

Meeting: 1002, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, SS 3A, Special Session on The History of Mathematics

1002-01-7 **David Alan Grier*** (grier@gwu.edu), Department of Computer Science, Philips Hall 704,
George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052. *Gertrude Blanch of the WPA.*

In January 1938, the Works Project Administration, a relief agency of the New Deal, started the Mathematical Tables Project, the largest known experiment in human computation. This group assembled 450 individuals from the relief rolls of the New York City to compute tables of mathematical functions. The mathematical leader of this group was Gertrude Blanch, a 40-year-old office worker with a PhD from Cornell University. For Blanch, the Mathematical Tables Project represented her last, best chance to become a mathematician. The Mathematical Tables Project was largely disdained by professional mathematicians and scientists but Blanch was able to discipline it into a computing office that was identified in its time as the most powerful computing group in the world. (Received April 19, 2004)