Preface

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Johan Jacob Seidel was born on 19 August 1919 in The Hague, where he graduated from secondary school in 1937. He went to the University of Leiden to study mathematics and physics, obtaining his bachelor's degree in 1940. In that year, the students' protest against the dismissal of Jewish professors by order of the occupying forces led to the closing of the university. Seidel completed his studies at the Free University in Amsterdam, graduating in 1946. That marks the beginning of the first period in his career: Seidel the educator. He was teacher at a few secondary schools and simultaneously completed his thesis. He obtained his Ph.D., again in Leiden, with J. Haantjes as supervisor. After that he was an instructor of mathematics at
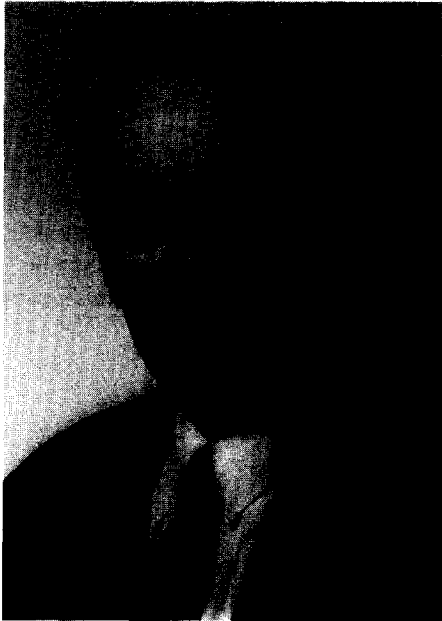
J. J. Seidel

Delft University of Technology until Eindhoven University of Technology (TUE) was founded in 1956.

Then the second period started: Seidel as administrator and organizer. It is fair to say that he more or less singlehandedly created the Department of Mathematics at Eindhoven. Many universities feared his visits as a recruiter. He always returned home with a trophy, the largest one being N. G. de Bruijn, whom he lured from Amsterdam to the TUE. Together they built up the very strong combinatorics group (with some aid from this author). This has recently led to the founding of the Euler Institute for Discrete Mathematics and Applications, which will surely maintain the tradition.

During this period Seidel was heavily involved with mathematical education at the national level. His emphasis on national interests rather than partisan attitudes was also demonstrated by several activities concerned with the Mathematical Centre in Amsterdam.

It is remarkable, for a mathematician, that Seidel's third period, as a prominent scientist, started when he was already 47 years old. The joint paper with Van Lint in 1966 (still cited) started a long sequence of important contributions to the theory of strongly regular graphs and design theory. He never ceased being a geometer, but algebraic methods and tools from algebra influenced his work increasingly. This algebraic trend and the fact that he is not a soloist, but the epitome of a collaborator, led to numerous joint papers with P. J. Cameron, Ph. Delsarte, and J.-M. Goethals. A continued interest in very many other parts of mathematics was rewarded: a number of papers linked his own research to other areas such as group theory and the theory of integration. Another reward deserves to be mentioned. In 1975 the Queen appointed him Knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion.

One would expect a fourth period, namely retirement. It has not happened. His clear exposition has led to many invitations to lecture abroad. On these occasions he still listens and talks extensively, especially to young mathematicians. This keeps the stream of joint publications going, let us hope for many years to come.

J. H. van Lint

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