From the Editor’s Desk:
Some Final Thoughts

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Editor in Chief

When I took over in the fall of 1999, my worst fear was that there would never be enough manuscripts. Thus, when people made suggestions or offered to help, I was happy to concur. As I write this, Annals now has more than three years of material in process, and I want to identify those who rose to the challenge. These stories are lessons of how good people make great things happen.

All new editors receive congratulatory mail. One such email came from Geoffrey Bowker, a former editor of Happenings. Along with his warm wishes, Goeff suggested that I try to do a special issue on computers and libraries and recommended W. Boyd Rayward as the guest editor. Boyd was extremely busy, but he saw the potential, enlisted Rebecca Graham as his coeditor, and convinced 13 authors to write for us. Two special issues (vol. 24, nos. 2 and 3) resulted from their efforts.

Some time later, I decided to look through the dead files for papers that “died on the vine” for one reason or another. I was surprised to find “Babbage’s Analytical Engine Plans 28 and 28a—The Programmer’s Interface” by Allan G. Bromley. I contacted Allan and asked why the paper had not been finished and, more importantly, whether he would be willing to work with us to finish it. His reply elicited both hope and sorrow. Allan was willing, but he had just been diagnosed with a terminal illness and did not know whether he would be able to do it. I immediately emailed Mike Williams—who had just visited with Bromley—explained the situation, and asked for his help. Mike worked with Allan and got his paper ready for publication and (Sir) Maurice V. Wilkes wrote an introduction to the paper. Looking for ways to fill the issue, I remembered that I had long ago purchased a copy of the Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1873, which contained a lengthy eulogy of Babbage. I had my graduate assistant scan it, I edited it, and Martin Campbell-Kelly wrote an introduction for it. Allan saw the issue (vol. 22, no. 4) and was pleased with the result.

After receiving a lecture notice from the Computer Museum in fall 1999, I wondered if Annals could mine the lectures—that is, get the speakers to expand their talks into publishable papers. The next lecture, given by Alvy Ray Smith and Richard Shoup, was titled “Recollections of Early Paint Systems.” I contacted them both and they agreed to write papers. Alvy Ray gave us “Digital Paint Systems: An Anecdotal and Historical Overview” and Dick shared the history of “SuperPaint: An Early Frame Buffer Graphics System” in vol. 23, no. 2.

I am most grateful for the efforts of many members of the editorial board, but I have to identify one (at the risk of embarrassing him) in this column. Bill Aspray called me and suggested that Annals publish a special issue dedicated to Erwin and Adele Tomash in honor of their many contributions to computer history. I liked the idea, and in no time, Bill developed a plan for the issue (vol. 23, no. 4), recruited the authors, and edited the entire issue—all ahead of schedule. As the saying goes, “With friends like this …”

Another phone call was from someone I did not know. Burt Grad called to suggest that Annals do an issue on the start of the software products industry. By now, I was getting good at saying, “That sounds like a good idea!” In no time, Burt had enlisted Luanne Johnson as coeditor, and together they found authors and reviewers. Annals vol. 24, no. 1 took us in another new direction—examining the people, products, and ideas that resulted in the robust software industry that we know today.

I am also grateful to Janet Abbate and Doron Swade for accepting invitations to serve as guest editors. Janet and Doron beat the bushes, put a call in Annals, and worked hard to bring us special issues on interesting and important topics. The current issue (vol. 25, no. 4) is a special issue on women and gender in the history of computing for which Janet served as guest editor. Next year, there will be a special issue on historical reconstructions (vol. 26, no. 2) with Doron as guest editor. My hat’s off to you both!

Lest you think that I will fade away, incoming Editor-in-Chief David Grier has asked me to continue working with some authors, including Dave Walden. Dave submitted an anecdote about his efforts at Bolt Beranek and Neuman about 18 months ago. After reading it, I sent him an email saying “with three or four more pages and a few photos this could be a nice article.” Dave replied that he was leaving on vacation and had done all he wanted to do with the anecdote. I encouraged him to call after he got back from vacation to discuss the possibility of a special issue on BBN. We have been emailing ever since, and two weeks ago, a FedEx box appeared on my porch, containing 17 draft manuscripts exploring all phases of this remarkable company. I look forward to working with Dave to provide Annals readers with some special issues for 2004 and 2005.
I would be remiss if I did not thank the members of the editorial board and especially the members of the editorial team: David Grier, Paul Ceruzzi, Jim Tomayko, J.A.N. Lee, Werner Buchholz, Peggy Kidwell, Mary Croarken, Nathan Ensmenger, Anne Fitzpatrick, Raul Rojas, Eric Weiss, and Thomas Haigh for their efforts as editors during the past four years. Each of these individuals has brought untold experience and boundless enthusiasm to the editorial process. I truly appreciate the guidance and support of the Annals editorial board. A special thanks goes to all the authors and reviewers who worked so hard to provide us with quality articles, anecdotes, reviews, events, sightings, biographies, and think pieces.

A special thank you goes to Robin Baldwin, Alkenia Winston, and the rest of the Annals staff for their unwavering support. Robin managed our editorial process with finesse and Alkenia worked to put Annals into the manuscript management system—something I really didn’t want to do (it was a change, you know!). In addition, Alkenia relieved me of the burden of dunning authors and reviewers and thus added years to my life! Finally, I want to acknowledge the personal support of our publisher, Angela Burgess. Knowing that she cared about Annals was always a source of strength for me. With Angela’s support, we received approval for an additional eight pages per issue for volume 25 from the Publications Board.

As you can see, it took a lot of effort on many people’s part to produce the past four volumes. I am in debt to each of them. I thank the Publications Board for the opportunity to serve as Editor in Chief of the IEEE Annals of the History of Computing.

It was great fun. I wish the new editorial team all the best!