

Foreword

This volume is the result of the cooperative effort of many persons and a number of organizations. The National Bureau of Standards has long been turning out mathematical tables and has had under consideration, for at least 10 years, the production of a compendium like the present one. During a Conference on Tables, called by the NBS Applied Mathematics Division on May 15, 1952, Dr. Abramowitz of that Division mentioned preliminary plans for such an undertaking, but indicated the need for technical advice and financial support.

The Mathematics Division of the National Research Council has also had an active interest in tables; since 1943 it has published the quarterly journal, "Mathematical Tables and Aids to Computation" (MTAC), editorial supervision being exercised by a Committee of the Division.

Subsequent to the NBS Conference on Tables in 1952 the attention of the National Science Foundation was drawn to the desirability of financing activity in table production. With its support a 2-day Conference on Tables was called at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on September 15-16, 1954, to discuss the needs for tables of various kinds. Twenty-eight persons attended, representing scientists and engineers using tables as well as table producers. This conference reached consensus on several conclusions and recommendations, which were set forth in the published Report of the Conference. There was general agreement, for example, "that the advent of high-speed computing equipment changed the task of table making but definitely did not remove the need for tables". It was also agreed that "an outstanding need is for a Handbook of Tables for the Occasional Computer, with tables of usually encountered functions and a set of formulas and tables for interpolation and other techniques useful to the occasional computer". The Report suggested that the NBS undertake the production of such a Handbook and that the NSF contribute financial assistance. The Conference elected, from its participants, the following Committee: P. M. Morse (Chairman), M. Abramowitz, J. H. Curtiss, R. W. Hamming, D. H. Lehmer, C. B. Tompkins, J. W. Tukey, to help implement these and other recommendations.

The Bureau of Standards undertook to produce the recommended tables and the National Science Foundation made funds available. To provide technical guidance to the Mathematics Division of the Bureau, which carried out the work, and to provide the NSF with independent judgments on grants for the work, the Conference Committee was reconstituted as the Committee on Revision of Mathematical Tables of the Mathematics Division of the National Research Council. This, after some changes of membership, became the Committee which is signing this Foreword. The present volume is evidence that Conferences can sometimes reach conclusions and that their recommendations sometimes get acted on.