

Turtle Mountain Corporation

*Data messages from **John Miller** with editing by Lowell Benson.*

INTRODUCTION

Turtle Mountain Corporation (TMC) was 'spun-off' from Atron which was spun off from ERA/Sperry Rand Univac in 1968, reference <http://vipclubmn.org/Spinoffs.html#Corporations>. It indeed continues to be amazing as well as gratifying to learn how talents of Midwest college graduates solved problems through application of technologies and business skills.

Many graduates from Midwest colleges started their technology careers in St. Paul at one of the Unisys predecessors. This is one of those NDSU 'graduate' stories which was initiated by John's December 3rd email "*Are you still accepting inputs?*" to the VIP Club's webmaster with a copy to Lowell. "**Yes,**" John's messages and Lowell's replies are copied below.

I have redacted some personal information from the messages.

Read on, the epilogue has a link to an NDSU news TMC article!

[John to Webmaster & Lowell - 12/3/2021 at 5:45 PM](#)

Are you still accepting updates?

I joined Univac early 1958 as a mechanical engineer. Worked on NTDS then later the CP 901 project. I was pleased to read that the CP-901 performed so well. The amount of testing that Director Arnie Hendrickson demanded during the design phase paid off. He kept saying, "looks good, but one more test".

When Finley {sic - McLeod} transferred {sic – to manage the AN/UYK-7 development} I was named Engineering Manager for the CP901. Then was asked to set up manufacturing organization in plant 1 for the CP-901 because of the new technologies.

I left Univac in 1969 when asked to join Osofsky, McLeod, Birkholder, Koschmann, Gountanis, Stoutenburgh, Stanga and Bergman to form Atron Corporation.

It's been 50 years, but I do recall knowing a L. Benson. Is that you?

John Miller Sent from my iPhone

[Lowell to John – 12/3/2021 at 6:27 PM](#)

John: Yes, you have the guy whose time card you signed for a while. Let me apologize a bit, in my rather egotistical career summary (page 9), I noted, "I worked for Ken Oehlers, Dave Zemke, Jim Miller, and Larry Woznicka during these years." I should have written John Miller, not Jim!

My memory is that your brother Ray also worked for UNIVAC then moved to work with some N.D. Indian Reservation company. I believe that Dave Zemke also went over to Atron. Ken Oehlers led the AN/UYK-7 design then moved to NCR in Kettering Ohio. Dave Z. and Joe Stoutenburgh also came back to Sperry for a few years. I vaguely recall that Goutanis ended up somewhere in CO - his ex-wife is a VIP Club member. Ken, Dave, and Larry are deceased as are many others who worked on the development team and those who started Atron

Established in 1980

The last CP-901, S/N 499 was built about 1992 - almost a 25-year production run.

Anyway, we are still accepting updates - I will insert your brief words into chapter 15, <http://vipclubmn.org/People5.html> as section 2.12.

Cheers, KEEP SAFE!

John to Lowell – 12/4/2021 at 11:27 PM

Hi Lowell,

Appreciated your reply. There are Millers everywhere and it's been a long time, so calling me Jim is not a problem, I have been called worse. Speaking of Millers, Ray Miller had two brothers and I was not one of them. He tried to claim me, but I squelched that. He was my second boss at Univac and a very close friend. Don't know how well you knew him, but he was a great guy. As a youngster from North Dakota, I accused Ray and his brothers of taking advantage of me. The three of them invited me to join their bowling team. It took me awhile to understand which were the beer frames. I think I got stuck every time. Ray did work for me on the 901 after a stint at Roseville and later at Turtle Mountain Corporation after he retired.

I organized TMC to enter the contract manufacturing business. Louis Amyotte was a technician for core memories at Univac and later at Atron. It was either Finley or Bob Bergman who hired him at Atron since the Atron computer had core memory. Louis suggested that I look at his home reservation for a core memory stringing capability. He said it was like bead work and his people were very good at that. So, we set a small shop there to string and test memories. When Atron was closed by Mohawk Data they moved the computer production to their plant in Herkimer, NY. They suggested that I stay on payroll and manage the core stringing plant. I told them no; if they wanted memories we would do it under contract. That's when Turtle Mountain Corporation was formed on December 7, 1974. There was a NDSU alumni article written in 1990 that tells the early story.

We built some stuff for Univac including the cable sets for UYK 20 -? Can't remember the number but Mike Farrell was helpful in getting that contract. Chuck Melsha also spent time with us on the project. I also travelled to Clearwater for one of the projects. We did other military work for Honeywell on the ring laser gyros, Flight Safety for trainers and simulators, etc. but most of our production was for the commercial market. IBM, 3M for theft detection products, and a variety of other customers. It's amazing how the technology has changed in my professional career. The transistor was new in 1958 and we were reflow-soldering ball grid array circuits and inspecting using x-ray in 2000.

Sorry to hear about the passing of so many. Ken Oehlers led the logic design for the CP901, what a talent he was. I think at the time he was attending law school and I believe had a good size family. He certainly could focus on the task at hand. Dave Zemke ran our test operation at Atron and did a great job. I think Gountanis and Koschmann are still living, but not sure. Would like to talk to Hy Osofsky if he is still living, I hope so.

