

Jan. 16th

Johann Helfrich von Müller

Born: Jan. 16, 1746;

Cleve, Germany

Died: June 12, 1830

In 1784, Müller released an improved version of Philipp Hahn's [\[Nov 25\]](#) mechanical calculator. In fact, Hahn later accused Müller of stealing his design, but Müller denied it.

In 1786, at the end of a 50-page extended essay about his machine, Müller added a section entitled "Further inventions of superior calculating machines and an arithmetical printing machine", where he described a difference engine (the "Differenzmaschine") for solving polynomials.

He didn't supply any details on how to implement such a device, but did say that he'd be willing to build one given sufficient financial support. Nothing came of the offer.



von Müller's Adding machine (1784). Photo by Daderot.

Some 30 years later, in 1819, Charles Babbage [\[Dec 26\]](#) began designing his Difference Engine [\[June 14\]](#) No. 0. Interestingly, it worked along the same lines as Müller's proposal, and Babbage is known to have read at least several parts of Müller's essay, which had been translated into English by John Hershel.

Although it could be argued that Müller should be given credit for

the concept of a difference engine, the first written mention of the basic principles were in a letter from Müller to the applied mathematician Albrecht Ludwig Friedrich Meister dated Sept. 10, 1784. Some research suggests that the difference engine ideas may have originated with Meister.

Tramiel Resigns

Jan. 16, 1984

Irving Gould [\[Sept 26\]](#), Commodore's chairman, and Jack Tramiel [\[Dec 13\]](#), CEO, had a successful working relationship until 1984 when a furious argument led to Tramiel quitting the company.

The disagreement seems to have started over Tramiel's wish to issue more stock to pay off Commodore's debts. It came to a head on Jan. 13 when Tramiel criticized Gould for using Commodore's assets (e.g. the company jet) for personal reasons.

Tramiel said: "You can't do this while I'm president," to which Gould responded, "Goodbye."

Another report says that the argument was about Tramiel wanted his sons to take on important roles in the company, which Gould opposed.

Three days later, Tramiel announced his resignation.

Without Tramiel, Gould and his new managing director, Medhi Ali, eventually led Commodore into bankruptcy, which was declared on April 29, 1994. Some Commodore engineers supposedly celebrated their last day by burning a life-size effigy of Mehdi Ali in the company's parking lot.

The IETF Meets

Jan. 16-17, 1986

The first Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF) meeting was held in San Diego, with 21 attendees. Attendance sizes grew considerably in later

gatherings, peaking at 2,810 in 2000 but has since leveled off at around 1,200.

IETF's main role is to develop voluntary Internet standards. There are no formal membership requirements, but there is a membership fee.

Typical IETF documentation types are BCPs, RFCs, and STDs: BCPs make recommendations about Best Current Practices; RFCs are the IETF's main technical documents, short for "Requests for Comments" [\[April 7\]](#); and STDs are RFCs that have become standards. This last acronym should not be confused with Sexual Transmitted Diseases, which are altogether different.

The IETF has a sister organization, the Internet Research Task Force (IRTF). It focuses on longer term research issues related to the Internet. IRTF was originally called INARC, but the name was changed for some reason.

The IETF was originally supported by the US government, but since 1993 has operated as part of the Internet Society (ISOC [\[Jan 1\]](#)), an international non-profit organization.

For more Internet organizations and acronyms (namely ICANN and IANA), see [\[Sept 18\]](#).

Borland vs. Lotus

Jan. 16, 1996

Borland's [\[Aug 00\]](#) "Quattro Pro" had a compatibility mode in which its menu could be made to look just like the one in "Lotus 1-2-3" [\[Jan 26\]](#). Lotus filed suit on July 2, 1990, claiming that its precious menu format was protected by copyright. Borland CEO Philippe Kahn [\[March 16\]](#) responded stridently that Lotus's position would stifle innovation and damage the delicate future of software development.

On Aug. 2, 1990, Richard Stallman's [\[March 16\]](#) "League for Programming Freedom"

(which is quite different from DC comics' "Justice League") demonstrated outside Lotus's headquarters. The protesters chanted:

1-2-3-4: Kick that lawsuit out the door;
5-6-7-8: Innovate, don't litigate;
9-A-B-C: Interfaces should be free;
D-E-F-0: Look and feel has got to go.

After various rulings and appeals, a court decided on March 9, 1995 that copyright didn't extend to the user interface (i.e. that Borland had won). Of course, this decision was appealed by Lotus, but on this day the Supreme Court agreed with the lower court.

By this time the decision hardly mattered to either Borland or Lotus: Borland had sold Quattro Pro to Novell [June 19], and Microsoft's Excel [May 2] had emerged as the real challenger to Lotus 1-2-3.

For more look-and-feel lawsuit action, see [March 17], [Aug 24], and [Dec 14]

"Becoming" Exhibited

Jan. 16 - Feb. 15,
2003

"Becoming" is a computer-generated animation playing on a wall-mounted LCD screen, that was first presented as part of Michael Craig-Martin's exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, New York.

Craig-Martin (1941 -) is best known for his drawings of ordinary, mass produced functional objects that he alters or assembles in ways to draw attention to the relationships between form and function.

"Becoming" utilizes a series of Craig-Martin's line drawings, which fade in and out against a bright pink background. At any time, eighteen objects - a chair, a pair of pliers, a tape cassette, a fan, a pitchfork, a sandal, a light bulb, a drawer, a metronome, a

book, a bucket, a TV, a flashlight, a safety-pin, a knife, a pair of handcuffs and a medicine jar spilling pills - may appear on-screen.

The artist was assisted by the London-based design group AVCO (Daniel Jackson and Tina Spear), who developed code in Lingo, using Macromedia Director [Jan 6] to generate the random appearance and disappearance of the objects. The executable runs on Windows XP [Oct 25] on a computer built into the back of the display.

Later in 2003, "Becoming" became the first software-based artwork acquired by the Tate gallery in London.

Recently, concerns have been raised about how to keep the artwork 'working' as its underlying hardware and software becomes increasingly obsolete. For example, there has been trouble opening the graphic files used by "Becoming" because Adobe [Oct 6] Illustrator had been updated multiple times since 2003.

Bob: the Best Developer

Jan. 16, 2013

Andrew Valentine, a senior investigator at US telecoms firm Verizon Business, recounted an amazing true story on his security-related blog that had occurred during the previous year .

A man in his mid-40s, identified only as "Bob", was a star programmer earning a six-figure salary at an American infrastructure company. In performance reviews, his code was praised for being clean, well-written, and submitted in a timely fashion. He was considered the best developer in the building.

Unfortunately, during a network-security audit, the company discovered that "Bob" had been outsourcing his job to a Chinese software company for

a fifth of his pay. Relieved of his tiresome workload, "Bob" would typically spend his day on eBay [Sept 3] and Facebook [Feb 4], before writing a brief progress report email for his bosses, and going home at 5pm.

Upon finding out how resourcefully "Bob" had managed his time, the firm sacked him rather than rewarding his initiative by promoting him to senior management.
