The Dozenal Society of America
Symbols, Symbols, @#$%¢&*(?! Symbols
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In May 1980, several members of the Dozenal Society of America met with Arthur Whillock of Great Britain. One of the most lively discussions Arthur raised concerned symbols. The two things we all seemed to agree upon were: first that the choice of symbols is very important, and second that EVERY idea proposed so far was imperfect.

The discussion seemed to narrow in on the following proposals for ten and eleven:

a) maintain the historical American symbols Χ and Ɛ

b) use the British symbols: ⌒ and Ɛ (rotated 2 and 3);

c) use the IBM hexadecimal digits A and B;

d) use the telephone company's symbols asterisk, *, and octothorpe, #;

e) use symbols that can be shown on a seven-element calculator display such as *H* and *L* ;

f) consider symbols that are already available both on a typewriter and to printers.

I found the discussion enlightening. I had come with preconceived notions about the best symbols to use. I left with my head spinning between the advantages and disadvantages of each of the various proposals which we discussed.

For my own use, I now believe that the telephone company's * and # are the best symbols to use at the present time. Some of the reasons that sway me are:

The telephone company is ubiquitous. Their new instruments are appearing everywhere and average people are becoming used to seeing these two symbols as some type of digit.

I have found them easy to use with pen and pencil and also with a typewriter. (I was disappointed when Mr. Whillock informed me that # is not a standard key on British keyboards. However, since it is standard in the U.S., it would seem simpler to either buy an American typewriter or to order an existing key from America than to go to the trouble and expense of having special keys made with Χ and Ɛ, or a rotated 2 and 3.) Further, if the Bell symbols become adopted world wide, we may see the # key becoming more popular. Incidentally, both * and # exist on computer keyboards as standard IBM characters.

I do not think that the IBM hexadecimal digits are convenient because of the confusion that would exist between numbers such as $2A_{twelve}$ and $2A_{sixteen}$ which equals 36_{twelve}. The hexadecimals are well established among computer people. What we do not need is any more confusion.

If we get a dozenal calculator, we could then get embroiled in the seven-element controversy. I think that this is far down the road, and not a very important question at this time.

Thus, I advocate the use of * for ten and # for eleven. Note the asterisk is like a Roman ten with a bar through it [as in the current digital conception of the "Bell" digit-ten: Χ] and the octothorpe is like the decimal number eleven with two bars through it [as in the current digital conception of the "Bell" digit-eleven: ₦]. I know that this solution is not perfect. It just seems to me to have the least drawbacks of all the proposals that I have heard.

The question of symbols is important. In the U.S. we have advocated unity (without demanding compliance) for more than 3 dozen years. Now that the various dozenal movements are in closer touch, it would be beneficial if we could agree on a single set of symbols. With this in mind, I view the world wide push by the Bell Telephone Company as a singular gift that might help to unite dodekaphiles. ⵘ

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