Francois-Edouard-Anatole Lucas Biography

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Biography

The discoverer of what was then the first new in more than a century, Francois-Edouard-Anatole Lucas made many contributions to and wrote a book on recreational mathematics that is still considered a classic today.

Lucas was born in 1842 in Amiens, France, where he received an education at the Ecole Normale. A gifted student and researcher, Lucas quickly found a job as an assistant at the prestigious Paris Observatory after graduating. However, like many other young men his age at the time, he had to interrupt his promising career to serve in the army during the Franco-Prussian War. Lucas was commissioned as an artillery officer.

After the war, he accepted a position as mathematics professor in Paris at the Lycée Saint-Louis, eventually moving from there to take the same post at the city's Lycée Charlemagne. At both schools, Lucas was known for being an accessible and entertaining teacher.

In 1876, Lucas gained a lot of academic attention for developing a new method of testing primality (whether a number is prime). He used this technique to show that the Mersenne number 2^{127}-1 is prime. He accomplished this completely without benefit of an electronic computer, and it remains today the biggest prime number ever found by hand calculation alone. Lucas was extremely fond of calculation, but in his spare time often worked on plans to create a large-capacity binary-scale computer.

A major figure in the esoteric world of recreational mathematics, Lucas is perhaps best remembered for his creation of the puzzle in 1883. In the meantime, he had begun what would become a four-volume work entitled *Recreational Mathematics* that he would finish in 1894. Lucas was also recognized for his original work on sequences (e.g., 1,1,2,3,5,8,13, etc.), in which every number in the sequence besides the first two is the sum of the two just before it. His work resulted in what is now known as .

Lucas died a bizarre and unfortunate death on October 3, 1891, several days after a shard of broken china cut his cheek at a dinner party. Erysipelas, an acute, fast-moving streptococcal infection, was blamed for his demise.