

Chronology of Events in the History of Microcomputers

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1971-1976 The Birth of the Microcomputer

Microprocessors, computer kits, pocket calculators

1971

*

February

• Intel ships copies of the 4004 microprocessor to Busicom. [556.10]

June

• Gary Boone, of Texas Instruments, files a patent application relating to a single-chip computer. [590.5]

November

- Intel introduces its 4-bit bus, 108-KHz 4004 chip the first microprocessor. Initial price is US\$200.
 Speed is 60,000 operations per second. It uses 2300 transistors, based on 10-micron technology. It can address 640 bytes. Documentation manuals were written by Adam Osborne. The die for the chip measures 3x4 mm. [9] [176.74] [202.165] [296] [393.6] [62] (750-kHz [556.11]) (1972 [339.86])
- Intel announces the first microcomputer, the MCS-4 system. It uses the 4004 microprocessor, 4001 ROM chip, 4002 RAM chip, and 4003 shift register chip. [393.6]

(month unknown)

 (summer) Steve Wozniak and Bill Fernandez build a computer with lights and switches, from parts rejected by local companies. They call it the Cream Soda Computer. [266.205] [548.414]

(month unknown)

- (fall) Electronic News publishes an ad from Intel promoting the 4004 chip. [266.14]
 (month unknown)
 - Intel renegotiates its contract with ETI, gaining Intel the right to market the 4004 microprocessor openly. [266.14]

(month unknown)

- The National Radio Institute introduces the first computer kit, for US\$503. [208.66] (month unknown)
 - The Kenback Corporation introduces the Kenback-1 computer, for US\$750. It uses a 1KB MOS memory made by Intel. [208.66]

(month unknown)

- Niklaus Wirth invents the Pascal programming language. [132] (1969 [447.385]) (month unknown)
 - Texas Instruments develops the first microcomputer-on-a-chip, containing over 15,000 transistors.

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[714]

(month unknown)

• IBM introduces the "memory disk", or "floppy disk", an 8-inch floppy plastic disk coated with iron oxide, [202,170] (1965 [363,46])

(month unknown)

Wang Laboratories introduces the Wang 1200 word processor system. [202.185]

(month unknown)

 Intel introduces the 1101 chip, a 256-bit programmable memory, and the 1701 chip, a 256-byte erasable read-only memory (EROM). [208.70]

1972

April

150

Intel introduces its 200-KHz 8008 chip, the first 8-bit microprocessor. It accesses 16KB of memory. The processor was originally developed for Computer Terminal Corporation (later called Datapoint).
 It uses 3500 transistors, based on 10-micron technology. Speed is 60,000 instructions per second. [9] [106.104] [208.66] [266.13] [296] [62] [556.10] (1971 [208.70] [266.xiv])

Augusi

 Scelbi Computer Consulting Company begins design work on what would be the Scelbi-8H microcomputer. [208.71]

October

• The first issue of People's Computer Company is released. [353.172]

November

- Researchers at PARC begin work on a prototype Alto personal computer. [716.93]
- Atari is founded by Nolan Bushnell, and ships Pong, the first commercial video game. [9] [30] [624.178]

(month unknown)

- (spring) At Xerox PARC, Alan Kay proposes they build a portable personal computer, called the Dynabook, the size of an ordinary notebook. PARC management does not support it. [716.84]
 (month unknown)
 - → (late) Texas Instruments introduces the TMS1000 one-chip microcomputer. It integrates 1KB ROM and 32 bytes of RAM with a simple 4-bit processor. [556.11] (1974 [110])

(month unknown)

National Semiconductor introduces the IMP-16 microprocessor. [208.70]

(month unknown)

Canada's Automatic Electronic Systems introduces the world's first programmable word processor
with a video screen, the AES 90. The computer system uses magnetic disks for storage, and a
custom-built microprocessor. [615.94]

(month unknown)

- Gary Kildall implements PL/I on the Intel 4004 processor. [266.xiv] (month unknown)
- The People's Computer Company is founded. [266.xiv]

(month unknown)

 Bill Gates and Paul Allen form the Traf-O-Data company. They had developed an 8008-based computer hardware/software system for recording automobile traffic flow on a highway. [266.xiv] [346.12]

(month unknown)

5.25 inch diskettes first appear. [346.28]

