Jan. 13th

Public Radio Performance

Jan. 13, 1910

The first public radio broadcast was a live performance of the operas “Cavalleria rusticana” (1890) and “Pagliacci” (1892), transmitted from the Metropolitan Opera House in NYC. The two operas are frequently performed as a double-bill, a pairing referred to as "Cav and Pag". Enrico Caruso took the part of the clown Canio in Pagliacci, one of his signature roles.

Enrico Caruso as Canio in Pagliacci (1904). Uploaded by Voceditenore.

Lee de Forest [Oct 20] organized the event to show that wireless telephony could handle sound, not just Morse code. He set up a radio transmitter backstage and placed an antenna on the roof atop a long fishing pole. Receivers were positioned at several locations around the city, including at the De Forest Radio Lab, on ships in New York Harbor, and at two hotels in Times Square.

For other candidates for first public radio broadcast, see [Jan 1], [Oct 6].

Gilbert William King

Born: Jan. 13, 1914;

Long Eaton, UK
Died: ??

King was a controversial figure in machine translation (MT) during the 1960's because of his strong belief in word-for-word dictionary-based approaches. Another issue was his love of high-profile public demonstrations which often gave the misleading impression that all the problems of MT had been solved.

His first machine, the Mark I, from July 1959, was a custom tube-based computer utilizing a 65,000 word dictionary. According to King, this was sufficient for it to translate the Russian newspaper *Pravda* satisfactorily.

His Mark II employed a 170,000-word vocabulary, and became well-known through its demonstrations at the World’s Fair in NYC during 1964 and 1965 . Typists using Roman-Cyrillic keyboards to send text, character-by-character, over a telephone line to his Language Processing lab at IBM Kingston. The message was transformed into a “usable, but not perfect, translation”, and sent back.

Examples of the Mark II’s output played a prominent role during the investigation into the state of MT research by the Automatic Language Processing Committee (ALPAC) [April 00]. ALPAC’s negative assessment killed off MT in the US for many years.

TV Broadcast

Jan. 13 1928

Ernst F.W. Alexanderson broadcast the first ever TV signal from his lab at General Electric (GE), which was picked up by TV sets in his home and two other houses in Schenectady, New York. The devices had displays a 1.5 inches long by 1 inch wide, and the picture was made up of 24 lines, and updated at 16 frames per second. It didn't matter though since the broadcast wasn't particularly exciting, consisting of a man taking his glasses off, putting them on again, and blowing a smoke ring.

Some histories prefer an Oct. 1927 date, when Alexanderson first tested the equipment, but this didn’t include the transmission of sound.

On May 22,1930, Alexanderson gave the first public exhibition of the system, but projected the picture onto a 7-foot screen at Proctor’s Theater in Schenectady. In 1998, *Life* magazine ranked this occasion 14th in a list of the 100 most important technical events of the last thousand years. (The discovery of the transistor [Dec 16] was 13th.)

For other TV firsts, see [Jan 13] and [Nov 2].

Arthur John Robin Gorell Milner

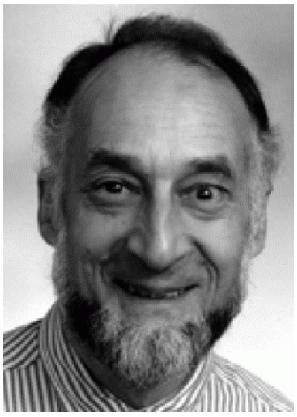
Born: Jan. 13, 1934;

Yealmpton, Plymouth, UK
Died: March 20, 2010

Milner worked on automatic theorem provers , the pi-calculus for describing concurrent processes and the dynamic communication between them, the modeling of mobile agents, and developed the ML programming language.

ML was the first language to support polymorphic type inference and type-safe exception handling, which led it to be called “LISP with types” [April 15]. It influenced many other functional languages, including OCaml and Haskell [April 8], [Jan 18].

Milner's first exposure to programming was on the EDSAC [May 6] in 1956. He wasn't impressed: “Programming was not a very beautiful thing. I resolved I would never go near a computer in my life.” However, he helped developed compilers at Ferranti [Feb 27] in the early 1960's.



Robin Milner. (c) Galois, Inc.

During his student days, he played the oboe, cello, and piano, and briefly considered a career in music.

Phillip James (Bill) Plauger

Born: Jan. 13, 1944;

Petersburg, West Virginia

Plauger worked at Bell Labs from 1969 to 1975, where he co-authored two excellent textbooks: "Elements of Programming Style" and "Software Tools" with Brian Kernighan [Jan 1]. He's also known for his standardization efforts for C and C++, and is credited with inventing *pair programming*. The idea is that one person programs while the other observes and comments. They're required to switch roles frequently, assuming they don't kill each other first.

He's also an award winning sci-fi author, and sold a story ("The Dawn Patrol") to Harlan Ellison's "The Last Dangerous Visions," an anthology famous for never appearing, although it's been due out many, many times since 1973 (see [Nov 28]).

A quote: "My definition of an expert in any field is a person who knows enough about what's really going on to be scared."

Tracy's 2-Way Wrist Radio

Jan. 13, 1946

Chester Gould introduced the 2-Way Wrist Radio in the *Dick Tracy* comic strip, having drawn inspiration from a metting with inventor Al Gross. According to the strip, the device was developed for Tracy by the aptly-named son of industrialist Diet Smith, Brilliant. It's powered by an atomic battery, and employs an aerial that runs up the inside of the wearer's shirt sleeve.

It became one of the strip's most recognizable elements, and it's capabilities were upgraded periodically. Its range was increased from 500 to 1,000 miles in June 1954, then to 2,500 in 1956. In 1964, it was replaced by the 2-Way Wrist TV.

Of course, it featured prominantly in almost every news story about the debut of the Apple Watch [April 24].

Nathaniel Read Silver

Born: Jan. 13, 1978;

East Lansing, Michigan

Silver is a statistician who first gained public recognition for his PECOTA system which forecasted the performance of Major League Baseball players.

This was followed by a long run of correct election predictions. For example, he chose the winner of 49 of the 50 states in the 2008 US presidential election, and the winner of all 50 states and the District of Columbia in the 2012 election. This run unfortunately ended when he gave Hilary Clinton a 71% chance of winning the 2016 contest. However, other forecasters had decided she would win with at least an 85% to 99% probability.

Silver's preference to keep the detail of his analytical model secret caused *Washington Post* journalist Ezra Klein to remark: "He won't give out the code, and without the code, we can't say with certainty how the model works."

Silver also plays poker semi-professionally.

Gates Steps Down

Jan. 13, 2000

Next: [June 15]

Bill Gates [March 2] stepped down as Microsoft's CEO, promoting Steve Ballmer [March 24] in his place. However, Gates didn't entirely depart the fold, instead taking on a newly created role of "chief software architect". Entirely coincidentally, this reshuffle occurred after the release of the findings in the US vs. Microsoft antitrust case on [Nov 5] 1999, but before its conclusions were delivered on [April 3] 2000.

The big fear at the time was that the ruling would demand the company be broken into pieces. Microsoft would appeal of course, but many commentators thought that Gates didn't much relish the prospect of being grilled in more courtrooms.