Organize your BBS File Lists with BBSee
by Paul Loshuk

A review of BBSee, a Bulletin Board System (BBS) master files list manager

Are you a power BBS user? Even a moderate user? If so, take a look at BBSee, a new and exciting program by local author Martin Vallevand.

BBSee's main premise is that most BBSs compile a master listing of all files the board carries (e.g. ALLFILES.ZIP, on the PUB). The idea is that you can download these master files for later review.

As the number and size of BBSs grow, however, not only do these files take up more and more disk space, but keeping track of them and what's in them becomes increasingly difficult. Enter BBSee.

BBSee Saves Space Intelligently

One of the great features of BBSee is the intelligent way it imports file names and descriptions, saving space without losing any information. It does this by screening out all duplicate file names, while remembering which boards the

> *"As the number and size of BBSs grow...keeping track of what's in them becomes increasingly difficult."*

duplicates were on. It also keeps the longest file description found for a particular file. For example, most BBSs will carry common files such as PKZ110.EXE. BBSee, in its database, will only have one record for PKZ110.EXE, but will

include in the record the name of every BBS on which PKZ110.EXE was found as well as the longest comment.

BBSee Saves Time

With BBSee, you do not need to keep re-importing the entire master file list from your favourite boards. You can capture to .LOG files the (N)ew files listings, or if you use offline mail readers, you can quickly and easily import the NEWFILES.DAT files in your .QWK files.

Or consider the following: You are certain you remember one of your favourite BBSs having a file called xxx.zip but you can't remember which

Lookin' Through the Window
by Jackson Hibbler

The April meeting's presentation by Microsoft

It took me a while to figure out just what was happening! I thought I was going to hear about Windows 3, so why was Bob Scowcroft telling us about Excel 3? Finally I realized Bob wasn't just showing off Microsoft's latest cure for Lotus, he was showing off one of the first products designed to take advantage of Windows 3, their latest cure for DOS!

More than just Multitasking

The deeper he got into his demo the more new stuff showed up. I don't mean just new Excel features, I mean

new programs! There was Word for Windows being hauled on board to dress up the numbers with some fancy text. Then some of the result was shoved through a GANTT chart run out by Project for Windows. Then the whole squeezed through PowerPoint to look like a set of slides...all in real time...all "live": every modification trickling back down or carried forward as we went along, back, under and over!

Hey! This was a lot more than just multitasking...this was smart multitasking: do a little of this...take a little from

Send Me a Letter   *by Lynda Simons*

Due to illness, Bonnie Carter has had to resign from her post as Newsletter Editor. We are very sorry to lose her, but she promises that she will still contribute articles.

May saw another change: new BBS phone numbers. The new numbers are posted on both the front and back of the newsletter. Further minor disruptions are in the wind (see p.3). We do our best to avoid them, and failing that to keep you posted. Just keep watching the PUB (our BBS) and/or the newsletter.

This is more of an announcement than an editorial as this is my first month doing the newsletter. It is now also turning into a request. Taking over from Bonnie to publish this month's newsletter, I realised how little I actually know about all but a few members of the group. There may be many reasons for this: mostly laziness I imagine! No more! Now, if I'm to produce a newsletter that is meaningful and useful to you I need to know you better. I don't need to know everything about you, just a few general things. Here are the questions that spring to mind as I rush to get these words typed into my computer to meet my deadline.

Are you very young (under 30) or the other thing (over 30-something)? Are you an end-user, a programmer, an engineer and are you a professional or an amateur in any or all of these areas? What do you use your computer for, and what would you like to use it for? What have you enjoyed most about the OPCUG newsletter in the past and what would you like to see in the future?

There are probably other better questions I could ask and in time, no doubt I will. But these will do to be going on with. Do write and let me know some of the answers and anything else you think I should know. You can use the PUB, or if you are one of the 30% of members who don't use the BBS, write me a letter! You can give it to me at the meeting or mail it in.

I'm looking forward to hearing from you.□

BBSee... *continued from page 1*

one. The old-fashioned way, you could find the various ZIP's of the file listings, unzip them, LIST them, and search through them one by one until you find the file you are looking for. Not any more! BBSee's master database of file lists means all the files from your favourite BBSs are now accessible at once.

