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Asgard News

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Editorial

I've always hated editorial writers that think they know how the world should be run, as well as editorials that tell people what they should do with their business. Ah well, here goes nothing.

Since I started writing about the Geneve at the beginning, and may have convinced some people to purchase it, I have a responsibility if not a right to discuss it and Myarc. I didn't get a silly plaque from Myarc "In Recognition for your continued support and Enthusiasm" for nothing. I was there when few other people were for them, so I have a paternal interest in the machine, if nothing else.

As you'll read in other parts of this magazine, Myarc is currently putting its resources into their Hard & Floppy Disk Controller (hereafter HFDC) card. I don't begrudge Myarc this - any business should put its money into what is most profitable. That's right, the Geneve really isn't all that profitable. It's also probably Myarc's biggest headache. To them it is an endless drain on resources, time and money. Their policies toward the Geneve reflect the financial significance it used to have on the company - there were many times in recent years when it almost drove Myarc to bankruptcy. Myarc was naturally interested in getting as much money out of the machine as possible (even if it meant freezing out 3rd party software support), because it literally meant the difference between getting by and utter financial failure. With the recent success of the HFDC, this equation has changed.

Myarc can now afford to stand back and do what's best for the future success of the machine. It's common knowledge that sales of the thing have stalled, so at this point it really wouldn't hurt them at all to do what's best for the machine and its owners. They really have nothing to lose - certainly not their business since the HFDC has reversed their financial situation. At worst all it would do is make the fate of the 1200 odd owners of the machine a bit brighter. At best it could mean sales of thousands more.

One of the primary reasons that sales of the Geneve haven't taken off isn't that they've reached the limit of their natural market (hardcore 4A users), it's that their has very little software that is specifically for the machine and takes advantages of its new capabilities. Right now it really is just a faster 99/4A with a better keyboard to most people. It could be so much more - the question is how.

For one thing, Myarc should get out of the application software business altogether. It should forget about "My-Word", "My-Base", and anything other such program it is planning or contemplating. It should then concentrate on finishing Advanced Basic, M-DOS, and the other basic utilities announced (such as the P-system software). Just cancelling the application software and moving resources into these other projects should move up their completion time dramatically.

While it is finishing up these projects it also should actually sit down and thoroughly document both M-DOS (from a programmer's point of view) and these other languages and utilities. What will this do for Myarc and where will the applications cancelled come from? If Myarc can just provide the tools, companies like Asgard, Texaments, Great Lakes, and others can create the applications that sell hardware. The neat part is that Myarc doesn't have to spend a dime developing any of them, or worry about marketing them. Very simple, very effective, and the reason the Apple II and the PC have been the incredible successes they are. The size of the market doesn't matter, the principal of an "open system", and its rewards, remain the same. I think this is the only thing that could save the Geneve now.

Regarding the user group survey in the last issue, we should have the results in the next one.

Finally, In this issue I'd like to introduce a new column by Jack Sughrue - **Jack's Jottings**. He is discussing TI-Base this month (TI-Base tutorials are a dime a dozen now), but I think you will actually benefit from this one because Jack has an uncanny ability to explain virtually anything. Being a sixth grade teacher, I'm sure, helps. Thanks.

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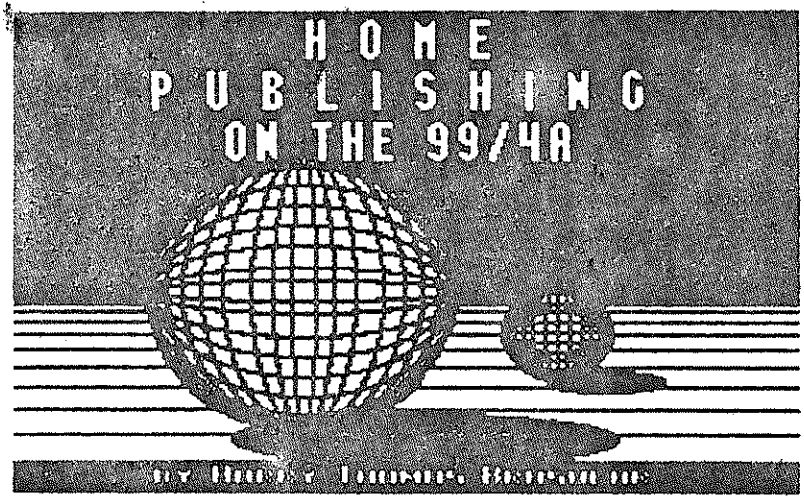
WONDERING WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR COMPUTER??

Think about....



HOME PUBLISHING ON THE TI99/4A MAY PROVIDE THE ANSWER TO YOUR QUESTION. THIS MANUAL SHOWS YOU HOW TO TURN THE COMPUTER INTO A HOME PRINTSHOP, FOR FLYERS, NEWSLETTERS, PAMPHLETS, LABELS AND BANNERS. EIGHTY PAGES LONG, THE MANUAL WILL EXPLAIN THE MANY GRAPHIC PROGRAMS AVAILABLE --- WHAT THEIR STRENGTHS ARE AND HOW THEY RELATE TO EACH OTHER. IT'S FULL OF DETAILED INFORMATION ON HOW TO PUT THEM TOGETHER TO WORK FOR YOU AND HOW TO MAKE WHATEVER YOU ARE PRODUCING LOOK ITS BEST. BUT IT DOESN'T STOP THERE. YOU WILL ALSO GET PROGRAMS THAT INCLUDE AN ARTWORK PRINTER THAT PRINTS COMPLETELY FREE OF THOSE ANNOYING LITTLE WHITE LINES, A PROGRAM TO ORGANIZE YOUR FONTS, AND THE WORLDS EASIEST COLUMNIZER. AND JUST SO YOUR MANUAL WILL ALWAYS BE UP TO DATE ON THE LATEST TIPS, TRICKS AND SOFTWARE, YOU WILL ALSO RECEIVE TWO FREE UPDATES TO THE MANUAL ABOUT FOUR MONTHS APART.

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Press - The Next Generation

An Inside Look - By Chris Bobbitt

By now, if you haven't seen the ads for Press, we evidently haven't done our job well enough. Even if you have, despite all that has been said and advertised about the program these last few months, its hard to condense a complete description of this remarkable program into 2 pages.

Hopefully, this article will serve a number of purposes - to clear the air about what the program is and what its capable of, to better inform people who've already purchased the program, and for those on the fence (we will make no bones about it), to hopefully persuade you to consider purchasing the program. This article is not a review of Press (we can hardly be objective), but is instead an overview of the program, its origins, and a short history of word processors in general.

Its been said before but is worth repeating, Press is the object of an intensive development effort that has spanned the last year. It is principally the product of 3 people - Charles Earl (who is responsible for virtually all of the programming), Ruth O'Neill (who is responsible for most of the documentation), and myself. Unlike most other 99/4A software projects, this wasn't a part-time effort by hobbyists - instead, it was a carefully planned and executed project by relative experts in the many fields required by the scope of this project.

Charles Earl is principally known for his TELCO (which is widely considered the best terminal emulator for the 99/4A and 9640), and also co-authored Batch-It (a batch processing language for the 99/4A and Myarc Geneve). While a relatively recent arrival on the TI scene, Charles has years of assembly programming experiance on the 4A and elsewhere, and is widely considered one of the best programmers for the machine.

Ruth O'Neill is an extremely capable writer best known for the documentation of TELCO. Ruth has a degree in translation, but prefers to use her training in writing and editing. In any good development project, the person writing the documentation has a large role in the design and implementation of the program (if not the mechanics) - if it can't be easily explained on paper it sure won't be easy to use by the user. Ruth and Charles understand this well, and both the program and the documentation reflect it.

Finally, I've managed Asgard Software since 1984, and over the years have developed skills in graphics arts and package design, documentation, and the more mundane arts of manufacturing and distribution. Asgard Software is now one of the top 3 software manufacturers for the TI-99/4A (the order depends on how you define it), and its package design, views on customer service and advertising style have been emulated by many of its competitors.

Press is one of the most complicated projects we've ever attempted (with over 15 types of components to plan, design and manufacture).

Press is the result of a partnership between Asgard Software, Charles Earl and Ruth O'Neill. Over the last year the concept has been defined, redefined, and refined. But, rhetorically speaking, what is the concept of Press?

Press is the first original word processor since TI-Writer was released in late 1982. The first word processors were written in Extended BASIC, and date back to within months of when the 99/4 was originally released. The first assembly language word processor, Companion, was released in the middle of 1982. This word processor was based on the (then popular) Wang word processing system (incarnated on PCs as Multimate), which utilized a number of symbols to represent formatting commands. Later that year, TI introduced its own word processor which was based on the Wordstar word processing system (which found its inspiration in the mainframe text formatter Runoff, found on TI's own minicomputer systems).

Until Press, all 99/4A and 9640 word processors were based on systems devised in the late 60's to mid 70's. Almost all word processing systems released since 1983 have been variations

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Correction

In the last issue of Asgard News, in the article discussing Picasso, the term "like" should have been used in a descriptive and not a specific sense. The L.A. 99'ers vehemently deny distributing Picasso. We apologize for any confusion on this point.

of TI-Writer (TK-Writer, BA-Writer, the Funnelweb Editor, and My-Word to name some of the more common ones). This is mainly because TI made the program public domain on exiting the home computer market, and the source code came to be distributed through the usual non-official channels. Over the years TI-Writer and its standard acquired inertia because it was the first widely used TI word processor, and programmers tend to be lazy and stay away from re-inventing the wheel. Programmers interested in word processing spent most of their time correcting TI-Writer's deficiencies. Word processing users spent their time learning the eccentrities of TI-Writer, and template packages such as Plus! (by Jack Sughrue), became very popular.

However, the rest of the computer industry hasn't been standing still. The level of competition in both the Mac and MS-DOS worlds has caused a rapid evolution in the user interface and capabilities of word processors, if not the actual concept of them.

