April 1st

Léon-Auguste-Antoine Bollée

Born: April 1, 1870; Le Mans, France
Died: Dec. 16, 1913

Bollée's Multiplier was the second (or third) direct-multiplying calculator, which (like the others) met with limited commercial success, although it did win a gold medal at the 1889 Paris Exposition. The first commercially successful direct multiplication calculator was the Millionaire [May 7].

The Multiplier's main advantage was its speed. In 1892, Bollée calculated the square root of an 18 digit number in about 30 seconds. The same calculation with a more conventional calculator (that used repeated addition to implement multiplication) was at least five minutes.

In his later years Bollée was more interested in designing, building, and racing light automobiles. He founded the racetrack at Le Mans, and the Le Mans 24 hour race.

Bollée's long career as an inventor began at the age of thirteen when he patented an unsinkable aquatic bicycle (Le Vélocipède nautique). On Sept. 18, 1921 an Englishman, Harold Ashton Rigby (1885 - 1945), successfully rode it across the Channel from Folkestone to Calais.

Alan Jay Perlis

Born: April 1, 1922;
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Died: Feb. 7, 1990

Perlis' work in programming languages resulting in his being awarded the first ever Turing Award [June 23] in 1966.

During the summers of 1948 and 1949 Perlis assisted the MIT Project Whirlwind [April 20] team with code for the still-unfinished computer.

Alan J. Perlis. (c) 2019 ACM.

In early 1955, Perlis' team at Purdue began work on the IT language ("Internal Translator"), a very early machine-independent language. This led to him becoming the chairman of the ACM Programming Languages Committee in 1957, and a delegate to the Zurich conference [May 27] where ALGOL 58 was defined.

He was the first editor of the "Communications of the ACM" (CACM) journal, and president of the ACM [Sept 15] in 1962. The ACM Curriculum Committee on Computer Science was formed during Perlis' term [March 00].

His 1982 article, "Epigrams on Programming," consists of witty short sentences about programming. A sample:

- "A year spent in artificial intelligence is enough to make one believe in God."
- "Computer Science is embarrassed by the computer."
- "A language that doesn't affect the way you think about programming is not worth knowing."
- "Lisp programmers know the value of everything and the cost of nothing."
- "Fools ignore complexity; pragmatists suffer it; experts avoid it; geniuses remove it."
- "It is easier to write an incorrect program than understand a correct one."
- "You think you KNOW when you learn, are more sure when you can write, even more when you can teach, but certain when you can program."

Norman Abramson

Born: April 1, 1932;
Boston, Massachusetts
Died: Dec. 1, 2020

At the University of Hawaii, Abramson led the team that developed the ALOHAnet wireless computer communication system. The goal was to use low-cost commercial radio equipment to connect users on Oahu and the other Hawaiian islands with a central time-sharing computer at the main Oahu campus.

ALOHAnet became operational in June 1971, providing the first public demonstration of a wireless packet data network. ALOHA originally stood for "Additive Links On-line Hawaii Area."

Unlike the ARPANET [Oct 29] where each node could only talk directly to a node at the other end of a wire or satellite circuit, ALOHAnet let all the client nodes communicated with a hub node on the same frequency. This was possible by employing an acknowledgment / retransmission scheme to deal with packet loss and collisions.

This approach radically reduced the complexity of the protocol and the networking hardware, and was subsequently adopted by other network protocols including Ethernet [May 22], and Wi-Fi networks.

Norman Hugh Nie

Born: April 1, 1943;
St. Louis, Missouri
Died: April 2, 2015

Nie was one of the co-developers of the "Statistical

Package for the Social Sciences" (SPSS) with C. Hadlai ("Tex") Hull and Dale Bent.

While a graduate student at Stanford, Nie was faced with the daunting task of analyzing data from thousands of responses to a questionnaire. The routines he wrote to automate that process, became part of SPSS.

The first SPSS manual (Nie, Bent and Hull, 1970) has been described as one of "sociology's most influential books" because it allowed a much wider group of researchers to perform statistical analysis on their data.

Planning and Coding Problems

April 1, 1947

Herman Goldstine [Sept 13] and John von Neumann [Dec 28] released the report, "Planning and Coding Problems for an Electronic Computing Instrument. Vol. 1". The second and third parts were published a year later, on April 15 and August 16 1948, respectively.

