First Telephone 'Book'
Feb. 21, 1878

The first telephone book - actually a single 14 cm. x 21 cm. sheet of cardboard - was issued by the New Haven Telephone Company. It listed fifty individuals, businesses, and other offices that had telephones. There were three physicians, two dentists, two boarding stables, twenty stores and factories, four meat and fish markets, eleven residences, and eight places marked miscellaneous. At the time, New Haven, had a population of around 150,000 people.

Although other businesses had used telephones before, and even printed lists of subscribers, this document was the first to include private customers.

What isn't on the sheet are any phone numbers; people instead had the switchboard operator direct their calls. New Haven was also the first place in the US to have a commercial telephone exchange [Jan 28].

Another New Haven telephone book, issued in Nov. 1878, sold at auction in 2008 for $170,500. This was the first with more than one sheet (40 pages in fact). It contains the names and addresses of 391 subscribers, and includes adverts.

The book also acted as a user manual, with suggestions such as: "NEVER take the telephone off the hook unless you wish to use it", "Should you wish to speak to another subscriber, you should commence the conversation by saying 'Hulloa!'", and " When you are done talking, say 'That is all!', and the person spoken to should say 'O.K'." "Much trouble," the directory explains, "ensues from both parties speaking at the same time."

France was the first country to offer an electronic telephone directory in 1981, on its Minitel system [May 10]. The directory was called "11" after its access number.

Thelma Estrin
Born: Feb. 21, 1924;
New York City
Died: Feb. 15, 2014

Estrin and her husband, Gerald, helped build the first computer in the Middle East, the Weizmann Automatic Computer, or WEIZAC. It was constructed at the Weizmann Institute (hence the name) in Rehovot, Israel, during 1954-1955, based on the IAS architecture [June 10] developed by John von Neumann [Dec 28]. Gerald led the project, while Thelma helped redesign the arithmetic unit for greater reliability.

Thelma Estrin. (c) Enginneering and Technology History Wiki.

After their return to the US, Estrin became associated with the Brain Research Institute at UCLA, and was an early champion of the application of computers to medical research and treatment. She developed one of the first systems for the analog-to-digital conversion of electrical activity from the nervous system.

In the early 1950's, she applied to work as an engineer at RCA [Nov 20], and was turned down. Estrin later recalled that the personnel officer told her "that they didn't have a ladies' room for me at the time." She replied, "Well, what about the ladies' room that the secretaries use?" "Well no, that wouldn't be proper."

A.P.P.L.E.
Feb. 21, 1978

The Apple Pugetsound Program Library Exchange (A.P.P.L.E.) was established by Val J Golding with fellow Apple II [June 5] enthusiasts Mike Thyng and Bob Huelsdonk.

The first meeting brought together 13-20 people, and the organization grew rapidly, reaching some 50,000 members by 1985. The organization is still in operation, making it the longest lived Apple group (but see below).

In 2013, A.P.P.L.E. released "The WOZPAK Special Edition," containing Steve Wozniak's [Aug 11] restored hand-written notes and printouts about the Apple II. Their other retro books include: "Nibble Viewpoints: Business Insights From The Computing Revolution", "What's Where in the Apple:", and "The Colossal Computer Cartoon Book" (cheesy fun).

Golding has said of the group's name, "I started with the acronym and just played around with it until I found something that fit. I was never happy with combining "Pugetsound" but I never figured a better word."

Other notable user groups, in chronological order of their foundation, include SHARE [Aug 22], DECUS [March 00], USENIX [May 15], the Amateur Computer Society [May 5], the Amateur Computer Club [Dec 13], the Homebrew Computer Club [March 5], ACGNJ [June 13], and the Chaos Computer Club [Sept 12].

ACGNJ is the oldest existent group dealing with microcomputers, having started in 1975. Since it includes Apple machines within its ambit, it could claim to be the oldest Apple group.

CompuServe CB Simulator
Feb. 21, 1980

CompuServe's [Sept 24] most popular feature was "CB Simulator", a chat system which went live on this day, and attracted over a million subscribers by 1988.

As the name suggests, it used a citizens band (CB) radio theme to help users understand multi-user chat and instant messaging. Like CB radio it had "channels" and commands like "tune," "squelch," and "monitor," and numerous 'quirky' channels, such as one where users spoke only Olde English.

CB Simulator had a major influence on chat culture. For instance, many of the Internet's common abbreviations, such as IMHO, MORF, and textual emoticons like ;), first became popular on CB Simulator.

The first version was coded by Alexander "Sandy" Trevor [April 12], who "wrote it in assembly language over a weekend on my kitchen table." The source code was made freely available in 1983, allowing BBS hobbyists to install their own chat system.

