Subject: MITS Altair 8800
Posted by Wayne Parham on Tue, 27 Aug 2024 18:44:28 GMT
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The Altair 8800 was the first popular general purpose microcomputer. It was introduced in late 1974.

There were a few other microprocessor-based systems that predated it, but they weren't as versatile or as popular as the Altair 8800. This is the first microcomputer system that had any sort of public appeal. And by "public appeal," what I mean is visibility to folks that were more comfortable with schematics, soldering irons and slide rules than they were with anything else.

The Altair 8800 design borrowed heavily from minicomputers, specifically the Data General Nova line, having a front panel that was used primarily for initial startup and for troubleshooting. It also introduced the idea of open architecture, having a standard bus for processor, memory and peripheral connections.

A fully-equipped Altair 8800 had an Intel 8080 processor, up to 64Kb of RAM, an RS-232 interface for an ASCII terminal main console and a diskette drive or two. The most popular operating system for the Altair was CP/M.

This is also the machine that gave Microsoft its start. Bill Gates and Paul Allen saw the Altair 8800 on the cover of the January 1975 issue of Popular Electronics, and they approached the MITS owner, Ed Roberts about developing a version of the BASIC language interpreter for it. The rest is history.

Altair 8800