



# Guide to The Computer Museum records

**Creator:** The Computer Museum

**Dates:** 1971-2015; bulk 1975-1998

**Extent:** 4.15 gigabyte

**Collection number:** X8339.2018

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**Collection processed by:** Gordon Bell and Victoria Rozycki, 1999-2015

**Finding aid prepared by:** Gordon Bell and Sara Chabino Lott, 2017

## Abstract

The Computer Museum (TCM) records contain the remaining records of TCM from its inception in the early 1970s through the various stages of its life in Maynard, Massachusetts, Marlborough, Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts, and Moffett Field, and Mountain View, California in the 1990s. The records are maintained in the form of The Computer Museum website <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/>. Types of records include annual and other public reports, correspondence, marketing material, and videotaped recordings of lectures. Representations of the exhibitions were not retained, but descriptions and files related to the planning and design of the exhibitions are included. The TCM website was constructed by Gordon Bell in 2015 to be a virtual representation of TCM's physical space, and is maintained by the Computer History Museum.

## Administrative Information

### Access Restrictions

All records at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org> are available for research. Files in Series 7 "File archives" are restricted to onsite use and special arrangements must be made with CHM to access the files. Please contact [research@computerhistory.org](mailto:research@computerhistory.org) to request access to restricted files.

### Publication Rights

Requests for copying and permission to publish, quote, or reproduce any portion of the Computer History Museum's collection must be from the Computer History Museum.

### Languages

English

**Preferred Citation**

[Identification of Item], [Date], The Computer Museum records, Lot X8339.2018, Series [title], [URL], [Date accessed], Computer History Museum.

**Immediate Source of Acquisition**

Gift of Gordon Bell, 2017.

**Processing Information**

The TCM website was built by Gordon Bell with the help of Victoria Rozycki in 2015. Material was scanned from Bell's personal collection of TCM material as well as the institutional archives held by CHM. This guide follows the arrangement established in the TCM website by Bell.

**Repository**

Computer History Museum  
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USA  
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[research@computerhistory.org](mailto:research@computerhistory.org)  
[www.computerhistory.org](http://www.computerhistory.org)

**Biographical/Historical Note**

The Computer Museum was founded by Ken Olsen and Gordon and Gwen Bell in 1975 as the Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) Museum Project. The first exhibit was in a converted closet at DEC's building in Maynard, Massachusetts. In 1979 it officially became the Digital Computer Museum (DCM), an exhibition site funded and operated by DEC out of its Marlborough headquarter building's lobby. In 1982 it received non-profit charitable foundation status from the IRS and changed its name to The Computer Museum, and in 1984 it opened to the wider public with a move to downtown Boston where it was co-located with the Children's Museum on Museum Wharf. In 1996, approximately half of the Museum's collection was relocated to Moffett Federal Airfield in Mountain View, California as The Computer Museum History Center (TCMHC). In 1999 TCM officially closed, the corporation was dissolved, and the remainder of the collection was moved to TCMHC. In 2000 TCMCH incorporated as a California non-profit, and changed its name to the Computer History Museum, located in Mountain View, California with additional buildings in Milpitas and Fremont.

From the first Annual Report, 1980,

"Several unrelated events and decisions all worked in the direction of Digital Equipment Corporation developing the Digital Computer Museum. Ken Olsen took it upon himself to preserve and store Whirlwind, TX-0 and early DEC equipment ... Gordon began a collection of early calculators and logic devices and wanted to continue and expand his

interest in the taxonomy of computers ... Ken and Gordon went to other computer exhibits and were extraordinarily disappointed that the Smithsonian was not making an effort to appropriately classify and organize its material; fascinated by the IBM wall (now in a warehouse) but considered that its emphasis on the interaction of social events and computing was not the story to be told ... These events led to both Ken and Gordon to conclude that a Digital Computer Museum was needed. Ken's goal, to create a place to preserve machines so that computer scientists, engineers, and programmers can see the antiques that they had worked on as little as ten years ago, and Gordon's goal, to create an understandable taxonomy of all computers and related computing devices, are complementary. The role of the Museum is to make sure that significant artifacts are kept ...”

