

SLC before IT

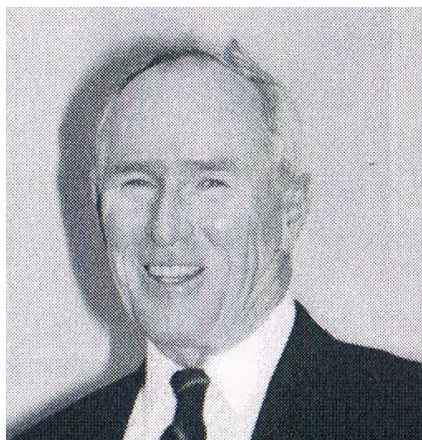
In the course of preparing the retiree column for the spring issue of *Voyageur*, entitled “Ruminations about Computations,” I received stories and photos about the early years of IT at SLC from members of our Association and also gathered some additional information – resulting in far more material than could be accommodated in the space available for my column. The happy solution to this problem is to post all of this additional material here at our website. It is my hope that looking at this material will inspire some of you to post comments about your memories of rudimentary computers and IT in the early years of the college.

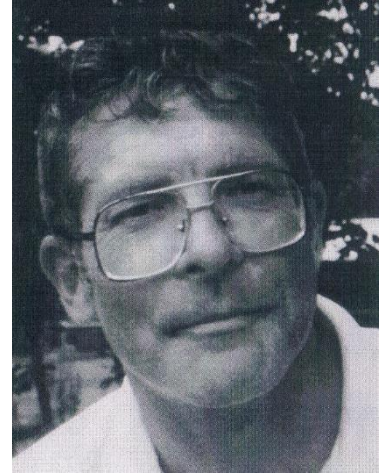
Opinions vary of who first invented the computer. Some say Charles Babbage, way back in the early 19th century, while others cite Alan Turing, famous for his work in breaking the Nazi Code (as featured in the 2014 film “The Imitation Game.” Have you considered, however, that the computer might have been invented by some guy named Timothy, resulting in the term “Tim bits and bytes.” [I donut know why I said that; just can’t help myself.]

The Punch Card Pioneers

In addition to Judy Hartlen, others involved in the early years of college computing, included: David Bell, who had been teaching programming in high school before being hired by Don Douglas in 1970, Edith Adam who began as a part-time key punch operator in 1970 and then joined the Computer Services Department in 1973, Connie Edwards who joined the Kingston Campus as key punch operator in 1975, and Betty Hunt who began as a part-time and sessional teacher in 1975 and became recognized as a “technical expert” and the Master of WordPerfect software. [Editor’s Note: Should Betty have been described as the “Mistress” of WordPerfect? One never knows how best to stay out of trouble in this times of ultra-political correctness.] Deserving of special mention is Ross Hermiston, who joined the college in 1968 and, as a personal project, developed an amazingly extensive data base of information on countries around the world on his “primitive” Vic 20 Commodore.

Photos follow, in the order in which these pioneers were mentioned. Also below are photos of a large group of Brockville Campus computer pioneers, and some of the early IT equipment.





The Way We Were

This photo shows the wall of computer equipment in Brockville in 1972, with numerous employees assembled in front. While there is lots of long hair, gender parity appears to be seriously lacking back then. They are also rather a somber bunch except for the smiling chap in the front row with the suit jacket (Ed Lypchuk).



Evolution of IT in the Library (with the Two Barbs, Carr and Love)



In the early 70's, access to the collections was via the card catalogue and the printed periodical indexes. BL and I were responsible for helping students and faculty find the information they needed, a task that sometimes required diplomatic skills. One student was looking in the card catalogue for information on the N.D.P. When informed that he had to look under the full form of the name, he replied that he had already checked under Non-Democratic Party. Another student was having a hard time finding a title beginning with "Chaos."