Later implementations included encrypted communications, and support for multi-user games such as the "Island of Kesmai" [Dec 15]. The first online wedding was performed on CB Simulator on [Feb 14] 1983. In 1985 it hosted the first online comic, "Witches and Stitches" [Sept 24]. It added multimedia support in 1995, which "got rolling" with an online conference call with Mick Jagger on [Dec 7] 1995.

For earlier chat systems, see EMISARI [Aug 15], and PLATO's Talkomatic [July 00].

Daniel Ek
Born: Feb. 21, 1983;
Stockholm, Sweden

Ek was the co-founder with Martin Lorentzon of the music streaming service Spotify which provides DRM-protected music obtained legally from record labels.

Ek's business model for Spotify was quite novel when it launched in Oct. 2008; it offered basic features for free with advertisements, and additional features if you paid a subscription.

Daniel Ek (2011). Photo by Magnus Höij. CC BY 2.0.

Spotify wasn't the first music streaming platform, but it tied together the strengths of services like Pandora [Aug 25], Last.fm, and SoundCloud (e.g. algorithm personalization, social listening, and various subscription models).

As of late 2020, Spotify had 345 million active users, including 155 million paying subscribers.

Ek first had the idea for Spotify in 2002 when peer-to-peer music service Napster [Nov 22] shut down and another illegal site Kazaa took over. Ek later said that he "realized that you can never legislate away from piracy. Laws can definitely help, but it doesn't take away the problem. The only way to solve the problem was to create a service that was better than piracy and at the same time compensates the music industry – that gave us Spotify."

Ek was deemed the most important person in the music industry by *Billboard Magazine* in 2017.

The Legend of Zelda Released
Feb. 21, 1986

"The Legend of Zelda" is a high-fantasy action-adventure game created by Shigeru Miyamoto [Nov 16] and Takashi Tezuka for the NES/Famicom [Oct 18].

It's now seen as the forerunner of the entire role-playing genre, and was also the first console game with a save function that let players stop playing and resume later.

The "Zelda" games [Nov 21] center on Link, who usually has to rescue hapless Princess Zelda from Ganon's nefarious clutches. There's also commonly some business involving a relic known as the Triforce, a set of three golden triangles (symbolizing power, wisdom, and courage) that will save the land of Hyrule from destruction.

The game was partially inspired by Miyamoto's love of exploring the hills, forests, and caves near his boyhood home in Sonobe, Japan. Miyamoto often used a lantern while exploring the cave system, which is why Link always carries a lantern.

Miyamoto thought F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife's name, Zelda, sounded "pleasant and significant", so he used it for his princess, and as the title of the game. However, in Japan, the game was originally called "The Hyrule Fantasy".

Actor/comedian Robin Williams revealed in 2009 that his daughter Zelda Rae was named after the title character in the series.

On July 9, 2021, a sealed "The Legend of Zelda" cartridge sold for $870,000 at Heritage Auctions, setting a new world record for the most expensive video game. The record lasted a mere two days [Sept 13].

Star Fox Released

Feb. 21, 1993

"Star Fox" (Starwing in Europe) was an SNES game [Nov 21] where the player had to fly a spacecraft, through a 3D environment while various enemies (spaceships, robots, creatures, etc.) attacked.

It was Nintendo's [Sept 23] first game to use polygonal 3D graphics, powered by a GSU-1 "Super FX" graphics coprocessor in the game cartridge.

The "Super FX" chip was designed by Argonaut Games, and was so much more powerful than the SNES's standard processor (a 16-bit Ricoh 5A22) that the development team joked that the SNES was just a box to hold their chip.

Originally the game had been intended for the NES [Oct 18], but Argonaut persuaded Nintendo to port it over to the SNES, while Argonaut extending the game's engine.

During development, the chip was codenamed "Super Mario FX" or "MARIO", an acronym for "Mathematical, Argonaut, Rotation & Input/Output". "MARIO" is printed on the face of the chip.

Argonaut was founded by British teenager Jez San in 1982, with the company's name being a play on his name (J. San) and the story, "Jason and the Argonauts" [June 19].

"Star Fox" ultimately sold over four million copies, and Nintendo went on to release five more games using the same characters. Nintendo also teamed up with Kellogg's (the cereal company) and Nelsonic (an electronics manufacturer) to release a "Star Fox" LCD watch. The order form was printed on the back of Kellogg's "Corn Flakes" boxes and the watch was free. The catch was that you had to eat (or at least buy) two large boxes of cereal first.