THE COMPUTER MUSEUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO



2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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01

THE COMPUTER MUSEUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO

THE VISION

The Museum's vision is to ensure an enduring recognition and understanding of the history of computing and computer science at the University of Waterloo and the broader Waterloo community, and to make such knowledge available for public education and scholarly research.

THE MISSION

Through its collection of artifacts, oral histories and other memorabilia, the mission of the Computer Museum at the University of Waterloo is to preserve, catalogue, and display such materials in a variety of physical and virtual environments, and to educate the University community and the general public about the impact of computing, and Waterloo's role in the development of computing.

VALUES

Central to the defining values of the Computer Museum at the University of Waterloo is respectfulness and responsibility to community. The Museum endeavours to provide a diversity of historical perspectives and inclusive dialogue in relationships with employees, volunteers and community members. The Museum recognizes the importance of integrity and excellence in its stewardship of the legacy it maintains and strives for accuracy and objectivity in the execution of its mission.

The Computer Museum at the University of Waterloo acknowledges that it exists on the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. The Computer Museum is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. The Museum acknowledges the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge and philosophies of the Indigenous people.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Computer Museum at the University of Waterloo dates to the early 2000s, arising from the efforts of a few key individuals who had a personal interest in preserving artifacts from bygone eras of computing at Waterloo.

https://uwaterloo.ca/computer-museum

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THE MUSEUM'S 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

The year 2025 was one of retrenchment and reorganization for the Museum. The Museum office was closed for the Winter and Spring terms (January to August), undergoing a major renovation designed to improve the physical space and presentation space of the Museum. This work, completed in December, now provides outstanding visibility and opportunities to display the Museum's artifacts and provide information and interpretation to the community.

Despite the closure, Museum personnel continued to engage the public and expand awareness of the Museum. As detailed below, several exhibits and open-houses were held in 2025. The Museum continued its online presence with virtual exhibits, blogging and social media. Further, the Museum responded to public inquiries about the history of computing at Waterloo, providing information and references to other Museums and researchers.

In the fall, as the office re-opened to the public, the Museum introduced its new logo and visual identity. Designed by student Anna George (of the Stratford School of Interaction Design and Business) the new logo and branding will be used in all future Museum materials (online and print).

3 IN-PERSON EVENTS

- Winter Open House
- Alumni Day
- Fall Open House





3 NEW EXHIBITS

- DC display "Frutiger Aero"
- Simulating Society: Human Representation in Video Games
- Evolution and Adaptation of Computer Screens





- **26 LOTS ACQUIRED**
- **12 DECLINED FOR 2025**
- **704 NEW ARTIFACTS FOR 2025**

6408 CATALOGUED ARTIFACTS (AS OF DECEMBER 31, 2025)

03

2025 IN REVIEW

PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS AND EXHIBITS

The Museum continued its programme of public presentation, exhibits and open-house presentations.

Winter Open House, March 18

The Winter 2025 Open House was held on March 18. The theme of the open house was “Computers at the Movies”, showing the depiction (for better or worse) of computer technologies in Hollywood (including the movie “Utilities” which was filmed on the Waterloo Campus and featured the Math & Computer building’s “Red Room”).









DC display-case exhibit, May

A new exhibit in the Davis Centre debuted in May, featuring an exploration of the Frutiger Aero design style that influenced computer aesthetic design from 2004 to 2013.



The exhibit is also presented in the Museum online exhibit and in an Instagram Reel (login may be required).



Alumni Day, June 7

On June 7, at the request of the Math Faculty Advancement Office, the Museum created a pop-up exhibit of items relevant to the themes of the year's Alumni Day (graduates from 1975 and 2000), including the IMSAI8080 (from 1975) and a working Windows 98 system. The exhibit was favourably received by the Dean of Mathematics (Mark Giesbrecht).

