

Tuesday 24 July 2018, 14:45-15:45

Room: Auditorium PA 113/ PA 110

Theme 6: History of mathematics in the Nordic countries

The first Norwegian textbooks in mathematics - A story of independence and controversy

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Abstract

Norway got its Constitution in 1814 after being subject to Denmark for 400 years. As a result of the Napoleonic wars, Norway had to go into a union with Sweden that lasted until 1905. However, the years after 1814 were a time for national awakening, where Norway had to rely on its own resources.

The first Norwegian university was functional from 1813, and there were four learned schools that prepared students for the university. These schools had mostly been using Danish textbooks, but in 1825 Bernt Michael Holmboe (1795-1850) wrote the first Norwegian textbook in mathematics for the learned schools. Holmboe wrote textbooks in arithmetic, geometry, stereometry and trigonometry, and most of them came in several editions.

Holmboe became one of the most influential persons in the development of school policy in Norway, and he was a close friend of the mathematician Niels Henrik Abel (1802-1829). The learned community was very small in Norway in the beginning of the 19th century, but that did not prevent that Holmboe's textbooks met opposition. His textbook in geometry caused a long and bitter controversy with the only other Norwegian professor in mathematics.

In my talk I will try to understand these textbooks based on the historical period, and the political and social conditions in which they were written. I want to illuminate questions like where the inspiration came from, and what we may learn from these textbooks today.
