

Minutes for SCC meeting of August 24, 2005

by Dave Redell

Attending

Jonathan Cheyer
Mary Cicalese
Mike Cochran
Lee Courtney
Bob Fraley
Henry Gladney
Kathe Gust

Phil Gust
Gardner Hendrie
Sellam Ismail
Cynthia Jordan
Paul McJones
Randall Neff
Bernard Peuto

Michael Powell
Dave Redell
Bill Selmeier
Len Shustek
Kirsten Tashev
John Toole

User Study

Mary Cicalese presented the initial results of the User Study that she and Lee Courtney have been working on. The long-term goal is to identify a range of targeted user categories for a CHM Software Collection and then survey a representative sample of individuals across these categories to understand their needs and usage patterns – in other words, to listen to the “voice of the customer”. The Project is still in its initial stage: using its first draft of a survey instrument to gather data from a small test sample of 4 potential users. The main goal is to test the survey methodology, but there are already some tantalizing results, albeit without much statistical significance.

One category of users who promise to have interesting needs is lawyers – for example those exploring prior art issues relating to patent litigation. More generally, a major axis spanned by the various user categories can be described as “bits vs back-story”. That is, are the users more interested in the software artifact itself, or the surrounding history and other context? Moreover, for those interested in the bits, do they want to study the source code, or execute the software (typically under emulation) to observe its behavior? And in both cases, a lot of surrounding context may be necessary (OS, libraries, documentation, language manuals, etc.)

One feature that seems likely to figure prominently in the final study results is the users’ desire for the CHM repository to contain a definitive set of links to software collected elsewhere, rather than simple a self-contained collection disconnected from the rest of the software preservation world. This is very consistent with the SCC’s increasing recognition of this “clearinghouse” function as a key role for CHM.

The next step of the study will escalate the size of the sample from 4 subjects to 20, which will not only further validate the approach but should also start to produce some significant data. Mary estimated that this next step will take 2-3 months.

Cyber1

Mike Cochran gave a brief history of the cyber1.org group, which focuses on preservation and execution of the PLATO educational software. It uses the DTCyber CDC emulator from the controlfreaks.org group, and there is actually significant overlap between the memberships of the two groups. Mike suggested that an important key to the success of groups like cyber1 is the presence of one or more people who are comfortable

taking the initiative to contact and negotiate with the wide variety of people necessary to find and obtain software, locate owners and gain legal permission for access/usage, and so on. This resonates with much of what Paul McJones has described about his recent efforts around Fortran and Lisp. Mike pointed out that many of the people who naturally gravitate to studying and preserving old software tend not to be very comfortable in this role, which can limit the success of their efforts.

Project Status Reports

1. Fortran. Paul McJones reported that the scanning of the Nutt microfiche has produced rather disappointing results, as the quality is not generally very high and much of the content duplicates materials available elsewhere. He is working though this, trying to extract what value there is, but the bottom line is that these microfiche do not represent as valuable a resource as originally hoped.

2. Lisp. Paul's recent focus on Lisp has produced a large amount of material and many useful contacts. He reports however, that he has started running into a "brick wall of apathy", possible a lingering side effect of the "AI Winter". Many Lisp veterans just don't seem interested in helping. Nevertheless, Paul proposes that CHM set a goal of creating the Lisp repository for the world. One important aspect of this would be offering to Herbert Stoyan of the University of Erlangen a permanent home for his large Lisp collection. Paul has also compiled a list of other key sources, and is thinking about first steps to bootstrap the effort and provide critical mass and credibility, not to mention possible outside funding.

3. NLS. Phil Gust summarized recent progress. John Toole has been making progress on the IP issues with Boeing. Meanwhile, progress continues on creating a "clean clone" of Doug Englebart's personal NLS system. Work is underway on booting this image and actually running NLS on a Unix-hosted PDP-10 emulator. The team still hopes to demonstrate NLS at the CHM Fellows Dinner on October 18th, when Doug will be inducted as a Fellow. Other major milestones include rebuilding the system on itself and creating a viable Augment Terminal implementation.

4. APL. There is a possible person to start an APL project, but this is just tentative so far.

Software Preservation Workshop

Work continues to clarify the definition of this event. SCC members are invited to submit their ideas.

Software Collection Catalog Effort

Significant progress was reported on the effort to catalog the existing CHM collection of software. In particular, work on the PDP-10 section of the collection is essentially complete, and a lot of the commercial software has been sorted through. It is hoped that this effort can be completed around the end of the summer.

Meeting Schedule

It has been decided that the SCC will continue to meet once a month on a Wednesday near the middle of the month. The big change is to move the meeting time from 1:00pm to 5:30pm to ease conflicts with members' work schedules. This new schedule will start in September.

Upcoming Meetings

Day	Date	Time	Conf Room
Wednesday	September 21	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	October 19	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	November 16	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
No December Meeting			