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William C. Norris, 95, Founder Of an Early Rival to I.B.M.

By JOHN MARKOFF

William C. Norris, an electrical engineer who founded Control Data, the company that created the first supercomputers, died on Monday in Bloomington, Minn. He was 95.

His death followed a long battle with Parkinson's disease, a son, Roger, said.

After World War II, Mr. Norris helped found Engineering Research Associates in St. Paul, which built early digital computers, mostly for the Navy. In 1951, that company merged with another early computer maker, Sperry Rand. Mr. Norris led the Univac division of Sperry Rand until mid-1957, when, after chafing under the restrictions of a large company, he left to found Control Data.

Under his leadership, Control Data grew to become a fierce competitor of I.B.M., then the dominant computer maker. Control Data thrived by making machines that underpriced and outperformed I.B.M. products.

After starting out by making computing peripherals, under the design leadership of Seymour Cray, the company produced an early mainframe computer, the 1604 in 1959, and the next year released the CDC 160A, considered by many to be the



Control Data Corporation

William C. Norris, around 1985.

Mr. Norris to complain to the Justice Department's antitrust division. In December 1968 Control Data filed an antitrust lawsuit against I.B.M., and a month later the Justice Department also sued. Although I.B.M. would lose the suit, the damage had

first minicomputer, a multiuser machine smaller than a mainframe.

The minicomputer was used by many early computer researchers, including Douglas C. Engelbart, a pioneering computer scientist who invented the mouse as well as many related technologies that underlie the personal computer and the Internet of today.

In 1962 Mr. Cray became frustrated with the emerging bureaucracy at Control Data and demanded that Mr. Norris let him and his team depart for Mr. Cray's hometown, Chippewa Falls, Wis. There, Mr. Cray and a small team designed what would become the CDC 6600, generally recognized as the first supercomputer.

The 6600, which was capable of executing about one million instructions a second in 1964, drew the attention of I.B.M. In August of that year, as Control Data prepared to make its first 6600 delivery, I.B.M. preannounced a competitor, the 360/91 system, which it said would be more powerful and flexible than the 6600.

The larger company made delivery-date pledges and accepted orders, cutting into potential Control Data business. At one point Control Data was unable to book a single order for the 6600 for 18 months, becoming a victim of I.B.M.'s ghost computer strategy.

The strategy forced Control Data into a financial loss in 1966 and led

been done, and people in the computer industry would come to speak of "I.B.M. and the seven dwarfs": Univac, Burroughs, Scientific Data Systems, Control Data, General Electric, RCA and Honeywell.

Mr. Norris remained the head of Control Data until retiring in 1986. The company, at one time one of Minnesota's biggest, went into a decline starting in the 1980's, when the personal computer industry came into its own. In 1992, part of Control Data was spun off to become the information services company Ceridian.

A passionate believer in education, Mr. Norris led Control Data in the 1960's in building an innovative computer-based education and training system named Plato.

William Charles Norris was born in Red Cloud, Neb., in 1911 with a twin sister, Willa, and grew up on his parents' cattle, hog and corn farm. Fascinated early by physics, he built a mail-order radio set and became a ham radio operator. In 1932 he graduated from the University of Nebraska and during World War II served in the Navy, getting involved with electronic systems that were forerunners of modern computers.

Besides his son Roger, Mr. Norris is survived by his wife of 61 years, Jane Malley Norris, and seven other children: William, George, Daniel, Brian, David, Constance Van Hoven and Mary Keck.