

# *The Interface*



Fresno, California

August/September 1999

## *Taking 8 Bits to the 21st Century*

### A History of Our Calendar

"There is no  
reason any-  
one would  
want a com-  
puter in their  
home."

—Ken Olson, presi-  
dent & Founder of  
Digital Equipment  
Corp, 1977

Some argue that 1999 is the last year of the century. Others maintain that the new century will not begin until January 1, 2001. When it comes to the calendar, such confusion is nothing new.

The calendar which most in the Western World use today is called the Gregorian calendar. It is the result of a revision made to its predecessor, the Julian calendar. The Julian calendar came about under the rule of Julius Caesar who ordered it in 46 BC to replace the mess preceding it.

The Roman calendar in use about 738 BC consisted of a 304 day year divided into 10 months, with a month of 22 or 23 days added every second year. Political manipulations later added two more months. By the time of Julius Caesar, the calendar was some three months ahead of the seasons.

To rectify things, the year was made 365.25 days, divided into 12 months, each having 30 or 31 days, except for February, but with a day added every fourth year. However, to realign the calendar with the seasons, Caesar decreed that the year 46 BC would have 445 days!

The Julian calendar was the standard for 1500 years. But a year is actually a little less than 365.25 days. Consequently, by 1580 AD, the calendar was 10 days ahead of the seasons. This prompted Pope Gregory XIII to revise the Julian calendar. To permanently correct the slight error, he decreed that years ending in 00 would NOT have an extra day, unless divisible by 400. Hence, the year 2000 will see an extra day in February; but 1900 was NOT a leap year.

Then, to realign the calendar with the seasons, 10 days were dropped from October: the day that would have been October 5,

1582 became October 15th!

Not every nation immediately adopted the Gregorian calendar. For instance, Britain and its colonies, didn't adopt it until September 2, 1752. By then, of course, the old Julian calendar had drifted off another day. Hence, what would have been September 3rd became September 14, 1752. This explains why George Washington's birth date is shown on today's calendar as February 22. Actually, he was born February 11, 1732 under the Julian calendar.

(From Civic 64/128 Gazette, Oxnard CA, January 1999)

## C-64/128 Light Pens

by Tom Haslehurst

Light Pens, another alternative input device for the C 64/128, only become a serious contender to the input device contest when they are being used with graphics programs. All light pens work on the same basic principles, but you will find that not all light pens are created equal. Light pens send out an electron beam which hits the phosphor coating (the coating on the inside surface of the monitor) which then sends the signal back to the computer through the joystick port. The sensitivity of the light pen determines how well the computer recognizes the signal.

I had three different light pens to compare, and each of them was activated in a different manner. The Madison Computer McPen was attached through a pen stand which had a sensitivity control dial on the stand. There was also the Tech Sketch Inc. light pen, which used a button attached to the pen itself. The button had to be depressed to activate the light pen. Last of all was the Inkwell Systems Flexidraw light pen which uses a pressure sensitive pen tip that compresses when pushed against the monitor screen to activate the light pen. Each of the light pens come with

some form of graphics program and demo software.

McPen: The McPen light pen looks very impressive with its stand and the holder where you can place the pen when not in use. The software for the pen is the major letdown. The graphics drawing program is very simple and unsophisticated in design. This program would be useful for young children to use but would not be beneficial to an adult beyond the very basic level of drawing. Anyone with a talent for good computer graphics, would be disappointed with this program.

Even for a child the program may be somewhat difficult to use. The pen has to be placed to the screen before an operation of the program can be selected. Also the pen was a little too sensitive and would begin the screen manipulations as soon as the pen started to move. This would create imaging where it was not wanted. The sensitivity dial on the stand did not seem able to control this problem.

The McPen's demo programs such as Hangman and TicTacToe worked quite well with the light pen. Again the children found Hangman fun and easy to play. The TicTacToe was good as well but the children got bored with it very quickly because playing against the computer was less of a challenge than if they had been able to play against each other. The other major drawback with this light pen is its inability to function with GEOS. This will probably be the biggest deterrent to anyone wishing to use this light pen.

