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**Rita G. Minker**

**April 28, 1927–October 11, 1988**

Rita G. Minker, an early worker in the field of computer programming, died on October 11, 1988 of cancer at the age of 61. Mrs. Minker received a B.S. degree with High Honors in Mathematics from Douglass College in 1948 and a M.A. degree in Mathematics from the University of Wisconsin in 1950.

In the summer of 1950 Mrs. Minker started to work at the Bell Telephone Laboratories in Murray Hill, New Jersey. She programmed network problems for one of the early digital computers, the Bell Relay Machine. She was among the first computer programmers in the United States. On June 24, 1951 she married Jack Minker, whom she had met at the University of Wisconsin. The couple moved to Buffalo, New York where Mrs. Minker was employed as a mathematician at the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratories. She worked on electronic analog computers on which she simulated the performance of missile systems. In 1952 she was hired by RCA in Camden, New Jersey and became the second computer programmer, and the first woman programmer to work at that company. She programmed the Bizmac, RCA's first computer.

In April 1964, Mrs. Minker returned to work as a mathematician and computer programmer in the newly formed Division of Computer Research and Technology (DCRT) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland. She served as Head, Training Unit in DCRT from 1968–1975, and instituted training courses to permit medical researchers to learn how to program and work with computers and become familiar with statistical methods. In 1975, after having built up the Training Division, she joined the Statistical Software Section, Laboratory of Statistical and Mathematical Methodology of the DCRT. She was able to participate and assist medical researchers with their programming and statistics problems. She was also in charge of consulting on and maintaining SPSS, a major statistical package.

Mrs. Minker was coauthor of a number of medical journal articles on the schistosomycin disease and was acknowledged for her assistance in numerous medical journal articles. Together with her husband, she published an article in the Annals of the History of Computing, which traced the historical developments in the optimization of boolean expressions and related problems.

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