Barometric Pressure Measurement Using Semiconductor Pressure Sensors

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ABSTRACT

The most recent advances in silicon micromachining technology have given rise to a variety of low-cost pressure sensor applications and solutions. Certain applications had previously been hindered by the high-cost, large size, and overall reliability limitations of electromechanical pressure sensing devices. Furthermore, the integration of on-chip temperature compensation and calibration has allowed a significant improvement in the accuracy and temperature stability of the sensor output signal. This technology allows for the development of both analog and microcomputer-based systems that can accurately resolve the small pressure changes encountered in many applications. One particular application of interest is the combination of a silicon pressure sensor and a microcontroller interface in the design of a digital barometer. The focus of the following documentation is to present a low-cost, simple approach to designing a digital barometer system.

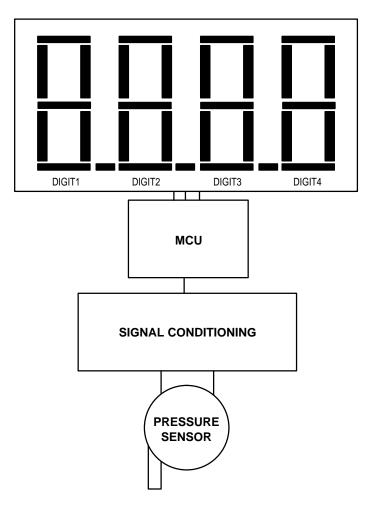


Figure 1. Barometer System



INTRODUCTION

Figure 1 shows the overall system architecture chosen for this application. This system serves as a building block, from which more advanced systems can be developed. Enhanced accuracy, resolution, and additional features can be integrated in a more complex design.

There are some preliminary concerns regarding the measurement of barometric pressure which directly affect the design considerations for this system. Barometric pressure refers to the air pressure existing at any point within the earth's atmosphere. This pressure can be measured as an absolute pressure, (with reference to absolute vacuum) or can be referenced to some other value or scale. The meteorology and avionics industries traditionally measure the absolute pressure, and then reference it to a sea level pressure value. This complicated process is used in generating maps of weather systems. The atmospheric pressure at any altitude varies due to changing weather conditions over time. Therefore, it can be difficult to determine the significance of a particular pressure measurement without additional information. However, once the pressure at a particular location and elevation is determined, the pressure can be calculated at any other altitude. Mathematically, atmospheric pressure is exponentially related to altitude. This particular system is designed to track variations in barometric pressure once it is calibrated to a known pressure reference at a given altitude.

For simplification, the standard atmospheric pressure at sea level is assumed to be 29.9 in–Hg. "Standard" barometric pressure is measured at particular altitude at the average weather conditions for that altitude over time. The system described in this text is specified to accurately measure barometric pressure variations up to altitudes of 15,000 ft. This altitude corresponds to a standard pressure of approximately 15.0 in–Hg. As a result of changing weather conditions, the standard pressure at a given altitude can fluctuate approximately ± 1 in–Hg. in either direction. Table 1 indicates standard barometric pressures at several altitudes of interest.

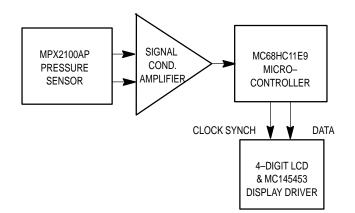


Figure 2. Barometer System Block Diagram

Table 1. Altitude versus Pressure Data

Altitude (Ft.)	Pressure (in–Hg)
0	29.92
500	29.38
1,000	28.85
6,000	23.97
10,000	20.57
15,000	16.86

SYSTEM OVERVIEW

In order to measure and display the correct barometric pressure, this system must perform several tasks. The measurement strategy is outlined below in Figure 2. First, pressure is applied to the sensor. This produces a proportional differential output voltage in the millivolt range. This signal must then be amplified and level–shifted to a single–ended, microcontroller (MCU) compatible level (0.5 - 4.5 V) by a signal conditioning circuit. The MCU will then sample the voltage at the analog–to–digital converter (A/D) channel input, convert the digital measurement value to inches of mercury, and then display the correct pressure via the LCD interface. This process is repeated continuously.

