Why Make History Hands-On?

For some people, names like Whirlwind or UNIVAC evoke vivid memories. But for others, these vintage computers have no apparent connection to their lives. The computer interactive in PEOPLE AND COMPUTERS were designed to involve everyone personally in computer history.

Some of the interactives offer a firsthand experience about the application shown in the historic vignette. At “Punch Your Name,” for example, visitors can enter their name on a punched card like those used by the 1930s Social Security Administration. Other hands-on exhibits such as “What Do You Think?” help people relate what they see to their own lives. “Comparing Computers” introduces information about computers, letting visitors choose comparisons with size shown in school boxes and weight shown in pigs! Also interactive video stations throughout the exhibition offer over 100 entertaining, informative film clips on the people, technology, and popular culture of each era.

In exit interviews, over half the Museum’s visitors said that the interactive computer programs and videos were their favorite part of PEOPLE AND COMPUTERS. Together, the interactives and the artifacts offer the widest range of visitors the chance to relive computer history.

Tell Your Own Tale

At the “Tell Your Own Tale” station, Museum visitor Chris Reina told his own tale called “query,” and Grover McNulty wrote “the sniders and the fractal”.

query

I read a quote on the wall that said unless computers can compose a sonnet and feel pain, they could never be considered human. That impressed me. But then I thought... I can’t compose a sonnet, I don’t feel any pain. Next thing I knew, someone re-booted me and I became part of the displays in the museum.

the sniders and the fractal

Once upon a time there were two sniders named fault and proci who liked to mess around with computers. Unfortunately all they could do was snaid and panck and their cognitive functions remained rudimentary. Nevertheless, one day they found a fractal on their roof that had fallen off a passing rocket multiphone. They crawled inside and soon lost their way, getting drop into the Caves of Self-Similarity.

Greetings from
The Computer Museum in Boston, Massachusetts.

This position was created by a visitor at the “Publish Your Own Postcard” station where visitors can explore desktop publishing. See photo at right.

Programming a Computer

Press the trackball button to begin

The High and Low-Level Programming interactive gives those who have never programmed a computer the challenge of programming a car through a maze.

Cape Cod residents Diane Nettlungs (left) and Doris Connors enjoy history hands-on in PEOPLE AND COMPUTERS.