

Introduction

This article is copied from the Charles Babbage Institute's web site posting of their fall 2018 newsletter. Posted on the VIP Club anthology with permission of the author, Dr. Jeffrey Yost.

Minnesota Computing History

Homepage of the new Minnesota Computing History website

<https://mncomputinghistory.com/>¹

Over the past year Charles Babbage Institute staff, a University of Minnesota History of Science, Technology, and Medicine (HSTM) doctoral student and an HSTM postdoc collaborated with the Minnesota High Technology Association, the Dakota County Historical Society, Twin Cities Public Television (TPT, the local PBS affiliate), the VIP Club (a local IT retirees group), and industry veterans (especially Rich Daly and Dale Weeks), to conduct a major research and [public history project](#) on computing history in Minnesota. This has been a very rewarding partnership, and we have just completed this important one-year project, funded by the state of Minnesota through the [Minnesota Historical and Cultural Heritage Grants](#) program, which is administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.

CBI Archivist Amanda Wick has been the chief archivist advisor on the project, and I have been the chief historian advisor to it. University of Minnesota History of Science, Technology, and Medicine doctoral candidate Elizabeth Semler has served with great distinction as the lead researcher and project manager, and HSTM graduate Dr. Jonathan Clemens has been an important consulting advisor. The grant goals were two-fold: first, to develop and disseminate information and resources on Minnesota computing history, primarily focusing on the unparalleled sets of collections from the partnering organizations and second to conduct video interviews with Minnesota computing pioneers and former CBI Director Tom Misa, author of [Digital State: The Story of Minnesota's Computing Industry](#). The latter goal—the interviews/footage—is a major first step toward a documentary film on Minnesota's computing history that TPT is planning.

CBI has rich resources on Minnesota computing in many collections, with none more prominent in scale or scope than the 350+ linear feet of [Control Data Corporation Records](#). This includes records on the facilities, finances, marketing, social responsibility efforts, products, services, strategies, and leadership of this path-breaking international company that largely made Minneapolis a high-tech city.

¹ Blue, underlined text are links to other internet resources. Use in the original CBI newsletter editorial and in this copy does not assure that the links will remain operational.

Established in 1980

A small sampling of CBI's other collections wholly or largely on Minnesota computing include the [William C. Norris Papers](#) (CDC's first and longtime CEO), the [Robert M. Price Papers](#) (Norris' successor as CEO), the [Engineering Research Associate-Remington Rand-Sperry Rand Records](#), the [Total Information for Educational Systems Records](#), the [Mark P. McCahill Papers](#) (inventor of internet Gopher), and the [Minnesota Joint Computer Conference \(MJCC\) Records](#). Our collections range in format from manuscript materials and digital records to photographs and video/film. We also have many dozens of [oral histories](#) that focus heavily on Minnesota's computing history, especially with individuals from ERA/Sperry-Univac and Control Data.