There are several significant performance features implemented into this system design. First, the system will digitally display barometric pressure in inches of mercury, with a resolution of approximately one-tenth of an inch of mercury. In order to allow for operation over a wide altitude range (0 – 15,000 ft.), the system is designed to display barometric pressures ranging from 30.5 in–Hg. to a minimum of 15.0 in–Hg. The display will read "lo" if the pressure measured is below 30.5 in–Hg. These pressures allow for the system to operate with the desired resolution in the range from sea–level to approximately 15,000 ft. An overview of these features is shown in Table 2.

Display Units	in–Hg
Resolution	0.1 in–Hg.
System Range	15.0 – 30.5 in–Hg.
Altitude Range	0 – 15,000 ft.

Table 2. System Features Overview

DESIGN OVERVIEW

The following sections are included to detail the system design. The overall system will be described by considering the subsystems depicted in the system block diagram, Figure 2. The design of each subsystem and its function in the overall system will be presented.

Table 3. MPX2100AP Electric	al Characteristics
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Characteristic	Symbol	Minimum	Typical	Max	Unit
Pressure Range	POP	0		100	kPa
Supply Voltage	٧ _S		10	16	Vdc
Full Scale Span	V _{FSS}	38.5	40	41.5	mV
Zero Pressure Offset	Voff			±1.0	mV
Sensitivity	S		0.4		mv/kPa
Linearity			0.05		%FSS
Temperature Effect on Span			0.5		%FSS
Temperature Effect on Offset			0.2		%FSS

Pressure Sensor

The first and most important subsystem is the pressure transducer. This device converts the applied pressure into a proportional, differential voltage signal. This output signal will vary linearly with pressure. Since the applied pressure in this application will approach a maximum level of 30.5 in–Hg. (100 kPa) at sea level, the sensor output must have a linear output response over this pressure range. Also, the applied pressure must be measured with respect to a known reference pressure, preferably absolute zero pressure (vacuum). The device should also produce a stable output over the entire operating temperature range.

The desired sensor for this application is a temperature compensated and calibrated, semiconductor pressure transducer, such as the Motorola MPX2100A series sensor family. The MPX2000 series sensors are available in full–scale pressure ranges from 10 kPa (1.5 psi) to 200 kPa (30 psi). Furthermore, they are available in a variety of pressure configurations (gauge, differential, and absolute) and porting options. Because of the pressure ranges involved with barometric pressure measurement, this system will employ an MPX2100AP (absolute with single port). This device will produce a linear voltage output in the pressure range of 0 to 100 kPa. The ambient pressure applied to the single port will be measured with respect to an evacuated cavity (vacuum reference). The electrical characteristics for this device are summarized in Table 3.

As indicated in Table 3, the sensor can be operated at different supply voltages. The full–scale output of the sensor, which is specified at 40 mV nominally for a supply voltage of 10 Vdc, changes linearly with supply voltage. All non–digital circuitry is operated at a regulated supply voltage of 8 Vdc. Therefore, the full–scale sensor output (also the output of the sensor at sea level) will be approximately 32 mV.

$$\left(\frac{8}{10} \times 40 \text{ mV}\right)$$

The sensor output voltage at the systems minimum range (15 in–Hg.) is approximately 16.2 mV. Thus, the sensor output over the intended range of operations is expected to vary from 32 to 16.2 mV. These values can vary slightly for each sensor as the offset voltage and full–scale span tolerances indicate.

Signal Conditioning Circuitry

In order to convert the small–signal differential output signal of the sensor to MCU compatible levels, the next subsystem includes signal conditioning circuitry. The operational amplifier circuit is designed to amplify, level–shift, and ground reference the output signal. The signal is converted to a single–ended, 0.5 - 4.5 Vdc range. The schematic for this amplifier is shown in Figure 3.

This particular circuit is based on classic instrumentation amplifier design criteria. The differential output signal of the sensor is inverted, amplified, and then level–shifted by an adjustable offset voltage (through R_{offset1}). The offset voltage is adjusted to produce 0.5 volts at the maximum barometric pressure (30.5 in–Hg.). The output voltage will increase for decreasing pressure. If the output exceeds 5.1 V, a zener protection diode will clamp the output. This feature is included to protect the A/D channel input of the MCU. Using the transfer function for this circuit, the offset voltage and gain can be determined to provide 0.1 in–Hg of system resolution and the desired output voltage level. The calculation of these parameters is illustrated below.