One of the first innovations in modern word processors was the combination of the editor and the formatter. Instead of making it 2 separate steps (as it is in TI-Writer and in most PC word processors prior to 1984), formatting was done at the time the text was composed. The advantage to this is pretty obvious - the amount of guesswork required to create a properly formatted document was greatly reduced. However, such an approach wasn't possible until (supposedly) standard memory amounts increased and processors were fast enough, and (more likely) graphics programming knowledge had reached a certain level. Combining the formatter and the editor wasn't possible until the concept of "what-you-see-is-what-you-get" (hereafter WYSIWYG) became more widespread. Because of the need to display special type styles (such as underline and bold), and the micro-formatting sometimes necessary (where letters have to be adjusted on a pixel basis), WYSIWIG, and by extension, combining the formatter and the editor required very graphics-capable systems. That is why the first modern word processors got their start on the Apple Macintosh, which was dramatically more graphics oriented then the text-oriented C/PM and MS-DOS systems of that time.

The Macintosh is also responsible for a more recent change in formatting capabilities which is just now becoming more common on MS-DOS machines (with the release of WordPerfect 5.0), full-column support. Early word processors occasionally offered crude or clumsy support for multiple column pages, but generally such utilities were difficult to use at best. WYSIWYG, again, opened doors to new capabilities, and the ability to create newspaper style and tabular-style columns has recently become more common, and more demanded by users.

Multimate, and later versions of Wordstar introduced another innovation that later came to be considered an integral part of modern word processors - a "virtual" text buffer. Virtual memory, or the act of treating disk storage as an extension of regular memory, was itself not a new concept. Text editors on mainframe systems commonly supported this feature in the early 70's. However, it didn't really become very common in microcomputer word processors (and text editors) until disk drives began operating at faster speeds. The micro-computer word processors that supported it in the late 70's and early 80's often did so at a great sacrifice in speed (and hence, a dramatic increase in user frustration). In all modern word processors, the area available for a text file is limited only by the available disk space.

As word processors continued to evolve, the spelling checker came to become more then just an after-thought. After integrating the editor with the formatter, it soon was obvious that considerable time was being wasted in leaving the word processor, spell-checking the document, and then returning to the word processor to continue writing. The spell-checking process was much faster if paragraphs could be checked as they were composed (and hence fresh in the mind of the writer). In 1984 and 1985 spelling checkers started to become integrated within word processors until, by 1986, virtually every word processor on the market had a spelling checker built-in. Such programs as Borland's Lightning even offered spell checking on the fly, but again, at a great sacrifice in speed and memory. The real-time spelling checker (which checks as you type) hasn't yet become the norm. That's because it is rather a nuisance for the program to constantly interrupt you when you are composing a sentence (and your thoughts). However, the integrated spelling checker, which allows you to check what you want, when you want to do it, became very popular. In 1986 the computer thesaurus also became a popular add-on, but as of yet still isn't commonly included in word processors.

The WYSIWYG approach to the user interface necessitated another change in the way word processors worked, but this time of a less dramatic nature - block operations. Block oriented text editors were also introduced in the 70's, but many early word processors and text editors (including TI-Writer) were line-oriented. The advantages of

block-oriented editors over line-oriented ones are more subtle, but can be profound. Block-oriented editors allow you to select a block once (usually by marking the ends of it with the cursor, or a mouse), and then execute a move, copy or delete operation. While this is functionally similar to a line-oriented editor, blocks are inherently easier to use. This is because block-oriented systems usually indicate the selected area before a potentially destructive operation. Many functions can be easily made into a potentially destructive operation, and many functions can be easily made to operate on a block as easily as they do the whole document (the integrated spelling checker discussed earlier, and the search and replace function to name two). Finally, unlike line operations, blocks don't necessarily have to be limited to everything on the lines selected; more sophisticated modern word processors allow you to select a range of columns within a range of lines - literally any "block" of text on the screen! Block operations of this sort make moving columns in a table a lot easier, and more natural.

Finally, many other less profound functions have become common on word-processors in the last 5 years, mainly due to careful research of what people want in a word-processors. Some word processors generate tables of contents, footnotes and indexes, and even have outlining capability. Most include automatic and manual hyphenating, more sophisticated search and replace functions, line graphics, more capable header and footer functions, macros, and disk management functions within the program. Only the last innovation mentioned has to any degree been implemented in TI-Writer derivatives to date.

To sum up, modern word processors have a number of characteristics. They combine the editor with the formatter in a WYSIWYG manner, support a variety of columns and relatively free-form page creation, feature an integrated spelling checker, offer "virtual memory" support for the text buffer, and they all have block-oriented functions. They also have a plethora of lesser features that extend common functions and automate previously time-consuming tasks. Additionally, they support all the functions found in more primitive word processors (such as mail-merge). It should be obvious, at this point, that TI-Writer doesn't even compare to a modern word processor. Technically, it should be very difficult or impossible to support many of the functions mentioned above, what with the severe memory limitations, and slow bitmap graphics found in a TI-99/4A.

However, this is exactly what we intended to do with Press.

Press has numerous features, including all of the major ones mentioned above as crucial components of modern word processors. Press isn't "one" program, actually, it is more akin to an operating system that reads in little programs for each function as they are needed by the user. Not only is the text area in "virtual memory", the program itself actually loads in parts of itself as needed, and the vast majority of the program resides on disk at any one time. The advantage to this is greatly expanded functionality, and the ability to do things which are technically "impossible" on a 99/4A.

Press occupies a single SS/SD disk, and the spell-checker dictionary uses 3 other SS/SD disks. It comes with an extensive manual that includes a highly detailed table of contents, an index, and a tutorial. Tabs are included for quick reference. The program is packaged in an "IBM-style" binder with slip-case, includes a disk-page to hold the 4 disks, a quick-reference card, a 99/4A keyboard strip, and a registration card. The documentation, and the program itself to some degree, is geared towards the user converting from TI-Writer to Press. As such, the Press user will note that some commonly used functions are accessed with the same keys, TI-Writer files can be converted (the formatting commands are even converted to Press format), and the documentation features numerous sections on the differences between TI-Writer and Press where they are relevant.

The most obvious change when the program loads is a difference in the user interface. TI-Writer has a "command line" interface, in that, there is a separate area on the screen where the user types in commands. Press does not offer a command line, instead it has a menu bar. The user uses the arrow keys to move a highlighted bar over the option of choice, and once selecting the option desired, chooses the sub-option needed in a similar manner from the sub-menu presented. Whenever you select an option that needs more information (such as loading a document or entering a search string), a window appears on the screen and the desired information is entered within. This method is great for beginners (and considerably more natural then a command line), but soon grows old for the more experienced user. Hence, Press also allows you to select each function through a direct key-press, bypassing the menus entirely. Press, like all modern word processors, has different interfaces for the beginner and the advanced user.

Press offers a plethora of options, the vast majority of which are selectable directly and through menus. These options

are arranged in the manual, and within the program, by type.

In editing, Press will allow you to move the cursor up and down by line, screen or by page (the program keeps track of actual physical pages) using familiar commands. It also allows you to window over to display up to 256 columns (which can be defined with the page format options). Directly on the screen, Press displays normal text, underlining, bold text, italics, overstriking, and, super and subscript text. It also allows you to combine any of these attributes. Additionally, it supports such functions as hidden hyphens, an undo key (not to be confused with the "oops" key) which reverses many commands, the block functions discussed (including moving, copying, deleting, or saving a block to a file), a range of text deletion functions (delete character, word, sentence, line, to the end of line, paragraph, a column, a page, or the document), an "oops" function which allows you to recover your last 2 deletions. It has a comprehensive search and replace that is case-sensitive (it will preserve upper and lower case letters), is bi-directional and supports several types of wildcards. In the editing mode Press also allows you to view and edit embedded formatting codes (which are printer independent), including ASCII characters directly in text. You will also be able to draw line graphics with the cursor (for boxes, borders and tables), as well as insert printer codes directly.

Press also has a large number of formatting commands. Press will allow you to define virtually all the characteristics of a page, including the vertical dimensions, the margins, the tab settings, indents and outdents, the pitch, justification style (left, right, center, or full), the header and footer, the page number set, columns on the page, the number of lines per page, the top and bottom margins, the lines per inch and the line spacing. While you type in the text you can change some of these options (such as the justification) in order to create text effects on the screen (such as a centered title followed by fully-justified text). Press also supports columns by offering you two column types ("parallel" and "snaking"), and will allow you to enter the dimensions of each column manually or will automatically generate them for you.

Once a document is created it is printed, and Press offers you tremendous flexibility there as well. Utilizing your printer with Press is simply a matter of selecting your printer from a list of the available types - Press takes care of the details. Press will allow you to print the document currently being edited, print a document saved to another disk, choose from several paper feed options, set the printer device name, insert printer codes, and even print a previously selected block of text.

Press also features a full range of disk management functions. When you first start Press you must open a document - either a new one or a previously created one. Press requires a disk filename so that it knows where to put your text as you compose it (Press only keeps a portion of your document in memory at once). After opening and creating a document, you can close it to save your final changes. A unique safety feature inherent in Press is that since it saves your document as you compose it, if your computer crashes for some reason you will rarely lose very much of your work. Press will also allow you to read a document in and merge it into the one you are currently using, save a previously marked block of text to its own file or the end of another, get a disk directory, view a text file on disk, copy a file, move it, delete, rename, protect and unprotect files. Press will also allow you to save a file as straight ASCII for transfer to another computer, or read in an ASCII or TI-Writer file. In the case of a TI-Writer file, Press will interpret the formatting commands as it reads them, and present the formatted document to you on the screen in Press format. Finally, for hard-disk users, Press will allow you to change the name of the directory currently in use (the path).

As mentioned previously, Press has an integrated spelling checker. Not only will it check any previously selected block of text, it will also check a word, a page, a range of pages, the whole document, or an external document (one not being edited). The same function will also optionally count the number of words in a document for those people who write professionally or for school. While checking, if it finds a word not in its dictionary the word will be displayed within the line it was found on, and you will be given the option of skipping the word, skipping just this incidence of it, adding it to the user dictionary, or changing (editing) the word. Press will also optionally change all occurrences of a misspelled word (so if you consistently spell something wrong Press will do most of the work for you).

Press also supports macros. A macro in Press is a series of stored keystrokes which may be recalled in the order they were entered any time while editing a document. These keystrokes can be letters, numbers, symbols or commands. Macros can be used to save time in entering repetitive words, to perform the same series of tasks on several documents, or several times within a document. Macros can even be used to combine several commands into one more sophisticated one - for instance the manual contains a macro for duplicating lines within a document and consists of 8

separate keystrokes. Most modern word processors support macros to some degree because they make editing text, and creating custom commands, much simpler.

