



# SMPTE Almanac

By Michael Dolan

**In this column we provide interesting historical briefs from the *Journal* articles of days past. The purpose of this column is primarily entertainment, but we hope it will also stimulate your thinking and reflection on the Society's history, how far we have come in the industry, and (sometimes) how some things never change. This is not meant to be an authoritative reference, and no attempt is made to correct any past errors or omissions of the *Journal*. We simply hope you enjoy the material. This column is sponsored by Television Broadcast Technology, Inc.**

## 25 Years Ago in the *Journal*

The May 1983 *Journal* published in "Videodisk Standards: A Software View of the Technology," by Wolfgang Bock: "...audiovisual systems can be divided into two classes: linear and nonlinear. The first is intended for collective viewing over broadcast media, thus excluding individual user control over the flow and delivery of the program. The second explicitly aims at such user control, and is therefore unsuitable for broadcast purposes...any medium that is flat, capable of storing at least one hour of television programming per side and that can be read out electronically, can be called a videodisk...plus the information encoded on the disks, which, in addition to movie sequences, may incorporate still frames (where from one to four frames are repeated in a loop), several sound channels, and, possibly, data...Which computer language should be chosen as a host for videodisk control instructions? Some are easier to read, some are easier to program, others are better production tools. Since it is necessary to incorporate only a few control constructs, it might be feasible to devise standard notation for PASCAL and a new BASIC...commands and responses to the system may be input to the system by pointing a cursor, or a light pen, or a finger, to a selected part of the video. In the future more powerful methods of pointing, such as voice input, may become available. The form used should be expressed in standard fashion. It is proposed that notation similar to the COBOL ENVIRONMENT DIVISION be devised to describe these system parameters."

## 50 Years Ago in the *Journal*

The June 1958 *Journal* published in "A Writer-Producer Looks at SMPTE," by Charles Brackett: "The late Terry Ramsaye wrote, "Showmen are never inventors and inventors are rarely showmen. Showmanship is ever concerned with exploiting the status quo and things in hand. Inventors are not

concerned with the status quo or the things in hand."...How often have you saved the industry from terrible doldrums with some brilliant new concept of picture presentation! Once, briefly, it was 3-D, then CinemaScope, then Todd-AO...How about using your talents to un-invent something?...[however] television has been the healthiest thing that ever happened to motion pictures. It has demanded new excellence and has sky-rocketed the drawing power of a great picture; it has increased the grosses of such pictures unbelievably...In your March *Journal*, for instance, there were five papers on international television and multilingual films...the arts will be so expanded in the foreseeable future that understanding and friendship between countries now separated by language and ideological differences will be infinitely simplified."

## 75 Years Ago in the *Journal*

The June 1933 *Journal* reported in "Report of the Sound Committee:" "The recording of a wider range of frequency on sound film brings into prominence certain problems that have heretofore been of considerably less importance. With high-frequency extension, distortion becomes more readily discernible, and film ground noise more noticeable... With low-frequency extension, a-c. hum becomes a more important factor, and may necessitate in many cases more effective electrical filtering. With wider frequency range, more realistic reproduction, particularly of music and sound effects, becomes a fact. The need for increase in volume range becomes increasingly urgent to effect naturalism... Although universal standardization of film processing may not be feasible at present, each producer should be in a position to formulate the requirements for best results with his own films...The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences continues its search for a truly silent camera... Effort toward decreased production costs is evidenced by economies in recording practices being employed in several Hollywood studios...(1) Recording sound on both sides of a 35-mm film and then splitting the film through the center after it has been developed. This is usually referred to as the "split film" method. (2) Splitting the standard film through the center prior to recording, by which method the 17.5-mm film is employed from the start. (3) Selecting choice takes from the sound negative prior to its processing and using the faulty sound track negative for printing dailies, tests, and other incidental purposes. This is sometimes called the "preselection" method."