Introduction to this web version

In 2012 the History Committee of the IEEE Computer Society was approached by another IEEE group asking if they could recommend someone from the early days of computers to act as a role model for a project they were considering. During the ensuing discussion I indicated that they should consult J.A.N. Lee’s *Computer Pioneers* and see if they could find someone that fit their image of a good role model.

We were later told that the book was out of print, copies on the second hand market were scarce and that it was essentially impossible to find a copy to consult. This prompted several of the Committee members to consider scanning it and putting the text on the web.

As I was one of the few that knew JAN personally (he always goes by his initials – pronounced “Jan”) I volunteered to contact him for permission to use his work and to also contact the publishing arm of the Computer Society to ask for their permission to use the material. The Computer Society readily agreed to the project and JAN also agreed “in principle” but pointed out that simply scanning the work was insufficient. He would rather see a version that could be updated and added to as time went on and as others were recognized as being pioneers in their own right.

I agreed with JAN’s suggestion and, in my spare time, began to scan the material. While never actually regretting undertaking this project, I was quickly enlightened that it was much larger than I had originally thought. The initial scanning was easy enough but the material had several problems (particularly the photographs and the small print used for the footnotes) that made an automatic text conversion difficult. Sometimes a few weeks would go by with nothing being done—then I would feel guilty and spend a few hours before letting the project “mature” for a few more weeks.

Many of the portraits have been replaced (often because I could access a color photo rather than a black and white version), updates have been done to record the many changes that resulted from pioneers receiving other awards or, more commonly, that have died since the original publication. In all cases the changes from the original are noted in an “Updates” section that has been added to the end of each entry. Under the assumption that the History Committee will nominate an individual to keep this material up to date, each update has a set of initials the person making the update and the year in which it was done.

I am old enough to not only have met many of the individual recorded here, but to also have become friends with many of them. Most were honest, hard working, pleasant individuals and those that weren’t still led interesting lives!

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