

Belz, Maurice Henry (1897–1975)

Maurice Henry Belz (1897-1975), mathematical statistician, was born on 1 February 1897 at Auburn, Sydney, eleventh child of John William Belz, a carpenter from Germany, and his Australian-born wife Elizabeth Esther, née Saunders. Educated at Sydney Boys' High School and the University of Sydney, Maurice studied arts and engineering before graduating (B.Sc., 1918) with the John Coutts scholarship and the university medal in mathematics. In 1920 he received a Barker graduate travelling scholarship and proceeded to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge (M.Sc., 1922). He worked at the Cavendish Laboratory under Sir Ernest (Lord) Rutherford.

In 1923 Belz took up a lectureship in mathematics at the University of Melbourne. He married a medical practitioner Florence Marjorie Hughes on 19 May 1928 at St Mary's Anglican Church, Caulfield. That year he was promoted senior lecturer and in 1929 introduced a course in the theory of statistics. Awarded a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship in 1932, he left next year to undertake research at the London School of Economics and the University of Oslo into the application of mathematics to economics. At Professor (Sir) Douglas Copland's invitation, in 1937 he began teaching mathematical economics in the faculty of commerce at Melbourne and published with Professor John Michell *The Elements of Mathematical Analysis* (London). When the university, at Belz's instigation, formed the first autonomous department of statistics in Australia in 1948, he became its head, first as an associate-professor of mathematical statistics and in 1955-63 as professor. In 1947 he had been a Carnegie fellow at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina, United States of America; he also attended the founding meeting of the Biometric Society and became a charter member of its first council; in 1952-53 he was a research associate at Princeton University.

Many of the initial generation of Australia's professional statisticians were either trained or taught in Belz's department. He established a course for graduates from science and industry, and encouraged university researchers and industrial organizations to seek statistical assistance from departmental staff. During visits to Britain (1961, 1964 and 1970-72) he worked both as a consultant and as a lecturer to executives in British Petroleum Co. Ltd in London, and prepared *Statistical Methods for the Process Industries* (London, 1973) for publication.

A council-member (1935-47) of the University of Melbourne, Belz was sub-dean (1942-44) of the arts faculty. He represented the university on the National Standards Association's committee on statistical quality control, was vice-president (1924-61) of the Mathematical Association of Victoria and published *Notes on Statistics for Matriculation General Mathematics* (1948). Elected a member (1948) of the International Statistical Institute, he was made an honorary life member of the Statistical Society of Australia (1970) and of the Australian Society for Operations Research.

Belz was president (1944-70) of the French-Australian Association of Victoria and was appointed to the Légion d'honneur in 1954. Fond of the theatre, he was foundation president (1939) of the graduate drama club, the Tin Alley Players. He also loved gardening at his Hawthorn home, where he and his wife were warm and generous hosts. Belz died on 28 March 1975 at Parkville and was cremated with Presbyterian forms. His wife survived him; they had no children. A bronze plaque by Andor Meszaros is attached to the Maurice H. Belz prizes board at the University of Melbourne.

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