April 24th

Lawrence Gordon Tesler

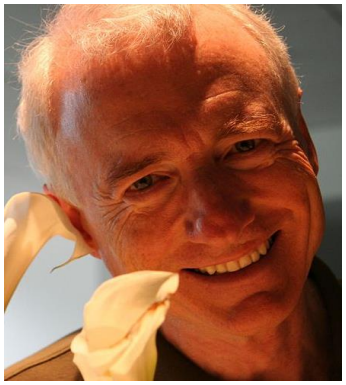
Born: April 24, 1945;

Bronx, New York
Died: Feb. 16, 2020

Tesler was the primary inventor of the cut-copy-paste operations, while he and Tim Mott were working on the Gypsy word processor [Oct 00] at Xerox PARC in the 1970s.

In 1980 he moved to Apple, where he worked on the Lisa [Jan 19]. In particular, he simplified the mouse by reducing the controls down to a single button (PARC mice had three buttons at one time, but Douglas Engelbart's [Jan 30] first mouse only had one [Nov 14].)

In 1983 his team developed Clascal, the first Pascal to support OOP, and later he and Niklaus Wirth [Feb 15] worked on "Object Pascal". He was also involved in the development of MacApp, one of the first libraries of classes for writing applications. and he led the Apple Newton [Aug 3] development team.



Larry Tesler (2007). Photo from the Yahoo! Blog. CC BY 2.0.

While at Apple, Tesler obtained a Californian car license plate that read "NO MODES," emphasizing his passion for software where the user is never "stuck" in a mode. (The vi editor [Nov 8] is a good example, utilizing three separate modes for commands, text insertion, and "last line" operations.) Along with others, he began using the phrase "Don't Mode Me In", as a rallying call.

Long before Xerox or Apple, in the late 1960s, Tesler was involved in the Midpeninsula Free University (MFU), one of the more successful free universities that appeared as part of Berkeley's Free Speech Movement. MFU featured an open curriculum, where a member could offer a course in anything. There was no campus; classes were taught in homes and stores. Tesler's courses included: "How to end the IBM Monopoly", "Computers Now", and "Procrastination".

While teaching his IBM course, Tesler gradually realized that most of his students actually worked for the company. At first none of them would admit it, but after a series of confessions, they began discussing the behemoth's behavior (which was under investigation by the Justice Department at the time [Jan 17]).

Other notable MFU staff involved in computing were John McCarthy [Sept 4], Jim Warren [July 20], Stewart Brand [Dec 14], and Marc Porat [May 00].

Programming the UNIVAC

April 24, 1947

The Electronic Control Company (ECC), soon to be called the Eckert–Mauchly Computer Corporation (EMCC [Dec 8]), published "A Tentative Instruction Code for a Statistical EDVAC." About a month later, the name "statistical EDVAC" was changed to UNIVAC [March 31]; the machine was also called the EDVAC II in some documents.

Some historian consider this to be the first publication about programming an electronic digital computer. However, Howard Aiken [March 8] and Grace Hopper [Dec 9] had released "A Manual of Operation for the Automatic Sequence Controlled Calculator" the previous year [March 00], and published several magazine articles. However, the ASCC didn't have a stored-program architecture, so could perhaps be excluded.

The report included a discussion of subroutines, including the fact that it was possible to relocate them in memory.

EMCC released an initial table of instruction codes, called C-1, a week later. Among the 30 instructions, were ones to write data to an oscilloscope, and to compare values using binary subtraction.

John Wendell Thompson

Born: April 24, 1949;

Fort Dix, New Jersey

Thompson was the only African American leading a major technology company during his tenure (1999 - 2009) as CEO of Symantec. He took on the job after the company's founder Gordon Eubanks [Nov 7] stepped down.

He later joined the Board of Microsoft, and on Feb. 4, 2014, became the chairman, succeeding Bill Gates [June 27], and subsequently led the search for Microsoft's next CEO – Satya Nadella [Jan 6].

Thompson went to college on a music scholarship, but although he played the clarinet and saxophone, his goal was always to become a businessman.

He worked for IBM for 28 years, and kicked back against that company's traditional look by sporting a mustache, a large afro hairstyle, and wearing leisure suit attire.

Goodbye Apple III
April 24, 1984

Apple abruptly discontinued production of the Apple III [May 19] and III+.

