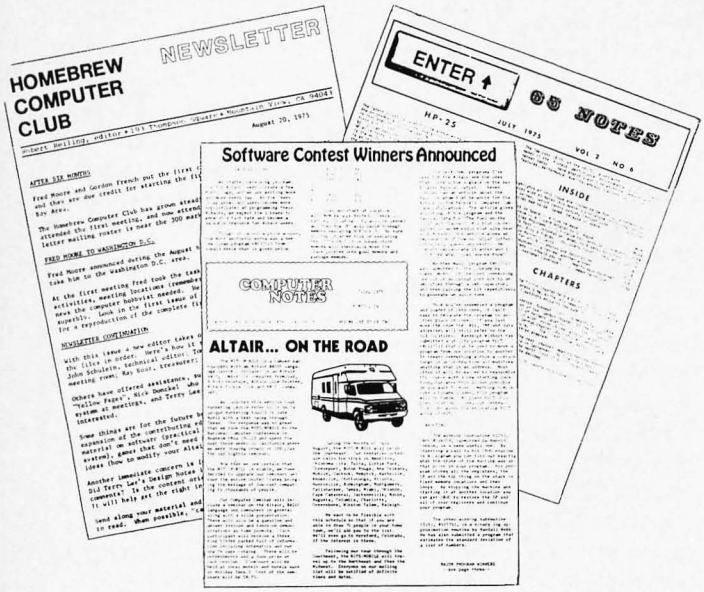

Clubs and Newsletters

The Evolution of the Homebrew Computer Club

BYTE has received the latest issue of the Homebrew Computer Club Newsletter, now edited by Robert Reiling, 193 Thompson Sq., Mountain View CA 94043. This club was started with a meeting on March 5, 1975, assembled by founders Fred Moore and Gordon French. Fred has been pretty much running the show since then via the newsletter activity. However, Fred's personal plans took him to the Washington DC area in the middle of August so he had to pass the ball along to someone else in the Silicon Valley. According to the newsletter dated Aug. 20, 1975, the following persons are now working on the club and newsletter:

- Robert Reiling, editor.
- John Schulein, technical editor.
- Tom Pittman, mailing list.
- Lenny Shuster, meeting room.
- Ray Boaz, treasurer.

The Aug. 20 issue is nicely done in a very professional photo offset format. It includes notes by John Schulein and Tom Pittman on the problem of audio cassette recording standards. (See BYTE's conference announcement elsewhere in this issue for some additional inputs.) The issue also includes comments by Ken McGinnis on TV display timing for the computer hobbyist, and some random data of interest compiled by Robert Reiling. The Homebrew Computer Club meets every two weeks at the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center, usually in the auditorium. Ask a guard for directions when you get there. Extrapolating the every two week algorithm from known dates of Aug. 20 and Sept. 3 gives the following dates in October and November: Oct. 1, 15, 29; Nov. 12, 26. The address for correspondence is temporarily Robert Reiling's site, but arrangements are being made for a club post office box.

HP-65 Users Club

The HP-65 is probably the one "home computer" in widest circulation by now. This is certainly true if your definition of "home computer" is something which costs under $1000, has programmability, uses microcomputer technology, has off-line storage, and some form of interactive set of user controls and displays.

The HP-65 Users Club is an organization founded by Richard J. Nelson (2541 W. Camden Pl., Santa Ana CA 92704) and devoted to the use of the HP-65, and other programmable calculators. The club publishes a newsletter, *65 Notes*, for a nominal fee. The July 1975 issue (Volume 2 number 6) is typical of the many issues included in a sample packet forwarded by Richard: a feature on the new HP-25, comments on the formation of various local club chapters, several programs, an article on repairs and/or modifications of the HP-65, and an article on how one reader of *65 Notes* adapted his HP-65 to a hard copy printer. (Note: *65 Notes* and the HP-25 Users Club are in no way affiliated with Hewlett Packard.) Here is where to turn for a wealth of information on programmable hand-held calculators.

Beta Iota Tau

Richard A. Petke announces formation of Beta Iota Tau, a new fraternity for campus computer freaks, knurds, hackers and assorted hangers on. For a full description see the letters section of this issue. His address:

BETA IOTA TAU
c/o Richard A. Petke
R.H.I.T. Box 520
Terre Haute IN 47803

If you want a definition of the terms "knurd," "hacker" and "computer freak," either look into a mirror or get in touch with Mr. Petke!

North Texas No-Name Club

The second informal gathering of the North Texas No-name Computer Club took place at the Irving Library on August 18.

Bill Fuller gave a short introduction on what the club's general aims could be and a few reasons for forming a group. With this, each of the 16 attendees introduced themselves, and summarized their computer interests and general background.

Lannie Walker, the Ft. Worth co-founder, brought his Martin MK-2 to display. Greg Walker demonstrated operation of his TVT-II. Ric Martin provided his TVT-I for comparison. Also available for a "look-see" were a Processor Technology In/Out board, ECS modem, two Suding cassette interfaces, ECS digital display PC board, and the MITS VLCT PC boards.