Search Features

You can search for a specific filename, or a text string by itself, or with a qualifier, or an exception. The [+] key can tag files and these can later be viewed, deleted from the database, or used to create a download list from whichever board they are available on. The browse option allows you to flip through the filenames, almost like a Rolodex system, showing the file name, its source boards, size, upload date, and description (up to 512 characters). Search results can be displayed on the screen, or saved to a text file. Even these search-to-disk files can be imported directly into BBSee.

Catalog Option

Other features include a cata-

HP Palmtop Demo and Micrografx Designer Give-away at May Meeting

We have an added treat at the May 28th general meeting. As well as Hugh Chatfield's presentation, Carl-Henri Gomez, former OPCUG Membership Chairman, has graciously offered to demonstrate for us Hewlett-Packard's new palmtop computer. This may well be the first official showing in Canada of this amazing little computer.

Carl's company, Compufit, a medical systems integration group, is also the official sponsor of a door prize for the May meeting. The prize is expected to be Designer by Micrografx.
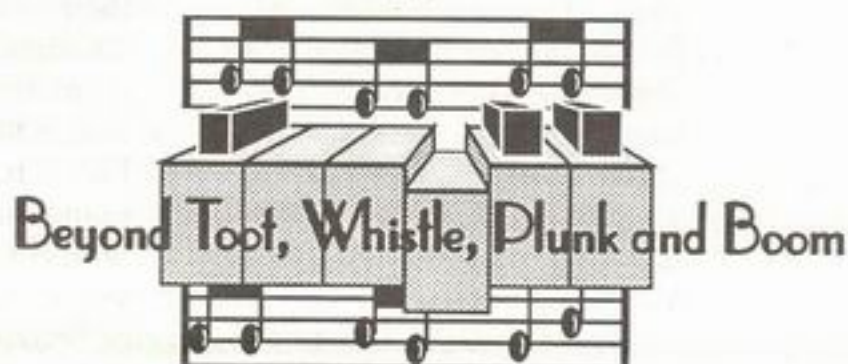
Hugh Chatfield's presentation promises to be both informative and entertaining. A self-confessed non-musician, he plans to prove that to make sweet music all you need is desire and the right electronic equipment.

Hugh will cover the genesis of the MIDI interface and bring us up-to-date on how it now relates to multi-media systems. He'll be bringing his equipment and may even give it the opportunity to upstage him. Should be interesting! Don't miss it. □

OPCUG presents...

On the Application of Computers to the Generation of Music

or

Beyond Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom

by

HUGH CHATFIELD

at the next meeting
8:00 p.m.

Tuesday, May 28, 1991

in the auditorium of Rideau High School
815 St. Laurent Blvd., Ottawa

Calendar (subject to change)

June — DATAEASE, a DOS-based relational database management system

August — IBM: Celebration of the 10th anniversary of the release of the first IBM-PC

September — VIRUSES & COPYRIGHTS: presentation by the RCMP

June Meeting- Change of Date and Location

Please note that due to Ottawa Board of Education renovations to Rideau High School, our June meeting has had to be moved to a slightly different day and place.

Watch out for details in next month's newsletter and on the PUB.□

No Meeting in July

Just a reminder to help you plan your summer. OPCUG doesn't meet in July.□

The DOS Environment
by Robert Parkinson

The following is the next section of a very long article which explains in depth the intricacies of the DOS Environment. The full 40 page treatise is available on the PUB in the Text file section in a file called ENVIRON.ZIP. This month's excerpt comes from the section titled "The COMSPEC Variable and the PATH, SET, APPEND and PROMPT COMMANDs".

The COMSPEC Variable

Let me start this section by first disposing of the semantics. APPEND, PATH, PROMPT and SET are shown in the DOS manual as "commands", whereas COMSPEC is shown as an environmental "variable". Having said this, it is also correct to say that AP-PEND, PATH and PROMPT may be considered to be "variables" as they appear as such in the DOS environment. Nevertheless, to avoid unnecessary confusion, I will use the nomenclature from the DOS manual.

These five DOS variables or commands are only ones that a user can normally employ from the command line or a batch file to alter the Master Environment Block. Bear in mind that there are other very useful DOS commands such as SUBST.EXE, AS-SIGN.COM, JOIN.EXE and SHARE.EXE that alter the underlying DOS "working environment" in a general sense, but they do not alter the Master Environment Block itself. I stress the word "normally" in regard to the five we are going to discuss, as there are some excellent non-DOS utilities such as SETENV.EXE, SU-PERSET.EXE and others that will give you at least some of

that capability and more. I will briefly discuss each of those five, but I am assuming that you are familiar with their basic usage. While they all impact on the environment, their syntax is not identical. Of the five, only AP-PEND is an "external" command, but there are other differences between them that you should be aware of.

