

**Seminar SAW**  
**Seminar History and Philosophy of Mathematics – 2011-2016**

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**History of the historiography of algebra**

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*The history of American abstract algebra, two accounts by E. T. Bell and G. Birkhoff*

**Abstract** - In 1938, E. T. Bell presented « modern abstract algebra » as a very recent trend in America. Although « practically all German » in its history, it was carried by a american « vigorous young school ». In this talk, I would like to discuss two different images of this history of an American abstract algebra. First, we will focus on Bell's history of algebra in the 1930s. We will see how his specific way of presenting the development of mathematics by « abstraction » is linked to his definition of abstract algebra as a theory of structures. In a second part, we will use historical papers by G. Birkhoff from the 1970s to look at the same issue from an other point of view. In particular, in both historical presentations, we will question the use of national categories and their link to the history of algebra.