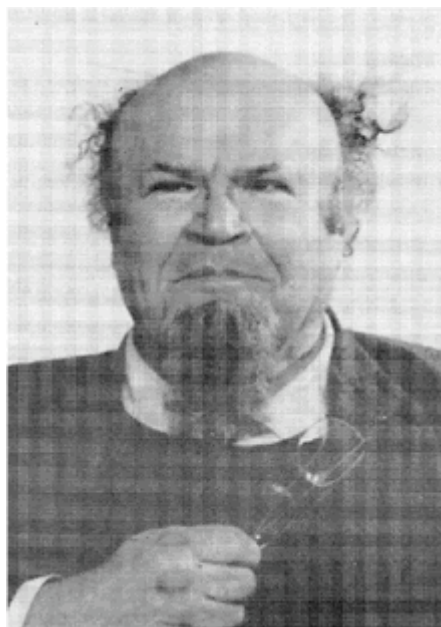## *CENTREFOLD*

Gordon Petersen

No New Zealand mathematician would fail to recognise one of their number described thus: "Larger-than-life-size, American with Danish and English origins, Canadian and Welsh overtones, Chinese undertones and New Zealand associations".

Gordon Petersen was born in San Francisco in 1921. He was an undergraduate at Stanford in 1941–43,taking lectures from Seger, P\'olya, J.V. Uspensky and Blickfield. After a spell of school-teaching at Deep Springs he returned, in 1946, to do an M.Sc. degree under D.C. Spencer, who with A.C. Scheffer was studying univalent functions. The University of British Columbia was just then expanding from about 2,000 students to 12,000 with returned servicemen (100 army barracks were brought in on rafts from Washington to act as lecture-rooms) and Gordon spent two years lecturing there. Then off to Toronto to do a Ph.D. in functional analysis under G.G. Lorentz. With G. De B. Robinson, Stanton and Coxeter also at Toronto it was an enjoyable place and Gordon's thesis gave rise to three papers in Fourier series. Off to Manitoba in 1951, which he found awful; thence to Arizona where he started upon his continuing interest in mathematics for top students, writing a problem book with R. Graesser; on to Oklahoma in 1954, which he describes as god-awful.

Fed up with Americans, Gordon headed off to Swansea in 1955 where, except for an interlude in 1957 in Albuquerque, he stayed for a decade. This was a productive period, with a number of papers on divergent series, some jointly with F.O. Keogh.

In late 1965 Gordon took up the new chair of pure mathematics at Canterbury, joining Derek Lawden (then head of department), "Billy" Andress, Mary Harding and others (who are still on the "scene") making a total of 13 staff. The department was still at the old town site and

computing within the university was under its umbrella. In 1967 Derek Lawden returned to Birmingham and Gordon took over as head, presiding over the rapid growth of staff numbers up to the present 26.

Of his association with mathematical life in New Zealand Gordon looks back on the establishment of the Colloquia as a great success. He recalls making the suggestion at a Steering Committee meeting in Professor Campbell's office in Wellington and having the balance tipped in its favour by Professor Jowett's enthusiasm. The First New Zealand Mathematics Colloquium took place in Wellington the following May (1966).

To the formation of a New Zealand Mathematical Society, Gordon initially expressed opposition—on the grounds of its financial insecurity, the confusion with the affairs of the Colloquium and the inability of the country to support another mathematics journal. (All of these considerations remain current!) However, when its birth became inevitable, he supported the Society, especially in its links with Australia, and served as President for two years.

His local university contributions have been towards fostering indigenous M.Sc. and Ph.D. programmes, getting rid of the language requirement for B.Sc.Hons. and not least, visiting Roy Kerr in America and persuading him to return.

Internationally, Gordon's name is synonymous with matrix summability theory - an area which, in a less complicated era, G.H. Hardy was content to refer to vaguely as divergent series. The last 30 years has witnessed a stream of impressive papers with the result that now summability theory is an important and stimulating mix of some of the best and noblest results in classical and functional analysis. His book "Regular Matrix Transformations", which appeared in 1966, was a welcome attempt to survey this field, to which he has contributed over seventy papers, and to plot directions for future growth. It is still essential reading for any researcher (raw or seasoned) who wishes to appreciate this beautiful branch of analysis. G.M.P. retires in January, prematurely, because of ill-health which has also affected a proposed trip to his beloved China.

W. Brent Wilson