Glory and Failure: The Difference Engines of Johann Müller, Charles Babbage, and Georg and Edvard Sheutz (History of Computing)

Michael Lindgren

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The first attempts to mechanize the production of numerical tables were remarkable in conception coming at a time when a "computer" was in fact a person rather than a machine. This book is the first to provide a unified picture of the difference engines that were the mechanical predecessors of today's digital computer, to emphasize them as part of the history of numerical tables, and to give equal weight to the technical and social aspects of their creation.Lindgren analyzes the difference engines of Müller and Babbage and the mathematical principles on which they are based, tells the story of how Georg and Edvard Scheutz learned about Babbage's engine, discusses the design and operation of the Scheutzs' machine, and tells why Babbage failed technically and the Scheutzes failed commercially. The often detailed technical descriptions bring to light the inventors' own ways of thinking as work on the engines progressedMichael Lindgren is Curator at the National Museum of Science and Technology in Stockholm.

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