

TI-99ers In The '90s

*Classic Computer Column
by Barry Traver*

Boston and Ottawa In the Springtime

TI faires and fests continue, and so does the life of the TI-99/4A and the MYARC 9640! Some may love Paris in the springtime, but many TIers, rather than spending April in Paris, prefer to spend it in Boston or Ottawa.

Although I was not able to attend the Ottawa TI Fest on Saturday, April 27, 1991, I was able to be at the Boston TI Fayuh on Saturday, April 6, 1991. This month's column is primarily a report on people and products associated with the New England gathering, although--thanks to Paul Meadows, President of the Ottawa TI Users Group (130 Besserer Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N-9M9)--I have some news for you from the Ontario get-together as well.

The star attraction at both seems to have been a demonstration of the power of linking a TI-99/4A or MYARC Geneve to a digitizer. The technical side may be a bit complicated for most of us, but the main effect is fairly easy to describe: a video

camera is linked to a digitizer (the ImageWise digitizer in Boston, a "black box" in Ottawa), and the digitizer is linked to the computer. The purpose is to capture the image and convert it to a format where it can be stored to disk, put on the screen, printed out, etc. Both north and south of the US/Canada border, we are talking accomplished fact, and not mere theory. (Actually, it has been accomplished fact for some time, but it seems to be only recently that TIers have gotten excited about the possibilities offered by video digitizers.)

Creating a TI "Rogues Gallery"

The Pioneer Valley 99er Users Group (111 Oakridge Street, Chicopee, MA 01020) demonstrated how to make a standard ImageWise digitizer work with a Geneve (or TI with 9938 video chip). "Ciarcia's Circuit Cellar," way back in the May and June 1987 issues of BYTE, was devoted to the topic of building a gray-scale video digitizer, "an imaging system with remarkable features for the price." (For more information specifically on the ImageWise digitizer, you can contact Micromint, Inc., 4 Park Street, Vernon, CT

06066.) The digitizer connects to the RS232, so it can be used with various computers, dependent primarily on having appropriate software available for a specific computer.

Well, such software for the /4A and 9640 is available from RFW Enterprises (same address as for Pioneer User Group). I learned from Ray Wenninger (RFW) and Joe Syzdek at the fair that many things are available, including seven volumes of ImageWise pictures, Joe Syzdek's ImageWise Plus program (\$14.95 plus S&H; lets you grab and display digitized pictures; modify picture data by shifting, contouring and thresholding; etc.), Barry Boone's ImageWise Display (\$4.95 plus S&H, but that does not include fairware contribution); Steve Langguth's ImageWise Show (\$4.95 plus S&H) and Ray Wenninger's ImageWise Portrait Print (\$4.95 plus S&H). (Shipping and Handling per item is \$1.50.)

My own picture was taken at the Fayuh to be placed in a "TI Rogues Gallery" along with other TI "rogues" there, including Gary Bowser (of OPA); Walt Howe and Donald Mahler (active members in the Boston Computer Society), Mickey Schmitt (adventure expert and partner in MS Express) and Jack Sughrue (popular

TI columnist). These pictures are now finding their way throughout the TI community in MYART format. To view the photos on the screen, you will need a 9640 (or TI with 9938 video chip) plus appropriate software (e.g., YAPP, Picture Transfer or MYART), but you can print them out on a printer as well, as I have already indicated.

At the Ottawa Fest, Gary Bowser of OPA (Oasis Pensive Abacutors, 432 Jarvis Street, #501-502, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4Y/2H3; phone 416/960-0925 or 416/960-1424 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. EST) demonstrated an early "black box" version of a digitizer he has been working on. I understand that (as at the Boston show) the image was 16-shade gray-scale, but Gary reportedly has hopes (or plans?) of taking advantage of the 9958 video chip and changing that 16 to 64. The 9958 is contained in Gary's "TINY T-I-M" (TI-IMAGE-MAKER), which he also demonstrated at Ottawa (and which was covered in an earlier column here in Computer Monthly).

