WILLIAM FELLER, 1906–1970[1]

William Feller died on January 14, 1970, at the age of 63, at Memorial Hospital in New York. He was a member of the National Academy of Sciences, of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, of the Danish and Yugoslavian Academies of Sciences, fellow of the Royal Statistical Society, past governor of the Mathematical Association of America, former president of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics (1946). A few days before his death he had learned also of his election as honorary member of the London Mathematical Society and of the decision to award him the National Medal of Science, which his wife Clara was to receive in his stead on February 16 at the White House. These outward and visible honors confirm his position in science, to which is added our affection for his gaiety, enthusiasm, gentleness, and responsiveness.

Will Feller was born in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, on July 7, 1906; he attended the University there from 1923 to 1925, leaving with a degree equivalent to our Master of Science. From 1925 to 1928 he worked at the University of Göttingen, where he received the Ph.D. in 1926, at the age of twenty. At Göttingen he had the good fortune to become acquainted with David Hilbert, always his ideal mathematician, as well as with Richard Courant, who recognized his promise and encouraged him to become a mathematician in earnest. In 1928 he went as Privatdozent to the University of Kiel, but left there in 1933 after refusing to sign a Nazi oath. He passed a year in Copenhagen, where he came to know Harold Bohr and his brother Niels, and then five years (1934–1939) at the University of Stockholm, in the vicinity of Marcel Riesz and Harald Cramér. It was during his last year there, on July 27, 1938, that he married Clara Nielsen, who had been his student at Kiel.

In 1939 Will and Clara moved to Providence, Rhode Island, where Will became associate professor at Brown University as well as the first executive editor of *Mathematical Reviews*; he deserves the gratitude of mathematicians for his six years of effort establishing the new journal, now the leading review of mathematics in the world. In 1944, toward the end of the period at Brown, Will became a citizen of the United States (District Court, Providence). The following year he accepted a professorship at Cornell University. Finally, in 1950, he came to Princeton as Eugene Higgins Professor of Mathematics, a position which he held until his death. In 1966 he was appointed also Permanent Visiting Professor at Rockefeller University where, during two years of leave from Princeton in 1965–66 and 1967–68, he found himself serving in part as liaison between geneticists and mathematicians.

Feller's work had great variety and scope, for he contributed to calculus, geometry and functional analysis. But about half of his papers lie in the field of probability. Only these, his best known papers, are discussed here.

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[1] Editor's note. This article, prepared by the Editors, is a combination of the memorial resolution by the Faculty of Princeton University and the documents supporting Feller's nomination for the National Medal of Science.