

# CHARLES BABBAGE FOUNDATION

## IN SUPPORT OF THE HISTORY OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

**MEMO TO:** Charles Babbage Foundation Trustees and Directors  
Software History Center Board Members  
Attendees at the May 16 CBF/SHC Strategic Planning Meeting  
Friends of CBF and SHC

**FROM:** Luanne Johnson, CBF President  
Burton Grad, SHC President

**DATE:** May 29, 2003

**RE:** Report on Strategic Planning Meeting, May 16, 2003

This meeting was organized jointly by the Charles Babbage Foundation and the Software History Center and held in conjunction with the 2003 CBF Trustees meeting in Palo Alto, CA. The purpose of the meeting was to establish a consortium of organizations and individuals interested in preserving information technology history, to establish an initial set of priority projects, and to create a framework to record activities accomplished and in process as a basis for selecting and funding future projects. This initial meeting of the consortium members focused primarily on the history of computer software & services.

We had an excellent response to the invitations to this meeting. Nearly every major US organization currently working on some aspect of information technology history was represented or expressed interest in participating in the future. Fourteen organizations attended the meeting and made presentations during the morning session. A list of these organizations is attached as Appendix A.

The afternoon session was devoted to a spirited and thought-provoking discussion among the participants on how CBF and SHC can best contribute to the preservation of information technology history. Many different viewpoints were represented but all participants clearly shared the view that preserving IT history is of critical importance and that there is great value in combining forces to advance these efforts.

The following recommendations were made to CBF by the participants:

- CBF should take a leadership role in coordination, facilitation, and communication among IT history organizations.
- Everyone needs to know what everyone else is doing on an ongoing basis.
- We need to avoid overlapping efforts (except when done deliberately for valid reasons).
- We need to provide better access to financial resources (grant funds, etc.) through joint proposals.
- We need to facilitate sharing of open source tools for capturing, organizing and retrieving information.

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- We need coordinated marketing of the concept that preserving IT history is important to academics, historians and practitioners.
- We need coordinated action on legal, political and cultural impediments to preserving the information critical to IT history.

Recommendations to SHC were:

- Focus on key topics, rather than broad coverage; examples might be timesharing, database management systems, transaction processing systems, custom software for government projects, etc.
- Obtain depth of coverage on key topics using oral histories, preserved personal and corporate materials, memoirs and anecdotes. Obtain depth of coverage on particular companies such as ADP.
- Obtain customers' reactions to and the impact from the various services and product offerings, not just look at them from the producers' standpoint. Look at the feedback loop from the customers to the suppliers and how that affected the offerings.
- Consider both business and technology contributions in the selected areas.
- Create an advisory group to assist SHC in selecting projects and in determining what should be done in each project. Those who volunteered to participate are: IEEE Annals; CBI; Smithsonian NMAH; CHM; IEEE History Center.

CBF will follow up by investigating the options for an appropriate mechanism to support ongoing communications among the consortium members (such as a listserv, web-based chat room, Lotus Notes, etc.) and then implementing the solution that best meets the needs of the group. We will then define some specific tasks to be accomplished in order to refine the process and get consortium members actively involved. Examples of such tasks will be 1) to develop proposals for some of the projects that have been suggested such as joint undertaking of an extensive oral history program or development of tools to facilitate digital archiving, and 2) to use the communications mechanism to get feedback on projects pursued by individual consortium members, for example, getting feedback from all members on CBF's portal.

SHC will follow up by selecting one or two theme areas of interest to be pursued in 2003 and 2004 and then organize its collection, oral history and *IEEE Annals* efforts around those selected interest areas. Topics under consideration are mergers & acquisitions, DB management systems, timesharing, application development systems, data communications and transaction processing systems, and professional software services.

The meeting was a great success from both CBF's and SHC's viewpoints as it provided very clear and practical directions to both organizations for moving ahead. We are very grateful to everyone who participated for their insightful input, their spirit of cooperation and their commitment to preserving the history of information technology.

Appendix A

The following organizations participated and made presentations on their current activities:

- Software History Center (Burt Grad, Doug Jerger, Tom Haigh)
- Charles Babbage Institute (Jeff Yost, Phil Frana)
- IEEE Annals of the History of Computing (Tim Bergin, David Grier)
- IEEE History Center (John Impagliazzo, John Vardalas)
- IFIP (John Impagliazzo)
- Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History (David Allison)
- Computer History Museum (John Toole, Dag Spicer)
- Charles Babbage Foundation (Jim Cortada, Ed Feigenbaum, Luanne Johnson)
- ACM (Jim Horning, Julian Gomez)
- Stanford University (Henry Lowood, Casey Alt)
- Indiana University (Bill Aspray)
- University of Maryland (David Kirsch)
- HP Archives (Anna Mancini)
- The Internet Archive (Brewster Kahle)

Plus there were additional comments from:

- Joshua Lederberg (Rockefeller University, National Library of Medicine Profiles in Science project)
- Stewart Brand (The Long Now Foundation)
- Bernie Galler (Software Patent Institute)

Many other trustees and guests attended the meeting and participated in the discussions.

Representatives of the following organizations were unable to attend but expressed interest in future participation in the consortium.

- IBM Archives (Paul Lasewicz)
- Hagley Library (Lynn Catanese)
- Before the Web (Taylor Walsh)
- Smithsonian Institution Air & Space Museum (Paul Ceruzzi)
- American Computer Museum (George Keremedjiev)
- University of Pennsylvania (Nathan Ensmenger)
- Warwick University (Martin Campbell-Kelly)