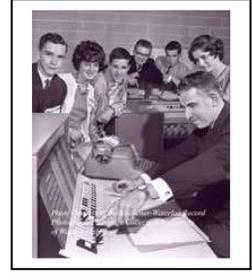


James Wesley Graham



Wes Graham was a humble visionary known as the “father of computing” at the University of Waterloo. His legacy is one of generosity – Graham devoted his career to making the magic of computers available to everyone.

“He had enormous influence. He was a great teacher and a great leader, and did more than any one person to put Waterloo on the map in computing,” former UW president Doug Wright said after Graham’s death in 1999.

James Wesley Graham began teaching statistics at the University in 1959, but was soon engrossed in the world of computers after the first one arrived at UW a year later. Graham, who had worked at IBM before coming to Waterloo, became heavily involved in the Computing Centre and would be its first director.

His experience in the private sector served him well over time as he negotiated deals with business to bring faster computers to the campus.

Graham’s first major achievement was in the development of new software that would make the massive computers of the 1960s more user-friendly. In the summer of 1965, Graham and four students created educational software called WATFOR that helped computers process jobs more quickly with fewer errors.

In short order the wildly successful software was being used by universities around the world. The success established Graham, a native of Copper Cliff, Ontario, as a pioneer in the area of educational software. Later adaptations were used by businesses and government.

During the 1970s, Graham set his sights on high school students, developing computer curriculum for the classroom and designing one of the first “portable” computers that could be moved from classroom to classroom, making it accessible to as many students as possible.

The 1980s brought more challenges, with Graham helping to establish one of the region’s first “spin-off” companies. With his help, three of his former students started WATCOM, a business designed to develop and market educational software.

The collaboration between the University and WATCOM was copied many times over as ambitious, entrepreneurial graduates embarked on their own businesses. Start-ups like Waterloo Maple and Open Text are just a few of the companies that have benefited from Graham’s model of co-operation.

WATCOM was purchased by Sybase Inc. in 1994. Shortly after, Sybase became the first company to announce its move to the University of Waterloo Research and Technology Park where it can be found along Wes Graham Way.

Graham received many honours throughout his career including the Order of Canada in 1999 and a Distinguished Teacher Award. The University created the J.W. Graham

Medal in Computing and Innovation, and in January 2001 established the J.W. Graham Information Technology Trust to award innovative teachers.

Fellow colleague Mohammed Elmasry wrote after Graham's death from cancer:

“Graham was a man of principles and deep sense of spirituality. He was a first-class communicator: With his compassion, he used to get the attention of his audience easily. It was impossible to dislike him.”

*Photo courtesy of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record Photographic Negative Collection,
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