

FC=UG

"Taking Commodore Computing Into The Twenty First Century And Beyond ..."

Nov./Dec. 2012



-by Lenard R. Roach

Here it is, winter in Kansas City. There's nothing like it. We had our famous Plaza lighting ceremony on Thanksgiving, the Zona Rosa shopping center had their midnight rally of shoppers that went till 3 am, the fountains are just about done running for the year, and people in town are going nuts trying to grab that last item on sale for that special friend or family member that they know will appreciate it.

I enjoy winter in Kansas City because I know that the leaves are done blowing about, which is a relief for my allergies, but I also know that this season is short lived since in 16 weeks we will be wrestling with spring again and the lawn cuttings will once again activate the running, dripping, and sneezing and I will be fighting for every breath as my lungs adjust to the warmer weather.

But you didn't start reading this newsletter to hear about the failings of my olfactory glands, you want to know what I have been doing in the world of Commodore

computing. With the Commodore Users Group of Kansas City no more, I do very little. Most of my time at the end of the year is spent basically at work as customers try to add shopping to the list if extra curricular activities. No harm done, it's just hard to comprehend to add the spending of extra money, which most people don't have, on people, so out comes the credit card and BAM! We act just like Congress. I should know for I speak from experience; I put Christmas 2011 on all my credit cards and had a plan to have it all paid off by Christmas 2012, but I didn't figure the loss of one job and the financial failure of another all in one summer to destroy my goings on. I did learn one thing from it, and that is Kingdoms rise and fall, and also the only constant is change.

My latest book, Skits For 2nd Hand Puppets Volume 1: The Ten Commandments, will be available from Amazon.com through Create Space. It is not a Commodore book, but the original manuscript was written on a Commodore 128 using GeoWrite 2.1 and a Commodore 1571 disk drive. If anyone would like a copy of the original document, let me know and I will see what I can do about making it available to you. I will ask for a little monetary compensation for my time and effort, but that is negotiable. I can tell you from looking at both the Commodore and Word copies of the manuscript that the Commodore one is bigger and easier to read. I didn't use a font that would be harder to read like I did in Run/Stop-Restore, but chose a font

and Printer that was near letter quality and chose that default. Much easier on the eyes.

During a hiatus from working on this article, I had time to think about our machine. In the Past I spoke on how the computer society has been "pushing" us retro-users into working with more modern machines and updated Programs, but sometimes I think now that it is a matter of choice. We can either cave in to the so called "need" of using their computers and software, or we can search in our own Commodore community and find compatible software for said need. Some users of today's machines have compared my financial software Packages I have written to Quicken. So I'm wondering, what am I doing? I am leaning more and more into the PC world because it is convenient. Sure, some things are necessary to do on a PC, but some things I do on it can be done on a Commodore. It's pretty bad that the very software I wrote for Commodore I hardly use because it is easier to use similar software on the PC.

So, I've blown the dust off of my Commodore 128, cleaned off my 1571 disk drive, found my old Programs, and am, once again, ready to step back into the Commodore world. It's amazing how quickly we forget the basics (Pardon the Pun) of computing and settle into what would be considered "easy computing". One thing I have noticed is that computers used to work with people, now they do most of the things people used to do for themselves. Tragically, this makes for "lazy computing."

When I put out the call for articles for this edition of The Interface, I didn't expect the flood of information that both Robert and Dick would give me. Within the span of 48 hours, I had all the "meat" for a sizable newsletter. With the arrival of a new Big Blue Reader Program and a 1571 disk drive, I am ready to edit again. Sadly, it appears that I have no aim since in the last issue I had a lot of columns running off to the southeast. Sorry about that. It looks straight on paper, but when I scan it in to .PDF, it

looks like Poop. I'll have to check the alignment of my Printer Paper.

I was messing around with the Commodore 64 Program, "The Ledger," and I noticed a couple of developments that can be done to the Program. The first is a "calendar advance" feature on the "When?" input to the UPDATE STATEMENT ON ACCOUNT function. The idea is for the user of the Program to hit just one Key (while in the function), like the + Key, and advance the date one month. For example, with a touch of a Key, you can go from 11/15/12 to 12/15/12. The trick, I think, is to make the function flip the date from December of this Year to January of next Year at the flip of a Key. I will mess with this on and off during the next few months.