In determining the amplifier gain and range of the trimmable offset voltage, it is necessary to calculate the number of steps used in the A/D conversion process to resolve 0.1 in–Hg.

$$(30.5 - 15.0)$$
in-Hg * 10 $\frac{\text{steps}}{\text{Hg}} = 155$ steps

The span voltage can now be determined. The resolution provided by an 8-bit A/D converter with low and high voltage references of zero and five volts, respectively, will detect 19.5 mV of change per step.

$$V_{RH} = 5 V, V_{RL} = 0 V$$

Sensor Output at 30.5 in–Hg = 32.44 mV Sensor Output at 15.0 in–Hg = 16.26 mV Δ Sensor Output = Δ SO = 16.18 mV

$$Gain = \frac{3.04 \text{ V}}{\Delta SO} = 187$$

Note: 30.5 in–Hg and 15.0 in–Hg are the assumed maximum and minimum absolute pressures, respectively.

This gain is then used to determine the appropriate resistor values and offset voltage for the amplifier circuit defined by the transfer function shown below.

$$V_{out} = -\left[\frac{R_2}{R_1} + 1 \right]_* \Delta V + V_{off}$$

 ΔV is the differential output of the sensor.

Choosing R_{offset1} to be 1 k Ω and R_{offset2} to be 2.5 k Ω , V_{out} is 0.5 V at the presumed maximum barometric pressure of 30.5 in–Hg. The maximum pressure output voltage can be trimmed to a value other than 0.5 V, if desired via R_{offset1}. In addition, the trimmable offset resistor is incorporated to provide offset calibration if significant offset drift results from large weather fluctuations.

The circuit shown in Figure 3 employs an MC33272 (low–cost, low–drift) dual operational amplifier IC. In order to control large supply voltage fluctuations, an 8 Vdc regulator, MC78L08ACP, is used. This design permits use of a battery for excitation.

Microcontroller Interface

The low cost of MCU devices has allowed for their use as a signal processing tool in many applications. The MCU used in this application, the MC68HC11, demonstrates the power of incorporating intelligence into such systems. The on-chip resources of the MC68HC11 include: an 8 channel, 8-bit A/D, a 16-bit timer, an SPI (Serial Peripheral Interface – synchronous), and SCI (Serial Communications Interface – asynchronous), and a maximum of 40 I/O lines. This device is available in several package configurations and product variations which include additional RAM, EEPROM, and/or I/O capability. The software used in this application was developed using the MC68HC11 EVB development system.

The following software algorithm outlines the steps used to perform the desired digital processing. This system will convert the voltage at the A/D input into a digital value, convert this measurement into inches of mercury, and output this data serially to an LCD display interface (through the on–board SPI). This process is outlined in greater detail below:

- 1. Set up and enable A/D converter and SPI interface.
- 2. Initialize memory locations, initialize variables.
- 3. Make A/D conversion, store result.
- 4. Convert digital value to inches of mercury.
- 5. Determine if conversion is in system range.
- 6a. Convert pressure into decimal display digits.
- 6b. Otherwise, display range error message.
- 7. Output result via SPI to LCD driver device.

The signal conditioned sensor output signal is connected to pin PE5 (Port E–A/D Input pin). The MCU communicates to the LCD display interface via the SPI protocol. A listing of the assembly language source code to implement these tasks is included in the appendix. In addition, the software can be downloaded directly from the Motorola MCU Freeware Bulletin Board (in the MCU directory). Further information is included at the beginning of the appendix.

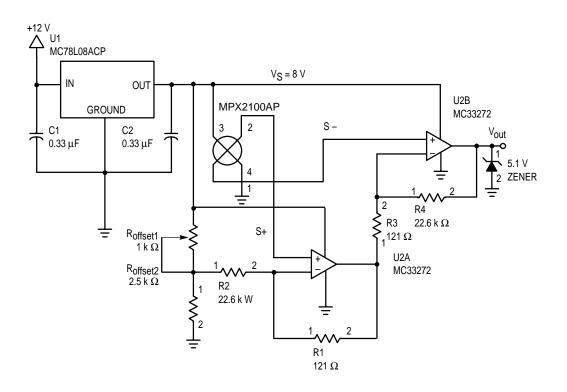


Figure 3. Signal Conditioning Circuit

LCD Interface

In order to digitally display the barometric pressure conversion, a serial LCD interface was developed to communicate with the MCU. This system includes an MC145453 CMOS serial interface/LCD driver, and a 4-digit, non-multiplexed LCD. In order for the MCU to communicate correctly with the interface, it must serially transmit six bytes for each conversion. This includes a start byte, a byte for each of the four decimal display digits, and a stop byte. For formatting purposes, decimal points and blank digits can be displayed through appropriate bit patterns. The control of display digits and data transmission is executed in the source code through subroutines BCDCONV, LOOKUP, SP12LCD, and TRANSFER. A block diagram of this interface is included below.

