

# Project Whirlwind comes home

May 25 2009, Tom Rosko

---



Stephen Dodd, Jay Forrester, Robert Everett, and Ramona Ferenz at Whirlwind I test control in the Barta Building, 1950. Photo / The MITRE Corporation

(PhysOrg.com) -- The Project Whirlwind Computer collection -- a compilation of pioneering digital computing research conducted at MIT in the 1940s and 1950s -- has been transferred back to the Institute from the MITRE Corporation, and its contents are being opened to the public for the first time.

The research project, which included the creation of "Whirlwind I" -- the first digital computer at MIT and the fastest of its time -- began at the Institute and had been moved to Lincoln Lab and then later to MITRE. Materials in the collection were previously unavailable to researchers, but with its transfer to MIT, the collection is now accessible to the public. Key documents from the Whirlwind collection have also

been digitized and will soon be made available online.

Whirlwind I was completed in 1951, the same year that Project Whirlwind was detached from the Servomechanisms Lab to become the MIT Digital Computer Laboratory. Unclassified research projects using the computer were managed by the Digital Computer Lab staff on the MIT campus, where Whirlwind I occupied 3,300 square feet within the two-story Barta Building (N42).

The precursor to modern-day computers, Whirlwind's fingerprints are evident in today's software and hardware. Parallel digit processing, random-access and magnetic core memory made the initial launch of commercial computers, and interactive visual computer displays, possible. Its groundbreaking design also laid the foundation for simulation and real-time technology. In operation until 1959, Whirlwind formed the basis for the U.S. Air Force's Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE) air defense system.

The project materials have been transferred to the MIT Institute Archives and Special Collections. Documents on the project will soon be available through the MIT Libraries' web site at: [libraries.mit.edu/archives/whirlwind](https://libraries.mit.edu/archives/whirlwind) . There will also be a reunion of the Project Whirlwind team at the Meridien Hotel (formerly the Hotel at MIT) on Tuesday, June 30.

Provided by Massachusetts Institute of Technology ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Project Whirlwind comes home (2009, May 25) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-05-whirlwind-home.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private
---

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.