With introductions complete, a general open forum discussion took place until we were kicked out of the library at 9 pm. The "meeting" continued at a local coffee shop until 11:30 pm.

A quick summary of pertinent data obtained from questionnaires filled out shows:

Computer: Five Altairs, one MK-2 and one home brew.
TVT: One TVT-I and two TVT-II.
Cassette interface: Three Suding, one ECS, one Computer Hobbyist, one MITS.
Paper Tape: Three punches, one reader.
Teletype: Five of various vintage.

Since we are still somewhat unstructured as a formal club, interested "byters" should contact Bill Fuller, 2377 Dalworth 157, Grand Prairie TX 75050, 1-214-264-0111 or Lannie Walker, Route 1, Box 272, Aledo TX 76008, 1-817-244-1013.


WORLD'S FIRST COMPUTER STORE

COMPUTER STORE

COMPUTER NOTES

MITS-MOBILE HITS SE

Information Parlor). The store sells Altairs over the counter of course, and functions as a general computer hobbyist gathering place and information center. *Computer Notes* also features a travelogue of the MITS-MOBILE Altair Caravan, which toured the Southeast during August and September.

In his editorial, Dave Bunnell leads a good deal of rumors to their proper resting places, covering "off brand peripherals, memory cards, etc.", the false rumors concerning "less than full spec" Intel 8080 chips, software agreement technicalities, MITS' development of a Motorola 6800 system, and delivery complaints. Dave precedes all this with the explanation, "One point that has gotten us good press in a number of publications is that we try and level with our customers." From Dave's straightforward presentation, I think they deserve another "good press."

There are no surprises in the rest of the newsletter, with its "Altair Service Dept.," "Letters to the Editor," "HARDWARE," and "SOFTWARE" sections. In "HARDWARE" Tom Durston and Paul van Baalen deliver some ACR (Audio Cassette Recording) hardware alignment updates, fixes for 8800 problems, some "Boo Boos," various maintenance techniques and hardware specifications.

The "SOFTWARE" section contains "Software Contest Winners Announced" by Bill Gates; "Q & A" on the "Monitor, Editor and Assembler" by Paul Wasmund, the author of these software components; "General Software" by Paul Allen, the director of MITS' Software Department, answers various questions concerning MITS' software performance, policies and future plans; Monte Davidoff, one of the authors of Altair BASIC, illustrates the string handling and recursive subroutine capabilities of BASIC in "Fun with Altair BASIC."

Monte does a good job of describing these interesting possibilities of BASIC, even though such applications can be a bit strenuous for both the reader and the BASIC language itself, as witnessed by Monte's closing comment on factorial computation: "If confusion still prevails, do not worry about it."

Bill Gates, in his article "Software Hints for 8800," gives just that. Mentioning some of the reasons for the 8080's power, Bill goes on to discuss binary coded decimal (BCD) arithmetic, giving a sample routine for conversion from BCD to binary. After a short lesson on special short branching ("skip") techniques the reader is presented with some neat but fairly general stack usage tips. Bill doesn't waste words in his article; a rank beginner would probably be left far behind by these last concise hints.

In a short review, Dave Bunnell gives BYTE an A+ for format and an A– for content ("They have something to work for."). Although it sounds a little like an ad for BYTE, Dave is pleasantly positive in his remarks.

I have a couple of complaints. The format of *Computer Notes* is imaginatively done, but at some points the text is hard to follow – you don't know what to read next. [But then, it is only fair to point out that BYTE may suffer the same malaise in one or two places . . . Carl] Also, a lot is assumed on the part of the reader. I realize that any such newsletter can't function as a tutorial publication (that is a major part of BYTE's job) but the "HARDWARE" and "SOFTWARE" sections would certainly throw any real beginner. But I judge too harshly: *Computer Notes* is truly a good bulletin for the users of Altair equipment.

To paraphrase Dave's closing question in his BYTE review, is the Altair User's Group something no Altair computer hobbyist should be without? At this point in time, I would have to say that he has no choice since membership is automatic for Altair owners. Should the Altair computer hobbyist be thankful for *Computer Notes* and other benefits of the User's Group? I would have to say yes.

. . . Chris Ryland

DIAGNOSTICS

Debugging is the art of removing bugs. Many times, bugs in programs are only uncovered after the program is executed – and on larger machines "diagnostics" often tell what happened. Well, a magazine is like a computer program – large and complex. Here is some centralized documentation of known bugs in BYTE detected in the execution of previous issues.

BYTE #2, p. 15, fourth column, Kluge Harp. The formula for the well tempered scale ratios was "squashed" a bit, and should read:

$$r_n = e^{(\ln(137) + n \ln(2)/12)}$$

BYTE #2, p. 16, first column, Kluge Harp. The formula for the timer interval is incorrectly printed. It should read:

$$Lc_n = \text{time} / (\text{oh} + \text{dt}\ pc_n)$$

The "#" symbol should be deleted.