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Science Archives at SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory
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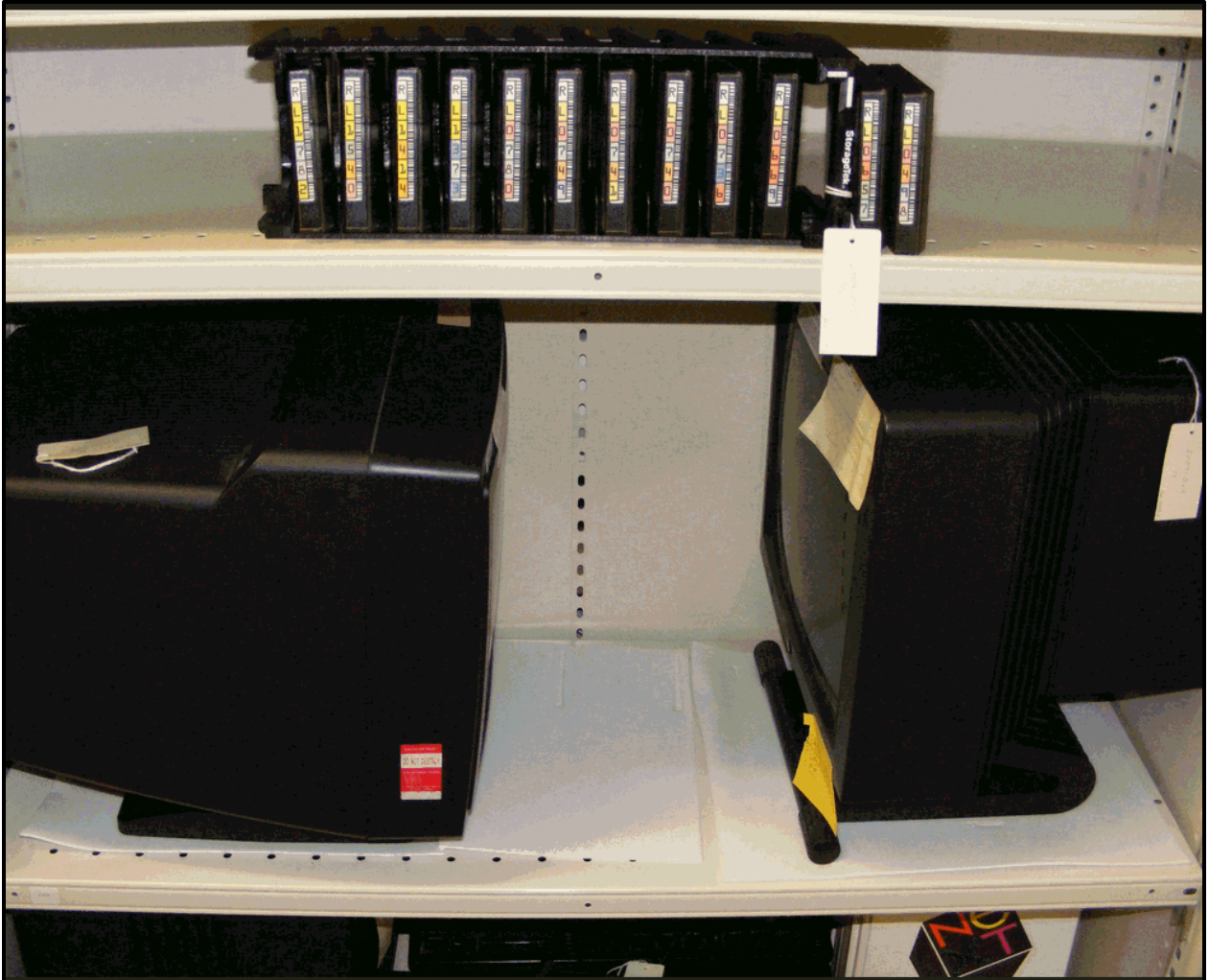
The idea for a two-mile linear accelerator at Stanford University was conceived in 1956, proposed in 1957, and authorized by the United States (US) Congress in 1961. Initially called "Project M," the venture was renamed "The Stanford Linear Accelerator Center" (SLAC) in August of 1960, and "SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory" in 2008. SLAC is owned by the United States government, and is operated for the US Department of Energy by Stanford University. Its present-day mission is to design, construct and operate state-of-the-art electron accelerators and related experimental facilities for use in high-energy physics, synchrotron radiation and laser research.

SLAC's expertise in the acceleration of electrons, theoretical physics, the design and construction of particle detectors, lasers, cosmology, materials and environmental sciences, biology, chemistry and alternative energy research enables its researchers to pursue answers to basic questions about the structure of matter and about the fundamental forces that operate in our universe. To date, three Nobel Prizes in Physics have been awarded for research conducted at the lab.

The archival effort at SLAC began as the laboratory's 1987 "History Project," a records survey in administrative groups throughout the lab. Identification of important records was followed by creation of an inventory database for records collections, and by the inauguration of a physical archive of important records no longer needed for current business. The records survey was supplemented with an oral history program to gather information not fully documented in the available records. SLAC's History Project officially became the "SLAC Archives and History Office" (AHO) in 1989.

Challenges facing the present-day SLAC Archives and History Office are both physical and intellectual. "Getting the goods," that is—getting materials deposited in the archives—fits both categories. Our large community of international users is a fluid population with varying affiliations, sources of support, and connections to SLAC. As such, they pose a unique challenge for the archival program. Many of them create records that belong to them personally or to their home institutions, but some of them create records that are appropriate for inclusion in the archives at SLAC. In sorting out what belongs where, we emphasize the importance of preserving significant records in the appropriate repository – whether at SLAC or at another institution. We work with records liaisons, individual researchers, collaboration committees, administrative associates, computer center staff, and sometimes the SLAC Facilities staff, to locate records; identify, appraise and collect abandoned records; and explain to all relevant parties what records should be retained and when they should be retired.

The most significant intellectual challenge we face is the one posed by electronic records. SLAC has been at the leading edge of some developments in computing in physics, and has been an early adopter in others. The archives has a large backlog of experimental data tapes, as well as volumes of new materials that have been born digital. While computer scientists working with the lab's experimenters wrestle the issues of data archiving, the SLAC archives deals with preserving an equally intimidating constellation of experimental collaboration electronic technical notes, newsletters, email messages, design drawings, and specifications.



A small pilot project undertaken in the electronic records area has been the documentation of SLAC's early web site: the first one in the United States. Working with the SLAC "Web Wizards" who developed and maintained the site in the early 1990s, the Archives and History Office has collected, arranged and preserved the electronic and hardcopy documentation of the site. Shown above are the computers on which the site was originally run, as well as SLAC's earliest surviving website data tapes. (SLAC photo AHO 2008_11100016)