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Choosing Department Heads at West Point

If you were looking to hire a mathematician to teach at your institution around 1800, who would you hire and why? Even though this was a Presidential appointment, why would Lagrange or Lacroix move from cosmopolitan Paris to West Point, New York, an isolated outpost on the Hudson River ninety kilometers north of New York City? There was an aversion in the United States army against hiring anyone French. Gauss was famous for discovering Ceres, but not yet for his mathematics. An English speaker was needed, but it was not considered fair to steal a faculty member from another school even by the President. This problem has arisen and has been solved 21 times since the Military Academy was founded in 1802. Were the methods of solution all the same or has the hiring process changed over time? Our purpose here is to illustrate the dramas involved: sometimes the mathematician had a connection with the U.S. President, sometimes there was family connection, and on occasion the person selected was the most qualified army officer for the job. The most interesting case was when a national search was conducted, a search that included some prominent civilian mathematicians.