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Minicomputers and Microcomputers Videohistory Collection, 1987

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., *osiaref@si.edu*
Title:	Minicomputers and Microcomputers Videohistory Collection
Identifier:	Record Unit 9533
Date:	1987
Extent:	2 videotapes (Reference copies). 11 digital .wmv files and .rm files (Reference copies).
Creator::	
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Prefered Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9533, Minicomputers and Microcomputers Videohistory Collection

Historical Note

An informal confederation of computer software designers, known as "The Brotherhood," formed during the late 1970s. The group began as a result of the members' mutual interest in microcomputer software development and their geographic proximity along the West Coast of the United States. Their contribution to computer graphics and games was significant in the development of more advanced systems.

Interviewees were Douglas Carlston, Ken and Roberta Williams, Margot Comstock, Jerry Jewell, and Dave Albert. Douglas Carlston wrote *Software People* in 1985 to document the role of "The Brotherhood" in the microcomputer industry. Carlston, a lawyer, was "bitten by the computer bug" in 1979 and began writing programs as a hobbyist. After the commercial success of his first two games, *Galactic Empire* and *Galactic Trader*, Carlston quit his practice and co-founded Broderbund Software, Inc., with his brother Gary in 1980.

Ken and Roberta Williams founded On-Line Systems in 1980 and achieved success with their creation of the first adventure/mystery games with graphics, *Mystery House* and later *The Wizard and the Princess*. In 1982, they became known as Sierra On-Line and continued to focus on games and educational software for the Apple Computer.

Margot Comstock began the journal *Softalk* with Al Tommervik in Los Angeles on September 12, 1980. Comstock had been hired by a small software publisher, Softape, to publish their in-house newsletter, when she transformed it into a national full-scale magazine for Apple owners. The magazine reviewed software, tracked industry news and listed the monthly top thirty best-selling computer programs.

In 1980, Jerry Jewell was working as a Computerland store manager in Sacramento, California. Less than a year later, he and partner Terry Bradley were in charge of the multimillion-dollar Sirius Software

Company founded on the games of programmer Nasir Gebelli. Sirius Software was noted for its meteoric rise and fall in the games market bonanza of the early 1980s. Dave Albert, a journalism major from the University of Iowa, worked as an editor for *Softside* magazine. The magazine prompted its original editor, Mark Pelczarski, to form the Penguin Software Company in DeKalb, Illinois, in 1981. Albert joined Penguin as a software publisher for the Apple II-inspired graphics and animation tools and games which the company produced. Albert later moved to Electronic Arts, an educational and game software house.

Introduction

The Smithsonian Videohistory Program, funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation from 1986 until 1992, used video in historical research. Additional collections have been added since the grant project ended. Videohistory uses the video camera as a historical research tool to record moving visual information. Video works best in historical research when recording people at work in environments, explaining artifacts, demonstrating process, or in group discussion. The experimental program recorded projects that reflected the Institution's concern with the conduct of contemporary science and technology.

Smithsonian historians participated in the program to document visual aspects of their on-going historical research. Projects covered topics in the physical and biological sciences as well as in technological design and manufacture. To capture site, process, and interaction most effectively, projects were taped in offices, factories, quarries, laboratories, observatories, and museums. Resulting footage was duplicated, transcribed, and deposited in the Smithsonian Institution Archives for scholarship, education, and exhibition. The collection is open to qualified researchers.

Descriptive Entry

Jon B. Eklund, curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, interviewed six members of "The Brotherhood" at Broderbund Software, Inc., in San Rafael, California, on July 31, 1987. The group discussed the creation, publishing, marketing, distribution, and reporting of microcomputing software in the late 1970s. They also reflected on how software houses survived the leveling off of the personal computer market in 1984 and 1985, and suggested strategies for remaining competitive in the marketplace. In addition, group members demonstrated early computer games.

This collection consists of one interview session, and one supplementary session, totaling approximately 5 hours of recordings, and 59 pages of transcript.

Please note that this session is comprised of dual sets of tape from two cameras positioned at different angles, plus a supplementary direct feed from a microcomputer.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Computer games -- History
Computer games -- Programming -- History
Computer programming
Interviews

Oral history
Science -- History
Technology -- History

Types of Materials:

Transcripts
Videotapes

Names:

Albert, Dave
Brotherhood
Brøderbund
Carlston, Douglas G.
Comstock, Margot
Eklund, Jon B., interviewer
Jewell, Jerry
Williams, Ken
Williams, Roberta

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews   **Session 1: July 31, 1987**

Interviews   In the office area of Broderbund Software, San Rafael, California, reviewed the activities of "The Brotherhood," concerning the development, publication, and marketing of microcomputer software and trade publications from 1975-1987, including: excitement of the early days in the industry; in-house versus out-of-house software development; evolution of microcomputer software editing, publishing, and marketing techniques; transitions from garage operations to large-scale businesses; growth and subsequent failure of the *Softalk* magazine as an indicator of the rise and decline of the industry; transmission and borrowing of ideas for software products; problems of software piracy and associated litigation; social activities of "The Brotherhood"; computer demonstrations of early software. Visual documentation included: group interaction among members of "The Brotherhood; computer feed of early games created by these programmers.

Interviews   Transcript, pages 1-59, of videotape recording, 1 hour, 40 minutes.

Interviews   Recording of Interview: Total Recording Time: 1 hour, 40 minutes on two cameras and a direct computer feed, totaling 5 hours of videotape

    Note:
- Original Masters: Camera A: 5 Beta videotapes
- Camera B: 5 Beta videotapes
- Preservation Masters: Camera A: 5 Motion jpeg 2000 and 5 mpeg digital files, Camera B: 5 Motion jpeg 2000 and 5 mpeg digital files
- Dubbing Masters: Camera A: 2 U-Matic videotapes
- Camera B: 2 U-Matic videotapes
- Reference Copies: Camera A: 1 VHS videotape, 1.6 hours, 5 Windows Media Video and 5 Real Media digital files
- Camera B: 1 VHS videotape, 1.6 hours, 5 Windows Media Video and 5 Real Media digital files
- Special Note:
- A supplemental recording, labeled "computer," was made with a direct feed from the microcomputer used to demonstrate computer games.
- Original Masters: 1 VHS videotape, 1.6 hours
- Dubbing Masters: 1 U-Matic videotape
- Reference Copies: 1 VHS videotape, 1 Windows Media Video and 1 Real Media digital files