Herbert Alexander Simon

Born: June 15, 1916;

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Died: Feb. 9, 2001

Simon was a pioneer across several domains, including economics, AI, organization theory, and complex systems. He received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1978, and the Turing Award for his work on AI.

With Allen Newell [March 19], he created the Logic Theorist ([Aug 9] 1956) and the General Problem Solver (GPS; [Dec 30] 1958). They were written using the Information Processing Language (IPL; [Feb 26]) developed by Newell, J. Clifford Shaw [Feb 23], and Simon.

Simon's interest in how humans learn led to work with Edward Feigenbaum [Jan 20] on EPAM (Elementary Perceiver and Memorizer) theory in 1984, one of the first models of learning to be implemented as software.

A quote: "I don't care how big and fast computers are, they're not as big and fast as the world."

First IFIP Congress

June 15-20, 1959

Although the first International Conference on Information Processing commenced in Paris on this day, the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) was only formally established a year later by UNESCO, and its title initially included an "S" for Societies (IFIPS).

An early IFIP success was the organization's contribution to ALGOL 60 [Jan 11], one of the first examples of international collaboration in computer science.

IFIP's founding president was Isaac L. Auerbach (1960–1965).

Bryant Handy Hard Disks

June 15, 1965

In 1961, Bryant Computer Products (formerly Chucking Grinder Co.) introduced its 4000 series of hard disk drives [Sept 14], housed in massive cabinets that stood 1.3 meters high, were 1.8 meters wide, and could hold up to 26 disks. Each platter was almost 1 meter in diameter, but could hold around 4 MB of data (which was considered enormous, for the time.) A CDC 6600 [Sept 00] installed at Lawrence Livermore Labs used multiple Bryant disk units.
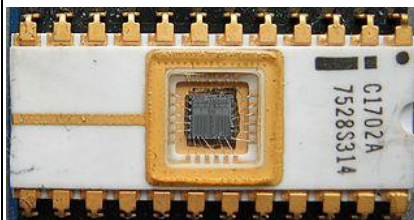
Some historians believe these Bryant disks were the physically largest ones ever made.

On this day, the company released the Model-2 Series, which added air-filtering and reduced the warm-up time of the system to a very sprightly 15 minutes or less.

Bryant was also responsible for creating the MOBIDIC ("MOBIle DIgital Computer") [Dec 1].

Intel 1702

June 15, 1970

The Intel 1702 was the first EPROM (Erasable Programmable Read Only Memory) chip whose contents could be erased by shining ultraviolet light through its quartz window.

The Intel 1702. Photo by Poil. CC BY-SA 3.0.

This made them ideal for holding BIOS code (firmware), which had to be available at system start-up, but could be updated.

Dov Frohman [March 28] was awarded US patent 3660819 for the work, which he filed on this day.

EPROM was later superseded by EEPROM and flash memory [Dec 20]. EEPROM can be programmed and erased electrically without the need for an ultraviolet light source. Flash memory is a form of EEPROM where multiple blocks of memory can be erased all at once.

SCCS Formed

June 15, 1975

The Southern California Computer Society (SCCS) was formed by Judge Pearce Young of the Los Angeles Superior Court, Don Tarbell, and G.A. Silver. The first meeting was held at Tarbell's home on Father's Day.

One of the society's aims was to change the public attitude that the computer was a dehumanizing force, which it furthered by publishing a monthly newsletter, *SCCS Interface*.

Lee Felsenstein [April 27] later compared the Homebrew Computer Club [March 5], also founded in 1975, to the SCCS: "What made [Homebrew] pivotal was its lack of organization. The [SCCS] was highly organized. It immediately became a hot bed of politics and basically they never did anything and they destroyed themselves."

SCCS also fell victim to a "Col. Whitney," a swindler who managed to abscond with thousands of dollars of the society's funds. The club was badly hit by the lawsuits that ensued.

In Aug. 1976, Robert S. Jones began publishing a breakaway magazine, *Interface Age*, which focused on business computing . Its May 1977 issue was the first

computer magazine to include a flexi-disc; in this case a 6800 BASIC interpreter written by Robert Uiterwyk, a variant of Tiny BASIC [June 10] for the SWTPC [Nov 00].

The May 1977 issue of *Interface Age* featuring a flexi-disk. Photo by Swtpc6800 (Michael Holley).

Microcomputers Worth Space
June 15, 1977

For the first time, the National Computer Conference (NCC) set aside an area for microcomputer companies.

The conference dates back to the early 1950's, beginning as two semi-annual meetings: the Eastern Joint Computer Conference (EJCC) in 1951, and the Western Joint Computer Conference (WJCC) in 1953. In 1963, they were renamed the Fall Joint Computer Conference (FJCC) and Spring Joint Computer Conference (SJCC), and the two were merged into the NCC in 1973, which ran until 1987.

Events of note included:

- 1962:, the introduction of the Compatible Time-Sharing System (CTSS) [May 3] at the SJCC;
- 1968: "The Mother of All Demos" [Dec 9] at the FJCC;
- 1981, NCC: the first public appearance of the Xerox Star [April 27] at the NCC.

GIF
June 15, 1987

CompuServe's [Sept 24] Sandy Trevor [April 12] released the Graphics Interchange Format (GIF), version 87a, although its primary creator was Steve Wilhite.

GIF offered a palette of up to 256 colors, supported animations, and compressed images using the Lempel–Ziv–Welch (LZW [Nov 27]) technique without degrading the visual quality. That method was patented in 1985, which led to the "GIF licensing controversy" in [Dec 24] 1994.

Although GIF's color limitations made it unsuitable for color photographs, it was fine for simpler images, and much better than its main competitor, Run-length encoding (RLE), which was restricted to black and white.

Although the GIF licensing fuss eventually went away, a more serious bone of contention remains. When Wilhite was honored at the 2013 Webby Awards [March 6], he emphatically rejected the hard-"G" pronunciation of his invention. He pointed out that that the intended articulation echoes the American peanut butter brand Jif. Indeed, CompuServe employees would often declare that "Choosy developers choose GIF", spoofing the brand's TV commercials. Controversially, the word is often pronounced with a hard "G" as in "gift".

Wilhite's speech triggered a storm of 17,000 posts on Twitter and fifty indignant news articles.

NVidia RIVA TNT Released
June 15, 1998

NVidia's [Feb 17] RIVA TNT was a 2D, video, and 3D graphics accelerator chip for PCs. Its massive success cemented NVidia as a serious rival to 3Dfx [Nov 6].

RIVA stood for "Real-time Interactive Video and Animation", and "TNT" supposedly referred to the chip's ability to work on two texels at once (TwiN Texel).

RIVA TNT was the first graphics chip to get a branded driver, modestly called the Detonator. It provided a major boost to OpenGL [June 30] and DirectX [Sept 30] applications, which made them stronger opponents to 3Dfx's proprietary Glide API.

A third graphics chip contender entered the ring in Dec. of that year – ATI's Rage 128 [Oct 24].

Cabir Phone Worm
June 15, 2004

Kaspersky Labs discovered Cabir, the first malware for smartphones, aimed at devices running Symbian OS [June 24]. Whenever an infected phone was activated, the message "Caribe" was displayed, and the worm attempted to spread itself through Bluetooth [May 20]. Worryingly, the phone's owner didn't even have to make a call for the worm to propogate.

Cabir was probably developed by the Spanish group 29A (hexadecimal for 666), as its source was published in the final issue of its *29A* magazine.

Dozens of phones at the Athletics World Championship held in Helsinki in Aug. 2005 were infected, probably due to the close proximity of so many people and Cabir's use of Bluetooth.

Another unwanted side effect of Cabir's appearance was the birth of many neologisms involving the phrase "blue", such as "Bluebugging", "Bluejacking", and "Bluesnarfing".

'Google' is a Verb
June 15, 2006

The first recorded use of "google" as an intransitive verb occurred on July 8, 1998. Google co-founder Larry Page wrote "Have fun and keep googling!" in a mailing list.

Google's earliest use as a transitive verb was on US TV in the "Help" episode of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" (Oct. 15, 2002), when Willow asked Buffy, "Have you googled her yet?"

However, "google" was added to the Oxford English Dictionary as a verb on this day, with the meaning "to use the Google search engine to seek online information." (also see [Dec 12]).

Gates Shift
June 15, 2006

Prev: [Jan 13] Next: [June 27]

Bill Gates [Oct 28] announced that he was starting to shift his work focus to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and would gradually transfer his day-to-day duties at Microsoft to Ray Ozzie [Nov 20] (who would take on Gates' role of chief software architect) and to Craig Mundie (the new chief research and strategy officer). His last day as a Microsoft employee would occur two years later, on [June 27] 2008.

During today's announcement, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer [March 24] felt moved to remark, "It's been my privilege to work shoulder to shoulder with a true visionary."

This of course was hyperbole – Ballmer is 1.96 meters tall, while Gates' is 1.77 meters. Paul Allen [Jan 21] was 1.78 meters, so worked much closer to Gates.

Enigma Sells
June 15, 2017

A rare Enigma M4 cipher machine [Feb 23], with four rotors, was sold at a Christie's auction for a world record-breaking price of $540,000.

Out of 1,600 M4's produced during WWII, only around 100 are believed to survive. Most of them were used aboard U-boats, so were lost at sea or were destroyed by their crews to keep them from falling into Allied hands.

Wheel on an Enigma M4 at the Deutsches Museum München. Photo by OS. CC BY-SA 4.0.

Karl Donitz, the Kriegsmarine's commander-in-chief, was convinced that the Enigma code was unbreakable. At his trial in Nurenberg, he stated that it was the Allies' radar systems that had led to the discovery and destruction of his fleet.