

# Nebraskan's Success Story

By Robert Houston

WHENEVER the listed price of a share of Control Data Corporation stock goes up three points on the New York Stock Exchange, a former southwestern Nebraska farm boy makes a paper profit of \$549,660.

William C. Norris is getting accustomed to having this happen. He is president of the swiftly-growing six-year-old Minneapolis firm, which was one of many to spring up in the electronics field in the last decade. Most of them faded, but not Control Data.

Last March it emerged from golden-boy status to contention in the heavy-weight division when its stock was accepted for listing at 36 dollars a share on the New York Stock Exchange.

Since then, it has been the fastest-rising stock the Exchange has had in many years, and it has stood among the top 10 stocks in trading volume. A week ago it closed at 105 3/4.

It was a hot day in July, 1957, when Mr. Norris and several engineers formed the corporation. They offered 500 thousand shares in their company to friends and acquaintances in Minne-

He grew up on a thousand-acre farm along the Republican River between Inavale and Red Cloud.

"My boyhood life was, at least to me, nearly idealistic," he says in recollection. "I hunted, fished, trapped, participated in sports and did about everything that most boys like to do.

"The little one-room school I attended was enjoyable and, I would have to admit in comparison with school standards of today, not very taxing of one's ability. Even so, it was good enough to provide the basis for a higher education later.

"Much of my free time in winter in grade school days was spent in trapping. A good skunk pelt would bring three to four dollars, and possum, raccoon and muskrat pelts also netted a pretty good price in those days.

"The skunk odor was not saleable, but it had its uses. I recall filling a small bottle from the musk gland and taking the bottle to school with me.

"On arrival, I decided not to take it inside and risk having the teacher find it on me, so I removed a loose brick in the school foundation and threw it underneath.

"Unfortunately the bottle hit a stone and broke. It was a cold day, the school stove was very hot, and it wasn't long before the teacher had to let out school because of the skunks under the school house."

## Three on a Pony

YOUNG Bill Norris had an older sister Katherine, now Mrs. Fred Buffett of Omaha, and a twin sister Willa, who teaches guidance and counseling at Michigan State University.

"All three of us rode one pony to school," he recalls. "Being the only boy, you can easily figure out where I sat. However, having the back seat was all right because it was fun."

One morning, my dog, but with treed what I thought was a coon. In the faint morning light, with my flashlight, I could see a ring tail and, being excited, I shot the animal. It turned out to be the hired man's tomcat.

"In fact, I did not know it was the hired man's tomcat until later. I skinned him and put the pelt to dry, and a few days later the hired man saw his tomcat hanging in the corn crib."

Young Norris drove a Model T eight miles to high school in Red Cloud. He was a lineman on the football team. During that time he showed an interest in electronic matters; he assembled a ham radio outfit.

## He Herded Cattle

HE helped his father herd and round up cattle in the fall and spring. In summer, when the Republican River would get low, some bo-

Control Data's president, William C. Norris, was born and reared on a farm between Inavale and Red Cloud, Neb., then was graduated in engineering from the University of Nebraska.



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vines would wade across to reach greener pastures and then heavy rains would cause the river to flood.

"It was six or seven miles to drive the cattle back around across a bridge," he said, "so we would force them back across the river. This meant having the horse swim the river several times, which I always found to be exciting as I was not given to daring physical feats."

Far less exciting was the chore of helping to milk five or six cows.

"Some weren't too well trained," he recalled, "so there was occasionally a foot in the bucket or some spilled milk."

Bill Norris decided that he did not wish to be a farmer, primarily because of the vagaries of nature in the area where he lived.

"There were simply too many dry years," he declared. "My father's keen disappointment at prolonged as-

sure to not be subject to something so much beyond my control." He enrolled in electrical engineering at the University of Nebraska in 1928. He earned part of his way, and during two years was a radio repairman for Walt's Music Store in Lincoln. He remembers his employer as "a very fine, understanding person."

A roommate was Marvin Schmid, who came to Omaha as a lawyer and has been active in civic affairs.

"Bill had a real determination to succeed," says Mr. Schmid, past president of the Chamber of Commerce. "He knew what he wanted and had an almost singleness of purpose. He was a real good student, but he had time for a little social life on the week ends, too."

## A Russian Thistle Triumph

YOUNG Norris found it impossible to get a job in engineering



A teen-age photo of Mr. Norris

"It is my recollection that no one in my graduating class was able to get an engineering position until several years later," he says.

