Since the late nineteenth century, measurement has been an integral part of economics. The metrics of the discipline lend it credence as a science, while contemporary debates illustrate the political significance of economic measurement (for examples, consider the 1996–97 U.S. congressional hearings on the Consumer Price Index, the symposium on measurement in the winter 1998 issue of the Journal of Economic Perspectives, and the recent attempts by the United Nations to construct a “Human Development Index”). Despite its importance, economic measurement has received remarkably little attention from historians of economics. The aim of the 2000 HOPE workshop was to account for the emergence and establishment of economic measurement as a critical element of modern economics. Participants wanted to understand what questions and problems created the drive to measurement and how economists reacted to the changing status of numbers in the discipline. The papers presented at the workshop explored the origins of economic measurement and the historical links between empirical observations, issues of public policy, changes in economic theory, and academic practice. Authors presented material from several countries in Europe and North America and concentrated on the time period from 1830 to 1950, which could well be labeled the “age of measurement” in economics.

The essays in this volume were first presented at a small intense workshop at Duke University on 28–30 April 2000. There were several stages of revision after the workshop in which authors developed points raised...
in the discussions and responded to reports by anonymous referees and suggestions from the editors.

We would like to thank the editors of HOPE—Craufurd Goodwin, Neil De Marchi, and Roy Weintraub—and the managing editor, Paul Dudenhefer, for their enthusiastic support of the workshop and this volume. We are also grateful to Shauna Saunders and other graduate students at Duke who contributed to the workshop, and we thank a number of referees who contributed reports on the papers. Finally, we thank all our authors for their patience in dealing with our editorial demands and for their hard work and creative engagement with our questions about measurement, both at the workshop and for this volume.