

LAST ENIAC PROGRAMMER JEAN BARTIK PASSES AWAY

By Kathy Kleiman, 3.24.2011

I am sorry to share with you that late last night, Betty Jean Jennings Bartik, the last of the original ENIAC Programmers, passed away. She was 86 years old. Jean, as she was known to her friends, left her family farm in Missouri at the age of 20 to answer the call of the Army's call for women mathematicians during World War II. She became a "Computer" in Philadelphia, hand-computing ballistics trajectories, and quickly one of the original six ENIAC Programmers (programming the enormous machine to perform the ballistics differential calculus equations they had calculated by hand). She and fellow programmer Betty Holberton led the programming, and their program became famous when it was used to introduce the ENIAC and its engineers to the world in 1946 (the Programmers were never introduced).

Jean then led the team that converted ENIAC to a stored-program machine, and went on to be part of the early team at Eckert Mauchly Computer Corporation. There she helped create UNIVAC, the world's first commercial computer. The rest, of course, is history.

Jean was a dynamic personality, warm and happy. She was thrilled when she came to be recognized later in life with significant awards, and enjoyed the excitement she inspired when young people met her and the inspiration she provided to girls, and boys, to study computer science.

She was a friend, a mentor and role model. We have lost a part of our computer and Internet history.

Thank you,

Kathy Kleiman

Historian of the ENIAC Programmers

ADDITIONAL QUOTES

"Jean Bartik was one of the most creative and interesting people I ever met. She was warm and humorous, straight-forward and crystal clear. She would regale us with stories of the ENIAC and computer history, still so real for her, and then listen intently as someone explained our modern systems to her."

"I was thrilled when Jean began, late in life, to receive the awards and recognition she so richly deserved. These would expand to include The Fellows Award (Computer History Museum), Computer Pioneer Award (IEEE Computer Society) and Women in Technology International's Hall of Fame induction (the last together with all the ENIAC Programmers). I remember tears in everyone's eyes as they learned the recognition was long in coming – 50 and 60 years."

"I have two favorite memories of Jean: one is my time with her listening to stories and learning about computer pioneers – the many hours and days we spent together. The other is in 2008 watching Jean in the Google cafeteria, surrounded by young women from Google, their heads together swapping stories and laughing. Systems change, but challenges in computing, and triumphs seem to stay the same, and they had a wonderful time sharing."

"I will miss Betty Jean Jennings Bartik deeply – she changed our world."