(month unknown)

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MS-PCA 1140798 CONFIDENTIAL • Xerox decides to build a personal computer to be used for research. Project "Alto" begins. [263.58] [266.267] [716.85]

1973

January

- Intel files a patent application for a "memory system for a multichip digital computer". [556.30] March
 - The first prototype Alto workstation computer is turned on at Xerox' Palo Alto Research Center. Its first screen display is a bitmapped image of the Sesame Street character Cookie Monster. [203.59] [716.14] [716.93] (completed in 1974 [266.267])

April

• The first operational Alto computer is completed at Xerox PARC. [714.95.167]

May

 Design work is completed on the Micral, the first non-kit computer based on a microprocessor (the Intel 8008). Built in France, the Micral is advertised in the U.S., but is not successful there.

June

The term "microcomputer" first appears in print, in reference to the Micral.

(month unknown)

• (late) Gary Kildall writes a simple operating system in his PL/M language. He calls it CP/M (Control Program/Monitor). [266.138] (Control Program for Microcomputer [346.50]) (1974 [443.433])

(month unknown)

Bill Millard founds IMS. [647.95]

(month unknown)

Michael Cowpland and Terence Matthews found Mitel, in Canada. [615.29]

(month unknown)

Stephen Wozniak joins Hewlett-Packard. [266.xiv]

(month unknown)

• Gary Kildall creates PL/M for the Intel 8008, based on PL/1. [266.137]

(month unknown)

o. IBM develops a cheap disk and drive. [444.110]

(month unknown)

• IBM introduces the IBM 3340 hard disk unit, known as the Winchester, IBM's internal development code name. The recording head rides on a layer of air 18 millionths of an inch thick. [202.170]

(month unknown)

 David Ahl protests Digital Equipment cutbacks of educational products, and is fired. He is soon rehired. [266.19]

(month unknown)

Gary Kildall begins consulting work at Intel. [266.137]

(month unknown)

Scelbi Computer Consulting Company offers the first computer kit in the U.S. using a
microprocessor, the Intel 8008-based Scelbi-8H, for US\$565, with 1KB programmable memory. An
additional 15KB is available for US\$2760. [9] [208.66]

(month unknown)

Bob Metcalfe invents the Ethernet connectivity system. [156]

1974

April

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. Intel releases its 2-MHz 8080 chip, an 8-bit microprocessor. It can access 64KB of memory. It uses 6000 transistors, base on 6-micron technology. Speed is 0.64 MIPS. [9] [41] [108] [176.74] [266.30] [296] [346.19] (1973 [208.70])

June

- Intel receives a patent for a "memory system for a multichip digital computer". [556.30] July
 - Radio Electronics magazine publishes an article on building a Mark-8 microcomputer, designed by Jonathan Titus, using the Intel 8008. [208.67]

MITS completes the first prototype Altair 8800 microcomputer. [744.2]

September

- · Creative Computing, the first magazine for home computerists, is founded. [9]
- Hal Singer starts the Micro-8 Newsletter for enthusiasts of the Mark-8. [208.67]
- · Bravo is developed for the Xerox Alto computer. It is the first WYSIWYG program for a personal computer. [477.158]
- Despite being US\$300,000 in debt, Ed Roberts is able to borrow an additional US\$65,000 from the bank to complete work on what would be the Altair. [266.33]

November

Hal Chamberlin and others begin publishing The Computer Hobbyist magazine. [208.67]

December

- Scelbi sells its last Scelbi-8H, discontinuing hardware to concentrate on software. [208.71]
- Popular Electronics publishes an article by MITS announcing the Altair 8800 computer for US\$439 in kit form. It uses the Intel 8080 processor. The Altair pictured on the cover of the magazine is actually a mock-up, as an actual computer was not available. [9] [106.104] [123] [185.109] [192.3] [208.67] [218] [205.18] (US\$397 [266.35] [346.19] [353.190] [415.15])
- Les Solomon, publisher of Popular Electronics, receives Altair number 0001. [266.35]

(month unknown)

 (spring) In a desperate act to save his failing calculator company, MITS company owner Ed Roberts begins building a small computer based on Intel's new 8080 chip, with plans to sell it for the unheardof price of US\$500. [185.109] [266.31]

(month unknown)

