

40-year ERA Plaque – Where did it go?

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a record of email messages relative to the title. Dates of significance: from the Plaque, 8 January 1946, and 19 August 1985. From the Pioneer Press article 10 May, 1991 – Midway area says goodbye to computer pioneer; <http://vipclubmn.org/Locations.html#Closing>. see page 8. Now, after a newsletter article [<http://vipclubmn.org/Newsletters/Enews2011.pdf>] and two years we need to ask again. Perhaps charter a replica?

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September 2nd, 2020, message from Keith Myhre to Wilfred Geiger

“Hi Bill – {Personal note redacted out} Yesterday at the Lawshe Museum I came across these six photos. I was hoping you could help me in identifying some of the people. I recognize you, Jack Nichols, and Bob McDonald [picture 2 below] but not any of the others.

- I can read the badge name for Joe Feely. [Picture 3] Do you know what group he was in?
- How about Jay Kershaw? [Picture 4] He must not have been an employee. Any insight into who he was?
- Any other faces that you can put a name to?
- Am I correct in remembering that you once told me that the ERA plaque disappeared, and no one knows where it is? Or did I hear that from someone else?

Thanks, Keith

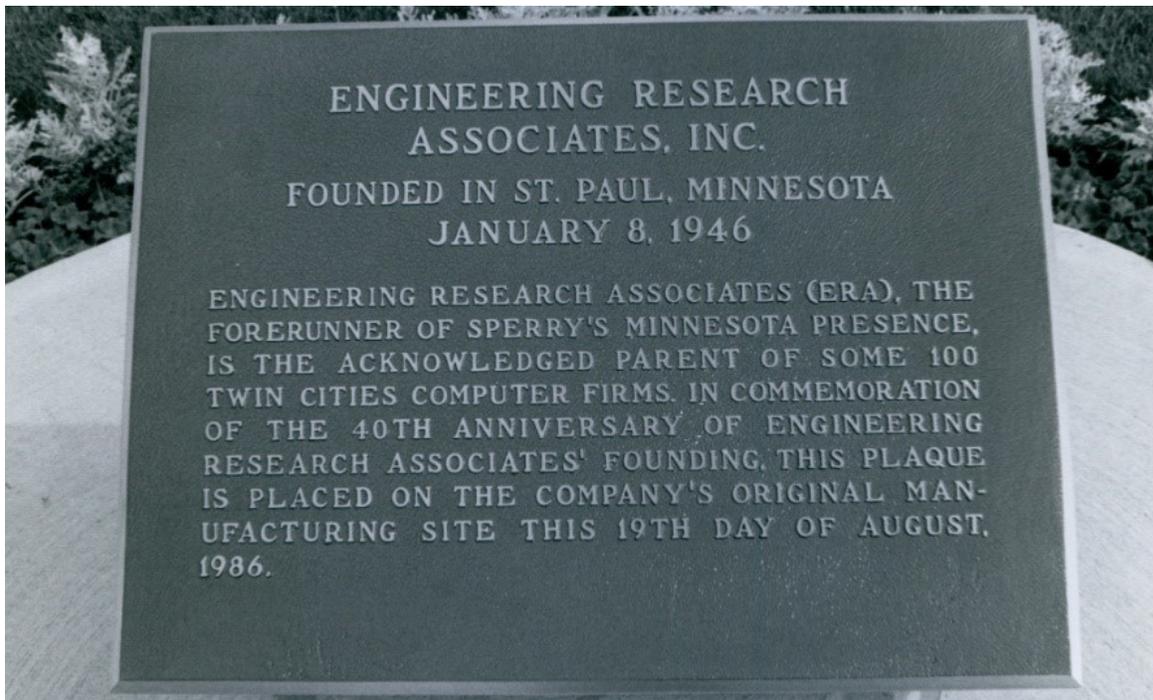
September 9th, 2020 message from Bill to Keith

“Sorry for the delay in response to your questions. It is Jay and I do not remember the other man in the group photograph, but I am pretty sure I knew him. Do not recall names of any of the others in single photos. Memory just does not function the way it used to. {Personal note redacted out}

We hope you are staying well and enjoying all the projects you have. We inactive retirees owe you a debt of gratitude for all you do. Our best to you and thanks for the contact.

