Oct. 6th

Reginald Aubrey Fessenden
Born: Oct. 6, 1866;

East-Bolton, Quebec, Canada
Died: July 22, 1932

Fessenden did pioneering work on amplitude modulation (AM) radio, including the first transmission of speech. On Dec. 23, 1900, he telegraphed the message "One, two, three, four. Is it snowing where you are Mr. Thiessen? If so telegraph back and let me know" from his lab in Maryland, 50 miles to Arlington, Virginia. Thiessen replied that it was indeed snowing. This occurred a year before Guglielmo Marconi transmitted Morse Code from England to Signal Hill in Newfoundland [Dec 12].

Reginald A. Fessenden. From "Harper's Weekly Magazine", February 1903.

Fessenden also made the first broadcast to multiple receivers on Dec. 24, 1906, from Brant Rock, Massachusetts to ships owned by the United Fruit Company. Fessenden began his broadcast with a recording of Handel's "Largo," and then played the Christmas classic "O Holy Night" on his violin, while singing the words. The event was so successful that a second short programme was broadcast on Dec. 31.

For other possible first public radio broadcasts, see [Jan 1], [Jan 13].

John Warnock
Born: Oct. 6, 1940;

Salt Lake City, Utah

Warnock founded Adobe Systems with Charles Geschke [Sept 11] in Dec. 1982 after trying to get Xerox to commercialize their Interpress page description language for almost two years. Interpress was based on an earlier graphics language called JaM (standing for John and Martin), created by Warnock and Martin Newell at PARC [July 1] in the late 1970s. The name "Adobe" came from a creek that ran outside Warnock's garden in Los Altos, California.

At Adobe, Interpress evolved into the PostScript language, which teamed-up with Aldus PageMaker [July 15] and the LaserWriter [March 1] to kick start desktop publishing (DTP) in 1980's. In the 1990's, Warnock's Camelot system became the Portable Document Format (PDF), which was standardized as an open format in 2008.

Warnock's 1969 doctoral thesis described an algorithm for hidden surface determination. Warnock later noted that this work had earned him "the dubious distinction of having written the shortest doctoral thesis in University of Utah history". It is just 32 pages long.

Electric Photography
Oct. 6, 1942

Chester Carlson [Oct 22] was issued a patent for electrophotography, which produces a dry picture rather than a wet image as in the mimeograph process.

Searching for a buyer for his invention between 1939 and 1944, Carlson was turned down by more than 20 companies, including IBM, General Electric, Eastman Kodak, and RCA. The commercial breakthrough came when John Dessauer, chief of research at the Haloid Company, read an article about Carlson's invention in 1946. Unfortunately, Haloid didn't much like the term "electrophotography", mainly because it contained the word "photography". A kindly classics professor at Ohio State solved that problem by suggesting "xerography" – formed from the Greek words xeros ("dry") and graphein ("writing").

As a result, on Oct. 22, 1948, Haloid made its first public announcement about *xerography*, and shipped the first commercial photocopier, the XeroX Model A Copier, in 1949. Outside the company it was nicknamed the "Ox Box."

Photocopying soon became such a large part of the company's revenue that Haloid changed its name to "Haloid Xerox" in 1958, and after the roaring success of the Xerox 914 [Sept 16] to Xerox Corporation in 1961. Xerox PARC opened on [June 1] 1970.

Brian Keith Reid
Born: Oct. 6, 1949;
USA

At the end of the 1970's, Reid created the Scribe typesetting system , the first markup language to cleanly separate presentation from content. He also set up SUN (the Stanford University Network), a name later adopted by Sun Microsystems [Feb 24].

In 1987, he and John Gilmore created the alt.* hierarchy on USENET [Jan 29], intended as a home for 'alternative' newsgroups. The associated FAQ document jokes that "alt" is an acronym for "Anarchists, Lunatics, and Terrorists".

In 1995 he became director of the DEC Network Systems Lab which, together with the Western Research Lab,

developed the AltaVista [Dec 15] search engine.

Reid joined Google in June 2002, but after a year was reassigned to a programme with no funding or staff, and was fired in 2004. Apparently, he was also told that his ideas were now "too old to matter". Reid proceeded to sue for discrimination on the basis of age and disability, and the case was eventually settled out of court for undisclosed terms.

