ELECTRONOTES

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NON-PHOTO BLUE AND RELATED MATTERS

-by Bernie Hutchins, March 2016

Fig. 1 shows an editor's "blue pencil". The term "blue pencil" is today more of a metaphor for editing (often over-editing), but like many such terms, there was a reality-based origin. Specifically, the offset printing and photo-copying technologies of the 1970s to 1980s did not "see" the light-blue color. Hence an official editor (employed as such) or anyone preparing printed material could write with a light-blue pencil with the assurance that when one made a black-and-white copy, all the blue would be gone. Remember, there was no digital text!

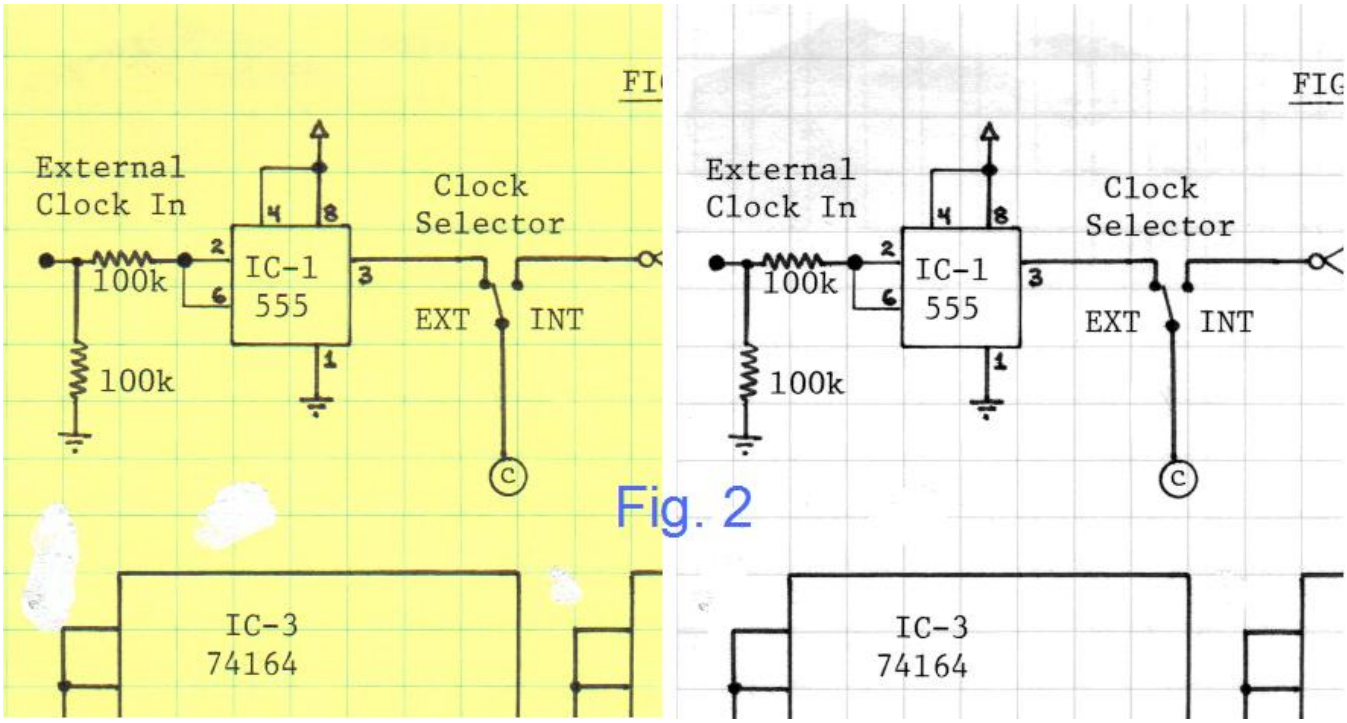

Fig. 2 shows another technique of the old days. This is from a 1977 ***Electronotes***, and is scanned directly from the original that has been in the file folder for 37 years. We show the results of scanning it in color, and in B&W, on a simple "all-in-one" printer/scanner. Neither scan looks as good as the 1977 printing did, which was sharp high-contrast B&W. Note that the diagram was done on grid paper – blue lines on yellow. This was the way we got diagrams nicely squared up. The blue on yellow paper worked well in the Xerox copier we were using – it ignored the blue, the yellow, and the white-out. So the colored scan is pretty much an example of what we often have in the files. Note that the B&W scan, the same as a photocopy if made today, shows the grid lines. Also there is a "blotch" in the upper left corner – a discoloration of the rubber cement underneath.

Speaking of rubber cement, and the stick-on corrections we often used (typed on address labels, cut out, trimmed, and stuck over the faulty text), both dry out with time. So when we open an envelope that has been in the cabinet, we generally expect the worst. At least we expect the unexpected. Sometimes, a half-page is loose. Sometimes we find the correcting "chads" scattered about. We find a "the" floating around - - where is the uncovered "hte"? When we take out a set, we have to do it with great care, top-down. Of course, some pages were perfectly typed on a single white sheet and are perfect for scanning if we had a mind to do that. But general auto-feed would be out of the question. "Repairing" a set of originals takes a roll of magic tape and an hour or more of time. Fortunately, for much of our material we have no need to reprint. We have good supplies of the original printing – and then some.

Yes, I wish I had made “make-readies” of the issues of the era when we were using a particular Xerox machine - on the machine we were then using successfully. That is, single sided copies which would have come out without the distractions on Fig. 2 and become “runable originals”. It was not evident that the technology would “improve” to the extent of seeing the blue, or that the adhesives would give out over the years. And who would have even guessed that we would still be producing Electronotes so many years later?

The examples here illustrate in general that the status of our “originals” has varied immensely, from slow-turned hand mimeograph best copies in 1972 to IBM Selectric to various word-processors (as convenient “typewriters”) to purely digital presentations today. Recently a potential customer suggested that we must have digitized versions of all the material since we make copies (imagining that this was the only way to make copies – I guess). We have gone through a lot of methods. Every few years or so we have had different capabilities and changes (some good, some not so good).

We have, I estimate, some 9000 pages, which means 9000 sheets of one-sided “original” paper, many (most) of which are paste-ups and/or also have some “make ready” versions, all told doubling the height of the pile once again. About 6000 of these are in paper form. [The remaining 3000 are free online (which I think is generous).] That’s four feet of “original” materials. Allowing further for file folders, etc., these are stored in five file cabinets drawers. And there is a foot or so of material still needing to be refilled. What a mess! It’s somewhat overwhelming.

Some years back, a customer did send me a CD of most of the older material (from copies he had purchased), which he had scanned on some institutional equipment he apparently had access too. There is little doubt that it could be done again professionally (at considerable cost and/or effort), run from salable copies. His effort was appreciated, and evidence of the effort that was input, but the result was not of a quality (in total) that could be a commercial alternative. I have no such equipment even to attempt to do that. And, of course we would want to run from repaired originals or make-readies in the cases where we have them. This is not something a casual worker could do. That is, my knowledge of what we have and where it is is necessary, and would require much effort on my part.

PLEASE – do not make a statement that digitizing everything properly has been done or would be easy, unless you are volunteering to help! (A lot could be done if we had the money, and the time.)