Thomas John Watson, Sr.
Born: Feb. 17, 1874;

Campbell, New York
Died: June 19, 1956

Watson served as chairman and CEO of IBM [Feb 14] from 1914 to 1952, overseeing its tremendous worldwide growth. By 1956, IBM's annual revenues were $897 million, and the company had 72,500 employees. But during his leadership, IBM largely concentrated on punched card tabulating machines [July 20]; it was his son, Thomas Watson, Jr. [Jan 14], who refocused IBM on the computer field.

Thomas J. Watson (1920s). Photo from the IBM Corporate Archives. CC BY-SA 3.0.

Watson Sr.'s first sales job was selling pianos off the back of a horse-drawn wagon in upstate New York. He also spent some time hawking sewing machines, pitching shares, and running a butcher's shop in Buffalo. Watson liked the NCR cash register he used in the shop so much that he eventually persuaded NCR to hire him as a sales apprentice in Nov 1896.

By the 1930's, Watson was the highest-paid executive in America, earning $365,000 a year. Naturally, he was quickly dubbed the "Thousand-Dollar-a-Day Man" by the newspapers.

He was President Roosevelt's unofficial ambassador in NYC and often entertained visiting foreign statesmen. Perhaps most infamously, Watson paid a call on Adolf Hitler in Berlin on [June 26] 1937, but as part of his efforts to promote world peace. Of course, he coined an accompanying slogan: "World Peace Through World Trade."

Although Watson is meant to have declared in 1943 that, "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers," there's scant evidence that he did so. However, if Watson had made such a prediction, then, as Gordon Bell [Aug 19] pointed out in his ACM 50 years keynote in 2017 [Sept 15], he would have been correct for some ten years after 1943. Douglas Hartree [March 27], a founder of UK computing, did say something along those lines in 1951. He thought three computers was enough, for all of Britain.

Watson is unrelated to Thomas A. Watson, Alexander Graham Bell's [June 2] assistant from the 1870's, but just to confuse matters further, Watson's father was also called Thomas A. Watson.

Some pithy quotes: "If you want to succeed, double your failure rate."

"A man is known by the company he keeps. A company is known by the men it keeps."

"Whenever an individual or a business decides that success has been attained, progress stops."

Jen-Hsun ("Jensen") Huang
Born: Feb. 17, 1963;

Taipei, Taiwan

Huang co-founded NVidia in 1993 with Chris Malachowsky and Curtis Priem. Their decision was made at a Denny's in San Jose, and Huang probably ordered their signature "Super Bird" sandwich, but with mayo and mustard.

NVidia became a leader in the design of graphics processing units (GPUs) for the gaming market after the release of the RIVA TNT on [June 15] 1998. Recently, GPUs have found lucrative new roles as tools for cryptocurrency mining and deep learning AI.

NVidia's primary GPU product line, the GeForce [Oct 11], competes with Advanced Micro Devices' (AMD) Radeon. Before co-founding NVidia, Huang was a designer at AMD, and is related to AMD's current CEO Lisa Su. Su's grandfather is Huang's uncle.

The NVidia name comes from Invidia in Roman mythology, the goddess who enacted terrible retribution upon those who were arrogant towards the gods.

Huang is an accomplished table tennis player, and was placed third in the junior doubles at the US Table Tennis Open when he was 15. As a consequence, he's quite possibly the only hardware CEO to also have appeared in the pages of *Sports Illustrated* magazine.

A Computer Perspective Begins
Feb. 17, 1971

In the late 1960's, famed architects and designers Charles and Ray Eames were commissioned to create an exhibition for IBM's New York headquarters, "A Computer Perspective: Background to the Computer Age."

It charted the development of the computer from 1890 to 1950 along a densely-layered wall, along with displays of vintage machines, documents, and other computer artifacts. A multiscreen slideshow of 500 images highlighted the newest advances of the time, and visitors could play an interactive computer game of "Twenty Questions". The Eames' also produced a short 10-minute film

(online at https://archive.org/details/computerperspective) and book based on the exhibition. The book has been described as "a standard for the history of computing" by Paul E. Ceruzzi.

The couple worked for IBM on several other projects, including the film "Think" which was shown in the IBM pavilion at the 1964/1965 New York World's Fair [April 22].

The UK Science Museum's "Computing Then and Now" [Nov 00] was another important computing exhibition of the 1970's.

Apple QuickTake
Feb. 17, 1994

The Apple QuickTake was one of the first consumer digital cameras. Three models were built: the 100 and 150 made by Kodak, and the 200 by Fujifilm.

The Apple QuickTake 100. Photo by jaqian. CC BY 2.0.

The basic QuickTake was capable of storing eight 640×480 photos in 24-bit color, 32 320×240 photos, or some mix of both sizes. The camera had a built-in flash, but no focus or zoom controls, and no way of viewing the snaps except by downloading them to a computer via a cable.

The QuickTake didn't sell well, and was discontinued in 1997 shortly after Steve Jobs had rejoined Apple [Sept 16].

The first commercial digital camera was the Cromemco Cyclops [Feb 11], released in 1975.

Windows 2000
Feb. 17, 2000

Prev: [June 25]; Next: [Oct 25]

The San Francisco launch of Windows 2000 featured entertainment by Carlos Santana, with hosts Patrick Stewart (from "Star Trek: The Next Generation") and Bill Gates [Oct 28]. *Wired* magazine [Jan 2] gave the event a scathing review, claiming that "the weak jokes and low-power wit couldn't relieve the crushing tedium."

Microsoft marketed Windows 2000 as the most secure Windows ever, but that didn't stop it from being the target of multiple high-profile virus attacks such as Code Red [June 13], Nimda [Sept 18], Blaster [Aug 11], SQL Slammer [Jan 25], SoBig [Aug 18], and Sasser [April 30]. Microsoft ended up releasing security patches nearly every month until the OS was discontinued in 2010. But the company did earn credit for making security such a high priority.

Other features included better memory protection to stop BSODs [July 27], improved plug and play, Virtual Private Networks (VPN), and support for USB [Jan 15].

Gates later said that the software cost more than a $1 billion to develop, and had involved over 1000 partners. The OS contained 29 million lines of code, mainly written in C++ with over 8 million of those lines for the drivers.

Windows 2000 was a continuation of the Microsoft Windows NT family [July 27], and was originally called Windows NT 5.0. The resulting downside was that it couldn't run some old MS-DOS programs, so Microsoft also released Windows ME, which was part of the 95/98 series [June 25]; it also proved to be buggy.