the Presbyterian Church, Chair of the Oxford Community Chest, and a member of the Masonic Lodge. Christofferson's personal interests included golf, bridge (where he had his own ideas of how it should be played), and raising plants. He enjoyed sharing cuttings and bulbs with other members of the Oxford community.

Dr. Christofferson was an early advocate of inquiry or heuristic teaching methods, and he believed in a need to teach "functional" mathematics that would be useful in the industrial society of his day. His best-known publication is *Geometry Professionalized for Teachers*, based on his doctoral dissertation at Columbia. More than twenty articles and book reviews were published in professional journals, including fourteen in the *Mathematics Teacher*. He also authored a number of mathematics workbooks and curriculum guides and served as the mathematics editor of *School Science and Mathematics* from 1942 to 1945.

At the height of World War II, Christofferson's article, "Mathematics that Functions in War and Peace," appeared in the February 1944 issue of the *Mathematics Teacher*. The following month he attended

an NCTM conference in New York to begin planning a program of mathematics in the post-war era. Returning home, he organized an aeronautics conference for high school teachers, held in April 1944 at the Vandalia Airport and Wright Field in Dayton.

Professor Christofferson held joint appointments in the Department of Mathematics and the School of Education at Miami until his retirement in 1961. After his retirement, the Department of Teacher Education hired Jim Wesson, Johnny Hill, and Bill Rouse as mathematics educators. Dr. Chris, as he was known to his friends, delighted in dropping by their offices and reminding them that the University had to hire three people to replace him.

Dr. Christofferson helped in many ways to further the education of future mathematics teachers. At one point he provided a scholarship for a young faculty member, enabling that person to return to graduate school in order to complete a doctorate in mathematics education. He also endowed funds at Miami University to provide prizes, scholarships, and NCTM student memberships for prospective elementary and secondary school mathematics teachers. He passed away on June 4, 1973, in Rochester, Minnesota.

H. C. Christofferson served on the board of directors of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (1934–38), followed by a term as NCTM President (1938–40). He was one of the founding members of OCTM in 1950 and served as the Council's second president (1952–1954). OCTM's Christofferson–Fawcett award for lifetime contributions to mathematics education is named after him and co-founder Harold Fawcett. His philosophy of mathematics education may best be summed up in the closing lines of his President's Message in the 1953 OCTM Newsletter. Paraphrasing a well-known verse from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Christofferson wrote: "And now abideth skill, understanding, and insight, these three, but the greatest of these is insight."