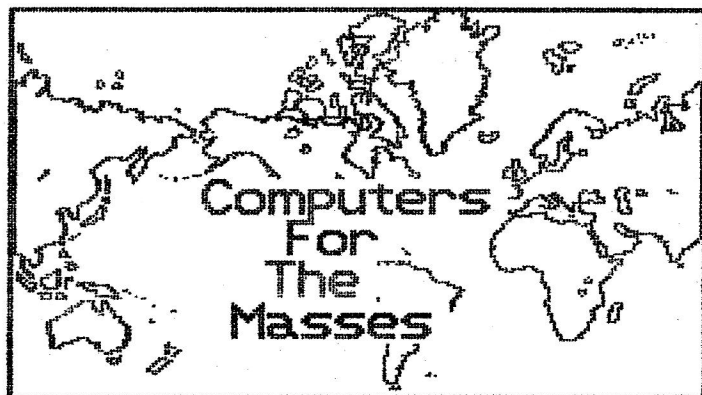
Then there is the Possible Problem of those users who got the entire Roachware Innovations Package from CommVEx 2012 and don't plan on separating the main Programs onto different disks, like putting "The Ledger" on one disk and "Checkmate" on another. If a user tries to access a data file meant for "Checkmate" with "The Ledger," even accidentally, by calling both data files by the same name, then the data files will crash, or flat out access only partial information. I'm thinking to fix this Possible mishap, is to do to what I did to "The Envelope Addressor 4.2" (TEA 4.2) to separate the "To" and "From" address labels and add a character to the front of data file's directory title. Commodore has some Keys on the Keyboard that are rarely used in inputting data like the "UP-arrow" Key and the Pound sign, and I can simply put these symbol Keys in the beginning of each OPEN statement, be they read or write statements, and the computer can tell the difference between a "Checkmate" data file and a "The Ledger" data file.

This "new" innovation to the Programs will cause a new Problem: changing the old data file name to the new data file name, without having to re-input all that information. Luckily for us,

Commodore foresaw this little hiccup and developed within its motherboard a command called "rePlace". With this simple function, used with an OPEN statement on a non-numbered line (see users manual for details), You can change the name of a file. Too much, You say? Not a Problem. I have a small Program I wrote back in 2000 that utilizes the "rePlace" function of Commodore. For the simple Price of zero dollars, I will ship this Program out to anyone who will need it, once the updated version of "The Ledger" comes out. If You are not having this Problem of data file misrepresentation by the Programs on "The Ledger", then Please ignore this item and continue as usual, but if You would like to tell the difference between Your "Rent" file on "The Ledger" and Your "Rent" file on "Checkmate", and still keep all Your Programs on the same disk, then You will need these new Programs (when released) and the data file name management Program.

One more thing is on my mind before I log off for this issue: someone on the Homestead Mailing List asked if someone would be picking up the work of Loadstar magazine. Nigel Parker of "Commodore Free" magazine mentioned in reply that his Commodore work was willing to pick up Programs from those willing to submit any. Though Reverend Moorman did a great work for Commodore, I know what it is like to have all Your efforts destroyed by a disaster. I lost much in the Kansas City flood of 1993, never to be replaced again. However, my Point is that, I think we, as Commodore enthusiasts, should aid what we have as users and not try to resurrect the Past. I personally have written for "Commodore Free" and have had my material treated fairly by the editor-in-chief. I have a few things to submit to "Commodore Free" in the way of simple Programs and, as I'm sure You can tell by now, I'm never at a loss for words (at least none that I will ever admit!). Please consider this medium as a release for our collective Commodore energies.

Okay, I've wasted enough of Your time this issue. Be here next issue when we focus on 2013 and what might be ahead for FCUG, and Commodore in General.



-From: Digital Antiquaria, article by Jimmy Maher, author of The Future Was Here: The Commodore Amiga

The company that would eventually become Commodore International was formed in 1958 as an importer and assembler of Czechoslovakian Portable typewriters for Canada and the northeastern United States. Its founder was a Polish immigrant and Auschwitz survivor named Jack Tramiel. Commodore first made the news as a part of the Atlantic Acceptance scandal of 1965, in which one of Canada's largest savings and loans suddenly and unexpectedly collapsed. When the corpse was dissected, a rotten core of financial malfeasance, much of it involving its client Commodore, was revealed. It seems that Tramiel had become friends with the head of Atlantic, one C.P. Morgan, and the two had set up some mutually beneficial financial arrangements that were not, alas, so good for Atlantic Acceptance as a whole. Additionally, it appears that Tramiel likely lied under oath and altered documents to try to obscure the trail. (The complicated details of all this are frankly beyond me; Zube dissects it all at greater length on his home Page, at

<http://www.stat.colostate.edu/Kzube/commodore2.txt>

for those with better financial minds than mine.) The Canadian courts were plainly convinced of Tramiel's culpability in the whole sorry affair, but ultimately decided they didn't have enough hard evidence to prosecute him. A financier named Irving Gould rescued Tramiel and his scandal-wracked company from a richly deserved oblivion. Commodore remained alive and Tramiel remained in day-to-day control, but thanks to his controlling investment Gould now had him by the balls.

