Jan. 14th

Semyon Nikolaevich Korsakov
Born: Jan. 14, 1787;

Kherson, Ukraine
Died: Dec. 1, 1853

Korsakov built several devices in the 1830's which he termed "machines for the comparison of ideas". They were designed to speed up the search for information stored on punched cards or similar media (e.g. wooden boards with holes). Korsakov was perhaps the first person to utilize cards to hold data, stepping away from their usual role as a way to control looms [July 7]. Specifically, he hoped to employ his machines to help doctors choose medical treatments, and to organize the classification of plants and animals.

His work was largely forgotten until the early 1960's when documents relating to his machines were unearthed in the archives of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.

First UK Private Telephone Call
Jan. 14, 1878

Late in 1877 Alexander Graham Bell [March 7], ostensibly in England on his honeymoon, found time to demonstrate his "telephone" invention at the London Society of Telegraph Engineers.

A month or two later, on this day (actually this evening; it was 9:30pm), Bell was royally received by Queen Victoria at Osborne House on the Isle of Wight. He set up a telephone line to Osborne Cottage a few hundred yards from the main building so she could converse with Sir Thomas Biddulph (the Master of the Queen's Household). She was sufficiently impressed to purchase two instruments, but Bell offered instead to make a special set for the Queen. She also ordered a phone line installed between Osbourne House and Buckingham Palace in London.

One calamity during the demonstration was that Bell accidentally touched the Queen, which was considered rather bad form. As recently as 2009, Michelle Obama caused an uproar in the UK press by giving the Queen a hug.

Queen Victoria had sent the first official telegram across the Atlantic Ocean to US President James Buchanan, some 20 years before [Aug 16] .

Alfred Tarski (Teitelbaum or Tajtelbaum)
Born: Jan. 14, 1901;

Warsaw, Poland
Died: Oct. 26, 1983

Tarski is considered one of the greatest logicians of the twentieth century (perhaps second only to Kurt Gödel [April 28]). Once asked to compare himself to other logicians, he replied, "I'm the sane one."

Alfred Tarski (1968). Photo by George Bergman. The Oberwolfach photo collection. GFDL.

Much of his work was concerned with the semantics of mathematical logic, and he's sometimes called 'the man who defined truth'.

The 1924 Banach-Tarski paradox (developed with Stefan Banach) states that a solid sphere can be cut into a finite number of pieces, then put back together to form two new spheres, each the same size as the original. This is apparently so disturbing that there was an attempt to have its teaching outlawed in Illinois schools.

He left Poland for the US in August 1939 on the last ship to sail before the German and Soviet invasions.

Thomas John Watson Jr.
Born: Jan. 14, 1914;

Dayton Ohio
Died: Dec. 31, 1993

Watson Jr. became president of IBM in 1952, and was named CEO shortly before his father's death in 1956. Watson Sr. [Feb 17] had always kept a firm grip on the reins of power which Watson Jr. later characterized as "he wanted to make me head of IBM, but he didn't like sharing the limelight."
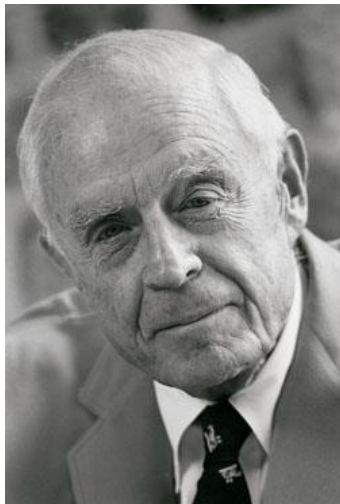
The handover came at an opportune moment – Watson Sr. had always thought computers to be overpriced and unreliable, except for one-of-a-kind projects such as the IBM SSEC [Jan 27]; he preferred the proven steadfastness of punched card systems. Once in charge, Watson Jr. took the company in a new direction, helped by the technical prowess of Cuthbert Hurd [April 5].

Three computer families emerged: the 7070 and 7090 for government business [May 7], the 1620 [Oct 21] for the scientific community, and the 1401 [Oct 5] for commercial uses; they were all remarkably successful.

In the early 1960's Watson oversaw the development of

System/360 [April 7], an enormous risk for the company since it represented a near-complete break with earlier designs. In the end, the gamble paid off handsomely.

Fortune magazine dubbed Watson "the most successful capitalist who ever lived", and in the year that he stepped down as CEO (1971), IBM was the world's largest computer company.

Thomas J. Watson, Jr. (1980). Photo by the US State department.

Watson was an avid seafarer who sailed his yacht *Palawan* further up the Northern coast of Greenland than any other non-military ship, and explored the Pacific by following Captain Cook's route.

