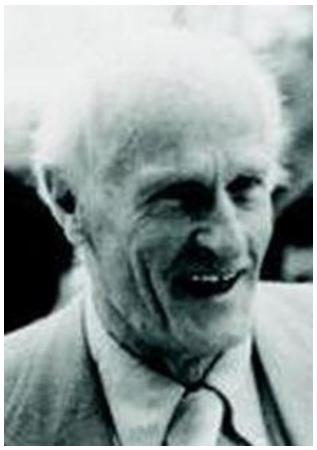
Jan. 5th

Stephen Cole Kleene

Born: Jan. 5, 1909;

Hartford, Connecticut
Died: Jan. 25, 1994

Kleene worked on the theory of algorithms, and helped develop recursion theory alongside Alonzo Church [June 14], Kurt Gödel [April 28], Alan Turing [June 23], Emil Post [Feb 11], and others. He made significant contributions to the foundations of computability, inventing regular expressions along the way.



Stephen Cole Kleene (1978). Photo by Konrad Jacobs. CC BY-SA 2.0 de.

A large number of concepts are named after him: Kleene hierarchy, Kleene algebra, the Kleene star (Kleene closure), Kleene's recursion theorem and the Kleene fixpoint theorem. However, Kleenex tissues were developed by the Cellucotton Products Company of Neenah, Wisconsin.

Although his last name is commonly pronounced KLEE-nee or kleen, Kleene himself pronounced his name as KLAY-nee, but his son, Ken Kleene, wrote: "As far as I am aware this pronunciation is incorrect in all known languages. I believe that this novel pronunciation was invented by my father."

Kleene also discovered a variety of butterfly, Beloria Todde Ammiralis Ba Kleenei (another naming honor), was an avid mountain climber, and his knowledge of mushrooms was legendary.

Vera Molnár

Born: Jan. 5, 1924;

Budapest, Hungary
Died: Dec. 7, 2023

Molnár was a pioneer of algorithmic art, and actually worked in the area for over a decade before turning to computers in 1968.

In the 1960's, she co-founded the "Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel" (GRAV) which investigated collaborative approaches to mechanical and kinetic art. Later came "Art et Informatique" which was more computer oriented.

In the mid-1970's, she developed the Molnart software with her husband, François Molnar. It generated drawings based around semi-random geometric shapes specified according to prescribed rules.

For more early computer art, see SAGE [Dec 00], and the "3N" pioneers [?? 1939], [Dec 16], [June 23]

PDP-11 Announced

Jan. 5, 1970

The PDP-ll family was made up of fast 16-bit minicomputers designed by Harold McFarland, and produced by DEC from 1970 to the early 1990's. The company eventually sold over 600,000 units, making it the best-selling minicomputer ever.

The PDP series began with the PDP-1 [Nov 00] (what a surprise), and included the historically important PDP-7 [Dec 00] and the remarkable 12-bit PDP-8 [March 22].

One of the PDP-11's innovations was its UNIBUS communications technology. The bus idea wasn't new, but the PDP-11's carried the concept further: nearly all major parts of the machine, including its memory and I/O, employed it. That made the computer especially easy to configure.

Its CPU design (eight 16-bit registers, including a stack pointer and program counter) had a large influence on later chips, such as the Intel 8086 [June 8] and the Motorola 68000 [Sept 26].

The PDP-11 was designed to be manufactured by semiskilled labor. For example, the dimensions of its components were relatively non-critical, making their assembly easier.

For a decade, the PDP-11/20 was the smallest system that could run UNIX [Nov 3]. Indeed, a PDP-11 became the OS'es second home after it was ported across from a PDP-7 [Dec 00] by Ken Thompson [Feb 4].

The earliest appearance of a PDP-11 on TV was in the "Tomorrow Man" episode of the UK police drama "The Sweeney" (1976). The bad guy, played by John Hurt, employs a PDP 11/05 with an attached VT52 terminal to present a computer class as cover for his nefarious plan to hack into a bank.

There are persistent rumors that PDP-11s are still in use today. For example, as a part of the US Navy's radar systems, and at the British Atomic Weapons Establishment [June 00], and for the design of the A320 family of planes. But for the oldest working computer, see [April 00].

TheDraw

Jan. 5, 1986

ANSI art reached its zenith during the bulletin board era when systems like CompuServe [Sept 24] were king. It offered a larger set of characters than boring old ASCII, including escape sequences that could color text and create animations

(commonly called ANSImations). For example, "Trade Wars 2002", a 1986 multiplayer BBS game that remained popular for decades, used ANSI graphics to depict ships, planets, and even cut scenes.

ANSI art received a massive boost in popularity with today's release of Ian E. Davis' shareware program, TheDraw. It considerably simplified the art-making process by including ready-to-use "fonts" and animations.

Sonoma County Bliss

Jan. 5 ??, 1996

One Friday afternoon in January, former *National Geographic* photographer Charles O'Rear was driving through the Los Carneros American Viticultural Area of California's Wine Country. He was working on a book about the area, and looking for photo opportunities.

