1971 PRESS RELEASE

INTRODUCTION

A history snapshot in time by Jack Nichols. Les Nelson found this 1971 Press Release Draft while cataloguing documents donated to the Lawshe Memorial Museum. The release was in recognition of Engineering Research Associates' 25th Anniversary, 1946-71.

Contents

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Does NEstor 9601 ring a bell with you? If so, you recognize it as the telephone number of Engineering Research Associates, back when it was the forerunner of Univac operations in the Twin Cities area.

If you don't remember round metal badges, you' are a relative newcomer. The present laminated style badge was introduced early in the Soaring Sixties.

If you remember maintenance dock skies, vibratory tool holders, automatic candy casting machines, and the IBM room; you go back to the very beginnings of the 25-year period being commemorated this year.

In the beginning, there was ERA.

It all started on January 8, 1946, when Engineering Research Associates, Inc., was incorporated under the laws of the State of Minnesota. ERA was organized to use the talents of a group of Navy scientists and technicians recently released from wartime duty, and operations began in the old American Radiator building at 1902 West Minnehaha Avenue, which had last been used for construction of World War II wooden gliders.

As an often-quoted old-timer recalls, "There were more sparrows than people" inside that building.

The unusual products listed above (along with such others as gas porters, lavatory service porters, and bore—hole cameras) helped to keep the wolves away while ERA scientists and engineers tackled their primary interest — magnetic storage, digital computers, and data handling systems.

In 1946 their efforts brought the first commercial magnetic storage drum into being, the “Goldberg" drum.

The significant ability to alter stored data selectively without rewriting the whole drum record was achieved about three years later, and the first magnetic computer working memory was born.

Parallel developments in arithmetic circuitry led to the delivery, in 1950, of the 1101 computer. The 1101 was the first commercially produced large—scale, general—purpose electronic digital computer for scientific applications.

Rapid expansion was the keynote of ERA’s early years. From an initial work force of 39 employees, the staff grew to more than 600 by 1949. The original employee numbering system, which included departmental identification, became unworkable due to personnel transfers.

A new system was instituted on March 15, 1949. Current employees were arranged alphabetically and assigned consecutive 'clock numbers". New employees were given the next higher number as they were hired. Thus, while lower clock numbers indicate an earlier hire date, the numbers below 641 are arranged alphabetically by last name, not by date of hiring. The numbers below 21 indicate an officer.

Remington Rand enters the scene.

ERA’s achievements caught the eye of Remington Rand Inc., an east coast-based tabulating and office equipment firm. Remington Rand had entered the electronic data processing field in 1951 with its acquisition of the Eckert—Mauchly firm in Philadelphia, creators of the UNIVAC name. In May 1952, Remington Rand acquired all the stock of Engineering Research Associates, Inc. ERA operated as a wholly owned subsidiary for the remainder of the year and became a division on January 1, 1953.

The year 1952 proved to be a big one for ERA in other ways. Design and delivery of the 1103, the first scientific on-line computer, was completed. The company’s line of magnetic drums had received such acceptance that a headline in *The Orbit*, the company newspaper, proclaimed "Your Cymbals may be Good, But you can’t Beat our Drum.”

Automatic Antenna Couplers first went into production during 1952. Plant expansion got under way with the leasing of the old Republic Hudson building at 543 St. Peter Street, for production of Directional Gyro Indicators for the Air Force.

There was further plant expansion in 1953 with the leasing of space at 2295 University Avenue to meet the needs of antenna coupler assembly. 1953 also saw ERA joining the Remington Rand retirement plan, and the arrival of one Robert E. McDonald as Director of Manufacturing.

Work also started on NTDS (Naval Technical Data Systems) contract, and the now familiar Red Border approval form made its appearance in a hastily drawn and dittoed version.

The year 1955 was one of dramatic change and accomplishment. In the three years since its purchase by Remington Rand, ERA had grown from about 700 to 1440 employees at the time of the mid-1955 merger between Remington and the Sperry Corporation. Plant space had grown from 175,000 square feet to nearly a quarter million in the same period, and ground—breaking for the 208,000 square foot Plant 1 was imminent.

