

NORTHWEST COMPUTER NEWS

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MY SYSTEM

Michael Holley

My introduction to home computers was the now famous January, 1975 Popular Electronics story on the Altair 8800 computer. By January of '76 I was looking the market over, reading every issue of Byte, and trying to decide which computer to buy. During this period computers were not as tame as they are today; no one was selling a complete computer system that would work when you got it home and assembled. I was living in San Francisco, one of the hot spots in small computers, and since computers came in kit form only I was able to make my hobby pay for itself by assembling kits for computer stores. Also I was able to play with all the new gizmos before I bought one.

By the fall of 1976, Southwest Technical Products Corporation was delivering a complete system that would run BASIC and didn't have a gaggle of toggle switches on the front of it. My first working system was a SWTP 6800 computer with 8k of memory, an AC-30 cassette interface, and a CT-1024 video terminal. A major consideration for choosing SWTP was low cost hardware and software. This system cost less than \$1000 and BASIC was only \$5.

In the first part of 1977 I added another 8k of memory and a PR-40 printer. The major limitation of my system was the width of the output (32 columns of video and 40 for the printer). At this time in our computer hobby some major manufacturers were selling good items but poor systems. A friend of mine bought a Professor Tech SOL in January but BASIC wasn't released until June. I guess the manufacturers were expecting their customers to steal MITS BASIC. SWTP sold a complete hardware package with instructions on how to interconnect each unit and software that didn't require the user to write I/O drivers. I imagine there are still people who are trying to install all those jumpers to their I/O card and write a I/O driver for their hot copy of BASIC.

One drawback with cassette tape interfaces is speed or their lack of it: the SWTP lacks a lot of speed. With 8k BASIC taking 5 minutes to load, I didn't turn my computer off very often. In fact it ran 24 hours a day for about six months without failure, except a memory chip now and then. The diagnostics provided are very effective in pointing out any memory failure, however obscure. Memory, like wine, improves with age.

In April of 1977 I attended the First West Coast Computer Faire and saw 3 SWTP compatible disk systems in operation. A major consideration in choosing a disk system is the software, unless you just want to see the disk spin. Often a bargain in hardware isn't a total system bargain. Since SWTP had developed good low cost hardware in the past I chose their disk system.

That June I managed to get the first SWTP Minifloppy off the production line. It was hand carried back from San Antonio, Texas, by Chet Harris, a Cali-

fornia computer wholesaler, a week before shipments began. I also had the first Minifloppy that didn't work right. If you have ever wondered who found the errors corrected by the errata sheet, it's the first people to get the kit.

The system that I have now is a SWTP 6800 with 36k of RAM, a dual minifloppy disk, a Hazeltine 1500 video terminal, and a Trendata 1000 Selectric terminal. This is my system but I have quite an assortment of other goodies also. I have most of the boards SWTP has made their their computers plus EPROM boards from other manufacturers and half a dozen prototype boards. I have designed and built a 8 channel A to D and D to A board and various custom I/O boards. Of course I have a few modems; one of them is auto answer that allows remote use of my computer.

As for software, I have SWTP BASIC and Altair 680 BASIC plus some outstanding TSC packages. The disc operating system is FLEX by Technical Systems Consultants. This DOS is one of the finest I have ever seen; it even has features that CP/M doesn't have. The documentation is very complete, about 60 pages in all, with explanations on how to use all major subroutines with your own assembly language programs.

One of the nice utility programs is "EXECUTE" which reads a text file and executes the statements as if they were coming from the keyboard. I use this to set the characteristics of TTYSET and to assign my system and working disc drive with a one word command. The system comes with about 20 such utilities, with more on the way. The documentation explains how to write your own utilities and gives detailed examples. The output routine has the option of printing a full screen of text then pausing until you hit escape. Very nice at 19.2k baud. After 3 months of heavy use the DOS has yet to make a hard error.

The most useful package I have is the TSC text editor. I am using it to write this and it has also been used to collect a 500 line data base. It has all the features a terminal based editor can have, except macros.

Two other TSC packages I use are the mnemonic assembler and the text processor. A review of the text processor is in July Creative Computing.



"AM I FAMILIAR WITH FORTRAN? I MAY BE—WHAT'S HIS FIRST NAME?"



My system is a Southwest Tech 6800 with 36k of memory, dual mini floppys, a Hazeltine 1500 video terminal, and a Trendata 1000 Selectric terminal. The small box on the disk drive is my low cost modem

MEETINGS

The Northwest Computer Society meets at the Pacific Science Center, in Seattle, on the first and third Thursday of each month at 7:30 PM. The first meeting of the month normally is held in room 200, on the East side of the Science Center Court. This meeting usually features a formal presentation by a speaker or speakers. The second meeting of the month is normally held in the math room, at the Southeast corner of the Science Center Court, two flights down. This meeting is usually more informal with freewheeling discussion and problem solving.

Thursday, August 3 - Room 200

"Data Structures and Data Management" by Thomas Thackery, Boeing Computer Services

Thursday, August 17 - Math Room

Informal meeting with no speaker scheduled. Bring your things for "show and tell."

Thursday, September 7 - Room 200

"Intecolor Color Graphics Terminal," by a representative from Thorson Co.

TACOMA AREA MEETINGS

A Tacoma section of the Northwest Computer Society is in the process of organization. About 40 individuals have expressed an interest in getting together in Tacoma. It is planned to form a section which meets in the Tacoma area on evenings other than the present 1st and 3rd Thursdays of the month. This will allow attendance at Seattle meetings by those who might also wish to do so, and possible attendance by Seattle members who can not make the present meetings. Actual dates will be determined by majority vote at the first meeting which will be held soon. If interested, drop a line to Sam Steere, care of the Northwest Computer Society, P.O. Box 4193, Seattle, WA 98104.

Since the Tacoma group will be a branch of the Northwest Computer Society, meetings and participation will be open to all present members, and "wheel will not be reinvented," a larger organization will give us more "clout," etc. More details will be published in future issues of NCN.

ATTENTION HAMS

What about the possibility of setting up a time and frequency to have computer oriented round table discussions on 2 meters, 10 meters or 15 meters as the convenience and interest of individuals might dictate? I am not yet on 2 meters but am in the process of assembling a rig. If interested how about dropping a line to Sam Steere, N7SS, care of the Northwest Computer Society, P.O. Box 4193, Seattle, WA 98104.

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P.O. Box 4193
Seattle, Wa 98104

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