Finally, Press has a well-developed mail merge function which is completely compatible with the TI-Writer mail merge format. So, if you use this function in TI-Writer for form letters and business correspondence, you can use the same files in Press as-is.

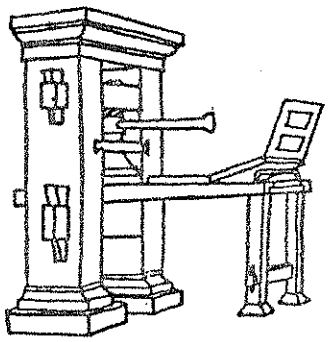
One of the most exciting capabilities of Press isn't a function most users will see or use very often - Press can be configured to take advantage of virtually any system. Press will use to its advantage the full range of RAM-disks, super-carts, GRAM devices, all 80-column cards, keyboard enhancements, any number of drives and hard-drives, and (of course) the Myarc Geneve. It is axiomatic in Press that virtually any hardware you purchase for your system will result in an increase in performance, and in some cases, functionality. For instance, while the program will readily function with a single disk drive, it is very difficult to use the spelling checker with less then two. An extremely efficient 99/4A system would be one with at least one disk drive and a 512K RAM-disk. You could put the entire program, dictionary and user dictionary on the RAM-disk for fast access, and use a floppy to store your document (where it would be safest in case of power problems anyway). Press could fully utilize a 9640 system with 720K floppies and a hard-drive or two. The more hardware you have, the more you can make Press do and the faster it will do it. Adaptable programs are also relatively rare in the TI world - most programs are designed with a minimum system in mind and will rarely take advantage of more then perhaps a few disk drives.

Press is a full-featured word processor for the 4A and 9640 that is on par with popular PC-based word processors. It was designed to do things that other word processors did, but doesn't owe much to any one specific program. It was designed to take best advantage of the capabilities of the 99/4A and the Geneve, and was written within that context. Like TI-Writer, it is a word processor for a TI computer, not something ported to a TI computer.

While we believe (and you may agree) that it is the most capable word processor for the 4A and 9640, we do not pretend that it is the end in word processors. There are many things on our list of features that didn't make the initial release due to time considerations. We may periodically add these functions. It is here where our commitment to user service comes in. We will mail announcements of upgrades as they occur to all registered users, and offer them at a price commensurate with the scale of the changes. In order to reach unregistered users (if any), we will also announce upgrades in TI magazines. Finally, we will be running a regular column in this publication called Press Report (this is the first installment), oriented to the Press user. It will feature notices of updates, useful macros, tips and advice to Press users.

All in all, we think Press is a good value.

Note Shipping between 12/16/88 and 1/1/89



Harry's Corner

Neither Asgard Software nor any of it's staff is responsible for the opinions stated in this column.

Have you got a commercial program in your collection of software that has a handwritten label on it? Do you have a couple of programs laying around that didn't come with docs on the disk - that you never learned to run? Have you ever spent hours cracking a protected program you bought, just so you could watch those sectored walls come tumbling down? Have the first words you typed to your X Basic environment ever been: CALL INIT::CALL LOAD(-31931,0)? If you answered "yes" to any of the above... welcome to the club!

Are you and I wielding the cutlass that beheads our software authors? Are we wearing the patch that blinds us to the inevitable demise of all software for the 99/4A computer! Etc., etc., and... I think not! Last year I spent approximately three hundred dollars on software, both fairware and commercial products. Yet, I AM a pirate! (I'm not a hacker, I couldn't beat my way out of a protection scheme if it were made of butter.) I am also a most trusted member of the beta testing community, and I always send programs back after I review them, uncopied. Could this be a dual personality, you ask? No, it's more of an "honor among thieves," a bit of philosophy, and a basic respect

for the people and firms that I deal with.

The program I am using for this article, TI-Writer, cost me over one hundred dollars seven years ago. In my extensive collection of software, there are at least three other major competitors to this program, but I don't use them. I looked for years to find a better word processor than this one, to no avail. There is none better. I would estimate that my search COULD have cost me an additional $175.00, and I would have arrived at the same conclusion. In fact, it did cost me $50.00 to become one of the first registered users of WriterEase. This fifty dollar wonder is totally useless to me, however, because it's protected to the nines. I can't put it in my Horizon ram, and I can't add words like "microfiche" to the dictionary, which I use every day in my business letters. Hence, WriterEase resides in it's original wrapper and my fifty dollars is gone forever. I anxiously await a cracked copy, however, so that I may at least get some use out of it.

Let me tell you another one. I like to write, and I help turn out one of the best looking group newsletters around, if I do say so myself. I am ALWAYS looking for software to make my job easier, or make the newsletter look better. When the Printer's Apprentice first appeared I was impressed by the advertising and sent for the program. As I recall, I believe that it was priced at $39.95 back then. Upon receipt of the software, I found that I could not successfully get my layouts to the printer. I also discovered that the same company had produced a program that I had purchased a year before called Business Graphics 99. I hadn't been able to get that one to work either... same problem. This time I wrote letters, two or three of them, and received replies very quickly. None of them helped, because I found that the program was not usable with a Gemini 15 printer, only later models of the Gemini series. The company would not refund my money even though I had proved conclusively that it wouldn't work for me. I was forced to sell both programs for a total of $20.00. A net loss of another fifty smackers.

My policies before were a bit loose, now they are firm. If it cost over ten dollars, I will wait for a copy to come along. Then, if I like it, and find a use for it, I'll buy it. What other choice do I have? I am not a rich man.

On the subject of fairware, things are a bit different. With these programs, I am allowed to try before I buy, and I have bought quite a few. Only on rare occasions, however, have I bought version 1.0. No amount of beta testing will ever bring out all the ways a human being can screw up a program. A prime example is PR-BASE. Version one was a bear to work with, (although I DID use it for over a year) but it had a lot of potential. When version 2.0 was announced, my money was in the mail the same day, and I have never regretted my decision to pay my money. I think there are a lot, maybe a majority, of people that feel the same way about the fairware market. USAGE is the million dollar word. Having been a member of my group for five years, I am very close to most of the people there. Close enough to KNOW they will be honest with me. I queried my group on the ownership of a given program one night. Out of the thirty-three members present, at least twenty-five of them owned it... only one person was USING it, and he had paid the fairware fee. There are hundreds of copies of the Usable Disk Cataloguer in the TI comunity. (My own donation to the fairware game.) I have received donations of slightly over a hundred dollars in two years. So what! It's not a program that everybody needs, wants, or uses. Never the less, it has been revised up to vrs 2.4, and I continue to add things as they are needed. It only fills a nitch, a tiny nitch, and I have received exactly what I expected. I'm happy!

Now let's look at the other side of the usage coin. I'm not here to be loved, so let me put it this way... I DARE every one of you, as soon as you finish this, to go to your desk and mail one stinking dollar to Barry Boone for his Archiver, and one dollar to the Ottawa user group for DM1000. Don't tell me you don't use them, I don't believe it. If you've already sent money, fine, good for you! But I'm talking about the fifty thousand people out there that use both of those programs on a weekly basis and haven't sent a penny. Don't feel bad about not paying ten dollars, or five dollars, because one dollar would REALLY do if every one of you pirates sent one. There is no question that at first the authors are going to be highly insulted about such a minor reward for their efforts, but if they receive ten thousand one dollar offerings... I think they might change their attitudes.

Here's the way I see the TI software community: (1) We, the users, are suffering from the after shock of the early eighties. We, more than any other computer, were cheated time and time again by people that wanted to make a quick buck in the software field. This can, and does, still happen today. How many stupid basic programs do you have around from the days when a cassette cost $19.95? (2) We DEMAND to see what we are going to buy. We are less interested in the software than we are in the computer itself. How much can we squeeze out of this little baby? The software shows us that. We may not use it, but we do keep it laying around for the proof. (3) We DO NOT pirate everything! If we did, Tenex, Triton, and half a dozen other companies couldn't stay in business. (4) The highest percentage of the TI community has no access to pirated software.

Mainly this is true because they don't belong to the groups where you come in contact with the pirate captains. Ninety percent of the groups do not condone piracy. Therefore, new users will not have access to "those" programs for quite some time. (5) If the program is good, does "it" better than it's been done before, is relatively bug free, fills a need and gets used, it will get paid for... sooner or later. (6) The software people must not protect. I, for one, will NEVER buy a protected program if I know it is. I am sitting here with one million, one hundred and fifty two thousand bytes of battery-backed ram. I intend to use it! I can't if a program is protected. (7) I believe this is a mature community that pays out more per capita today than they ever have before for good software. I do not believe that we read about programs here or in MICROpendium, want them, and wait around for them to passed along for free. (8) it's all in the attitude. If you get mad and walk off in a huff because you didn't make a thousand dollars the first week your software was out, you'll never make it! Think. Is it possible that your program wasn't necessary? Did it have some bugs that needed correcting? Was the exposure wrong, or too short? You can either do something about it, and make that thousand, or else it will lay around my "future reference archives" forever. (9) In conjunction with the preceeding statement; I would bet my bottom dollar fifty percent of the TOTAL community will not be aware of the existence of a program, commercial or fairware, within a year. Remember, less than twenty-five percent of TI people belong to groups, and less than ten percent have modems. The mailing list of Triton or Tenex is well in excess of a hundred thousand names. In my next column, I would like to answer some letters that I hope you will send. L8r... HTB

Jack's Jottings

[Ed Note: This is the first of a monthly column for Asgard News by Jack Sughrue. Jack is well known for his monthly "Impact 99" columns printed in dozens of user group newsletters, as well as his work with Plus!, and for generally being a nice guy.]

Before I first started using TI-BASE I worried about the comments I heard about its difficulty of use. After all, as a 99er for many years, I was familiar with numerous data bases. And ALL of them were difficult for new users. Many were difficult for old users like myself, too. So why were some people saying TIB was "not for first-time users?" If THIS base was harder to learn than the others, would it be worth getting?

I have used CFS and PRBASE and DB300/500 and cartridge bases and lots of user-group bases. I have used bases designed just for videos or just for books or just for addresses of just for stamp collections or just for about any specific thing. But none were for EVERYTHING. None of them (for me) were easy to use, and none of themended up doing what I REALLY wanted a data base to do.

Those days are behind me now. I have TI-BASE.

What does TIB do that the others do not do; even though the others are well-designed and certainly intelligently thought out within severe limitations?

