IBM Personal Computer

In the beginning, there was the IBM Personal Computer.

Well, not really.

Although IBM's launch of the Personal Computer (IBM 5150) in 1981 set the industry standard for personal computing, IBM had introduced a variety of small computers for individual users several years before that. So while now is certainly an appropriate moment to salute the legendary IBM PC on its 20th birthday, it's also a good time to take a brief look back at some of the pioneering IBM products that immediately preceded it.

One of the earliest IBM attempts to move computing into the hands of single users was the "SCAMP" project in 1973. This six-month development effort by the company's General Systems Division (GSD) produced a prototype device dubbed "Special Computer, APL Machine Portable" (SCAMP) that *PC Magazine* in 1983 called a "revolutionary concept" and "the world's first personal computer." To build the prototype in the short half-year allowed, its creators acquired off-the-shelf materials for major components. SCAMP could be used as a desktop calculator, an interactive APL programming device and as a "dispenser" of canned applications. The successful demonstration of the prototype in 1973 led to the launch of the IBM 5100 Portable Computer two years later.