

Minutes for SCC meeting of February 15, 2006

by Dave Redell

Attending

Kathe Gust
Phil Gust
Gardner Hendrie
Paula Jabloner
Paul McJones

Randy Neff
Paula Newman
Bernard Peuto
Mike Powell
Dave Redell

Len Shustek
Bill Selmeier
Olin Silbert
Judith Tauber-Lovik

Project updates

Fortran. Paul reported that a listing of the Fortran II sources has been scanned. This is part of an effort to build a complete Fortran II environment, including FMS, and run it on a 704 emulator. The files appear to be in the public domain, since IBM gave them away many years ago.

Lisp. Some progress has been made in pursuing the eventual donation of the Stoyen collection of Lisp materials. A request has been communicated to Professor Stoyen and his response is awaited.

NLS. Last month, we had a talk/demo of NLS from Doug Englebart. This was videotaped, and the proper disposition of the result is being discussed. The next target milestone for this project is the creation of a second running NLS system. Also, Jonathan has been studying the NLS data structures and considering ways to export them in XML. Some interesting NLS artifacts have been collected, including about six of the chord keysets (used with left hand while right hand used the mouse), both schematics and a physical example (S/N #1) of the NLS Line Processor, and a set of source files from the SDS 940 version of 1967-1968.

The IP ownership issue for NLS continues to be a tangled thicket, but some progress has been made toward effectively getting a quitclaim release from each of the plausible “owners” of the NLS IP. BT is sending a release letter, and Boeing seems to be somewhere in the process of moving toward that. The MCI/Verizon situation is less clear, but Jonathan will try to enlist the aid of Vint Cerf to help sort this out from the inside. At the very least, the project is establishing a paper trail of due diligence.

Some accession issues have come up relating to CHM 501(c)(3) status. It was suggested that CHM develop an effective pre-qualification process for donations, so a subgroup, including Phil and Paula, will work on this and report back, with the goal of training some number of SCC members in the resulting process.

HOPL Archive Hosting

Discussions have been arranged with the committee for HOPL III (ACM SIGPLAN 3rd Conference on the History of Programming Languages). The idea is for CHM to house the software archives associated with HOPL and its participants.

Software cataloging effort

Judith Tauber-Lovik was introduced as a new volunteer working on the cataloging effort. She is now looking at the PDP-1 paper tape situation, with the immediate goals of finding and logging all tapes, making working copies, and transcoding to more modern (and permanent) media. Longer term goals include publishing findings and eventually getting the software from the tapes running, both via emulation and on CHM's restored PDP-1 hardware.

It was pointed out that some work on these tapes has also been done by Al Kossow, so the two efforts need to be coordinated to avoid redundant work.

Multics Project

The major presentation of the meeting was by Olin Silbert, who told us about his work on creating the definitive Multics archive. This effort was kicked off at the big Multics reunion in 2004, and has resulted in a huge amount of material being assembled. The long-term goal is to get Multics running on an emulation of the Honeywell 6180 hardware. The emphasis is on the later releases of the Multics system, both because it was the most complete realization of the original Multics vision and because the earlier GE 645 version is apparently almost completely lost.

Major segments of the collection so far include 35 reels of backup tapes from the MIT system and a huge volume of paper documents to be scanned (Multics Technical Bulletins, the Multics System Programmer's Manual, etc.). The project team has explored the parallel use of inexpensive scanners as opposed to a single big/expensive scanner. This approach has been quite successful, especially at exploiting the different pros and cons of several scanner models. So far, no OCR has been done. More material keeps coming in, attracted by the growing reputation of the project as the definitive Multics collection.

The construction of the 6180 emulator will be a challenge. The CPU is complex but well understood and documented. The I/O system will be a problem – especially the obscure Honeywell Communication Processor used for terminal connections. Some combination of *ad hoc* reverse engineering and emulation of higher level I/O interfaces will probably solve the problem.

Eventually, the materials will be in a database, and an automatic process will generate a web front-end, enabling Internet access. In this sense, the project may point the way for other such projects to create their own web presence that automatically tracks the content and structure of a dynamic and expanding archive of historical materials.

Outreach Workshop

A whitepaper by Dag and Henry was distributed for review, entitled “The Attic and the Parlor”. It describes in some detail an approach to the basic two-phase idea about software archiving that the SCC has been discussing in more general terms for some time. The idea is that the “Attic” is a very open “catch-all” collection, whose main goal is to make sure that nothing falls through the cracks. Its audience would be fairly narrow – mostly researchers. The “Parlor” is a more selective and organized collection, with careful analysis to insure completeness, accuracy and sufficient context to allow a large audience to access and understand it.

Upcoming Meetings

Day	Date	Time	Conf Room
Wednesday	March 15	5:00 pm – 6:30 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	April 26	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	May 17	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
Tuesday	June 13	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	July 19	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	August 16	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
(no September meeting)			
Wednesday	October 18	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
Wednesday	November 15	5:30 pm – 7:30 pm	Hopper
(no December meeting)			