

Early Days in Statistics at Michigan

Cecil C. Craig

For me this period began in 1922 when I arrived in Ann Arbor with an M.S. degree intending to take courses in Actuarial Science. Professor J. W. Glover, who set up the actuarial program in Michigan, which still flourishes, conceived the idea in about 1910, that such a curriculum should include courses in mathematical statistics. In 1916 he brought back to Michigan a recent graduate, Harry C. Carver, to develop courses in that subject. In 1922 there were only two schools in the country, the State University of Iowa and the University of Michigan, where courses in mathematical statistics were offered. Carver's first course, Mathematics 49 and 50, each for 2 hours credit, ran throughout the year at a precalculus level. A second more mathematical course was given by Professor R. W. Barnard, who later taught pure mathematics at the University of Chicago. I took this course and learned some mathematics but not much statistics. I began teaching an advanced course after I got my doctor's degree which was a result of a year in Lund, Sweden, working under Professor S. D. Wicksell.

In those days the *Journal of the American Statistical Association* was well established, but manuscripts with any mathematical content had little chance of being published by the *Journal*. I heard Professor Carver say on more than one occasion that there ought to be a place in this country where a paper in mathematical statistics could appear. I have always thought that the trigger for the founding of the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics* was a paper of mine that was rejected by the *Journal* because it was too mathematical. Carver reacted rather strongly to this and shortly afterward he joined with a friend, J. W. Edwards, who was trying out a new lithoprinting process, in putting out the first issue of the *Annals of Mathematical Statistics* in 1930. Carver assumed the financial responsibility for the new journal and with the aid of two assistants and his friend's support he served as its editor until 1935 when he turned the *Annals* over to the newly formed Institute of Mathematical Statistics. There was a sufficient supply of scholarly papers offered for

publication but the supply of funds to meet the bills was not enough to avoid severe strains. At times toward the end of World War II the *Annals* came close to going broke. I don't know if Carver ever told anybody the cost in dollars of his devotion to statistics but I doubt if he knew closely. Fortunately, the publishers of the *Annals* and the officers of the Institute allowed a really large inventory of back numbers to accumulate during the second World War. Once the war was over, it turned out that there was a healthy market for those back numbers. The faithful industry of Paul Dwyer and Carl Fischer handled the sale of this merchandise. Only their friends knew how hard they worked, but enough money came in to put the *Annals* on a sound financial footing.

The remainder of the 1920s and the first of the 1930s were marked by a steady growth in this country in the number of people whose principal interest lay in mathematical statistics. By living and working in the city where the new *Annals* were edited and by regular attendance at the national meetings, it was easy for me to become widely acquainted with the members of the new group. I spent the year 1930-31 in Stanford University where Harold Hotelling was beginning a career in statistics. When I left Stanford to return to Ann Arbor, Hotelling also left to accept an appointment at Columbia University. On my way back across the country I stopped for a few days in Iowa City where Egon Pearson was lecturing. There a rather remarkable group of students was working with H. L. Rietz, who deserved to be known as the dean of American mathematical statisticians. These students were S. S. Wilks, A. T. Craig, Selby Robinson, and Carl Fischer. They all earned doctorates under Rietz, and I made friends with all of them. Only Fischer, who recently retired from Michigan, is still alive. When I left Iowa City, I went to Minneapolis where I spent five weeks listening to my first series of lectures by R. A. Fisher. Sometime in the next few years I became well acquainted with B. H. Camp of Wesleyan.

In 1935, the summer meetings of the mathematics societies were held in Ann Arbor. The attendees included enough people interested in mathematical statistics to fill the reception room in the Betsy Barbour dormitory on this campus. They were convened to discuss a proposed organization of a new society devoted to mathematical statistics. I do not recall all of the thirty to forty people who were present, but I do remember Rietz, Wilks, A. T. Craig, Carl Fischer, Selby Robinson, and Paul Rider from Iowa

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