Tramiel and Gould would spend almost two decades locked in an embrace of loathing co-dependency. Tramiel worked like a demon, seldom taking a day off, fueled more by pride and spite than greed. Working under his famous mantra Business is War, he seemed to delight in destroying not only the competition but also suppliers, retailers, and often even his own employees when they lost favor in his eyes. Gould was a more easygoing sort. He put the money Tramiel earned him to good use, maintaining three huge homes in three countries, a private yacht, a private jet, and lots of private girlfriends. His only other big passion was tax law, which he studied with great gusto in devising schemes to keep the tax liability of himself and his company as close to zero as possible. (His biggest coup in that department was his incorporation of Commodore in the Bahamas, even though they had no factories, no employees, and no product for sale there.) Some of his favorite days were those in which Tramiel would come to him needing him to release some capital from his private stash to help him actually, you know, run a proper business, with a growth strategy and research and development and all that sort of thing. Gould would toy with him a bit on those occasions, and sometimes even give him what he wanted. But usually not. Better for Tramiel to pay for it out of his operating budget; Gould needed his pocket money, after all.

Commodore's business over the next decade changed its focus from

the manufacturing of typewriters and mechanical adding machines to a new invention, the electronic calculator, with an occasional sideline in, of all things, office furniture. They also built up an impressive distribution network for their products around the world, particularly in Europe. Indeed, Europe, thanks to well-run semi-independent spin-offs in Britain and West Germany, became the company's strongest market. Commodore remained a niche player in the U.S. calculator market, but in Europe they became almost a household name. Through it all Commodore's U.S. operation, the branch that ultimately called the shots and developed the product line, retained an ever-present whiff of the disreputable. One could quickly sense that this company just wasn't quite respectable, that in most decisions quick and dirty was likely to win out over responsible and ethical. Which is not, I need to carefully emphasize, to cast aspersions on the many fine engineers who worked for Commodore over the years, who often achieved heroic results in spite of management's shortsightedness or, eventually, outright incompetence.

Tramiel and Commodore stumbled into a key role in both the PC revolution and the videogame revolution. In 1976 the company was, not for the first nor the last time, struggling mightily. Texas Instruments had virtually destroyed their calculator business by introducing machines priced cheaper than Commodore could possibly match. The reason: TI owned its own chip-fabrication plants rather than having to source its chips from other suppliers. It was a matter of vertical integration, as they say in the business world. Desperate for some integration of his own, Tramiel bought a chip company of his own, MOS Technologies. With MOS came a new microprocessor, one that had been causing quite a lot of excitement amongst homebrew microcomputer hackers like Steve Wozniak: the 6502. Commodore also ended up with the creator of the 6502, MOS's erstwhile head of

engineering Chuck Peddle. For his next trick, Peddle was keen to build a computer around his CPU. Tramiel wasn't so sure about the idea, but reluctantly agreed to let Peddle have a shot. The Commodore PET became the first of the trinity of 1977 computers to be announced, but the last to actually ship. Tramiel, you see, was having cash-flow problems as usual, and Gould was as usual quite unforthcoming.

The PET wasn't a bad little machine at all. It wasn't quite as advanced in some areas as the Apple II, but it was also considerably cheaper. Still, it was hard to articulate just where it fit in the North American market.

Hobbyists on a budget favored the TRS-80, easily available from Radio Shack stores all over the country, while those who wanted the very best settled on the more impressive Apple II. Business users, meanwhile, fixated early on the variety of CP/M machines from boutique manufacturers, and later, in the wake of VisiCalc, also started buying Apple IIs. The PET therefore became something of an also-ran in North America in spite of the stir of excitement its first announcement had generated.

Europe, however, was a different story. Neither Apple nor Radio Shack had any proper distribution network there in the beginning. The PET therefore became the first significant microcomputer in Europe. With effectively no competition, Commodore was free to hike its prices in Europe to Apple II levels and beyond. This meant that PETs were most commonly purchased by businesses and installed in offices. Only France, where Apple set up distribution quite early on, remained resistant, while West Germany became a particularly strong market, with the Commodore name accorded respect in business equivalent to what CP/M received in the U.S. And when a PET version of VisiCalc was introduced to Europe in 1980, it caused almost as big of a sensation as the Apple II version had the year before in America. Within a year or two,

Commodore stopped even seriously trying to sell PETs in North America, but rather shipped most of the output of their U.S. factory to Europe, where they could charge more and where the competition was virtually nonexistent.

