



Sperry Rand Corporation, Engineering Research Associates (ERA) Division records 2015

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Manuscripts and Archives

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Summary Information

Repository:	Manuscripts and Archives
Creator:	Sperry Rand (Corporation). Engineering Research Associates Division
Title:	Sperry Rand Corporation, Engineering Research Associates (ERA) Division records
ID:	2015
Date [inclusive]:	1949-1965
Physical Description:	18 Linear Feet
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	Engineering Research Associates (ERA) origins can be traced to the classified World War II-era Navy project to break the German secret codes by using electronic data processing. After the war, ERA became a private sector company that did pioneering work in computer development. In 1952, it was purchased by Remington Rand. The records include the correspondence of ERA's founding engineers including William Norris and Arnold Cohen. Also included is business and technical correspondence, legal records, patents, and oral histories.

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Historical Note

Engineering Research Associates' (ERA) origins can be traced to a classified World War II era Navy project which recruited highly skilled cryptologists, mathematicians, engineers, and physicists to break German and Japanese codes in order to pinpoint the movements of their ships. These tasks required the use of computing devices that could calculate data at ever increasing speeds. This led to an effort to investigate electronic solutions to cryptologic problems.

The work of this group was coordinated by Commander Howard T. Engstrom, who before the war had been a professor of mathematics at Yale University; and Lt. Commander William C. Norris, former sales manager for Westinghouse. After the war, the Navy made an effort to keep this team together and offered several members civil service appointments. However, Engstrom and Norris preferred to go into business for themselves. In the fall of 1945, they began searching for financial backing, but this proved to be difficult because they were unable to discuss their classified projects with potential investors. Finally, John Parker, a Wall Street investment banker and former head of Northwestern Aeronautical

Corporation, provided the necessary capital. In January 1946, Engineering Research Associates was formed in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where John Parker was based.

In the fall of 1946, ERA received its first major contract from the Office of Naval Research to compile a report on "High Speed Computing Devices". This report, which became the definitive study of the infant state of computing, was later published in book form by McGraw Hill. During this project, ERA personnel was given access to classified government reports and worked with computer pioneers John Mauchly and J. Presper Eckert, inventors of the ENIAC, and John von Neumann, of Princeton University's Institute for Advanced Study.

ERA was dependent on government funded cost-plus--fixed-fee contracts. In August 1947, it began work for the Navy on Task 13 - a project to design a general all-purpose stored-program computer. During this project ERA developed the first magnetic storage drum; the technology upon which the next two generations of computers was based. In October, 1950, ERA completed work on the Atlas computer - America's first electronic stored-program computer. The Atlas with its 2,700 vacuum tubes was capable of running twenty-four hours a day with only 10% of the time allotted for maintenance.

ERA hoped to establish a niche in the private sector. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, it worked with TWA to develop an automated airline reservation system. It also had a number of contracts with Prudential Insurance Company. However, the Navy was its primary customer. This left it vulnerable to Washington politics. Even though it was recognized as the most advanced computer company in the world, Drew Pearson's 1951 column in the "Washington Merry Go Round" charged Norris and Engstrom had used war time government connections to advance their private business. Pearson charged that ERA's Navy contracts represented a clear conflict of interest and were not subjected to competitive bidding. By 1952, under considerable political pressure, ERA merged with the Remington Rand Corporation. At first it operated as a semi-autonomous division, but after the 1955 Sperry merger, it was consolidated with the Eckert-Mauchly division of Sperry Rand and became part of Sperry-UNIVAC. William Norris never found this to be a satisfactory relationship. In 1957, Norris left Sperry to establish the Control Data Corporation. Later that year, the ERA people who remained were given a good deal more autonomy when Sperry created its St. Paul Research Division led by Sidney Rubens and Arnold Cohen. This division's primary job was to develop computer systems for the military and it played a crucial role in developing the command and control systems for the U. S.'s International Continental Ballistic Missiles and early space satellites. In 1960, what was left of the ERA group became Sperrys' Military Division, which was renamed the Aerospace Division. Accession 1952 - archives of the Aerospace Division - contains records from these periods.

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Scope and Content

The ERA records include correspondence, technical reports and memoranda, minutes of the administrative, manufacturing, planning and engineering committees which describe work on the LARC, ERA 1101 and 1103, the Rapid Selector, and the bore hole camera. There are also records documenting

ERA's involvement with the U.S. missile and rocketry programs of the late 1950s. ERA's successful effort to build airborne computers for the Jupiter and Sparrow programs are described.

Other projects described include ERA's Rapid Selector, airline reservation system, and high speed printer. There are several reports which document some of the early work that was done with transistors and efforts to incorporate this into the computers that were being developed during the late 1950s.

The records make it clear that much of ERA's research and development work was focused on the problem of magnetic core storage. There was an attempt to coordinate these activities with the work being done at the Philadelphia research laboratory (Eckert-Mauchly division) and the Norwalk, Ct., laboratory. However, William Norris' correspondence shows that there was a good deal of competition between the Eckert-Mauchly and ERA people which inhibited progress on many projects.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Manuscripts and Archives

PO Box 3630

Wilmington, Delaware 19807

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URL: <http://www.hagley.org/library>

Use Restrictions

Literary rights retained by depositor.