Crusing along the Sonoma Highway, he saw a wonderfully green hill (at 38°15′00.5″N 122°24′38.9″W), and snapped it with his Mamiya RZ67.

The Bliss location, Sonoma Valley in Nov 2006. Photo by Simon Goldin. CC BY-SA 3.0.

The photo never made it into his book, but O'Rear did put it up for sale through Corbis. In 2000 or 2001, Microsoft's Windows XP [Oct 25] development team contacted him, asking to buy the rights. Microsoft renamed the photo "Bliss", and made it the default wallpaper for XP, and a key part of the OSes marketing campaign.

They paid O'Rear what he believes was the second-largest amount ever for a single image at the time, but signed a confidentiality agreement so cannot (even now) disclose the exact sum. Nevertheless, it's been reported to be "in the low six figures." (The most expensive photo of that period showed President Bill Clinton hugging Monica Lewinsky.)

O'Rear was contracted to send the original film to Microsoft, but no delivery service would accept the job due to the value of the image. In the end, Microsoft bought him a plane ticket to Seattle and he personally delivered the picture to their offices.

IMDb

Jan. 5, 1996

As of Dec. 2020, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) holds information on around 7.5 million titles, 10 million personalities, and 83 million registered users.

It all started as a USENET [Jan 29] post by British film fan and programmer Col Needham, with the subject line "Those Eyes", which listed actresses with beautiful eyes. Other people starting posting their own themed lists, which by 1990 had grown to cover almost 10,000 movies and TV series.

On Oct. 17, 1990, Needham uploaded a collection of UNIX scripts for searching the lists, and these became the basis of a "rec.arts.movies" database.

On Aug. 5, 1993 Rob Hartill announced a Web version of the database, the Cardiff Internet Movie Database, so named because it was hosted on servers at the University of Cardiff.

On this day, IMDb was incorporated in the UK, with Needham its primary owner. Amazon [July 16] bought the site in 1998, but Needham remained its head honcho.

Needham's first trip to the cinema was to see "Jaws" (1975), aged eight, with his mum. Afterwards, he recalled, "I was scared of even going in a swimming pool, let alone the sea." Needham grew up in Manchester, and saw most of his childhood films at a movie house in Tameside.

Needham's lists on IMDb include "10 Roman Empire Movies" and "Top 100 Comedies Up To 1960," but nothing labeled as "Those Eyes".

Dancing Baby

Jan. 5, 1998

The "Dancing baby", a 3D animation of a baby performing a cha-cha, was featured on the "Cro-Magnon" episode of "Ally McBeal", marking the growing influence of the Internet on mainstream 'culture'.

The video and song, sometimes referred to as the "Ugachaka (or Oogachaka) Baby, " was released in Autumn 1996 as a sample in the "Character Studio" application that was part of "3D Studio Max". It was created by Michael Girard and Robert Lurye, without the use of motion capture (i.e. no real babies were forced to dance for our entertainment).

Ron Lussier, at LucasArts [Sept 12], gave the baby a make-over at a later date: "I added some shoulder bounce, retimed the hands, retextured (colored) the surfaces, relit it, altered some skinning parameters, rendered it out…"

In late 1996, John Woodell converted the movie into a highly compressed animated GIF [June 15], which quickly began multiplying across Web sites, and took center stage at "The Unofficial Dancing Baby Home Page."

On Jan. 15, 2006, the video was uploaded to YouTube [Feb 14], where it has attracted upwards of 4 million views and 2,000 comments. Sadly, it has lost out in recent years to videos of real dancing babies.

For more Internet memes [Nov 15], see [April 21], [May 31], [July 27], [Aug 00].

Porn Popup

Jan. 5, 2007

Substitute teacher Julie Amero was convicted of four counts of "risk of injury to a minor", which carried a penalty of 40 years in prison.

It began on Oct. 19, 2004 when Amero was checking her e-mail in class and took a short break to go to the bathroom. While she was away, the computer began displaying a flurry of pornographic images. She returned to find two students giggling at the screen. Amero tried to remove the inappropriate images, but closing one window just made another appear.

Following the trial for this heinous crime, a letter appeared in the local newspaper on March 6, 2007. It argued that Amero had been treated unfairly, and was signed by 28 computer science professors.

Eventually the felony charges were dropped, but in Nov. 2008 Amero pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct so she wouldn't have to face another trial. This meant she could never again work in a classroom.

Nexus One

Jan. 5, 2010

Google released its flagship smartphone, the Nexus One, featuring Android [Nov 5], version 2.1, codenamed Eclair. The hardware (built by HTC [May 15]) included a Snapdragon processor, HDTV video playback, a 5-megapixel auto-focus camera, a GPS receiver, Bluetooth, and WiFi.

The phone was praised for its display, processor, and design, but suffered from poor marketing and support by Google. Also, HTC released its own branded phone, the HTC Desire, in February, that had very similar specs.

Many people believed the phone's name was a reference to the novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" (1968) by Philip K. Dick, which features "Nexus-6" humanoids [June 25]. Indeed, Google later received a cease-and-desist notice from the author's estate about the name.