In North America, Commodore's role in the early microcomputer and game-console industries was also huge, but mostly behind the scenes, and all centered around the Commodore Semiconductor Group, what had once been MOS Technologies. In an oft-repeated scenario that Dave Haynie has dubbed the Commodore Curse, most of the innovative engineers who had created the 6502 fled soon after the Commodore purchase, driven away by Tramiel's instinct for degradation and his refusal to properly fund their

research-and-development efforts. For this reason, MOS, poised at the top of the microcomputer industry for a time, would never even come close to developing a viable successor to the 6502. Nevertheless, Commodore inherited a very advanced chip-making operation - one of the best in the country in fact. It would take some years for inertia and neglect to break down the house that Peddle and company had built. In the meantime, they delivered the 6502s and variants found not only in the PET but also in the Apple II, the Atari VCS, the Atari 400 and 800, and plenty of other more short-lived systems. They also built many or most of the cartridges on which Atari VCS games shipped. All of which put Commodore in the enviable position of making money every time many of their ostensible competitors built something. Thanks to MOS and Europe, Commodore went from near bankruptcy to multiple stock splits, while Tramiel himself was worth \$50 million by 1980. That year he rewarded Peddle, the technical architect of virtually all of this success, with termination and a dubious lawsuit that managed to wrangle away the \$3 million in Commodore stock he had earned.

Commodore's transformation from a business-computer manufacturer and behind-the-scenes industry player to the King of home computing also began in 1980, when Tramiel visited London for a meeting. He saw there for the first time an odd little machine called the Sinclair ZX-80. Peddled by an eccentric English inventor named Clive Sinclair, the ZX-80 was something of a throwback to the earliest U.S.-made microcomputers. It was sold as a semi-assembled kit, and, with just 1 K of memory and a display system so primitive that the screen went blank every time you typed on the keyboard, pretty much the bare-minimum machine that could still meet some reasonable definition of computer. For British enthusiasts, however, it was revelatory. Previously the only microcomputers for sale in Britain had

been the Commodore PET line and a few equally business-oriented competitors. These machines cost thousands of pounds, putting them well out of reach of most private individuals in this country where average personal income lagged considerably behind that of the U.S. The ZX-80, though, sold for just under 100 pounds. For a generation of would-be hackers who, like the ones who had birthed the microcomputer industry in the U.S. five years before, simply wanted to get their hands on a computer - any computer - it was a dream come true. Sinclair sold 50,000 ZX-80s before coming out with something more refined the next year.

We'll talk more about Sinclair and his toys in later posts, but for now let's focus on what the ZX-80 meant to Tramiel. He began to think about a similar low-cost computer for the U.S. consumer market. This idea of a home computer that had been frequently discussed but had yet to come to any sort of real fruition. To succeed in the U.S. mass market Commodore would obviously need to put together something more refined than the ZX-80. It would have to be a fully assembled computer that was friendly, easy to use, and that came equipped with all of the hardware needed to hook it right up

to the family television. And it would need to be at least a little more capable than the Atari VCS in the Games department (to please the kids) and to have BASIC built in (to please the parents, who imagined their children getting a hand up on their future by learning about computers and how to program them).

Luckily, Commodore already had most of the parts they needed just sort of lying around. All the way back in 1977 their own Al Charpentier had designed the Video Interface Chip (the VIC) for a potential game console or arcade machine. It could display 16-color graphics at resolutions of up to 176 X 184, and could also generate up to three simple sounds at one time. Commodore had peddled it around a bit, but it had ended up on the shelf. Now it was dusted off to become the heart of the new computer. Sure, it wasn't a patch on the Atari 400 and 800's capabilities, but it was good enough. Commodore joined it up with much of the PET architecture in its most cost-reduced form, including the BASIC they'd bought from Microsoft years before, added a cartridge port, and they had their home computer. Well, like any engineering project it was a bit more complicated than that, but that's the basic idea. After test marketing it in Japan as the VIC-1001, they brought it to North America as the VIC-20 in the spring of 1981, and soon after to Europe. (In the German-speaking countries it was called the VC-20 because of the unfortunate resemblance VIC had to the German verb ficken - to f**k.) In the U.S. the machines first list price was just under \$300, in line with Tramiel's new slogan: Computers for the masses, not the classes. Tramiel may have been about the last person in the world you'd expect to start advocating for the proletariat, but business sometimes makes strange bedfellows. Discounting construction kits and the like, the VIC-20 was easily the cheapest real computer yet sold in the U.S.

For the first and only time in the company's history, Commodore created a major U.S. advertising

campaign to accompany the VIC-20 that was well-funded and smart, Perhaps because it was largely the work of an import from the much more PR-savvy Commodore UK named Kit Spencer. He hired as spokesman William Shatner, Captain Kirk himself. "Why buy just a videogame?" Shatner asked. "Invest in the wonder computer of the 1980s, with a real computer keyboard." The messaging was masterful. The box copy announced that the VIC-20 was great for household budgeting, personal improvement, student education, financial planning. In reality, the VIC-20, with just 5 K of memory and an absurdly blocky 22-characters-per-line text display, was of limited (at best) utility for any of those things. But always Commodore snuck in a reference, seemingly as an afterthought, to the fact that the VIC-20 plays great games too! Commodore was effectively colluding with the kids they were really trying to reach, giving them lots of ways to convince Mom and Dad to buy them the cool new game machine they really wanted. Understanding that a good line-up of games was crucial to this strategy, they made sure that upon release a whole library of games, many of them unauthorized knockoffs of current arcade hits, was ready to go. For the more cerebral sorts, they also contracted with Scott Adams to make cartridge versions of his first five adventures available at launch.