Provenance

Deposit of Unisys Corporation

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Related Materials

Related Material

Sperry-Univac records (Accession 1825), Manuscripts and Archives Department, Hagley Museum and Library

Separated Material

Engineering Research Associates photographs (Accession 2006.202), Audiovisual Collections & Digital Initiatives, Hagley Museum and Library

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Controlled Access Headings

- Computer engineering.
- Cryptography.
- Computer industry
- Electronic data processing
- Computer storage devices.
- Research, Industrial.
- Naval research.
- Engineering Research Associates

Collection Inventory

William Norris papers

Administrative Records, 1953-1957

Scope and Content

Administrative records includes memoranda from the Research Division, Engineering Department, Operations Division, Manufacturing Division, Product Planning Committee and Patent Department. These records describe the relationship between ERA and Sperry Rand. They focus on administrative issues - corporate organization, strategic planning, personnel policy, research priorities, allocation of resources, and fiscal accountability. There are several files which describe the relationship between the ERA and Eckert-Mauchly divisions and documents

the ways in which work was allocated to allow ERA to focus on military and Eckert-Mauchly to focus on civilian projects.

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Engineering Department Memoranda, 1953-1954	box 1	folder 1
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Operations Division, Technical Memoranda, 1950 March - 1951 June	box 1	folder 3
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Operations Division, Technical Memoranda, 1953-1954	box 1	folder 5
Research Division, minutes and correspondence, 1956-1959	box 1	folder 6
New York Central Railroad - computerized reservation system, 1954	box 1	folder 7
William Norris, General Correspondence, 1950-1953	box 2	folder 1
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Administrative Committee - Remington Rand, 1955 December - 1956 May	box 2	folder 4
Eckert-Mauchly Division Correspondence, 1955-1957	box 2	folder 4a
Engineering Committee minutes, 1952-1959	box 2	folder 5
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Engineering Division, General Correspondence, 1954	box 2	folder 7
Financial Planning and Control, 1956	box 2	folder 8
Form Committee, 1956	box 2	folder 9
Information Science Division, 1956	box 2	folder 10
Legal Division, 1953-1956	box 2	folder 11
Management Meeting minutes, 1957	box 2	folder 12
Manufacturing Division, 1953-1957	box 2	folder 13
Military Engineering Division, Remington Rand	box 2	folder 14
Management Policies - Administrative Procedures, 1947-1956	box 2	folder 15-16
Norwalk Laboratory - Employment, Salaries, Classifications, 1956-1957	box 2	folder 17
Patent Department, 1958	box 2	folder 18
Plant Locations, 1957	box 2	folder 19
Product Planning Committee, 1956-1957	box 2	folder 20-22

UNIVAC Division Monthly Progress reports

box 2

folder 23

General Correspondence

Scope and Content

General correspondence documents major projects and contracts. These files describe work on the magnetic storage drum and the ERA 1101 and 1103 computer systems. The records document ERA's contracts with the Bureau of Ships, Atomic Energy Commission, the National Bureau of Standards, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. There are also files on competitive systems (mostly IBM), sales and marketing records, contracts and correspondence - documenting efforts to market the UNIVAC I and II. Software development files include correspondence of Admiral Grace Hopper.

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically.

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Airport - time utilization - magnetic storage drum, 1949	box 2	folder 27
Airline Flight Plan Storage System, 1951	box 2	folder 28
Airline Reservation System, 1949	box 2	folder 29
Association for Computing Machinery, 1947-1948	box 2	folder 30
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Atomic Energy Commission re High Speed Digital Computers, 1956	box 2	folder 31
Auerbach Corporation, 1965	box 2	folder 32
Binary Computer Coding, 1948	box 3	folder 1
Bureau of Ships (Directory)	box 3	folder 2
Charactron Rapromatic, 1956	box 3	folder 2a
Cohen, Arnold, 1956-1960	box 3	folder 3
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Competitors, 1956	box 3	folder 3b
Competitors, IBM, 1953-1955	box 3	folder 4
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Cunningham, W.R. re employment, 1956	box 4	folder 15
Defence Marketing Project MAC, 1963	box 4	folder 16
Delchamps, H.J. (vita)	box 4	folder 17
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Dunn & Bradstreet credit report	box 4	folder 19b
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Eckert-Mauchly salary information	box 4	folder 21
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Magnetic Delay Lines	box 5	folder 17
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Midwest Research Institute, 1957	box 6	folder 9
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Minnesota Nuclear Operations Group, 1956	box 6	folder 13
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National Bureau of Standards Proposal to Build a digital computer, 1948	box 6	folder 15
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Radio Electronics Manufacturing Association - <i>International News</i> , , 1956	box 7	folder 1-2
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Arnold Cohen papers

Scope and Content

Arnold Cohen's papers focus on Research & Development. There is considerable information on the development of magnetic storage and ERA's contracts with the Office of Naval Research for the building of the Atlas Computer. There are also files describing the relationship between ERA and M.I.T.'s Servomechanism Laboratory, and the Lawrence Livermore Radiation Laboratory. The latter describe the LARC computer project. Records documenting the 1947 symposium at Harvard University on "Large Scale Digital Calculating Machinery" describe early efforts to develop airline reservation systems and to automate procedures at Prudential Insurance Company.

