

Arthur Ranum

Professor of Mathematics

— *Feb. 28, 1934*

Professor Arthur Ranum was first at Cornell University in 1893-96 as graduate student, Scholar, and Fellow. After receiving his doctor's degree from the University of Chicago, and teaching in western universities, he returned to Cornell in 1906. Here he remained, leading a quiet life as investigator and teacher.

As a productive scholar he won the highest respect of his colleagues and the mathematical public, especially through his mastery of two fields. His earlier publications dealt with Modern Algebra, and were full of new and interesting results. During the past twenty-five years, however, he wrote mainly on Differential Geometry. He devoted special attention to three topics: the differential geometry of hyperspace; the singularities of space curves; and quasi-spherical curves. His papers contain practically all that is known about the last-named subject. Apart from their originality and rigor, his writings are remarkable for their style and elegance. The subject matter is presented as a complete and harmonious whole; the procedure is strikingly simple and direct; laborious proofs are avoided; and the reader is left with an impression of the richness and beauty of the total conception. The effect is due partly to Professor Ranum's care in thinking through his subject, and partly to his rare genius for presentation.

These talents and his accurate scholarship made him an able teacher. He had a remarkable gift for making the most recondite ideas understandable and attractive. His students gave enthusiastic testimony to the lucidity of his lectures and the pleasure and ease of following them.

The love of harmony so evident in his mathematical research had a counterpart on the emotional side in a passion for music. Though not a skilled performer himself, he was intimately acquainted with the great masterpieces of musical composition, and over-looked no opportunity of hearing them.

In manner he was quiet and self-effacing. He had a considerable element of stoicism in his nature; although handicapped in his later years by ill health, he paid as little attention as possible to his physical disabilities. In his last months, when he was more seriously ill than his most intimate friends suspected, he kept to his work as long as his strength held out, attending to his university duties until within a few days of the end.

By his death Cornell University and mathematical science lose a scholar recognized at home and abroad as a distinguished worker in his field.

Source: Fac. Rec., p. 1838 Resolutions of the Trustees and Faculty of Cornell University, April, Nineteen Hundred And Thirty-Four