 Southwest Technical Products Company introduces the TVT-11 kit for US\$180, and ASCII keyboard kit for US\$40. [208.67]

(month unknown)

• Gary Kildall, of Microcomputer Applications Associates, develops the CP/M operating system for Intel 8080-based systems. [9] [176.64] [258.224]

(month unknown)

· Motorola introduces its 6800 chip, an early 8-bit microprocessor used in microcomputers and industrial and automotive control devices. The 6800 was designed by Chuck Peddle and Charlie Melear. [556.11]

(month unknown)

 Brian Kernighan and Dennis Ritchie develop the C programming language. [9] (1972 [176.121]) (1975 [132])

(month unknown)

 RCA releases the 1802 processor, running at a blazing 6.4 MHz. It is considered one of the first RISC chips. It is used on a variety of devices, from video games to NASA space probes. [32] [556.12]

(month unknown)

 Engineer David Ahl suggests Digital Equipment produce an inexpensive version of its PDP-8 minicomputer, for US\$5000. Top management call the idea foolish. [203.10]

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(month unknown)

Xerox releases the Alto computer. [266.xv]

(month unknown)

Gary Kildall and John Torode begin selling the CP/M disk operating system for microcomputers.
 [266.xv]

(month unknown)

Lauren Solomon, 12 year old daughter of Les Solomon, publisher of Popular Electronics, suggests
the name "Altair" for Ed Robert's new microcomputer. Altair was the name of where Star Trek's
Enterprise was going that night on TV. [266.34] [353.190]

(month unknown)

 Railway Express loses Ed Robert's only prototype Altair computer, en route to New York for review and photography for publishing by Popular Electronics. [266.34] [353.190]

(month unknown)

(1975?) IBM scientist John Cocke completes a prototype high-reliability, low-maintenance computer
called the ServiceFree. It incorporates a RISC architecture, achieving at least 80 MIPS, 50 times
faster than IBM's fastest mainframe at the time. However, the project is later canceled due to the
massive "Future Systems" project consuming much of IBM's resources. [606,41]

(month unknown)

Charles Simonyi joins Xerox PARC. [734.37]

1975

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January

 Harry Garland and Roger Melen receive Altair number 0002. They had proposed in December to attach their Cyclops camera to the Altair, for use as a security camera. [266.38]

February

- Paul Allen meets with Ed Roberts to demonstrate the newly written BASIC interpreter for the Altair.
 Despite never having touched an Altair before, the BASIC works flawlessly. [346.24] [346.257]
 [606.17]
- Bill Gates and Paul Allen license their newly written BASIC to MITS, their first customer. This is
 the first computer language program written for a personal computer. [123] [176.122] [389.28]
- The Xerox PARC-developed Gypsy word-processing system is first field-tested by end-users. Gypsy
 is one of the first word processors termed "WYSIWYG", meaning what you see is what you get.
 Gypsy runs on the PARC-developed Alto personal computer. [716.111]

March

- Fred Moore and Gordon French hold the first meeting of a new microcomputer hobbyist's club in French's garage, in Menlo Park, California. 32 people meet, including Bob Albrect, Steve Dompier, Lee Felsenstein, Bob Marsh, Tom Pittman, Marty Spergel, Alan Baum, and Steven Wozniak. Bob Albrect shows off an Altair, and Steve Dompier reports on MITS, and how they had 4000 orders for the Altair. [185.110] [266.104] [301.55] [346.18] [353.200] [346.257] (April [208.67] 266.39)
- Stephen Dorsey, founder of Automatic Electronic Systems, sells his 25% of the company for \$135,000. [615.98]
- Stephen Dorsey and Louis Miller found Micom Data Systems, in Canada. [615.90]
- Ed Roberts hires Paul Allen as director of software at MITS. [266.40] (May [346.25])

April

- The 3rd meeting of the Homebrew Computer Club is held. [353.208]
- Bill Gates and Paul Allen found Micro-Soft (the hyphen is later dropped). [41] (July [346.26])
 (August [346.257])
- MITS delivers the first generally-available Altair 8800, sold for US\$375 with 1KB memory.
 [208.67] (256 bytes [266.38])

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• Bob Marsh and Gary Ingram found Processor Technology. [266.45] [353.208]

May

The Amateur Computer Group of New Jersey is formed. [208.67] [266.xv]