As I said, some TIers (such as Steve Langguth) have been playing with video digitizers for a while, but--judging from the response at both Boston and Ottawa--it appears that

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HARDWARE / The Big Apple

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Users Group) is a 15,000 member Apple II users group dedicated to AppleWorks aficionados. Membership costs \$31/year and includes 12 issues of a 36-page monthly newsletter called "AppleWorks Forum." As such, The Apple II Hard Disk Primer also contains several references to hard disks and AppleWorks users. It even offers step-by-step instructions for AppleWorks hard disk installation.

Some materials covered in The Apple II Hard Disk Primer are now out of date. For example, hard disk prices have dropped considerably since the date of publication (1990). In addition, the text refers to GS/OS 5.0.2 (not 5.0.4). There's no mention of CV Technologies RamFAST/SCSI controller as an alternative to Apple's SCSI card. Nevertheless, by the time you're through with The Apple II Hard Disk Primer, you'll have a much better understanding of the differences between ProDOS 8 and GS/OS. Purchasing a hard disk won't seem so intimidating.

PRODUCT: The Apple II Hard Disk Primer

RETAIL PRICE: \$16.95 (plus \$3 s/h) for non-members;

\$14.95 (plus \$3 s/h) for members
COMPANY: National Apple-Works Users Group (NAUG)
Box 87453, Canton, MI 48187
313-454-1115
HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS: Apple II with hard disk

PRODUCT: Hard Drive Buyer's Guide by Jerry Kindall (includes Beginning with ProDOS 8 & 16 and GS/OS, by Gary R. Morrison and Steven M. Ross

RETAIL PRICE: \$6.00
COMPANY: Quality Computers
20200E. Nine Mile Road
St. Clair Shores, MI 48080
800-443-6697 or 313-774-7200
HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS: Apple II with hard drive

The Ultimate in Desktop Computing

Welcome to the hectic '90s, where time is money and efficiency is measured by the number of seconds you can shave off your daily schedule. If you need to maximize productivity, consider adding a hard disk to your computer system. You'll be amazed

at how many minutes you can recapture by having applications and data files appear instantly on your electronic desktop. If you already own a hard disk, tweak it to the "max" by keeping it properly tuned (optimized) and loaded with useful desk accessories and utilities. There are plenty of software utilities available to maximize Apple II computing power!

News Item of the Month!

Have you recently upgraded from GS/OS 5.0.2 to 5.0.4? Do you run AppleWorks 3.0 under 5.0.4? Has AppleWorks 3.0 started acting strangely?

GS/OS 5.0.4 could be the culprit!! It seems the two applications are incompatible! In my case, problems started with the AppleWorks spelling checker. The program hung during "document scan" and froze unexpectedly on several occasions when I worked in the database module.

I reinstalled "fresh" copies of AppleWorks and all my TimeOut applications "just in case," but AppleWorks continued to behave erratically. I called Claris Technical Sup-

port and was put on hold for more than 20 minutes waiting for an available technician. The service representative acknowledged problems, but said that Claris had "no plans" for a fix.

It doesn't seem right for Apple to release System software that is incompatible with its own (Claris) products! If you're experiencing problems with AppleWorks 3.0 running under GS/OS 5.0.4, send me the details. In addition, I urge you to voice your concerns in polite but direct letters to Claris (5201 Patrick Henry Drive, Santa Clara, CA 95052) and Apple (20525 Mariani Ave., Cupertino, CA 95014). Also, you may want to lodge a complaint with a service representative on Apple's new customer assistance line (800-776-2333).

About The Author:

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their time has finally come. Video digitizers were around earlier, but it looks like they have only recently been discovered by the TI community at large.

Who's Who (and Who Wasn't) in Boston

The Boston Fayuh (or Northeast TI-99/4A Home Computer Fair, to give it its more "proper" designation, and Bostonians do like to be proper!) was sponsored by the TI Users Group of the Boston Computer Society (One Center Plaza, Boston, MA 02108). That users group currently has two co-directors (makes sense, right?): Justin Dowling and J. Peter Hoddie.

