The following brief review traces the departmental leadership and a few of the directional changes which have shaped the first 150 years of the Washburn Mathematics Department. Most of the information in this review was garnered from the annual and biennial issues of the Washburn Catalog (1).

Lincoln College was originally established in 1865 and three years later the college was renamed Washburn College. One of the four original professors of Lincoln College was George Collier, Professor of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy. Collier remained at Lincoln College for only a few years. During the following 25 years, mathematics at Washburn was managed and taught by several different mathematics and science professors, most for a relatively brief period of time.

A department structure within the college was first mentioned in the 1886-87 Catalog. This was the first catalog indication of a “Mathematics Department” at Washburn College. Astronomy was combined with the Mathematics Department for several years. In these early years, science oriented students entered a program called the Scientific Collegiate Course which led to a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree. Since there were but a few students involved, the requirements for a BS degree simply included a specific list of required mathematics and science courses. After about twenty years “lines of study” were required for the BS degree. A line of study was simply a focus in a specific department. This departmental focus evolved to what was later called “major” and “minor” fields of study. Thus a BS degree with a major or minor in mathematics became a degree option.

In 1890 William Asbury Harshbarger (2) arrived at Washburn College as a mathematics student and a student instructor in the Washburn Academy (a Washburn associated high school). In 1893 he earned his BS Degree in Mathematics from Washburn and began teaching in the Washburn College, quickly becoming Chair of the Mathematics Department. Remarkably, he remained in this position until 1940, serving one of the longest periods of teaching tenure in the history of Washburn University. Harshbarger, a fascinating and multitalented man, received an Honorary Doctor of Science Degree from Washburn in 1919.

Dr. Paul Eberhart (Ph.D., Brown U.,1943) arrived at Washburn in 1937 and became Chair of the Mathematics Department when Harshbarger departed in 1940. A few years after his arrival, the Engineering Department combined with the Mathematics Department for about seven years. For the previous two decades, engineering involved a four-year program at Washburn, but it now converted to a two-year program. Dr. Eberhart remained the guiding force in the Mathematics Department for over 25 years.

In 1967 Dr. Richard Shermoen (Ed.D., Oklahoma St. U.,1965) left North Dakota St. U. to become Chair of the Department, and begin a new era in mathematics at Washburn. The Mathematics Major was modified to include three different tracks, better serving the varied interests of the incoming students. Those tracks were Pure Mathematics, Secondary Education, and Applied Mathematics. Computer language courses had been introduced in the department in the 1960s. Significant addition of other computer courses and faculty led to a computer science major within the department in the early 1980s. This emphasis within the department continued to flourish and within a decade an autonomous Computer Information Science Department was formed. In 1993, after 26 years as Department Chair, Dr. Shermoen retired and Dr. Aaron Stucker (Ph.D.,U.of Chicago, 1986) took over the department reins for a four-year period.

In 1989 an actuarial science track had been added to the department major track options. The actuarial science program thrived and statistics faculty were added. The department name was changed to The Department of Mathematics and Statistics. Dr. Larry Blumberg (Ph.D, Kansas St. U, 1978) was the major force in the development of the actuarial science program. Dr. Blumberg had been a faculty member since 1967 and. became Chair of the Department when Dr. Stucker left in 1997. Dr. Kevin Charlwood (Ph.D., U. of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1994) arrived at Washburn in 1997 and became Chair of the Department in 2007 when Dr. Blumberg began his phased retirement. Under the leadership of Dr. Charlwood, the department has maintained and enhanced the current (2013) three Mathematics Major track options; Secondary Education, Actuarial Science, and Mathematics.
Since 1947 many department students have enjoyed membership in Kappa Mu Epsilon (KME), a National Mathematics Honor Society. Student members have presented numerous mathematical papers at regional and national conventions of the society with most of these papers judged among the best presented at the convention. Additionally, Washburn has hosted four national KME conventions and has had three department members serve as National KME Officers - Laura Greene (Secretary, 1967-73), Dr. Allan Riveland (Treasurer, 1995-2003) and Dr. Ron Wasserstein (Vice President and President, 2005-2013). Dr. Kevin Charlwood served as Regional KME Director (2008-2012).

For many years, the department has also maintained an active Mathematics Club, open to all Washburn mathematics students. Since 1969 a mathematics contest has provided area high school students the opportunity to compete on a mathematics exam at its annual Math Day. Department faculty remain actively involved with educators and actuarial science and business leaders in the area and their input helps guide the department in meeting the mathematical needs of the local community and area.

A listing of all full-time faculty, who have served in the Mathematics Department since 1970 can be found in the archives at Mabee Library. A significant number of those faculty members advanced to notable administrative positions within the university (Prof. Laura Greene, Dr. Gary Schmidt, Dr. Ron Wasserstein, Prof. Jack Decker, Dr. Nancy Tate, and Dr. Donna LaLonde). Details of these positions are included in the faculty listing.

Information in this review was gathered by Allan Riveland in 2013.

References.
(1) Annual or biennial issues of Washburn Bulletins and Washburn Catalogs, 1865 - 2013