Vol. 1 covers a wide range of programming techniques, from flowcharts to numerical analysis. This was the first use of flowcharts for programming although the employment of flow diagrams for describing processes dates back to the 1920s to the "flow process chart" of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth.

Vol. 2 deals with sorting and merging in detail, and Vol. 3 briefly looks at the usefulness of subroutines. This notion had been floating around since the ENIAC days [Feb 15].

The [June 28] 1946 report, "Preliminary Discussion of the Logical Design of an Electronic Computing Instrument." by Arthur W. Burks [Oct 13], Goldstine, and von Neumann is often paired with these volumes. That report focusses on machine architecture.

Apple Computer Founded

April 1, 1976

Prev: [June 29] Next: [July 00]

Steve Jobs [Feb 24], Steve Wozniak [Aug 11], and Ron Wayne [May 17] signed a partnership agreement that established the Apple Computer Company. The intention was to sell Wozniak's Apple I [June 29].

Around 12 days later, Wayne dropped out, handed back his 10% share of the company in exchange for $800. He had decided that the financial risks were too great.

In an interview in the mid-1980s, Wozniak and Jobs recalled how they chose the Apple name:

Wozniak: "I remember driving down Highway 85, and Steve mentions, 'I've got a name: Apple Computer.' We kept thinking of other alternatives to that name, and we couldn't think of anything better."

Jobs: "And also remember that I worked at Atari, and it got us ahead of Atari in the phonebook."

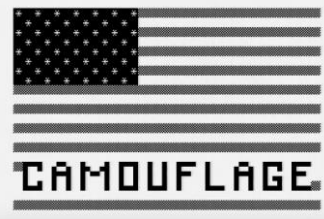
Camoflage

April 1, 1983

"Camouflage" was a single released by the musician Chris Sievey in 1983, who would become better known later for his comic character Frank Sidebottom.

The B-side is notable for being the first example of code released on a record: three programs written by Sievey for the Sinclair ZX81 [March 5].

Two of them are versions of a game called "Flying Train" for the 1K and 16K ZX81's, and the third is a simple animation for the song on Side A. YouTuber soundhog09 has kindly uploaded a copy at `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8u9ZyV-BHFA`. The code is stored as audio tones in the record's grooves, and soundhog09 had to employ PVA glue and a mix of audio filters to retrieve the data.



Chris Sievey: Camouflage Animation. 1983

The credits include "Recorded - Strawberry - April 1 C.V", which is why I've placed this entry here; "Strawberrry" is a reference to Strawberry Studios in Stockport, UK.

A contemporary record (released in May) with a similar feature is "XL1", the second solo album by Pete Shelley. The lead-out groove of the B-side includes a program for the ZX Spectrum [April 23] coded by Joey Headen. It has 10 parts, one for each song, combining that song's lyrics with simple graphics made up of lines, circles, and blocks of color. Screenshots can be found at `http://www.headen.com/newpage11.htm`

Perhaps the best known use of code in music is on the "OK Computer" album by Radiohead [July 12] from 1997.

Kremvax

April 1, 1984

A message was sent to multiple newsgroups on USENET from Konstantin Chernenko (chernenko@kremvax.UUCP).

At the time, Chernenko (1911 – 1985) was the General Secretary of the Communist Party, and led the Soviet Union from Feb. 13, 1984 until his death thirteen months later, on March 10, 1985.

Chernenko explained that the Soviet Union wanted to join the network to "have a means of having an open discussion forum with the American and European people."

The message created a flood of responses, but two weeks later its true author, a European man named Piet Beertema, revealed it was a hoax. It is now credited with being the Internet's first April Fool's joke.

Six years later, when Moscow really did link up with the Internet, it adopted the domain name 'kremvax' in honor of the hoax.

Soybean Disks

April 1, 1985

Byte Magazine featured a section called "What's Not," instead of its usual "What's Hot" section. Included in the topics was a computer disk made of soybeans. The blurb ran: "If merely erasing sensitive data is not enough for you, Soycure Systems of Tokyo has developed the ultimate in disk security. Made entirely of processed soybeans, ParaSoya Disks are writable, readable, and edible. ParaSoya disks contain 84 percent more protein than average floppy disks and are available in 5¼-inch (regular) and 3½-inch (crunchy) formats."

