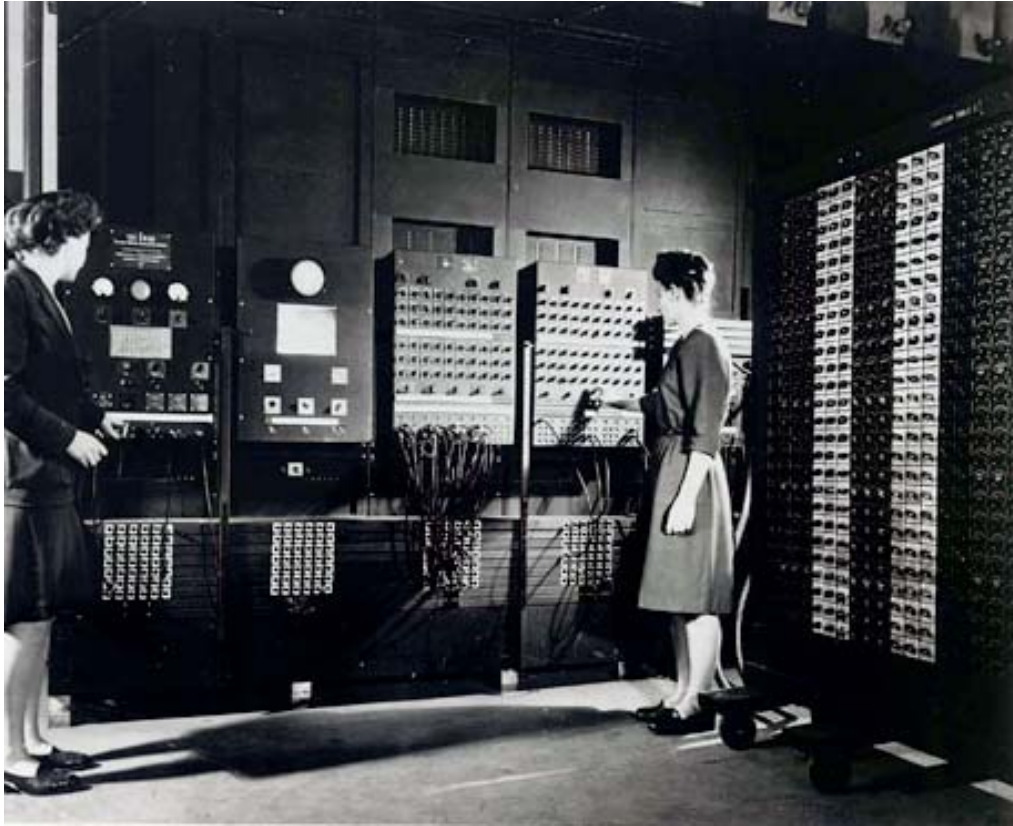


Flora and Flossie



Crystal had paid a pretty penny for her new cell phone, but it was worth it. After all, it had *so* many features! It had an mp3 player and AM radio, a digital camera and self-charging flashlight, a GPS travel assistance receiver and SpeedPass mobile wallet, a tiny television and an even tinier microwave oven, and a combination coffee grinder and flexible sigmoidoscope, to name but a few appurtenances. Why, it even could send and receive telephone calls – all in a package no bigger than her two front teeth! (In fact, with the optional Deluxe Dental Fascia, the phone doubled as a pair of fully functional, plug-in maxillary incisors.) But one day, after she had been trading text messages with a hundred of her closest friends, the phone abruptly stopped working. Crystal shut down all external functions and initiated the self-diagnostic program. A moment later, four words appeared on the LCD display: LOIS AND EDNA IMPAIRED. Huh? Who were Lois and Edna?! As if anticipating the question, the phone added another string of words to the display: TOGGLE JOYSTICK TO OPEN CASE. REMOVE LOIS AND EDNA. REPLACE WITH FLORA AND FLOSSIE. Crystal tapped the joystick with her finger. A high-pitched whir from deep within the phone suggested that something was happening. Then the miniature keyboard popped up and revealed ... Crystal was initially so flabbergasted that she fetched her magnifying glass to be sure of what she was seeing. Sure enough, two minuscule women in old-timey attire were standing stock-still before the cell phone's central processing unit. Lois and Edna – it *had* to be them! Carefully, she picked up the Lilliputians with teensy tweezers and disposed of them in the rubbish bin. Then she extracted the “FLORA AND FLOSSIE” tube from the telephony peripherals packet, opened it, and shook the contents into her hand. Voilà – an equally diminutive Flora and Flossie! She placed them on the spots previously occupied by Lois and Edna, and immediately they began to do things to the CPU. (Crystal couldn't tell what, and she really didn't care, as long as the phone worked again.) Just as she was closing the case, the nano-woman with the microscopic “Flossie” nametag glanced up and gave Crystal a thumbs-up sign – which would later go down in history as first contact between human beings and the Artificial Intelligentsia!