

Minutes for SCC meeting of March 16, 2005

by Dave Redell & Lee Courtney

Attending

Mary Cicalese
Lee Courtney
Henry Gladney
Kathe Gust
Phil Gust
Sellam Ismail

Ron Mak
Paul McJones
Bernard Peuto
Michael Powell
Dave Redell

Bill Selmeier
Len Shustek
Kirsten Tashev
John Toole
Mike Walton

Note: new approach to SCC action items

Starting with this month, we will have a separate Action Item list, maintained and distributed by Lee Courtney. Dave Redell will continue sending out these minutes, with the benefit of Lee's notes as input.

Task-oriented Agenda (Bernard)

Following from last month's presentation by Bernard, we will shape our agenda around the specific tasks that are identified as agreed-upon components of the SCC's activity. As part of instituting the formal status of these projects, a five-line descriptive paragraph for each will be created, as well as an overview paragraph describing the SCC's activities as a whole. All of this will be available on the Plone server.

Task Status updates

Fortran (Paul): Paul continues to make progress on the early Fortran I & II materials. Henry cited similar ongoing work on "mid-life" Fortran history; Paul characterized this as a potential follow-on, but not a part of what the Fortran Task is currently covering. The recovery of the located source files (reading old tapes and OCRing microfiche) will be a substantial task. It was suggested that CHM might benefit by picking Paul Pierce's brain about reading old tapes. In general Paul feels that he is moving from the original locating/collecting phase into the start of the organizing/preserving phase. He is still some distance from the emulate/present phase, but hopefully that will come in time.

Lisp (Paul): Just a couple of weeks before the meeting, Paul decided to start looking into the history of early Lisp as well. He contacted a number of the major players in the Lisp world, and got positive but otherwise varied reactions – often amounting to "Sigh, all that stuff went into the trash 25 years ago!"

CDC (Dave): Dave is hoping to get Mike Cochran from the controlfreaks and cyberl groups to attend an upcoming SCC meeting. This should help strengthen ties to the ongoing CDC activities, since Mike is a key player in these. [Late news: Mike will be in Italy during our April meeting, but plans to attend in May.] Otherwise, the main activity with the CDC groups is an attempt to further develop the relationship with BT regarding access to and use of the old CDC software and documentation. There has been some discussion of how/whether CHM could help with this.

NLS (Phil): Phil showed a set of slides and reported on encouraging developments in the NLS Task. The team has filled out and Doug Englebart has given the project his blessing; it is thought that CHM involvement was a factor in this. One open issue is finding a client (i.e. terminal) to use with NLS, since much of the client source is now missing and the design was based on ancient versions of the PC environment. There is a Smalltalk-based client, but it has its own set of issues (installation, licensing, look-and-feel). The hope is to find (or create?) an appropriate client on a modern platform (Windows/Unix/Mac). The immediate goal is to define and create a “clean clone” system, which has all of the elements of Doug’s most recent version but is cleansed of all user-specific information. Phil hopes to report further progress in April.

Physical reorganization of the CHM software collection room (Sellam)

Sellam is working on physical cleanup and sorting of the artifacts. He also plans to start using his current taxonomy to create an initial catalog on the Plone site. Phil suggested that he focus on lessons that can be drawn from this by keeping a complete list of the inevitable questions and problems that will arise, as input to debugging the taxonomy.

Plone server (Bernard)

The SCC Plone server is set up and running, and members are encouraged to register new accounts for themselves on it. Mass cloning of our existing CHM accounts would be messy, so instead, members are being asked to request their own accounts individually. Just follow the email registration instructions at:

<http://community.computerhistory.org/scc>

The SCC Plone system will serve both as an experiment and as a resource for committee members, while not being forced on anyone if they feel that they have different tools that are more appropriate for some reason. For example, the NLS team is using another approach, the Fortran/Lisp activity is on Paul’s blog (“dusty decks”) and the existing CDC groups use a Twiki. In general, SCC projects will lean toward using the Plone system when there is no good reason to do something else, but it will not be treated as a force-fit when it is not appropriate. There was some discussion of whether a single Plone server can handle both internal and external user communities, but no definitive answer seemed to be reached. This is one of several areas of Plone where we are still learning.

Workshop proposal (Sellam)

Sellam distributed an initial proposal for a workshop, based on the idea of having a fairly small (perhaps 50 person) Workshop in the Fall of 2005, to be followed by a larger Symposium in 2006. A spirited discussion followed, with several people raising questions about the long-term goals of this activity and whether a small workshop in 2005 would advance those goals. The Workshop was initially positioned as leading to the larger Symposium, but after some discussion, a clear distinction emerged between a 2005 Workshop and one or more meetings to organize a larger 2006 Symposium. Either could be valuable, but it is important to recognize the difference between them. There was also discussion of whether such a Symposium would be a one-time event or the first of a series – perhaps held every two years or so, perhaps with co-sponsorship (ACM, IEEE, etc). There was also discussion of formats, such as single vs. multi-track and opening/closing plenaries. With so many open issues on the table, it was clear that the immediate need is for a Workshop Steering Committee to start working on defining the event and looking at dates. Several people felt that about a year from now (around March 2006) was the earliest realistic date for such an event.

1401 Project (Ron Mak)

Ron started by noting that despite our repeated references to “the 1401 Plone site” in our past meetings, the 1401 project is not, in fact, using Plone. Instead, they use a “blog-like website”. He described the software work that parallels the 1401 hardware restoration effort. (Much of the work is going on remotely, in Southern California.). The team plans to search the world for old 1401 software and get it running on simulators in parallel with the hardware restoration. They also plan to write *new* 1401 software, in part to serve as good demo-ware for the restored hardware. They currently have no adequate repository for this planned 1401 software collection. The end goals of the project include the establishment of a viable development environment (on a modern platform) for creating new 1401 software, and a simulator for running it (as well as running it on the actual restored hardware, of course). One way to describe the motivation for all this is a desire to recreate the experience of programming and using a computer in the 1960s. The team would like to package this experience as a 2-3 hour class that would be offered to interested people.

Cyber collection (Kirsten, Mike)

The Cyber Collection has three main aspects:

- The collection of artifacts

- The Cyber Exhibits

- The Cyber Collection Website

The Cyber Collection team is working to establish best practices for this effort. A key step is the establishment of a body of metadata based on the Dublin Core. The goal is to serve both internal and external audiences. The infrastructure is moving from Inmagic to a SQL-based approach, and a custom front-end is central to the plan. Categories of material in the Cyber Collection include

- images of physical artifacts from the CHM collection (currently 3,000 with a target of 20,000)
- images that are themselves the collected artifact (both still and moving)
- documents, usually in the form of scans of paper documents
- software

Plans for Cyber Exhibits include *Virtual Visible Storage* (online access to images of the physical collection) and the *Chess Exhibit*, a presentation of the history and artifacts of computer chess. More generally, the team is also looking at the work of other museums as a source of ideas.

Upcoming Meetings

Day	Date	Time	Conf Room
Wednesday	April 27	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	May 25	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	June 22	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Hopper
No July Meeting			
Wednesday	August 24	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	September 21	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	October 19	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	November 16	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Hopper
No December Meeting			