



HP in New England

New England newsbits

>> HP in New England

- >> Contacts and directions
- >> Community programs
- >> Customer successes
- >> New England business groups

DEC Equipment, Archives Reunite at Computer History Museum

Historic equipment and archival materials from the proud 40-year history of Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) now reside together at the Computer History Museum (CHM) in Mountain View, Calif.

"This collection is a critical piece of computing history," said Paula Jabloner, senior archivist at CHM. "It's a wonderful toolbox to have so that historians can study what it was about DEC that worked: the phenomenal growth and the corporate culture that gave rise to this remarkable company."

The history of DEC and the creation of the CHM are intertwined. In 1979, Gordon and Gwen Bell opened an exhibit of their own personal collection of DEC equipment in the lobby of company headquarters in Maynard, Mass. Bell joined DEC in 1960 and is considered a co-founder along with Ken Olsen. Bell, seen by many as Olsen's perfect intellectual partner, became a pivotal player in the company's success and built a world-class engineering organization. He left the company in 1983.

After a five-year stay in the DEC lobby, the collection, by now called the Computer Museum, moved to Museum Wharf in Boston and opened to the public. In its new home, the museum emphasized lectures, exhibits and educational activities.

By the mid-1990s, Silicon Valley stood at the epicenter of the technology and computing world, and became the ideal geographical spot for collecting and preserving the museum's growing computer history collections. The museum's primary collections moved from Boston to Mountain View in 1996. The remaining collections came west in 2000.

Digital Equipment Corporation was founded in 1957 by Ken Olson and Harlan Anderson, two engineers fresh out of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) computing labs. They wasted little time transforming the computing landscape. DEC was the central figure in minicomputers, which served as the link between the hulking mainframe technology of the 1960s and today's microcomputers.

DEC's first computer, the Programmable Data Processor or PDP-1, was released in 1961; the PDP-8, now regarded by many as the first true minicomputer, made its debut in 1964. DEC broke into the high-end computing market in 1976 with VAX (Virtual Address eXtension) and its 32-bit architecture.

The company continued to fly high with its innovative and collaborative culture, but by 1990, a series of late releases put financial pressure on the company. The formerly invincible DEC struggled and was forced to sell off various business units. In 1998, it was acquired by Compaq Computer Corporation, and in 1999, Compaq made a substantial donation of DEC hardware to the Computer History Museum.

In 2002, with the completion of the HP-Compaq merger, the people of the former DEC, Compaq and HP joined talents and destinies. The document archives of DEC, which were now in HP's hands, rejoined with DEC equipment through a gift initiated by Compaq in 2001 and completed by the HP Archives in 2005.

Anna Mancini, HP corporate archivist, worked with CHM to complete the donation. "These are very important records that, frankly, would have been stored away in boxes had they remained at HP," Mancini said. "We're very happy that we could assist in making them



accessible for research. DEC deserves to receive proper credit for the role it played in pioneering the complex computer business."

In 2005, Hewlett-Packard Company deeded the gift of the former DEC archives to the Computer History Museum. The gift consisted of nearly 2,000 linear feet of DEC records including:

- 725 record cartons of DEC documents dating back to the founding of the company;
- 170 linear feet (approximately 20 large metal file cabinets) of photographs and their card catalog file system. These constitute a comprehensive pictorial history of DEC products, people, and sales and marketing campaigns;
- 3,000 videotapes, primarily of engineering lectures, internal design protocols, meetings, training and customer materials.
- 1,700 magnetic tapes, many containing software programs.

Because of the sheer volume of DEC materials donated, access to the collection in its entirety is still some distance in the future. "Only a small portion of the collection is presently cataloged, and CHM is searching for funding to complete that within the next year," Jabloner said. The goal of the museum is to have the entire collection cataloged and available to the public within a three to four year timeframe.

The good news is a great deal of the DEC material is on display either physically in the CHM's permanent facility or virtually at its online museum. Researchers are welcome by appointment, and the CHM staff is happy to work with individuals seeking specific materials. Those wishing to view and access the DEC collections are encouraged to do their part in supporting the collections and computer history by becoming CHM members.

Explore DEC exhibits and search the collections on the CHM website:
www.computerhistory.org.

26 June 2008

 [Printable version](#)

[Privacy statement](#)

[Using this site means you accept its terms](#)

[Feedback to HP in New England](#)

© 2008 Hewlett-Packard Development Company, L.P.