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The 25-year run for the 901 was great. Just curious about upgrades during that time. I think I have pictures of the original design but just interested in what changes were made. I really enjoyed my trips to the Naval Air Station near Philadelphia with Clem and Rapinac. Jim would entertain on the piano as Rapinac from Univac. I was impressed with the Navy commanders who knew how they wanted the computer designed to fit their plane. One occasion, Clem said I needed to go to the Pentagon to see an Admiral who had questions as to why our computer design was better than the IBM 4(Pie). I flew out there and was met by Clem and another civilian, Don somebody?.

Got a ride in the limo. We went in to the admiral's conference room, the admiral asked me a couple questions which were then 'amplified' by Clem and the civilian friend of Univac. Wasn't long, I was soon on the street with a day to see the sights of DC.

I read a few of the posts {sic – web site} others have made, but I have not found yours yet. I noticed that Bob or Bill Myller wrote his story. He was a classmate of mine at NDSU. Other classmates were Roger Ness, Tom Mack, Curt Christensen. Some of them were studying specifications (reading funny books) over in plant five while we had too much to get done on the NTDS. I told them they should come over to plant two and help us out. They declined because they heard how low paid we were. It may have been true; I think Dolan Toth controlled the payroll as though it was from his checking account.

Lowell, I enjoy this communication with you and others. I think I can picture you, but it has been a long time. I like your statement below your closing. {sic - *Predict the future; then plan and work to make it happen!*} I wonder what your prediction is for the short-term future is, and your thoughts on what actions we can take? *John*

Lowell to John – 12/8/2021 at noon

John: Several things in response to your additional career information. My memory, like many octogenarians, is not perfect. Obviously it was you who went to an Indian Reservation area, not Ray Miller. You and I do have more than the CP-901 history tidbits in common:

- 1) North Dakota connection? I was born in Sanish ND in 1938. My mother was born south of Sanish in 1916 on the North edge of the Fort Berthold Reservation. Sanish was flooded out by the Garrison Dam thus the Corps of Engineers had to move the villages of Sanish and Van Hook, combining them to make New Town. We moved from Van Hook to MN the summer of 1949.
- 2) The newspaper article about the TMC mentions that you grew up in Underwood ND. I vaguely remember going to a bible camp outside of Underwood along the Missouri for a week in 1948.

I had put a bit about your career summary into our Legacy people chapters, see <http://vipclubmn.org/People5.html#Miller>. Yet this week I will update with data from your Dec. 4th message. AND will write an introduction, then post this TMC article as the 'Our Stories' for December.

I have no information about Gountanis, Koschmann, nor Osofsky.

- The CP-901 'information' is at <http://vipclubmn.org/CP30bit.html#CP901>.
- Ray Miller was the VIP Club president in 1984 then the Treasurer in 1988, <http://vipclubmn.org/History.html#Officers>.

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- Jim Rapinac (deceased) was a contributor to our Legacy Anthology, <http://vipclubmn.org/People6.html#Rapp> and <http://vipclubmn.org/PeopleInterview.html#Rapinac>.
- You mentioned Clem, we have a tidbit from him: <http://vipclubmn.org/sysairborne.html#Clement>.
- The civilian Don whom you mentioned is quite likely Don Ream, <http://vipclubmn.org/deceased.html#Ream>. As a government civilian employee, he was good for UNIVAC and very good for the Navy, read <http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/DonReamNominated.pdf>.
- Your classmate Bob Myller is at <http://vipclubmn.org/People5.html#Myller>.
- Your classmate Curt Christensen (deceased) provided three articles for the Legacy Anthology Our Stories, #277 [1101 tech description](#), #155 [ENIAC Beginning](#), and #116 <http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/AnotherComputerWasBorn.pdf>. I had worked with Curt in plant 1 briefly the summer of 1963.
- Ken Oehlers' obit is on page 5 of <http://vipclubmn.org/Newsletters/Enews2109.pdf>.
- Dave Zemke's obit is on page 3 of <http://vipclubmn.org/Newsletters/Enews1109.pdf>.
- My info is at <http://vipclubmn.org/People1.html#Benson> with a link to <http://vipclubmn.org/PeopleDocimg/Vol01Book1.pdf>.

The above links are a small part of the VIP Club's Legacy Anthology.

Cheers, KEEP SAFE!

EPILOGUE

1. <http://vipclubmn.org/Articles/TMCfromNDSU.pdf> has the Turtle Mountain Corporation story.
2. Wrote this Article to post as the Our Stories for December 2021, #287 at <http://vipclubmn.org/OurStories.html#2021>.
3. Inserted John's specific data as a career summary in chapter 15, see <http://vipclubmn.org/People5.html#Miller>.
4. Updated the Legacy <http://vipclubmn.org/SiteMap.html>, <http://vipclubmn.org/People.html>, and <http://vipclubmn.org/PeopleIndx.html> chapters with reference insertions.

As usual, we are open to corrections or additional Legacy articles. *LABenson*