

March 25, 2002

Dear Bob,

Early in the summer of 1945, I received and accepted a telegraphic offer of an instructorship at the U of M. A colleague at Northwestern University's Office of Scientific Research and Development Project communicated with a cousin at the U of M and got me an invitation to spend several days as a house-guest in a private home on Packard Road.

Naturally, I traveled by train. The morning after my arrival in Ann Arbor, I visited the Math Department in Angell Hall and was advised not to worry about housing: "The bomber plant at Willow Run is closing, and soon there will be plenty of space." I was not only skeptical about the advice, but also lucky in a contact. A real estate broker showed me a vacant house on James Street (off Independence Boulevard). It belonged to Paul Dwyer of the Math Department, and Dwyer sold it to me on a land contract for 7000 dollars. I returned to Evanston, and shortly before the beginning of the fall term Louise and I took possession of the house.

My office was on the second floor of East Hall, a former school building condemned by the fire marshal. Immediately after entering my office, I opened the window and was pleased to see a drain pipe that might serve as a fire escape. According to Earl Rainville, whose office was on the same corridor, the floors had been oiled ever since Christopher Columbus had discovered the building. Later, I saw that in sunny weather my colleague Donat Constantinovitch Kazarinoff simply threw his cigarette stubs out of his window. Later yet, I heard that on one occasion a stub had landed on the dessicated wooden cover over an unused stairwell and had recognized and honored its opportunity. "But somebody discovered the fire and inadvertently put it out."

Oops! It had not occurred to me to inquire about teaching loads. Mine turned out to be sixteen hours per week. Grading homework and examination papers would be my responsibility. Whether I could remain at the U of M would depend on my research, but finding time for that would be my own problem. Gird your loins!

Registration was heavy. Again, I quote Rainville: "Every veteran who has experienced the thrill of flying thinks he has a future as aeronautical engineer". The signals were clear, and in 1946 the Math Department's eastern contingent moved into new quarters in the East Engineering Building. (Now, after the total absorption of Engineering by North Campus, East Engineering has come into its rightful inheritance: its new name

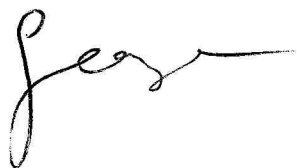
identifies it as the spiritual reincarnation of the oiled-floor structure that had been razed to make room for the Dennison Building's south wing.

September of 1946 also brought a substantial contingent of new math instructors. Willow Run, here they come! The ensuing winter (or the winter after that) was bitterly cold, and Willow Run's drafty shacks gave little protection. One of the Department's new families developed serious health problems. Sumner and Alison Myers stepped in: they moved the entire family into their own home on Forest Avenue.

During World War II, the armed services had (through the Office of Scientific Research and Development) consulted mathematicians about problems concerning design and performance of equipment and about optimal strategies. Some mathematicians had shown admirable ingenuity. After the war, the armed services cultivated the mathematical community's good will by inviting applications for research support. In other words, they helped revive the idea of academic leisure when even the universities had forgotten it. The Research Contracts usually reimbursed appropriate travel expenses to conferences, thus enabling even impecunious mathematicians to attend meetings, where they became personally acquainted with their peers. Friendships sprouted and generated joint research, and collaboration became a way of life. Ah, the joy of it, and oh, to be young again!

I hope you can use some of this, and that younger colleagues will inform you about more recent developments.

Greetings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. E. S.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.