Detecting which COM port Windows assigns to a USB Serial Port Adapter.

Many new notebook computers no longer have a traditional DB9 connector. All RTC cables require a DB9 connection to work. The solution to the missing DB9 connector is the USB port available on all but a few notebook computers.

USB converters turn the USB serial port into a DB9 connector. When the USB converter is connected to the computer, Windows identifies it and assigns it a COM port number. This COM port number can then be entered into the RTC software, and the connection is used to communicate to the RTC time switch.

The following steps show you how to identify which COM port Windows assigns to the USB serial converter.

Steps to Identify COM Port Number Windows Assigns

For this procedure to work, the USB device must have been installed correctly. Here's how to check it:

1. Open the Control Panel from your computer's Start menu.

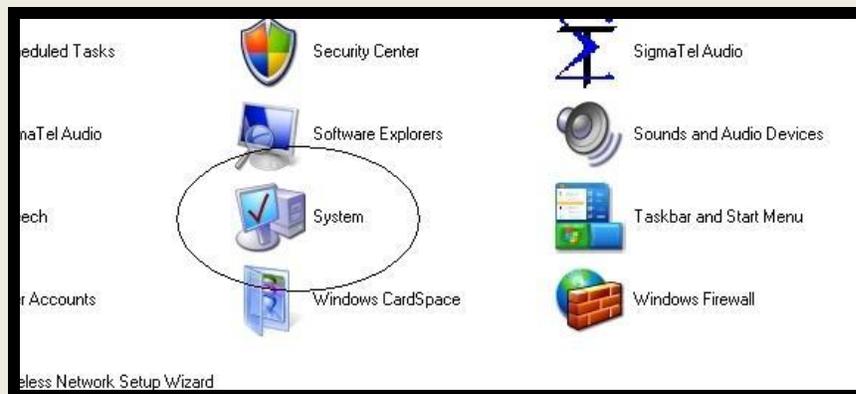2. Then, find and click on the System icon or link. (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1

3. A box resembling Fig. 2 will appear.

Fig. 2
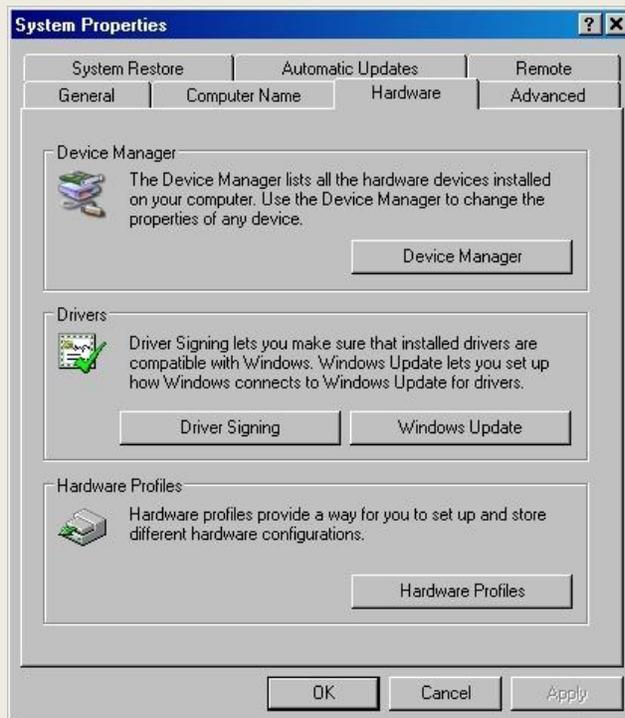
4. Click the Hardware tab. (Fig. 3)