Regards, Bill”

PHOTOS



Picture 1. The Plaque is self-explanatory



Picture 2. Rolland Anderson, Bill Geiger, Jack Nichols, and Bob MacDonald – see Dick Lundgren’s web page article <http://vipclubmn.org/Locations.html#Commemorated>



Picture 3. Joe Freely per name tag. Picture 4. Bob MacDonald at left, Jay Kershaw at right, two behind are unknown.

{Editor’s Note: I, Lowell, recognize Jay too. In 1963 he was an engineering Director with an office on the 2nd floor of Plant 5, next to George Raymond. The Antenna Coupler Department Manager reported to him, his secretary rode with me to work from Minneapolis. I think that Jay and George both reported to Arne Hendrickson. His name appears a few other places in our Legacy Anthology as well as in Dr. Misa’s Digital State book. Also see page 4 Legacy article <http://vipclubmn.org/Newsletters/Enews1609.pdf> for an ERA experience of Jay. }



Picture 5. Insufficient resolution to read nametag of lady by plaque monument, does anyone recognize her face?

I, Lowell, found another picture and the following words on an obsolete Legacy web page:

Celebrating ERA's 40th anniversary at Plant 2

From right to left are: Rolland Anderson, ?, Lou Cramer, Laverle Cocchiarella [identified by Don Weidenbach], Shirley Wood [identified by Laverle], Gen Sederstrom [identified by Jim Wazlawik], ?, ?, ?, behind the camera person appears to be Bill Geiger because of his necktie.



FEEDBACK MESSAGES, i. e. Detective Work

[September 9th, 2020 message from Keith to Bill](#)

Thanks for the response, Bill. {Personal note redacted out} 😊.

Am I correct in remembering that the ERA plaque disappeared? Do you have any insight into when or how it happened? Or someone who would know? It would be nice to have that plaque at the Lawshe Memorial Museum. Keith

[September 9th, 2020 message #2 from Bill to Keith](#)

Have never heard that the plaque was "lost".

Even bigger question of who would have been the custodian of the plaque since may even have been the Navy. Do not know who the last Navy personnel were? Need a detective!

[September 9th message from Keith to Bill and the VIP Club Board](#)

Hi Everyone,

Does anyone know what happened to the ERA 40th anniversary plaque? Or did I mishear that it was missing? If missing, it would be a good article for the VIP Club newsletter: "Where is the ERA 40th Anniversary Plaque?" Keith

Thanks for the insight, Bill. It would make sense that the Navy may have ended up with the plaque, considering it was their facility. Keith

[September 9th message from Dick Lundgren to the VIP Club Board and Keith](#)

Keith, I remember writing an article for the newsletter about that plaque, long time ago. I had been at the MH History Center and found an article in the St. Paul newspaper about the dedication. Many have searched high and low for the plaque with no success. Best guess it that it got bulldozed on site. Maybe a smart metal detector would locate it. Dick

[September 10th message from Keith to the VIP Club Board](#)

Anybody know someone who worked at/with NSTR near the end that might be able to provide insight into the plaque's whereabouts? Keith

[September 14th message from Harvey Taipale to the Board, Keith, and Bill](#)

Great scans. From the badges, I can identify Bob McDonald, Bill Geiger, Jay Kershaw, and Jack somebody.

First, looking at the current GIS data from St. Paul, this area appears to have been significantly remodeled. Perhaps the core plant 2 structure is still there, along with the old Minnehaha guard shack and maybe building 6. The wing where the cafeteria and NSTR were located appear to be gone. The building at the corner of prior and Minnehaha is probably new, as this used to be a parking lot.

One of the photos shows a cross street to Minnehaha, near the plaque location, which is likely Tatum. This would place the plaque just east of the guard shack, and area which now appears to be a parking lot (shades of Joni Mitchell <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2595abcvh2M>).

The current St. Paul online property records only go back a few years (2015-16) so I am guessing none of the current tenants has a clue about what happened to the plaque. My recollection is that years ago, the Plant 2 complex was painted with the red white and blue stripe that was the symbol of JLT Group, a real estate development firm owned by Jerry Troien. JLT group is no longer active with the MN Secretary of State. Troien did run for US Senate in 2018, so presumably he is still around.

