

Annual Report – The Software History Center

Accomplishments and Plans for 2002-2003

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This Software History Center (SHC) Annual Report is being sent to all of the SHC Founders, contributors, associates and those cooperating and interested groups who have helped SHC realize these results.

2002 was a year that saw a number of our initiatives bear significant fruit: a special issue of the IEEE Annals, the ADAPSO Reunion meeting, 10 workshops on ADAPSO activities, 15 oral histories, a complete update of the softwarehistory.org website and the donation of significant materials to the Charles Babbage Institute (CBI). It was also a year in which Luanne Johnson moved on from the presidency of SHC to becoming president of the Charles Babbage Foundation (CB Foundation) after leading SHC since its origination in 2000. Burton Grad was then elected as the new president of SHC.

The Software History Center has focused on the following areas: retention and preservation of relevant materials from people, companies and institutions that contributed to the formation and growth of the software and services industry; obtaining oral histories and articles from industry pioneers; communicating the information acquired through publications and websites specifically aimed at supporting researchers, historians, curators and archivists while also making the information available to a broad audience; sponsoring professional research and publishing projects regarding key events, participants and influences in the evolution of the software and services industry. The balance of this report will cover SHC's accomplishments and plans in each of these program areas.

Retention and Preservation

In 2002 SHC was instrumental in arranging for ITAA to save and donate its remaining files from the 1960s and 1970s to the Charles Babbage Institute; this constituted 25 boxes of materials and is the largest collection of ADAPSO related papers yet assembled. SHC also assisted CBI in initiating collection efforts for the files of a number of software and services pioneers: Milt Wessel, Tom O'Rourke, Larry Schoenberg, Joe Piscopo, Joe Markoski, John Imlay, Esther Roditti, Larry Welke and Dick Canning. Most of these acquisitions have not yet been concluded and we will continue to monitor this area to ensure that these papers and the many others of value will not be lost.

Retaining and donating historic materials is only the first step in a difficult and expensive process of indexing, organizing, physically preserving, professional accessioning and, at some time in the future, scanning and storing these materials in digital format. SHC has discussed with CBI whether it wishes to be the archive of choice for all significant historic software and services collections, but it is not clear whether the specific retention

and preservation goals of SHC are consistent with CBI's plans; therefore, this subject will be explored further and possibly an alternative repository will need to be located and negotiated. We are planning an extensive retention program for 2003 with Doug Jerger leading the effort by contacting another 10-15 software and services pioneers and having them work with the selected archives in selecting and donating their papers. Meanwhile we urge all of those who are reading this report to NOT throw away your old files, but to contact SHC for preliminary assistance in determining what you should do to make sure that the relevant files are not lost to future use.

Oral Histories and Publications

The first quarter of 2002 saw the publication of a special issue of the IEEE Annals of the History of Computing (24:1) devoted to the early development of the software and services industry. Luanne Johnson and Burton Grad were the coeditors of this 96 page issue which contained articles about and by many of the industry pioneers and special articles by historians on software related topics. If any of you have not seen this special issue, please send us an email with your current address and we will send you a copy. While there have been a number of articles about software and services history previously published in the IEEE Annals, this one issue more than doubled the amount of IEEE published material on this subject. Tim Bergin, Editor-in-Chief of the IEEE Annals came up with the idea of this special issue and was instrumental in its being published in such a timely fashion.

In conjunction with the ADAPSO Reunion meeting in May 2002, SHC organized an oral history interview program with seven computer historians interviewing 15 software and services pioneers. This project was cosponsored by CBI and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. The background of each of the interviewees was carefully researched by the interviewers in order to prepare a pertinent set of questions to guide the interview. Each interview lasted about two hours and was recorded and transcribed and then edited for readability and clarity while retaining its tone, style and content. Each of these edited interviews has been or is being submitted to CBI for publishing on their website and the original tapes and unedited transcriptions will be deposited in CBI's archives. As of the end of March 2003, 10 of these interviews are available on the CBI website and the remaining 5 are targeted to be available by the end of May 2003. Reading these interviews is a wonderful experience; it provides great insight into the problems that these industry entrepreneurs faced and how they creatively resolved these difficulties to construct substantial businesses with valuable products and services. In many cases their comments show the special value that ADAPSO gave to them and to their companies and how together they were able to develop workable industry models and improve relations with their customers, with IBM and with each other.

As part of its plans for 2003, SHC is organizing 15 more oral histories of software and services pioneers using some of the same and some additional historians to plan and conduct the interviews. Elizabeth Virgo is the coordinator for this project, which is scheduled to be carried out in the fall of 2003.

