August 10th

Willgodt Theophil Odhner

Born: Aug. 10, 1845;

Dalby, Värmland, Sweden
Died: Sept. 15, 1905

In 1871, Odhner was asked to repair a Thomas de Colmar arithmometer [May 5], and decided he could design a more efficient machine. He replaced the bulky Leibniz cylinder [July 1] with a geared pinwheel, creating the barrel-shaped Odhner Arithmometer.

He filed a patent in 1878 which was granted on Oct. 29, and eventually started the commercial production of the arithmometer in 1890. It quickly became one of the most popular mechanical adding machines, that was still being used into the 1940s.

The other widespread adding device of the period was the Comptometer, developed by Dorr Felt [March 18]. For fast multiplication, Otto Steiger's Millionaire [May 7] was most people's choice.

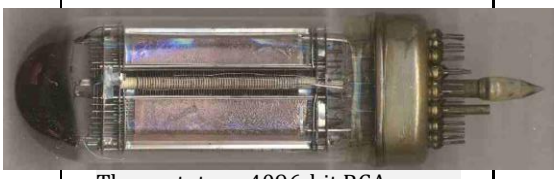
Jan Aleksander Rajchman

Born: Aug. 10, 1911;

London, England
Died: April 1, 1989

In January 1936, Rajchman joined Vladimir K. Zworykin's [June 30] RCA lab in Camden, New Jersey where he worked on a vacuum tube capable of binary arithmetic, dubbed the Computron. He also developed the first read-only memory, made up of a large matrix of resistances, which found use in some early computers.

Rajchman had less success with his storage vacuum tube, the Selectron, which was the first truly digital, random-access high-speed memory. After he presented it at the Moore School summer course [July 8] in 1946, things seemed to be going well when von Neumann decided to use it for the main memory in the IAS [June 10]. Unfortunately, although the Selectron was more reliable and faster than the competing Williams-Kilburn [June 26] tube, it proved very difficult to build in the quantities required. After many delays, von Neumann switched allegiances to the Williams-Kilburn tube in April 1948.



The prototype 4096-bit RCA Selectron Tube. Photo by OldZeb. CC BY-SA 3.0.

Rajchman began to study magnetic memory devices at the end of the 1940s, and came up with a design involving ferrite bands wrapped around thin metal tubes. Incidentally, these cores were squeezed into shape using a converted aspirin tablet press.

It was a hotly contested area: both Jay Forrester [July 14] and An Wang [Feb 7] had been working along similar lines, and got into a patent dispute [May 11] over the matter.

Shannon's Thesis Submitted

Aug. 10, 1937

Claude Shannon [April 30] took a part-time job as an operator of the Vannevar Bush differential analyser [July 23]. The analyser's relay circuits needed frequent attention, and Bush suggested that their design would make for a good thesis subject.

Shannon's Master's thesis, "A Symbolic Analysis of Relay and Switching Circuits", was later characterized as the most significant of the 20th century. He showed that the two-valued logic developed by George Boole [Nov 2] could form the basis for the design of electrical circuits using relays, such as a binary adder.

Independently, George Stibitz [April 30] drew the same parallels between relays and logic just a few months later [Nov 00], when he built his "Model K", a binary adder, from relays.

Lucas in a Cockpit

Aug. 10, 1983

A cockpit version of the "Star Wars" [May 4] arcade game was presented to George Lucas by Don Osborne, vice president of marketing for Atari [June 27]. Written on the side were the words: "A special thanks for creating THE FORCE behind so much fun."

The game places the player inside an X-Wing Fighter shooting down enemy Tie-Fighters, and attacking the Death Star, all the while being encouraged to "use the force" by a digitized Alec Guinness.

Atari sold just over 12,000 game cabinets, consisting of 10,245 uprights and 2,450 cockpits, making it a multi-million dollar earner.

The game had started life as a 3D space war game called Warp Speed, developed by Jed Margolin. Meanwhile, Atari had picked up the rights to develop Star Wars games in partnership with Lucasfilm [Sept 12]. Margolin suggested that Warp Speed would be a promising basis for one, and management agreed.

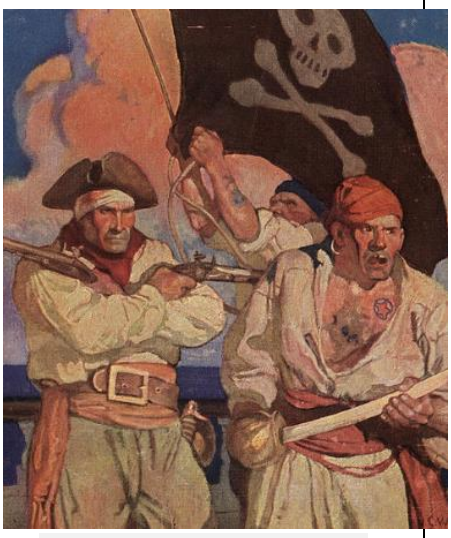
Pirate Bay Launched

Aug. 10, 2003

The Pirate Bay (TPB), an innocuous online index of

digital content maintained by the Swedish organization Piratbyrån, came online in Mexico on a server run by Gottfrid Svartholm (aka "Anakata").

A few months later the site moved to Sweden, where it could be satisfactorily hosted on a single Pentium III 1GHz laptop with 256 MB of RAM belonging to Fredrik Neij (aka "TiAMO"), with help from Peter Sunde (aka "Brokep").



Pirate Bay Sysadmins (?). Drawing by Newell Convers Wyeth (1911).

However, by the end of 2004, it was managing a million peers and over 60,000 torrent files. By 2008, the site was one of the 100 most popular websites in the world.

Of course, there have been a few hiccups. In April 2009, the founders were found guilty of assisting in copyright infringement, and were sentenced to one year in prison. Also, the website has been shutdown, and its domain seized, numerous times, but has always managed to bounce back.

The Pirate Bay's first server is now part of Sweden's National Museum of Science and Technology's collection. It can be found in the museum's "Inspiration Imitation" display, which aims to stimulate interest in intellectual property rights.

SCO vs. Novell Ruling

Aug. 10, 2007

On this day, the US District Court ruled in the SCO [Jan 00] vs. Novell case that Novell did indeed hold the copyright to UNIX [Oct 15] and UnixWare, allowing the company to claim licensing fees that SCO had previously withheld; see [June 14].

The court also ruled that SCO had to drop its suits against IBM and Sequent regarding the distribution of Linux [March 14].

Following the ruling, Novell announced that it had no interest in suing any individuals over the use or distribution of UNIX, stating "We don't believe there is Unix in Linux." The move earned the company the praise of the open source [Feb 3] community.

Of course, SCO decided to appeal, but that also ended in Novell's favor on March 30, 2010. For even more SCO litigation, see [March 6].

Pinterest is Open

Aug. 10, 2012

Pinterest is primarily an image sharing social network, although CEO Ben Silbermann prefers to call it a "catalogue of ideas" that inspires users to "go out and do that thing."

Pinterest was founded by Silbermann, Paul Sciarra and Evan Sharp in December 2009, and launched as a closed beta in March 2010. Silbermann contacted the site's first 5,000 users, giving them his personal phone number in order to gain feedback.

On this day, Pinterest was opened to everyone without the need for a request or invitation. The site reached 400 million monthly active users as of August 2020.

The Pinterest name refers to the platform's support for "pinning" interesting images to a shared board. Silbermann's wife came up with the name while watching TV. It does not refer to dramas written in the style of Harold Pinter (1930 – 2008), which is commonly termed "Pinteresque." Pinter disliked that term himself, but passed away before he could comment on "Pinterest".