August 5th

Transatlantic Telegraph Cable

Aug. 5, 1858

After four failed attempts, the first transatlantic cable was completed when the ship Niagara dropped anchor off the Newfoundland coast. It had laid 1,016 miles of telegraph cable, starting from Ireland. The task had begun in 1857 after American businessman Cyrus West Field had secured financing in England and backing from the American and British governments.

The first test message was sent on August 12, and the line was officially opened on [August 16], 1858. Sadly, it broke down three weeks later, and wasn't reconnected until 1866. As a reward for his perseverance, Field received a gold medal from the US Congress in 1867, and was awarded the grand prize at the International Exposition in Paris.

The laying of the first trans-Pacific cable started on [Dec 14] 1902.

Alexander Keewatin Dewdney

Born: Aug. 5, 1941;

London, Ontario
Died: March 9, 2024

Dewdney followed Martin Gardner [Oct 21] and Douglas Hofstadter [Feb 15] as the author of *Scientific American*'s recreational mathematics column from 1984 to 1991.

Dewdney was the co-inventor with D. G. Jones of the game "Core War", where two or more battle programs (called "warriors") compete for control of a virtual computer. This is achieved by terminating the execution of opposing warriors (which happens if they execute an invalid instruction).

"Core War" was inspired by a self-replicating program called Creeper [March 15], and its companion, Reaper, which destroyed copies of Creeper. Dewdney was also inspired by the Darwin game [Aug 00].

Guiding a Minuteman II

Aug. 5, 1965

The first Minuteman II ICBM arrived at the Grand Forks Air Force Base, and was stored in its silo two days later.

Its inertial guidance system employed the Autonetics D-37C, the first computer constructed from (small-scale) integrated circuits. By contrast, the D-17B used in the Minuteman I [Nov 17] relied on transistors and other discrete components.

From 1962 through 1965, the Minuteman programme accounted for 20% of the chip industry's total sales. Every D-37C used about 2,000 integrated circuits, and the Air Force bought hundreds of missiles.

The other major customer of integrated circuits at the time was NASA for its Apollo Guidance Computer [Aug 25], which had similar weight and ruggedness constraints.

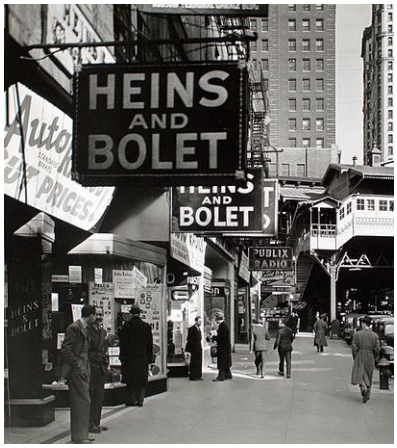
Goodbye Radio Row

Aug. 5, 1966

NYC's Radio Row was a warehouse district on the Lower West Side of Manhattan. By this date, when construction began on the World Trade Center, most of its electronics and radio stores had been relocated to 45th Street.

Radio Row was born when Harry Schneck opened "City Radio" on Cortlandt Street in 1921.

After WWII, the pace of expansion increased as the "radio" hobby expanded to include high-fidelity music reproduction, automatic control, and even robotics.



Radio Row, looking east along Cortlandt Street. Photo by Berenice Abbott.

The area eventually grew to around 13 blocks of electronics stores, going north-south from Barclay Street to Liberty Street, and east-west from Church Street to West Street. At its peak, more than 300 businesses and over 30,000 employees were located there. The *New York Times* called it a "paradise for electronics tinkerers."

Reid Hoffman

Born: Aug. 5, 1967;

Stanford, California

Hoffman was a co-founder of LinkedIn [May 5], one of the first business-oriented social networks. In 2016, he sold LinkedIn to Microsoft for a very reasonable $26 billion and a place on Microsoft's board.

His first company, SocialNet.com (1997), focused on "online dating and matching up people with similar interests, like golfers." SocialNet is regarded by many as the first online social network, although other contenders include Classmates [Nov 17] and SixDegrees [Dec 00].

In January 2000, he joined PayPal as the company's COO,

becoming part of the “PayPal Mafia” [Nov 26].

Hoffman arranged the first meeting between Mark Zuckerberg [May 14] and Peter Thiel, which led to Thiel's $500,000 angel investment in the company; Hoffman, spotting a good thing, also chipped in.

In 2016, Hoffman created "Trumped Up Cards", a party card game modeled after "Cards Against Humanity". Hoffman was an avid tabletop roleplaying gamer as a child, and his first paid job (at age 12) was as an editor at the game company Chaosium.

Joseph Anthony Liemandt

Born: Aug. 5, 1968;

Minnesota

In the 1990s Liemandt was called the "golden boy of enterprise software," as the founder of Trilogy which sold sales configuration software to companies such as Hewlett-Packard and Boeing. In 1996, he was the youngest self-made member of *The Forbes 400*, with a net worth of $500 million.

At the time, Trilogy was known for its testosterone-fueled work environment, and became an early model for Silicon Valley’s “boys club” culture.

