The C programming language emerged in 1972 at Bell Laboratories, crafted by Dennis Ritchie. Its primary purpose was to develop and implement the Unix operating system, which was initially written in assembly language. C offered a more structured and portable alternative while still providing low-level memory access and control, making it ideal for system programming.

C's lineage traces back to earlier languages like BCPL and B. Ritchie incorporated features from these predecessors while introducing new concepts, including data types and structured programming capabilities, to create a more robust and versatile language. The publication of "The C Programming Language" by Brian Kernighan and Dennis Ritchie in 1978, often referred to as "K&R C," established a de facto standard for the language and significantly contributed to its widespread adoption.