Sept. 28th

Seymour Roger Cray

Born: Sept. 28, 1925;

Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin
Died: Oct. 5, 1996

Cary was "The father of supercomputing," and founder of Cray Research which built many of those machines. Jokingly, Cray liked to refer to himself as "an overpaid plumber."

In the early 1950s, he helped design the ERA 1103 [March 00], the first commercially successful scientific computer.

Seymour Cray. Photo by Michael Hicks. CC BY 2.0.

In 1957, Cray helped found Control Data Corporation (CDC [July 8]) with William Norris [July 14] and several others. In Oct. 1959, he designed the CDC 1604 [Oct 16], the world's fastest computer at the time, and the first to be fully transistorized. He also built the CDC 160 [June 00] to act as an I/O device for the 1604, which has since been called the first minicomputer.

Next came the CDC 6600 [Sept 00] (now considered the first supercomputer), followed by the CDC 7600 [Dec 3] which was around ten times faster.

During this time, CDC built a lab on land Cray owned in his hometown of Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. Of course, his nickname at the time was "The Wizard of Chippewa Falls." (For more wizards, see [March 25; April 6; April 9; July 30].)

One reason for the new lab may have been Cray's worries about an impending nuclear war. His house, built a few hundred yards away, included a huge bomb shelter, and one of his pastime was the digging of tunnels. He noted that: "while I'm digging in the tunnel, the elves will often come to me with solutions to my problem."

He founded Cray Research in 1972, and four years later announced the CRAY-1 [March 4]. Integrated circuits replaced transistors, making it four times faster than the CDC 7600. When asked what kind of CAD tools he had used, Cray said he liked #3 pencils with quad paper pads.

A long-standing myth associated with Cray's death due to a car accident was that his vehicle, a Jeep Cherokee, had been designed on a Cray supercomputer. The design work on the Cherokee had started back in 1978, led by Renault's Francois Castaing, head of American Motors product development team.

As part of his push for faster product turnaround, he organized the purchase of the CATIA CAD package from Dassault Systemes. CATIA started life as a 3D surface modelling extension to CADAM (computer-augmented design and manufacturing). CADAM was originally written for IBM mainframes and later ported to UNIX workstations. No Cray's were utilized.

Twisted Ethernet Standard

Sept. 28, 1990

Early forms of Ethernet [May 22] used various kinds of coaxial cable, but the change to unshielded twisted pair cables in 1984 led to the development of 10BASE-T (T stands for twisted). It supported speeds of 10 Mbit/s, and became the IEEE 802.3i network cable standard on this day [Sept 11].

10BASE-T supported hubs and switches, freeing Ethernet from its often cumbersome bus architecture. Networks became easier to manage and gave users more flexibility where they could locate their PCs. It was also much cheaper than other networking options, such as Token Ring [Oct 15].

The final nail in Token Ring's coffin came with the introduction of Ethernet switching and 100BASE-TX and 1000BASE-T, supporting speeds of 100 and 1,000 Mbit/s respectively.

NCSA Mosaic Beta

Sept. 28, 1993

NCSA Mosaic was the browser that popularized the Web and the Internet – the killer app [Sept 8] of the nineties. It was the first to be able to display graphics inside Web pages (as opposed to in separate windows). It was easy for the average user to install, had a simple GUI, and was reliable. It supported multiple Internet protocols, such as FTP [April 16], news [Jan 29], and Gopher [Feb 7] (which was the reasoning behind its name), and was probably the first browser for MS Windows, although Tom Bruce's Cello was a very close second.

The browser began as a project at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA [Jan 15]), announced by Marc Andreessen [July 9] on Jan. 23, 1993. He had been inspired by seeing a demo of the ViolaWWW browser [March 9].

Andreessen and Eric Bina [Oct 25] initially built Mosaic to run on UNIX's X Windows [June 19], but others soon ported it to PCs.

The first alpha release was in June 1993, and the first beta (numbered 0.6b) came out on this day. The software then went through a rapid series of improvements and bug fixes,

and version 1.0 was announced on Nov. 11.

