Oct. 7th

Henriette Regina Davidson Avram

Born: Oct. 7, 1919;

New York City
Died: April 22, 2006

Avram developed MARC (Machine Readable Cataloging), the first digital metadata format, for the Library of Congress. By 1971, it had become the US national standard for bibliographic data, and two years after that, it became an international standard.

MARC made it possible to automate many library functions, including the sharing of bibliographic information electronically between libraries. It also made card catalogs, containing typed or handwritten index cards, obsolete.

There are several versions of MARC in use around the world, the most popular being MARC 21

John Edward Hopcroft

Born: Oct. 7, 1939;

Seattle, Washington

Hopcroft has made major contributions to the design and analysis of algorithms, data structures, automata and language theory. For example, the Hopcroft–Karp [Jan 3] algorithm finds matchings in bipartite graphs (one that can be divided into two disjoint and independent sets).

He has coauthored four well-respected books on formal languages and algorithms with Jeffrey Ullman [Nov 22] and Alfred Aho [Aug 9]. His textbook on the theory of computation, "Introduction to Automata Theory, Languages, and Computation", is known as the "Cinderella Book", although Cinders only appears on the cover of the second edition (1979).

John Hopcroft (2009), Photo by Pavel.mavrin.

Hopcroft is a grandson of Jacob Nist, founder of the Seattle-Tacoma Box Company.

Prototype IBM 608

Oct. 7, 1954

IBM demonstrated a calculator that required only 5% of the power consumed by existing devices, whch it achieved by replacing 1400 vacuum tubes in an IBM 604 [June 00] by 2000 transistors.

The prototype went on to become the IBM 608, released in Dec. 1957, the first commercial calculator based entirely on transistor tech. It employed over 3000 germanium transistors, could store up to 40 nine-digit numbers, and was able to perform 4,500 additions per second. The chief designer was Robert A. Henle.

Unfortunately, it proved to be too expensive to be a commercial success, but it set off changes across the industry, including the dramatic reduction in the price of transistors.

The 608 was part of Thomas Watson Jr. [Jan 14] plan to refocus IBM on transistor technology, along with the diktat that no new vacuum tube based products should be released. One result was the IBM 7070—the company's first transistorized stored-program computer.

There's a wide choice of candidates for the title of very first transistorized computer, including Bell Lab's TRADIC [March 14], the Harwell CADET [Feb 00], and MIT's TX-0 [Nov 20]. The winner is probably the Manchester TC [Nov 16].

Crisis in Garmisch

Oct. 7-11, 1968

The first NATO Software Engineering [June 10] Conference, held in Garmisch, Germany, was attended by over fifty people from eleven countries. Debate centered on what attendees called the 'software crisis' or the 'software gap', related to the growing, bewildering complexity of modern hardware and software.

The conference report was written by Peter Naur [Oct 25] and Brian Randell. Doug Mcllroy [April 3] jokingly described it as "a triumph of misapplied quotation!". However, Alan Perlis [April 1] gave out copies to his graduate students with the words, "Here, read this. It will change your life." Edsger Dijkstra [May 11] also remarked: "The general admission of the existence of the software failure in this group of responsible people is the most refreshing experience I have had in a number of years, because the admission of shortcomings is the primary condition for improvement."

Resistive TouchScreen

Oct. 7, 1975

G. Samuel Hurst and William C Colwell Jr. received a patent for the first resistive touchscreen (US 3911215), which they'd filed over a year and a half before, on March 18, 1974.

Capacitive touchscreens had been invented almost ten years before [Aug 2], but this new resistive design offered a few advantages, the most important

probably being that the screens were cheaper to make. Also, since they responded to pressure rather than electrical conductivity, they worked with both a stylus and a finger, which made them easier to use in difficult environments.

Perhaps their main drawback, at least in early versions, was that they could only sense a single location at a time, so couldn't respond to two-finger pinch or zoom actions.

Computer Bowl
Oct. 7, 1988

The first "Computer Bowl" (a computer trivia contest) was held at Boston's World Trade Center. Gurus from the East coast were pitted in a life-and-death struggle against the Wizards of the West. The winning team were awarded a beautiful silver bowl and the coveted title "Computer Masters of the Universe".

The event had been organized as a fund-raiser for the Computer museum [Sept 24] in Boston, and raised a goodly $175,000. The occasion was broadcast live to the West Coast, and shown later in two parts on PBS Television's "Computer Chronicles" [Sept 00]. Such was it's success that it became an annual event, for a few years.

The East coast team was Richard Shaffer (Captain), Esther Dyson [Sept 18], David Hathaway, Mitch Kapor [Nov 1], and John William Poduska. The West Coast team was David Bunnell [July 25] (Captain), Adele Goldberg [July 7], Bill Joy [Nov 8], Allen Michels, and Casey Powell. The winner?—the East, 365 points to 310.

An amusing write-up by Karen Frenkel, with all the questions and answers, appeared in the Jan. 1989 issue of the *Communications of the ACM* [Sept 15]. Typical questions included: "Name the top three minicomputer producers in 1965?", and "What computer did Data General introduce by showing a microchip in a woman's belly button?" [June 7].

A later competition was described in the Sept. 1994 issue of *Wired* [Jan 2]. Questions during that grueling affray included: "What did Alan Turing do in the woods to guard against wartime inflation?" [June 00], and "Was the internal pre-release name of Borland's [Aug 00] Quattro spreadsheet: 1) Buddha, 2) Rows and Columns, or 3) Spreadsheets R Us?"

Touch Woody
Oct. 7, 1996

According to the *Electronic Engineering Times* (and numerous web sites), Matsushita Electric's new PC for the Japanese domestic market came with a Web browser developed by Panasonic. Panasonic had licensed the cartoon character "Woody Woodpecker" for use in the product.

The day before a huge marketing campaign was to begin, a quick-witted American woman working at the company alerted Japanese management to certain problems with their advertising campaign, namely the slogan "Touch Woody - The Internet Pecker."

All "Touch Woody" references in the promotional materials were hurriedly switched to "Woody Touch Panel." Executives at a press conference apologized for the sudden change of name, although they stopped short of explaining the touchy subject to the Japanese press or dealers.

Cyber Games
Oct. 7-15, 2000

The first World Cyber Games (WCG) was held in Seoul, bringing together teams from 17 countries to compete in various PC games including Quake III [June 22], FIFA 2000 [May 27], Age of Empires II, and StarCraft: Brood War [March 31].

One discerning intention was to emulate the spirit of the Olympic Games, so there was an official opening ceremony, and players competed for gold, silver, and bronze medals. There was also prize money, totaling around $20,000.

The 2019 games were hosted in Xi'an, China on July 18–21.

N-Gage Released
Oct. 7, 2003

The N-Gage (pronounced "engage") was an unsuccessful attempt by Nokia [May 12] to create a game-playing handheld which also functioned as a phone. Its development codename was Starship.

The Nokia N-Gage. Photo by Evan-Amos.

Unfortunately, the system had to face some tough competition, namely the Nintendo Game Boy Advance [March 23], and also had a limited library of games, was expensive, and suffered from a screen that was taller then it was wide. Even worse, for some reason it was necessary to remove the device's battery to change games.

Several snide commentators decided that the phone's unusual curved shape made it look not unlike a taco.

Its design meant that the device had to be placed sideways against your head to be used as a phone (aka "sidetalking"). In poor light it made people appear to have a very large ear.

The N-Gage QD released in 2004 fixed a couple of the big issues, such as the position of the ear-piece, the location of the game cartridge, and the price.