One major project which SHC has started in 2003 has been to retain Thomas Haigh, a major young computer industry historian, to prepare a set of biographies for the IEEE Annals of some of the software and services pioneers with emphasis on their ADAPSO experiences and contributions together with an introductory article describing the role that ADAPSO played in the formation and structuring of the industry. He has used the transcriptions of the workshops conducted at the ADAPSO Reunion as well as the SHC oral histories and the ADAPSO, Wessel and Goetz files in the CBI Archives. In addition, SHC is working with a number of industry entrepreneurs to prepare articles about their own experiences for publishing in the IEEE Annals over the next two years; Oscar Schachter is leading this project.

Information Communication and Access

The big SHC event for 2002 was the ADAPSO Reunion that was held in May in Washington, DC at the Monarch Hotel. Over 30 industry pioneers attended along with 10 historians and 30 other spouses and guests. The celebration/working meeting started with a dinner on Friday night with Senator Frank Lautenberg as the featured speaker. It continued on Saturday morning with a plenary session at which SHC and the cosponsors (CBI, IEEE Annals, ITAA and the Smithsonian NMAH) each spoke of their interest in and activities relative to computer software and services history. The bulk of the morning was devoted to 5 workshops each focused on a particular topic or activity that ADAPSO was involved in during the 1960s through the mid 1980s. Martin Campbell-Kelly was the luncheon speaker. His new book, "From Airline Reservations to Sonic the Hedgehog: A History of the Software History" which has just been published (February 2003 by MIT Press), used substantial material from the transcript of the SHC-sponsored meeting, "One for the History Books," held in September 2000 in Palo Alto. In the afternoon there were 5 more workshops, again devoted to key ADAPSO topics.

The feedback from the pioneers and historians who participated was very positive and the materials that were recorded during the workshops will provide the basis for better future understanding of the many significant ADAPSO contributions to the evolution of the industry. Luanne Johnson has edited the transcripts from these ten workshops and SHC has published a book in cooperation with a publishing company established by Larry Welke that includes these transcripts and the plenary presentations.

SHC completely restructured its website during 2002 and updated much of the information to fit into the new format. The website includes information on the beginnings of the industry and a company creation and events timeline along with anecdotes and the names and brief bios of many of the industry pioneers. The SHC website references other websites that have pertinent information about software and services industry history rather than trying to replicate this material.

One major 2003 project for SHC is to organize, in conjunction with the CB Foundation, a consortium of organizations that are interested in retaining, preserving, archiving, displaying and researching information about the history of information technology. An

initial meeting was held in Palo Alto on May 16, 2003 at which each organization described its current and planned activities and what projects it believes should be performed in the future. From these discussions, a framework for future activities has been structured to ensure that all significant areas are being addressed and that non-productive overlap of work can be avoided. The CB Foundation now has a better guide as to where the results of its coordinating efforts should be directed and how to set up a mechanism for working with the various members of the consortium to enhance the value of all history-related efforts.

Research and Professional Publications

An exciting new initiative in 2003 for SHC is to provide guidance and funding for a major research and professional publication project related to the founding and growth of the software and services industry. For our first topic we have selected the role of ADAPSO in helping to set the framework of the industry. Thomas Haigh, who we mentioned earlier in this Annual Report, has been selected as the first SHC Research Scholar to conduct this research. The research work was carried out during the summer of 2003 and a paper is planned to be published within the next two years in a major professional historical journal. This particular project takes full advantage of the files that ITAA, Milt Wessel and Marty Goetz have donated to the CBI Archives and all of the transcribed materials from the ADAPSO workshops and the 2002 oral histories. We have also asked some other ADAPSO participants to be available for phone or face-to-face interviews with Tom to flesh out certain subjects or to fill in gaps in the information data base. We hope that this is the first of an annual SHC Research Scholar program.

And an Early Look at 2004

Since 2004 is the 25th Anniversary of VisiCalc on the Apple computer, SHC is using this event as a stimulus to organize a Conference on PC Software: The First Decade to be held May 6-7, 2004. This meeting will be modeled on our successful ADAPSO Reunion meeting with participation from many of the early software company pioneers in spreadsheets, word processing, data base systems, business graphics and other business applications. The conference will include oral histories, workshops and presentations by a few of the early industry leaders from the 1975-1985 time period. The conference will be cosponsored by CBI, CB Foundation, IEEE Annals, the Computer History Museum, the Mass Software Council, SIIA and other interested organizations.