Fig. 3

5. Open the following box (Fig. 4) by clicking the Device Manager button in the System Properties box. This window my look slightly different from computer to computer.
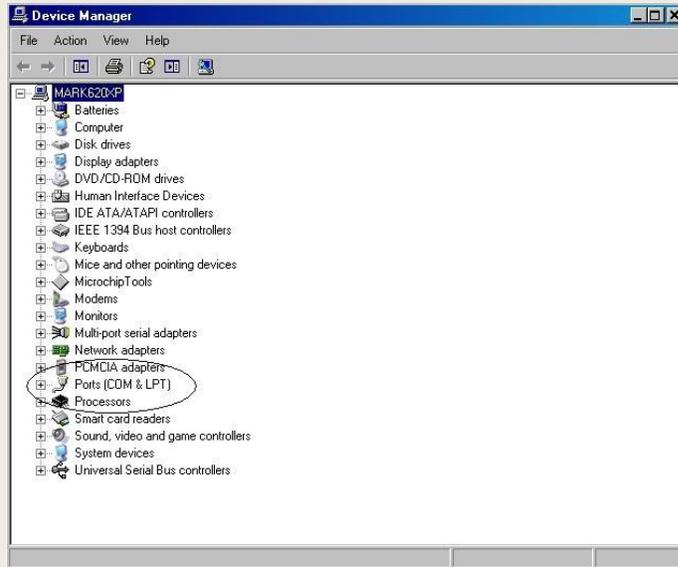

Fig. 4

Notice the icon labeled Ports (COM & LPT). This is where you identify which port is which. Click on the + to the left to expand the Ports section. If your system does not have a Ports section then you have no ports installed. This is OK.

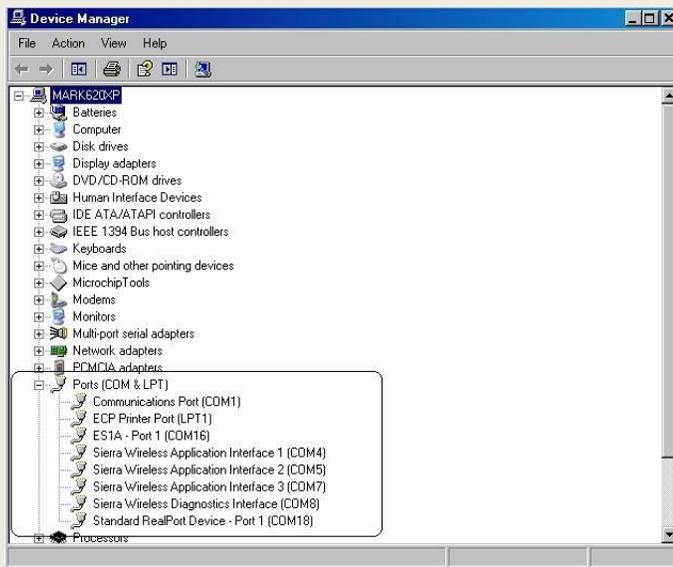Notice in Fig. 5 the ports that are currently installed in the system.

Fig. 5

Notice in this system, the COM ports 1, 16, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 18 are used.

Jot down which ports, if any, are currently in your system. If none are listed, you will have to install a USB converter mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Once the USB device is installed into a USB port, you will see a new port listed. (Fig. 6) In the system below, Windows has assigned COM36 to the USB to serial converter.
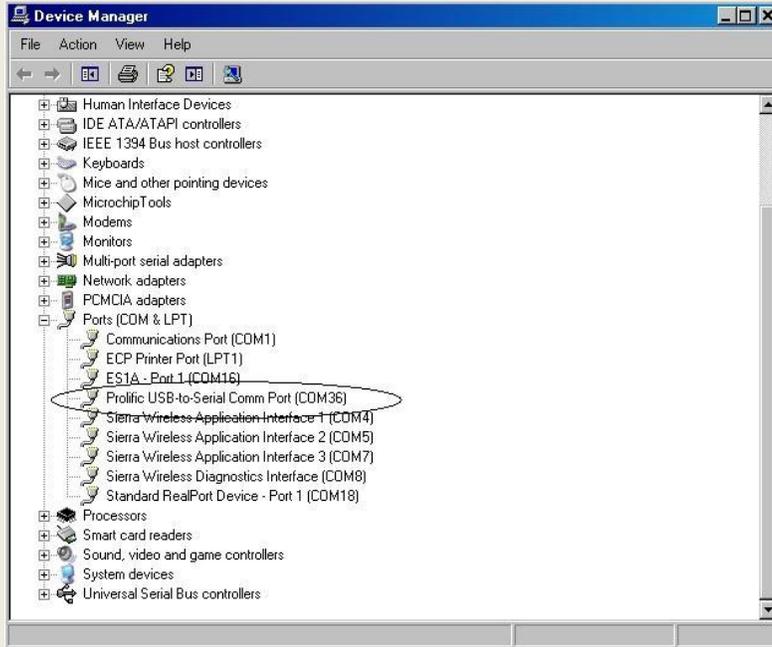

