

OUR SILVER ANNIVERSARY

BY ALLEN T. CRAIG

University of Iowa

Prior to 1920, a scant half-dozen American colleges and universities had, as a member of the department of mathematics, anyone who was seriously interested in a newly developing method of scientific inference called Mathematical Statistics. In the decade that followed, spurred perhaps in part by the first World War, there was a marked increase in the number of graduate students of mathematics who found mathematical statistics to be a challenging and rewarding field of study. But the problem of publication was quite acute. On the one hand, the relatively large American Statistical Association was, at that time, quite effectively dominated by persons who vigorously objected to having their *Journal* cluttered up with a lot of meaningless symbols. On the other hand, the august American Mathematical Society took a very dim view of the whole business and looked upon these mavericks with a suspicion of quackery. Although most mathematical statisticians were members of both of these societies, it was fairly clear that access to the publications of these societies was too restrictive to represent a healthy situation. In a rare and generous move, Harry C. Carver founded and personally financed a new journal that he named *The Annals of Mathematical Statistics*. Volume One appeared in 1930. In fairness to the American Statistical Association, it should be remarked that a few years later the *Annals* became affiliated with that Society.

By 1934 there was a group of reasonable size (made up of persons in government, in industry, and in the colleges and universities) that felt the interests of mathematical statistics could better be served if we had a society and a journal of our own. The Editor volunteered to make his *Annals* the official journal of such a society and in fact to turn over the publication of the *Annals* to the new society as soon as it was able to carry the burden. Preliminary conversations and correspondence concerning the organization of a society of mathematical statistics soon showed that people were far from unanimous as to what should be the nature of the organization. Some thought of a statistician of that day as a specialist much like an actuary; and accordingly it was urged that membership in the society should be graded and should be awarded on the basis of written examinations. A survey revealed the obvious: that practically everyone would be willing to give examinations but virtually no one would take them. A compromise was worked out whereby the general plan of organization of the new society would be along the lines of the Mathematical Society but there would be two grades of membership, namely, Members and Fellows. Thus, on September 12, 1935, at Ann Arbor a constitution and by-laws were adopted and The Institute of Mathematical Statistics was formally organized. Henry Lewis Rietz was chosen to be the first president.

Received July 9, 1960.

I have often regretted our yielding to the notion of having two grades of membership. When one scans the current Directory and finds listed as Members many highly talented persons, he too must share some mis-givings about the fairness and the wisdom of these designations.

During these years the Mathematical Society was gradually mellowing and it was possible for the Institute to hold its first post-organizational meeting jointly with that Society on January 2, 1936, in St. Louis. The meeting consisted of exactly one session at which four contributed papers were read and one invited address was given. Perhaps the most significant feature of the meeting was the decision to request the Society to meet jointly again with the Institute at Cambridge in September of 1936.

It is my opinion that the Cambridge meeting aided materially in the rapid development of the Institute. Held as it was in connection with the Harvard Tercentenary Celebration, this meeting provided an opportunity for the Institute to bring itself and its purposes to the attention of an audience with broad and varied interests. The acceptance, by other societies, of the Institute as a scholarly society itself was certainly accelerated by this meeting.

With stability assured, the Institute could now employ the energy and talent of its members to attack some of the problems of the day. A particularly acute problem at that time was the state of the teaching of statistics in the colleges and universities of the United States. Under the able and aggressive leadership of one of our members, constructive suggestions on the improvement of the teaching of statistics were formulated, were officially endorsed by the Institute, and were given wide circulation. The Institute should be credited with having focused academic attention on this problem. To be sure, other forces were at work at the same time, but the action of the Institute seems to have provided the initial jolt. In any event, the teaching of statistics has shown steady improvement and, after all, that is what the Institute wanted.

Meanwhile the second World War was under way in Europe and in this country one heard a great deal about national defense. In the summer of 1940 the Institute appointed a war preparedness committee. The chairman of this committee prepared an excellent report on where and how mathematical statisticians should be used in preparing for or prosecuting a war in that era. This report was brought to the attention of our government agencies. Perhaps some of you were as favorably impressed as I was with the close parallel between the actual utilization (in general) of mathematical statisticians during the second World War and the recommendations of the Institute.

In 1946, the President of the Institute announced that the first Rietz Memorial Lecture would be delivered at the Yale meeting in September, 1947. The lecturer was Abraham Wald and the subject was "Sequential Estimation and Multi-Decisions." It was a tragic and cruel twist of fate that a few years later the name of the first Rietz lecturer should be used to establish a second series of memorial lectures.

The events of the past decade are so recently in mind that I shall not dwell

upon them. The Institute of Mathematical Statistics, now a powerful and influential force in science in the United States, still holds that support and encouragement of teaching and research in mathematical statistics are its primary aims. However, many members of the Institute not only have continued their support of the numerous applications of statistics that they formerly supported but in recent years others have actually enlarged the scope of that support. This, I think, is particularly true in the social and behavioral sciences.

Of the many achievements of the Institute, the one that is to me the greatest source of pride is the change in the stature of its journal, the *Annals*. In 1935 the list of subscribers to this journal consisted of the names of 98 libraries and 118 individuals. In accordance with the 1934-35 agreement, the Institute took over the publication of the *Annals* beginning with the June, 1938 issue. The first editor appointed by the Institute served from that time through December, 1949, and the present editor is the fifth to be appointed. An editor of a scientific journal bears a heavy responsibility. He can make or break a journal; and as a journal goes, so goes the organization that supports it.

Some manuscripts present such important new results, viewpoints, or solutions of outstanding problems that they do not present difficult editorial decisions. But most manuscripts make smaller contributions—they complete the development of a theory or point out interesting facts that have been overlooked. All kinds of manuscripts are important in that they represent a continued intellectual interest by those who are responsible for the teaching of statistics, the training of future mathematical statisticians, and the carrying out of statistical research. There are few manuscripts that present exceptionally important new results, solutions, and viewpoints, while there are many that present less outstanding material. Yet I firmly believe that only editors who appreciate the importance of a constant flow of all kinds of contributions can build great journals that will remain great. Our editors have measured up to this. And on this twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics, I offer to each of our five editors our sincere thanks for the effort he has put forth to make the *Annals*, and inferentially the Institute, incomparable.