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# IBM relic arrives in Binghamton

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Another piece of history has found a home at TechWorks! in Binghamton.

On Monday, the Water Street museum welcomed an IBM 1401 Data Processing System, a first-of-its-kind mass-market computer designed and built in Endicott

beginning in the late 1950s.

Relatively inexpensive, the 1401 system was the first computer that was accessible to mid-sized businesses, helping to make it one of the most popular computers of the 1960s.

Only a handful of functioning 1401 systems exist today, according to TechWorks! Executive Director Susan Sherwood.

"Two in California, one in Germany and, hopefully, this one," Sherwood said.

The crew at TechWorks! plans to add the historic machine to the list of others it has restored to working order, now on display in the building's Vintage IBM Computing Center.

TechWorks! will open its doors Saturday afternoon for the public to take a look at the system — and the other pieces of history on display in the building — before restorations begin.

"(The 1401 system) doubled the global computing capacity in five years," Sherwood said on Monday. "That means ... every second electronic calculation in the world (at the time) was made by a machine designed, built and programmed in Endicott."

The 1401 system, a 1403 high-speed printer and six tape drives were donated to TechWorks! by Paul Pierce, a collector in Portland, Oregon, Sherwood said.

The equipment, which was transported by truck from Portland to Binghamton, weighs six tons altogether, according to Sherwood.

TechWorks! was told that the main machine worked the last time it was plugged in. But that was in 1995, Sherwood said with a laugh.

On Monday, it sat wrapped tightly in black plastic on the brown tile floor of the TechWorks! building. The other pieces of donated equipment sat nearby, also covered in plastic, either black or clear.

## VIDEOS

Sherwood said the fact the machines were shrink-wrapped and kept in storage should mean the chances for its restoration are good. But the process will take a while, she said.

"You can't just wake them up with an alarm clock," Sherwood said. "You have to go very slowly ... You have to be careful about it."

Before the 1401 system debuted in 1960, mainframe computers belonged mostly to university research labs, government offices, big insurances companies and other large corporations, Sherwood said.



Mirsad Mustedanagic, of McCollister's Transportation Group, helps bring the IBM 1401 Data Processing System into TechWorks on Water Street in Binghamton on Nov. 23. (Photo: SUSAN SHERWOOD / Photo Provided)

Typical stored-program computers rented for about \$30,000 a month, the equivalent of about \$200,000 a month today, according to [a booklet](#) on the 1401 system produced by the Computer History Museum in Mountain View ,California.

Francis Underwood, an IBM systems architect in Endicott, came up with the idea for designing a low-cost stored-program machine in 1957, according to the museum.

The 1401 system launched a few years later, along with the 1403 high-speed printer and a magnetic tape drive controller. Most entry level systems leased for \$2,500 per month, or about \$20,000 today, according to the booklet.

By 1965, half of the approximately 26,000 computers in the world were models of the IBM "1400 family," according to the museum.

"Before this came out, ... the ordinary business on the street, medium size, they could not afford a computer," Sherwood said."This really made ... complex computing affordable for the ordinary business."

The public will have an opportunity to learn more about the machines at Saturday's

event at TechWorks! IBM printer and punch card machines will be operating, Link Pilot Makers will be flying and printed circuit gingerbread cookies will be available for decorating, Sherwood said.

The event is set to run from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., and cost of admission is \$5.

*If you go*

*What: TechWorks! will open for the public to see the IBM 1401 Data Processing System that arrived this week, along with other pieces of history on display at the museum.*

*When: Saturday, Nov. 28; 1 p.m. - 4 p.m.*

*Where: 321 Water St. in Binghamton*

*Price of admission: \$5*

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