Within a few months of the launch, Tramiel made a deal with K-Mart, one of the largest U.S. department-store chains of the time, to sell VIC-20s right from their shelves. This was an unprecedented move. Previously department stores had been the domain of the game consoles; the Atari VCS owed much of its early success to a distribution deal that Atari struck with Sears. Computers, meanwhile, were sold from specialized dealers whose trained employees could offer information, service, and support before and after the sale. Tramiel alienated

and all but destroyed Commodore's dealer network in the U.S., such as it was, by giving preferential treatment to retailers like K-Mart, even indulging in the dubiously legal practice of charging the latter lower prices per unit than he did the loyal dealers who had sometimes been with him for years. Caught up in his drive to make Commodore the home-computer company as well as his general everyday instinct to cause as much chaos and destruction as possible, Tramiel couldn't have cared less when they complained and dropped their contracts in droves. Eventually this betrayal, like so many others, would come back to haunt Commodore. But for now they were suddenly riding higher than ever.

The VIC-20 resoundingly confirmed at last the mutterings about the potential for a low-cost home computer. It sold 1 million units in barely a year, the first computer of any type to do so. Apple, by comparison, had after five years of steadily building momentum managed to sell about 750,000 Apple IIs by that point, and Radio Shacks numbers were similar. The VIC-20 would go on to sell 2.5 million units before crashing back to earth almost as quickly as it had ascended. Commodore officially discontinued it in January of 1985, by which time it was generally selling for well under \$100. Attractive as its price was, it was ultimately just too limited a machine to have longer legs. Still, and while the vast majority of VIC-20s were used almost exclusively for playing games (at least 98% of the software released for the machine were games), some who didn't have access to a more advanced machine used it as their gateway to the wonders of computing. Most famously, Linus Torvalds, the Finnish creator of Linux, got his start exploring the innards of the VIC-20 installed in his bedroom. For European hackers like Torvalds, without as many options as the U.S. market afforded, the VIC-20 as well as the cheap Sinclair machines were godsend.

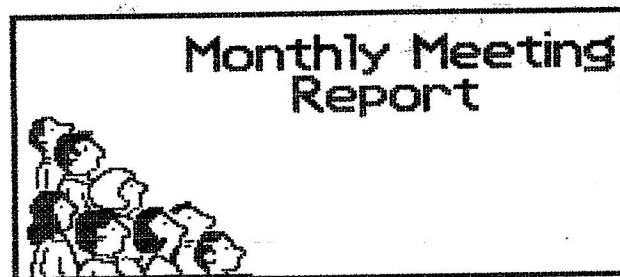
The immediate reaction to the VIC-20 from users of the Apple II and other more advanced machines was generally somewhere between a bemused shrug and a dismissive snort. With its miniscule memory and its software housed on cartridges or cassette tapes, the VIC-20 wasn't capable of running most of the programs I've discussed on this blog. Primitive as many of them have been. Even the Scott Adams games were possible only because they were housed on ROM cartridges rather than loaded into the VIC-20's scant RAM. Games like Wizardry, Ultima, The Wizard and the Princess, or Zork not to mention productivity game-changers like VisiCalc were simply impossible here. The VIC-20's software library, large and (briefly) profitable as it was, was built mostly of simple action games not all that far removed from the typical Atari VCS fare. Companies like On-Line Systems released a VIC-20 title here and there if someone stepped forward with something viable (why throw away easy money?), but mostly stayed with the machines that had brought them this far. To the extent that the VIC-20 was relevant to them at all, it was relevant as a stepping stone or, if you will, a gateway drug to computing. Hopefully some of those VIC-20 buyers would get intrigued enough that they'd decide to buy a real system some day.

Yet in the long run the VIC-20 was only a proof of concept for the home computer. With the segment now shown to be viable and, indeed, firmly established, the next home computer to come from Commodore wouldn't be so easy to ignore.

(By far the best, most unvarnished, and most complete history of Commodore is found in Brian Bagnall's *Commodore: A Company on the Edge* and its predecessor *On the Edge: The Spectacular Rise and Fall of Commodore*. Both books are in desperate need of a copy editor, making them rather exhausting to read at times, and Bagnall's insistence on slamming Apple and IBM constantly gets downright

annoying. Still, the information and stories are there.

Michael Tomczyk's much older *The Home Computer Wars* was previously the only real insider account of Commodore during this period, but its of dubious value at best in the wake of Bagnall's books. Tomczyk inflates his own role in the creation and marketing of the VIC-20 enormously, and insists on painting Tramiel as a sort of social visionary. He's amazed that Tramiel is willing to do business in Germany after spending time in Auschwitz, seeing this as a sign of the man's essential nobility and forgiving nature. News flash: unprincipled men seldom put principles - correct or misguided - above the opportunity to make a buck.)



