Feb. 1st

Stepan Alexandrovich Pachikov

Born: Feb. 1, 1950;

Vartashen, Azerbaijan

Pachikov plays an important role in a creation myth concerning the Apple Newton's [Aug 3] handwriting software. The story goes that Apple senior VP Al Eisenstat was unexpectedly handed a floppy disk by a nervous Russian (usually identified as Pachikov) during a 1987 trip to Moscow. Back home, he passed the code to Steve Sakoman (head of the Newton project). The disk contained remarkable cursive handwriting recognition software which went on to become the centerpiece of the Newton [May 29].

The reality of Pachikov's involvement is sadly much less thrilling. Apple signed a contract with ParaGraph International in 1991, a Russian company which developed the handwriting recognition code. Pachikov worked for ParaGraph, and in 1992 opened a US branch in Silicon Valley so it could work more closely with Apple on the beta version of the software.

Andrew David Birrell

Born: Feb. 1, 1951;

Edinburgh, Scotland
Died: Dec. 7, 2016

Birrell's work in distributed systems included the design of the remote procedure call (RPC) with Bruce Nelson (in 1983), and the Grapevine distributed email system (1981).

He and Ted Wobber released the "Personal Jukebox" (aka the PJB-100) in Nov. 1999, the first harddisk-based MP3 player, which utilized the smallest 2.5-inch drive then available. The "100" part of the name came from the capacity of the 4.86 GB drive, which could store around 100 music CDs encoded at 128 Kbit/s. The name was kept for later models even though they could hold many more albums.

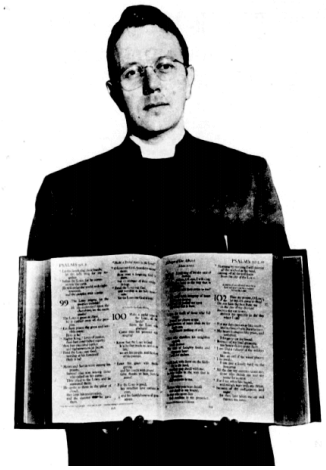
Peter J. Denning [Jan 6] called Birrell "a luminary in operating systems," known for "his elegant designs that made the complex seem simple."

He was also a skilled amateur wood-worker.

Bible Concordance

Feb. 1, 1957

The Rev. John W. Ellison, rector of the Church of the Epiphany in Winchester, Mass., published "Nelson's Complete Concordance of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible". It listed in alphabetical order more than 800,000 words, and consisted of 2,157 large quarto pages printed in two columns in small type.



The Rev. John W. Ellison (1957)

Thanks were due to a Univac [March 31] which reduced the estimated 30-year task to one that took a total of 1,000 computing hours. However, the Bible text had to be transferred to magnetic tape first, using a keyboard device called the Unityper, which took some nine months.

Ellison first conceived the idea in 1951 while studying at Harvard. He used a computer to compare 309 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, classifying them according to their similarities.

For more literary shenanigans with computers, see [Aug 1; Aug 22; Sept 9; Sept 11; Oct 26; Dec 25].

No More Typewriters

Feb. 1, 1980

Apple CEO Michael Scott sent an internal memo to all employees entitled "YOU ALL BETTER READ THIS":

"Effective Immediately!! No more typewriters are to be purchased, leased etc., etc. Apple is an innovative company. We must believe and lead in all areas. If word processing is so neat, then let's all use it! Goal: By 1-1-81 No typewriters at Apple.

Apple also banished the job title of "secretary" as the company believed it was too closely linked to being a typist.

"Scotty" had been persuaded to become the first official Apple CEO in Feb. 1977 by Mike Markkula [Feb 11] who reasoned that the co-founders — Steve Jobs [Feb 24] and Steve Wozniak [Aug 11] — were both insufficiently experienced for the job.

Scotty was also responsible for Apple's "Black Wednesday" [Feb 25] in 1981, and departed the company soon afterwards.

Intel 80286 introduced

Feb. 1, 1982

The 80286 (or just 286) was Intel's second-generation x86 16-bit processor, succeeding the 8086 [June 8] and 8088 [July 1].