Justin was at the Fayuh. Many people were hoping to see Peter Hoddie as well (since he has been associated with the event for so many years and his parents live near Boston, where his father teaches at Boston University), but such was not to be the case, nor were any products available from JP Software which has over the years come out with a number of outstanding products for the TI or Geneve (e.g., Mike Dodd's PC-Transfer). Also absent were two other JP Software members many of us had been hoping we might see, Mike Dodd (currently a student at Boston University) and Paul Charlton (who reportedly works now in New York City).

I hope that JP Software will be represented at future fairs, but in the meantime, apparently the only way to obtain their products is to order them directly through the mail from JP Software (1014 Pine Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025). Asgard Software (P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20849) and COMPRODINE (1949 Evergreen Avenue, Fullerton, CA 92635) were also not able to be present in person at the Boston Fayuh, but they were able to send their software so that attendees could purchase their products directly.

But let's not talk about who didn't attend; rather let's mention the TI "notables" who did! These included (in no particular order) Terri Masters and Tom Freeman (T & J Software), Gary Bowser (of OPA), Bud Mills, John McDevitt (of Rave 99), Mark Van Coppenolle (of CaDD Electronics), Justin Dowling, Walt Howe, Corson Wyman (president of MUNCH), Mickey Schmitt and Mike Sealy (both of MS Express), Jack Sughrue (of New Age 99), Ron Williams (one of the organizers of the Boston Fayuh, and a leader in the Greater Brockton TI-99 User's Group), Janet Ryan (a leader in the Nutmeg 99ers), and Mike Wright (TI archivist and historian, who gracious-

ly invited Terri, Tom and me to stay with him in his home in nearby New Hampshire).

As at Ottawa, attendance in general was "moderate," but it was an event well worth attending. It's always a great experience when Tiers get together (which is why Terri and Tom traveled all the way from Los Angeles to attend the Boston Fayuh and why some people traveled all the way from Nova Scotia to attend the Ottawa Fest), so if you've never attended such an event, I hope you will seriously consider trying to make one in the future. (For those who really like to plan ahead, let me mention that plans are already being made for TI Fest West 1992 to be held on Saturday, February 15, 1992, and Sunday, February 16, 1992 in Phoenix, Arizona. See you there?)

A Touch of Nutmeg Does It!

Some TI user groups are small, but offer a contribution way beyond what you might expect from the size of their membership. One such group (as I have mentioned before) is the Lima User Group, sponsor of the Lima (OH) TI Faire and publisher of an excellent newsletter. Well, the Nutmeg TI-99ers User Group (c/o Janet Ryan, 10 Jolly Road, Ellington, CT 06029) is another such group, and I'd like to tell you about some of their offerings at Boston. (If you were not able to attend the Fayuh, cheer up: these products are also available by mail at the address just given.)

These items included the Chicago Hardware Manual (which was rated "A" in MICROpendium; \$6.50), the TI-Writer Supplement (which was also rated "A" in MICROpendium; \$5.00), TI-Writer Supplement Companion Disk (\$5.00, or get both the supplement and disk for \$8.00), the "Any Key" key chain (a Nutmeg 99ers "original" at \$.99; supplies limited), TIPS 1.8 (full set of 13 archived floppy-SS/SD disks for \$30.00, or you can just get the 1.8 update disk for \$4.00), TIPS (printed) catalog (3200 images, \$9.95), TIPS catalog supplement (28 additional image files, \$6.00), more TIPS graphics disks (6 archived disks, \$15.00), Earl Raguse's TIPSLABEL version 1.3 (\$4.00) and Garfield "user friendly" stuffed animal (\$15.00).

Nutmeg's TIPS catalogs are similar to the ones that Chicago did, although the Nutmeg version takes up less space, since sheets are printed on both sides. They are available "while supplies last," so if you're interested, you should not delay in sending in your order. If you use TIPS at all, you should order either the Nutmeg or the Chicago printed catalog. (Information on the

latter was provided in a previous column.) Both are professionally done, and they are real time- and money-savers for anyone who seriously makes use of Ron Wolcott's TIPS program and/or TIPS graphics collections.