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- MOS Technology announces the MC6501 at US\$20 and the MC6502 at US\$25. At this point, the Intel 8080 costs about US\$150, [9] [261.304]
- Bob Marsh delivers the first Processor Technology 4KB memory boards for the Altair. [266.110] [353.210]
- The Southern California Computer Society is formed. [266.184]
- The National Computer Conference is held in Anaheim, California. [266.188]
- At Xerox, John Ellenby proposes they build the Alto II, a modified Alto, making it easier to produce.
 more reliable, amd more easily maintained. His request is approved. [716.205]
- Paul Terrell signs a deal with MITS in which Terrell would receive a 5% commission on every Altair sold in Northern California, for promoting and selling the Altair. [266.188]

July

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- Bill Gates and Paul Allen sign a licensing agreement with MITS, for their implementation of the BASIC language. [299.8]
- Bill Gates and Paul Allen ship 4K and 8K version of BASIC v2.0. [123]
- Dick Heiser opens Arrow Head Computer Company, subtitled "The Computer Store", in Los Angeles, selling assembled Altairs, boards, peripherals, and magazines. This is the first retail computer store in the USA. [266.185] [684.41]
- Micom Data Systems ships its first product, the Micom 2000 word processing computer. [615.99]

September

- IBM's Entry Level Systems unit unveils "Project Mercury", the IBM 5100 Portable Computer. It is a briefcase-size minicomputer with BASIC, 16KB RAM, tape storage, and built-in 5-inch screen.
 Price: USS9000. Weight: 55 pounds. [9] [197.xi] (Price over US\$10,000 [203.10])
- The first issue of Byte magazine is published. [9] [266.159]

October

MITS releases a version of MicroSoft BASIC 2.0 for its Altair 8800, in 4K and 8K editions. [9]
 [123] [208.67] [346.257]

December

- Paul Terrell opens the Byte Shop, in Mountain View, California, one of the first computer stores in the US. [34] [266.189]
- IMSAI hires Ed Faber as Director of Sales. [266.193] (1976 January [266.64])
- Lee Feisenstein and Bob Marsh begin work on a complete computer, 8080-based with a keyboard and color video display capabilities built-in. [353.240]

(month unknown)

(summer) IMSAI announces the IMSAI 8080 microcomputer. [346.32] [647.95]

(month unknown)

 The second meeting of Fred Moore/Gordon French's computer hobbyists group is held at the Stanford AI lab. 40 attend. The name for the group is chosen: Bay Area Amateur Computer Users Group - Homebrew Computer Club. [353.203]

(month unknown)

The 4th meeting of the Homebrew Computer Club is held at the Peninsula School in Menlo Park.
 Steve Dompier plays the music "Fool on the Hill" and "Daisy" using the Altair and a radio.
 [353.203]

(month unknown)

Wavemate releases the Jupiter II computer kit. [218]

(month unknown)

Southwest Technical Products releases the M6800 computer kit. [218] [208.67]

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(month unknown)

Microcomputer Associates releases the JOLT computer kit. [218]

(month unknown)

 Canadian microchip maker Microsystems International shuts down, after accumulating losses of over \$50 million. [615.27]

(month unknown)

• Gates and Allen's Traf-O-Data company is renamed Micro-Soft. [266.40]

(month unknown)

• IBM's John Cocke begins work on project "801", to develop a scalable chip design that could be used in small computers as well as large. [205.103]

(month unknown)

Wayne Green founds BYTE Magazine. [713.219]

(month unknown)

• IMSAI begins working on the IMSAI 8080. [266.63]

(month unknown)

Zilog is founded. [233.194]

(month unknown)

MITS begins work on a Motorola 6800-based Altair. [266.47]

(month unknown)

 Sphere Corporation introduces its Sphere I computer kit, featuring a Motorola 6800 CPU, 4KB RAM, ROM monitor, keyboard, and video interface, for US\$650. [9.200] [16.371]

(month unknown)

 Cromemco is founded, by Harry Garland and Roger Melen. The company is named after the Crowthers Memorial dorm at Stanford. [266.xv] [353.207]

1976

January

- David Jackson founds Altos Computer Systems. [163.58]
- Paul Terrell begins signing dealership agreements, allowing Byte Shop franchises to open elsewhere in the US. [266.189]