COMSPEC

Why do we really need the COMSPEC variable or the SHELL command at all? Well, if you boot from your hard drive and keep COM-MAND.COM in the root directory of that drive, and if you don't want to expand the default environment space, you certainly do not need either one of them. However, the transient portion of COM-MAND.COM is loaded into memory just below the 640KB "user memory" ceiling. That memory area is often overwritten by larger application programs. This transient portion of COMMAND.COM is the section that processes the "internal" DOS commands, governs batch file processing and controls program loading. It is therefore not needed by application programs after the loading process is underway. It is the resident portion of COMMAND.COM at the bottom of low memory that controls program termination (both normal termination and "aborts" or "abends"). After the application program terminates, DOS checks to see if the transient portion of COM-MAND.COM is still valid. If not, the DOS kernel reloads this transient part and to do this it has to find the COM-

MAND.COM file. It looks to the COMSPEC (COMmand SPECification) variable to find the path to it.

On bootup, DOS automatically sets COMSPEC to the root directory of the boot drive (hard or floppy) actually used. Try it yourself by booting from a floppy system disk with no AUTOEXEC.BAT file, but with a one-line CON-FIG.SYS file that has the statement "SHELL=C:\DOS\COM-MAND.COM /P" or the equivalent path to the hard disk location where you keep COMMAND.COM. Then look at the environment with "SET". Contrary to what you might expect, you will see the entry "COMSPEC=A:\COM-MAND.COM". Thus you can see that the first path used in the SHELL statement has absolutely no effect on the COM-SPEC path. In your AUTO-EXEC.BAT file you can override this DOS default COM-SPEC path setting if you wish by inserting a line such as "SET COM-SPEC=C:\DOS\COM-MAND.COM" near the end of that file.

If you are using DOS 3.2 or later, you can also use a second "C:\DOS" path in the CONFIG.SYS "SHELL" statement to set the COMSPEC variable for the system, thus making any "SET COM-SPEC=" line in your AUTO-EXEC.BAT unnecessary. For example, you could use the statement "SHELL=C:\DOS\COM-MAND.COM C:\DOS /E:1024 /P". However, you should be aware that, if you do use a second path, DOS will immediately check to see if COMMAND.COM is really

there, so you cannot cater for a RAM drive by putting something like "D:\" into the "SHELL" statement, as you haven't yet copied COMMAND.COM to the RAM drive. You will certainly get an error message and will eventually hang the system with a "Cannot load COMMAND, system halted" message. If you want to use COMMAND.COM from a RAM drive, for faster reloading time, leave out the second "C:\DOS" path in the "SHELL" command and put a new entry into your AUTO-EXEC.BAT file such as, for example, "SET COM-SPEC=D:\COM-MAND.COM", but only after you have copied COMMAND.COM to the RAM drive.

If you do decide to use the second path in the SHELL statement, you should be aware

that there is a "bug" in DOS (versions 2.0 to 4.0) that limits the length of the command. The limit is that there can be no more than 33 characters (counting spaces) after the end of the actual command processor name (i.e. the third "M" in "COMMAND.COM"), including all parameters, second path, etc. This will normally not present a problem, the example I used above uses only 18 characters, unless you keep COMMAND.COM in some distant subdirectory requiring a path of some 21 or more characters to find.

Note that, unlike the SHELL statement, the COMSPEC variable, not being a command itself, requires the use of the "SET" command. As everything following the equals sign is treated as a string, rather than a command, you are not able to use any of the COMMAND.COM parame-

ters such as "/E:nnnn", etc.

You can change the COM-SPEC variable from the DOS command line or from a batch file with a "SET COM-SPEC=[drive] [path] [file-name]" command. However, unlike PATH and APPEND, use of "COMSPEC" by itself will not display the current setting. It will just return a "Bad command or file name" message.

If you wish to use an alternative command processor like 4DOS.COM in place of COMMAND.COM, you will have to alter both the SHELL statement and the COMSPEC variable to refer to the new processor, it's location, the desired "switches" to be used, etc. The documentation should provide you with full details on how to do this.□

Next month, the PATH command.