TIB does everything EASILY, for onething; and in exactly the ways you want it to, for two. And has so much other stuff that it's going to be fun to grow with and learn with, for three. And lots more, for four.

But, first, user friendliness. I was surprised and very pleased to discover that TIB is the most user friendly of the lot. You tell it what to do and it does it.

Let's take a few examples and create a base right away, so you can see what I mean.

You must first decide what you want the base for. Do you want to catalog your book library or all your videos? Do you want a checkbook manager or a mailing address listing or a catalog of your records and tapes?

Do you have a collection of anything: old bottles, stamps, coins, baseball cards, insects, used socks?

TIB'll take care of you!

For our purposes, let's decide to catalog some video tapes. You have a collection of 150 videos. Some were purchased. But most were recorded off the air or dubbed by a friend from her collection. Some tapes have movies on them; some have a couple of shows from a series; some have music; some comedy. Whatever.

[YOU have to make some decisions before loading this (or any) data base.]

Here are a few things you might want to put onto your base:

a) Title of program or series (such as OUT OF AFRICA or MASH)
b) Title (or number) of episode (if series)
c) Cast (which would include narrator of specials or actors or anchor people or team [if sports]
d) Date of taping (year is sufficient for most things)
e) Commercial, Dubbed, Off-air
f) Type (comedy, documentary, play, sit-com, baseball, movie, music, cartoon, etc.)
g) Length
h) Tape #

i) Audience (Children, adult, left-handed blondes, whatever)
j) Author (if this is one of the criteria important to you)
k) Comments (plot, topic, etc.)

Then you go through your selections to put them in the order you'd like with proper field identifications. Such as:

1) Number of tape [We'll call this field "#". We'll make it three numbers long. It can be up to 255 characters long, but I don't think your video tape library will extend to the thousands. If it does, change this to four or five places.

2) Title of program or series. [We'll call this field "TITLE1" and make it 20 characters long.]

3) Next, episode titles. [If you taped a MASH episode, MASH would be TITLE1. The episode might be "Exploding Golf Course" or any title you want. These would be TITLE2, of course. 22 characters.]

4) To denote Commercial, Dubbed, Off-Air, Other you could title this field CDAO. And give it one character length.

5) Type (comedy, drama, sports, etc.) might be called TYPE and given 8 characters.

6) Cast might be called CAST and be given 40 so you can list the major actors, let's say, in GONE WITH THE WIND.

7) If author is important to you (such as a play by Arthur Miller) this could be another field called, appropriately, AUTHOR, and be given 15 slots.

8) Audience would be for whomever it suits. You could abbreviate to A for adults, C for children, E for everyone, O for other. Thus titling it ACEO and use up one character.(All this abbreviating business simply takes up less space and sorts faster, but you could have EACH field of the 17 fields allowed contain 255 characters.)

9) Length of time. You might want to keep this in minutes, call the field LENGTH and have up to five characters for, say, a long mini-series.

10) Date can be DATE and use just the year (which is what I usually do) and be four characters. A date item is also built into the base if you wish to use that with a 10/23/88-style designation.

11) Comments (called COMMENTS) could be 255 characters long so as to allowdetails of plot, topics, opinion, whatever.

There! Eleven fields. (Remember we could have up to 17, which is why I chose videos for this tutorial. More fields are required than with books or addresses or music audio tapes. That way, if you follow this tutorial, most others you create will be much easier.)

Your personal way of cataloging your videos would probably be quite different. Which is the joy of TI-BASE.

Now we're ready to load up TIB.

But, first, make a backup copy of the original and have an initialized diskready for your data.

TIB can be loaded with just your XB cartridge or with Minimem or E/A. You must have a disk drive (obviously) and 32K. If you are fortunate enough to have two or more drives and/or RAM capabilities then you can really go to town. The more heavy duty your system, the more heavy duty the use of such a profound piece of software.

Okay, you load it up from boot and have to wait about 70 seconds. *[Ed. Note: The new version reportedly loads much quicker]* This is a BIG program with lots of wonderful features.

Title Screen prompts for date. Type in 12/11/88 and all your files done in this session will contain this date. Nice feature.

Once the date is ENTERed a SETUP file scrolls into place. These are your system parameters.

This STATUS reports these following defaults:

```
DATDISK=DSK2.
PRGDISK=DSK1.
PRINTER=PIO. PAGE=56
HEADING=ON
TALK=ON
SPACES=1
RECNUM=ON
LSPACE=256
DATE=10/23/88
```

with a dot sitting in the lower left-hand corner waiting for you to command.

If you want to change the defaults just type in the change simple as that. Do the same for any of the others. PRGDISK is the disk where TIB is kept. I keep it in Drive 3, which is my MYARC 512 RAM (and makes this VERY FAST [all Assembly] data base even more lightning fast). PRINTER as PIO is okay for me but can be changed to serial. LINE can be up to 134 condensed for columns on the TI or down to any narrow needs you may have. PAGE length I keep at 56. I take the HEADING OFF because I'm not interested in printing out the headings, as I know what they are.

The TALK I keep ON because I like to see on the screen the commands I'm giving to the computer. I change the SPACES between columns to 3. I removed the RECNUM (record numbers) to the OFF position, as the videos will be numbered accordingly, anyway. I keep the LSPACES to encompass the range allocated for local variables.

Everything is ENTERed to my satisfaction.

Now I type CLEAR to clear the screen. Isn't that simple?

Then I type DISPLAY STATUS to make sure all is well with the new defaults I just created. These are now "permanent" until you want to change any for other reasons.

All the changes come up in the listing. Perfect. (DISPLAY, by the way is a simple yet powerful command. Later, you'll see all the other ways to use this.)

You may have noticed how EASY, how CLEAR, how QUICK it is to have this base do all the things you want it to. Things get even easier.

Before we get into the base, is there any way to change the white-on-blue to my favorite black-on-green? Heh-heh-heh. Keeping with the directness and simplicity of the dot-command approach of TIB, you simply type COLOR BLACK DARK-GREEN. When you ENTER, those colors are there until you type COLOR again.

Chompchompchomp.

"All this is very nice," I can hear you say, "but when do we get into our commission of base deeds?"

Now... You want to create your video record. Type (of course) CREATE DSK4.VIDEOS. Automatically, you are set up. [NOTE: be sure to have an initialized disk in Drive 4 (or whichever) turned on before you type in this.]

After I have typed CREATE DSK4.VIDEOS (data titles must be 8 characters or less), the screen comes up with some thick lines following a #1. I type "#" in the first bar and ENTER. Cursor jumps to next short bar with the "C" (character) default. I type "N" for number. For the third bar I type in "3" because that is the maximum length of the tape numbers (which could carry me up to 999). Another little bar appears. I type in 0 (zero) as I have no need for decimals in this base. I ENTER each item. Now I am on #2 with the same configuration appearing.

If you look up above at the 11 fields I created, you can see that my MY #2 will be "TITLE1". So I type this in, select C, and 20 for character length. No little bar appears as there are no decimal notations without a prior number designation.

Then I go to #3: "TITLE2 C 22" and so on. My base will look like this when done:

1 # N 3
2 TITLE1 C 20
3 TITLE2 C 22 11 COMMENTS C 255

EUREKA! Our personal data base for our video library is done in a few seconds (providing you have blocked out previously what you want).

I may make changes at this point or EXECUTE (FCTN/8). All these functions are on the command strip which comes with TIB. Another nice feature. Dennis Faherty, the author of this gem, seems to have thought of everything.

Now Record #1 appears on the screen and we are ready to go. [At this point, looking back over this article, it seems as though the process is difficult. Actually, it is quick and easy and much more difficult WRITING about this process that DOING it. Once you've gone through this thing once, you own it and can set up a zillion bases with ease and alacrity.]

From here on, you simply fill in the blanks you created.

1) 001
2) MYSTERY
3) SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA
6) Jeremy Brett, etc.
7) Arthur C Doyle
8) E
9) 60
10) 1984
11) Sherlock Holmes series on PBS. Excellent.

Do I need any changes? Nope. ENTER. This is automatically recorded as Record #1 on my data disk.

Now #2 comes up.

1) 001 [NOTE: same tape]
2) AMERICAN PLAYHOUSE
3) GHOST WRITER
4) A
5) DRAMA
6) *** [I don't know the actors and will leave asterisks to EDIT later.]
7) Philip Roth
8) A
9) 120
10) 1984 Then #3. And so on.

I do another dozen tapes or so at this sitting, all SAVEd automatically. Then I QUIT for the night by typing CLOSE ALL.

Today, I go back to TIB. At the command dot I type USE DSK4.VIDEOS. There it is!

I type EDIT just to look over the previous day's efforts. I PAGE forward and back (the 5 and 6 keys) and add things here and there with the normal function keys (such as FCTN/2 for INSERT). Then I'm ready to add more.

I type APPEND and my next blank record (#17) comes up, and I proceed in the same way.

After I go through another dozen records, I take a break to play with TIB some more. (This is, after all, a program with lots of fun built in.)

Screen displays:

I type SORT ON TITLE1 Whoooosh! All sorted alphabetically. I least I think so. To check I first type DISPLAY ALL TITLE1 TITLE2 #. I get an instant 3 columns on my screen, alphabetically displayed on TITLE1. Second column is TITLE2; third column is the number of the tape it is on.

While it's still sorted on TITLE1 I decide to DISPLAY ALL # DATE TITLE2 TITLE1 AUTHOR and get five neat columns in the order I just typed. Looks good. I want a hardcopy. I type PRINT ALL # DATE TITLE2 TITLE1 AUTHOR. Because I had my printer on, the above structure is printed out as nice and neat as you please.

But I'd prefer just TITLE1 and COMMENTS. Another nice pre-sorted printout.

Then I decide I want it done numerically by tape. SORT ON # gives me this instantly. Then I type PRINT ALL # TITLE1 TITLE2. Another instant hardcopy configuration.

DISPLAY ALL etc. puts it on screen; PRINT ALL etc. puts it on paper. SORT ON n sorts it instantly on your choice alphabetically (for characters) or numerically (for numbers).

There are loads of other simple and direct commands. And loads of complicated commands if you are into heavy-duty data bases. This base lets you go as far as you want.