The Computer Museum's mission was three-fold: (1) To educate and inspire all ages and levels of the public through dynamic exhibitions and programs on the technology, applications, and impact of computers. (2) To preserve and celebrate the history, and promote the understanding of computers worldwide. (3) To be an international resource for research into the history of computing.

At the DCM's opening at Marlborough, Massachusetts on September 24, 1979, where Maurice V. Wilkes spoke, nearly all of the features and functions of the current Computer History Museum were established: artifact and archive collection and storage; lecture series to collect and chronicle the important computing inventions (e.g. the first 20 pioneers from Atanasoff to Zuse); key artifact exhibits; outreach marketing material and archival publications; an intern program; development of ephemera for sale in the museum store; a stellar board of directors, and an active program to attract visitors and members.

By 1982 a board of eighteen directors was installed that included Charlie Bachman, inventor of the first database; Pat McGovern, publisher of ComputerWorld; Les Hogan, president of Motorola semiconductor; Robert Noyce, inventor of the Integrated Circuit and Intel co-founder; Brian Randell, Computer Science professor and historian, and Massachusetts Senator Paul Tsongas.

### **Scope and Content of the Collection**

The Computer Museum records are comprised of material created by the Museum between 1971 and 2015, with the bulk of the material being from 1975 through 1998, when the Museum was located in Marlborough and Boston, Massachusetts. The records were compiled and digitized as the TCM website by Gordon Bell in 2015 <http://tcm.computerhistory.org>. The website represents nearly all of the existing records that were retained by the Museum prior to 1998 and contains over 700 files representing over 7000 individual pages and 50 video recordings. There are annual reports, marketing brochures, posters, gift shop catalogs, video recordings of lectures, and working files of the Museum such as board meeting minutes and correspondence. Not included in the records are digital representations of the Museum's physical exhibitions. However, descriptions of their content, and correspondence and design notes related to each exhibition, are included. Also included are a timeline of key TCM events

and a timeline of the 300+ pioneering computer systems that informed the TCM artifact collection.

### **Arrangement**

The collection is arranged into 8 series:

- Series 1, Computer Museum reports, 1975-1998; bulk 1982-1998
- Series 2, Videos, 1976-1996; bulk 1979-1996
- Series 3, Exhibitions, 1975-1998
- Series 4, Computer Bowl, 1988-1998
- Series 5, Marketing, 1975-2001, bulk 1980-1998
- Series 6, Pioneer computers, 2015
- Series 7, File archives, 1971-1998
- Series 8, Digital Computer Museum, 1972-1999

### **Indexing Terms**

Computer Bowl  
Computer Clubhouse  
Computer pioneers  
Computer museums--Exhibitions  
Computer Museum (Marlborough, Mass.)  
Computer Museum (Boston, Mass.)  
Computer Museum History Center  
Digital Computer Museum (Marlborough, Mass.)

### **Collection Contents**

#### **Series 1, Computer Museum reports, 1975-1998; bulk 1982-1998**

This series contains annual reports, semi-annual reports, and The Computer Museum News newsletter published between 1975 and 1998, with the majority of material dating from 1982 through 1998. Information on events, lectures, and exhibitions held at the Museum, board members and employees, as well as lists of new acquisitions and donors can be found in the reports and newsletter. The series may be accessed at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/reports.html>.

#### **Series 2, Videos, 1976-1996; bulk 1979-1996**

The forty-two videos in this series fall into three major groups. The first group contains lectures by the pioneer's who built the first computers and pioneering technologies. Wes Clark's lecture on LINC as the first PC or workstation for biomedical research, and Bob Evans' description as the leader of the IBM System/360 fall outside this more narrow definition. The second group of videos is a two part lecture by Gordon Bell titled *Computer Pioneers and Pioneer Computers* about the first computers, and the people who built them. These were jointly sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery and The Computer Museum. The third group of videos is a miscellaneous collection of talks, videotaped tours of the Museum, and films produced by entities other than TCM. Robert Noyce's lecture from the opening of the Museum in Boston in May 1984 is especially noteworthy for its content and the fact that it is one of the few known

video recordings of Noyce. The series may be accessed at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/videos.html>.