His father, William H. Norris, had died two months before graduation and, with depressed farm prices plus severe drouths, Bill Norris found it necessary to run the home farm for a while.

"I became active in soil conservation work and I believe that I helped lay out the first pasture terraces in Webster County.

"One experience in 1934 stands out in my mind. Small grain had failed and the corn was burning, having gotten only knee-high. The only really green thing was Russian thistles, which had grown profusely after the grain failed.

"Many farmers had to sell their livestock because of lack of food. I recalled that when I was a boy being somewhat surprised to see cattle, in the winter time, pick Russian thistles out of alfalfa hay and eat them.

"This caused me to believe that by cutting and stacking green Russian thistles, when added with a small amount of concentrated food (like cottonseed cake), I could get the cattle through the winter at a very reasonable cost. Then we could gamble on having moisture in the spring.

"We moved and stacked what I recall as more than a hundred acres of green Russian thistles. I had difficulty finding people to help because no one wanted the onus of being involved in such a foolhardy enterprise.

"I bought up some more cows at distress sales. The cows did eat the thistles and came through the winter in surprisingly good shape. Luckily, there was moisture the next spring.

"As I have learned, you always have to count on a certain amount of

Continued on next page.



William C. Norris and twin sister Willa are shown on family pony at school near Inavale.

sota. It took nearly two months to sell the stock at one dollar a share.

## Fast Expansion

THE company began with 11 employees. Now there are 44 hundred. The original stock was split three-for-one two years ago. A share originally purchased for a dollar now would be worth around three hundred dollars.

From the second year on the company has managed a profit, and sales this year are expected to rise to above 70 million dollars.

Control Data has avoided direct competition with giants in the field such as International Business Machines. It manufactures high-speed digital computer systems, ranging in size, as Mr. Norris puts it, "from small to medium, large and super."

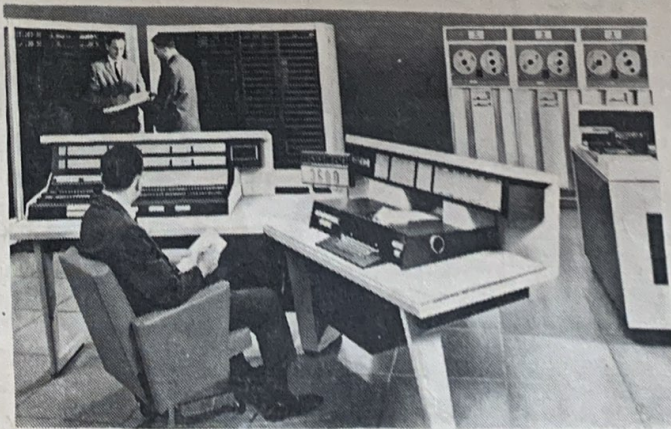
The super computer is the new "6600" scheduled for delivery next year. It carries a seven-million-dollar price tag and Mr. Norris says it "might be considered the first of the third-generation computers."

Last March, Control Data surprised the industry by acquiring the computer division of Bendix Corporation with its skilled manpower, as part of its plan to move into the data processing field.

Within the last year it has set up subsidiaries in Canada, Switzerland, Sweden, West Germany, France, The Netherlands and Australia.

Mr. Norris is confident, but is far from being cocky. He has known adversity at more than one stage in his life, and he feels it has taught him some valuable lessons.

Despite the heat of battle these days in electronics, Mr. Norris carries vivid and happy memories of his boyhood in Nebraska.



Control Data Corporation recently marketed its computer 3600, and early next year will have a still larger one, called the 6600.

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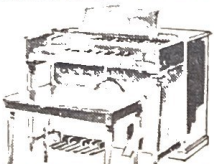


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### Office Carpets Opposed

Continued from preceding page.  
luck. Yet you have to take that initial gamble or all the luck in the world will not be of any benefit."

Two years after Mr. Norris's graduation, things were better on the farm, and his mother could operate it with hired men. She continued to do it until a few years ago. Now 89, she lives in the home where her husband had lived all his life.

Mr. Norris now got a job with Westinghouse as a sales engineer. He spent one year in Omaha, then was transferred to Chicago.

He left that company in 1941 to join the Navy, and during the next five years he did research on fire control, rose to the rank of commander and became director of a naval communications section.

After the war, a company called Engineering Research Associates was formed to make computers by a group of officers who had served with Mr. Norris. The Nebraskan was vice-president of operations.

