

Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club

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c/o 31 Potowatomi Trail Milford, OH 45150

July, 2007 President's Page

Howdy Fellow Commodore Users!

I would like to congratulate all the officers that got elected for the 2007-2008 year. You'll find the new list printed as usual on our newsletter.

During our June meeting, it was suggested we have a picnic in August. The picnic will be held at the same place as previous years in Caldwell Playground. It is located at the intersection of Dillard and North Bend Road in Carhage. The time is our usual meeting time at 2PM.

This park is between Mill Creek and the railroad, so if you crossed both, you went too far. See the map detailing the site our picnic will take place.

Don't forget your covered dish filled with yummy food. The club will be bringing soft drinks, ice, paper plates, cutlery, cups, and an assortment of chips. Oh, one other thing, bring your appetite, too!

See you at this month's meeting held on July 15th!

Keep on Commodoring!!

David Wimer Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club President
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From 75N:

Take exit 9 for Paddock Rd/
OH-4 toward OH-561/Seymour
Ave, Keep left at the fork,
follow signs for Paddock Ave
N/OH-4, Turn left at OH-4/
Paddock Rd, Turn left at E
North Bend Rd

From 75S:

Take exit 9 for Paddock Rd/
OH-4 toward OH-561/Seymour
Ave, Keep right at the fork,
follow signs for Paddock Rd
N/OH-4 and merge onto OH-4/
Paddock Rd, Turn left at E
North Bend Rd



Remembering Jim Butterfield

As many of you already know, our good friend, and Commodore guru Jim Butterfield passed away on Friday, June 29th, 2007. This issue of the 4C'er newsletter is dedicated to the memory of his life, and the influence he had on all of us over the years. His contribution to the Commodore community was enormous, it would be difficult to find anyone who had done so much to promote our hobby. I believe I can speak for all of us at CCC when I extend my heartfelt condolences to the Butterfield family, and Jim's friends at TPUG.

Newsletter Articles wanted

Articles should be submitted to the Editor at the email address: sixdarklordsofchaos.com or snail-mailed to 17 Edwards, Walton KY 41094. Articles from members or non-members are welcome, and should cover some retro-computing-related topic.

"Meet Jim Butterfield" - Reprinted from Computer! Sept 1982

The Butterfield homestead is a modest brick house within walking distance of downtown Toronto. It is comfortably cluttered with books, plants, computers, and three cats. Even the attic is pressed into service as storage space for whatever books and computers Jim Butterfield cannot cram into his small office.

The office, in fact, resembles a crowded depot for a changing assortment of computers including four Commodore PETs of varying screen sizes and ages, a VIC-20, an Atari 800, a KIM, a Rockwell AIM, and an Alpha, a European machine. Stacked next to the computers is a "disk tower", consisting of two Commodore double disk drives (a 4040 and an 8050), an Atari 810 drive, and an ancient Commodore 2023 printer perched on top. Bookselves along one wall are overflowing, and every available inch of floor space is carpeted with piles of diskettes, papers, and still more books. Yet, amazingly, Butterfield always seems to know into which pile to dive for what he needs.

One of the three cats, the Siamese, possesses a similar instinct. With a feline knack for howling in on the center of warmth and attention, she often dozes atop whichever PET is on and humming. The main occupant of the office Butterfield meshes with the environment, too. He speaks with a gravelly voice in the measured phrases of someone used to teaching or being quoted for publication. Middle-aged and greying, he brings to microcomputing an almost childlike curiosity and sense of delight, a fascination which led him first to an absorbing hobby and finally, in early 1981, to a new career as a freelance writer, consultant, and teacher. Today he is recognized as a premier expert on Commodore computers, as a prolific writer and perhaps most of all as an unusually coherent voice in the seemingly impenetrable technical thicket of personal computing.

A change of careers like most career changes, the switch surprised Butterfield as much as anybody. For 24 1/2 years he worked for Canadian National/Canadian Pacific Telecommunications. He quit solely because the company decided to move far away from central Toronto, and he would have spent so much time commuting there would have been none left for his hobby. For Butterfield, it was no contest.