Tech Sketch Inc.: The Tech Sketch light pen works differently from the McPen. The Tech Sketch pen uses a button on the pen to activate and deactivate it. As with all light pens this one also comes with a graphics program. This program is similar in design to the Koala Pad drawing program. The menu is separate from the drawing

screen. Even with the button control, this pen seems to be a bit too sensitive when used on the screen, which makes it difficult to control.

The drawing program is more functional than the McPen program, but is still rather limited in its usefulness. There are some good demo pictures with the program but I believe it would take a fair bit of experience to achieve this level of work with the software. For printing purposes the software supports the CBM 1525 printer. This is obviously not going to be sufficient for most people, especially if you have a color printer. I might recommend a Super Snapshot cartridge, so you can do a screen dump and then print your graphic out in color.

The Tech Sketch pen has some other drawbacks as well. For example the program will not work with JiffyDOS activated. This is not necessarily a problem but it is an inconvenience. Also the light pen cannot be recognized by GEOS. Again this may not be a prime deterrent to anyone wishing to use this program for its limited graphics software only.

Flexidraw: The Flexidraw 5.5 from Inkwell Systems is the only light pen for the Commodore still on the market today. It can be purchased from J P PBM Products by mail in Toronto at (416) 240-8993 or from CMD, Inc., in East Longmeadow, MA 01028. Luckily for anyone interested in a light pen, the Flexidraw light pen is the most advanced of the three pens that were tested. The Flexidraw pen itself handles very well, and the pressure sensitive tip that collapses when pushed against the monitor screen works flawlessly.

The pen comes with some good software as well. The demo programs have good graphics using color and sound. For example the memory teaser game called Follow Me will hold your interest for quite some time, and the Piano Keyboard demo

works very nicely.

The drawing program is also the best of the three tested. It will allow the use of other input devices such as the Koala Pad, the mouse, or the joystick, as well as the light pen. The program allows the use of the function keys also, for rotating, flipping, and disk operations.

The only drawback with the program may be in the fact that the color must be added to the graphic after it has been drawn, but considering how good the program is, this is a very minor problem. The program also has a little larger learning curve than the other programs tested, and may be a bit more difficult or kids to use but it will benefit people with talent a great deal more

Other pluses of the Flexidraw light pen are its ability to be fully functional with GEOS programs. It works flawlessly with them, and in some ways, actually excels over the mouse. With the light pen you just point to the function and click, instead of having to drag the cursor around with the mouse.

(From TPUG, Spring 1998 newsletter via June 98 Computer Compendium of Basic Bits BG via Random Bits, newsletter NOVA- ter of COM)



# The Five Cent Review

## A Nickel's Worth of Opinion on Every Program I've Ever Used (Last of a 3-Part series)

by Dick Estel

The goal of this series is to present a capsule review of every program I've ever used enough to form a fair opinion. Where I feel comfortable doing so, I've provided a rating from 1 to 10, with 1 being best. In some cases I don't use the program any more because I use a PC program; but my assessment of the Commodore programs is still valid.

Another great program in the educational but fun category is **Sky Travel**. This astronomy program was published by Commodore itself, and is well worth hunting down if you have any interest in this subject. In addition to extensive astronomical information, the main part of the program is a sky map that lets you look at any part of the sky, at any time backward or forward for about 10,000 years.

Of course, the first thing you want to do is set it for local coordinates (36 degrees, 44 minutes, 12 seconds north latitude; 119/47/11 west longitude for Fresno). This allows you to discover such information as the fact that the bright object in the west each evening is Venus; and the bright object in the east early in the morning is Jupiter. Or you can find out where to look for Scorpio while you're watching for Santa on Christmas Eve.

The program includes a 138 page manual which contains a vast amount of information in addition to instructions on how to use the program. This is more like 25 cents worth than a nickel, but it would take several pages to write a review that really does justice to this great program.

A program that sounds like it might be related (but

is not) is **Time Traveler**. In effect, TT is a data base of news events, prices, and other information about each year of the century. When you run it, TT asks you for your name and a date, and whether this is a birth date or wedding date. The program then displays average salary, average cost of a new house, and prices on a number of other items, both for the year specified and for 1989 (the year I purchased my disk). In addition you will learn who won the major Oscars in that year, who was president, who won (and lost) the World Series, and several major news items from the time. The information can then be printed out in a nice format. This is a fun program (rated 3), but as time goes on, the comparisons are getting more and more out of date. A letter to the company a year ago did not return but was not answered.

