

Alice Rowe Burks Biography

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Biography

Alice Rowe Burks is best known as a writer, particularly on the subject of early computers. She is also regarded as an excellent mathematician.

Alice Rowe Burks was born in East Cleveland, Ohio, in 1920. In 1944 she received her B.A. in mathematics from the University of Pennsylvania, a school she attended as the result of winning a competitive mathematics scholarship. It was while at the University of Pennsylvania and the Moore School of Engineering during the Second World War that Burks worked as a human computer--she was one of 75 female mathematicians employed to calculate firing and bombing tables. The need to perform so many of these calculations led to the development of the **ENIAC** (Electronic Numerical Integrator and **Calculator**), the world's first electronic digital computer. In 1957 Burks received an M.S. in educational psychology from the University of Michigan.

Alice and her husband, Arthur Walter Burks (himself part of the ENIAC team), have published extensively on the ENIAC project and computers in general. In 1989 their book *The First Electronic Computer: The Atanasoff Story* won the University of Michigan Press Award.