BBSee...*continued from page 2*

log option, which will read the files on a floppy, and associate the comment contained in the master database to any files you have obtained from any of your specified BBSs. You can label floppies from within BBSee, and disks can also be un- catalogued. You can sort the catalog by filename or by volume and can save it to disk as a pure ASCII file. These files can also be imported by BBSee, which allows people to swap each other's catalog listings.

DOS Shell

At all times, aDOS shell is available, as well as help. There is also a Telix-like .USE file created by BBSee detailing the results of any read-ins it does of any BBS file listings or

NEWFILES.DAT from .QWK packages; including elapsed time, files added, modified, and skipped.

Set-up

The BBSee setup program will guide you through a selection of directories where you can locate key files . You alsohave the option of specifying up to 10 file extensions, 20 words, and 5 word pairs that, will cause BBSee not to include the corresponding file/description in the master database. (examples would be .GIF, .BMP, "wallpaper", "demo", and "bbs + door").

How To Get BBSee

The first release of BBSee, v. 1.1, is available on the PUB in the files BBSEE11A.ZIP (main

program) and BBSEE11B.ZIP (supplemental utilities). The author can be reached on Synapse BBS, or write to Martin Vallevand, TAC systems, Suite 100, 56 Fourth Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 2L1. Mr. Vallevand welcomes any comments or suggestions for future improvements and enhancements.

BBSee is truly a beneficial tool for BBS users. Take a look for yourself. Once you do, the BBS world may never look quite the same again.□

Paul Loshuk is a University of Ottawa business student. As part of the BBSee beta test team he became known as the "Cosmetician" and is in many ways responsible for BBSee's final appearance.

Paradox Preferred   -selected messages from the PUB

Msg#:25615 *GENERAL MESSAGES* 05-04-91 23:23:11
From: ANDRE LEFRANCOIS
To: JOHN WHELAN (Rcvd)
Subj: PARADOX

I was a dedicated dBASE programmer and decided to switch to Paradox in order to cut my development time. Programming in dBASE and programming in PAL are two very different things. PAL is object oriented (which accounts for the faster development time) and must be approched in a much different way than dBASE.

The best approach to learn PAL is this. Do not try to use it as you would dBASE. Forget dBASE. Clear the mind and read the PAL programming manual from scratch. It takes about two months to get up to speed, but the increase in programming productivity is amazing. Our site is now 100% Paradox in a networked

environment and life as a programmer is great. I cannot imagine being able to make ends meet using dBASE for true relational applications.

Paradox screams on a network. One issue which is rarely discussed is record based database VS set based databases on a network. All larger scale databases which use an SQL type query engine (ie: DB2, Oracle,...) are set oriented. Paradox is also set oriented, which makes it easy to use in a network environment, going across multiple platforms. I can image the problems that record based systems will have intergrating into networks. That is the reasons Paradox, Rbase and Dataease are the leaders in the networked environments...they are all set based, not record based.

Prediction: Watch dBASE and others (but not Foxpro) go set

oriented within the next two years...

Msg#:25621 *GENERAL MESSAGES* 05-05-91 10:33:37
From: CHRIS TAYLOR
To: ANDRE LEFRANCOIS (Rcvd) Subj: REPLY TO MSG# 25615 (PARADOX)

Why "not FoxPro" ??

Msg#:25654 *GENERAL MESSAGES* 05-05-91 20:17:55
From: ANDRE LEFRANCOIS
To: CHRIS TAYLOR (Rcvd)
Subj: REPLY TO MSG# 25621 (PARADOX)

The president of the company has stated in Infoworld that Foxpro will "buck the trend" and remain a record based product in a network environment. They may develop a record base engine for networks which will be dedicated to Foxpro. Should be interesting...□

Window... *continued from page 1*

that...bring them all together...go back to any part...edit and have the changes reflected throughout. I liked it!

Remember Framework? Lotus' Symphony? You know, those wonderful, all-in-one, jack-of- all-trades, and yes, master-of-none "integrated" programs? It's that last part: master-of-none that doomed them. This was different. This was about getting the "masters" together: sharing their data, accepting each other's output. Working together. No special input/output conversions. Bob made it look pretty neat. Yes, he was still using

programs all-of-a-family. But the mechanism that was making them work together wasn't exclusive to any of them...they were all hooking into Windows 3. There was the smart link.

And there was the promise: if Microsoft can hook their disparate programs into Windows 3, others' programs could be modified to hook into it as well...and presumably all work happily together ever after!