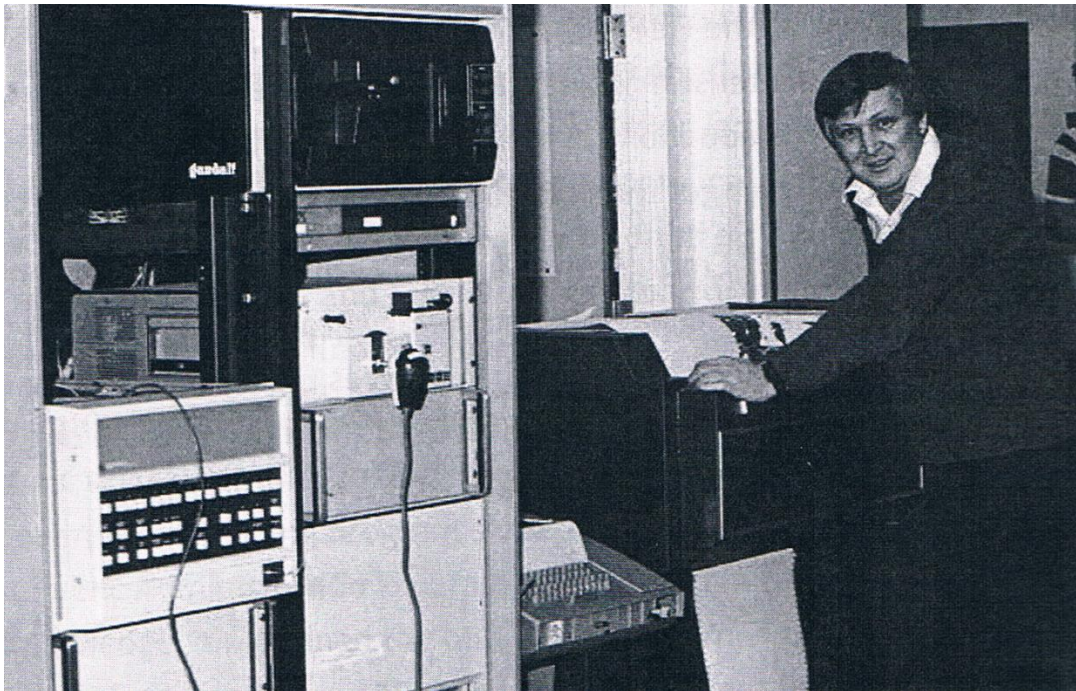
When shown the entry, he replied, oh, I always thought that was pronounced “chowce.” Not all questions were course-related. A favourite of mine was who was involved in the shoot-out at the OK Corral. [I managed to find a photo depicting that famous episode. Sorry, couldn’t help myself again.] Another was helping a woman identify an opera by the excerpt that she sang.

During our time at the college, libraries moved from card catalogues to computer-based catalogues. For a short time we had the cumbersome COM (computer output on microfiche) catalogue, but fortunately we were able to move on quickly! The Barbs were proud that the SLC Kingston library was the first in the Ontario college system to automate with a network of PCs. Thanks to Sherwin Raichman’s leadership, the project came in on time and on budget. Over the next year or two, the libraries at the Brockville and Cornwall campuses were also automated. Online database searching began, with our connection at first being a phone that was jammed into a modem once the piercing audio signal was received. Things gradually improved!

It was an exciting time to be a librarian, what with all the changes in technology. At one time or another our collections included film loops, filmstrips, audiocassettes, beta videotapes, microfilm, microfiche, data on floppy disks (big and small), etc. There was a high-speed audiotape duplication machine on the second floor for making copies of course materials, perhaps dictation tapes for the secretarial students. When the new staff magnetic name tags started to be used, we discovered that they had the ability to mess up the videos if the latter were held near the name tag. On special occasions we used to borrow a TV from the Educational Media Department and set it up in the library for students (and staff) to watch. I remember watching the landing of the first space shuttle, and a game in the World Series, among others.

10 inch disk from mid-1970s. MCM Model 70 microcomputer, 1974.





Claude Regis and the new VAX computer on Cornwall Campus. Microcomputer Engineering Technology Program launched in 1981 acquired the first UNIX license in Canada to run on this new computer.

My Personal IT Evolution

Today's students, who spend much of their time on the Internet, would marvel at the transition over the last half century from punch cards, to mainframe computers, to PCs, to small tablets that have as much power and storage space as the room-sized computers of old. I can trace a somewhat similar pattern in my person experience. My first computer was a Kaypro and while it was billed as a portable it was more accurately transportable. It came in an aluminum case with a handle and weighed 29 pounds! It had only 64 kb of RAM and was equipped with two 5 1/4 floppy disk drives. The machine cost me \$3400 back in the early 1980s, but it allowed me to convince my publisher of the time that I could submit the latest edition of one of my books on the floppy disks, thereby shortening dramatically the time to bring the book to production. Over the decades since, I have purchased many computers, each smaller, lighter, vastly more powerful, and cheaper than the last.