One of the favorite uses of a computer is to catalog one's family tree in a genealogy program. I tried several of them, and found only one that I felt was worth the effort--**Personal Ancestral File (PAF)**. This program was produced by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons), and my version works under the Commodore 128's CP/M mode. This version will actually run on just about any CP/M computer. It allows printing of all the standard genealogical displays: Ancestral tree, descendent chart, family groups, etc. There are quite a few commercial and public domain genealogy programs, but this one is worth hunting down.

Anyone who uses GEOS even half-way seriously ends up using some of the literally hundreds of programs that have been created as public domain, shareware or commercial offerings to make GEOS easier and more fun. Dozens of these programs are worth having. I guess my number one favorite is still **geoWizard**, Jim Collette's task switching utility. This lets you open any application or desk accessory from within another one. Included in the

package is **MiniDesk**, an excellent desk accessory that lets you copy to and from any of three drives.

A program I can't live without is **Paint Scrap** by Dennis Seitz. This application allows you to clip any size photo scrap, up to the full page, from a geoPaint document.

Another neat little goody that I use regularly is **ScrapGrab**. One of the limitations of the Photo Manager is that it only operates on scraps and albums on the same disk. ScrapGrab and **PhotoGrab** can be used to copy a scrap from an album on any of three drives, and save it to the drive it was launched from. Since ScrapGrab is a desk accessory, it's useful when you're working on a geoPaint document and realize you need a scrap from another disk. You can click on GEOS, click



on ScrapGrab, and get the needed clip without leaving geoPaint. PhotoGrab is an application that has to be run separately, but it can capture a larger scrap.

Programmer Nate Fiedler created a program similar to, but in some ways better than, geoPaint, called **geoCanvas**. Although it was a commercial program, Nate released it to public domain when he went on to other pursuits. Its best feature is the ability to open three windows, which can be three different geoPaint files, or three views of the same file.

As this article was being completed, Maurice Ran-

dall's **Wheels** came on the scene. This is a significant revision of the whole GEOS operating system. The initial 64 release was essentially a beta version, so it is a bit early to give this program a full assessment. I think it will prove to be essential for people using GEOS on a hard drive or RAM-Link system.

There you have it, more than you ever wanted to know about over three dozen Commodore programs. With thousands available, this just scratches the surface--but out of this batch, you could find enough programs to make your Commodore do probably 90% of what most people

## Recovering a Lost Directory

by Dick Estel

A couple of times I have made panic calls to more experienced members of the group seeking help in restoring a bad directory.

The first time, I did a short format of a disk, which does NOT erase any files, but clears the directory and makes the entire disk available for use. I knew my files were intact, but I did not know how to get the directory back. This sort of thing can be done with a track and sector editor, but this is fairly complicated task and requires some knowledge that I did not have of how files are stored on a disk. Ultimately I recreated this disk from various other sources.

Not long ago a 1581 disk with well over a hundred Doodle and Koala files took a dive. I still do not know what happened, but the result of trying to read the directory or load the files was the same as doing it with a blank disk.

I had just read that issue 82 of Loadstar would have a program to recover disk directories, so I waited impatiently for it to arrive. When it finally came, I was dismayed to find it was only for

1541/1571 disks, but the documentation mentioned that Maverick also has a directory recovery program.

I promptly booted up Maverick and selected the Directory Recovery program from the menu. I followed the very simple instructions, put in my bad disk, and did something else while the program did its work. In a matter of a few minutes it was done, and when I tested the disk, everything was back to normal, with all my files accessible.

If this ever happens to you, don't stomp the disk into the ground in frustration--just get out Loadstar or Maverick, or call for help from one of our members who has these programs if you don't have them.

## LOADSTAR Careens Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Fender and Judi Tucker, sole proprietors of the monthly Commodore disk magazine, LOADSTAR, have taken solemn vows of poverty and now pledge to continue publishing LOADSTAR at least to the end of the year 2000.

Having also vowed not to leave subscribers in the lurch with unfulfilled subscriptions, LOADSTAR has been accepting subscriptions only through December 1999. Now they hope everyone will renew through December 2000. And as Fender notes, that will be issue 1999, and "who can stop at such a number?"

