

Letter from Professor Thomas Banchoff to Rudy Rucker on the subject of
Charles Howard Hinton, dated May 25, 1993.
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Dear Rudy,

Are you still interested in Hinton? I got some stuff today and I thought I'd organize it by writing you a letter. I spent the afternoon with Dirk Struik and Jean Rosner. Struik has made quite a name for himself in the history of math, and one of his continuing interests in George Boole. He is the one who told me about Hinton's granddaughter Jean Rosner in the first place, and she is the one who lent me the photograph of Hinton, his wife Mary Ellen Boole Hinton, his four sons, and an unidentified woman. You recall that I sent you a copy of the photo with the suggestion that it included the "extended" family, but I know now I was wrong. At least my rereading of Phyllis Grosskurth's 1980 biography of Havelock Ellis indicates that the bigamous union was with a certain Maude Weldon in a hotel at Kings Cross, and that the result was twins! Apparently it was Olive Schreiner from Ellis's entourage who took the unfortunate Ms. Weldon in after Hinton left England, so it is extremely unlikely that she would show up in Japan without any hint of the twins. The chronology of the four children is a bit hard to figure--as far as I can glean from the somewhat contradictory information in the genealogy (sic) folder, the four boys were George (1882), Eric, William, and Sebastian (1887).

George raised a family and his children are still in contact with Jean. His son Howard is a highly regarded entomologist, it appears, and another son, or perhaps George himself, is an orchid specialist. There are any number of Hintonea in the orchid literature, it seems.

Eric is a confusing case, mentioned somewhere as mentally defective, elsewhere as "disappeared" and in another place as "died in a pernicious anaemia epidemic, they think."

William died at age 21. That's about all anyone seems to know about him.

Sebastian was the husband of Carmelita Pope Hinton, founder of the Putney School in Vermont in about 1933. (Donald Coxeter is a resource on this topic, since he was connected with that effort in some way. I should ask him this summer for more of a rundown the family now that I am getting to know them better.) They had three children, Jean(1917), William (1919), and Joan (1922). The last two are both living in China, for different reasons.

Bill is a sinologist with UNICEF in Beijing and Joan runs an Agricultural Machinery Experiment Station in the same city. She is a physicist who was once an assistant of Fermi in Los Alamos. I have the dates of birth somewhere in a chart prepared by Struik (Later: I put them in) , but now I'm referring to my notes from what Jean said this afternoon. I noticed that Joan was the only woman in a Los Alamos reunion picture that included Maurice Glicksman, former provost at Brown and someone I can ask about her when I see him at the faculty meeting this Friday. According to Jean, the other woman on the project became an alcoholic and has since died.

Apparently there wasn't much discussion of family secrets in the Hinton household when Jean was young. Her father died in 1923, when she was six years old. She found out much later that he had committed suicide, and that he had been depressed. Apparently the same thing had happened to his mother Mary Ellen Boole Hinton, and the prospect that he would end up the same way caused him even more anxiety.

Jean did know about the bigamy, although she said it was considered something they should never talk about so she had not mentioned it to me a few years ago when we first met. She recalled that her brother was quite curious about the event when he first found out about it and that he had pressed his mother Carmelita for some details. She refused to discuss it though. Jean was quite interested in the passages I read her from the photocopied pages of the Grosskurth biography, and she said her brother and sister would both be very happy to get copies. That gives me an entry to the China trade, I'd say.

I also read to Jean and to Dirk my transcription of the diary entries of Edward Thring, Head Master at Uppingham when Hinton was Science Master in the early 1880's. That, you recall, was the same time that the Maths Master there was Abbott's friend Howard Candler, the "H.C." to whom Flatland was dedicated. Thring reports his amazement that Hinton had come to him to confess the crime of bigamy, with the woman whom he had thought was Hinton's sister. That doesn't square with another report in the diary that says Mrs. Hinton was not aware of her husband's infidelity until a week before it all came out in public. That comment was contained in a letter to a Mrs. Nettleship, and just this afternoon I learned that Ada Hinton Nettleship was indeed Howard Hinton's sister. Can it be that Thring had jumped to the wrong conclusion somehow? In any case, I note that Grosskurth has a reference to two newspaper articles in October 1885 describing Hinton's trial and subsequent sentence of three days, and eventual release. I'll have to hunt that down more

vigorously. I never could find those stories when I looked before in the back issues of the local Uppingham area paper.

One other thing to check on was that Mary Ellen Boole served for a time as secretary to James Hinton (1822-1875), the aural surgeon specializing in writing about pain and about free love. That always has struck me as an intriguing combination.

There were also in Jean Rosner's files some incomplete stories about her Great Aunt Alice (Alicia?). One story is that her husband Walter refused to consider that his wife should have any career outside the home. But then there is a mention that it was he (or maybe their son Leonard?) who noticed an appeal by the Dutch mathematician Schoute for the solution to the other half of some four-dimensional geometry program he had partially resolved. Alice had the other half in the models she had made. Schoute came thereafter each summer, and they continued to work together. At the tercentenary of the University of Groningen, they made a big deal about the collaboration and the models, and they sent back to Alice a fancy scroll, in Latin, which she couldn't read. Later her son read it and exclaimed, "Jesus Christ, they're making you a Doctor."

I also have the complete draft of an article written by Donald Coxeter, published in an abbreviated form in a book Women of Mathematics (by Prof. Grinstein?) that I should probably read for comparison purposes.

Struik's Boole family tree includes some notes worth repeating: I have already put the dates of Sebastian's children in above. He is the one credited with inventing the jungle gym. (Did I read that in your introduction to Hinton's writings?) Struik also includes information about the other three daughters of George Boole and Mary Everest Boole (niece of the mountain climber): Luch Boole, a chemist and the first woman elected to the Pharmaceutical Society; Margaret, wife of Edward Taylor and mother of Sir Goeffrey Taylor, F.R.S., a physicist and meteorologist; and Ethel Boole Voynich, author of The Gadfly, which I still haven't read. Apparently that story was made into a movie in Russia with incidental music by Shostakovich.

I just finished reading Coxeter's story about Alicia Boole Stott, called "Alice" by the family. The photocopy is so faint that I'm not sure I can recopy it, but I'll try. It's very nicely told.