

Tutte Colloquium History

D.H. Younger

If it is Friday afternoon, there is most likely a research lecture sponsored by the Combinatorics and Optimization Department taking place on the fifth floor of the MC building.

It has been that way for as long as there has been an MC building, that is, 1967. Indeed, the Colloquium's history can be traced back to the summer of 1962, when Professor Tutte arrived at Waterloo.

Let us step back to describe his history. William Thomas Tutte was born in Newmarket, England, in 1917. Newmarket is not far from Cambridge, and it is there that Tutte was educated, first in the high school, and then at Trinity College. As an undergraduate at Cambridge, he majored in Chemistry, but at the same time began to do research in combinatorial mathematics. Tutte continued on as a graduate student, but that was interrupted by the War: in 1941 he was recruited to work on codebreaking at Bletchley Park, work that was not known publicly until his 80th birthday. At the end of the War, Tutte returned to Cambridge to pursue a Ph.D. in mathematics. Completing his thesis in 1948, he moved to Canada, to the University of Toronto, as a member of the faculty.

In 1962, Ralph Stanton, Chair of the Mathematics Department, then within the Arts Faculty, brought Tutte to Waterloo, regarding him as key to the development of Mathematics at Waterloo. That was a period of intense growth, and Tutte drew many visiting scholars to Waterloo. So it was that Mathematics became a Faculty in its own right, with the MC building as its home. From his first days, Tutte gave seminars on his work, and invited visiting scholars and members of the cadre of new graduate students to give seminars.

Having a seminar on Friday afternoons became a tradition.

In the early days of the Faculty, Tutte took on as part of his role the coordination of these seminars. The Tutte Colloquium was, until his retirement, mainly his responsibility. Sometime after his retirement as Professor in 1985, Tutte Colloquium became the official title for this series.