Next time we'll discuss some of the other commands, but for most uses all that is needed is explained above or in the 40-page manual that comes with TI-BASE. The $24.95 (plus $1.50 shipping and handling) is a fantastic price for this remarkable piece of software This is the best buy of the year for the TI. [Jack Sughrue, Box 459, E.Douglas, MA 01516]

New Products

Typewriter

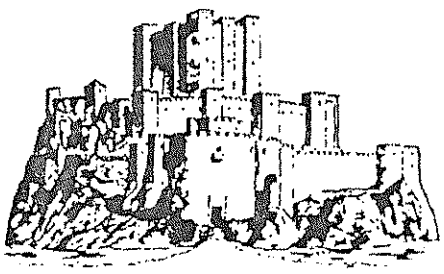
Typewriter is one of those things that sort of sneaks up on you. Simply put, it is a program that turns a computer into a typewriter. It isn't a clunky manual typewriter either, but a modern, "electronic" typewriter incorporating many computer-like features such as word-wrap, right justification, auto-underline and bold type, even centering. Why go to all the trouble of making a computer into a typewriter? Because, for many jobs, a word processor is too much trouble, or inconvenient. A short BASIC program is too inflexible and requires too much playing around (as well as BASIC expertise). Typewriter it perfect for addressing envelopes, typing out labels, and even writing short letters or filling out forms. Typewriter is also perfect for luring latent computerphobes to the computer. It's non-threatening and very easy to use. The program allows you to adjust your margins and even your tab stops on the fly, and even displays the six lines previously typed on the screen. It will either print as you type or a line at a time, so you can make changes before it hits paper. This program makes an excellent companion to your word processor. It is written in 100% assembly by Jim Reiss, and is available on disk ($19.95), cassette ($19.95, Mini-Memory required) or in module form ($24.95). While it naturally requires a printer, it is completely printer independent and will work with any printer or interface.

My Art Coloring Book

This two disk package is an unusual companion for the My-Art drawing package. My-Art is extremely easy-to-use by young children, with the mouse and the descriptive icons. My-Art Coloring Book makes the Geneve into an electronic coloring book with dozens of high-quality picture outlines in low and high resolution. Electronic crayons have many advantages over the wax variety - they don't smudge furniture, clothing or little people. They are indigestible, you can't lose them as easily, and electronic outlines can be used over and over again! This packages requires a Myarc Geneve 9640 with My-Art and mouse. By Cynthia Becker. A good buy at $9.95.

Oliver's Twist

Oliver's Twist is a very professional new game for the Adventure module, by Mickey Schmitt and Lynn Gardner. Set in an old castle that you just inherited, your task is to return 15 treasures to their rightful locations (hence the twist!). Complicating matters some, the ghost of King Oliver makes it even more difficult for you. On a par with the best and most difficult Scott Adam's adventures, Oliver's Twist is the most challenging new text adventure in a long time. Available on disk or cassette for only $9.95.



Batch-It

Batch-It is very difficult to describe because it doesn't do any one thing - it does many unrelated things. Batch-It is a programming language that produces programs that run behind other programs. These programs can capture data or screens from one assembly program and put it in another, put complicated keystroke sequences in a running assembly program (in other words, add macros), capture keystrokes the user types and display screens, or even run other programs from within an assembly program, and much more. Batch-It programs run while an assembly language program runs, in a separate area of memory (either in a Mini-Memory or a supercart). Batch-It programs can be used to create automated demos, can be used to add macros to your favorite text editor, create super menu programs for running many different programs from one menu, or even automate the program creation process in c99, Fortran 99, Turbo Pasc'99 or Assembly. Batch-It runs behind many program-image assembly programs, such as Telco, DM-1000, BA-Writer, and some databases and drawing programs. Heavily documented, it comes with sample batch files and a limited subscription to a user magazine! It requires a Geneve or a 99/4A with 32K, a disk drive, and either of the modules mentioned above. By Charles Earl and Tom Bentley. $19.95

Beginner's Corner

Topic: Expanding your TI, Part I

Your TI is a good little machine. So it follows, then, that the more there is of it, the better it becomes. This line of reasoning only goes so far however, especially if you are trying to justify expanding your system. It helps to get an idea of what kind of peripherals there are for the 99/4A, and how they can help you. When you know exactly what you want, it is much easier to persuade reluctant family members to budget newfound necessities.

Before we discuss expansion options though, we should describe a few of the peripherals now available for your computer:

RS232: This little device, available in plug-in form, as an expansion card for the peripheral box, or even as a module for the cartridge port, is probably one of the first things you'll want for your TI-99/4A. The reason is simple - most people who want to seriously use the computer want a printer. Word processing, databases and spreadsheets (three common "serious" computer applications), are pretty pointless without one. So, before you buy a printer, you have to buy one of these things. Typical RS232 devices include at least two ports - the RS232 port ("modem port") and a PIO or Parallel port ("printer port"). Don't buy one that doesn't have at least these two. Most printers attach to the PIO port nowadays, and if you don't know what a modem is or what it's useful for, see the previous issue of this magazine and column. Pay no more then $100 for a device like this.

32K RAM: Actually, RAM devices now come in many flavors for the 99/4A. You'll see RAM cards up to 1Mb (1024K) advertised in dealer flyers and catalogs, not to mention 4A magazines. Anything over 32K, though, falls into a different category. Those devices are either "GROM" devices or "RAM-disks". (See the appropriate section below for information about either of these.) A basic TI-99/4A has 16K of memory, which is actually what's known as "video-RAM". There is only 256 bytes of "real" RAM in the console. This device, available as either a peripheral expansion card or a plug in device (and for people with friends in user groups, as a device inside the console itself), will expand your system to 32.25K of "real" RAM, and 16K of video-RAM, for a total of a little more then 48K of RAM. Virtually all of the more powerful programs for the TI-99/4A require at least this amount of RAM in your computer system. There are a few drawing programs, databases and word processors in cartridge form that will work without it, but virtually all of these become much easier to use and faster programs with this additional memory present - so even if you do serious work only with cartridges, you can still benefit from increased memory. A basic 32K device should sell for under $100, and perhaps $150 or less if coupled with an RS232.

Disk Drives: Once you have a printer port and extra memory, you'll definitely want to consider disk drives. While there are word processors and other serious programs that get by just fine with the above peripherals, you'll soon get tired of waiting 20

minutes for your work to save and load from a cassette recorder. By this time you'll also probably be salivating over the mounds of free software, and tons of commercial software available only in disk format. Talking about disk drives as a single item is a bit misleading, especially in regards to the price. The cheapest way to attach a disk drive to a 99/4A is if you have a Peripheral Expansion Box. Virtually all of the more sophisticated peripherals require this marvelous device, and it does make expanding your TI a lot cheaper in the long-run. You can obtain one by browsing the yard sales or by watching the local classified ads, but you can't buy one new anymore. Since they originally sold for over $300, it's doubtful you'd get much of a bargain that way anyway. You can usually pick up a good used box for under $100 and rarely over $200, usually with some of the previously mentioned devices thrown in. If you don't have a PEB (as we'll call the "box"), you're disk drive expansion options are limited to only one - the Corcomp 9900 Micro-Expansion System. This little device, with a built in RS232 and 32K retails for about $300, without a disk drive included. (Some distributors sell it for much less though.) A basic disk drive for a 4A is actually several components you can buy separately, or, packaged together. There is a "disk controller", the disk drive itself, and the power-supply for the disk drive, as well as cables to connect the mess together. The Corcomp unit includes the disk controller built-in (a Corcomp one, naturally) which can control up to 4 DS/DD (360K capacity) drives. If you have a PEB, you can purchase a new disk controller by Myarc instead - which will also control up to 4 DS/DD 360K capacity drives. Buying a used box will sometimes net you a used TI disk controller, which can handle up to 3 DS/SD drives (180K capacity). Virtually all TI disk software is distributed around the lowest-common denominator; SS/SD, or 90K-capacity disks. The nomenclature, by the way, translates into "single-sided and single-density". The highest capacity typically used, is "double-sided, double-density". There is also something called "double-sided, quad-density" (720K capacity floppies), but they can be more trouble then they are worth. In any case, if you don't have a PEB, a disk system will cost about $400 with a disk controller, disk drive, power-supply and case, and cables. With a PEB, it will cost you about $200-250 (all you'll need is the disk controller and the disk drive - the drive will slip right into the PEB).

The above peripherals are the most commonly used with the TI-99/4A. As mentioned in the disk drive discussion, sometimes you can pick up a used setup with all three things described above for under $150 or $200. If you can do that, you'll walk away with a real steal because the original setup cost some of us old-timers over $1000 back in 1982. With these three things, and a printer (choosing a printer is a column unto itself), you can run virtually any piece of TI software. At that point you'll find that many serious programs work better with 2 drives, so throwing in another $150 will double your capacity (and more then double the fun). You can make do with less then the 3 items mentioned above just fine, but you will also limit yourself to what you can do with the computer. The basic setup will let you do most anything you could do if you spent $1000 on a PC-clone.

However, the TI keyboard isn't as nice, and the disk drives sure aren't very fast. This is where the many other types of peripherals come in.

RAM-disks: The very first thing you should purchase after laying out money for a second disk drive, or maybe even before doing so, is a RAM-disk. All a RAM-disk is, is a block of memory that thinks its a disk drive. You can save and load programs and data to it just like you would a floppy drive, get a catalog of its contents, even re-initialize it. However, there are a few major differences - one is that all these operations are 10 times faster, and two, unless the RAM-disk has a battery on it or a power-transformer you'll lose whatever is in it when you turn off the computer. The 10-times speed improvement is the real reason to buy one even if you do have to re-load things into it time and time again if it doesn't have power backup. RAM-disks come in 2 forms, as a plug-in box (for Corcomp Micro-Expansion system owners) and as a card for the PEB. The plug-in one is by Corcomp (of course), and as RAM-disks go, is pretty limited. It is also incompatible with some software. As before, PEB owners have a lot more choice. There are RAM-disk cards for the PEB from at least 3 manufacturers - the Myarc RAM-disk, the Horizon RAM-disk and the Rave RAM-disk. These are the cards advertised with enormous amounts of memory installed. That extra memory is used as a RAM-disk, and in the case of the Myarc model, also a print spooler for your printer (a device which captures text and feeds it to the printer, freeing your computer to do other things). Most programs are RAM-disk friendly, and virtually all will run a LOT faster with one. A RAM-disk really eliminates many of the performance differences between a TI system and some of the more recent computers, and can be very economical (for less then $200 in some cases). A list of the advantages and disadvantages of each is another article altogether, though.