Watson was also a keen aviator, able to fly a range of aircraft, from helicopters and jets to stunt planes. In 1986 he was the first private citizen to receive permission from Mikhail Gorbachev to fly through all the time zones of the Soviet Union.

Nathaniel Rochester
Born: Jan. 14, 1919;
USA
Died: June 8, 2001

Rochester designed the 701 [April 7], IBMs first scientific computer, also known (for commercial reasons) as the "Defense Calculator". He also built the prototype for the 702, the company's first commercial computer. These machines helped signal IBM's move away from its traditional punch card business.

Rochester and Herb Gelernter [Dec 17] were pioneers in the early days of AI, heading a group at IBM studying pattern recognition, information theory and switching circuit theory. For example, group members used an IBM 704 [May 7] to investigate the properties of neural networks.

In the summer of 1955, John McCarthy [Sept 4] and Marvin Minsky [Aug 9] approached Rochester and Claude Shannon [April 30] with a proposal to fund a conference on AI. It became the 1956 Dartmouth Workshop [June 18].

In 1958, Rochester was a visiting professor at MIT, where he helped McCarthy with the development of LISP [April 15]. Unfortunately, by then IBM's interest in AI was cooling, although work continued on computer-based checkers [Feb 24] and chess [June 00].

Elvis via Satellite
Jan. 14, 1973

Elvis Presley's "Aloha from Hawaii via Satellite" was supposedly broadcast live from the Honolulu International Center to over 1 billion viewers in 33 countries. (That excluded the US which was watching Superbowl VII at the time.)

Sadly, those numbers were mostly hyperbole generated by Presley's agent, Colonel Parker, although the broadcast did utilize the Intelsat IV F-4 satellite to transmit the show live to Australia, parts of Asia, and islands in the Pacific. Elvis was probably seen live in six countries, having a total population of around 216 million people. However, recordings of the show were broadcast later by many more countries (20+), and they may have reached a billion people.

'Aloha' wasn't the first music show broadcast by satellite; 'Our World' beat it by nearly seven years, airing on [June 25] 1967.

Tiger Woods Recalled
Jan. 14, 1999

Electronic Arts (EA [May 27]) recalled up to 100,000 copies of "Tiger Woods 99 PGA Tour Golf" for the PlayStation [Dec 3] due to the unauthorized inclusion of a short cartoon. Not just any cartoon, but the South Park 'pilot', commonly known as "Jesus vs. Santa", which is far from the wholesome family fun that a team-up between Jesus and Santa might suggest. While the episode wasn't viewable from within the game itself, it could be accessed from a PC.

"Jesus vs. Santa" was originally made as a video Christmas card by Trey Parker and Matt Stone in 1995. A bootleg copy caught the attention of the "Comedy Central" network which hired the pair to develop "South Park". The show premiered with the intriguingly titled episode, "Cartman Gets an Anal Probe," on Aug. 13, 1997.

Ultimately, the recall of "Tiger Woods" didn't hurt the game, and arguably the franchise went on to populize golf simulations. It introduced several innovations that are now standard in the genre, such as the three-click golf swing.

Microsoft vs. MikeRoweSoft
Jan. 14, 2004

Microsoft vs. MikeRoweSoft was a legal dispute between Microsoft and a Canadian Belmont High School student named Mike Rowe over "MikeRoweSoft.com" which he had acquired in Aug. 2003.

On this day, Rowe received a letter from hard-hitting Microsoft lawyers demanded that he give up the domain, while offering to pay him the princely sum of $10 for it, the cost of registering the name originally.

Rowe wrote back, asking for $10,000 instead. Microsoft politely declined by sending him a cease-and-desist letter extending over 25 pages.

Rowe went to the press, and within 12 hours the site had received 250,000 views, and Rowe had been sent nearly $6,000 to cover court expenses; he was even offered free legal counsel.

In the end, Microsoft and Mike Rowe came to an agreement that earned him an Xbox [Nov 15], among other things, in exchange for turning over the name. "We believe he's a bright young man with great potential," Microsoft spokesman Jim Desler said later.

Other cybersquatting cases from the early 2000's include Madonna suing a NYC web developer after he purchased madonna.com, and used it to display his favorite porn clips.

In a 2010 cybersquatting study, Microsoft was among the most squatted companies, with 705 registered domains based on variations of "Microsoft."

China Passes US
Jan. 14, 2009

Today it was reported that China had passed the US to have the most user of the Internet during 2008. Subsequently, the US fell to third place in June 2016 behind India.

However, in the third quarter of 2020, North America was still top in terms of Internet usage as a percentage of population:
- North Am.   90.3%
- Europe   87.2%
- Latin Am.   71.5%
- Middle East 70.8%
- Oceania   67.7%
- Asia   59.5%
- Africa   47.1%

The total number of world users was estimated to be 4,930 million out of a total population of 7,797 million.