The WELL Opens

April 1, 1985

Via a brief notice in the "Whole Earth Review," Stewart Brand [Dec 14] and Larry Brilliant opened The WELL (Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) one of the first online communities.

It began as a dial-up bulletin board system (BBS) on a leased VAX 11/750 running a conferencing program called Picospan. There were 12 (or perhaps 6) phone lines and 800 MB storage, and by the end of 1987 had gathered together over 2000 users.

The WELL was organized around a collection of "conferences," each devoted to a subject likely to spark lively debate. Each conference could spawn new "topics," devoted to more specific discussions. Each conference had a host, guiding and monitoring discussions.

PicoSpan pioneered the "clothesline model" of conferencing: put up a new topic, and users would post responses to it. Also a user was unable to erase their previous posts, and posts never expired. Everyone's real name was available on the system, linked to his or her login.

The founders of the Electronic Frontier Foundation [July 6], John Perry Barlow [Oct 3], John Gilmore [Aug 00], and Mitch Kapor [Nov 1], first met on the WELL. Also, Howard Rheingold, an early and active member, was inspired to write "The Virtual Community" based on his experiences.

The SunKit / SunStruck Division

April 1, 1985-1993

The early days of Sun Microsystems [Feb 24] were bedeviled by the April Fool pranks of the "SunKit Racing" and the SunStruck teams, and even today the identities of the perpetrators is shrouded in mystery. However, Bill Shannon's name is often associated with the groups (he was largely responsible for transforming Bill Joy's [Nov 8] BSD into the first version of SunOS).

Some of the more mind-blowing japes:

- Moving Eric Schmidt's [April 27] office onto a platform in the company's pond (1985);
- Reassembling a fully functional VW Beetle inside Eric Schmidt's office (1986);
- Floating Bill Joy's brand new Ferrari in the pond (1987);
- Installing a golf course in Scott McNealy [Nov 13] and Bernie Lacroute's offices (1988).

IP over Avian Carriers

April 1, 1990

The "IP over Avian Carriers" (IPoAC) proposal argued for a radical new hardware level for transporting Internet Protocol (IP) traffic. David Waitzman was responsible for this revolutionary concept, as detailed in RFC 1149 (https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc1149).

On April 28, 2001, IPoAC was successfully implemented by the Bergen Linux user group in Norway, as the "Carrier Pigeon Internet Protocol" (CPIP). Nine IP packets were transported over a distance of approximately 5 km by nine pigeon. Each packet contained a single ICMP Echo Request, and four responses were received.

A whimsical woodcut from William Yarrell's "A History of British Birds" (1843).

Admittedly, the packet loss ratio was high (55%). but this was mostly due to operator error. For example, during the tests one pigeon bounced off a window, which caused one onlooker to remark, "Oh, no! Windows causing problems again."

Also the response time was somewhat desultory, ranging from 3000 seconds (50 minutes) to over 6000 seconds. Clearly, this technology suffers from poor latency. Nevertheless, for large data transfers, IPoAC offers high average throughput when

flash memory devices are used as the packet containers.

There has been at least one real-world use of this approach, by Lockheed [Aug 18] in the early 1980s. Of course, IPoAC is essentially a form of sneakernet [July 11], which is still a very popular form of data transfer.

Waitzman described an improvement to his protocol in RFC 2549, "IP over Avian Carriers with Quality of Service," released on April 1, 1999.

Drunk Driving on the Internet

April 1, 1994

An article by John C. Dvorak in the April issue of "PC Computing" described a bill making its way through Congress that would make it illegal to use the Internet while drunk.

The bill had come about because the Internet was often referred to as an "Information Highway" [Jan 3], and Dvorak noted that, "Congress apparently thinks being drunk on a highway is bad no matter what kind of highway it is."

The bill was supposedly numbered 040194 (i.e. 04/01/94), and the contact person was Lirpa Sloof.

For more Dvorak, see [Sept 27], [Dec 26].

Internet Spring Cleaning

April 1, 1997

An email message was circulated warning that the Internet would be shut down for cleaning for 24 hours from March 31 until April 2. This was necessary to clear out the "electronic flotsam and jetsam" such as dead e-mail and inactive FTP directories. Unused Web and Gopher [Feb 7] sites would also be purged. During this time, users were warned to disconnect all devices from the Internet.