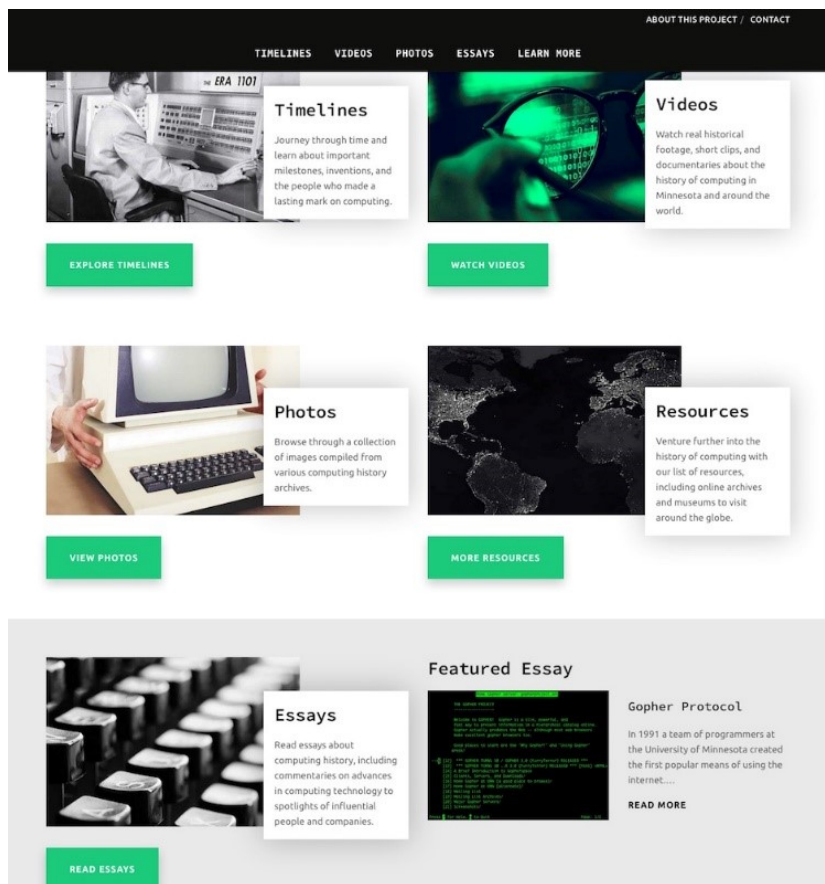
Right next door to CBI in Andersen Library is [University Archives](#), which has materials on supercomputing on the University of Minnesota campus, as well as records related to the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and the Computer Science and Engineering Department. It also has records on medical informatics and other computing and software applications at the university. [Dakota County Historical Society](#) has a large and impressive photograph collection that focuses primarily on St. Paul, Minnesota's Engineering Research Associates (one of the first two digital computer firms in the world), and its descendants with mergers and acquisitions— Remington Rand, Sperry Rand/Sperry Univac, Unisys, and Lockheed Martin. Meanwhile, the [VIP Club](#) has digitized their newsletters and made them available online. {Editor' note: <http://vipclubmn.org/Newsletters.html>.}

Early on, the group shifted from the original vision and agreed that the website should highlight and sample resources, instead of attempting to create a comprehensive joint index, and serve as a major public history website that would be engaging to high school students, college students, and the general public. With broad consensus on this from the group, Elizabeth Semler took the lead in researching, organizing, and working with web developers to create ["Minnesota Computing History."](#)

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This major new website has both a general interactive timeline (for broader context), which complements its core, a Minnesota computing history interactive timeline. Each interactive timeline has dozens of key data points for additional historical information, images, and resources. The site also contains a number of videos, including “In Your Defense,” a short film developed on the history of Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) and SAGE computing by one of the key industrial partners, the [Burroughs Corporation](#), a video from Unisys on “New Power Under the Sun,” and a video on Sperry-Univac’s (1956) Univac Scientific Computer.

The site includes scores of carefully selected photographs, many of which are from the Charles Babbage Institute Archives and the Dakota County Historical Society. It also includes a section where key topics and themes are explored through in-depth essays. This section was launched with critical essays in place and will be expanded as time allows in the future. The site includes essays on Engineering Researching Associates, IBM, Control Data, the Oregon Trail computer game, among others.





Elizabeth Semler and VIP Club President Harvey Taipale celebrate the launch of the website by presenting Liz with an ERA lapel pin.

I was delighted to attend a wine and cheese reception at the Dakota County Historical Society museum on September 13th, 2018 to celebrate the completion of the Minnesota Computing History website and hear updates on the TPT documentary under development. At the event, Elizabeth Semler gave a terrific presentation on the website and documentary projects. VIP Club (Unisys & LMCO) member Keith Myhre kindly provided me a personal tour of museum as well as an overview of the important volunteer processing work, he and other volunteer VIP Club retirees are doing with the photograph collections on computing history at DCHC.

Lockheed Martin donated substantial records to CBI on Sperry-Univac history, as well as a very impressive collection of artifacts and photographs to the DCHS. (Our institutions have a cooperative relationship in sharing digitized photos and records.)

The Charles Babbage Institute is very glad to be a partner in this important public history effort. We are especially grateful to the scholar whose research, creativity, and project management was so crucial to the production of the online exhibit/website, Elizabeth Semler.

*Jeffrey R. Yost
CBI Director*

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BEE U of MN 1966 and retiree from UNIVAC 1960 => UNISYS 1994.