This issue provides a rich assortment of articles from both sides of the Atlantic, exploring a range of topics and themes in the broad areas of computer research and development as well as business applications.

**Pioneering research**

With the two-part cover article on IBM La Gaude, the *Annals* continues its tradition of documenting the history of IBM laboratories overseas (see the January–March 1998 issue on IBM Zurich and July–December 2004 issue on IBM Boeblingen). The IBM La Gaude Laboratory, situated in a sublime setting between Nice and Cannes, is a prime reason why Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur has been dubbed Telecom Valley.

France’s Telecom Valley now boasts facilities of more than 60 high-tech companies. In 1961, as IBM launched its La Gaude Laboratory, the region was undeveloped. At that time, remote data processing was a new discipline and IBM La Gaude quickly established itself as one of the research leaders in this field. The authors, all with past or present affiliations with IBM La Gaude, provide an important survey of its achievements in computer networking and telecommunications.

**Success and failure**

The great preponderance of literature on the history of computing (and more broadly, the history of technology) has been success stories. More than two decades ago, historian John Staudenmaier (1985) identified a historiographical trend in technology to concentrate heavily on progress—of historians to engage in “progress talk” and not give due attention to technological failures. Still, only a small body of historical work has examined technological failures. Although documenting and analyzing successes is important, neglecting failures presents the risk of providing a distorted picture of the past, and in many cases, a lost opportunity to learn. For example, historian David Kirsch draws rich lessons relevant to the electric car and the energy policy debate of recent years in his book *The Electric Vehicle and the Burdens of History* (Rutgers Univ. Press, 2000).

In computing, the literature on IBM—a firm that successfully dominated the mainframe field for decades and has now succeeded mightily in the software and services businesses—dwarfs that of all of its mainframe competitors, few of which continue to exist as companies. This literature has also tended to concentrate around projects that, while perhaps missing original delivery dates, were major technological and business successes, such as IBM 650, Fortran, IBM 1401, and IBM System/360.

In the small number of instances where studies have examined failure in computer history, such as Donald MacKenzie’s 1996 analysis of software failures and associated infrastructure and safety risks, it has been quite illuminating. So too is Hans Neukom’s engaging analysis of a failed project, Ubisco, between the Union Bank of Switzerland (UBS) and the Control Data Corporation in the 1970s in this issue. Neukom insightfully draws on newly available UBS archival materials to examine the factors behind the failure of this computer automation project.

Often characterizing developments broadly as successes or failures is limiting, as elements of both invariably coexist. George Gray and Ronald Smith examine third-generation Burroughs computers and demonstrate how the substantial technological achievements of the B3950 and B6900 were undermined by late deliveries and poor customer service. Gray and Smith have published numerous articles on the history of Sperry Rand and Burroughs in the *Annals* over the past decade. Last year they published revised versions of many of these articles, and other research, in their book *Unisys Computers: An Introductory History* (available at www.lulu.com).

Finally, Jos Peeters also bumps up against themes of success and failure in examining early material requirements planning (MRP) systems at Royal Philips Electronics (Eindhoven, the Netherlands) as a precursor to the enterprise resource planning (ERP) industry. In this article on early computer logistics systems for manufacturing, he richly details pioneering work of Philips, but ultimately, its failure in the ERP industry relative to IBM.

Readers may contact Jeffrey R. Yost at yostx003@umn.edu.