

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY MATHEMATICS COLLOQUIUM

David Alan Grier

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will speak on

Human computers and the emergence of the American applied mathematics community

ABSTRACT: Prior to the second world war, applied mathematics was generally affiliated with astronomy, physics or electrical engineering. Most academic mathematicians shunned the subject. Within these disciplines, the individuals who were often most familiar with applied techniques were human computers, the individuals who did the calculations associated with the mathematical analysis. Through 1930s, human computers were most commonly found in Almanac offices but with the rest of the New Deal, these computers found more opportunities through the programs of the WPA and the National Youth Administration. By the start of the second world war, most large universities, many government agencies and few private companies could claim to have a scientific computing lab staffed by human computers. These computers were generally bright individuals who lacked the social standing to get a higher degree. They advanced the techniques of numerical analysis and numerical linear algebra, taught others numerical techniques and helped maintain an journal devoted to applied mathematics, *Mathematical Tables and Other Aids to Computation*. One group of them, from a laboratory called the Mathematical Tables Project, formed the core for the National Bureau of Standards Applied Mathematics Division, the group that promoted Applied Mathematics during the 1950s.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2006

LECTURE AT 4:00 PM (#)

COFFEE, TEA, AND REFRESHMENTS FROM 3-5 PM.

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