Two companies soon stepped in to commercialize browser technology: Spyglass, Inc. [April 5] with its Spyglass Mosaic browser, and Netscape Communications [March 25] set up by Andreessen and James Clark [March 23].

Think Different

Sept. 28, 1997

Just two weeks after naming Steve Jobs as interim CEO [Sept 16], Apple launched their "Think Different" ad campaign, which went on to win several awards.

A series of TV commercials featured a free-verse poem read by Richard Dreyfuss and Jeff Goldblum, and accompanied by iconic images of 20th century personalities, including Albert Einstein, Bob Dylan, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Albert Einstein and colleague (1932). Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-13749. CC-BY-SA 3.0de.

The poem read, "Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The trouble-makers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status-quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify, or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They invent. They imagine. They heal. They explore. They create. They inspire. They push the human race forward."

It's commonly thought that Jobs wrote the poem himself, but it was actually penned by Rob Siltanen and Ken Segall who worked at Apple's advertising agency, TBWA (Segall also came up with the "iMac" name [May 6]).

The campaign title, "Think Different," was a play on the "IBM Think" slogan [Feb 14] coined by Thomas J. Watson Sr. [Feb 17]. That idea also didn't come from Jobs, but Craig Tanimoto, Art Director at TBWA. The grammatically correct "Think Differently" title was considered but rejected.

A different agency, Chiat/Day, was responsible for Apple's "1984" advert introducing the Mac [Jan 22], and they had merged with TBWA in 1995.

eMachines Founded

Sept. 28, 1998

eMachines, based in Irvine, California, but backed by several South Korean computer manufacturers, sold a brand of low-end PCs with prices ranging from $400 to $600, without a monitor. At the time, few PCs sold for less than $700, and $1000 was a more common price point. In addition, eMachines PCs were frequently offered with large rebates, provided the buyer signed a long-term contract with a specific ISP.

eMachines' approach quickly touched off a price war involving Compaq [Feb 14], Hewlett-Packard [Jan 1], IBM, and Packard Bell (a manufacturer best remembered for not being HP).

Nevertheless, eMachines sold between one and two million computers each year before its purchase on Jan. 30, 2004, by rival Gateway Computers [Sept 5].

NetBank Closed

Sept. 28, 2007

NetBank (aka Net.B@nk) was primarily engaged in online retail banking, mortgages, and business finance. It was one of the nation's first Internet-only banks with an estimated $2.5 billion in assets. Its initial public offering in July 1997 raised $42 million.

On this day, US banking regulators (in particular, the Office of Thrift Supervision) shut NetBank down due to its high levels of mortgage-related losses. This made it the single biggest failing savings-and-loan association since that sector's crisis in the 1980s.

Fortunately, customers with less than $100,000 deposited in the bank were protected by FDIC insurance. $1.4 billion in insured deposits were sold to another virtual bank, ING Direct, for $14 *million*, and ING Direct also took on 104,000 former NetBank customers.

LibreOffice

Sept. 28, 2010

LibreOffice is a free and open source office suite for word processing, spreadsheets, presentations, database management, and graphics editing. On this day it was forked from OpenOffice due to concerns over Sun's and Oracle's management [May 1] of the code base.

Many OpenOffice developers departed as well, and within a year, it was estimated that the new project had more than 300 active participants, who had committed more than 25,000 changes altogether. Commercial contributors included SuSE [June 14], Red Hat [Aug 11], and Canonical [Oct 20].

The first stable version of LibreOffice was released on Jan. 25, 2011 by "The Document Foundation" (TDF). In 2018, TDF estimated that there were 200 million active users worldwide. In comparison, Microsoft Office was employed by around 1.2 billion people in 2018.

LibreOffice 7.3 (released in Feb. 2022) continued the software's proud tradition of incorporating novel features, by adding support for Star Trek's Klingon language [Sept 8]. It also added Interslavic, another artificial language, which bridges the gap between Slavic languages such as Russian and Polish. These elements were the responsibility of Eike Rathke who currently works at Red Hat [Aug 11].