CONCLUSION

This digital barometer system described herein is an excellent example of a sensing system using solid state components and software to accurately measure barometric pressure. This system serves as a foundation from which more complex systems can be developed. The MPX2100A

series pressure sensors provide the calibration and temperature compensation necessary to achieve the desired accuracy and interface simplicity for barometric pressure sensing applications.

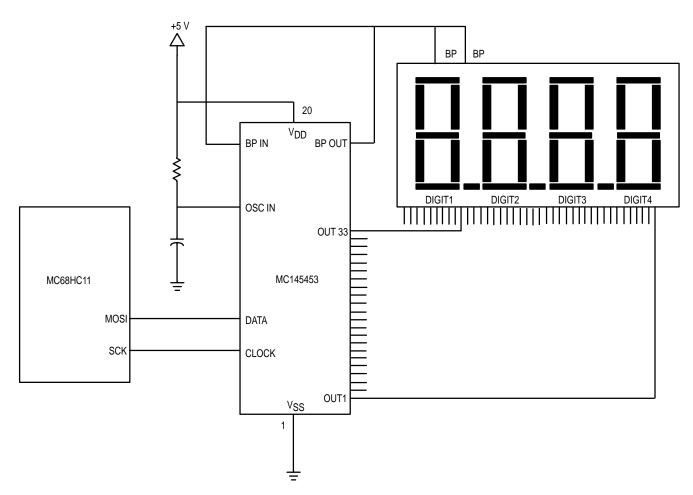


Figure 4. LCD Display Interface Diagram

APPENDIX

MC68HC11 Barometer Software Available on:

Motorola Electronic Bulletin Board MCU Freeware Line

8-bit, no parity, 1 stop bit 1200/300 baud (512) 891-FREE (3733)

 * BAROMETER APPLICATIONS PROJECT - Chris Winkler * Developed: October 1st, 1992 - Motorola Discrete Applications * This code will be used to implement an MC68HC11 Micro-Controller * as a processing unit for a simple barometer system. * The HC11 will interface with an MPX2100AP to monitor, store * and display measured Barometric pressure via the 8-bit A/D channel * The sensor output (32mv max) will be amplified to .5 - 2.5 V dc * The processor will interface with a 4-digit LCD (FE202) via * a Motorola LCD driver (MC145453) to display the pressure * within +/- one tenth of an inch of mercury. * The systems range is 15.0 - 30.5 in-Hg 						
*	۵/D & C	PU Regis	ter Aggin	nment		
*					ng to access the	
*					addressing will be	
*	indexed	off of R	EGBASE, t	the base a	address for these registers.	
REGBASE	EQU	\$1000		* regist	er base of control register	
ADCTL		EQU	\$30		* offset of A/D control register	
ADR2		EQU	\$32		* offset of A/D results register	
ADOPT		EQU	\$39 \$04		* offset for A/D option register 1	
PORTB PORTD		EQU EQU	\$04 \$08		* Location of PORTB used for conve * PORTD Data Register Index	ersion
DDRD		EQU	\$09 \$09		* offset of Data Direction Reg.	
SPCR		EQU	\$28		* offset of SPI Control Reg.	
SPSR		EQU	\$29		* offset of SPI Status Reg.	
SPDR		EQU	\$2A		* offset of SPI Data Reg.	
* * * DIGIT1 DIGIT2 DIGIT3 DIGIT4 COUNTER POFFSET SENSOUT RESULT FLAG	and calc are loca EQU EQU EQU EQU EQU EQU EQU EQU	owing lo ulations	used in	determin: 256 bytes * BCD bl * BCD te * BCD te * BCD or * Variak * Storag * Storag	to store important measurements ing the altitude. They s of user RAM Lank digit (not used) ens digit for pressure enths digit for pressure bes digit for pressure ole to send 5 dummy bytes ge Location for max pressure offset ge location for previous conversion ge of Pressure(in Hg) in hex format * Determines if measurement is wi	
T LIAG			00010		becernines if medsurement is wi	chini range
*	MAIN PRC		roapaa ir	wolwog +1	ne following steps:	
*	THE COUN	статоп р	LUCESS II	INOTAGE LI	TE TOTIONING PLEDS.	
*			1.		Set-Up SPI device-	SPI_CNFG
*			2.		Set-Up A/D, Constants	SET_UP
*			3.		Read A/D, store sample	ADCONV
*			4.		Convert into in-Hg	IN_HG
*			5.		Determine FLAG condition IN_HG	
*				a.	Display error	ERROR
*				b.	Continue Conversion	INRANGE
*			6.		Convert hex to BCD format BCDCONV	
*			7.		Convert LCD display digits	LOOKUP
			8.		Output via SPI to LCD	SPI2LCD
* * *	runs unc		ally thro	ough BRA	ted as the loop CONVERT (the BRANCH ALWAYS statement)	