Expanded Keyboards: The TI keyboard was pretty good when the 4A was released, and is considerably sturdier then most, but 48 keys can drive a touch-typist to distraction. There is a company called Rave (mentioned above) that makes a device that replaces the TI keyboard (just the keyboard, not the console shell), with a card that you can plug any of the many IBM compatible keyboards available. into. The Rave keyboard replacement can be purchased as a kit (for the technical minded), or put together and with an IBM keyboard included (which is actually a pretty decent keyboard). The constructed model with keyboard (105 keys), is slightly under $200. Those of us that learned to type on a 4A, though, probably don't need one of these. A PEB isn't necessary to use this.

GROM devices: If we focused on the technical aspect of this device, we could write a dozen articles, but instead, we'll just mention what it's useful for. GROM devices are available typically as a cartridge-port plug-in, or, more recently, as a card to plug into the PEB. The same people that make the Horizon RAM-disk also make the PEB card version, which is probably the most flexible one around (they call theirs a "P-GRAM Card"). In any case, this device can do a lot of things, particularly for people who like twiddling with the innards of their computer. For the average user it does one thing that justifies buying one - it allows you to vacuum out the contents of your cartridges and save them to disk. It will then allow you to load one or more saved cartridges into the device and run them from a menu. In the case of the P-GRAM Card, this essentially means you are putting your most commonly used cartridges into a card on your PEB, where they will be available from a single menu every time you turn on your computer. Some of these devices are "battery-backed" fully or in part, which means that you don't have to re-load your cartridges every time you turn on the computer. GROM devices buy you convenience and a little insurance for your modules (if the saved module fails, just save another copy, or keep several copies of the saved module around). Furthermore, some of these devices offer extra memory that some more flexible programs can take advantage of. The P-GRAM Card even has an optional clock built-in. The price of this device ranges from $120 for the plug-in versions to $200 for the card. The plug-in versions don't require a PEB.

Hard Drives: For the "power-user", or the user with a lot of money to blow, the "ultimate" 99/4A upgrade is a hard-disk drive. Hard drives are attached to the 99/4A much like floppy drives are. You'll need a hard disk drive controller, a hard drive, a power-supply/case and the appropriate cables. Simplifying things some, there is only one hard disk controller. It is produced by Myarc, and it will not only control up to 3 hard drives it will also handle 4 DS/DD floppies - so you can sell your floppy drive controller if you buy it, making things a bit cheaper. This controller will work perfectly well with hard disk drives produced for use with an IBM PC or XT computer - and those drives are not only extremely common, they can be purchased even surplus for next to nothing occasionally. For about $500 you can set up a 99/4A with a 10-20Mb hard drive. For under $1000, you could have three 20Mb hard drives up and running. The card will handle up to 240Mb of hard disk storage - so the sky (and your bank account) is the limit. The advantages to a hard drive? The most obvious one is that you can put all your programs in one place and quit juggling floppies. The other major advantage is that hard-drives are typically as fast as a RAM-disk - so it is like having a 20Mb, battery backed RAM-disk (which would cost you what a small mini-computer would cost if it was available at all). If you are trying to do any database work, or have to handle large lists, a hard drive is highly recommended. This device is for PEB owners only.

80-Column cards: For the more adventurous (those people who aren't shy about using a screwdriver and following instructions) there is a device that expands your screen display to 80-columns. Two manufacturers produce an 80-column card - Mechatronics and Dijit. The Dijit card is decidedly the more sophisticated of the two, but requires a PEB (whereas the Mechatronics card plugs into the side of the console). Both devices require you to open up your console and plug a few things into the motherboard (or "brains") of your computer. Both include instructions on how to do it. Both also include a "mouse" port for plugging in an electronic rodent. The only disadvantage to either of these devices is that little takes advantage of either - if you aren't interested in 80-column Multiplan, 80-column terminal emulators, a few 80-column word processors and text editors, or the odd art or picture display program, you really won't get a great deal out of this device. However, since the Mechatronics device is being blown out for $100 right now (while supplies last), it really isn't a bad deal. If you do a lot of word processing, 80-columns is a godsend, and well worth this - or even the $200 Dijit card (which has a few home-video features and better mouse support).

The Geneve: The other "ultimate" 99/4A upgrade isn't a 99/4A - it is a whole new computer that sits in your box and runs most 99/4A software. Before you plug a Geneve in you use software provided to save your cartridges, unplug the 99/4A, remove the

card connecting it to the PEB (this is definitely a PEB device), and plug it in. From then on you aren't a 99/4A user anymore - you are a Geneve user that uses 99/4A software. The advantages and disadvantages of this device have been mulled over here and elsewhere. However, they can be boiled down considerably. The Geneve essentially is the same thing as having an 80-column card with a keyboard enhancement, a 180K RAM-disk and 32K RAM cards, and a low-end GROM card all in one. It is also runs most 99/4A software up to 300% faster. For about $500 then, you get a device which is the same as spending around $800 on your 99/4A - plus a speed improvement you couldn't get no matter what you bought for your 4A. The price you pay is some incompatibility with a few cartridges and a few assembly programs, and incompatibility with most RAM-disks, but that is a pretty small price to pay against the benefits listed above. The 80-column versions of TI-Writer and Multiplan provided are also by far the best versions around. Plus many newer programs have been designed to take advantage of some of the special features of this computer. If you have a PEB and are considering enhancing it, take a long, hard look at this device.

Now that you are familiar with some of the major expansion devices available for the 99/4A, we can talk about specific expansion paths in the next issue, as well as some of the real reasons for expanding. In Part II of this topic we'll also discuss the economics of expanding your system versus buying another computer - and despite the declining prices of alternate systems, they may surprise you.

Geneve Corner

In the last installment of this column we listed all of the 9640-only software available for the Geneve. We'd like to continue that with the current issue. But first, a note about where these programs and files can be obtained. These lists are compiled from recent uploads on the various TI networks, as well as announcements in other magazines and newsletters. Because of time constraints, we are unable to offer these programs to our subscribers. Instead, if you are interested in these items either call your local TIBBS (which may have some or all, depending upon local Geneve interest). You may also look in Compuserve's TI-Forum, GENies TI Roundtable, or, Delphi's TI Information Network. Optionally, you may want to try your local user group library.

If you don't belong to one of these services, and don't have a local user group, you may want to consider joining the National Myarc User Group (11011 Ellwood Str., The Woodlands, TX 77380-4001, (703)367-1047). A recent conversation with President Mike Connel reveals that they have over 30 members now, and are in the process of producing their first bi-monthly newsletter. Dues also include a library service, which they evidently already offer members. They recently had a booth at the Chicago TI Faire, where they evidently gave away all the sample copies of their first newsletter and information packets. As with all nascent user groups it is bound to be a bit rocky at first as jobs are established and duties coordinated, but there seems to be a truly national effort.

In the course of the discussion, Mr. Connel also mentioned that N.M.U.G. will be lobbying Myarc for the release of more technical information. If that is the case, then giving this group your support may be a way of getting this justifiable concern voiced. Without more information about M-DOS, application software will be slow in coming for the Geneve.

Dues are $30/first year U.S., $33/Canada, and $38 for others. Substantial discounts on dues are applicable thereafter.

Now, on to the catalog:

Public Domain Releases

MOUSE1 - 27-Nov-88
: This is a mouse version of John Johnson's MENU program

C99LIB - 06-Nov-88
: c99 object library/header files for use with LDR v3.1. MDOS only. Part of c99, Faireware from Clint Pulley.

LOADER - V3.1 - 06-Nov-88
: The updated version of QDL below. Includes the ability to search object libraries. For M-DOS, c99 or Assembler. From Clint Pulley.

SINE DEMO - 03-Nov-88
: A little demo program for MDOS which plots a colored sine wave on the screen in graphics mode 7. An example of the upcoming 9640 fortran package. By Al Beard and LGMA Products.

Sector Editor - 03-Nov-88
: A file sector editor which runs under MDOS. By LGMA Products.

FRACTALS - 03-Nov-88
: A fractals demonstration in 9640 Fortran by Al Beard

MENUS - 09-Oct-88
Batch file system for MDOS mode with Autoexec file. From the National Myarc Users Group.

32K Geneve Notes - 25-Sep-88
Step-by-step instructions for adding another 32K of zero-wait-state RAM to the standard 9640. By Paul Charlton

QDE - V1.7 - 11-Sep-88
Clint Pulley's Quick n Dirty Editor, version 1.7. This one runs under MDOS versions 1.01, 1.06, and 1.08 (and probably later versions, too). It fixes several bugs from the previous version.

MDM5- V1.12 - 10-Sep-88
Myarc Disk Manager for use with HFDC controller only.

RLE-MyArt - 04-Sep-88
A utility to convert RLE to MyArt file format. Runs under M-DOS

EQUATES - 28-Aug-88
Updated equates for MDOS, matches version 1.06. Updates include new video library XOPs and bug fixes.

MENU - 27-Aug-88
Modified version of John Johnson's MENU program that runs with MDOS 1.06 or later.

TILEBREAKER - 27-Aug-88
An EA5 game that loads in GPL mode. Itcan be used with either mouse orjoystick. Originally written for the 4A by Dean Cleveland and adapted to the 9640 by Michael Riccio.

GPL - V1.03 - 20-Aug-88
GPL Interpreter v1.03. For version 1.08 of M-DOS.

MDOS - V1.08 - 19-Aug-88
Version 1.08 of MDOS.

Commercial Releases:

My-Art Coloring Book - Asgard Software
A two-disk package of pictures for My-Art that can be used as a coloring book for young children. By Cynthia Becker.

Jump-Boot v 2.0 - Disk Only Software
Latest version of Jump-Boot fast-load software for M-DOS. By Jerry Coffey.

HyperCopy-Genial Computerware
Track copier that runs under M-DOS. By Mike Dodd.

DISkASSEMBLER - T&J Software
Disk-oriented disassembler for M-DOS. By Tom Freeman.

Picture Transfer - Genial Computerware
Program to convert My-Art, GIF, RLE,TI-Artist and GRAPHX picture formats to GIF and My-Art format. By Paul Charlton.

LabelMaker - Don West Software
Don West. See this month's FYI for address information.

That's it for this issue!

