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Observations on Sir William Rowan Hamilton and George Boole. Preliminary report.

Sir William Rowan Hamilton and George Boole are regarded as two of the greatest nineteenth century algebraists, and rightly so, as their work helped lay the foundations for abstract algebra. These two are of significance to mathematical history for more than just their mathematical contributions, however, as a study of their lives clearly demonstrates. For instance, Boole is a wonderful example of what can be accomplished through diligence and perseverance. Though economically disadvantaged, he surmounted all obstacles to become a successful mathematician. While the two never formally met, there are many similarities in their philosophical views and personality traits. Neither fits the stereotype of "boring" with which mathematicians are so oft labeled. Indeed, their exciting connections with some of the most prominent men of their day were enough to keep their lives interesting. The humorous account of Hamilton hiding under a car to protect his books during a rainstorm (and unfortunately losing his hat in the process) helps one see Hamilton as more than just the mathematician who discovered quaternions. This talk attempts to convey a little of the spirit and enthusiasm of these men's lives and work that is so characteristic of both. (Received September 26, 2006)