Online exhibits, summer

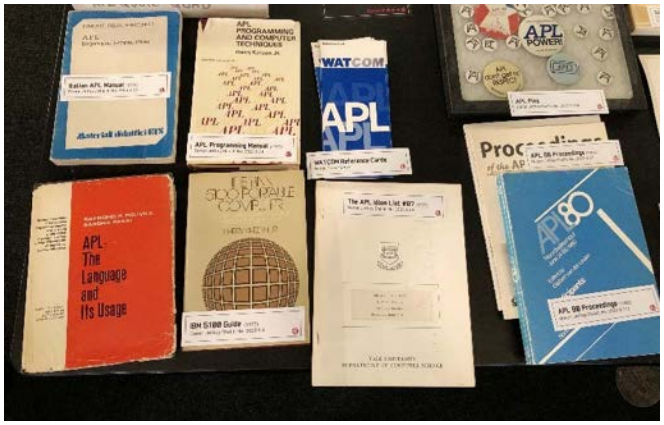
Because of the office closing from March to September, the Museum focussed on virtual exhibits on its blog website and social media posts. Two of the Museum's summer interns created blogs:

- Simulating Society: Human Representation in Video Games, Beatriz Barao, July 2025
- Evolution and Adaptation of Computer Screens, Michelle Wu, July 2025

Fall Open House, October 25

The Museum's Fall Open House was held on October 25, featuring guest speaker Steve McDowell (BMath 1982) discussing the creation of the University of Waterloo Computer Systems Group's Waterloo microAPL interpreter (subsequently marketed as WATCOM APL).









CAMPUS AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

An emerging Museum activity is, loosely defined, "campus engagement", in which the Museum collaborates with other groups on campus or organizations within the community; provides information and assistance with research by students and community members; and generally acts as a resource for historical research.

Hosting of visitors & VIPs

Prof. Dr. Bruce Nikkel, Bern University of Applied Sciences, School of Engineering and Computer Science at Switzerland, visited the Museum on April 4 as part of his investigation into creating a Computing Museum at his home institution.



On July 7, Museum personnel met online with **Kate E Ziarko** of the Western Michigan University (WMU) to share insights on creating a "mini-museum of technology" at WMU. They were seeking information on best practices, pitfalls and generally any advice the Museum could provide to guide them.

At the request of the Math Alumni office, on July 18 the Museum provided a personal tour to **Beric Farmer**, UW Computer Science alum (1993) and founder of XE.com. Beric presented to the Museum some OneLaptopPerChild laptops, two of which were signed by Alan Kay (on whose Dynabook the OLPC was based).



Photo credit: Alexandra Lippert allippert@uwaterloo.ca;

Left to right: Lawrence Folland, Beric Farmer, Chris Farmer, Diane Farmer.

Support for student projects and research



In July, the Museum assisted Computer Science Master's Student Hala Sheta in a presentation related to her Master's work that featured "the use of ChatGPT in 8-bit on an emulated Macintosh Plus". The Museum provided Apple Macintosh-related artifacts for the display.

Co-operation with Engineering Computing – Faculty of Engineering

In May, the Museum began a collaboration with Engineering Computing (Faculty of Engineering) to develop exhibit spaces in the DWE building, and generally to co-operate in the mission of the Museum.

Requests for historical information, research and artifact information

As public awareness of the Museum increases, an increasing number of requests for information are received from computer history researchers and community members. Some examples:

- **January 2025:** The Museum was contacted by Sheridan College seeking permission to use photographs of the Museum's Alex Terminal and related artifacts for a telecom training course that was being developed.
- **February 2025:** Guelph artist Mike Salisbury contacted the Museum for assistance in locating and adapting a working vintage Apple Macintosh computer. Subsequent discussions involved Museum personnel and technical staff from CSCF.
- **February 2025:** The Math undergraduate newspaper mathNews was seeking a single specific back-issue to complete their own mathNews archive collection. Through the Museum's online catalog, they became aware that the Museum had an original copy of the issue they sought. The Museum provided a scan of the issue to them.
- **February 2025:** The Museum received a request from the WLU Press which was celebrating its 50th anniversary. The Press wanted to create an exhibit of artifacts

pertaining to “office tech related to book publishing,” and asked the Museum to provide relevant artifacts on a loan basis for the exhibit.

