

Last summer, being on holiday abroad, I read Volume 2 of The Pelican Book: "Men of Mathematics", written by E.T.Bell. He describes the lives and achievements of many famous mathematicians of history. In the "Preface" is stated: "Although their work is indispensable for an appreciation of much of science and philosophy, the great mathematicians are far less well-known than the great scientists and philosophers. Yet several of them have had interesting lives ". And then 14 people having lived in the period 1793-1918 are described and analyzed in their activities and successes and, many of them, discussed in their relations with each other.

When I had finished this Volume, I started thinking about the period 1980-2005, the period that collecting slide rules and historical research of this aspect started and came to an activity of many people, all of them mostly in their state of retirement and having experienced the slide rule during their active life. And comparing that with the book having read, I thought it might be interesting to be able to read the private histories of some of these collectors who have spent much time and energy and perhaps much money into this activity, because all they have done gives altogether a very interesting view on the subject what has been done by whom to get the history of the slide rule saved for all next generations. When these collectors hadn't started their activities, it would be impossible for next generations - our children and grandchildren - to start up all this because all archives, objects, manufacturing firms, designers, etc. would not exist anymore.

After having thought about all this I started going through my many correspondence of the first years of my collecting hobby, reread several hundreds of letters and many other documents and decided to write my own history.

I first made a kind of scheme of subjects to be discussed. This was a list of 18 entrances to the planned private book. These 18 chapters are:

1. Way and result of looking after slide rules;
2. Anecdotes (related to chapt.1);
3. Buying stocks in bookshops and office stationers;
4. Visiting production firms;
5. Contacts with former representatives of production firms;
6. Search for manuals and books;
7. Search for patents;
8. Organizing exhibitions of slide rules;
9. Contact with former designers;
10. Writing and publishing articles in all kinds of magazines;
11. Contacts with some collectors in The Netherlands and abroad;
12. Founding the Dutch Collector's circle;
13. Swapping, buying and selling slide rules;
14. The international slide rule catalogue;
15. Organizing international meetings;
16. Writing and publishing books on slide rule history;
17. Taking part in activity: Collector of the year;
18. My collection.

I spent to each of these chapters a few pages. Each chapter could be a book for its own, but I wrote only the most important aspects of all these entrances. If necessary to give a better insight in special historical details, I added in total 20 supplements such as letters, lists, documents and many more, plus photos of all my 170 show panels to which I have fixed part of the totality of my slide rules and discs. The last supplement is an alphabetical list of all items in my collection. All together it takes about 160 pages.

The draft is ready. To make it to a book will cost me some more extra months to realize. Most of the text is written in the Dutch language and I planned to start with some 20 copies for my family and my good collector friends. Perhaps I will translate all of it in English language later on, depending the result of my suggestion.

(Note by the Editor: at IM2007 IJzebrand Schuitema has presented his finished book in English, of which 15 copies have been printed: 5 copies were presented to 5 country representatives)

My suggestion is, that other collectors, having been active in this same field, and having time and energy to start a comparable activity, do the same as I have done up to now, with their specific own entrances to the subject. If there will be several, or preferably many collectors, who like to join this project, we could try to make a series of books like mine and create a kind of small library, which will be, hopefully, at the end of our activities representative for the collecting of slide rules and their historical history, performed in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Let all of us think about this idea, and perhaps we can discuss this theme during one of the coming international meetings.