If you order by mail from Nutmeg, here are the instructions: "Please send a check for the amount listed plus \$2.50 shipping and handling charge to cover manuals, disk sets or Garfield. Shipping charges for single disk or Any Key key chains include 50 cents." As I said earlier, the Nutmeg group may not have a large number of members, but I believe that here--as in other ways--they are performing a real service to the TI community.

Grams and Kilograms

While at Boston, I was happy to see Mark Van Coppenolle of CaDD Electronics (81 Prescott Road, Raymond, NH 03077; phone 603/895-0119). I had known that he was manufacturing a Gramulator which was similar to the Gram Kracker earlier manufactured by Millers Graphics (I have more than one Gram Kracker and use them all the time), but I had not realized how far he had gone beyond what the original Gram Kracker could do. These extensions are worth knowing about, since I believe CaDD offers a number of options that may not be available in other gram emulation devices.

What is a "gram emulation device?" Well, simply put, it is a gadget that can load in data from disk and pretend that it's a cartridge. (It's a bit more than that, but that's the heart of the matter.) Well, what has Mark done that Craig Miller did not do with the Gram Kracker?

One new option is called "Alternate GRAM Emulation." Here's what it does (and why it's useful), as Mark describes it: "The obvious benefit is that you can have two or more cartridges online. The second benefit is much more powerful. When you have true alternate GRAM libraries, all subprograms are available no matter which GRAM library the subprogram is in. An example: if the TE2 and E/A cartridges are loaded into the Gramulator, then you can access both the OPEN SPEECH and CALL LOAD statements from TI BASIC automatically."

Something else new is a multi-diskette package containing three programs (plus source code for each):

- (1) a program to allow the user to load a CHARA1 file into GRAM 0,
- (2) a memory tester for the Gramulator, and
- (3) a "Universal GRAM converter" (supporting Gramulator,

Gram Kracker, Geneve; Gram Karte; and TI Gram Simulator).

The Gramulator itself (with manual and basic software diskette) isn't cheap: it sells for \$190, the MBX option (allowing you to load and run MBX cartridges, something the Gram Kracker can't do) for \$50 installed (or \$15 for the kit), the Alternate Gram Emulation option for \$55 installed (or \$45 for the kit), and the three utility programs (CHARA1, memory tester, GRAM converter) for \$15. But if you're considering a "gram emulation device," you definitely ought to check out Mark's Gramulator! (If I had the money, I think I'd order it all myself.)

New and Forthcoming from Asgard?

Chris Bobbitt of Asgard Software was the featured guest at a TI RoundTable Conference on GENIE on Monday, April 22, 1991. At that time he discussed a number of new or soon-to-come Asgard products: Jim Reiss' LINK (console-only cartridge-based terminal emulator that does XMODEM/YMODEM downloads to disk or cassette), Gary Christensen's EMU (Emulate Management Utility for the MYARC HFDC, lets you create any size emulate file on your hard drive), Bill Reiss' COLORS (strategy game akin to Nintendo's COLUMNS), Joe Deleto's SCREEN PREVIEW (an alternative to the TI-Writer Formatter), SWAN GRAPHICS WRITER 2 (CHARA1 file editor that can generate XB, Fortran, C99 or assembly source code), LINE EDITOR (lets you edit a file as large as the disk in DV80 or DF80 format), THUMBNAI LS (9640-only program for managing large collections of graphics), Chris' own CLASSIC CHECKERS, and more.

Obviously, there's no time or space left this month to do more than briefly mention these, but I thought that would at least emphasize once more that there's lots of life left in the TI-99/4A and MYARC 9640. I expect to be receiving some of these products from Asgard shortly to preview, view or review (and I'll try to pass on to you what I learn); other companies (e.g., OPA, as mentioned earlier) are continuing to develop new products as well. I will do my best to keep you informed of what's happening.

If you can help keep me informed, that will be great as well! If you have news of which our readers ought to be aware or have a product that you think I should review, please let me know. My address is Barry Traver, 835 Green Valley Drive, Philadelphia, PA 19128.

Until next time, then, keep on computin'!