Editorial comments

Barbara Beeton

R.I.P. Bob Morris

Bob Morris was one of the crew sent to Stanford by the AMS in July 1979 for the purpose of learning TeX, developing the AMS-TeX macros, and from there, communicating this new tool to the mathematical community as the mechanism for producing the publications in which they broadcast their research. This included the birth of the TeX Users Group in 1980 and active participation in the governance of TUG for several years.

Bob passed away on February 6, after a life filled with many adventures in digital typography, including leading research in this discipline at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. An interview with Dave Walden on the TUG web site[1] provides details of these activities as well as his earlier background.

He is remembered by those who knew him as a source of interesting ideas and a strong determination that something started should be investigated thoroughly.

His daughter Rachel remembers him thus,

> In life, my dad enjoyed taking things apart to discover how to put them back together better, whether physical or metaphysical. He was a philanthropist, a world traveler, an avid reader of non-fiction and science fiction, enjoyed a wide array of music, and dabbled in hobbies through the years, such as photography, ceramics, playing Go, and ham radio (which he gave up once Morse code was, to his disappointment, no longer required). He was proud that his Erdős number is three.

BaKoMa author has died

It was reported that Basil K. Malyshev passed away in 2019, but nothing more is known. Malyshev was best known in the TeX world for creating an extension of TeX that incorporated a WYSIWYG GUI, emulating MS Word.

A Russian physicist, Malyshev developed a wide array of TeX-related software, including a font converter to translate Metafont output to Type 1. All his software was released as shareware. The BaKoMa web site[2] remains intact, as do the packages posted to CTAN, and more information about the software and fonts can be found there.

J. W. Gibbs and why an annual lecture is named for him

J(osiah) Willard Gibbs was a professor of mathematical physics at Yale University in the late 19th century. Yale awarded Gibbs the first American doctorate in engineering in 1863. In 1866, he traveled to Europe, where he attended lectures in mathematics and physics. After several years, he returned to Yale, and spent the rest of his career there. He developed theories affecting physics, chemistry, mathematics and, perhaps best remembered today, applications of thermodynamics.

He submitted manuscripts reporting his work to a "local" journal, with this result.[3]

> Back in 1873, Gibbs had little idea of the epic consequences of his papers. Modest and unassuming, he sent his work to the little-known *Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Science*, which had no readership outside Yale. Moreover, because Gibbs's papers were longer than the articles usually published by the *Transactions* and because they contained mathematical formulas, their typesetting costs exceeded the publication's budget. To cover these, the editorial committee had to obtain donations from other faculty members and local businessmen. One committee member, A. E. Verrill, later recalled that they had long discussions about the merits of Gibbs's papers even though no one on the committee understood them. "Yet we all believed what Gibbs wrote must be of intrinsic value in his branch of science. Therefore, we raised the money and printed each paper as it came in."

(What are the chances that an editorial committee today would have such faith in the value of a first manuscript, even one by an author at their own institution?)

Gibbs's work was appreciated in both the U.S. and Europe, and in 1901 he was awarded the Copley Medal, the oldest and most prestigious award of the Royal Society of London. (Other recipients of this medal include Benjamin Franklin, Charles Darwin, and Albert Einstein.[4])

In 1923, the Council of the American Mathematical Society established the Josiah Willard Gibbs

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[1] `tug.org/interviews/morris.html`
[2] `www.bakoma-tex.com`

[3] Paul Sen, *Einstein's Fridge: How the Difference between Hot and Cold Explains the Universe*, Scribner: An imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc., New York, 2021. Quoted with permission.
[4] The list of recipients is stunning: `britannica.com/science/Copley-Medal`

Lectureship, "in order to show the public some idea of the aspects of mathematics and its applications."[5]

Don Knuth was the Gibbs Lecturer in 1978, when he lectured on "Computers in the service of mathematics". An important point made in that lecture was the characterization of mathematics composition as "penalty copy", on account of the difficulty, and for that reason, the high cost. Thus began the public journey of TeX.

Jubilees to celebrate: *Computers & Typesetting* and 50 years of the ebook

The end of December 2020 marked the delivery of the accumulated bug reports to Don Knuth for the periodic tuneup of the TeX/METAFONT complex. Don's report appears later in this issue.

In addition to the release of the updated software, included in TeX Live 2021, this update has resulted in the preparation of a "35th Jubilee Edition" of all five books comprising *Computers & Typesetting*. The new editions haven't yet been announced on the usual web sites, but stay tuned.

Another jubilee was announced on the Project Gutenberg mail list: 50 years of electronic books. An illustrated history can be viewed at:
`geekupdated.com/50-years-of-ebooks-illustrated-history/`

CTAN mirrors are now `https`

As of approximately 20 April 2021, the CTAN feature that automatically chooses a nearby mirror is now available through `https`, as well as `http`. The new address is `https://mirror.ctan.org`. Previously, redirection was available only through `http://mirror.ctan.org` (which still works).

Whether the multiplexer is accessed through `https` or `http`, the mirror chosen will always be accessed through `https`. If you are a CTAN mirror administrator (current or prospective), please ensure that your mirror is available via `https`. See `ctan.org/mirrors` for the current list of mirrors, and general information about CTAN mirroring.

TeX Live incorporates a copy of the mirror list, which is updated every day or two. This is used for the network updates via `tlmgr`. The TL list filters out those mirrors which are more than 36 hours stale (which are relatively few), since it's not useful to access old mirrors for current updates.

A self-published LaTeX book and ebook

Dan Grec, an inveterate traveler and travel book author, has described his "journey" producing his book, *The Road Chose Me*,[6] in an essay on the web page devoted to his travels.

Not wanting to go through the hassle of dealing with publishers, he decided to take the self-publishing route. Since he started out as a software engineer, he was used to (and not intimidated by) computer lingo, and chose LaTeX as the main input medium.

One significant attraction to self publishing is also its biggest downside: It's *all* up to you as the author!

He lists three goals for the result:

- The result should look professional, an effect he did not find satisfied by Word.
- The same source files should produce both the print book and the epub file.
- The whole process had to be automated.

After "a bunch of research", he settled on LaTeX:

> The more I dug into it, the more I realized it's a full-blown programming language, and it would certainly give me the pixel-perfect layout control I was looking for, [...]

Searching further, he came across Pandoc, "often called the swiss army knife of document converters." That is what he decided to use for the conversion from LaTeX to an industry standard epub file. He did consider using Markdown, though he doubts that it can provide the fine control provided by LaTeX.

The remainder of the essay presents the details of constructing the book, including technical physical details of the book layout and relevant examples of the code used. Whenever something confusing is encountered, an explanation is forthcoming.

Not all was smooth sailing — several later additions indicate changes in the production flow when certain online facilities became unavailable due to renaming or for other reasons. But LaTeX itself remained stable.

The clarity of the presentation and explanations, and the subject matter of the book itself lead me to think that I would enjoy reading it, something I intend to consider seriously.

Thanks to Paul Campbell for calling this to my attention.

⋄ Barbara Beeton
  https://tug.org/TUGboat
  tugboat (at) tug dot org

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[5] `ams.org/meetings/lectures/meet-gibbs-lect`

[6] `theroadchoseme.com/how-i-self-published-a-professional-paperback-and-ebook-using-latex-and-pandoc`