

Mina Rees¹

Born August 2, 1902, Cleveland, Ohio; director of the mathematical section of the Office of Naval Research who, in the 1950s, used Navy resources to support the fledgling computing community.



Education: AB, Hunter College, 1923; AM, Columbia University, 1925; PhD, mathematics, University of Chicago, 1931.

Professional Experience: Hunter College: instructor to professor, mathematics, 1926-1961, dean, faculty, 1953-1961, emeritus professor of mathematics, 1972-present; City University of New York: founder and dean, Graduate Studies, 1961-1968, provost, Graduate Division, 1968-1969, president, 1969-1972, emeritus president, 1972-present; technical aide and executive assistant, chief, Applied Mathematics Panel, National Defense Research Committee, Office of Science Research and Development, 1943-1946; Office of Naval Research: head, Mathematics Branch, 1946-1949, director, Mathematics and Science Division, 1949-1952, deputy science director, 1952-1953; National Research Council: member, Mathematics Division, 1953-1956, member, executive committee, 1954-1956.

Honors and Awards: King's Medal for Service in Engineering, 1948; fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science (president, 1971, chairman of board, 1972); Public Welfare Medal, National Academy of Sciences, 1983; IEEE Computer Society Pioneer Award, 1989; 18 honorary degrees from US colleges and universities.

Mina Rees, after receiving her PhD in mathematics at the University of Chicago in 1931 and serving her academic apprenticeship on the faculty of Hunter College, received her initiation into the military applications of mathematics during World War II when she served as assistant to the chief of the Applied Mathematics Panel of the Office of Scientific Research and Development. For her work, she was honored by both Britain and the US. At the end of the war, the Navy invited her to establish the mathematical research program in the newly created Office of Naval Research. This proved to be a surprisingly effective effort that expanded the horizons of mathematical research in the US and strengthened programs in mathematics throughout the country. Her work was recognized in 1962 when the Mathematical Association of America gave her its first Award for Distinguished Service to Mathematics.

Among Rees' activities in Washington, one that proved particularly significant was her participation, on behalf of the Navy, in the government sponsorship that proved critical in the infancy of computers. In addition to providing wide support for university research of basic importance to the emerging computer field, ONR collaborated with the National Bureau of Standards in supporting and directing its program. This program claims, as one of its achievements, funding the production of the first commercially produced electronic, stored-program computer, the Census Univac that was delivered in 1951 and used in analyses of the 1950 census data.

When, in 1953, Rees left Washington to become dean of the faculty of Hunter College, she continued her support of the Bureau of Standards as chairman of the Bureau's Advisory Committee on Mathematics, and was

¹ aka Mrs. Leopold Brahdy.

a member of the Mathematics Division of the National Research Council, where she was chairman of the Subcommittee on Applied Mathematics of the Commission on a Survey of Research in Mathematics in the United States, 1954-1956. There followed public service activities for the Defense Department, for several academic organizations, and for the American Association for the Advancement of Science, of which she became the first woman president in 1971.

With her assumption of the position of dean of graduate studies and, later, first president of the Graduate School and University Center of the newly established City University of New York, Rees' activities became focused on the strengthening of graduate education in her own institution and throughout the US. In 1970, she was chairman of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States. From 1964 to 1970 she was a member of the National Science Board.

Since her retirement in 1972, Rees has continued to serve on boards that are concerned with applications of research to social problems, including the delivery of health care. She is a member of visiting committees in two universities and works with a number of foundations concerned with improving the effectiveness of the educational establishment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biographical

Rees, Mina, "The Computing Program of the Office of Naval Research, 1946-53, " *Ann. Hist. Comp.*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1982, pp. 102-120.

Rees, Mina, "The Federal Computing Machine Program," *Ann. Hist. Comp.*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1985, pp. 156-163.

Significant Publications

Rees, Mina, *Theory of Air Warfare, Vol. II, Summary Technical Report, Applied Mathematics Panel*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1947.

Rees, Mina, "Warren Weaver," *Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. 57, National Academy of Sciences, 1983, pp. 493-530.

UPDATES

Mina Rees died October 25, 1997 (MRW, 2012)

Portrait added (MRW, 2013)