



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Sherman Poppen Papers

NMAH.AC.1159

Elizabeth Garber.

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Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Sherman Poppen Papers
Date:	1966 - 2008
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1159
Creator:	Poppen, Sherman, 1930- (Donor)
Extent:	1.5 Cubic feet (2 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Sherman Poppen Papers document the snurfer, the predecessor of the snowboard that he invented in 1965. The snurfer, a sled that was ridden while standing up, originally consisted of two skis bound together. Snurfer competitions fueled the development of the snowboard as a piece of sporting equipment. This collection contains material describing the snurfer's place in snowboarding history, and the associated business and legal aspects.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by Sherman Poppen on June 22, 2009.

Related Materials

Materials at the National Museum of American History

The Division of Culture and the Arts holds artifacts related to this collection. See accession #: 2009.0092.

Processing Information

Processed by Elizabeth Garber (intern), August 2009; supervised by Alison Oswald, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Sherman Poppen Papers, 1966-2008, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research but is stored off-site and special arrangements must be made to work with it. Contact the Archives Center for information at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270.

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Biographical / Historical

Sherman Poppen (1930-2019) was born in Muskegon, Michigan. He graduated from Northwestern University in 1952 and served in the United States Navy as a supply officer at sea from 1952-1956. He owned an industrial business, Lake Welding Supply Company, which sold gases and welding supplies in Muskegon, Michigan. On December 25, 1965, Poppen created the snurfer, a predecessor of the snowboard, by binding two children's skis together. His wife, Nancy, was pregnant with their third child and his two restless daughters, Wendy and Laurie, wanted to play on Christmas day. Poppen entertained them by playing outside in the snow. The girls' desire to stand up while riding on a sled and Poppen's vision of snow drifts as waves collided, and the idea for the snurfer was born. Nancy coined "snurf" by combining the words snow and surf. Neighborhood children soon began asking for snurfers of their own. Poppen decided to patent his creation (US Patent #: 3,378,274 --Surf-Type Snow Ski) and trademarked the words snurf and snurfer (US Trademark #: 1,518,101). It was also patented in Canada (Patent #: 819,596). In 1966, he licensed the product to the Brunswick Corporation and worked with them to create a board from the laminated wood used for bowling alley gutters. Brunswick manufactured the snurfer and sold it as a novelty item, not sports equipment, and it gained popularity. From 1968 through the late 1970s, snurfer racing competitions were held in Muskegon at Blockhouse Hill. In 1972, Brunswick discontinued production of the snurfer, but JEM Corporation continued manufacture until the early 1980s. By 1977, Jake Burton Carpenter, an avid competitive snurfer, began developing an improved model without a rope handle and with the addition of rigid bindings for ski boots to the board. As more resorts began allowing snowboards on their ski lifts, the popularity of the snurfer waned.

Poppen took up snowboarding at the age of 67. He received recognition from the snowboarding community as the grandfather of the sport and was inducted into the Snowboarding Hall of Fame in Banff, Canada in 1995 and the Muskegon Area Sports Hall of Fame in 2001.

Scope and Contents

The Sherman Poppen Papers document the invention of the snurfer and its distribution. The collection is arranged into two series. The collection consists of correspondence, product literature, photographs, books, notes, a scrapbook, newsletters, newspaper and magazine articles, and VHS videocassettes documenting the snurfer. The business and legal materials, 1966-2006, contains correspondence, notes, and legal documents.

Arrangement

The collection is divided into two series.

Series 1, History, 1966-2008

Series 2, Business and Legal Materials, 1966-2006

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Dolls
- Inventions -- 20th century
- Paper dolls
- Patents

Snowboarding
Snurfer
Sporting goods industry
Sports
Toys -- 20th century
Winter sports

Types of Materials:

Advertisements -- 20th century
Business records -- 1950-2000
Business records -- 21st century
Clippings -- 20th century
Correspondence -- 20th century
Negatives
Newsletters -- 20th century
Patents -- 20th century
Scrapbooks -- 20th century
Videocassettes

Container Listing

Series 1 : History, 1966-2008, undated

Box 1, Folder 1	Correspondence, 1968 - 2008, undated
Box 1, Folder 2	Product literature, 1966, undated
Box 3, Folder 3	Snurfer newspaper advertisement, 1966
Box 1, Folder 3	Photographs, 1966, undated
Box 3, Folder 1	Mounted photograph, undated
Box 3, Folder 2	Snurfing News (newsletter), 1979
Box 1, Folder 4	Magazine clippings, 1979 - 2008, undated
Box 1, Folder 5	Newspaper clippings, 1966 - 2008, undated
Box 3, Folder 4	Newspaper clippings, 1966 - 2008, undated
Box 3, Folder 5	Scrapbook, 1966 - 1989, undated
Box 1, Folder 6-10	CD-ROMs containing images of some collection material, undated
Box 1, Folder 11	The Snowboard Book: A Guide for All Boarders (book), 1997
Box 1, Folder 12	(Sick) A Cultural History of Snowboarding (book), 1998
Box 2, Item OV 1159.1	Transworld Sport episode (VHS), circa 2003 Notes: 10-minute segment from the British program that begins 42 minutes into the episode. It highlights Poppen, his invention of the snurfer, and the shift from snurfing to snowboarding. Features footage of Poppen discussing materials in this collection, Poppen snowboarding, and Jake Burton snurfing.
Box 2, Item OV 1159.2	Invention segment , undated Notes: 10-minute segment from the British program that begins 42 minutes into the episode. It highlights Poppen, his invention of the snurfer, and the shift from snurfing to snowboarding. Features footage of Poppen discussing materials in this collection, Poppen snowboarding, and Jake Burton snurfing.

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Series 2: Business and Legal Materials, 1968-2006, undated

Box 1, Folder 13	United States patent documentation, 1966
Box 3, Folder 6	Transparencies of patents, undated
Box 1, Folder 14	Canadian patent documentation, 1984, 1967
Box 1, Folder 15	Similar patents, 1966-1978
Box 1, Folder 16	Trademark documentation, 1969, 1980 - 1988
Box 1, Folder 17	Correspondence, 1996-2006
Box 2, Folder 2-4	Correspondence, 1996-2006
Box 2, Folder 5	Assorted notes, 1966 - 1970, undated

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