Development of the File Computer and the Univac II was announced in 1952 and work started on the Athena Guidance Computer for the Titan missile.

Birth of the Univac Division.

On October 1, 1955, James H. Rand made an announcement of major impact — the formation of the Univac Division, comprising all data processing activities within the Remington Rand Division, with headquarters in St. Paul. Thus, the Remington Rand Univac Division of Sperry Rand Corporation was born.

By the end of 1955, only vestiges of Engineering Research Associates nomenclature remained on a few leftover (and sentimentally hoarded) forms.

The next six years encompassed phenomenal growth and accomplishment, despite considerable organizational fluidity. Technical highlights during the period include: delivery of the first commercial solid-state computer, the Athena computer, and the Univac 1105; announcement of the Univac 490 and thin-film 1107 computers; and introduction of the CP-642 computer for the Navy, described as the most capable small digital computer ever built.

Almost explosive expansion of the Saint Paul operations of Univac was required to make this record. By the beginning of 1962, total employment had reached nearly 5,800 and space had grown to over 900,000 square feet with the first occupancy of the Roseville complex, along with several other locations. Such rapid growth and dispersion of facilities caused planning to be started in 1960 for a consolidation of Univac activities in Saint Paul, a concept initially proposed for Plant 1 back in 1954.

Recognition of the part played by Saint Paul was a factor in the 1962 announcement that Univac was established as an independent division of Sperry Rand Corporation. Once more, a familiar name (Remington Rand) was dropped from company identification.

Full organizational separation of Univac Saint Paul Operations occurred in mid-1962 with the formation of Military Operations and Commercial Operations, with Commercial occupying the Roseville facilities. However, management of both organizations remained centralized under Robert E. McDonald as General Manager. Then followed the heydays of 490, 1107, and NTDS production.

Shortly after his 1964 appointment as President of Univac, J. Frank Forster, ~~now Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Sperry Ra~~ announced the division of Univac into five profit centers. The Data Processing Division, pursuing commercial activities, then independently occupied the Roseville complex, and the Defense Systems Division the remaining plants. The proposed plant consolidation concept was approved, now with Defense Systems Division orientation, and negotiations commenced to secure appropriate acreage in Eagan Township.

The rest of the story is more familiar, having happened more recently. Even short timers will remember all or much of the 1966 rise of Robert McDonald to the Univac Presidency in 1966 after 13 years in Saint Paul; the formation of Federal Systems Division and occupancy of Unit A at Univac Park in 1967; the expansion of Roseville into Building 3 in 1966 and 1967; and finally, the creation of the Worldwide Marketing and Services and the Worldwide Manufacturing and Development organizations in 1970.

(Sperry) Univac as it is known today is a melding of talents and organizations from all over the world. But it is safe to say that Univac in the Twin Cities would not be here today but for that small group, long on vision and short on cash, who banded together as Engineering Research Associates, Inc. in 1946, to apply the forefront of digital technology to the problems of data holding systems.

Nor have the achievements and personnel of ERA and its successors been without influence outside of the Twin Cities area, both in Univac and their elements of the corporation. Robert E. McDonald now serves as (President & Chief Operating Officer) of the Sperry Rand Corporation. Not only the Sperry-Univac Presidency, but both the Univac Executive Vice Presidents and many other high-level Univac and sister division executive positions have been filled by Twin Cities graduates. And, finally, a myriad of small and not so small companies — in Minnesota and literally from Connecticut to California — can trace their lineage to that first campsite on the banks of the (1902 West) Minnehaha.

FROM: J. W. Nichols

Sperry Rand Corporation
Univac Division, Univac Park
P.O. Box 3525
St. Paul, Minnesota 55165 645-8511, Ext. 3953

EPILOGUE

To several of us who have been documenting ERA-Unisys history for 18 years, the most surprising words of this release are 3rd in the paragraph on page 1, “the IBM Room.” We welcome comments, send to webmaster@vipclubmn.org.