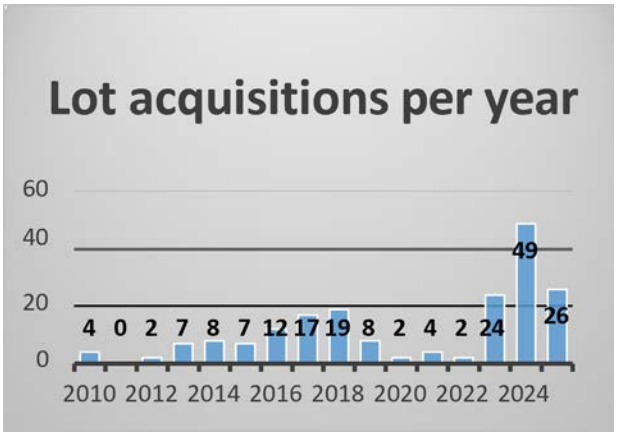
- **May 2025:** The Museum received a request from an independent IT researcher looking for information on text-based games written for the Math Faculty Honeywell system circa 1979. This request generated significant email correspondence between the Museum and various alumni who were involved with the development.
- **July 2025:** Martin Karsten forwarded a request from “a retro-computing enthusiast with a current interest in the Eh and Zed languages, the Thoth operating system and the portable tool chain that was developed in the software lab of Mike Malcolm between 1975 and 1979.” Museum personnel collected information to address this inquiry.
- **August 2025:** Scott Campbell, Director of the Museum, provided historical computing consultation with Canadian Literary Author Jane Park for an upcoming book.
- **November 2025:** The Museum received a request from a PhD candidate at the University of Utah who was researching early versions (circa 1974) of the original UNIX distribution from Western Electric. They were inquiring about early UNIX use at Waterloo. Their records showed that the University (the CCNG research group in particular) received licence 18 (Utah was 19), and were looking for any artifacts (licence paperwork, documents/manuals) that the Museum might have.

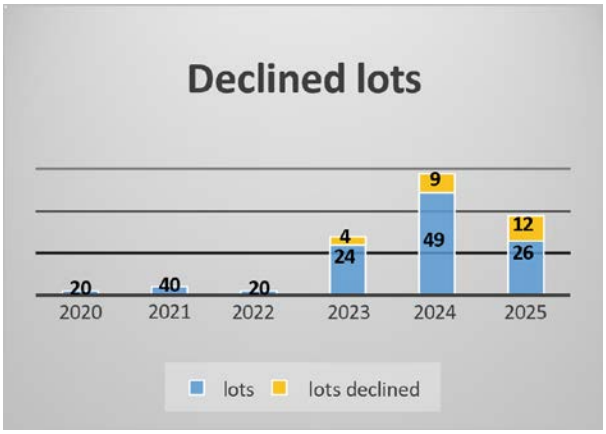
ARTIFACT COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT

