von Neumann, John
First draft of a report on the EDVAC.
Edited and with an introduction by Michael D. Godfrey.


Godfrey has prepared a TeXedion of John von Neumann’s 1945 summary of discussions between von Neumann, J. W. Mauchly, J. P. Eckert, A. W. Burks, H. H. Goldstine and others on a logical plan for the new digital computer EDVAC, electronic discrete variable calculator. In a brief introduction Godfrey, as editor, explains that there is a need for a fresh version since there are few copies of the original mimeographed reproduction of the typescript and it contains many errors. The latter are described only in a general way, as “numerous typographical mistakes” and “also a considerable number of errors” (p. 27). There is no indication of the editor’s specific emendations, which are presumably based solely on the editor’s judgement since no manuscript has been found. This unfortunately means that the new edition cannot be taken as an authoritative text according to the usual standards of scholarly editing: people wishing to quote in the most accurate fashion, for example, should still refer to the original typescript version. In any case, in view of the historical importance of the document it might well be of interest to readers just what errors there are in the typescript, even typographical ones. Goldstine [The computer from Pascal to von Neumann, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton, NJ, 1972; MR0389497] in his account of this “masterful analysis and synthesis” describes it as “in a sense, . . . the most important document ever written on computing and computers” (p. 191).

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