August 3rd

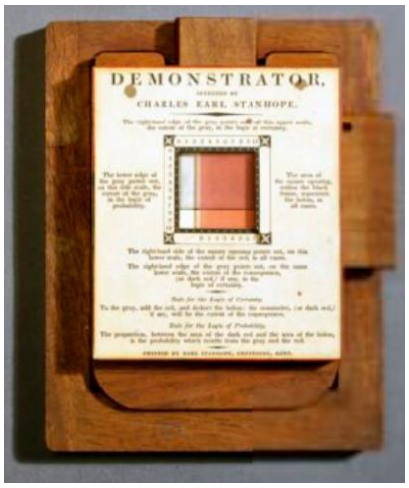
Charles Stanhope (Mahon), 3rd Earl Stanhope

Born: Aug. 3, 1753;

Stanhope, UK
Died: 15 December 1816

Stanhope is remembered for his calculating devices, which extended the stepped drum approach of Leibniz [July 1] with a tens-carry mechanism. Two of the prototypes were later acquired by Charles Babbage [Dec 26].

Stanhope also developed a range of "logic machines". In particular, his "Demonstrator" was able to solve elementary syllogisms and probability problems. In truth, the questions it could handle could just as easily be solved without the aid of a machine, but it demonstrated to other inventors, most notably to William Jevons [Sept 1], that this approach could work.



The Stanhope Demonstrator. Science Museum Group Collection. © The Board of Trustees.

Stanhope was known to his contemporaries for his strong opposition to the slave trade, as well as to the war against France (1803-1814), which earned him the nickname Citizen Stanhope. He was extensively caricatured by cartoonist of the time, such as James Gillray.

For more logic machines, see those by Jevons [Sept 1], Marquand [Dec 10], Peirce [Sept 10], and Pastore [Nov 13].

Alexander Schure

Born: Aug. 3, 1920;

Hamilton, Canada
Died: October 29, 2009

Schure founded the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT) in 1955, and in November 1974 hired Edwin Catmull [March 31] and Alvy Ray Smith [Sept 8] to lead NYIT's new computer graphics lab which went on to pioneer many new techniques.

Schure funded Lance Williams' unfinished "The Works", which would have been the first entirely 3D computer animated film. A trailer was screened at SIGGRAPH in 1982, and work on it continued until 1986. The technologies developed along the way were employed in later animations.

Many alumni of Schure's NYIT, including Catmull, Alvy Ray Smith, David DiFrancesco, Ralph Guggenheim, Jim Blinn, and Jim Clark [March 23], became the core of the graphics group at Lucasfilm [Sept 12], which later became Pixar [Feb 3].

For other pioneers of computer animation, see [Feb 28, April 8, July 4].

Guy L. (Bud) Tribble

Born: Aug. 3, 1953;

USA

Tribble was the manager of the Apple Mac's software development team [Jan 24], and helped to design its OS and user interface. He was also among the founders of NeXT [Oct 12].

Tribble coined the phrase "Reality Distortion Field" in 1981, to describe Steve Jobs' [Feb 24] charismatic influence on developers. Tribble later said that the term came from Star Trek's [Sept 8] 'The Menagerie" (series 1, episodes 11 and 12), where aliens created their own world through the power of their minds .

Nathan Myhrvold

Born: Aug. 3, 1959;

Seattle, Washington

Myhrvold and Chuck Whitmer created Mondrian, a clone of IBM's TopView multitasking environment for DOS, which was both faster and smaller. Microsoft liked it so much, that it bought the company in 1986, and Myhrvold ended up working for Microsoft for 13 years, becoming Chief Technology Officer and founding Microsoft Research [Feb 26] in 1991.

When the Science Museum in London built the computing section of Charles Babbage's Difference Engine #2 in 1991 [Dec 26], Myhrvold funded the construction of the output unit. He also commissioned a second Difference Engine for himself, which was on display at the Computer History Museum [Sept 24] for many years.

Myhrvold's popular 1997 TED talk on dinosaur sex concluded with him cracking a whip to demonstrate the function of an Apatosaurus's tail. At that point he said, "With that I conclude—unless someone wants to come up and talk about Microsoft as a dinosaur."