Reid is a practicing Anglican, and president of the Society of Archbishop Justus whose stated aim is to utilize the Internet to foster and further unity among Christians.

Dell's Apple
Oct. 6, 1997

Michael Dell [May 3] was asked his opinion of the poorly performing Apple company just after Steve Jobs had returned as temporary CEO [Sept 16]. Dell replied, "What would I do? I'd shut it down and give the money back to the shareholders." This opinion may have been influenced by Job's well-known opinion of Dell as a maker of "un-innovative beige boxes."

Ten years later, and ten months after the introduction of the iPhone [Jan 9], Apple's market capitalization was more than double that of Dell's: $140.4 billion vs. $62.27 billion. The disparity would grow larger.

Microsoft's First Phone
Oct. 6, 1998

Microsoft introduced its first telephone, the Microsoft Cordless Phone System (MCPS), also known as the MP-900. It consisted of a cordless handset, a charging cradle, and a base station linked to a computer.

Although the MCPS could work independently to make and receive calls, it required the computer to provide a digital address book, voice command dialing, Caller ID, voice mail management, and other add-ons. The MCPS lasted a year before being discontinued.

Microsoft's next phone product was the Windows Mobile series of smartphones, starting with the PocketPC [Jan 4].

Today, MCPS is generally taken to mean "Microsoft Certified Product Specialist"

Google Books
Oct. 6, 2004

During the Frankfurter Book Fair, Google launched Google Print (which became Google Books in 2005). However, the company had actually started scanning books back in 2002, under the codename Project Ocean. This interest was obviously related to Sergey Brin [Aug 21] and Larry Page's [March 26] earlier involvement with the Stanford Digital Library Technologies Project when they were students.

Hardly surprisingly, Google Books was not greeted with boundless joy by most authors and publishers, who soon sued the firm for copyright infringement. Lawyers were happily kept busy for years, but on April 18, 2016, the Supreme Court established that Google had a fair-use right to catalogue books and provide brief excerpts of them in its search results.

The Scanned Hand of Google.

Criticisms of the service include the large number of scanning and metadata errors, comprising crumpled pages, images of thumbs and fingers, 182 scanned works by Charles Dickens supposedly published prior to his birth in 1812, an edition of "Moby Dick" classified under "computers", and a biography of Mae West filed under "religion".

In Oct. 2009, Sergey Brin remarked, "The famous Library of Alexandria burned three times, in 48 BC, AD 273 and AD 640, as did the Library of Congress, where a fire in 1851 destroyed two-thirds of the collection. I hope such destruction never happens again, but history would suggest otherwise." This pronouncement was not considered a threat by the librarians in the audience.

Other digital libraries of note include the Library of Congress' American Memory [Oct 13], the Internet Archive [May 12], Project Gutenberg [July 4], the World Digital Library [April 21], and WikiSource [June 20].

Instagram
Oct. 6, 2010

Instagram, the photo-sharing social media platform, was created by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. The name is a portmanteau of 'instant camera' and 'telegram'.

The service reached one million registered users in just two months, 10 million in a year, and 850 million as of 2020. It was acquired by Facebook [Feb 4] in April 2012 for approximately $1 billion in cash and stock.

In May 2017, a survey conducted by the UK's Royal Society for Public Health concluded that Instagram was "worst for young mental health". As of July 2020, the most followed person is footballer Cristiano Ronaldo with over 233 million devotees.

The Qiui Cellmate
Oct. 6, 2020

Qiui is a Chinese company whose most famous product is probably the Cellmate, a remote-controlled cage that surrounds a user's penis, thereby acting as a chastity device.

The Cellmate comes with a formidable lock that can only be released by an onboard micro-controller. This is Bluetooth-controlled via a cellphone app.

On this day, several news outlets began reporting that security researchers had discovered that the Cellmate's API was exploitable by evil hackers. In particular, it was possible to cause the device to permanently lock shut, trapping the user's manhood in the device... forever.

Qiui hurriedly provided an updated version of their app, and also suggested a physical solution, if all else fails -- utilize a screwdriver to disassemble the cage.