

Minutes for SCC meeting of March 15, 2006

by Dave Redell

Attending

Jonathan Cheyer
Kathe Gust
Phil Gust
Nadia Ilyin
Paula Jabloner

Al Kossow
Jim McClure
Paul McJones
Randall Neff
Paula Newman

Bernard Peuto
Dave Redell
Bill Selmeier
Len Shustek
Judith Tauber-Lovik

ACM Book Initiatives

The ACM “Favorite Books” project collected opinions about significant out-of-print books, and has selected 25 winners from a list of 402 nominees. The ACM plans to make the materials available via its Digital Library, both online and as on-demand publications. There is a wiki that describes this project:

http://wiki.acm.org/classics/index.php?title=Main_Page

The books are mostly software, with some notable exceptions, such as the *IBM System/360 Principles of Operation*. The project also produced a list of 140 nominated titles that turned out to still be in print.

CHM has an initiative that parallels the ACM effort, with goals that include:

- Collecting original copies of the top 25 titles
- Assembling related historical materials about the authors, their work, and so on, possibly including selected oral histories.
- Appropriate attention to the in-print titles as well. Collecting these may not be as critical, but the fact that they are still in print represents some indication of their significance.
- Assessing the relative importance of all 542 (402 + 140) of the titles and keeping a prioritized Wish List for collecting purposes.

There has been tentative discussion of a possible “CHM Press”, perhaps as an on-demand publishing exercise. Questions include: resource requirements, critical mass of people, relative priority, collaboration with the ACM, and possible copyright issues. Len pointed out a similar effort by the Babbage Institute, which resulted in reprinting of about 15 books out-of-print titles from the MIT Press. Paul stressed the need for a very concrete plan if this activity is to go forward. Phil pointed out that publishers often revert all rights to the author when a book goes out of print. These and other issues will be explored by Len, Bernard and perhaps other interested participants.

Orphaned Works

Jonathan talked about this issue, based on his extensive efforts surrounding the NLS Project. The basic issue is: What if the copyright owner can't be located? Since 1978, copyrights have been self-declared, and their term is longer than the entire history of electronic computing. This makes copyrights more numerous and their holders harder to find, which can represent a serious problem for software collection efforts. In some cases where ownership has changed hands multiple times, the copyright holder may not even be aware of their ownership! The NLS system is a good example of this, where it is suspected that the copyright is currently owned by Boeing, British Telecom or MCI/WorldCom, but nobody seems to know for sure. Since the law provides no official procedure

for declaring a copyright abandoned (i.e. unlike a trademark), the best that can be done is often to perform due diligence and ask all suspected owners to disclaim ownership.

The seriousness of this problem is recognized in a report from the U.S. Copyright Office:

<http://www.copyright.gov/orphan/>

The report discusses the issues in depth and recommends changes in the law to help reduce the problem.

There was some discussion of what CHM might do to help with such efforts. One specific suggestion was for Jonathan to document his NLS experience as a case study, and he was receptive to the idea of drafting such a report. More generally, CHM should work with other interested parties to influence policy and law in this area. For example, CHM needs to have a clear policy on what constitutes sufficient due diligence on orphaned works such that it can assume the residual risk of collecting orphaned software and making it available in appropriate ways. Such a policy could serve as a template, both for other similar institutions and for lawmakers attempting to clarify the responsibilities and liabilities of collecting institutions. This is an example of a legitimate CHM engagement with the political process that is not “political” in a negative or inappropriate sense.

Workshop Preparations -- Review of the “Attic and Parlor” Model

At the February meeting, drafts of the “Attic and Parlor” model of software collection by Dag Spicer and Henry Lowood were distributed for comment. At this meeting, the feedback was reviewed, including a substantial written contribution by Randy Neff. Bernard presented slides summarizing the feedback. Points raised included:

- We cannot equate parlors with professional and attics with amateurs.
- The roles associated with individuals, institutions (e.g. CHM) and companies need to be defined, and probably differ somewhat between the two models.
- How can CHM help the larger collecting community organize itself for long-term viability – e.g. the 100th anniversary of the computer

Bernard concluded with a set of six criteria for distinguishing key properties of the Parlor and Attic models: Focus, Curation, Presentation, Community, Institution/Resources and Quality/Expertise. His slides were distributed on the committee email list.

This meeting was shortened to allow members to attend a talk at the Museum..

Upcoming Meetings

Day	Date	Time	Conf Room
Wednesday	April 26	5:30 - 7:30 pm,	Hopper.
Wednesday	May 17	5:30 - 7:30 pm,	Hopper
No June Meeting*			
Wednesday	July 19	5:30 - 7:30 pm,	Hopper
Wednesday	August 16	5:30 - 7:30 pm,	Hopper
Wednesday	September 20*	5:30 - 7:30 pm,	Hopper
Wednesday	October 18	5:30 - 7:30 pm,	Hopper
Tuesday	November 14	5:30 - 7:30 pm,	Hopper
No December Meeting.			

* Note changes to previous schedule