

1976.06.18

June 18, 1976

Dr. J. H. Laning  
130 Temple Street  
West Newton, Mass. 02165

Dear Dr. Laning:

Enclosed is a preliminary copy of a paper I presented earlier this week on the early history of programming languages. Since I mention the famous Laning/Zierliet system, I hope you can help me catch any errors before this is published.

I would especially like to receive also a copy of early documentation on the MAC language. Mark Wells says he thinks you produced this about 1958. It seems to be a well-kept secret, not appearing in Jean Sammet's book or in the ACM's "list of programming systems" published in Comm. ACM. May 1959, p. 16; there is only something called "MAC (NORWAY)" in that list, probably a language developed by Ole-Johan Dahl.

The deadline for final receipt of conference manuscripts is mid-July (although I suppose I could overshoot it by a few weeks if necessary). If you have time to send me any comments or corrections before then I will be able to insert them in the final draft.

Thanks in advance for any help you can give me.

Cordially,

Donald E. Knuth  
Professor

DEK/pw

Encl.: "The early development of programming languages"

P.S. Do any copies exist of the machine program for your Whirlwind algebraic interpreter? For several years I have been collecting 'milestones in software programs', and as I recently reviewed the literature that your system was way ahead of all others in its day. I also find it hard to understand how you could have accomplished so much in that small machine, without having anticipated programming techniques that I thought were invented much later! Thus I very much would like a copy of that program for my collection, if any copies survive anywhere. Of course I'll be glad to repay any reproduction expense.