

News from Nan

COMPUTER HISTORY

IBM 1401, AN OLD FRIEND

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From 2014 to 2020 we researched and cataloged over 5000 items (hardware, software, and text) at the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California. We sometimes blogged about our experiences and the fascinating items we encountered; this post is part of that set.



IBM 1401 on a pallet

After we got trained on how to use a pallet jack (in the Computer History Museum warehouse), we could begin cataloging some of the “big stuff” in the collection. I was happy that one of the first big objects we worked on was an IBM 1401 CPU. This was the first machine I worked on when I went through my new employee training at Service Bureau Corporation in 1965. When we weighed and measured it, we found that it tipped the scales at over 2000 pounds! It was so heavy we could just barely move it around with a pallet jack. And this was only part of a complete 1401 system.

According to an IBM web site, this machine originally was rented for \$2500+ per month, and there were once over 10,000 of them in service. IBM stopped selling the 1401 in 1971.

At Service Bureau we used our 1401 mostly to do card-to-tape operations so we could process the tape on a 7094, and to print data the 7094 wrote on tape when our batch job produced output. Our 1401 had 8K of memory. I did learn to program the 1401 in Autocoder (the 1401 Assembler), but I only wrote a few programs for it.

The Computer History Museum has restored another 1401 to a running state. It took several years to get it working. I haven't been in to see it yet.

◀ 2015 ◀ CALIFORNIA ◀ COMPUTER HISTORY MUSEUM ◀ IBM 1401 ◀ JOHNSON ◀ LOS ANGELES
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