February

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- Bill Gates write software routines for BASIC on the Altair to use diskettes for storage. [346.28]
- Lee Felsenstein and Bob Marsh deliver the first Processor Technology Sol computer to Popular Electronics magazine publisher Les Solomon. [353.242]
- David Bunnell publishes an open letter from Bill Gates to the microcomputer hobbyists, complaining of software piracy. [346.30] [389.28]

March

- Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs finish work on a computer circuit board, that they call the Apple I computer. [46]
- By the end of its first year in business, Micom Data Systems ships 180 Micom 2000 computers, worth \$2 million. [615.99]
- The First World Altair Computer Convention is held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. [123] [266.46]
 [346.31]
- Paul Terrell incorporates Byte, Inc. [266.189]
- Intel introduces the 5-MHz 8085 microprocessor. Speed is 0.37 MIPS. It uses 6500 transistors, based on 3-micron technology. It supports an 8-bit bus. Operates on a single 5-volt power supply. [62] (1978 [120])

April

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- Bill Gates writes a second open letter to computer hobbyists, condemning software piracy. [346.32]
- Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak form the Apple Computer Company, on April Fool's Day. [9] [46] [140] [218] [606.18]
- National Semiconductor releases the SC/MP 8-bit microprocessor, providing early advanced multiprocessing. [32] [556.11]

May

- Digital Research copyrights CP/M, its industry-standard microcomputer operating system, created by company founder Gary Kildall. [41]
- The Trenton Computer Festival is held, in New Jersey. [266.180]

June

- The Western Digital MCP-1600 3-chip CPU appears. [32]
- Texas Instruments introduces the TMS9900, the first 16-bit microprocessor. The microprocessor implemented Texas Instrument's 16-bit architecture on the TI 990 minicomputer. [32] [556.11]
- The Midwest Area Computer Club conference is held. [266.181]
- Wang Laboratories announces a word-processing system using advanced computer technology, rather than traditional electromechanical devices. The price is US\$30,000, more than twice that of the most expensive competitor's word-processor. [716.175]
- Processor Technology unveils the Sol-20 to the public at PC '76 at the Shelbourne Hotel in Atlantic City. It is sold in kit form, using the Intel 8080 CPU. [205.20] [266.116] [353.242]

July

- The Apple I computer board is sold in kit form, and delivered to stores by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, Price: US\$666.66, [46] [218] [593.350]
- Paul Terrell orders 50 Apple computers from Steve Jobs, for his Byte Shop. [266.213]
- Zilog releases the 2.5-MHz Z80, an 8-bit microprocessor whose instruction set is a superset of the Intel 8080. [32] [202.168] (early 1975 [9]) (1975 [556.11]) (1975 December [346.257])
- Micom Data Systems ships its first product, the Micom 2000 word processing computer. [615.99]

August

- Paul Terrell receives his order for 50 Apple computers. [266.213]
- iCOM advertises their "Frugal Floppy" in BYTE magazine, an 8-inch floppy drive, selling for USS1200. [9]
- Several computer hobbyist clubs hold their first convention at the Personal Computing Festival, in
 Atlantic City, New Jersey. [185.111] [266.181]
- Steve Wozniak begins work on the Apple II. [266.218]

September

• Computer Shack is incorporated. The name is later changed to ComputerLand, due to objections from Radio Shack. [266.xv] (ComputerLand is incorporated [647.95])

October

- Commodore International buys MOS Technology. [261.304] [266.49] [548.302] [624.172]
- Mike Markkula, ex-marketing wizard at Intel, visits Steve Jobs' garage, to see the Apple computers. [266.215]
- Steve Wozniak decides to remain at Hewlett-Packard, but is soon convinced that he should leave and join Apple Computer permanently. [266.218]

November

- The tradename "Microsoft" is registered. [123] [389.28]
- ComputerLand opens a pilot store in Hayward, California, as a retail outlet and a training facility for franchise owners. [266.194] [346.258] [548.433]
- Paul Allen resigns from MITS. [266.50] [346.35]

December

- Bill Gates drops out of Harvard. [346.35]
- Michael Shrayer completes writing Electric Pencil, the first popular word-processing program for