Fig. 6

In this case, COM36 would be entered in the RTC software to communicate to the switches. All RTC software uses a COM selection box similar to the one below. (Fig. 7)

Note that COM 36 is not available. There are over 250 possible COM ports, so not all of them are displayed. To get COM 36 to work, type the number 36 in the text area of the dropdown box, as shown in Fig. 8.
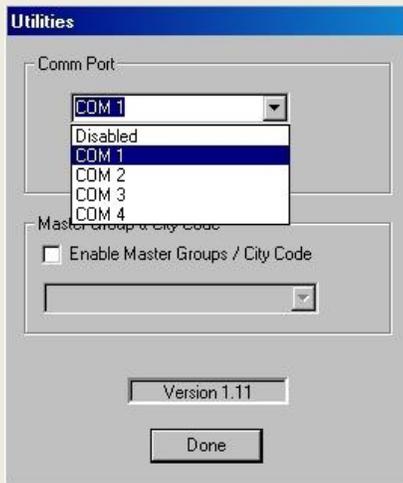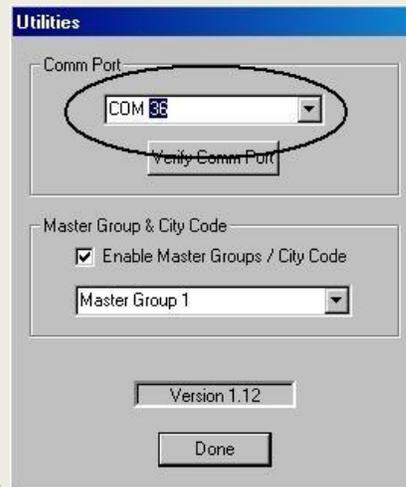

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

6. Click Setup after you have entered COM 36, or the COM port number your system has given you.
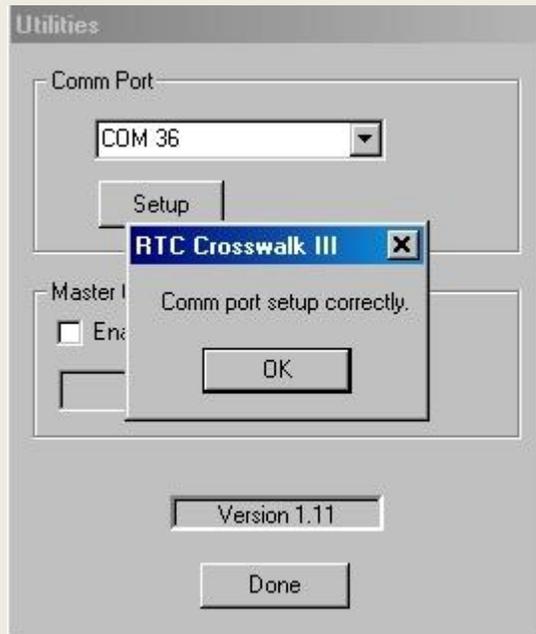
Fig. 9

Fig. 9 shows that the port in our example has setup correctly. If you get an error message, check the numbers and retry the setup.

The device will likely work if the success message appears. There are some cases, however, where the success message is given and the device still will not work.

The above steps can be repeated as often as needed to find the correct port number. Typically, if you always connect the USB device to the same port you will likely get the same COM port number. This is not always the case, as Windows ultimately decides which port number to assign.