FYI

In the last issue of Asgard News we presented a current list of 99/4A dealers. In keeping with the spirit of providing lists of useful information, in this issue, we'd like to list many of the TI-99/4A and Geneve hardware and software developers. There is also a short description of their major products. The date founded, if followed by "(est)" is an approximation.

Software

Name: American Software
Address: Unknown
Founded: Unknown
Owner/Manager: Unknown
Status: Inactive
Products: Entertainment software. (disk and cassette)

Name: Asgard Software
Address: P.O. Box 10306
Rockville, MD 20850
Founded: 1984
Owner/Manager: Chris Bobbitt
Status: Active developer
Products: Over 50 different products including entertainment, graphics, utility and productivity software, magazines and books. One of the largest 99/4A software manufacturers. (cartridge, cassette and disk)

Name: Databiotics
Address: P.O. Box 1194
Palos Verdes, CA 90274
Founded: 1983 (est)
Owner/Manager: Mike Evanbar, Bill Moseid
Status: Active developer
Products: Cartridge software including entertainment, utility and productivity software. One of the top 3 software manufacturers.

Name: Donaldson Software
Address: 521 Lievre Str.
Buckingham, Quebec
Canada J8L 2C2
Founded: Unknown
Owner/Manager: Floyd Donaldson
Status: Active
Products: Entertainment sdftware (cassette only)

Name: E&M Software
Address: Box 551
Oscoda, MI 48750
Founded: Unknown
Owner/Manager: Unknown
Status: Active
Products: Productivity software. (inquire)

Name: Genial Computerware
Address: P.O. Box 183
Grafton, MA 01519
Founded: 1987
Owner/Manager: Peter Hoddie, Corson Wyman, Barry Traver
Status: Active
Products: Graphics, utility, productivity and database software. (disk)

Name: Great Lakes Software
Address: 804 E. Grand River Ave.
Howell, MI 48843
Founded: 1985
Owner/Manager: Unknown
Status: Active
Products: Graphics software. (disk)

Name: Harrison Software
Address: 5705 40th Pl.
Hyattsville, MD 20781
Founded: 1987
Owner/Manager: unknown
Status: Active
Products: Music and entertainment software. (disk)

Name: Jackson Software
Address: 34 Village Ct.
Laconia, NH 03246
Founded: Unknown
Owner/Manager: P. Volkert
Status: Unknown
Products: Entertainment software (cassette or disk)

Name: McCann Software
Address: P.O. Box 34160
Omaha, NE 68134
Founded: 1986 (est)
Owner/Manager: John McCann
Status: Unknown (assumed active)
Products: Graphics and some business software, Avanti-99 Forth card. (disk)

Name: MG (formerly Millers Graphics)
Address: 1475 W. Cypress Ave.
San Dimas, CA 91773
Founded: 1982
Owner/Manager: Craig Miller
Status: Inactive
Products: Utility and entertainment software, books. (cassette and disk)

Name: Nameloc Software
Address: 3971 S.E. Lincoln
Portland, OR 97124
Founded: 1986
Owner/Manager: Paul Coleman
Status: Active
Products: Graphics software (disk)

Name: Not-Polyoptics
Address: unknown
Founded: 1981
Status: Active
Products: Entertainment software (disks, cassette)

Name: Texaments
Address: 244 Mill Rd.
Yaphank, NY 11980
Founded: 1984
Owner/Manager: Steve Lamberti
Status: Active
Products: Graphics and database software. One of the largest 4A software manufacturers. (disk)

Name: Tigercub Software
Address: 156 Collingwood Ave
Columbus, OH 43213
Founded: 1983
Owner/Manager: Jim Peterson
Status: Semi-active
Products: Hundreds of utility, music, entertainment, miscellaneous programs. (cassette and disk)

Name: Trio+ Software
Address: P.O. BOX 115
Liscomb, Iowa 50148
Founded: 1985 (est)
Owner/Manager: Unknown
Status: Active
Products: Graphics and music software (disk)

Hardware

Name: Bud Mills Services
Address: 166 Dartmouth Dr.
Toledo, OH 43614
Phone: (419)385-5946
Founded: 1985 (est)
Owner/Manager: Bud Mills
Status: Active
Products: Memory cards, a GRAM card (cartridge emulation)

Name: Corcomp Inc.
Address: 2211-G Winston Rd.
Anaheim, CA 92806
Phone: (714)956-4450
Founded: 1983
Owner/Manager: Jackarie Sagouspi
Status: Active
Products: Disk controller, memory cards, interface cards, multi-function board, expansion options. Largest TI hardware company.

Name: Dijit Systems
Address: 4345 Hortensia Str.
San Diego, CA 92103
Phone: (619)295-3301
Founded: 1984 (est)
Status: Active
Products: 80-column card, display devices.

Name: Myarc Inc.
Address: 241 Madisonville Rd.
Basking Ridge, NJ 07920
Phone: (205) 854-5843
Founded: 1983
Owner/Manager: Jack Riley, Lou Phillips
Status: Active
Products: 99/4A compatible computer, disk controllers, memory boards, interface boards. Many highly technical products.

Name: Rave 99
Address: 112 Rambling Rd.
Vernon, CT 06066
Phone: (203)871-7824
Founded: 1984 (est)
Status: Active
Products: Replacement keyboards, memory cards, interface boards.

Tips

This is an irregular column that discusses tips for using Asgard Software products.

PrEditor: While it is an outstanding text editor, there is no command to print a text file to disk (as the PF function in TI-Writer works). However, all isn't lost. There IS a way to print a text file, just not an obvious one. Press CTRL-S to save a file, but instead of the filename enter the device name of your printer (for example "PIO"). The text will go to your printer instead of the disk file.

Recipe Writer 2.0: The Convert Recipe function of Recipe Writer allows you to convert the serving sizes of any recipe. It can be confusing in its use, though. This function multiples the number you enter by the quantity expressed in decimal form, starting in the first column of each line of the ingredient list. If you want a smaller recipe, for instance, one 1/3 of the size, enter the number ".33". If you want to triple the size of the recipe, enter "3". This is detailed in the instruction manual. What isn't mentioned is that this number can be anything - not just an ingredient. More usefully, it can be the original serving size of the recipe! At the bottom of your recipe, for example, you could enter "4.0 people". Then, whenever you convert the recipe the serving size of the recipe will always be accurate.

New Versions

This is a column listing new versions of Asgard Software products. Send all update requests, and make checks payable to:

Asgard Software
P.O. Box 10306
Rockville, MD 20850

PrEditor, Version 1.2: Asgard Software is pleased to announce a new version of its popular PrEditor programmer's editor, which has been shipping since Nov. 20, 1988. This new version mainly consists of fixes to several bugs in the previous version, and substantial speed improvements to the screen display - up to 300% on a 99/4A and 500% on a Myarc Geneve 9640. PrEditor v1.2 also features a somewhat streamlined Configure program, and more gracefully quits when run through Extended BASIC (as with the Funnelweb environment). Because the additions have been slight, and the manual addendum is short, the new version is available for $1.50. Users should return their original program disk to receive the updated version.

EZ-Keys Plus: After a long wait, Asgard began shipping EZ-Keys Plus at the end of October. The new version features dozens of new additions and changes - including auto-checksum checking, built-in assembly screen-dump and disk cataloger, added routines for programmers, additional macro functions, many new utilities for creating custom versions and saving and loading macros to disk, and different memory models that permit, among other things, using high-memory for assembly and low-memory for storing Extended BASIC programs (8K for XB and 24K for assembly). This remarkable new version features a greatly expanded, and clearer manual. It is available to EZ-Keys owners for $5.00 plus the return of the original program disk.

Batch-It Manual: Purchasers of the first run of Batch-It received a manual with a few typographical errors (see Bug Reports for corrections). The new manual with the corrections listed in that section may be obtained from Asgard Software free of charge by just returning the old manual.

Quick-Run Manual: Similarly, the first version of the Quick-Run manual contained an example that lacked a statement which would make it non-functional on some computers. The changes to the example are listed in the Bug Reports section, but a new manual with changes made may be obtained by returning the old manual to Asgard Software.

The News

Hard Drive Prices to Rise

Hard disk industry sources report that the large amount of spare capacity in the hard disk industry, characterized by increasingly lower prices for 20 to 380Mb hard drives, will soon be reduced. The CEO of Micropolis Corp., Stuart Mabon, said that increased demand will start to mop up extra capacity and restore profit margins. The prices for 5 1/4" hard drives will, in the short term, rise because manufacturers are switching to 3 1/2" hard drives [Ed. note: the Myarc HFDC is capable of controlling both sizes], and production should diminish. However, as the popularity of the 3 1/2" models increases, demand for the 5 1/4" drives should drop,

along with prices. What should you do if you are planning to expand to hard drives? Either buy now or buy a year from now as prices start to go down again, or otherwise pay higher prices on everything except the oldest 5 1/4" hard disk drives.

RAM-Chip Reprise

The RAM-chip shortage, which we reported in the last issue, looks like it is here to stay despite reports from chip industry sources. Texas Instruments, the largest domestic RAM-chip manufacturer, has sued Micron Technologies, the second largest, for patent violations (much as it sued a number of Japanese companies 2 years ago). Because Micron depends on RAM-chips for so much more of its income then TI, an unfavorable ruling could cripple it, and a quarter of the domestic supply of RAM-chips could disappear, hurting computer and peripheral makers even more. Also, plans for a RAM-chip manufacturing consortium, sponsored by TI and the U.S. government, have apparently fallen through. RAM-chip prices have been soaring in recent months, with some manufacturers, such as Apple, announcing price increases - reversing the long-term trend towards more powerful computers at lower prices. Whether this will be a short-term or long-term consequence remains to be seen. Robert Howard, the inventor of the dot-matrix printer, long-time computer industry entrepreneur, and a partner in several deals with Japanese firms, offered his own insight into the problem; "The U.S. government has imposed its lack of understanding of the way business is done and has imposed a terrible hardship on all U.S. computer equipment manufacturers. It's ten to one hundred times as costly to the United States in both business production and actual manufacturing costs as a result of their tampering in that situation."