Only an estimated 120,000 units had been sold, resulting in a loss of around $60 million for the company. In an interview with Playboy magazine, Steve Jobs [Feb 24] described that loss as "Infinite, incalculable amounts."

Steve Wozniak [Aug 11] later said that the primary reason for the Apple III's failure was that the system was designed by Apple's marketing department, unlike previous engineering-driven projects.

On the plus side, the Apple III's failure led Apple to reevaluate their plans to phase out the Apple II [June 5], which remained available until the early 1990s [next entry].

Also, the Apple III's hierarchical file system and some design ideas from Apple SOS (the Sophisticated Operating System), became part of ProDOS and the GS/OS in later Apple IIs and the Lisa [Jan 19].

Apple IIc Released
April 24, 1984

The Apple IIc was the fourth machine in the Apple II [June 5] line, and the company's first attempt at a portable computer (weighing in at 7.5 lbs., minus the monitor). Indeed, the "c" in the name stood for "compact," but the machine wasn't really a true portable as it lacked a built-in battery and display. Its motherboard was also missing expansion slots for plug-in cards, which was part of its "appliance computer" design: the IIc was meant to be ready-to-use, out of the box, with no technical know-how required by the customer.

The machine introduced Apple's Snow White design, developed by Hartmut Esslinger [Nov 26], which became the standard for Apple gear for nearly a decade afterwards [March 19]. Aside from the color, it prominently employed vertical and horizontal stripes for decoration, ventilation, and to produce the illusion that the case was smaller than it actually was.

The name "Snow White" [Dec 21] referred to seven types of product which were to use the design, each with a codename from one of the dwarfs. "Happy" was the name for the next generation of Macs, while "grumpy" was assigned to printers.

An Apple IIc with a monitor. Photo by Bilby. CC BY 3.0.

Sadly, although Apple had predicted that it would sell 100,000 IIc's per month, it sold closer to 100,000 per year. Rather embarrassingly, even the dismal PCjr [Nov 1] outsold it. The problem was its lack of expandability, which meant that popular cards like the Z-80 SoftCard [April 2] couldn't be used, combined with the presence of the very similar Apple IIe which *was* expandable.

G4 Pongs
April 24, 2002

The US TV channel G4 was an entire channel devoted to the video games industry. It was created by Charles Hirschhorn, a former president of Walt Disney TV. The initial aim was to create a service similar to TechTV [May 11] but geared more toward MTV's demographic. It was launched on this day with a nonstop Pong [Nov 29] marathon that lasted for an entire week.

Two years later, on March 25, 2004, G4 Media announced that it was acquiring TechTV, which also coincided with a change of focus away from gaming to more general entertainment. In retrospect, this removed G4's unique reason for existing.

G4 closing down at the end of 2014, accompanied by the broadcasting of a game of Pong that slowly shrank on the screen until it disappeared.

Apple Watch
April 24, 2015

The first Apple Watch incorporated fitness tracking along with wireless connectivity to the user's iPhone [Jan 9]. It used a linear actuator (aka the "Taptic Engine") to provide feedback when an alert or notification was received, an accelerometer, and an ambient light sensor. Later versions added a GPS, an altimeter, a heart sensor, a brighter display, a water-resistant frame, and a more powerful dual-core processor.

The project was conceived in Jony Ive's [Feb 27] lab shortly after Steve Jobs' [Feb 24] death in 2011.

The device wasn't called the "iWatch" (which would have aligned it with the iPod [Oct 23], iPhone, and iPad [April 3]) due to trademark conflicts.

In comparison to other Apple products, marketing focused on the device as a fashion accessory. For example, a 12-page advertising spread in Vogue magazine highlighted the different combinations of watch bodies and bands, rather than the boring, incomprehensible technological stuff. Much attention was placed on the 18k gold models retailing from just $10,000 to $17,000 (plus tax).

Tim Bradshaw of the "Financial Times" newspaper tried out a watch for several days, and concluded in his review that

there was no obvious “killer application” [Sept 8] for it besides the standard one of telling the time. However, the Mashable website gushed that “it’s gorgeous, smart, fun, extensible… an object of true desire.”

The first commercial wrist wearable computer predates the Apple Watch by some 30 years: the Seiko UC-2000 was released on [Jan 00] 1984. Seiko also produced the RC-4500, better known as the WristMac, which was used by real-life astronauts [Aug 28], not fashion models