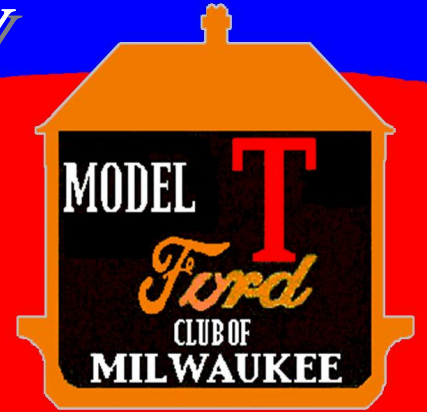




PLANETARY NEWS

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What I did on my COVID-19 Vacation 8th grade assignment

When asked how I spent my COVID-19 vacation, I like to say, "I hid in the basement". It's not far from the truth, and the vacation is not over, but nearing. Most days after breakfast I would go to the basement, the garage was rather cold, and I would take up working on my collection of antique computers. I've had an interest in computers since High School. I remember when a couple of IBM engineers came to our science class and demonstrated a "Flip-Flop" circuit made with the relatively new, transistors. It was built on a short length of 3/4 inch lumber and would alternately illuminate one of two lamps. These guys then went on to explain how this hunk of wiring could be expanded into a logic machine (computer). I was hooked. Over the years, I built or purchased a number of different computers or parts of them. A few years ago, I picked up some hardware from Lance Pauley's machine shop. One of those items is a Friden Flexowriter. This machine was used in the 1950's as a business machine to make copies of letters, transmit text over telephone wires (could have been early texting) and making copies of documents on paper tape or punch cards. This particular machine is a real mechanical marvel, with an electrical interface. I spent a lot of time cleaning and lubricating the many cams, levers, springs etal of this machine. I needed to find repair manuals and schematics for this "Writing Machine". It is amazing how much of this stuff is on the internet. After a number of months the machine came to life and would work as a type writer. During my investigation of this machine I found that during the War, the British built one of the first "Computers", they used to decipher German coded communications. AND they used a Flexowriter like the one I have as an input and output device. That inspired me to attempt to connect my Flexowriter to one of my computers. This turned into quite a project. I found out that the programming code that the Flexowriter uses to communicate is not what standard computer use today. (Go to page 3)

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