If anybody has a contact with this defunct company, please speak up. Otherwise, I will attempt to contact Jerry to see if he can point us in the right direction. Harvey

[September 14th message from Dick Lundgren to the VIP Club Board and Bill](#)

See my article on the subject from <http://vipclubmn.org/Locations.html> and read 2.5 under Locations/Chapters. {Editor's note: Scanned Press article copied on page 8.}

[September 23rd message from Lowell Benson to retired Navy Captains, Donald Leichtweis and Charles Alcon – Cc: Keith and Harvey](#)

Don and Chuck: Greetings, hope that you have been able to stay safe during the pandemic. One of our retirees, Keith Myhre, has been volunteering at the Lawshe Memorial Museum in S. St. Paul documenting ERA/UNIVAC/Sperry/UNISYS/LMCO artifacts and photos. Attached hereto are six photos from 1986 when an ERA Plaque was dedicated.

Each of you was at NSTR in St. Paul at one time. I think that Chuck may have been there when NSTR closed. Any idea what might have happened to this plaque. Who was there last? I do know that an Army Security Agency group used the facility for a time, reference <http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/ASAinPlant2.pdf>.

Any recollections or contacts from the 80s would be appreciated. Thanks,

September 23rd message from Don Leichtweis to Lowell, Cc Chuck, Harvey, & Keith Lowell,

I am embarrassed to admit I was not aware that a plaque was installed and dedicated. As program manager for PMS-408 from 1984 to 1988, I was the plant's Navy sponsor & should have known about it, but I am drawing a complete blank!

I recognize the faces in the pictures but cannot put a name to them.

I left the NSTR assignment in 1974. Chuck followed me, but I am pretty sure he was gone from that job by 1986. Hopefully, he can shed some light. I will see if I still have a record of the people at NSTR in the mid-80s. My wife has been after me to clean those out. Looks like now's the time!

We are well, staying inside, exercising at a distance outside as long as weather permits and wearing masks in between. Ready for this to be over, though I am not confident that will ever happen for us old folks. I will let you know what I find if anything. Stay safe.

September 24th message from Chuck Alcon to Lowell, Cc Don, Harvey, & Keith

Lowell- Also not a clue, must have been a big deal as all the men are wearing jackets; was not aware that the plaque had been installed. Looks like it was on the north side adjacent to Minnehaha Ave. next to the pedestrian entrance a good ole 1902; is it possible that two of the men in the picture on the left are George Badman and Don Ream, possibly Joe Stoutenberg. Do we know how the plaque installation was funded??

I retired in 1981 and was relieved by LCDR Steve Reitz, not sure when the plant was sold, sorry.

September 24th message from Lowell to all previous topic contacts

Greetings and thanks to all for your comments relative to Subject. I have attached a record of the communications to date - sorry that no answer has popped out! There is a bit more information about NSTR on our website, <http://vipclubmn.org/Locations.html#Nilsson>. Ben Nilsson has written a bit of history including several names. Unfortunately, many/most are no longer with us. One of his comments: "At one time there was a plaque in front of the building [I don't remember the inscription.]"

AND, thanks to all for continuing to document our *Legacy*! Keep Safe, Lowell A. Benson

September 24th message from Dick Lundgren to all previous topic contacts

I have stayed in touch with Ben (Bengt) Nilsson over the past several years. He and his wife (both very Swedish and involved with Gammelgården) moved a while back to Washington State, Olympic Peninsula. Ben has always had some medical issues, and I think he's losing. The last few emails, up to a couple years ago were written by Ann. I did ask him about the plaque with no luck.

September 25th Message from Lowell to Tom Lindquist, Cc: Keith M.

Tom: The Legacy Committee is trying to locate the 'Subject' - do you know of anyone who was around in 1991 when the plant 2 facility was closed who may have recollections? The attached has some communications. Thanks, keep safe!

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September 25th Message from Tom to Lowell to, Cc: Keith M.

Hi; the "plaque", stand, and event were funded out of Jack Nichol's corporate communication budget. Several times over 20, 25, 30 years ago the mystery/question of what happened to the plaque has been asked. It may well have ended up in someone's garage or recycled when the base was torn down. I really cannot add anything to the information you have already uncovered in your email records.

September 28th Message from Lowell to Chad Roberts & Mollie Spillman at Ramsey Co. Historical Society, Cc: Keith M.

Chad: This is a real long shot; our Legacy Committee is trying to find a missing plaque, see attached. Any possibility that it ended up at Ramsey county? Thanks in advance for any feedback.

