

August 26th

Karen Ida Boalth Spärck Jones

Born: Aug. 26, 1935;
Huddersfield, Yorkshire
Died: April 4, 2007

Jones was a pioneer in both information retrieval (IR) and natural language processing (NLP). One of her most important contributions was the concept of inverse document frequency (IDF) weighting for IR, which she introduced in a 1972 paper. IDF is used in most search engines today.

Jones was instrumental in establishing the Intelligent Knowledge Based Systems research area in the UK Alvey programme [Aug 30], which funded hundreds of projects and provided a huge boost to AI and language work during the 1980s.

Jones had a wide range of outside interests, most notably sailing: she and her husband Roger Needham [Feb 9] bought their first boat in 1961 and later sailed an 1872-vintage Itchen Ferry Cutter.

A quote: "Computing is too important to be left to men."

Maureen Ann "Moe" Tucker

Born: Aug. 26, 1944;
Jackson Heights, Queens, NYC

Tucker was the drummer for the Velvet Underground, making her one of the first female instrumentalists in a noted rock band.

She was asked to join the group after the original percussionist, Angus Maclise, left in Nov. 1965. At the time, Tucker had dropped out of Ithaca College, and was working for IBM as a keypunch operator.

Her first gig was also the first time the group was known as

the Velvet Underground, performing at Summit High School, New Jersey on Dec. 11, 1965. They played three songs: "There She Goes Again", "Venus in Furs", and "Heroin".

She preferred to play standing up, and used a simplified drum kit of tom toms, a snare drum and an upturned bass drum, playing with mallets rather than drumsticks. Her minimalist approach was one of the elements that gave the group such a unique sound.

In Sept. 1967, the *Boston Herald Traveler* ran a profile of Tucker with the headline "She Gave Up Computers to Play Drums in a Band."

The Mini Aug. 26, 1959

The first version of the small economy car, the Mark I **Mini**, was announced today. It became an icon of 1960s British pop culture, and was voted the second most influential car of the 20th century, behind the Ford Model T.



Mary Quant wearing a mini of her own design, with go-go boots (1966). Photo by Jac. de Nijs / Anefo. CC BY-SA 3.0 nl.

Another revolution of the Swinging '60s was the **miniskirt**. Fashion designer Mary Quant, who ran the cult King's Road boutique "Bazaar", named it after the mini, her favorite car: "The mini car went exactly with the miniskirt; it did everything one wanted, it looked great, it was optimistic, exuberant, young, flirty, it was exactly right,"

And finally to computing – the origin of the term **mini**computer is usually attributed to John Leng of DEC [Aug 23], who was responsible for establishing a DEC presence in the UK in the mid 1960's. While reporting on sales in 1968, he stated: "Here is the latest minicomputer activity in the land of miniskirts as I drive around in my Mini Minor." The phrase became popular at DEC and spread throughout the industry. It's a nice story, but there was a slightly earlier appearance of "mini-computer" [Jan 00] in 1967.

Independent of the name, DEC is usually awarded the title of producer of the first commercial minicomputer – the PDP-1 (Programmed Data Processor-1) in [Nov 00] 1960, although it wasn't called a "minicomputer" until later. However, some historians prefer to cite the CDC-160, released in [June 00] 1960, but it was a rather large mini.

MAD Primer Aug. 26, 1960

This day saw the publication of a report on how to program in MAD (Michigan Algorithm Decoder), a variant of ALGOL 58 [May 27] widely used for teaching programming at universities during the 1960s.

MAD was developed in 1959 for the IBM 704 [May 7] by Bernard Galler [Oct 3], Bruce Arden, and Robert M. Graham.

Brian Kernighan [Jan 1] was once asked "What hooked you on programming?"; he replied: "I think that the most fun I had programming was a summer job at Project MAC [July 1] at MIT in

the summer of 1966, where I worked on a program that created a job tape for the brand new GE 645 in the earliest days of Multics [Nov 30]. I was writing in MAD, which was much easier and more pleasant than the FORTRAN and COBOL that I had written earlier, and I was using CTSS [May 3], the first time-sharing system, which was infinitely easier and more pleasant than punch cards.”

MAD offered fast compilation, essential for a teaching environment, and good diagnostics to help students find errors. Also, when a program contained too many errors, the compiler would print a full-page ASCII-art picture of Alfred E. Neuman (the mascot of MAD magazine [Jan 10]). The caption read, “See this man about your program – He might want to publish it. He never worries – but from the looks of your program, you should.”

Bernie Galler remembers: “We had some funny interaction with the MAD magazine people, when we asked for permission to use the name MAD. In a very funny letter, they told us that they would take us to court and everything else, but ended the threat with a P.S. at the bottom - “Sure, go ahead.” Unfortunately, that letter is lost.”

Bob Rosin, who coded the image, recalled that the “feature” had to be removed eventually because students were deliberately coding errors in order to get the printout.

Miss Manners Replies

Aug. 26, 1984

For the first time, Judith Martin, who wrote a syndicated column about personal etiquette as Miss Manners, responded to a question concerning the use of a computer. A reader asked whether it was appropriate to use a word processor to type out personal correspondence.

Miss Manners replied that it was inappropriate since envelopes addressed using dot-matrix printers [Oct 20] could be mistaken for sweepstakes entries. Also, if friends found out that portions of a personal correspondence had been copied-and-pasted, it would cause difficulties.

The Intel Muzzle Award

Aug. 26, 1996

A feature on Intel [July 18] in today’s *Wall Street Journal* was not an unalloyed success. In the article, entitled “Intel Shifts Its Focus To Long-Term Original Research,” Intel COO Craig Barrett was quoted as saying, “Now that we’re at the head of the class and there’s nothing left to copy.”

After the gasps of horror had died down, Barrett explained that he meant that Intel could no longer take ideas for making speedier chips from older mainframes, supercomputers and minicomputers. That certainly sounded better.



Muzzled Dog (with no Intel Inside [July 00]). Photo by anne beaumont. CC BY-SA 2.0.

In a not-unrelated development, DEC sued Intel for copyright infringement in May 1997. In fact, DEC CEO, Robert Palmer, later admitted that the lawsuit was inspired partly by Barrett’s comment. The suit was eventually settled, but not before Barrett had become the latest recipient of the *Intel Muzzle Award*, a leather dog muzzle mounted on a wooden plaque.

The Muzzle is awarded when a senior executive makes an

‘unfortunate’ remark to the press. It is bestowed by a majority vote of Intel’s executive management committee, and must be displayed prominently in the recipient’s office until another executive wins the award.

Andrew Grove [Sept 2] bestowed the first Muzzle in the early 1980s to Roger Borovoy, then Intel’s general counsel, who was quoted as saying that “negotiating with the Japanese is like negotiating with the Devil.”

jQuery

Aug. 26, 2006

jQuery is an open-source JavaScript library designed to simplify the client-side scripting of HTML. It makes it easier to navigate a document, select elements, create animations, and handle events.

jQuery was first announced on Jan. 14 at BarCamp NYC by its developer John Resig [May 8]. The first stable version, jQuery 1.0, was released on this day.

It’s estimated that jQuery is installed at over 80% of the top million web sites. A major part of its appeal are its thousands of third-party plug-ins, including datagrids, dynamic lists, drag and drop, cookie handling, and modal windows.

BarCamp may sound like a strange name for a conference, but it makes perfect sense really. It arose as an open-to-the-public alternative to Foo Camp, an annual invitation-only conference hosted by Tim O’Reilly [June 6]. For the link between “Foo” and “Bar”, see [March 10].