The cleaning would be performed by "five very powerful Japanese-built multi-lingual Internet-crawling robots (Toshiba ML-2274s) situated around the world."

The message supposedly originated from the "Interconnected Network Maintenance Staff, Main Branch, MIT."

Hyper Text Coffee Pot Control Protocol

April 1, 1998

The "Hyper Text Coffee Pot Control Protocol" (HTCPCP) controls and monitors coffee pots and their associated condiments. It was proposed by Larry Masinter in RFC 2324 (https://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2324.txt).

The new HTTP functionality offered by HTCPCP includes:

- BREW: This causes the server to brew coffee. The method can include an "Accept-Additions" header, with values such as Cream, Whole-milk, Vanilla, Raspberry, Whisky, and Aquavit.
- WHEN: This causes the server to stop adding milk (or other additions) to the coffee. This is equivalent to saying "when" to a human server.
- GET: This "retrieves" the coffee from the server. The details on how this is to be implemented are not covered in the RFC, but IPoAC seems an obvious choice [three entries back].

On April 1, 2014, an extension of HTCPCP called HTCPCP-TEA was published as RFC 7168 (https://tools.ietf.org/html/rfc7168). It adds support for tea making.

One of the protocol's error responses, "418 I'm a teapot", has provoked much somber debate amongst developers responsible for maintaining and developing the "core" HTTP specification. They have claimed that a 418 error is not a valid status code and so should be should be removed. This calamity was averted in 2017 by the actions of a 15-year old developer Shane Brunswick, who established the "Save 418 Movement".

Google's MentalPlex

April 1, 2000

Google's experimental MentalPlex search engine (https://archive.google.com/mentalplex/) performs a search by having the user stare at a spinning disk while creating a mental image of what they want MentalPlex to find. The results would appear after clicking on the disk with the cursor.

The Google MentalPlex Disk. (c) Google.

Sadly, MentalPlex, like so many Google products, performed poorly, usually generating an error message. Some of these were:

- Error 001: Weak or no signal detected. Upgrade transmitter and retry.
- Error 666: Multiple transmitters detected. Silence voices in your head and try again.
- Error 01: Brainwaves received in analog. Please re-think in digital.
- Error 005: Searching on this topic is prohibited under international law.
- Error 008: Interference detected. Remove aluminum

foil and remote control devices.

- Error: Insufficient conviction. Please clap hands three times, while chanting "I believe" and try again.

Enigma Stolen
April 1, 2000

An Enigma machine [Feb 23] was stolen from the Bletchley Park museum.

Christine Large, the director of the Bletchley Park Trust, said, "This particular one was extra special because it was used by the German SS and was made to a higher standard than the ones which were used in the field."

It was one of only three such machines in the world, and its value was estimated at more than £100,000. Also, the theft occurred just a week before a new security system was to be installed.

The machine's whereabouts remained a mystery until Sept. 2000, when a man identifying himself as "The Master" sent a note to Bletchley Park demanding £25,000 and threatened to destroy the machine if the ransom wasn't paid. In early Oct., Bletchley Park announced that it would pay the ransom, but the deadline passed with no word from the blackmailer.

Two weeks later, BBC TV presenter Jeremy Paxman received a parcel containing the machine. It was missing three of its four encryption rotor wheels. Finally, in Nov. 2000, an antiques dealer was arrested after telephoning the "Sunday Times" newspaper to arrange the return of the missing wheels.

"The Master" is a recurring character in the BBC science fiction series "Doctor Who" [Nov 23]. He/she is a renegade Time Lord and the archenemy of the Doctor.

Evil Bit Proposal
April 1, 2003

RFC 3514 (https://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc3514.txt), authored by Steve Bellovin, offers a simple but effective solution to the detection of network packets that are untended to be used for evil deeds.

The IPv4 packet header includes an unused "Reserved Bit", which the RFC suggests should be reassigned as an "Evil Bit". Quite simply, if the packet's intention is to be evil, then this bit should be set. This would make higher levels of computer security engineering much easier to implement.

FreeBSD added this elegant security solution to its IPv4 stack to coincide with the release of the RFC, but the changes were removed on the following day.

Perhaps inspired by this RFC, Google briefly added an "evil=true" parameter to Ajax API requests on this day in 2010.

