

Uniting Science and Trade: Pan-Computer Professionalism, 1958-1975

Colby College STS Symposium Series, Spring 2002

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Abstract: By the late 1950s, two almost separate communities had embraced the new technology of the computer. The Data Processing community grew from existing corporate tabulating machine installations, and sought recognition as managerially important. Its main institution was the National Machine Accountants Association (NMAA). The Computing community comprised scientists and technicians using computers for calculation and simulation. Its members sought recognition for the study of computing as a scientific discipline in its own right -- complete with journals, conferences and departments. Its main institution was the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM).

My paper explores efforts to unite these two communities into a single profession of "computer people." I explore the origin of this idea, and chart the institutions and individuals involved in its pursuit. The aerospace firms of 1950s California, and the RAND Corporation, emerge as crucial training grounds for a generation of leaders. Most combined scientific training with long periods working in corporations or as managers within computer firms. Their vision of a single computing field was an attempt to knit together the disparate elements of their own careers into a single professional trajectory.

Bio:

Thomas Haigh is teaching in the Science, Technology and Society and Administrative Science programs at Colby College and completing a PhD in the history and sociology of science at the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation, *Technology, Information, and Power: Administrative Technicians in the American Corporation, 1917-1975*, is the first full-length synthetic history of the corporate use and management of information technology during that period. He holds BSc and MEng degrees in systems integration from the University of Manchester, UK. He has received numerous fellowships, including a Fulbright Award, and has published articles in *Business History Review* and *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*. His homepage is www.tomandmaria.com/tom