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- microcomputers. [9] [266.148] [346.258] [662.33]
- Shugart announces its 5.25 inch "minifloppy" disk drive for USS390. [9] [346.29] [363.46] [264.50]
 [346.258]
- Dick Wilcox demonstrates his Alpha Micro, a multi-user CPU board, at a meeting of the Homebrew Computer Club. [266.116]
- Don French and Steve Leininger are given official approval to develop and sell a microcomputer for Radio Shack. [266.197] [548.413]
- Steve Wozniak and Randy Wigginton demonstrate the first prototype Apple II at a Homebrew Computer Club meeting. [353.254]

(month unknown)

- (early) Hewlett-Packard begins Project Capricom, to build a computer-like calculator. [266.264] (month unknown)
 - (end) At Xerox, the Display Word Processing Task Force reccommends that Xerox produce an
 office information system like the Alto. Code name for the project is Janus. [716.230]

(month unknown)

- Advanced Micro Devices and Intel sign a patent cross-license agreement, giving Advanced Micro Devices the right to copy Intel's processor microcode and instruction codes. [141] [659.7] [752.1]
- Xerox management rejects two proposals to market the Alto computer. [716.174] (month unknown)
 - Fairchild introduces the Channel F, the first programmable (via plug-in cartridges) home video game system. Price: US\$170. [292]

(month unknown)

At Xerox, John Ellenby proposes they build the Alto III, to be marketed as an advanced word
processing system. The proposal is shelved. [716.206]

(month unknown)

 Processor Technology releases VDM, a video display module. It works on the Altair, IMSAI, Sol, Polymorphic computers, and any other with an S-100 bus. [266.133]

(month unknown)

- Dynalogic of Canada creates its own advanced microcomputer. [615.170] (month unknown)
- Gary Kildall founds Intergalactic Digital Research. [266.xv] [346.51] [346.280]

(month unknown)

Kentucky Fried Computers is founded. [266.xv]

(month unknown)

Tom Snyder's "Tomorrow" TV show features the Sol computer, playing a game called "Target".
 [353.243]

(month unknown)

IMS is renamed IMSAI. [647.95]

(month unknown)

 John Martin sells Bill Millard on the idea of a chain of computer stores. Bill promises John shares in the company in exchange for the idea. The chain later becomes ComputerLand. [647.95]

(month unknown)

• U.S. Robotics is founded, in Skokie, Illinois. [235]

(month unknown)

MOS Technology ships the 6502 microprocessor. The 6502 was developed by Chuck Peddle.
 [556.11]

(month unknown)

 MOS Technology Inc. announces the KIM-1 Microcomputer System, with 1-MHz 6502 CPU, 1KB RAM, 2KB ROM monitor, 23-key keypad, LED readout, cassette and serial interfaces, for US\$245.

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MS-PCA 1140805 CONFIDENTIAL [193.14] [261.304] (1975 [9])

(month unknown)

• Chuck Peddle designs the Commodore PET. [713.29]

(month unknown)

- MITS unveils the Altair 680, based on the Motorola 6800 microprocessor. [192.42] [548.303] (month unknown)
 - Steve Wozniak proposes that Hewlett-Packard create a personal computer. Steve Jobs proposes the same to Atari. Both are rejected. [9]

(month unknown)

Warner Communications buys Atari from Nolan Bushnell for US\$26 million. [30] [357.6] [482.D8]
 (US\$28 million [355.14])

(month unknown)

 Lore Harp and Carole Ely form Vector Graphic Incorporated, selling memory boards for S-100 bus systems. [202.201]

(month unknown)

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• George Morrow founds MicroStuf. [266.xv]

(month unknown)

• The first issue of Dr. Dobbs is published. [266.xv]

(month unknown)

• IMSAI begins shipping the IMSAI 8080. [266.48]

(month unknown)

 Polymorphic Systems introduces the Poly morphic 8800. It is the first microcomputer with an interface for a video monitor, a connection for a cassette tape recorder, and its basic operating system in ROM. [266.48] [714.83]

(month unknown)

- Stephen Wozniak demonstrates the Apple I at the Homebrew Computer Club. [266.xv] (month unknown)
 - The bus of the Altair is named (or renamed) the S-100 bus. [266.48]

End of 1971-1976 - The Birth of the Microcomputer

Continue to 1977-1980 - Home Computers

Jump to a particular year.

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