November 2012

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

This was not the longest-ever FCUG meeting, but it certainly came close. Dick arrived at Bobby Salazar's Restaurant about 10:45, 15 minutes before the official start time, with Robert arriving a few minutes later. Dick had brought his car, since we now have to transport equipment about 50 yards from parking spot to meeting room, and we made at least three trips.

Eventually, we had the C128, an Apple IIGS, an iMac, an Amiga, and a VIC-20, plus all kinds of peripherals. When we had first checked this room as a possibility, it seemed bigger than we needed, but we have found a way to expand into all the available space. In addition to equipment, we had four boxes of hardware, software, manuals, and odds and ends that had been donated, all of which was made available free to whoever wanted it.

On hand were Louis and Vince Mazzei, Roger Van Pelt, Robert Bernardo, and Dick Estel.

Before ordering, Robert spent a long time trying to set up a SKYPE chat with Berry de Jager, a Commodore fan in the Netherlands, using the iMac. It took a while to get the account set up, so we took a few minutes out to order our food.

Then Berry called Robert by cell phone, and they got connected via SKYPE. At first we could see Berry, but he could not see us, but we got that straightened out with the help of Louis, just about when our food arrived. Robert went back and forth between the talking to Berry on the computer and eating his giant burrito, while the rest of us tried to act normal while someone halfway around the world watched us eat.

The chat was actually a test for a SX-64 international event that is coming up at our January meeting, so we wrapped up that part of it and began the part of our meeting where Robert tries to keep us on task, and we all get into all kinds of discussions, computer and otherwise, while we finished eating. During this time, we reminisced about Robert's first Amiga. It was also Dick's first and only Amiga, and he owned it for all of five minutes. Dick was trying to buy a 1084 monitor, but the seller would only sell as a package, which included an A500. Dick bought the package and immediately sold the Amiga to Robert.

Robert announced that the C4 Expo (Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club), which was last held about three years ago, will return in May or June of 2013. Robert also spoke briefly about the SC3 Arcade Party in Claremont, CA last week. Photos will be on-line some time in the future.

Louis reported that he bought a box of disks from a defunct user groups library collection, about 50 disks for \$8 on eBay. He will go through them and see if there is anything of interest to our members.

Included in some of the odds and ends we had acquired were manuals (no software) for Programs used with ham radio. No one had heard of these Programs, including our ham radio expert Roger, but he took the manuals home to look at.

Each year FCUG makes a donation to a charity around the holiday; for the last several years ago it has been St. Jude Children's Hospital in Memphis. We voted to donate \$50 this year.

In southern California Robert had met with Charles Gutman, our member in Fontana. Charles had received permission from the developer to make a new run of a cartridge that contains 30 games and had given Robert a prototype. It had been some time since Charles contacted the developer, and he was notable to identify two chips and two diodes on the board. The developer had moved and could not be found, so Charles had asked for help in identifying the parts. When he was in San Jose, Robert talked to an engineer who was able to identify one chip, but the number on the other had been scratched off and was nearly unreadable. Then we handed it to 11-year old Vince, whose hawk-like eyesight put the rest of us to shame. After a brief study, holding the chip under different lights to get the best letter-to-light contrast, Vince read off the part number and part of the serial number.

Finally it was time for demonstrations to begin, about an hour after the official end time for our meeting (both the club and the restaurant are very flexible). Attempted demos on the C64 and VIC failed, but moving on to the Amiga we were able to get a good look at a new platform game called SQRXZ. As usual, after the old folks tried it and died quickly, Vince took over and ran up a respectable score.

Finally, the agenda called for a quick look at an old 5.25 Apple disk that Roger had brought in. From his vast collection of computer equipment, Robert had unearthed an Apple IIGS, along with third-party dual 3.5 disk drives.

The APPLE monitor was in hiding, but this machine could be used with a Commodore monitor, so we put in Rogers disk and tried to view it. This set off a half-hour or longer project to try and get the APPLE working. Louie had used this machine in the past, but it was over 20 years ago. Still, his knowledge allowed us to get close to our goal. First, he explained that the APPLE would not function with three drives attached, so he managed to disconnect one of the drives in the dual unit. After much effort and some on-line research, we brought up the graphic interface, only to be stopped dead by the fact that nothing could be done without the mouse, also in hiding. In a happy post script, back home after the meeting Roger got some help in an on-line forum and was able to use COPY II to view the file. It turned out to be a text file that was probably written by Roger's brother in his high school days. Now the search is on for a printer cable that will allow Roger to make a printout.