General Files

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Title/Description	Instances	
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Lawrence Livermore - University of California Radiation Laboratory - LARC Computer, 1959-1960	box 9	folder 6
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Memory Systems (Magnetic Tape Handler), 1960	box 9	folder 10
Mount Pocono Conference on Logical Design, 1960	box 9	folder 11
Peripheral Equipment, 1960	box 9	folder 12
Peripheral Subsystems, 1966	box 9	folder 13
Princeton Meeting - Commercial Engineering, January 1966	box 9	folder 14
Project 274,000 Systems Development, 1957	box 9	folder 15
Project 9080 - Character Representation, 1955	box 9	folder 16
Thin Film Manufacture, 1963	box 9	folder 17
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"XU" 72 Computer System, 1959	box 9	folder 19

Files - re: Development of Magnetic Storage

box 9

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Office of Naval Research, Bread Board Computer, (Tompkins), 1947	box 9	folder 21
Arnold Cohen's Trip Report MIT Servomechanisms Laboratory, 1947	box 9	folder 22
Acoustic Delay Lines (project 3001) Naval Research Laboratories, 1945	box 9	folder 23
Basic System Design Task Order 13, 1947-1950	folder F24	box 9
Basic Toggles and Gates, 1948	box 9	folder 25
<i>High Speed Computing Devices</i> (McGraw Hill)	box 9	folder 26
"Magnetic Drum Storage for Digital Information Processing Systems" paper by Arnold Cohen	box 9	folder 27
"Development in Methods of Electrostatic Storage" report to the Bureau of Ships, 1949	box 9	folder 28
"49-Position Translator Switch" report to the Bureau of Ships, 1948	box 9	folder 29
Addresses on a Computer Drum, n.d.	box 9	folder 30
Proposed Binary Accumulator, 1947	box 9	folder 31

Parallel Computer - National Bureau of Standards (30 and 36 digit), 1948	box 9	folder 32
Magnetic Storage Drum prints	box 9	folder 33
Prints miscellaneous	box 9	folder 34
Wayne Conference on Automatic Computing Machinery (includes information on the Raytheon Digital Computer and the IBM Defense Calculator), 1951	box 9	folder 35
Rutgers Conference - IBM Card Programmed Calculator, Arnold Cohen's notes, 1950	box 9	folder 36
Magnetic Storage, Arnold Cohen's Publications, 1949-1951	box 9	folder 37
Harvard University Computational Laboratory, Symposium on Large Scale Digital Calculating Machinery, (includes descriptive material distributed by the Moore School at the 1947 EDVAC display and memorandum for H.J. Volk "Sequence Controlled Calculators for the Prudential", 1947 - 1946)	box 9	folder 38
Prudential Sequence Control Calculators, copies of 1946-1947 memoranda	box 9	folder 39
Technical Memoranda (ditto masters), includes Arnold Cohen and William Keye "Selective Alteration of Digital Data in Magnetic Drum", 1946-1952	box 9	folder 40
Arnold Cohen's IRE Paper re Single Alteration, 1947	box 9	folder 41
Magnetic Drum History (includes photographs), 1968	box 10	folder 1
Memoranda re magnetic drum patent, 1958	box 10	folder 2
The Nature of Patent Rights and the Protection of Inventions (talk given by John W. Mailley of Cushman, Darby & Cushman. ERA's patent counsels.)	box 10	folder 3
Magnetic Drum Technology - background	box 10	folder 4
Miscellany - Honeywell v. Sperry Rand	box 10	folder 5
Patents general correspondence, 1953-1964	box 10	folder 6
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Microfilm Selector Equipment, 1949	box 11	folder 10
Microfilm Selector - manufacturing manual	box 11	folder 11
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Ore Car Data Processing System, 1951	box 11	folder 15
Self Recording Instruments, 1949	box 11	folder 16
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Taurus - Task 23 - Summary of objectives to equipment development, 1951	box 11	folder 18
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Legal records

Scope and Content

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the questions of who developed the first electronic digital computer and the first magnetic storage drum were the focus of a number of Patent infringement lawsuits. Honeywell v. Sperry,

Technitrol v. Sperry Rand, and Sperry Rand v. Control Data revolved around these questions. These files include copies of briefs, trial transcripts, and exhibits.

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Oral History, 1978

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Scope and Content

Contains transcripts of oral history interviews which were done for Sperry Rand's unpublished 1978 history book. Of particular interest are the interviews with Arnold Cohen and Sidney Rubens.

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