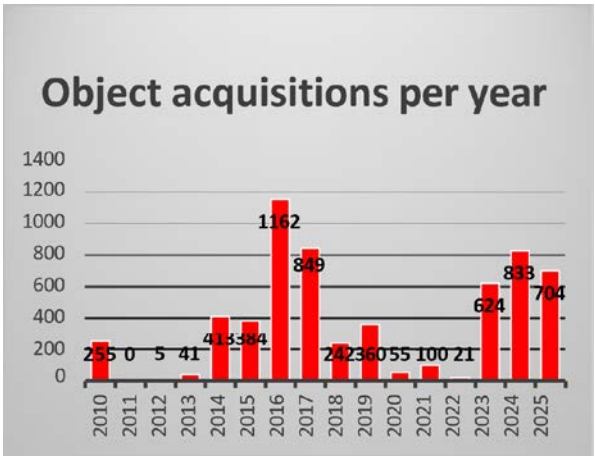
Acquisitions

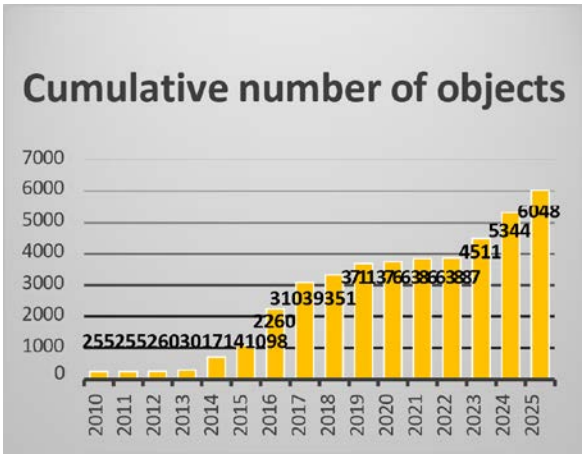
As noted in the Museum Annual Report for 2024, growth of the Museum’s artifact collection and management strategy needed to become more focussed and selective. For 2025, both the number of lots acquired and the number of artifacts contained in those lots decreased: 26 lots were acquired, containing a total of 704 artifacts. Two of these lots accounted for over half of the artifacts.

The following charts illustrate the state of the Museum’s acquisitions (from 2010 to the end of 2025): Note that during the year, the Museum Acquisition Committee declined offers of 12 lots, representing a 31% rejection rate.









For 2026, the Museum will continue its strategy of improved selectivity of potential donations.

Storage space

Storage space continues to be a challenge for the Museum. However, in co-operation with Engineering Computing, temporary storage space was acquired in DWE. This space was used principally to process incoming acquisitions. The space was upgraded by the Museum with new shelving and is now (for 2026 and subsequently) available indefinitely for the Museum to use.

NEW MUSEUM BRANDING

During the Fall term, the Museum undertook a branding project to re-vitalize its brand presence and create uniform “look and feel” across all of its displays and printed materials.

Several designs were generated in-house, and a short-list of three alternatives was generated. These three were then revealed to the Museum community through a preference survey. The project is described in a Museum blog post. The new logos are:

COMPUTER MUSEUM

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STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

THE MUSEUM'S GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2026

GOAL 1 | Governance and continuity

The Museum is defined informally within, and supported by, the Cheriton School of Computer Science. The current management practices depend on the efforts of key individuals (including volunteer retirees of the University). The role of these individuals is not clearly defined, nor is there any direct accountability to the leadership of the School. This structure has performed well and met the operational needs of the Museum. Longer-term, however, the Museum should be incorporated into the formal governance of the School (as defined in the School's Constitution), providing appropriate executive oversight for the Museum and ensuring Museum continuity.

Discussions to codify and formalize the Museum within the School have been in progress for two years. While models such as the Earth Sciences Museum in the Faculty of Science were considered (which is focussed on Board independence and adherence to the Ontario Ministry of Tourism guidelines for Community Museums), such models were considered inappropriate for the Museum and its position within the academic School organizational unit.

Going forward, the Museum will pursue a definition that is supported by the Constitution of the School of Computer Science, notably to constitute the Museum as a standing committee within the School. Discussions are ongoing and are expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

GOAL 2 | Collection management and exhibits

The Museum has established an exhibition practice and will continue to offer its once-per-term event. Each event is themed to highlight specific sets of artifacts within the Museum's collection. Where possible, guest speakers will be invited to present a talk/lecture related to the theme of the exhibition. We will also explore various event formats to reach a variety of audiences.

The Museum will respond, where possible, to requests from other University departments (notably, the Advancement Office of the Faculty of Mathematics, and Development and Alumni Affairs of the Faculty of Engineering) to conduct customized tours of the Museum and meet with Alumni. The Museum has been involved with Alumni Day activities (typically at the beginning of June every year) and expects to continue that involvement.

