

a memorable memo

In 1947 Los Alamos was in the throes of its postwar reorganization. Administration and Services, or A&S for short—a predecessor of Mail and Records—was wont to distribute a large number of mimeographed memos, in purple ink on plain white paper, to keep Laboratory members abreast of the latest developments.

One December day in a T-Division office, two individuals busily compiled a list of numbers, which they labeled “A&S Memorandum no. 10,742” and gave to a secretary to type for dissemination through the A&S channels.

Needless to say, once distributed this document caused a certain amount of stir and puzzlement, and at a Laboratory meeting an outraged member of the directorate suggested the perpetrator should be fired, which would free some much needed housing.

By and by the memo found its way to the AEC in Washington where it got a much better reception: A highly entertained Commissioner remarked that it was “The best thing to come out of Los Alamos yet!”

The culprits were J. Carson Mark (T Division Leader) and Stan Ulam (Group Leader).

Carson admitted later that their list had been hastily drawn and contained two “flaws”: It was confusing to begin with “a dozen” for the number 12, and they altogether overlooked the number 10.

December 18, 1947

A & S Memorandum No. 10742

To All Concerned:

For your convenience and ready reference, we have had prepared the following list of the numbers 0-100 (inclusive) in alphabetical order.

12, 8, 18, 80, 88, 85, 84, 89, 81, 87, 86, 83, 82, 11, 15,
50, 58, 55, 54, 59, 51, 57, 56, 53, 52, 5, 40, 48, 45, 44, 49,
41, 47, 46, 43, 42, 4, 14, 9, 19, 90, 98, 95, 94, 99, 91, 97, 96,
93, 92, 1, 100, 7, 17, 70, 78, 75, 74, 79, 71, 77, 76, 73, 72, 6,
16, 60, 68, 65, 64, 69, 61, 67, 66, 63, 62, 13, 30, 38, 35, 34,
39, 31, 37, 36, 33, 32, 3, 12, 20, 28, 25, 24, 29, 21, 27, 26,
23, 22, 2, 0.

FOR THE ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR