

March 3rd

Ulf Michael “Monty” Widenius

Born: March 3, 1962;
Helsinki, Finland

Widenius and David Axmark implemented the first version of the MySQL open-source relational database management system, which they released on May 23, 1995. It was originally intended as a free alternative to the mSQL propriety system, but used the prefix “my” since Widenius’ oldest daughter is called My.



Monty Widenius (2019). Photo by SofiaEk. CC BY-SA 4.0.

MySQL soon became a central component of the LAMP open-source web application stack; LAMP is an acronym for Linux [Sept 17], Apache [Dec 1], MySQL, and one of Perl/PHP/Python [Oct 5].

Axmark, Allan Larsson, and Widenius also founded the company MySQL AB. In a cunning move, MySQL AB made MySQL available under a GPL license [Oct 4] at no charge, and also sold it with more traditional licenses to clients who wanted to use it in propriety or closed source products.

Often this “dual licensing” approach is used to mark the start of the “second generation” of open source companies. The

“first generation” derived their revenue only from selling support, consulting services, and training.

MySQL AB was sold to Sun Microsystems [Feb 24] in Jan. 2008, but Widenius left Sun in 2009 prompted by its imminent purchase by Oracle [Aug 17]. He formed a new company, Monty Program AB, and forked MySQL, renaming it MariaDB, after his youngest daughter, Maria.

Widenius also has a son, Max, and coincidentally MySQL AB developed a relational database management system called MaxDB for a German company in the early 2000’s.

WHATSIT March 3-5, 1978

The second West Coast Computer Faire was held at the San Jose Convention Center. The unique tempo of those times was typified by two adjacent booths.

In one, decorated with hand lettered signs, Lyall Morrill of “Computer Headware,” wearing a beanie with a propeller, sold an information organizer that could process queries in a simplified English-like query language. WHATSIT (“Wow! How’d All That Stuff Get In There?”) was available for the Apple II [June 5] and CP/M [June 22].

The second booth was occupied by three men in suits working for IBM. Its chrome display racks held an IBM 5100 [Sept 9] (or perhaps the 5110). They spent most of their time watching people line up at Morrill’s booth to buy his program.

The faire also hosted the first microcomputer chess tournament, won by SARGON 5-0. It was written by husband-and-wife team Dan and Kathleen ‘Kathe’ Spracklen for a Z80-based computer [March 9] called the Wavemate Jupiter III.

For the first West Coast Computer Faire, see [April 16].

SCSI Named March 3, 1982

The “Small Computer System Interface” (SCSI; pronounced “scuzzy”) is a set of standards for transferring data in parallel between computers and peripherals.

SCSI has its roots in SASI (Shugart Associates System Interface), which had been developed by Shugart [Sept 27] Associates (as the name suggests). Larry Boucher authored both specifications.

The ANSI committee didn’t want a standard named after a company, and so a full day was spent trying to agree on a new name, with “Small Computer System Interface” (SCSI) being the most popular. However, “Small” wasn’t that great a word choice, since the standard eventually came to be used by all types (and sizes) of machine.

Boucher also preferred SCSI to be pronounced “sexy”, but Dal Allan pronounced it as “scuzzy” and that stuck.

The first version (SCSI-1), adopted by ANSI in 1986, was an 8-bit version with a 5 MBps transfer speed that allowed up to eight devices to be connected at once. Many other versions followed which increased these parameters considerably.

Pac-Man Battles K.C. Munchkin! March 3, 1982

“K.C. Munchkin!” was a popular game for the Magnavox Odyssey² [May 2], but on this day a Federal court decided it was a little too much like Pac-Man [Oct 26], and ordered Philips Consumer Electronics to remove the game from store shelves.

The ruling was one of the first to establish how copyright law would apply to the look and feel of software.

Munchkin was designed and programmed by Ed Averett, and was admittedly heavily based on Namco's 1980 arcade game, although not quite a direct clone. In addition, Munchkin was a home video game, and beat Atari's version of Pac-Man for the Atari 2600 [April 3] to market by almost a year.

The game's name was a reference to then president of Philips, Kenneth C. Menkin.

A Munchkin sequel duly arrived, called "K.C.'s Crazy Chase!", which mocked the legal battle between Phillips and Atari. The redesigned Munchkin character rolled about without the chomping of Pac-Man, but now seemed strangely reminiscent of Atari's Centipede.

Genetic Images

March 3, 1992

"Genetic Images" was a media installation created by Karl Sims where visitors could interactively "evolve" abstract images. It was exhibited at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris during 1992-1993, as part of the center's "revue virtuelle" series, presenting computer based art works.

A user was shown sixteen images, and had to select their favorite via a foot switch. Behind the scenes, a CM-2 Connection Machine [Sept 25] would render a new set of images based on random changes to the color, shape, texture, and several other parameters. In five generations, the viewer would journey along one of 2^{20} possible paths.

The process utilized a form of natural selection by applying an aesthetic filter to generations of random mutations. It worked in a similar way to Richard Dawkin's "biomorph" program described in "The Blind Watchmaker" ([Dec 00] 1986).

The details of the algorithm can be found in Sim's 1991 paper "Artificial Evolution for Computer Graphics".

Free Internet Chess

March 3 (or 5), 1995

The "Free Internet Chess Server" (FICS) was launched as an alternative to the Internet Chess Club (ICC). Its motto is "We do it for the game, not the money."

ICC began life as the Internet Chess Server (ICS) on Jan. 15 1992. Michael Moore and Richard Nash, of the University of Utah, wrote the first version, and the site was supported by volunteers over the next few years.

The game heated up somewhat on Dec. 17, 1994 when Daniel Sleator moved the American ICS to a new site. On March 1, 1995, the site changed its name to ICC, and began charging players for membership.

The riposte was lightning fast: on the same day, a mailing list was formed to develop a new, free chess server. That group, led by Chris Petroff and Henrik Gram, produced FICS.

As of 2020, FICS had over 300,000 registered users.

GNOME 1

Released

March 3, 1999

GNOME is an open-source desktop environment that runs on versions of Linux and BSD [March 9]. The name originally stood for "GNU Network Object Model Environment", but the acronym was dropped when the object model concept fell from favor.

The project was founded on Aug. 15, 1997 by Miguel de Icaza and Federico Mena, mostly as a reaction against KDE [Oct 14] which relied on the Qt widget toolkit that used a proprietary software license at the time. GNOME proudly employed the free GTK+ toolkit instead.

GNOME 1 and 2 sported a traditional desktop metaphor,

but GNOME 3, released in April 2011, tried something new. The shell was replaced by multiple tasks located in virtual desktops, and the designers even had the gall to remodel various toolbars.

Linus Torvalds [Dec 28] strenuously encouraged users to switch to KDE 3 rather than suffer the new-style GNOME. But in 2013, he returned to GNOME, stating that "it has been getting less painful" and "things are better than a year ago".



Three Gnomes. Photo by Walter J. Pilsak. CC BY-SA 3.0.

The GNOME logo is a footprint, drawn by Tuomas Kuosmanen, who was also responsible for Wilbur, the GIMP mascot [Feb 15]. The picture has been redrawn a few times, and now looks a bit like a "G" (i.e. a left footprint).

Patterson Sues Evans

March 3, 2005

Tim Patterson, [June 1] who sold 86-DOS (aka QDOS) to Microsoft on [July 27] 1981, sued author and former *The Times* editor Harold Evans, and his publisher Time Warner, for defamation.

In a chapter devoted to Gary Kildall [May 19] in Evans' "They Made America: From the Steam Engine to the Search Engine: Two Centuries of Innovators", Evans related how Tim Paterson "[took] 'a ride on' Kildall's operating system, appropriated the 'look and feel' of [Kildall's] CP/M operating system, and

copied much of his operating system interface from CP/M.” Evans also described Paterson’s software as a “rip-off” and “a slapdash clone” of Kildall’s CP/M [June 22].

The suit claimed that these needlessly cruel words had caused Paterson “great pain and mental anguish”, and so he requested “over \$75,000” in damages, plus costs to assuage the agony.

Evans' response was mainly one of puzzlement that the chapter had attracted a suit as it merely “recapitulate[d] and state[d] what 11, 12, 15 other books [said]”.

Judge Thomas Zilly dismissed the lawsuit in July 2007, taking a dim view of lawsuits designed to curb the First Amendment rights of journalists.

Nintendo Switch Released

March 3, 2017

The Nintendo [Sept 23] Switch was a hybrid console which could be used as a portable gaming device or be docked to a TV. It came with two “Joy-Con” controllers, attached to the console via side rails, but also detachable.



The Nintendo Switch. Photo by Evan-Amos.

It had been more than a decade since Nintendo’s last hardware mega hit, the Wii [Nov 19], and many analysts believed smart phones were the future of gaming. They were pessimistic about the Switch’s chances.

However, nearly three million were shipped in the first month, and over 14 million units worldwide within a year,

thereby outselling the total lifetime sales of Nintendo’s disappointing Wii U [Nov 18].

A strong lineup of reimagined classics helped. “The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild” [Feb 21] sold more than eight million copies in 2017 and was named “Game of the Year”. New versions of “Mario Kart” and “Super Mario” [Sept 13] performed similarly well.