September 28th Message from Chad to Lowell, et al'

Lowell, Mollie will investigate this on our end, but I don't think we have it. That said, I have heard from some folks that want to install a plaque commemorating ERA... I think the universe is telling me something. I will check with those folks – some are really invested in the ERA history and never even worked there. Chad

September 30th Message from Mollie to Lowell, et al'

Good morning Lowell, RCHS does not have this plaque. I hope you are doing well. Mollie

September 30th Message from John Westergren to Lowell, et al'

Lowell, et al: I don't ever remember seeing this plaque in person. Therefore, I do not have it either.
Regards John

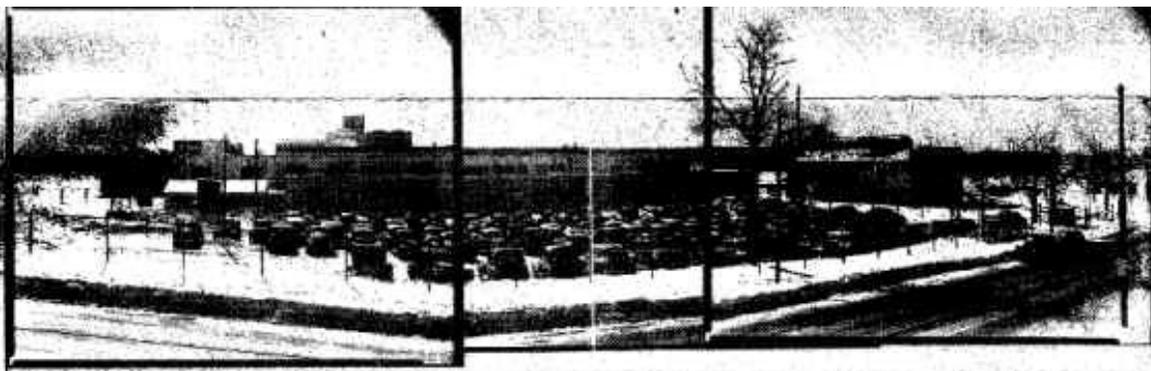
EPILOGUE

The article in the Club's November/December newsletter was good, it referenced a link to draft copy of this paper. Now almost two years later the issue is still open. We checked with the Ramsey Co. Historical Society and the St. Paul Historical Society to no avail.

If you, the reader would like to participate in the development of a replacement, contact Dick, Rflundgr@aol.com and/or me, la.gj.benson@comcast.net.



Established in 1980



The pioneering Engineering Research Associates computer firm occupied the plant on Minnehaha from 1946 to 1955.

Midway area says goodbye to computer pioneer

■ Unisys leaves plant that housed ERA until 1955

THOMAS J. COLLINS STAFF WRITER

Tucked in St. Paul's Midway neighborhood, the wellspring of Minnesota's computer industry has at last run dry.

A creative spurt — spawning more than 40 computer companies — ended officially last week when the Unisys Corp. ended its long-term lease of the plant at 1962 W. Minnehaha Ave. from the Navy.

All that remains are memories of a huge ramshackle warehouse that housed the former Engineering Research Associates computer company from 1946 to 1955 and nurtured computer industry giants Bill Norris, who founded Control Data Corp., and Seymour Cray, founder of Cray Research.

It was a cold, drafty, dusty building that was used first as a foundry for the American Radiator Co. Later, troop carrier gliders were built there, recalled Norris, 80, who co-founded ERA after the war.

"They never did get the roof fixed very well. It always leaked," he said.

During most of its life, the building was as much a home to rodents, bats, birds and flies as it was to the engineers and physicists who were developing the high-speed calculating machines. Flyswatters were standard fare on every desk, recalled futurist Earl Joseph, 64, who joined



JOE OGEN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Four former ERA workers stand in front of their old plant. Left to right are Bill Drake, Norm Palzer, Earl Joseph and Bob Keenan.

ERA as a computer programmer in 1951.

When the wind howled outside, it whistled through the deck of desks arranged in neat rows on a slivered wood-block floor. Occasionally, Bill Drake's chair would grind into that floor when he forgot and shifted his weight to the side of

his seat without a caster.

In the winter, snowdrifts collected near the desks. And often workers wouldn't bother to take off their coats.

"Your first impression was of a big,

ERA CONTINUED ON 12C ▶