The major new feature was a "protected" mode, which let the CPU address up to 16 MB of RAM (the 8086/8088s were limited to 1 MB), and a virtual

address space of 1GB. However, memory was still divided into 64KB segments, which made it hard to design large programs. As the name suggested, protected mode also allowed system resources to be protected from user programs, which was essential during program multitasking.

The 286 cannily supported a "real" mode, which made it backward compatible with the 8086/8088, and so able to run MS-DOS [Aug 12] applications. However, switching from protected to real mode took nearly one second.

Protected mode wasn't utilized much by commercial software until years after the chip's release, in part because of the high cost of PC memory. A more serious problem was the incompatibility of older MS-DOS programs with protected mode. This led Bill Gates [Oct 28] to modestly refer to the 286 as a "brain-dead chip", especially after it became clear that MS Windows [Nov 20] wouldn't be able to run multiple MS-DOS applications on the hardware.

The successor, the 80386 (or 386) arrived on [Oct 17] 1985, and addressed these issues. For example, its new "virtual 8086" mode offered much better MS-DOS compatibility.

HP ThinkJet

Feb. 1, 1984

The release of the HP ThinkJet (short for "thermal inkjet") product line (the HP 2225A and HP 2225B) marked the birth of commercial inkjet printing technology.

The HP ThinkJet. Photo by Stunteltje. CC BY 3.0.

Large, industrial inkjet devices already existed, but only crude printing of large characters was practical. By comparison, the ThinkJet could print 150 high quality characters per second, was surprisingly quiet, and weighed only 6.5 pounds.

Although inkjets worked in a similar way to dot-matrix printers (e.g. [Oct 00]), the technology opened the door to better print quality, greater graphics capabilities, quieter operation, lower power consumption, and eventually (in 1987) color.

In other words, the dot-matrix printer was about to be tippexed from existence.

Stoned Virus Detected

Feb. 1, 1988

Stoned was a boot sector virus aimed at MS-DOS [Aug 12], which ensured that an infected computer had a one in eight chance of displaying the message "Your PC is now stoned! LEGALIZE MARIJUANA!" when switched on.

Unfortunately, anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of programming could alter the message, and so numerous variants of Stoned circulated during the 1990's. One well-known example was the Michelangelo Virus [March 6] from 1992.

On May 15, 2014, a crucial piece of code from Stoned was added to the Bitcoin blockchain [Jan 3], which caused Microsoft Security Essentials to decide that the blockchain held a virus, and delete the file. Microsoft quickly updated the software to ignore this case.

id Software

Feb. 1, 1991

id Software, the video gaming company, was founded by programmers John Carmack [Aug 20] and John Romero [Oct 28], game designer Tom Hall [Sept 2], and artist Adrian Carmack (no relation to John).

The company became known for its creative use of 3D graphics and pioneering game engines. Wolfenstein 3D [May 5] is often considered the first true FPS, and Doom [Dec 10] went a long way to popularizing that genre, and PC gaming in general. Quake [June 22] was id's first fully 3D FPS.

id used shareware distribution to help sell their products, including Commander Keen [Dec 14], Wolfenstein, and Doom. Typically, they'd release the first part as shareware, then the rest would need to be purchased. John Carmack later open-sourced most of id's older engines once the code base was over five years old.

The company's name is a reference to Sigmund Freud's model of the psyche: the id is the primitive part of the mind that contains sexual and aggressive drives – useful skills for playing FPSs.

Azure

Feb. 1, 2010

Microsoft released "Windows Azure", its first cloud computing service, the brainchild of Ray Ozzie [Nov 20], Amitabh Srivastava, and Dave Cutler [March 13] (who had postponed his retirement to work on the project). On March 25, 2014, it was renamed "Microsoft Azure" after it became capable of supporting Linux.

Azure offers similar features as Amazon Web Services (AWS [March 14] 2006) and the Google Cloud Platform (GCP; launched in 2013), including virtual machines, databases, file storage, backups, and support for mobile and web apps.

In cloud terminology, Azure is considered both a "Platform as a Service" (PaaS) and "Infrastructure as a Service" (IaaS), although when it was announced on Oct. 27, 2008 at

the company's Professional Developer's Conference (PDC), it was known simply as "Project Red Dog". This name was honored by Srivastava wearing customized "Project Red Dog" sneakers on stage during the announcement, designed by Cutler.