When we started hauling equipment out to our cars, we were surprised to realize it was nearly 4 P.M. This did not stop us from the usual meeting after the meeting, during which anything and everything gets discussed. Key topics this time included auto accidents and the resulting hassles with insurance companies (Louie and Dick) and buying a Hummer (Louis).

Despite the length of the meeting, it was fun and interesting throughout, and we will be back to do it again in December.

~~December 2012~~

-by Dick Estel & Robert Bernardo

We had a small attendance this month, with just Brad, Robert and Dick. However, Brad has not been with us for a while, so Robert started the day by catching him up on some of the things we've been doing or trying to do.

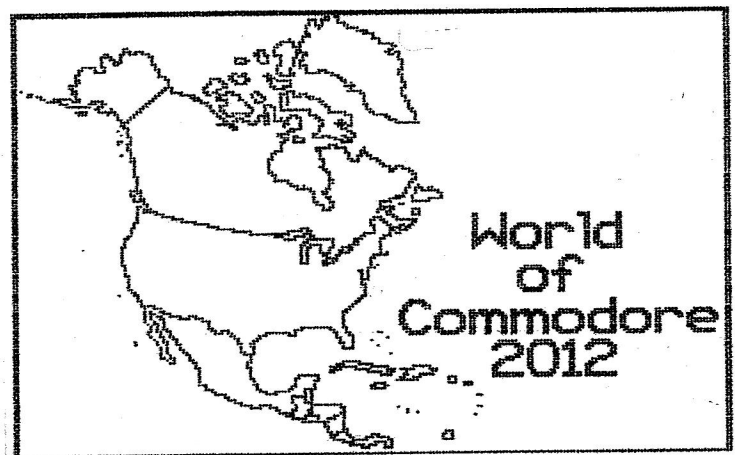
Speaking of trying, although we tried many things including tons of research on the Internet, the demo gremlin attacked every one of today's demos. For the most part,

it was something very small, like the need for USB cable, which kept things from going as planned.

Although we couldn't get programs running on them, we got a look at two PET's, a 4032 and 8032, and a 2031 PET floppy drive.

Nevertheless, we had good time, a great lunch, and discussed a lot of things. In addition, Robert brought various magazines and other books, many from the collection of former C= user, Charles Vreeland of Los Angeles. We especially enjoyed Family Computing, which was published by Scholastic Inc. Although it was a multi-platform publication, it was interesting to see the ads for various computers. The main article was about a family's search for just the right computer in 1983, ending happily with them buying a Commodore 64.

Next month will be a special event, an international "SX-64 Day" celebrating 30 years of this special Commodore, during which we will video chat with Berry de Jager and others in the Netherlands. They will have several SX-64s set up, and we will bring at least two.



-by Paul Quirk

I had the opportunity to attend World of Commodore 2012 in Mississauga, Ontario (Canada) yesterday. The event took place in a conference room in the Admiral Inn. This is an annual event put on by the Toronto Pet User's Group (TPUG), the oldest user's group in Canada and the second oldest user's group in the world. There were a variety of exhibits, including

demonstrations and products for sale, a freebie table, and an itinerary filled with excellent speakers covering an interesting range of topics from modern hardware developments to the use of Commodore computers in the arts.

I had the opportunity to meet some old friends and make some new ones. It was also a place to rekindle some friendships I believed were long lost. The real pleasure was getting to meet Jeffrey Daniels of Denial (the VIC-20 forum) in person for the first time. With so many fascinating individuals who attended the event, some from some great distances, it was worthwhile just to be in the same room and talk about our varied interests in retro-computing. Ever increasingly, the appeal seems to be about the aesthetics and creative artistic outlet represented by these vintage machines.

There's a trend these days to rekindle some of the great classics on modern hardware, so it was a pleasure to listen to a speaker from Comma 8 studios describe the process and challenges involved in bringing a modern version of M.U.L.E. to modern platforms like iPhone and Android. We got to listen to some possible theme music for the upcoming game, got to see how the characters are now rendered graphically, and got some insight into some of the challenges of creating a multiplayer game on these devices.

Jim Brain of Retro Innovations was present with a table selling his clever devices (I'm a huge fan and user of his uIEC), and announced that he was now able to legally sell JiffyDOS for the VIC-20, Plus/4, and Commodore 16 computers. I made sure to buy the first VIC-20 JiffyDOS chip after his presentation. This, combined with the uIEC and daughterboard, brings these computers into the 21st century, with the uIEC providing a modern SD card alternative to the 1541 disk drive and JiffyDOS a fast and easy way to work with SD card files and images on the uIEC.

Next we were treated by a presentation by a speaker from the Toronto Animated Image Society (TAIS) about a project, HelloAmiga.ca, where the Amiga computer was used in creating works of animated art. The microphone was then turned over to Mark Pellegrino, who treated us to G.I.R.L. This animated short work of art was completed using Deluxe Paint in an emulated Amiga. It was somewhat dark, somewhat disturbing, and yet very funny and entertaining at the same time. It was excellent.

