

July 25th

Babbage and Street Musicians July 25, 1864

Charles Babbage [Dec 26] was known for his intense dislike of London's organ grinders, who would stroll from street to street, playing 'music' on their often untuned instruments, until someone paid them to move on.

His low opinion was shared by many other distinguished London residents. For instance, Thomas Carlyle (the noted historian and essayist) constructed a soundproof study in his home, and Charles Dickens [Dec 00] told a friend that he couldn't write for more than an hour without being driven to distraction.

The brewer, Michael Bass, introduced a parliamentary act in 1863, the "Act for the Better Regulation of Street Music in the Metropolis," which would give the police the right to arrest any street performer who didn't leave a neighborhood when requested by a homeowner. Babbage's views figured prominently in the pamphlet Bass published to gain support for his bill.



Organ grinder and monkey (1892). Library of Congress.

In retaliation, organ grinders converged from miles around to

play their instruments outside his home, at time joined by people who tossed dead cats into his garden, blew bugles, and smashed his windows.

When the Bill passed Parliament in July 1864, writers and scholars of all types were grateful. The logician Augustus De Morgan wrote to John Herschel, "Babbage's Act has passed, and he is a public benefactor."

It was the beginning of the end for street musicians, although the story goes that when Babbage was on his deathbed, an organ grinder turned up to play outside his window.

IBM's First Patent July 25, 1911

IBM's first patent was filed on October 11, 1907 and granted on this day as US 998,631. It describes a 'perforating machine', essentially a punch card system for tabulation. This may seem unlikely since IBM only came into existence in 1924.

The patent's inventor was John Royden Peirce, who went on to design a variety of machines for sorting and tabulating punched cards. Peirce's company (the Pierce Accounting Machine Company) later failed, and in 1922 his patents were purchased by C-T-R [June 16] when he joined the company. C-T-R became IBM on [Feb 14] 1924, and inherited its patents.

IBM is one of the world's leading patent holders with over 150,000 to its name. It received a record 9,262 in 2019, the 27th consecutive year that IBM has topped the annual list of US patent recipients.

David Hugh Bunnell

Born: July 25, 1947;

Alliance, Nebraska

Died: October 18, 2016

Bunnell founded some of the most successful computer magazines, including *PC Magazine*, *PC World*, and *Macworld*. At one point, four of the top ten computer magazines were ones he'd started.

Bunnell began his career in 1973 as a technical writer for MITS [Sept 13], and later admitted that he knew virtually nothing about electronics at the time.

Bunnell began editing MITS's newsletter, "Computer Notes" [April 7], in April 1975 which focussed on the Altair [March 7], and so became the first regular publication devoted to personal computers. In 1976, he organized the first PC conference [March 27].

In 1977, Bunnell convinced Benwill, a Boston-based publisher, to fund *Personal Computing*, and got his former MITS colleagues Bill Gates [Oct 28] and Paul Allen [Jan 21] to write a software column. Less hardcore than BYTE magazine [Sept 3], it became a template for the many mass-audience tech magazines that followed.

Bunnell started *PC Magazine* in the fall of 1981 in the spare bedroom of his house near Golden Gate Park in San Francisco. The first issue of *Macworld* came out on [Jan 24], 1984, the same day that Steve Jobs announced the Mac.

Bunnell and his then wife, Linda, worked as teachers in the early 1970s on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. He also delivered food to the Indians who occupied Wounded Knee for 71 days from February 27, 1973.

A Chorus Line

July 25, 1975

"A Chorus Line" is a musical about 17 Broadway dancers auditioning for spots in a forthcoming show. The music is by Marvin Hamlisch, lyrics by Edward Kleban, with a book by James Kirkwood Jr. and Nicholas Dante.

It opened at the Shubert Theatre on this day, becoming the first Broadway show with its lighting controlled by a computer, a PDP-8 [March 22]. The machine had been modified by Gordon Pearlman at the University of North Carolina, and was sold as the LS-8 lighting console by Electronics Diversified, Inc. (EDI). However, the lighting designer of the show, Sharon Musser, nicknamed it "Sam".



The LS-8 computerized lighting console.

The show was a box office and critical hit, receiving twelve Tony Award nominations and winning nine, in addition to the 1976 Pulitzer Prize for drama. However, this was not entirely due to the use of a computer.

Laroux Virus Excels

July 25, 1996

The first known MS Excel [May 2] macro virus, "Laroux," was stored in a hidden datasheet named "laroux". Written in Visual Basic for Applications (VBA), it was able to operate inside Excel 5 and 7 (aka Excel 95). (There was no Excel 6 since all of MS Office's [Aug 1] applications had been standardizing on the same major version number at this point.)

The virus became active when Excel was loaded and copied itself into any other workbooks when they were accessed. In a short time, Laroux became one of the most common Windows viruses.

Laroux was first found in Alaska and South Africa, on machines at the offices of international oil companies.

WGA

July 25, 2005

Microsoft launched Windows Genuine Advantage (WGA), which scans a user's computer to ensure its Windows software is legal before allowing updates to be downloaded.

Two years later, the inevitable happened. On August 24, 2007, the WGA team accidentally installed buggy software on the WGA servers. The team quickly rolled back the changes, but didn't check the results. For 19 hours, until around 3 pm the following day, WGA flagged several thousand legal Windows users as pirates.

Fortnite

July 25, 2017

"Fortnite: Save the World" is a third-person shooter game developed by Epic Games [Jan 15; July 1] where up to four players cooperate on various missions while avoiding rampaging zombies. Epic has called the game a cross between Minecraft [July 25] and "Left 4 Dead".

The game was released as a paid-for early access title for Windows, MacOS, the PlayStation 4 [Nov 15], and Xbox One [Nov 22] on this day.

However, it had been announced back in 2011 at the Spike Video Game Awards, in the form of an action-packed trailer. Donald Mustard, creative lead at Epic, remarked that this event occurred just "three weeks after

we came up with the idea, before we even made the game".

"Fortnite: Battle Royale", was released in September: a free 100-person fight to the death that only allowed for one survivor. Within 24 hours, it had amassed one million players (in groups of 100).

By early 2018, Fortnite had passed 140 million players, and had reportedly generated over one billion dollars from in-game purchases.