### **Series 3, Exhibitions, 1975-1998**

This series contains information about the ten major exhibitions at the Museum's locations in Maynard, Marlborough, and Boston. The first exhibition was a display of various logic and memory technologies of vacuum tube and transistor generations in a converted coat closet of the main entrance lobby of DEC's building 12 in Maynard. The exhibition was 8 x 3 feet. After the Museum relocated to DEC's Marlborough building, the exhibitions were constructed in the building's large lobby. This is also where the majority of lectures took place. Seven of the Museum's exhibitions were developed after its move to Boston where they had 53,000 square feet of exhibit space, including a store. Exhibitions in Boston covered smart machines; the life size Walk Through Computer; Milestones of a Revolution (timeline of history); Tools and Toys, about games and desktop application; Networking; and a Virtual FishTank simulating the behavior of fish in a large tank. Information is also included on the traveling pocket computing exhibition *On the one hand*. Included in the series are descriptions of each of the ten exhibitions along with credits and basic statistics, as well as administrative records such as proposals, press kits, notes, promotional material, correspondence, labels, and catalogs, which come from the "File archives" series. The series may be accessed at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/exhibits.html>.

### **Series 4, The Computer Bowl, 1988-1998**

From 1988 to 1998 the Museum held a Computer Bowl which pitted two teams of East and West coast technologists against each other in a battle of computer trivia to benefit the Museum. The Bowls were videotaped except for 1989, 1996, and 1997, and all the questions were published in [The Official Computer Bowl Trivia Book](#). Notable contestants included Bill Gates, Larry Tessler, Andy Hertzfeld, Joseph Alsop, and Adele Goldberg. This series contains the videotaped competitions as well as programs from many of the Bowls. The series may be accessed at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/computerbowl.html>.

### **Series 5, Marketing, 1975-2001, bulk 1980-1998**

This series contains promotional material created by the Museum in Maynard, Marlborough, Boston, and Mountain View between 1975 and 2001, with the bulk of the material being from the Museum in Boston. Types of material include press releases/kits, store catalogs with TCM designed merchandise and other computer related ephemera, posters, invitations, exhibition guides, brochures, and pamphlets for the Museum. The series may be accessed at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/marketing.html>.

### **Series 6, Pioneer computers, 2015**

This series contains a timeline of 300+ major computers built between 1942 and 1996 that were represented in the TCM collection in some fashion. This may have been a computer or a part of a computer in the permanent collection, a computer or a part of a computer on loan from another institution, a lecture or presentation by the machine's creator(s), or other related material such as a photograph or document. How the computer was represented in the

collection is not noted in the timeline. The timeline is not an official TCM record, but rather was built by Bell in 2015 as a useful reference. This series may be accessed at [http://tcm.computerhistory.org/ComputerTimeline/TCM\\_Computer\\_Timeline4.htm](http://tcm.computerhistory.org/ComputerTimeline/TCM_Computer_Timeline4.htm).

**Series 7, File archives, 1971-1998**

This series contains administrative records from TCM, including the records of Gwen and Gordon Bell, the Museum's founders and first "keepers" of the Museum, as well as the papers of longtime Board Member Gardner Hendrie. Types of material include solicitation letters, collection development policy documents, lists of artifacts, classification/taxonomy documents, board and executive staff meeting minutes, trip reports, correspondence, exhibit planning, and goals. The files in this series are restricted to onsite use. Folder titles may be accessed at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/files.html>. Please contact [research@computerhistory.org](mailto:research@computerhistory.org) to request access to restricted files.

**Series 8, Digital Computer Museum, 1972-1999; bulk 1980-1984**

This series contains material from the critical period when the Museum transitioned from a volunteer organization in 1972 to a professionally staffed and funded non-profit institution in 1982. Types of material include memoranda, lists of artifacts, goals, financial information, and trip reports. This series may be accessed at <http://tcm.computerhistory.org/decmuseum.html>.