The Museum has worked diligently to grow community awareness of its collection and activities. As a result, the Museum receives invitations to participate with external museums and related history organizations in creating joint exhibits, sponsoring exhibits by other organizations. In 2025 this included joining the Waterloo Wellington Network of museums and galleries. These activities allow the Museum to reach a wider audience, develop expertise and gain invaluable experience. These activities are expected to continue and be expanded for 2026.

GOAL 3 | Software preservation and restoration

An emerging area of interest to the Museum and other academic History of Computing researchers is soft are preservation: what are the expectations and realistic goals of preservation, what are the current best practices, and so on. As the Museum's collection of software grows, the importance of accurate preservation and, where feasible, restoration is becoming apparent.

Accordingly, the Museum is planning to adapt its cataloging system to accommodate software artifacts more precisely, and develop a storage system for capturing software images. The ultimate goal of this project is to ensure, at a minimum, that every software artifact, whether acquired physically or electronically, is preserved securely. Preserving the operating environment for any given software artifact is a future extension of this work.

Software preservation is a corollary to the general University institutional work on the preservation of research data – research data often includes software for processing that data, and thus software preservation becomes an integral component of research data preservation.

GOAL 4 | Public programmes and outreach

Achieving the Museum's Vision

> *…ensure an enduring recognition and understanding of the history of computing and computer science at the University of Waterloo and the broader Waterloo community*

is directed by the mandate

> *…to educate the University community and the general public about the impact of computing, and Waterloo's role in the development of computing*

The Museum will engage with like-minded community organizations, such as other museums, libraries, professional organizations and amateur community-based groups that have an interest in the history and preservation of computing technology. Such collaboration may include joint-sponsorship of events, hosting of external exhibits and participation in information exchanges, networking and related professional activities.

For 2025, Museum personnel participated in:

- Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association
- Canadian Computer Heritage Network
- IEEE Canada History Committee
- Waterloo Wellington Network of museums and galleries

As awareness of the Museum increases, the opportunities to participate with the broader public community are expected to increase. The Museum is developing a strong positive reputation within the "technology history" community.

GOAL 5 | Student Engagement

The Museum is an enthusiastic supporter of the University of Waterloo Co-operative program, and, through the generous support of the School of Computer Science, employs a co-op student for every academic term. Our students come from a variety of backgrounds, from Computer Science, Physics, Global Business and Design and more. Each brings skills from their academic discipline and such diversity is invaluable to the Museum.

The Museum is also a supporter of the local community Boards of Education co-op program for high-school students. These students are placed in unpaid internships with the Museum, contributing significantly to our cataloging, social media and technology restoration projects.

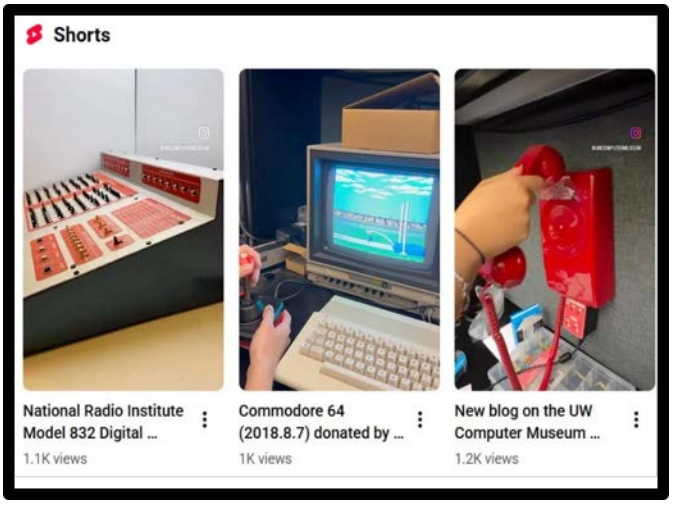
05

2025: MEASURING SUCCESS

Because of the Visitor Centre renovations from January to August, the number of Museum in-person visits was significantly reduced compared to 2024. The Museum's social media presence grew significantly during 2025, with "shorts" (short-form video) being the most popular form. The number of mailing-list announcements was reduced slightly (to an average of 1.3 per month) to reduce "subscriber fatigue" and try to focus on high-impact mailings.

