DEC Opens Computer Museum: Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC), the pioneer in minicomputers, has opened a “computer museum” in the lobby and mezzanine level of its Marlboro, Massachusetts, “Tower Building.” It illustrates, through actual equipment, the evolution from calculator to microcomputers. The exhibits include precomputer devices, the four generations of digital logic used in computers, and some early digital logic used in communications, computer science, linguistics, otorhinolaryngology, and psychology.

Fujitsu Overtakes IBM In Japan: For the past thirty years, IBM has dominated data processing over the entire globe. Now, however, it is reported that in Japan Fujitsu, Ltd, has overtaken IBM in sales. Fujitsu and several other Japanese computer suppliers are now preparing a massive onslaught into the US and European markets.

IEEE Local Network Standard Moves Ahead: The IEEE Local Network Standards Committee expects to have a draft of its standard by year’s end. At this time, it appears that the Ethernet system, proposed by Xerox, Digital Equipment Corporation, and Intel, will not be adopted as the standard. The reasons for this are that Ethernet is still in a preliminary-definition state with many areas not precisely defined. Further, Ethernet is highly dependent on coaxial cables and a particular modulation technique. Also, Ethernet does not have any provision for acknowledging data packets, which could lead to possible incompatibilities in error control between different manufacturer’s devices.

Random News Bits: Casio, Inc, the Japanese electronics manufacturer, has introduced a personal computer in the US. The FX-9000P can store programs directly in 4 K-byte CMOS (complementary metal-oxide semiconductor) memory cartridges (with lithium batteries) that can be removed from the unit. The basic unit is priced under $300. ...Pascal can now be considered as having “made it.” IBM has announced that Pascal will be available for IBM systems using OS/VS and VM/CMS operating systems. IBM will charge $235 a month for it. To think that most microcomputer users pay less than IBM’s monthly charge to buy Pascal outright.... A study conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found that videoterminal users suffer problems of eye strain, blurred vision, color perception, numbness, and loss of strength in their arms. These users also experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, confusion, and fatigue. The University of Southern California will offer a graduate degree in voice I/O (input/output). The curriculum includes courses in electrical and biomedical engineering, communications, computer science, linguistics, otorhinolaryngology, and psychology.

Super Computer Planned: The Ames Research Center of NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) is planning a special super computer capable of performing a billion floating-point operations per second. The computer will be designed to simulate a wind tunnel. It is expected to have 40 M words of directly addressable memory plus 200 M words of block-addressable memory. NASA wants the system operational in 1986.

US Government Shifting To Smaller Computers: The US government now has a reported 15,000 computers in operation, worth more than $5.4 billion. The trend is shifting from large, costly mainframes to smaller units. In fact, now at least two-thirds of the machines cost less than $50,000.

Ribbon Recycling: The word-processing and printer markets have created the new business of recycling printer ribbons. About fifty vendors are offering consumers recycled ribbons at a saving of as much as 60%, along with deliveries in 5 to 10 days. Several ribbon manufacturers are introducing sealed ribbon cartridges to prevent recycling. They claim that sealing improves ribbon reliability.

Microsoft Signs UNIX Agreement: Microsoft, of Bellevue, Washington, has signed an agreement with Western Electric for the rights to develop and market versions of UNIX, an operating system originated by Bell Laboratories. The Microsoft versions will be specifically designed for 16-bit microprocessors, such as the Intel 8086, Zilog Z8000, and Motorola 68000. The Microsoft version will be called XENIX. UNIX seems to be the most popular minicomputer timesharing operating system in current use. It is very popular in the educational community, probably because Western Electric sold it to educational institutions for a very low fee. However, due to its sophisticated features, UNIX has been gaining in popularity in the profes-
5-Inch Winchester Disk Drives Coming On Strong: At least a half-dozen companies will have 5-inch hard-disk drives on the market late in the first half of 1981. Latest to jump on the 5-inch disk-drive bandwagon are International Memories Inc (IMI) (the Cupertino, California, firm that marketed the first 8-inch Winchester drive) and Shugart Associates (the largest producer of floppy-disk drives). These drives typically store 5 million to 7 million bytes and sell for less than $1000 in OEM (original equipment manufacturer) quantities.

64 K-Bit Memory Devices Becoming Available: Several integrated-circuit manufacturers are currently supplying samples of the new 64 K-bit programmable memory circuits to OEMs for evaluation and development. Look to see these devices in use starting in early 1981. The introduction of these components has already caused the price of 16 K-bit devices to drop significantly; just a few months ago, these circuits cost six to eight dollars—now they are four or five dollars. Currently, the 64 K-bit memories are in the forty- to sixty-dollar range, which may drop to thirty or thirty-five dollars in production quantities.

It is expected that Japanese suppliers will dominate the 64 K-bit device marketplace. The 16 K-bit device market has been dominated by American suppliers, although the Japanese currently have 40% of that market. The demand for the 64 K-bit memories does not, as yet, appear to be very strong. However, the price erosion of the 16 K-bit memories and increasing competition from Japanese suppliers should cause the 64 K-bit memory prices to drop quickly.

Protecting The Software Copyright: Software vendors are very concerned about software being pirated by unauthorized copying. The problem is acute simply because it is very easy to duplicate cassette- and disk-based software. Furthermore, it is especially difficult to copy software stored in read-only memories.

The personal-computer user does not appear to be the cause of the problem because most of that type of pirating is for personal use, and it occurs only on a small scale without a significant impact on vendor sales. However, several software vendors are complaining that software pirates are making copies of their software packages and selling them. The software pirate frequently changes the name of the software package and may even make some minor changes so that the consumer is unaware that the software is a fraud. The practice appears to be widespread outside the US, where this kind of activity is very difficult to prevent.

As a result, software vendors are seeking ways to prevent pirating. Several are now experimenting with software techniques that cause the copied software to self-destruct if it is run on an unauthorized machine. I suspect that this will prove to be a deterrent for the experimenter and small-time thief, but the professional software pirate should be able to overcome this system.

Random Rumors: It is rumored that Intel, Motorola, and Fujitsu are all working on the development of microprocessors that will implement the IBM System/370 instruction set. Performance is expected to be comparable to an IBM 370/155. IBM is rumored to have already such an integrated-circuit version running.... Xerox is rumored to be attempting to buy Apple Computer.... Digital Equipment Corporation is rumored ready to release a 16-bit microprocessor device that will be compatible with 8080, 280, and 6800 support circuits. It is expected to have the power of a PDP-11/23. At least one company is rumored to be investigating an S-100 implementation....