"When faced with that choice, I really had no choice and I quit."

Actually, it was while working for CN/CP in 1964 that Butterfield was first introduced to computers although personal microcomputers were still undreamt of in those days. Butterfield spent a year as a programmer of a rather specialized computer, a Collins C8401, FORTRAN and COBOL were coming into use at the time, but the Collins didn't use any such advanced languages. Programmers had to do almost everything in machine language. Butterfield soon moved into other areas of the company, but a little more than ten years later his interest was rekindled by a new invention: microcomputers.

"I decided to find out what this 'micro' stuff was all about and started watching the current magazines," he says. "I finally decided to purchase when I saw a completely pre-built machine called a KIM I, which had a 6502 microchip in it. That turned out to be like a return to the past. Everything we had been doing a dozen years before on the large \$1.5 million computer, we were doing again on this little \$250 board including making the same mistakes."

KIM And The Start Of Social Computing

One machine led to another, and Butterfield began sharing his knowledge with other micro-computer users, as well as writing about his discoveries. He had gained some writing experience many years before in Western Canada, where he was born, as a "continuity writer" (Butterfield smiles, "That means for a couple of radio stations. As the users of early microcomputers began comparing notes, it wasn't long before a cult of sorts sprang up. Indeed, the emergence of microcomputers as a basis of social, and not merely technical,



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interaction is the facet of the field that Butterfield enjoys most. In the earliest days of "roll-your-own computers," he notes, everyone had a different machine, which crimped the sharing of information. "Suddenly, along came the KIM. Everybody had the same computer. An amazing thing happened - and this is multiplied many times over in the Commodore line - people built a social life around microcomputers." The thriving Toronto PET Users Group (TPUG) is a case in point. Butterfield had what he calls a "Machiavellian influence" on TPUG founder Lyman Duggan, whom Butterfield persuaded to hold the first meeting in his basement one summer evening. While Butterfield firmly rejects any organizing chores, he contributes a great deal as a friend of the club, speaking at monthly meetings and sharing his expertise. Butterfield admits, "It's getting harder to know what to talk about those meetings. There are a number of people who have the ability to track down any part of the machine they want to go after, and who are quite skilled at machine language. As a result, my sympathy is with the beginner. I'd rather bore ten experts than lose the bulk of people, so I try to keep things fairly simple"

Butterfield's sympathy for beginners is well known and shows in his articles. His writing is informal and witty in spite of its technical content. "I try to write it as I would say it. I do a lot of presenting material to both kids and adults, and I try to keep the same style in my writing. Also, whenever I can, I slip in a simple example program. Then, even if the readers can't understand, they can run the programs."

Light Consulting
Butterfield also indulges in what he calls "light consulting," principally for Commodore. In the spring he went on a western Canadian promotion tour for the VIC-20 computer. He's also frequent invited to shows, such as the PET Show in London he attended in June. He finds this part of his work "really great fun" because it provides opportunity for travel.

Lecturing and teaching, such as the machine language course he conducts each month for a special interest division of TPUG, provide him with feedback about problems and areas where people need more information. He has a reputation for being generous with his time, and his phone is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday to Friday.

"If somebody phones me up and asks a question which shows they just haven't bothered trying it themselves, then I will sometimes be a little short, because it does seem like a waste of my time," he says. "But most people who call do so because they're stuck on something. It's just a question of getting another opinion. If I get a number of inquiries in a certain area, that's usually a signal that it's time for me to write an article about it. It's a very good way of keeping posted on what's bothering people at the moment."

Butterfield is equally generous with his software. He rarely sells any of his programs. "I would like to foster an environment where people pass out their software with reasonable generosity. I think that by showing a good example, I might sort of lead the way in that." Often he distributes his work on TPUG's library disk.

Still, Butterfield vehemently supports an author's copyright: "I believe very strongly that the person writing an original program has the right to do as he chooses with that program. If he chooses to sell it or to request that it not be copied except for a fee, then he has absolutely that right."