YouTube

- 23 Videos
- 43 subscribers
- 796 long-video views & 15,246 short-video views. The most popular video was "1980s Portable Computers" with 5,200 views



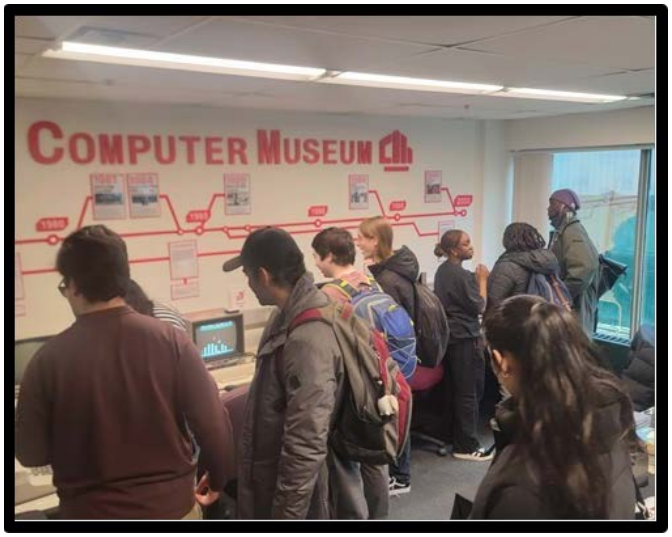
Instagram

- 159 followers
- 72 posts
- 19 reels with over 11,800 views

Website

Per Google Analytics for calendar 2025:

- 12,238 visitors, 14,246 sessions
- 4,662 blog views
- Peak usage: 1,677 views the week of Dec 21



Visitors

84 visitors signed the logbook for September to December.

Mailing List

16 posts for the calendar year with 125 subscribers by December 2025.

06

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Computer Museum's success depends on the generous contributions of the University of Waterloo and community.

- The Cheriton School of Computer Science provides office space, operational funding and moral support for the Museum. It supports the Museum's programme of co-op student hiring, without which the Museum would not be able to open its gallery/office to the public.
- The Department of Systems Design Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering provides storage space for the Museum, and additional administrative advice and moral support.
- The Faculty of Engineering provides storage space for the Museum and, in conjunction with the Engineering Computing office, exhibit space and collection management.
- The Computer Science Computing Facility (CSCF) supports the Museum through the provision of IT services, including staff computers, networking support and cloud storage. Staff volunteers within CSCF provide technical expertise for the Museum's preservation and restoration activities.
- The University's Information Systems and Technology (IST) provides central-computing support for the Museum's Website and its cataloging system.
- The Kitchener-Waterloo community organization Computer Heritage Group provides technical advice for preservation and restoration, and several members of that group are regular participants in the Museum's Open House events.
- The staff at the University of Waterloo Earth Sciences Museum provided invaluable advice and discussions on Museum management.

Special thanks to *all of the Museum's artifact donors in 2025* whose contributions enrich the collection and provide for a better visitor experience.

The Museum could not function without the dedicated support and expertise of its staff and volunteers for 2025 (in alphabetical order):

Cristian Baires (winter student intern)

Beatriz Barao (summer student intern)

Professor Scott Campbell (co-founder, Museum Director, Associate Professor Teaching Stream, Systems Design Engineering)

Annabel Chow (winter Co-op student)

Joshua Ensley (fall student intern and continuing volunteer)

Lawrence Folland (co-founder, Museum Docent, UW retiree)

Steve Garan (UW alumnus)

Anna George (fall Co-op student)

Trevor Grove (Historical Consultant & Advisor, UW alumnus & retiree)

Reis Lavery (winter student intern)

Luca McEwin (summer intern)

Steve McDowell (UW alumnus, invited speaker for Fall Open House)

Michelle Wu (summer student intern)

And finally, the contributors to this Annual Report were *Scott Campbell, Lawrence Folland, Anna George* and *Trevor Grove*. Edited by *Trevor Grove* and *Dece Peng*.