A renewal for Y2K in 1999 will be \$69.95 (\$79.95 international). After 1/1/2000 the price will be \$80 (\$90 international).

LOADSTAR is also offering all back issues for just \$6 each, with free shipping in the US and 50 cents per issue outside the US.

LOADSTAR continues to offer monthly billing on a credit card for \$7.95 per issue.

To subscribe or renew call 1-318-221-8718 (ext 257 or 287); 1-800-594-3370 (orders only), Email Judi@loadstar.com, or write to P O Box 30008, Shreveport LA 71130-0008.

### **An editorial comment:**

Fender's joke about a vow of poverty is not really that funny. From comments he has made in his monthly column, it is likely that he is making far less as owner than he did as an employee when LOADSTAR was owned by Softdisk. Subscriptions have dropped from above 5,000 about two years ago to around 900. It's pretty clear that there's not much profit on less than a thousand subscriptions after paying programmers, production costs and mailing. If you're passing around your copy of LOADSTAR, or receiving a pirated copy, look to your conscience. Are you willing to sell it for \$5.83 a month?

### **Biggest Commodore Yet**

There's a new Commodore around, and it's a big one. Even so, it gets some bad mouthing from the press.

Mike Commodore, who entered the world in Canada in 1979 (around the same time and same country as Commodore the computer company), was a second round draft pick in the National Hockey League's yearly draft in June.

Despite a hefty weight of 225 pounds and 6'4" height, The Hockey News wrote, "Realistically, Commodore's skill and speed game needs upgrading."

Oh well, what's new?



The Fresno Commodore User Group is going to have a table at the event below. Lend me your ideas about what should be the focus of our table. I'm excited, excited that we get the chance to show non-Commodore users as well as current users what our machines are capable of. All FCUG members, family, friends, and acquaintances are invited. Spread the news far and wide to everybody. This is the closest that we are going to get to a West Coast Commodore Expo. Let's make it a success!

VINTAGE COMPUTER FESTIVAL -VCF 3.0  
From: Sam Ismail <siconic@jasmine.psyber.com>  
Date: 28 Jun 1999

Parallax Inc. and Dr. Dobbs Journal proudly present The Vintage Computer Festival 3.0 October 2nd & 3rd in the Santa Clara Convention Center Santa Clara, California ([www.vintage.org](http://www.vintage.org)).

For the third year in a row, the Vintage Computer Festival is back to thrill and amaze you with the history of one of the greatest inventions in all of mankind, the computer!

This year:

- \* More great speakers!
- \* More great exhibits!
- \* More great vendors with Cool Stuff to sell!
- \* More fun games and contests, including the Nerd Trivia Challenge!
- \* Tour The Computer Museum History Center!
- \* And of course, FREE STUFF!!

In short, plenty of stuff to indulge all your senses: HEAR the speakers!

SEE vintage computers!  
TOUCH them too!  
SMELL their electronics!  
But please don't TASTE them!

"The mission of the Vintage Computer Festival is to promote the preservation of 'obsolete' computers by allowing attendees to experience the people, stories and technologies that embody the remarkable tale of the computer revolution."

Register by September 15 and pay only \$20 per person. That includes access to the entire event all weekend, including the speakers, the exhibit and the flea market. Kids 17 and under are admitted free, and as always, parking is free too!

To pre-register, send a check or money order to: Vintage Computer Festival, 4275 Rosewood Drive #29-161, Pleasanton, California 94588. Or visit the VCF website for more information and a handy registration form ready to print (<http://www.vintage.org/vcf/register.htm>).

### The Speakers:

Horst Zuse: Horst, the eldest son of early digital computer pioneer Konrad Zuse, will be giving a lecture on his late father's machines and will focus on the computer businesses that Konrad later founded to market his ideas.

Jon Titus: Who can forget one of the earliest of kit microcomputers, the Mark-8? Jon designed the Mark-8 around Intel's 8008 microprocessor and wrote a construction article which appeared in the July 1974 issue of Radio Electronics.

