From the Editor’s Desk

Jeffrey R. Yost
Editor in Chief

This issue grew out of an invitation workshop of the same title, “New Voices, New Topics (in the History of Computing and Information)” that Bill Aspray and I co-organized and co-ran at the University of Texas in 2010. Our goal was to bring new authors to the Annals and publish important scholarship on topics that have been ignored or underrepresented in the literature. The contents of the issue are discussed in our guest editors’ introduction. I am grateful to Bill for inviting me to co-lead this event and co-edit this issue as well as to the School of Information at the University of Texas-Austin for sponsoring and hosting the workshop. I am also grateful to the talented scholars who participated and for their work to revise the excellent articles that appear in the pages that follow.

Although “new voices, new topics” was the only restriction we placed on ourselves in selecting scholars to invite, several themes are common to all or most of the articles, one of which I would like to briefly discuss in a broader context here: the history of users and user-driven innovation.

As part of an effort to expand our content on the social, cultural, business, and scientific history of computing, users and user innovation have been areas the Annals editorial board and I have focused on recruiting manuscripts from the start of my tenure as EIC in January 2008. Since then, we have published articles on educational users, artist users, international users, banking industry users, industrial MRP users, computer game users, database users, and early women office users. And in this issue we have articles addressing medical users (Joseph November), hearing aid users (Mara Mills), personal computer users (separate articles by Patricia Galloway and Honghong Tinn), and casino/digital slot machine users (Cristina Turdean). Although we clearly have expanded our coverage on the history of computer users and user innovation in the past several years, this represents merely a healthy start to publishing on this vital area of research.

The Annals has and always will publish articles documenting and analyzing systems design and development. Some significant computing systems have not yet been examined, while many others could benefit from additional research, analysis, and interpretation. For years after the history of computing emerged as an area of study in the 1970s, there was a heavy focus on hardware. Only over the past decade or so has there been more balance in also examining software production. We should seek to complement these important studies with those on the diverse ways computers and software are used and modified by organizations, groups, and individuals. A growing number of historians, and scholars in other disciplines such as information studies and social informatics, communications, sociology, and anthropology, are now engaged in this dialogue.

Without a doubt, momentum is building on researching and publishing on the history of computer users—both within and outside of the Annals. Over the past half decade, a small number of important monographs, edited volumes, and survey books have been published serving as models for examining computer uses and users in different realms. These include Fred Turner’s From Counterculture to Cyberculture (University Of Chicago Press, 2006) examining digital utopian users, Joanne Yates’ Structuring the Information Age (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005) surveying life insurance industry users, Paul Edward’s A Vast Machine (MIT Press, 2010) analyzing climate scientist users, David Mindell’s Digital Apollo (MIT Press, 2008) on spaceflight users, Thomas Misa’s Gender Codes (Wiley-IEEE CS Press, 2010) containing chapters on women office users, David Stearn’s Electronic Value Exchange (Springer, 2011) addressing banking/credit issuing users, and James Cortada’s The Digital Hand trilogy (Oxford University Press, 2004, 2006, 2008) surveying users in more than 40 industries and sectors of the economy.

It is an exciting time for the history of computing as more scholars than ever are examining different types of computer users and focusing on the social history of computing. As much of this emerging literature shows, few users were passive—many refined, reshaped, (re)programmed systems to meet various purposes, needs, and desires. As such, sites of use often coexisted as production sites, and users were commonly sophisticated innovators.
Among other attributes, this issue is a major contribution to the study of a diverse set of computer users. The *Annals* should continue to seek out and publish the best historical scholarship on users and user innovation, gaining further insight and nuance into how computing has changed the world.

**References**


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