Going along with the creative arts theme, Jeffrey Daniels of Denial presented his work, explaining his philosophy of programming and his reasons for that philosophy. Some of his games are stunningly original, all are very playable. By drawing on subtle concepts of our consciousness, he develops themes that intrigue and draw us in. Some seasoned Commodore users are surprised that Jeffrey doesn't use machine language, as some of his games are so sophisticated they suggest that they might be written that way. I often think that had Jeffrey's games existed at the time the VIC-20 was created, Commodore's original intention of using the Vic's video circuitry in arcade machines may have been realized.

Unfortunately, I arrived too late to catch the first presentation and had to leave before the final one. However, the event was well worth the \$10.00 admission fee, and I decided to sign up as a TPUG member for a year. Besides buying Jim Brain's clever products (a daughtercard for my uIEC, along with JiffyDOS for my VIC and 64), I also scored an MPS-802 (printer) in great shape from the freebie table, and Cymbal's Games 20 book 1 for a dollar. Those of you who know me have seen my Youtube video of me opening up a VIC-20 for Christmas, showing off the VIC and this very Cymbal games book. The MPS-802 was the first printer I ever owned, and completes my original Commodore 64

set-up.

More Pictures of the event can be found here:

<https://picasaweb.google.com/106353454357695693703/WorldOfCommodore2012?authuser=0&feat=directlink>



-by Lenard R. Roach

As many of you have surmised, Solomon, son of King David, was suppose to be the wisest man on earth. It wouldn't surprise me that, if given the right timeline, Solomon would have invented the Commodore computer long before Jack Tramiel laid eyes on his first machine, but what do I know? I'm just a comedian out of work writing gists in various Commodore publications about this time changing machine we all treasure so highly.

Back to reality: I was cruising through some of Solomon's sayings in a book called Proverbs and came across this interesting one around 13:11. It basically said that fast gain is fast lost, but accumulation little by little makes it grow. I know he was referring to money in this case, but this little ditty struck a nerve with me and all this Commodore stock I had to move out of the garage and to the curb. How did I get so much Commodore books, magazines, software, and hardware? All I did was buy a piece of this and a part of that. Some things were given to me to try and use, while most if the time someone was just looking for a place to dump their stuff and was too environmentally conscientious to drop it in a landfill. In either cases, I had a garage full of Commodore equipment that I couldn't handle anymore.

Solomon said that would happen. 2500 Years before the invention of the Commodore, he knew that a little hovel on the east end of the Coronado Hills subdivision in beautiful Kansas City, Kansas, would accumulate so much Commodore stuff over a long period of time that he would eventually have to thin the herd and put some stuff out for the garbage man.

"Oh my gosh, Pops! You're trashing Commodore equipment! That's a heresy!"

Yes, to some this might be a Commodore crime, but all of it was busted cables I meant to fix and didn't; broken Printers that nobody uses anymore; and magazines that you can find copies of online. But don't think only Commodore hit the curb; some PC monitors, modems, and keyboards went right out with them. Usually, as I'm sure it is in your neighborhood, some scrap gatherers will be by during the week and find a way to take this equipment apart and scrap what copper and other metals they can. I suspect that a Commodore machine is mostly recyclable.

But the point I'm trying to make is this: Despite all the controversy surrounding the Bible these days, there are some truths that may apply, and it is funny how they apply somewhat to the Commodore computer. I read that and instantly thought of all the Commodore in my garage.

Oh, what about the part before the comma? Fast gain is fast lost? Let's turn back to the Commodore again. Isn't it funny that those geeks who have moved onto PCs or Macs come to your front door with a 54 foot trailer full of old Commodore and want you to take it off their hands? My lands! You've got the mother load of Commodore and you can't wait to dive into the entire collection. You take the equipment, and first shove everything into every spare nook and cranny of your dwelling. Later, with your fast gain of everything Commodore, you go through it and find out, much to your chagrin, that over 78% of the hardware won't work, 75% of the

Peripherals are bad or missing an element, like a cord, and 88% of the software won't run on your machine. In short, you may have a bookcase of Commodore material that works properly. What a waste! All that Commodore goodness, KaPut! You end up, over the next several months, putting little by little of that Commodore "trash" out on the curb. You got hosed, bro! But don't worry, you learned to be leery of rigs pulling up to your house bearing what seems to be "gifts". That is, until the next truck shows up with Commodore goodies and you get all elated

again.

I don't know of anyone who is a serious collector turning away anyone wishing to depart of their collections in lieu of some new prospect. I have taken and sold (and trashed) Commodore equipment for the last 22 years. However, with the invention of such websites like eBay and Craig's List, we should be finding less and less at our curbsides and more in our wallets. Like it has been shown in the past, all it takes is a determination to do it and a will to stick it out.