When the dot-com [March 10] bubble burst in 2001, Trilogy slashed jobs and Liemandt took his company private, absorbing it into ESW Capital, his equity firm.

Crossover, the recruiting wing of ESW, currently looks for people ready to commit to a 40- or 50-hour work week as contract workers based at home. They must agree to install spyware on their computers so Crossover can track their productivity by grabbing screenshots every ten minutes and, in some cases, snapping photos from the PC's webcam.

First WCCC

Aug. 5 - 8, 1974

The First World Computer Chess Championship (WCCC) took place at the Hotel Birger-Jarl in Stockholm during that year's IFIP Congress. It was a four-round tournament with 13 participants, held each evening, Monday through Thursday.

The main interest was in how the Soviet entry, Kaissa, would compare to the leading American program, Chess 4.

Kaissa was coded in assembly by Mikhail Donskoy, Vladimir Arlazarov, Anatoly Uskov, and Georgy Adelson-Velsky, and named after the goddess of chess, Caïssa. It employed bitboards to represent board positions and used some advanced search techniques, notably the idea of null move pruning. It was based on software that had narrowly beaten the Kotok-McCarthy chess program on [Nov 22] 1966. It ran on an ICL 4-70 [July 9] located in Moscow.

Chess 4 was coded by Larry Atkin and David Slate in a mix of FORTRAN and assembly. It ran on the CDC 6600 [Sept 00] and CDC Cyber.

Kaissa won, 4 out of 4.

Visible Human Project Begins

Aug. 5, 1993

The Visible Human Project set out to create a detailed data set of cross-sectional photographs of the human body, that could be used in anatomy visualization applications. The project was run by the US National Library of Medicine (NLM) under the direction of Michael J. Ackerman.

Planning had begun in 1986; the data set for a male cadaver was completed in November 1994, and the female data was finished in November 1995.

The cadavers were frozen in a gelatin and water mixture in order to stabilize them for cutting. The male cadaver was cut in the axial plane at 1 mm intervals, and each of the resulting 1,871 slices was photographed in both analog and digital, yielding some 15 GB of data. In 2000, the photos were rescanned at a higher resolution, coming in at 65 GB.

The female cadaver was cut into slices at 0.33 mm intervals, resulting in some 40 GB of data.

King’s Cross Phone-In

Aug. 5, 1994

The King’s Cross Phone-In was a coordinated effort by British artist Heath Bunting to disrupt the everyday routine of King’s Cross railway station in London.

King's Cross as featured in the Illustrated London News in 1852.

Bunting utilized various newsgroups and emails lists to distribute instructions for the event, which included the telephone numbers for over 30 public phones located in the station.

Bunting encouraged people to: call the phone in a specific order, call at a certain time, call and speak to a stranger, or show up and pick up the telephone.

This was perhaps the very first flash mob, but see [June 17].

iSmell Trademarked

Aug. 5 1999

The iSmell Personal Scent Synthesizer (iSmell for short) was connected to a PC via a USB or serial port, and would emit a specific aroma when a user visited a Web site or opened an email. iSmell did this by reading an associated “digital scent" file and creating the fragance by mixing 128 “primary odors”.

In 1998, Stanford graduates Joel Bellenson (a molecular biologist) and Dexster Smith (an industrial engineer) were on holiday in South Beach, Florida when inspiration for the iSmell struck Bellenson: “I took a deep breath and said, ‘Man, is there some way I can capture this and give all the other loser geeks on the internet a taste of the outside world?”

In November 1999, the still-unreleased iSmell landed a scratch-and-sniff cover story in *Wired* [Jan 2].

“It had a fatal flaw,” one person who worked on the device later admitted. “The residue from the previous smell would linger…that residue polluted the palate and turned the second (and subsequent smells) into the smell of shit.”

In 2006, the iSmell was named one of the “25 Worst Tech Products of All Time” by *PC World Magazine*, which commented that “few products literally stink, but this one did.”

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there had been earlier, similar devices, but without the computing link. In 1959, two competing devices, the AromaRama, and the Smell-O-Vision, promised to create a “new immersive experience” in movie theatres across the US. Perfume containers were triggered by cues on the film, so the audience could experience more than 100 aromas piped fresh to their seats. These ranged from grass to the “scent of a trapped tiger.”

The Smell-O-Vision was ranked by *Time Magazine* as one of the 100 worst technological inventions ever.

“I am Rich” App

Aug. 5, 2008

The “I am Rich” $999.99 iPhone [Jan 9] app appeared in the Apple store [July 10]. It displayed a glowing red gem and an icon that, when pressed, displayed the following large text:

I am rich
I deserv it
I am good,
healthy & successful

The application, developed by Armin Heinrich, was described as “a work of art with no hidden function at all”.

Apple took the app down after one day, but not before it had been purchased eight times (six US sales and two European ones).

The next year, Heinrich released "I Am Rich LE" priced at $9.99. The new app sported several new features, including a calculator, “help system,” and the same text but without the spelling mistake.
