

Jan. 17th

ASCC Proposal

Jan. 17, 1938

Prev: [April 22] Next: [March 31]

Howard Aiken [March 8] submitted a proposal to Harvard President J.B. Conant to fund the construction of his Automatic Sequence Controlled Calculator (ASCC) [April 17], later known as the Harvard Mark I [Aug 7].

The document included a brief historical survey which mentioned the work of Herman Hollerith [Feb 29] and Charles Babbage [Dec 26]. Aiken probably cited Babbage because some 70 years earlier Babbage's son [Jan 21] had donated a demonstration set based on the Difference engine to Harvard, and Aiken had recently examined it. This in turn led him to add references to the Analytical Engine [Dec 23] based on details lifted from the 1926 catalog "Calculating Machines and Instruments" written by David Baxandall [Nov 00].

Aiken later grew fond of saying, "If Babbage had lived 75 years later, I would have been out of a job."

Anita Borg Naffz

Born: Jan. 17, 1949;

Chicago, Illinois

Died: April 6, 2003

Naffz founded the Systems mailing list in 1987, the first network group for women in technology. She had just returned from an OS conference, and had noticed how few women were present.

Incidentally, Systems initially ran on top of "GNU Mailman".

One of the list's early campaigns was to persuade Mattel to remove the phrase "math class is tough" from the repertoire of "Teen Talk Barbie," (1992) [Feb 14].

Naffz and Telle Whitney also founded the "Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing" (GHC) [Dec 9], which was first held in Washington, D.C. in June 1994, and brought together 500 technical women. More than a dozen conferences have been held since, and now requires a convention center to accommodate everyone.



Anita Borg Naffz. (c) Google Anita Borg 2011 Scholarship.

Naffz established the Institute for Women and Technology in 1997. It was renamed the "Anita Borg Institute for Women and Technology" after Borg's death, and currently sports the trendy title, AnitaB.org.

IBM Antitrust (Again)

Jan. 17, 1969

The US Department of Justice's (DOJ) antitrust division filed suit against IBM, alleging that by bundling software with its hardware the company was engaging in anti-competitive behavior.

After a sprightly six-year long discovery process, the case finally went to trial in May 1975. It dragged on for another seven years before being dropped on [Jan 8] 1982. The government had initially estimated that the case would take at most 60 days. Robert H. Bork, a Yale law professor, later dubbed it "the antitrust division's Vietnam."

The suit actually achieved its main goal during the first year of discovery when IBM voluntarily

unbundled its pricing of hardware, software, and services. Perhaps the DOJ were onto something, since this change gave an enormous push to the rise of independent software services during the 1970's (e.g. see [March 19]).

The same judge, David Edelman, had presided over the 1952 IBM antitrust suit [Jan 21], concerning the monopolization of the punched card business, but that case had been settled quickly, in a mere four years.

This time around the reading of documents and testimony into the official record became so time-consuming that Edelman established a routine where he would read the testimony in his chambers while the amassed IBM and DOJ lawyers would carry on the trial in front of an empty bench.

Betamax Ruling

Jan. 17, 1984

The US Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that Sony could continue to sell its Betamax videocassette recorder (VCR) despite the objections of two Hollywood studios, Universal and Disney.

Although Betamax had lost the videotape wars with VHS, its VCR had become the foundation of the burgeoning home video business. This was a significant income source for those Hollywood companies, but they were more concerned about the ability to copy tapes.

Fortunately, the court was persuaded by the large number of copyright holders who didn't object. One persuasive voice was Fred (Mr.) Rogers who stated that he had "absolutely no objection to home taping for noncommercial use".

The decision meant that if a product (in this case a VCR) had a substantial, legitimate use it could be legally sold, even if some consumers used it illegitimately. It also meant it was legal to copy material so long as it was for private use only.

The ruling opened the door for the TiVo and other digital home gadgetry, and was later employed in defense of Web-based services, such as YouTube [Feb 14] and Dropbox [June 1].

DART works up a Storm

Jan. 17, 1991

The Dynamic Analysis and Replanning Tool (DART) is a lesser known AI system used by the US military to schedule the transportation of supplies and personnel around the world. In 1995, it was estimated that DART had saved the military the equivalent of all the funds DARPA [Feb 7] had assigned to AI research during the previous 30 years.

DART was the joint work of BBN [Oct 15], the ISX Corporation, and the US Air Force's Rome lab. It was given the go-ahead in Nov. 1990 when military planners realized that the upcoming "Operation Desert Storm" (Jan. 17 - Feb. 28, 1991) would pose enormous transportation problems for bases in Europe and Saudi Arabia. A working prototype was ready in time for the start of the mission.

Online Gambling

Jan. 17, 1996

Jukka Honkavaara, a 17-year old Finn, logged onto Intertops.com and bet \$50 that the UK soccer team Tottenham Hotspur would defeat Hereford United. They did, and Honkavaara won a princely \$2.00.

This is generally considered the first ever online sports bet, arguably making Intertops the first ever Internet gambling site. However, several casino sites predate Intertops, but the sticking point is whether they allowed real money to be wagered.

Intertops was founded in 1983 by Detlef Train, but Ian

Sherington only started setting up the Internet part of the business in late 1994.

Two other early betting sites (also from 1996) were "Gaming Club", owned by Microgaming based on the Isle of Man, and Intercasino, owned by Cryptologic which was founded by Andrew and Mark Rivkin in the basement of their parents' home in Canada.

Another 'win' for Intertops was the acceptance of the first ever mobile bet, placed via WAP [June 26] in 2000.

The Drudge Report

Jan. 17, 1998

(just before midnight)

Matt Drudge broke the story of the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair on his website "The Drudge Report". Many commentators mark this event as when the Internet replaced traditional news media.



Matt Drudge (1996). Photo by John Mathew Smith and www.celebrity-photos.com. CC BY-SA 2.0.

Michael Isikoff had been investigating the story for over a year and *Newsweek* was due to publish his article on this day. But, just before the magazine went to press, the editor pulled the item. However, when Drudge saw the story, he didn't hesitate.

"The Drudge Report" had originally been an e-mail newsletter focusing on Hollywood and Washington D.C

gossip, and had nearly 85,000 subscribers by 1997. In the early days of the website, Drudge maintained it from his home in Miami Beach.