On Dec. 20, 2009, Myhrvold appeared on CNN to discuss his patented idea to eliminate global warming and climate change. It involves suspending hoses from helium balloons 25 km above the Earth.

New Tendencies

3 Aug. - 14 Sept. 1961

From 1961 to 1973, several international exhibitions were organized under the "New Tendencies" title in Zagreb, Croatia, to promote concrete and

constructive art, which later came to include computer-generated images and sculptures.

The fourth exhibition held in 1969 was entitled "Kompjuteri i vizualna istrazivanja" (Computer and Visual Research), and featured a 12-foot long computer-generated nude by Ken Knowlton [Feb 28] and Leon Harmon of Bell Labs, and "Boeing Man" by William Fetter [March 14]. It was organized by Vladimir Vladimir Bonačić, and Ivan Picelj.

Bonačić had previously created several computer-controlled light installations for galleries and public spaces, including one mounted on the exterior of the Nama department store in central Zagreb.

An iconic reminder of Tendencies 4 is the exhibition's poster by Ivan Picelj; its distinctively dotted design is based on computer paper tape.

Towards the end of Tendencies 4, British art critic Jonathan Benthall issued the so-called Zagreb Manifesto, urging artists to embrace new technologies in the service of mankind.

TRS-80

Aug, 3, 1977

Lewis Kornfeld, president of RadioShack [Feb 2], a division of Tandy, announced the TRS-80. It became one of 1977's trinity of PCs, with the Apple II [June 5] and Commodore's PET 2001 [April 15]. However, the TRS-80 was much cheaper than the other two, and so over 10,000 units were sold in the first six weeks, and 200,000 over the lifetime of the product. In 1980 *InfoWorld* described RadioShack as "the dominant supplier of small computers".

"TRS" stood for "Tandy RadioShack" and the "80" referenced the machine's microprocessor, the Zilog Z80 [March 9]. Later on, the device gained the label "Model 1" as RadioShack released newer machines. In any case, it was always best known by its jokey nickname, the "Trash-80". This was somewhat unfair, because the machine was actually very capable.

The TRS-80 Model I. Photo by Dave Jones. CC BY-SA 4.0.

It supported 4 to 16 KB of RAM, 4 to 12 KB of ROM, had a 12" display, a cassette-based data recorder, built-in BASIC, and included blackjack and backgammon games. RadioShack stores across America frequently ran them as sales demos, introducing many people to the joys of computer gaming.

A novel "feature" of the TRS-80 was that it radiated so much interference that a radio placed next to it could be used to provide sounds.

The BASIC fit into 4 KB of memory, which left no room for unnecessary features such as fancy error messages. Only three were supported: WHAT?, HOW? and SORRY.

The BASIC implementation was by the TRS-80 designer, Steve Leininger, based on the public domain "Palo Alto Tiny BASIC" [June 10] that Li-Chen Wang wrote in 1976. Leininger was also the chief architect of Tandy's Model II, Model III, and Color Computer.

On [March 29] 1984, Tandy released the first successful laptop, the Model 100.

The Newton MessagePad

Aug. 3, 1993

Apple introduced the Newton MessagePad, one of the first PDAs [Jan 7], at the Macworld Expo in Boston, a mere 14 months after it had been first announced [May 29].

Inside the 1 lb, 7.25 x 4.50 x 0.75 inch device was a 32-bit ARM chip [April 26], with 640 KB of RAM, and a 336 x 240 pixel LCD.

The Newton was innovative, but expensive, and problems with its handwriting recognition [Feb 1], its most anticipated feature, eventually made it into a bit of a joke. For example, Garry Trudeau memorably mocked the Newton in a weeklong arc of his comic strip *Doonesbury* [Aug 23]. What's often forgotten is that subsequent versions of the Newton improved the accuracy of the handwriting recognition to a point where it was actually quite useful.

Apple only sold 50,000 units in the product's first four months on the market, and this poor showing contributed to John Sculley's [April 6] departure on Oct 15 1993.

When Steve Jobs returned in 1997 [Sept 16], he quickly killed the project. He had always been critical of the device's performance, the management team, and the use of a stylus (fingers were better, he believed).