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Opening in Namur of the Computer Museum NAM-IP (long version)

Saved collections

At the origin of the museum that will open its doors in Namur on October 27th, 2016 is the desire of a few collectors to save historical artefacts of the development of computing in Belgium.

- During more than 25 years, Jacques Laffut has gathered deprecated hardware and rare items relevant to the history of computing in the legacy of Burroughs-Unisys to put them on display at the Computer Museum Unisys, which was one of the museums of Brussels until February 2016 when it merged into the NAM-IP.
- Former technicians and engineers from Bull had created a Federation of Bull teams in Belgium (FEBB), they saved everything they could from the European history of Bull. This set also merged into the NAM-IP in April 2014.
- Jacques Lemaire donated, one year before his death, of his computing instruments collection.
- Finally, around a pioneering application of computing to texts (notably from the Bible and archive documents), the team “Informatique & Bible” from the Abbey of Maredsous and its director R.-Ferdinand Poswick have preserved a large amount of artefacts from work started in 1968-1969.

All these collections have been donated to the “Informatique Pionnière en Belgique - Baanbrekende Informatica in België” fund owned by the King Baudouin foundation who recognized the important patrimonial value of those collections for the history of computing in Belgium and for preserving traces from the birth of a new culture based on numeric processing.

The infrastructure

The promoters of the museum looked in various places in Wallonia and Brussels for a suitable space to save these collections in peril. Old computers and their peripherals always take up a lot of space!

The choice was fixed on the former sports hall from the Saint-Aubain school, 2km away from the train station and in the immediate vicinity of the provincial campus, rue Henri Blès in Namur. This hall has been bought by the King Baudouin Foundation in 2014 to house the collections to be saved.

This hall of 1,200m² was not of course not designed to house a museum, being 10m tall at the center of the roof.

Given the constraints of the building, it has thus been required to come up with a way of providing the minimum requirements for a museum space: reception and management areas, exhibition spaces, and storage rooms (usually much larger than the exhibitions themselves!). A choice of combining the practical, architectural and museum requirements was to rely on maritime containers: 21 containers of either 9 or 6 meters long constitute the internal structure and the sign board of the museum.



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The museography and scenography have been entirely designed and produced by the curators and two full time assistants hired in February 2016 for the museum. The special lighting has been designed by the company Expo-duo.

The exhibition: *at the numerical roots: machines that count*

The probable addition of a fifth collection has led to a reduction of the exhibition space to 450m². Under the name “*at the numerical roots: machines that count*”, the museum presents the various collections given to the King Baudouin Foundation.

On peut y voir, notamment :

- A full set of punched card machines from 1960, in working condition;
- One of the first Bancontact machines (ATM) ever installed in Belgium;
- One of the only four remaining statistical machines of Herman Hollerith;
- Over 100 calculating machines and typewriters illustrating the progression of those until the birth of computing;
- A Moon-Hopkins identical to the one used by the priest Lemaître to establish the big bang theory
- IBM machines from the CGER/ASLK who handled the pensions of Belgian citizens for 50 years
- The very first prints of archaic hebrew on IBM-3800 laser printers

A timeline and thematic information boards are laid out along the walls of the museum and provide a complete journey through the history of computing. A few videos prolong the experience of the physical objects on display. A few workshops help understand binary and other fundamental concepts of computing. Some other appeal to the creativity of the visitor: making art from electronic components, giving an opinion about the future of a culture based on numerical writing, etc.

Practical aspects

The museum is open during the week, all year round from Tuesday to Friday 10 am to 4 pm. And between April and October, also the 1st Saturday of the month from 10 am to 5 pm.

It is accessible for guided tours on request (individual or by groups - including school groups). People with reduced mobility can access the exhibition hall, but not the reception area. This area includes the ticket booth (from 6 € to 8 € depending on visitor category) and a souvenir shop.

A large parking (25 spots) is available.

Tours with demonstrations are available on request.

A documentation center including a large library and archives are accessible to researchers upon request.



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Opening in Namur of the Computer Museum NAM-IP (short version)

The Computer Museum NAM-IP, located in Namur, is entirely dedicated to the history of information processing since ancient times, goes over punched card processing, large and small computers, and leads to tablets and smartphones and a glimpse of the future.

After two years of work from curators their full-time assistants, the King Baudouin Foundation has gathered in the same location the four Belgian collections from its “Informatique Pionnière en Belgique” fund.

These collections are installed in a large hall located in Namur, 2km away from the train station. They constitute a museum whose opening is planned for October 27th, 2016 in the presence of personalities, amongst them the minister and mayor of Namur Maxime Prévot.

The goals of the museum are to preserve a disappearing patrimony, to valorize it, and to make of this place a privileged location for allowing the new generations to concienzialize the progress that lead us to the new technologies that already revolutionized their environment.

The museum also includes a documentation center, a library, and archives which are accessible to researchers and students from universities and other higher education schools.

Far from being a severe, the museum is attractive and purveyed with an original scenography based on maritime containers.

The theme of the first exhibition is: **At the numerical roots, machines that count.**

Expected to be at the cutting edge of the touristic activity in Namur, the Computer Museum NAM-IP is a museum that aims to be accessible from the beginning to French, Dutch and English speaking students and tourists. It is indeed the only museum of its kind in a radius of 375 km!

Amongst the objects on display, coming from the partnering collections, will be full set of punched card machines from 1960, in working condition; an impressive series of calculating machines covering a century of technology; a pioneering application of computing to textual corpuses; a representative selection of personal computers from 1981 to the current days; and many other systems that have been surprisingly preserved.