* Repeats to step 3 indefinitely.

CONVERT	BSR	ORG LDX BSR ADCONV BSR BSR	\$C000 #REGBASE SPI_CNFG SET_UP * Calls DELAY IN_HG	* Location * Set-up SP * Power-Up subroutine t * I	DESIGNATES START OF MEMORY MAP FOR USER CODE of base register for indirect adr I Module for data X-mit to LCD A/D, initialize constants to make an A/D conversion Delay routine to prevent LCD flickering Converts hex format to in of Hg
* * *	If a ran statemen	nge error nts are us	G passed from IN_1 has occurred. Th sed to either allo display a range en	ne following ow further co	logical onversion or jump
		LDAB CMPB BEQ BSR BRA	FLAG #\$80 INRANGE ERROR OUTPUT	* : * system * :	Determines if an range Error has ocurred If No Error detected (FLAG=\$80) then will continue conversion process If error occurs (FLAG<>80), branch to ERROR to output ERROR code to display
*	No Error	Detected	d, Conversion Prod	ess Continue	25
INRANGE	JSR	BCDCONV JSR	* Conver LOOKUP	ts Hex Resul * Uses Look	t to BCD -Up Table for BCD-Decimal
OUTPUT		SPI2LCD BRA	CONVERT	transmissic * Continual	on to LCD ly converts using Branch Always
* * *	Subrouti		WFG is to initialize r the display bef		
SPI_CNFG	BSET	PORTD,X LDAA STAA	#\$20 * Set SF #\$38 DDRD,X	*	gh to prevent glitch Initializing Data Direction for Port D SS, MOSI, SCK as outputs only
		LDAA STAA	#\$5D SPCR,X		Initialize SPI-Control Register SPE,MSTR,CPOL,CPHA,CPRO
		LDAA STAA LDAA	#\$5 COUNTER SPSR,X		sets counter to X-mit 5 blank bytes SPSR to clear SPIF Flag
		CLRA		* [- Transmission of Blank Bytes to LCD
ERASELCI	JSR	TRANSFER DEC BNE	* Calls COUNTER ERASELCD	subroutine t	o transmit
		RTS			
* * SET_UP	Subrouti LDAA		is to initialize	used in con * selects A * Power-Up * Initializ * POFFSET =	d to power-up A/D version purposes. DPU bit in OPTION register of A/D complete e POFFSET 305 - 25 in hex or Pmax + offset voltage (5 V)
* * *	Subrouti		is to delay the c ize LCD flickerin		ocess
DELAY OUTLOOP INLOOP	LDB DECB	LDA #\$FF DECA BNE RTS	#\$FF INLOOP OUTLOOP	* 1 * Delay = c	Loop for delay of display lk/255*255
* * *	Subrouti				re the conversion into r.
ADCONV	LDX	#REGBASE LDAA STAA	* loads #\$25 ADCTL,X		er for indirect addressing es A/D cont. register SCAN=1,MULT=0

