

ADDRESSING THE FORTH STANDARD

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**Introduction**

At the 1986 Rochester Forth Conference there have been a variety of (unofficial!) discussions about standardization of Forth and related topics. A number of people have requested serious comments, and this prompted me to write this. The intention of this paper is to present one out of very many points of view.

The standard must address different groups of people:

- Forth programmers;
- Forth vendors and their customers;
- Software project managers;

Forth programmers will either create their own variations of implementation of any standard, or modify a given system to their likings. This is not merely a possibility, it is reality. Therefore, from the Forth programmers point of view any standard can only be a referential guide for communication between themselves.

Forth vendors are not really interested in any standard, as long as there is one. They must be able to sell a 'standard system', irrespective of whether such a standard is good or bad. The crucial attribute for a standard is that it stays a standard for a significant amount of time.

The statement has been made that all the talk in the past over the 83 standard has harmed the image of Forth with project management. Such people too require a standard to be stable rather than that it is changed in a way that seems insignificant.

An extreme example of changing a standard is the update from COBOL 1 to COBOL 2: a variety of software vendors sued the standard committee for the loss in value of their products that were no longer standard.

The following statements are put here for reflection:

- there are at least as many Forth systems as there are other computer languages;
- changing a standard or talking about it harms the image of the language, whichever language it is;
- only significant enhancements, agreed upon by the majority of all people involved, may justify alterations in a standard (note that this is different from: "...always justify alterations...").

### Conclusions

Given the above, already too much I said about standards, yet I would not like to deprive you from a positive thought this has led to. The acute problem that has to be faced by most people that have interests in the standard, is that of the rapidity of change therein, not its actual contents.

What I would like to see is (yet another?) Forth system, that supplies a wordset with which it is possible to accommodate any change in a Forth standard without having to rewrite programs that have been compiled on top of this system. This requires new words and makes others obsolete. I hope to be able to show this Standard Independent Forth (SI-Forth) system in the near future.

## Chronicle of the Ad-Hoc 1986 Rochester Forth Conference Standards Committee

In keeping with the Rochester Forth Conference's Friday night tradition, numerous stalwarts found themselves thrust upon the steps of Wilson Commons at management's behest. For some unknown reason, these people who haven't had enough sleep as it is, sought a few more brews and continued wee hour discourse on Fantastic Forthian Fables. Cut off from a supply of the foamy elixir, the group had but two choices - venture upon the land for a supply, or disband and get some sleep. The latter being totally unacceptable, a collection was rapidly taken and a hand picked band of intrepid supply corpsmen sallied forth.

All was still not well, however. All the participant's zeal could not bring enough warmth to the cool morning air and the monsoon dampened steps of the Commons invited few rumps. But tradition is strong and inspires invention. The lounge of Crosby Hall came to mind and, despite protests from the warm blooded, the troupe tramped off. Upon arrival at Crosby's lounge the group found a pair already engaged in the gentlemanly art of verbal fisticuffs. Not wanting to be left out, all leapt in, creating a raucous brawl. Soon the brew arrived and with it, the promise of a loudening fray. Curiously, this was not to be. Civilization reared its ugly head with the consensus proclamation that Don Meyers should chair this rabble (Don's countenance brings to mind the village smithy - one that could rip the spreading chesnut tree out by its roots). Thus was born the Ad-Hoc 1986 Rochester Forth Conference Standards Committee.

As deliberations and bottles careened about the room, agreement was hard to obtain. Whatever someone wanted, someone else did not. Still, consensus emerged that questions about the standards and the standards formation process needed to be answered. Foolishly, having brought paper and pen, your "secretary" (for reasons little understood) scribbled down the gist of these questions. This activity has been misconstrued to the conference organizers as "taking minutes of the meeting", by some unknown participant. This report is the result of subsequent irresistible duress applied by Thea Martin.

The questions:

1. Should there be any changes to anything common to the '79 and '83 standards, unless it is important?
2. Should the next (1987) standard be a "last" standard?
3. What is the purpose of a standard for Forth? Transportability?
4. Who benefits from standardization?
5. What should be standardized?
6. Who should define a standard?
7. How should a standard be specified?
8. What is the "test suite"?

Three motions were voted on during this "committee meeting", at least one of which was unrecorded, unremembered by this secretary and voted down. The other two were recorded. First, it was resolved that if a new standard is to be made, it should be an ANSI standard. Secondly, it was moved, seconded and voted upon that "Forth Dimensions" should publish a column delineating the "state of the art" to provide the Forth community with a view of what the new standard might be. Unfortunately, it is unclear which way the vote went! It was about this time that the Ad-Hoc 1986 Rochester Forth Conference Standards Committee was busted by campus security for disturbing the peace. This latter event led to the resolution that our esteemed conference chairman, Larry Forsley, should be responsible for seeing to it that there is a place for the traditional Friday Night Crazies to get out of the weather if necessary - beyond the long arm of the law.

My sincerest apologies to any and all that don't recall events during the Ad-Hoc 1986 Rochester Forth Conference Standards Committee quite the way they are herein recorded. Next time, you bring the paper and pencil. **Please!**

yours,

Walt Pawley  
Coherced Secretary  
Ad-Hoc 1986 Rochester Forth Conference Standards Committee  
(Burp! ...)