Todd Fischer: Todd bought the assets of IMSAI after their bankruptcy and continued to manufacture and sell IMSAI products under the Fischer-Frietas Corporation. Todd consulted with MGM for the movie *War Games* and, as a treat,

will be bringing along for show and tell the actual IMSAI 8080 computer that co-starred in the film.

**Stan Veit:** Stan is an early chronicler of the microcomputer revolution, and also a participant. Stan started one of America's first computer stores in New York, and in the process forged relationships with some of today's revered pioneers, including Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, whom he shared a booth with at the first West Coast Computer Faire where the Apple II was debuted to the world.

**Jim Willing:** Our admired and beloved VCF celebrity, Jim will wax philosophic on various themes of stupendous relevance.

**Eugene Kim:** Eugene is a writer for Dr. Dobbs' Journal (a VCF sponsor!) and will be giving a lecture on the history of free software, a very relevant topic considering the free-software movement is in full force in today's computing arena as evidenced by the escalating adoption of GNU/Linux.

**Curt Vendel:** Curt is the founder of the Atari Historical Society (check out his great website at <http://www.atari-history.com>) and has amassed an amazing collection of Atari artifacts and company history, including some one-of-a-kind Atari prototypes. Curt will be bringing along some of these prototypes for show and tell.

**Roger Sinasohn:** Roger is an avid collector of early portable computers and will be giving a talk on the history of the Kyocera 85, AKA the Tandy Model 100, a.k.a. the Olivetti M10, AKA the NEC PC-8201A.

**Doug Salot:** Doug's research has uncovered what he believes to be the first "personal computer." Forget the Apple II, the Altair or even the Alto. Doug's pick as first PC goes all the way back to the 1950's. Designed by Edmund Berkeley, an unsung hero of computer history, Doug intends to win Berkeley the prominence and praise that he

feels is much deserved by this virtually unknown computer visionary.

**Plus:** Workshops by Parallax on their amazing little BASIC Stamp. Get a preview of this cool little device by visiting their website at <http://www.parallaxinc.com>. More speakers to be announced soon! Check the VCF website for updates.

This year, the Vintage Computer Festival exhibit will feature the exhibits of individual collectors, all vying to win first, second or third place in eleven categories, plus the coveted "Best of Show" award. The winner of the "Best of Show" ribbon will also win fabulous prizes. This year, we want YOU to exhibit the pride of your collection. What better way to demonstrate your enthusiasm for your hobby than to be an exhibitor at the Vintage Computer Festival. Exhibitor information can be found on the Vintage Computer Festival website (<http://www.vintage.org/vcf/exhibit.htm>).

Every year the best deals on vintage computer items can be found at the Vintage Computer Flea Market. Here are only a few of the amazing items sold at last year's flea market: \*

Apple 1 (no, we're NOT kidding!) \* SWTPc 6800 \* A rare computer by "the digital group" \* Morrow Decision 1 (S-100) \* California Computer Systems (S-100) \* Apple Lisa 2 \* And much, much more!! If you've got old computer stuff that you'd like to sell, there's no better place than the Vintage Computer Flea Market at the Vintage Computer Festival. Please visit our website for rates and regulations (<http://www.vintage.org/vcf/vendor.htm>).

**The Nerd Trivia Challenge!** Hey trivia fans! Think you got what it takes to survive the Nerd Trivia Challenge? If you qualify, you'll be pitted against two other players in a battle to determine who is the undisputed master of computer history trivia. Answer the most questions correctly and

you could walk away with \$50 in cash plus some other nifty prizes. Lightweights need not apply, this contest is geared towards the serious computer history enthusiast. For contest rules please visit <http://www.vintage.org/vcf/ntc.htm>.

### **Tour The Computer Museum History**

**Center.** The Center boasts the largest collection of historic computer artifacts in the world. Their collection includes rare, one-of-a-kind computers and artifacts that date back to the early part of the century and beyond. A tour of the History Center's "Visible Storage" warehouse will be organized on Sunday, October 3. Tickets are limited and so advanced registration is recommended. FYI: The History Center is on the move, and is thrilled to announce plans to build a permanent museum to be dedicated by 2007. You can help the History Center achieve its goal by becoming a member. Information about becoming a member can be found at <http://www.computer-history.org>.

**Meet Fellow Computer Collectors!** The VCF is the premier gathering for collectors of vintage computers. What better way to enjoy your hobby than by meeting other like-minded individuals to share stories and information about your computer collection.

### **Visit our Sponsors :**

Parallax, Inc. <http://www.parallaxinc.com>  
Parallax manufactures the BASIC Stamp, a versatile microcontroller with a built-in BASIC language that is suitable for most any electronics and computer hobbyist project.

Dr. Dobb's Journal <http://www.ddj.com>  
Dr. Dobb's Journal is the oldest continually running microcomputer journal, in existence since 1975. It features monthly articles and columns geared towards the computer programming professional.

## I've Got Five Dollars and It's Saturday Night

Our June winner was Helen Silvas, her first win after years of membership. Her name popped up so quickly with the raffle program running in the SuperCPU that she didn't know she had won till we handed her the money.

In July our enthusiasm got the best of us and we drew **four** names: Les Crites, Virgil Leisure, Art Gumprecht, and Martin and Maria Marquez. With all that, there was no winner, so come to the meeting in August to have a chance at **ten** dollars!

Other 1999 winners have been Ben Briscoe, Jack Fissette, Pat Spears and Jim Kirby.

Absentee names drawn in 1999 include Pat Spears, George Savaros, Art Gumprecht, John Weaver Doug Cunningham, Zella Mallard, and Bill Clark.

Art, that's twice--you gotta come on down!

## Food for Thought for the Not-Very Hungry

"The Web represents the zenith of dozens of different technologies, combining the efforts of millions of man-hours of computer, network, and information discovery and retrieval research and development to bring a revolutionary unified interface for distributed information."

—Steve Berlin, whose web site "The Useless Pages" celebrates the web's most egregious waste of electrons.

Babbling is a form of communication. It's a way of saying, "Not only do I not know what I'm talking about, I don't even know enough to keep quiet and stop advertising the fact."

# What the Editor Said



## Progressions

A milestone birthday does not always make us stop and take stock of where we've been and where we're going. But the approach of age 60 seems for me to be a time to at least take stock of what I have collected and what it's all for.

My parents (and their parents) grew up in a time when you did not throw away anything that might be useful some day, and I inherited this passion. As a result I helped out when my dad and mother sorted through the accumulation of things my grandparents left, and I look at my house and theirs and see the huge task of two more generations of sorting awaiting my children.

Not wanting that to be my legacy, I am starting to look at what I can get rid of. Realism compels me to include among those things a lot of Commodore stuff. I use a PC. I rarely use my Commodore for anything except keeping up the FCUG library list and looking at the monthly LOADSTAR disk. And I cannot foresee a major change in this situation.

So, a lot of good stuff is coming on the market soon. Prices are low for fast clearance. Let me know what you're looking for, and make an offer (but don't be afraid to bid high, there's a big line forming already).

## Transitions

When I started this period of editing The Interface, I made a commitment to do it at least through Au-

gust (I can't remember what year that was now). In any event, I am now letting everyone know that the last issue I will promise to edit is August 2000. This gives the club a year to decide what direction to take with the newsletter.

Although a lot of Commodore people throughout the world seem to feel that a newsletter is a vital part of a computer club, there are few members who believe this strongly enough to contribute. This is problem in all areas and with all types of computers (and probably true of other types of organizations). In any case, submissions from members are virtually non-existent. My Commodore interest is dwindling and my knowledge is stagnant or moving backward. I no longer have the passion to write about Commodore that kept me going for a number of years over two sessions of editing.

If you look through this and recent issues, you will find a mix of articles from other clubs and material recycled from our own archives. While this fills up white space, I'm not sure it's the best use we can make of our dwindling funds. That's a decision the members will need to discuss and decide over the coming year.

I will continue to serve as librarian, a position which is mostly unnecessary and requires virtually no effort. In keeping with my plan to reduce clutter, I will no longer be the guy who stores the stuff that former Commodore users donate to us. I have no intention of leaving the club; as long as it exists and I live in Fresno, I ex-

## Fresno PC Users Group

Meetings 1st Monday of each month, 7:30 p.m. at  
Ramada Inn, Shaw & Fresno.  
Recorded information phone: 496 3974  
Membership: 434 0941 or 225 8824  
6751 N Blackstone # 395  
Fresno CA 93710