

***The 1920s: Otto Gross and Friends, and Floyd Harper:
Pioneers of Actuarial Science at Nebraska***



Otto Gross

The roots of Actuarial Science at Nebraska can be traced back to the late 1920s when Otto Gross, a 1928 University of Nebraska graduate, and three classmates, including Ray Kentzinger, talked Floyd S. Harper, a Mathematics faculty member, into teaching them actuarial mathematics.

The efforts of the four students not only led to the first actuarial science instruction at the University of Nebraska, but also led to the formal study of actuarial science at Drake University and at Georgia State University as Professor Harper helped establish the actuarial science programs at those universities after serving on Nebraska's Mathematics faculty from 1922-1947.

After Professor Harper's resignation, the Mathematics Department dropped the Actuarial Science program, a move not favored by the local insurance groups. In 1957, the Actuarial Science program was restored through the efforts of the Nebraska Actuaries Club, which began in 1953, and, in particular, Jim MacLean, who was Club president for the 1956-1957 club year.

Otto Gross passed away at age 98 on June 17, 2004 after a long and illustrious career as an actuary and insurance company executive. While attending the University of Nebraska, Otto worked at Midwest Life in Lincoln. After receiving a B.S. degree in Business Administration from Nebraska, he continued to work at Midwest Life until he left to study actuarial theory and statistics at the University of Iowa. From 1931 to 1935, Otto served as actuary and examiner for the state of Iowa Insurance Department. Subsequently, he served as actuary and executive for several insurance companies, retiring in 1977 as Senior Vice President at First American Life in Houston.