WTCONV	BRCLR	LDAB	#\$80 WTCONV ADR2,X	* Wait for completion of conversion flag * Loads conversion result into Accumulator
		CLRA STD RTS	SENSOUT	* Stores conversion as SENSOUT
* * * IN_HG	Subrout:	units of This rep LDD SUBD	is to convert the in-Hg, represent	<pre>e measured pressure SENSOUT, into ed by a hex value of 305-150 30.5 - 15.0 in-Hg * Loads maximum offset for subtraction * RESULT = POFFSET-SENSOUT in hex format * Stores hex result for P, in Hg</pre>
		ELO LDAB STAB BRA	#150 TOLOW #\$80 FLAG END_CONV	
TOHIGH	LDAB	#\$FF STAB BRA	FLAG END_CONV	
TOLOW		LDAB STAB	#\$00 FLAG	
END_CONV	/ RTS	611LD	1 1110	
* * *	Subrout	ine ERROR	This subroutine an error message	sets the display digits to output having detected an out of range he main program from FLAG
ERROR		LDAB STAB STAB	#\$00 DIGIT1 DIGIT4	* Initialize digits 1,4 to blanks
		LDAB CMPB BNE	FLAG #\$00 SET_HI	* FLAG is used to determine* if above or below range.* If above range GOTO SET_HI
		LDAB STAB LDAB STAB BRA	#\$0E DIGIT2 #\$7E DIGIT3 END_ERR	<pre>* ELSE display LO on display * Set DIGIT2=L,DIGIT3=0 * GOTO exit of subroutine</pre>
SET_HI	LDAB	#\$37 STAB LDAB STAB	DIGIT2 #\$30 DIGIT3	* Set DIGIT2=H,DIGIT3=1
END_ERR	RTS			
* * * *	Subrout:	ine BCDCO	Purpose is to con uses standard HE	nvert ALTITUDE from hex to BCD X-BCD conversion scheme ore Remainder, swap Q & R, repeat mainder = 0.
BCDCONV	LDAA	#\$00 STAA STAA STAA LDY	DIGIT2 DIGIT3 DIGIT4 #DIGIT4	<pre>* Default Digits 2,3,4 to 0 * Conversion starts with lowest digit</pre>
CONVLP	LDX	LDD #\$A IDIV STAB DEY CPX XGDX BNE LDX RTS	RESULT 0,Y #\$0 CONVLP #REGBASE	<pre>* Load voltage to be converted * Divide hex digit by 10</pre>

*

RTS

Subroutine LOOKUP

* * * LOOKUP LDX TABLOOP DEX	The BCl where that do DIGIT4 #DIGIT1+4 LDY #TABLE LDAB 0,X ABY LDAA 0,Y STAA 0,X	* Loads current digit into B * Adds to base to index off TABLE * Stores HEX segment result in A
	CPX #DIGIT: BNE TABLOOM	
	RTS	
* Subrou	tine SPI2LCD	
* * * *	The for four d: will ha	e is to output digits to LCD via SPI rmat for this is to send a start byte, igits, and a stop byte. This system ave 3 significant digits: blank digit ree decimal digits.
*		Sending LCD Start Byte
		Senaring heb Start Byte
SPI2LCD LDX	#REGBASE LDAA SPSR,X LDAA #\$02 BSR TRANSFI	* Byte, no colon, start bit
*	LDAA DIGIT3 ORA #\$80	Initializing decimal point & blank digit * Sets MSB for decimal pt. * after digit 3
	STAA DIGIT3	
	LDAA #\$00 STAA DIGIT1	* Set 1st digit as blank
*		Sending four decimal digits
DLOOP	LDY #DIGIT: LDAA 0,Y BSR TRANSFI INY CPY #DIGIT BNE DLOOP	* Loads digit to be x-mitted ER * Transmit byte * Branch until both bytes sent
*		Sending LCD Stop Byte
	LDAA #\$00 BSR TRANSFI	<pre>* end byte requires all 0's ER * Transmit byte</pre>
	RTS	
* Subrou *		end data bits to SPI nversion complete flag bit to be set.
TRANSFER LDX	#REGBASE BCLR PORTD, 2	X #\$20 * Assert SS Line to start X-misssion
XMIT	STAA SPDR,X BRCLR SPSR,X	<pre>* Load Data into Data Reg.,X-mit #\$80 XMIT* Wait for flag X #\$20 * DISASSERT SS Line</pre>
	RTS	
	on for FCB memory are 11 possible di	
TABLE	FCB \$7E,\$3 END	D,\$6D,\$79,\$33,\$5B,\$5F,\$70,\$7F,\$73,\$00

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