However, he feels that a person who takes money for software is obligated to support that program by upgrading it and furnishing the means to modify it, if necessary. "That's another good reason to give programs away. I really feel that most people who put down a lot of money for software feel that they are not buying a disk or cassette tape, but they are buying a service.."

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Interestingly, Butterfield believes the problem of software piracy might lessen, not grow, with the increasing business use of microcomputers. He laughs, "If an employee ran to the boss and said, 'Chief, I think you should give me a raise because I just saved you \$500, I lifted a copy of a program,' I really don't think very many businesses would stick a cigar in my mouth and give me a promotion. They would more likely start keeping an eye on me."

Butterfield thinks that renting software eventually may be the best way to distribute it. A yearly fee could be charged for its use. In return, the user would receive continuing support on such things as upgrades, newsletters, information, warranty, and documentation.

Something Unprecedented In Education

Given his multiple interests in computing, writing, teaching, and making life easier for beginners, it's only natural that Butterfield is a strong advocate of introducing children to computers early in school. "As I understand the writings of Seymour Papert [author of Mindstorms: Children, Computers, and Powerful Ideas], the earlier a child becomes exposed to computers, the better it is likely to be," he says. "I have seen no evidence to contradict this. It seems to me that more important than anything formalized we teach young people about computers is that we get them familiar with the concept, we get their fears allayed, we make sure that the usefulness of computers is understood at an early age. By the time a student gets to high school, computers are an oddity. There's something not quite natural about them - something manufactured and solemn."

If you use computers in grade two or three you simply understand that they're around and they're going to help you whenever you feel like using them." Teachers are faced with devising methods of guiding computer studies and providing resources for students, some of whom could soon outstrip them in programming ability. This can be an intimidating task, but student enthusiasm should make it stimulating and challenging as well. "We have in the microcomputer one of the most incredible forces that has ever happened in education," says Butterfield. "I'm not talking about games; games don't last very long. Students are begging for access to this logic device. It has no precedent. I don't know what specific educational objectives are precisely to be served. All I know is there must be something in the whole phenomenon, some need in the young mind that causes an intense urge to interface with the computer, to try things, to make the computer do things."

Part of the appeal, he believes, comes from the creative nature of programming. "Programming is creative not necessarily in the most visible sense. If you write yourself another Space Invaders it might end up looking like everybody else's. I sometimes like to compare programming, especially machine language programming, which is more exacting, to doing a jigsaw puzzle. Why would you sit there for two or three days and put in all this effort when you know that the end result will be a rather crummy looking picture? The point is that you will have felt you have accomplished something, that you have brought together a number of skills, and even though it's the same as everyone else's, in a sense you have created it. It's the same thing with programming you feel so good when it all comes together, when it all works."

Expert Debugging

But what if it doesn't work? When you're the ranking expert, what do you do when you get stuck on a problem? "Well, when you reach a certain stage, and it really isn't all that hard to achieve, then you have control of all parts of the machine."

Once you get to that point, and there are many people who have achieved that, you don't have to ask anybody. You can go in there and look for yourself. One of the messages that I try to deliver to people is, 'If I can do it, you can do it.' Because often there isn't anything in the problem that logically you can't look at."

The Future Of Personal Computing

As personal computer enthusiasts grow wiser and I more mature in the next few years, so will their machines, Butterfield predicts. Memory will be cheap, machines more powerful, and at the same time less expensive. The biggest single change will probably be a move toward better human interface.

Full-screen editing, color, sound, and graphics will be almost universal and easier to use. Peripherals such as light pens, paddles or joysticks will simply plug in. Features such as upper/lowercase letters, now viewed as optional by some companies, will be standardized. There will be some moves toward better languages, but, Butterfield says, "BASIC it appears to be indestructible at present." I more specifically, Butterfield offers some opinions on the future of microcomputer manufacturers: "I think we can say with some certainty that IBM will survive, not necessarily because of the merit of its products, but because IBM will gather around itself a massive amount of support."