In 1952 this firm was sold to Remington Rand, which had also bought out the makers of the Univac computer. Mr. Norris for three years was vice-president of Remington's ERA division, then was vice president and general manager of Sperry Rand's Univac division.

Looking back, Mr. Norris termed the merger of ERA with Remington a "tremendous mismatch." He says that the turnover of top executives hampered long-range planning, and that a technological and sales lead over IBM evaporated rapidly.

"An Absence of Carpeting" — THERE is no carpeting of executive offices with rare exceptions.

"At the time we planned our new headquarters, I requested that there be no carpeting in any office," said Mr. Norris. "Some of my associates felt strongly that there should be carpeting in my office, which joins the board of directors' meeting room.

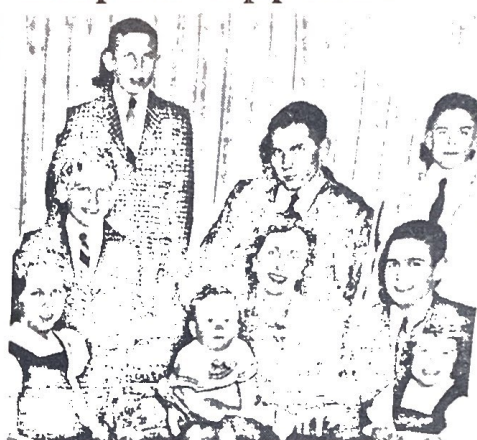
"They argued that I should have it because of the customers. I didn't want to be dictatorial, so we did outfit the board and one other meeting room and the offices adjacent to them with carpeting.

"Carpeting to me is like any other decoration in an office; I notice it once and from then on probably never notice it again particularly."

A genuinely humble and soft-spoken man, Mr. Norris



Despite Control Data's growth, the Norris family continues to live in a frame house in St. Paul, Minn. An addition was built recently.



Members of William C. Norris's family are (from left), back row: Daniel, William, Jr. and Brian; middle row, Roger, Mrs. Norris with David, and George; bottom row, Constance and Mary.

about a half million dollars in working capital, and salaries were cut in half to conserve cash.

"Some didn't like it much," he says, "but it was better to do this than lay off people."

The company ended its first year 200 thousand dollars in the red, but that was the last deficit period. Earnings for the second year were 280 thousand dollars. The record for the 1963 fiscal year was \$63,111,401 in sales and \$8,004,751 in earnings.

The company recently built a severely modern headquarters in suburban Minneapolis, but the austerity of the early days hasn't all disappeared.

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A genuinely humble and soft-spoken man, Mr. Norris

enjoys great respect on the part of associates.

He believes there's no substitute for brains in employees and he wants ideas that work. He also believes that success is dependent on meticulous planning, and his work day is filled with conferences, meetings, talks, inspections and decisions.

He finds it hard to explain how he "relaxes." On week ends he takes home reports he didn't have time to read at the office. But he spends as much time as he can with his family.

He was married in the early '40s to Jane Malley, who was when a lieutenant in the WAVES. They have six sons in age from 16 down to 2 1/2 years.

### Study Table at Home

The president of Control Data is determined that his children make the most of their educational opportunities. He holds a study table at regular spots and oversees their homework.

He also likes to take them on boating and fishing jaunts. Last summer and on several previous occasions the whole family vacationed at the Norris home place near Inavale.

Growth of the company hasn't changed their standard of living. They continue to reside in a roomy frame house in St. Paul. An addition was built several years ago.

Back in 1957, it took courage to quit a good job and take a flier in the highly competitive electronics industry.

Business Week magazine stated recently that "few gave the new Minneapolis company much chance to survive."

Mr. Norris was under no illusions concerning the risk involved, but he and his wife decided they'd stake what they had, agreeing that if they lost they'd go on a bread and water diet while starting anew.

Now, six years later, Control Data is planning a gradual expansion in business data processing, looking at specific market areas and developing it's own Texas Instruments. "We are optimistic. We have the tools for continued substantial growth and we believe we can cope with competition."

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Business and Markets

Board's Stock  
Wed., Dec. 25, 1963

### Predicts Future Computers Of Still Larger Dimensions

By DON BARRETT

MINNEAPOLIS — Future computer depreciation on its large computers will be "substantially larger" than the largest now being built, according to William C. Norris, president of Control Data Corp. Mr. Norris told the Milwaukee Investment Analysts Society here last week that the firm's 6500 computer will be "hybrid" rather than

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