Sophie Germain Encyclopedia Article

Sophie Germain

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Sophie Germain

1776-1831

French mathematician who contributed to the studies of acoustics, elasticity, and the theory of numbers. Born in a time when women were not permitted to attend schools of higher learning, Germain advanced her education early on by reading whatever she could in her father's library. She mastered calculus in this manner, then took correspondence courses (under the pseudonym of M. Leblanc) from the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, where women were not accepted. Eventually, she became so highly regarded by prominent mathematicians of her era that she was recommended for an honorary Ph.D from the University of Göttingen. However, she died before her degree was presented.