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Mary Ross; Mathematician, Engineer, Space Pioneer



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Mary G. Ross, Cherokee, was born in Oklahoma in 1908. She attended Northeastern State Teachers College (now [Northeastern State University](#)) and graduated at age 20 with a degree in mathematics. She then taught math in public schools for approximately ten years before returning to school to complete a master's degree in math, which she accomplished in 1938 when she graduated from Colorado State Teachers College (now [University of Northern Colorado](#)). Ms. Ross next worked for Lockheed Aircraft Corp. in California and continued her educational pursuits by taking courses in engineering from [UCLA](#), where she received a mechanical engineering classification in 1949, which gives her the distinction of becoming the first Native American woman engineer. She rose through the Lockheed engineering ranks and was included among the first 40 employees, and the only female engineer, of Lockheed's Missiles Systems Division. In her career she contributed to (among others) the developmental work on the [Poseidon](#) and [Trident](#) missiles, engineering systems for manned space flights, and satellite orbits.

After retiring in 1973 she devoted much of her time and energy to speaking to student groups and encouraging Native American youth and young women to consider careers in technical areas such as engineering. Ms. Ross was a pioneering member of the [Society of Women Engineers \(SWE\)](#), which bestowed the honor of electing her a [SWE Fellow](#). The [Santa Clara Valley Section of SWE](#) offers a [scholarship in her name](#). In 1985 Ms. Ross received the [Fly S. Parker award](#) from the [American Indian Science and Engineering Society \(AISES\)](#) and in 1992 she was inducted into the [Silicon Valley Engineering Hall of Fame](#).

Ms. Ross has said, "Why did this happen for me? How, without an engineering degree and no previous experience was I able to adapt and move through such an interesting career? The answer, I think, is that I had a firm foundation in mathematics and those qualities that came down to me from my Indian heritage. I had a great deal of curiosity, interest, willingness to study and to learn, to try out new ideas and most of all to work."

Mary G. Ross, a kind and gentle spirit, died in 2008 leaving behind a legacy worthy of honor and emulation.

To learn more about the life and career of Mary Ross, read the articles linked below.

[Mary G. Ross blazed a trail in the sky as a woman engineer in the space race, celebrated museum](#)

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