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Radio Shack is very strong. Like IBM it will probably survive for reasons not directly associated with quality. This is not a reflection on its quality, but it has access to so many outlets of its own that it can support continuing sales. Atari has so far suffered from its games image.

"One of the most interesting phenomena could be Sinclair," he says. "Sinclair has introduced a series of small, not very powerful, but remarkably inexpensive computers. While people who are used to the speed of, say, a PET or a VIC would find some of the existing Sinclair computers very slow, we can't ignore the fact that Sinclair through Timex is going to sell an astonishing number of machines."

Butterfield foresees a very interesting battle between these less expensive machines, which are likely to be sold in every corner drug store, and the more powerful products. He notes that people tend to be loyal to a product line, and so far Sinclair's line has a clearly defined top end. Whether this situation will change as a result of demands from buyers of machines such as the ZX-81 who want to upgrade their systems remains a matter for speculation.

As computer prices drop, it is likely that people will begin to see a computer as an affordable tool for the family's financial management, entertainment, and education. Wider distribution of machines will affect society in several ways. Already, of course, people use home computers in a limited way for business, and more commonly for enjoyment and exercise of mental agility. "People test themselves against their computers by asking, 'Can I make the computer do this task?' People also go to the computer for something resembling relaxation.

"I was talking to a microcomputer owner who is having difficulties in his business. He told me he goes home, speaks to no one, and works on his computer for an hour or so. Only when he shuts the machine off does he say 'hello' to everyone. He finds the computer a very great pacifier in some sense - perhaps he takes his energies out on it. He feels that he comes out of that environment more of a human being, and his family is very understanding of it."

Butterfield also feels that people armed with the facts rather than the myth of computers are better equipped to cope with society. The most important change that small computers have brought is they have restored to the individual a sense that he has control over the events around him. Not only can his computer calculate a mortgage as well as his bank can, but he has control in that he will not simply accept any nonsense the computer prints and mails to him.

Essentially, it's related to the question of competence. If you can handle these little beasts, then in one sense, at least, you are more competent. You understand more about some of the things which are happening in the world around you. That in itself is probably one of the most profound things microcomputers do."

As we become more aware of a computer's true capabilities and limitations, we also may better assess the complex arguments about artificial intelligence. Butterfield defines it very simply: "A computer which adapts its behavior based on what it has learned from external sources is showing artificial intelligence." He cites a game called "Animals" as a simple example of a program which learns from the user. "Animals says it will guess any animal you can name. The first few times, you're going to name an animal it has never heard of. It will ask you for more information about the animal and put it in its list. Eventually you will run out of animals you know, and then it will know as much as you do."

Videotex is another computer-based system with great possibilities for the future - one which he fears will not reach its potential. "I wish I could see a stronger future for videotex. Things like Telidon, Prestel and so on have a conceptual problem for me. They seem to be predominantly one-way only communications systems, perhaps a little bit like television, only not as effective. You have a few people communicating to a lot of people. I don't view that as a good move, or even a typical move in this day where people are getting competence in their own hands. I think that if Telidon were more of a two-way interface, if more people could contribute, then you might have more of what I would call a lively medium."

Rest And Diversion

Now that Butterfield finds himself constantly occupied with computers, he must force himself to get away from them for relaxation. Prowling around whatever city he happens to be visiting is one of his favorite diversions. He adds, "I do play the piano quite badly. Occasionally I go and dig dandelions out of the garden if I have time. But there is a little bit of change in the order of things. Since my hobby has become my work, I can't do it all the time."

In many ways, Butterfield has achieved celebrity status. He is much sought after by the micro computer community around the world and does enjoy the travel. Yet he remains very approachable. "It's really great fun. It's nice to be invited over to England. But simply if any part of it is intimidating to others if I hear people say 'Well, that's all right for Jim Butterfield' - then I feel ... not good. Essentially, what I'm trying to say is, 'If I can do it, you can do it.'

The 4C-er, July 2007 Issue Cincinnati Commodore Computer Club

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