Gmail Launched
April 1, 2004

Google launched Gmail, a free email service, as an invitation-only beta. (It would be another three years before it was made available to the general public.)

The launch was met with wide-spread skepticism due to Google's long-standing tradition of April Fool's jokes (e.g. [three entries back]).

The service offered 1GB of storage, an unprecedented amount for a major email provider. It also quickly became know for its effective spam filters. Gmail was developed by Paul Buchheit under the codename Caribou.

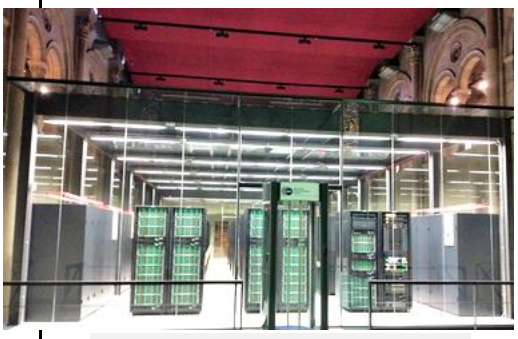
One unforeseen consequence of Gmail's popularity was its adverse effect on the graphic design firm, Gamil Design. By 2006 its website was receiving 600,000 hits per month from Gmail users. Gamil responded by pinning a message on its front page: "You may have arrived here by misspelling Gmail. We understand. Typing fast is not our strongest skill."

After more than five years, Gmail finally left beta in July 7, 2009.

In 2013, Microsoft launched an advertising campaign attacking Gmail for scanning all of its users' emails. A Microsoft spokesperson called the issue, "Google's kryptonite." This turned out to be optimistic, since by 2018, Gmail had an estimated 1.5 billion users worldwide.

Supercomputing Chapel
April 1, 2005

The Barcelona Supercomputing Center, at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC), was established on this day in a deconsecrated 19th century church, the Chapel Torre Girona. The building had been used as a Catholic church until the early 1960s.



MareNostrum 4 at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center (2017). Photo by Gemmaribasmaspoch. CC BY-SA 4.0.

The center's Intel Xeon Platinum-based supercomputer, called the MareNostrum, is encased in a climate-controlled glass box that runs the length of the chapel. However, the rest of the building's beautiful architecture has been left untouched.

The center made an appearance in Dan Brown's 2017 novel

"Origin", as the home of the E-Wave device.

For more religious-themed computing, see [April 4].

SIGBOVIK

April 1, 2007, and every year since

SIGBOVIK (the conference of the ACH Special Interest Group on Harry Quagmiry Bovik; http://sigbovik.org/) is a prestigious computer science conference held at CMU, organized by the much loved Association of Computational Heresy.

The conference prides itself on specializing in lesser-known areas of academic research including: Inept Expert Systems, Perplexity Theory, Thaughmaturgic Circles, the Denotational Semantics of Pidgin and Creole, Blog Shapes, Elbow Macaroni, Rasterized Love Triangles, Synergistic Hyperparadigmatism, Computational Archaeolinguistics, and any other topic approved by the conference organizers.

GMail Tap

April 1, 2012

Google announced the release of "Gmail Tap", an app that allows users to send e-mails written in Morse Code [Oct 19] from their mobile phones.

Selling points for this traditional messaging approach include a much reduced set of keys (two, or perhaps three), simple enough to be employed without looking at the screen. This makes it "ideal for situations where you need to discreetly send e-mails, such as when you're on a date or in a meeting with your boss."

Morse's great-great-grandnephew Reed Morse – a Google engineer – was instrumental in the development of the product.

Heartbleed Bug Discovered

April 1, 2014

Heartbleed was a security bug in the open source OpenSSL cryptography library, accidentally added to the code on Dec 31, 2011. It was only discovered by Google's security team on this day, even though the code had been reviewed by one of OpenSSL's four core developers before it was added.

The bug could allow hackers to eavesdrop on communications, and steal information such as usernames, passwords, and documents.

Heartbleed was a serious concern because OpenSSL protects a significant portion of the world's web servers. Subsequently, it was determined that around 17% of them were vulnerable to attack, and based on the examination of audit logs from a few high profile servers, hackers may have been exploiting the flaw for at least five months before its discovery.

The OpenSSL foundation's president, Steve Marquess, said later, "The mystery is not that a few overworked volunteers missed this bug; the mystery is why it hasn't happened more often."