Fortran for M-DOS in the works

LGMA Products (Box 210, RD 4, Coopersburg, PA 18036), recently gave us a test copy of their newest version of Fortran 99 - that runs entirely within the M-DOS environment. Fortran 99 is a true compiler for the 99/4A (and now the Geneve) that compiles Fortran IV programs into 9900 code. It is only marginally more difficult to write in then Extended BASIC, but produces programs equal to c99 and Forth in speed. The new version of Fortran 99 runs entirely within the M-DOS environment, features a routine librarian, and will soon have extensions for higher resolution graphics, support for byte data, and the ability to make larger programs. No word yet on eventual availability or price.

Modem Prices Plunge!

Compuserve users are probably aware of the news by now. As predicted in the last issue of Asgard News - modem prices have plunged, even before expected. On-Line Store (805-650-0188, 3037 Golf Course Dr., Ventura, CA 93003), which is found on Compuserve's Electronic Mall, is offering 300/1200/2400 Baud, Hayes compatible modems for $95.23 plus $5.00 S&H (call for price confirmation before ordering). More spectacularly, they are selling 4800 baud modems for $202.23! That is less expensive then most manufacturer's 2400 baud modems. With prices at this level, many users will be making the switch to 2400 and even 4800 baud telecommunications very soon if they haven't already. Many TI BBSs are now offering 2400 baud service, and all networks offer 2400 with some offering 4800 and even 9600 baud service. Those using paid networks will find that the formula for the lower baud rates doesn't often apply at the higher speed - Compuserve and GEnie are the same rate at 2400 baud ($12.00/hr), and GEnie becomes more expensive then Delphi at that rate as well.

Bud Mills Releases PEB Cartridge card

Bud Mills Services (16 Dartmouth Dr., Toledo, WA 43614), maker of the popular Horizon RAM-disk, has announced the P-GRAM Card. This remarkable device allows you to do what many people have wanted to do for years - put their most commonly used cartridges in the Peripheral Expansion Box and off their desks. The P-GRAM Card comes with 72K of battery backed memory (along with 72K of non-battery backed memory for use with other applications), where you can put such popular cartridges as Extended BASIC, Multiplan and the Editor/Assembler module all in one place, accessible from a single menu. The card includes software to vacuum out the modules to disk, as well as software to load the saved modules into the card. Technical users will note that the card allows them to modify saved modules, and screen the operating system of the 99/4A to their hearts content. This card also optionally includes a clock for use with software that can utilize it (Telco, and some BBS software mainly). Available in kit form (for $150), or fully assembled and tested (for $180 - $20 extra for the clock in either version), this device will make using the 99/4A a much more pleasurable experience.

Calendar Maker Utilities to be late

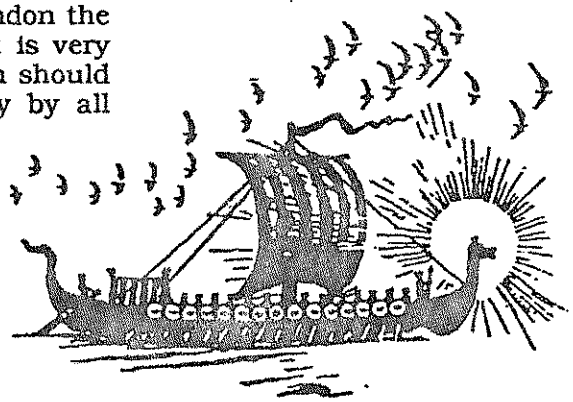
The Calendar Maker Utilities package, previously announced in Asgard Software's Fall catalog has been delayed because of other commitments by its authors - Ed Johnson and Chris Bobbitt. This companion to the very popular Calendar Maker 99 allows CM99 users to create new fonts, border styles, month/year files, and print out art. It will even create a universal data file where you enter text once and merge it into as many calendars as you want later (good for birthdays and annual events). Expected to be completed before the middle of January, 1989, this package is completely integrated into the Calendar Maker 99 program, and will retail for $12.95.

Triton Sold!

Triton Products Corp., the largest distributor of TI-99/4A related software and hardware (the one TI entrusted with the bulk of the remaining inventory of new TI products for the 4A), has recently been sold to Ashton-Tate, one of the largest software companies. Ashton-Tate, which also owns Infocom (which quit manufacturing TI-99/4A products soon after it was purchased by Ashton-Tate), has made Triton the official distributor of all Infocom products, as well as a major distributor of its own software (the DBase series, Multimate, etc.). While Triton has no immediate plans to abandon the TI-99/4A community (it is very profitable), this situation should be watched very closely by all anxious 99/4A owners.

Asgard Moving

Time to get out your Rolodex - as of January 1st, 1989, Asgard Software and Asgard Publishing's new phone number is going to be (703)255-3085. Our mailing address (P.O. Box 10306, Rockville, MD 20850) will remain the same. We've had to move to larger facilities because of the tremendous growth we've experianced over the last two years. Our new location (in Virginia) features three times the work space and 8 times the storage space of our current Maryland office. We are still located in the Washington D.C. metropolitan area. Our new facilities will permit us to increase our stock (and hence reduce the time needed to fill orders), as well as our manufacturing capability. It will also give Asgard News and other Asgard Publishing periodicals expanded pre- and post-production facilities - crucial before Asgard News can go to a bi-monthly or monthly format. Finally, the additional space will allow us to set up an Asgard BBS - which will be announced within the next six months. Our continued growth is a reflection of the support you've given us since Asgard started operations in 1984. We hope to repay this support with even better and more comprehensive service in the years to come. Thank you for making this possible.



Rumors

The following column is devoted to all those bits of information that haven't quite graduated to "news" status yet - either the items and issues discussed in this section are unconfirmed or they are incomplete. Asgard Publishing takes to responsibility for incorrect information, and will happily publish a correction if necessary.

Triton to sell Myarc Products

Triton Products Corp. has recently expressed its intention to resume marketing selected Myarc products after a 2 year hiatus. Triton originally quit selling Myarc's equipment, supposedly, because of supply difficulties, and not because, as widely presumed, they intended to release the Triton Turbo XT PC clone. Initially, Triton will only be carrying the extremely popular Hard & Floppy Disk Controller card, and perhaps some of Myarc's memory cards. Discounting of these items is unlikely unless Tenex, Myarc's only other major distributor, enters into a price war with Triton to retain its share of Myarc products currently sold. This move by Triton should do wonders for Myarc's financial health, as well as permit much wider distribution of some of their products.

More TI-Base

TI-Base has become one of the most popular programs for the 4A in recent months, and rumor has it that they are working on a new version to deal with the many bugs that have been found in the program. The new version, expected in the first quarter of '89 is available by returning the

original program disks, and $7.95, to the manufacturer. The word at this time is also that the manual has been cleaned up extensively. The manufacturer claims that over 1500 copies of this program have been sold - making it one of larger hits this year.

More First-Base

First-Base has arrived, after the lengthy delay, and the jury is still out as to whether it was worth the wait or not. While a formal evaluation will be required (and should be out soon in other TI periodicals), we were rather impressed with the manual, unlike TI-Base. While the packaging isn't particularly impressive, the manual seems to be clear in everything except the report generator section, which looks like an afterthought and desperately needs an example. It also has its share of typographical and grammatical errors. No word yet on how the program functions, but early reports state that it is about as buggy as TI-Base, and sorting the index is extremely slow, even on a hard-drive. Some of the noted bugs include ones in the delete record section of the program and in the report generator (which eats the last character without exception). Genial Computerware claims the program was extensively beta tested prior to release.

Desktop Publisher Expected

The rumor had it that Great Lakes Software planned to introduce a desktop publishing program at the Chicago show. While it didn't materialize as we hoped (and the owners didn't discuss it), chances are that something of that nature will appear from them in the not-too-distant future. Desktop publishing on the 4A has a long and varied history, and most such programs are pretty primitive compared to PC equivalents (not to mention Macintosh software). However, several companies are working towards that goal, and 1989 should provide some revolutionary developments in the field (including several from this manufacturer). A desktop publishing standards conference should be held by interested manufacturers to coordinate file formats, but chances of that are slim. Most likely defacto standards will emerge from the most popular programs - and converter programs will be quite popular.

Myarc said to be lowering Geneve Status

Sales of the Myarc Geneve supposedly have stalled because of the scarcity of Geneve-specific software, as well as the lack of support from software manufacturers (tied to the lack of technical documentation on the Geneve from Myarc). While this would have been disastrous a few months ago, now that Myarc has a hit with its HFDC card (see Editorial for more information), they have evidently lowered the priority of Geneve development. Discussions with several Geneve dealers confirm that the general impression is that Myarc isn't planning much further development beyond the projects explicitly announced, and that even many of those will never see the light of day. Further, Myarc is scaling back promotion of the machine to concentrate resources on the highly-profitable HFDC. Because of the many headaches the machine has caused, Myarc could be tempted to abandon it if it doesn't become profitable again. Some of the headaches involving the machine were apparently self-inflicted - there are critical bugs in the hardware itself that make using more then 512K in the machine difficult and more then 1Mb impossible. Without a lot of interest in the machine, it isn't in Myarc's interest to spend a lot of money to correct them. Since M-DOS software tends to be large anyway, this could put severe restraints on the future viability of M-DOS. After trying to work with it, several software developers would like to just throw M-DOS away and develop a new, more memory-efficient DOS. However, without a large base of available machines, such an approach could never be done except on a hobbyist level. The chicken-before-the-egg problem continues to haunt the Myarc Geneve.

Current Versions

Program	Vers.	Last Upd.
Balloon Wars	1.15	1/1/86
Column Attack	1.0	n/a
High Gravity	2.3	5/1/88
Legends	1.1	4/1/88
Missile Wars	1.0	n/a
Haunted Mine	2.0	n/a
Doom Games I	1.0	n/a
Doom Games II	1.0	n/a
Volcano Fort.	1.0	n/a
Artist Enlarger	1.01	n/a
Font Writer II	2.0	8/15/87
Calendar Maker	1.05	6/1/88
Press	1.0	n/a
Recipe Writer	2.0	5/1/87
Schedule Mngr	1.2	4/15/87
Stamp Manager	1.1	5/1/86
Total Filer	1.0	n/a
Typewriter	1.1	n/a
Batch-It!	1.0	n/a
Bey. Vid. Chess	1.0	n/a
EZ-Keys Plus	2.0	8/15/88
Music. Synth.	1.1	11/1/86
Pre-Scan It!	1.1	10/1/86
PrEditor	1.2	12/1/88
Quick-Run	1.0	n/a
RAM*Boot	1.0	n/a
TOD Editor	3.0	3/1/87

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