CNS /Update Newsletter Feature

150 Years of UF Computing

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UF Information Technology

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150 Years of UF Computing

The year 2003 marks the beginning of UF's sesquicentennial celebration, and in that spirit we're offering a bit of the history of computing in our world and on our campus. This is the first in a series of articles on this subject.

You might think that computers didn't exist in the 19th century, where UF has its roots. You'd be wrong. The ancestor of the computers we at UF know today was the brainchild of an English mathematics professor, Charles Babbage (1791--1871). In 1822, Babbage proposed a machine to perform differential equations, called a Difference Engine. Powered by steam, and as large as a locomotive, the machine would have a stored program and could perform calculations and print the results automatically. In later years, Babbage began work on the first general-purpose computer, which he called the Analytical Engine.

Babbage's assistant, Augusta Ada King, Countess of Lovelace (1815--1842) and daughter of English poet Lord Byron, was instrumental in the machine's design. She helped revise plans, secure funding from the British government, and communicate the specifics of the Analytical Engine to the public. Lady Lovelace's fine understanding of the machine allowed her to create the instruction routines to be fed into the computer, making her the first computer programmer. In the 1980s, the U.S. Defense Department named a programming language ADA in her honor.

Babbage's steam-powered Engine outlined the basic elements of a modern general-purpose computer and was a breakthrough concept. The basic design of the Analytical Engine included input devices in the form of perforated cards containing operating instructions, a "store" for memory of 1,000 numbers of up to 50 decimal-digits long, a control unit that allowed processing instructions in any sequence, and output devices to produce printed results.

Meanwhile, at UF

In 1853, an act of the Legislature designating public funds to support higher education resulted in the creation of the East Florida Seminary in Ocala. EFS was shut down for a while by the Civil War, but in 1866 moved to Gainesville and later combined with other local schools to become the University of the State of Florida, one of four state universities.

Sources:

http://www.ufl.edu/150/htmltimeline/

Your Comments are Welcome

We welcome your comments and suggestions on this and all UFIT documentation. Please send your comments to:

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