



## Obituary: George E. Forsythe

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GEORGE E. FORSYTHE

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January 8, 1917–April 9, 1972

For over two decades George Forsythe was an outstanding leader in the development of computer science, and he was one of the pioneers.

In 1948 he joined the highly influential, but all too short-lived, Institute for Numerical Analysis of the National Bureau of Standards. The SEAC and the SWAC, the first of the modern generation of electronic computers on this side of the Atlantic, would not go into operation until two years later. Numerical analysis, although having an ancient and honorable tradition, was undergoing a revolution in anticipation of the high-speed programmed computers, and the direction it was to take was largely established at INA, which attracted many distinguished mathematicians from all over the world. In August of 1951 a symposium was held on the UCLA campus on the subject "Simultaneous Linear Equations and the Determination of Eigenvalues". This was organized by INA personnel, and George gave one of the principal papers *Teutative classification of methods and bibliography on solving systems of linear equations*. He was able to assemble a list of roughly 500 titles, and he brought form and organization into an area that hitherto had none, and that would attract increasing attention for some time to come. Since he was a former meteorologist, and author of a book on the subject, his interest is easy to understand.

The range of George's interests are well brought out in the list of his publications given below, and it is hardly necessary for me to comment or enumerate. At the time of the symposium computer science was hardly thought of as a special discipline. What there was of it was mainly numerical analysis and logical design. When INA was discontinued in 1954, George, with a few others, remained at UCLA with appointments in the University for a time, then in 1957 he went to Stanford as Professor of Mathematics. In 1961 he became Professor of Computer Science and Chairman of the Computer Science Department.

The subject had now arrived, and under George's direction this Department became the most influential one in the Country, attracting almost as many National Science Foundation fellowship winners as all other such departments combined.

George's success as an educator was due to many factors, but not the least of these is brought out in a recent letter from which I quote in part:

"He invited me to Stanford when I was only just beginning to become involved in things to do with numerical analysis and he was very generous with his time, and his ideas, and in giving me access to things such as his own personal library. I have always felt that my first visit to Stanford was a major turning point in my life and that I owe much of what happened to George."

I think it unnecessary to name the writer because I know he was only one of many who had a similar experience.

His influence on students, associates, and friends was profound, and perhaps the more so because he was in no sense a "character." He was simply there, solid, sane and wise. He set high standards for himself and expected them from others.

George was for two years a member of the Board of Trustees of SIAM; he served a term as President of ACM, and has been otherwise active in these and other professional organizations. His circle of friends is world-wide. He leaves a gap no one can fill, but his influence will long remain.

A. S. HOUSEHOLDER