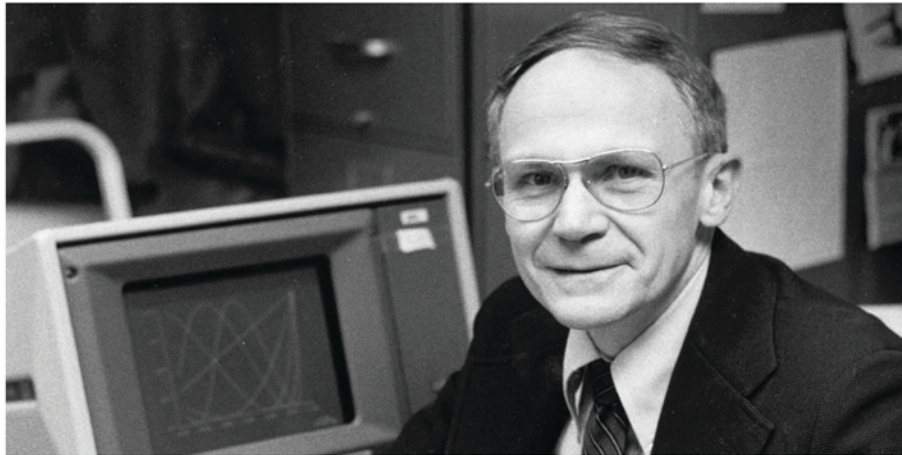


David L. Wallace, statistician who helped identify Federalist Papers authors, 1928-2017



Prof. Emeritus David L. Wallace in October 1978.

Photo by Donald Rucker/Courtesy University of Chicago Special Collections

By David Mercer
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Press Inquiries

Prof. Emeritus David L. Wallace, a statistician who co-authored a book that revealed the answer to one of American history's most enduring questions, died on Oct. 9. He was 88.

Historians had puzzled over the authorship of 12 of the 85 Federalist Papers almost since they were written in 1788. Wallace and Prof. Frederick Mosteller of Harvard University applied statistical analysis and computational power to the problem, publishing their answer in 1964's *Inference & Disputed Authorship: The Federalist*.

Their findings—that James Madison authored all 12—created a national stir, both for the answer and for how they put computers to work to arrive at it. Newspapers around the country, *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune* among them, wrote about Wallace and Mosteller, as did *Time* magazine.

Much of the news coverage on the Federalist Papers focused on their early application of computational power to statistics, an area in which Wallace would remain influential. But their work also was the first full-scale applied statistical analysis done using Bayesian methods—statistical theory based on the work of statistician Thomas Bayes.

"David Wallace's study of the authorship of the Federalist Papers still stands among the best full-scale Bayesian statistical studies, and it has left a mark even as the profession has advanced, as an exemplar of what can be accomplished," said Stephen M. Stigler, the Ernest DeWitt Burton Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. "As a teacher and colleague he has shared deep insights into statistical methods, and those lessons are still being widely repeated several academic generations later."

Wallace also was part of a team that in the 1960s helped develop modern methods of forecasting election outcomes based on early results, and worked as part of NBC's election coverage.

Wallace joined the University in 1954 as an assistant professor. He remained at the University of Chicago until he retired in 1995, serving as chairman of the department from 1977 to 1980.

Wallace's students said he challenged and helped them, while leaving a vivid image of himself as the professor in the white lab coat.

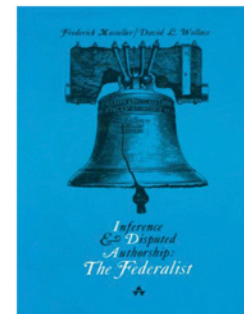
"He wore it to class to keep the chalk off his clothing, but we students didn't figure out that motivation until later, and it added to the mystique," said Robert Kass, PhD'80, who is the Maurice Falk Professor of Statistics & Computational Neuroscience at Carnegie Mellon. "At a holiday party my first year I imitated David in a skit, and when I appeared in a lab coat, everyone immediately laughed."

Ted Karrison, PhD'85, a University of Chicago research professor who was among the 16 doctoral students advised by Wallace, called him a rigorous and insightful who was very generous with his time.

"I recall very well that after our meetings, I would find in my mailbox notes and comments that he had written out just so I wouldn't forget," Karrison said.

Wallace's wife of 62 years, Anna Mary Wallace, said her "extraordinary husband" had a deep love of architecture, as well as the outdoors, leading his family on camping trips across the country.

David L. Wallace is also survived by his brother, as well as three children and three grandchildren.



Cover of *Inference & Disputed Authorship: The Federalist*
Courtesy of Frederick Mosteller / David L. Wallace

Tags

David L. Wallace, Obituary, Federalist Papers, Stephen M. Stigler, Ted Karrison