

William Seward Burroughs Biography

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Biography

Born in Auburn, New York, Burroughs began tinkering in his father's machine shop early in his childhood--a hobby that he continued throughout most of his life. While he was clerking in a bank at age 15, Burroughs conceived the idea of a device that would perform arithmetical calculation. Although the Comptometer developed by Eugene Felt (1862-1930) was successfully utilized by most businesses of that time, Burroughs wished to design a calculator capable of printing figures as they were entered, permitting greater permanency and accuracy.

In 1881 he moved to St. Louis, Missouri, and began developing such a device in his spare time. Three years later he had a working model along with his first patent. Once in production, the design of his machine proved impractical. Aided by three partners, Burroughs sold \$100,000 of stock in the American Arithmetic Company and continued with his experimentation. His second design was also unsuccessful because it was unable to stand up to heavy use.

Finally in 1891, Burroughs produced a well designed, fully functional adding machine. Each figure entered, as well as the final results of the computation, was printed on paper. Burroughs enlisted the Boyer Machine Company to aid in production, and the adding machine proved a great success, particularly in the banking and insurance industries.

Burroughs died in 1898 before he could see the impact his machine had on improving the efficiency and accuracy of the business world. In 1905 the American Arithmetic Company was renamed the Burroughs Adding Machine Company (later shortened to Burroughs Corporation).