OLE and DDE

Naturally, question period probed the arcana of how interprocess communications

and "seamless" data exchanges could be done between heretofore incompatible programs. Bob described it as an "Edit/Copy...Edit/Paste/Link" cycle. The technical term from Microsoft is Object Linking and Embedding (OLE). This is their new extension of the Dynamic Data Exchange (DDE) protocol they hope will fix the problems of "missing links" that weren't addressed by DDE when some important part of the whole was "off line" for a while. (Refer to Martin Heller's "Future Documents" article in the May BYTE for a good, if less san-

guine, discussion of OLE.) And what about integrating across platforms? (TrueType, just like on the Mac, is coming--"real soon now" for both of 'em).

Will Windows Last?

So what kind of system is required to run these new "Windows-aware" programs? (Big! 4 megabytes of RAM on a 386SX minimum for acceptable results...5 or 6 megabytes and a 386DX or 486 is better..just "better"?) Remember OS/2? It had Threads, DDE, "Interprocess communications", and needed two and a

> *"Will Microsoft's real replacement for DOS please stand up and wave?"*

half megabytes of RAM! All that on a 286! We know where that one has gone.

Will Windows 3 make it?

Bob says 68 million DOS users can't be wrong. My question is whether 68 million users can be moved. As far as DOS programs are concerned, he admits we will be better off staying with DOS 5 (presumably multitasking virtual 8086 machines on a 386 à la Deskview). But deaf and dumb multitasking on a 386 is not going to sell Windows 3. Upgrading our favourite programs so they can work together just might...even at the price.

Can Windows 3 carry it off? Can we make it work for us? Everyone who is curious about this should read Mark J. Minasi's BEYOND DOS article in the May '91 issue of BYTE to get a feel for life with

Windows 3. You see, there remains a skeleton in DOS' closet: the 80286. Windows 3 was written to work with that processor's segmented memory and its two "tiny" 64K byte program stacks. Until that ghost can be exorcised-- by a 386-aware Windows (or a reincarnated OS/2.../3?)-- things still seem pretty crowded for all of that smart interprocess communication between multiple programs on board. And by the time Windows is up to speed on a 386, IT will probably look a lot like a whole new operating system...rather than just a DOS "front end"! (Will Microsoft's real replacement for DOS please stand up and wave?)

For those of you who have not had the "pleasure" of living with a Mac, Mark's article will also give you an idea of the fun you will have getting unstuck when fine-tuning your very own GUI...or just keep-

> *"... it's not for nothing GUI is pronounced 'gooey'..."*

ing it up and running when you add something new...it is not for nothing GUI is pronounced "gooey"!

Nevertheless, those who write the software we use now say they are ready to move now. A flood of Windows-aware versions, and entirely new programs are indeed on display by many vendors. Microsoft has "working models" they would love to give away, just call 232-0484. They hope to bring us over, of course. And as we begin to see how things work together when inside Windows 3, perhaps the great mass of us will begin to climb in...if we can indeed bring our familiar tools with us!□

Jackson Hibbler is a local freelance goldsmith whose growing family of computers (5 at last count) include pre-IBM-PC machines, a Mac and a Toshiba Laptop. Jackson has been a member of OPCUG since 1986 .

Beginners' Corner

At 7:00 p.m., prior to the regular monthly OPCUG meetings, special sessions are held to help beginners with any problems they have been having. If there is enough time, there is generally discussion of some topic of interest, e.g. use of DOS commands, how to take care of your computer, organization of subdirectories on a hard disk, ect.

If you have a topic you would like to have discussed, call Eric Clyde at 749-2387

OPCUG Executive

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Past Chairman, Dave Terroux	238-4859	Membership Chairman, Harald Freise	828-3411
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Beginners' sessions, Eric Clyde	749-2387	Software Assistant, John Ing	235-8132
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Can you help in Group Activities? Check those that apply.

- ❏ Programming Instruction
- ❏ Newsletter Input
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- ❏ Hardware Techniques
- ❏ Meeting Locations
- ❏ Agendas & Speakers
- ❏ Advertising
- ❏ Bulletin Board
- ❏ Other _____

Hardware Used:
- ❏ XT
- ❏ AT - 286
- ❏ 386
- ❏ 486

Modem?
- ❏ Yes
Baud:
- ❏ 300
- ❏ 1200
- ❏ 2400
- ❏ 9600

What in particular interests you in the Group?

_____