

ANNUAL REPORT
of the ACM HISTORY COMMITTEE
For the Period: July 1, 2005 - June 30, 2006

Submitted by Richard Snodgrass and David S. Wise, co-chairs

1. BASIC INFORMATION

1.1 List of committee members

Richard Snodgrass, co-chair, Oct 2003 to present
David S. Wise, co-chair, Oct 2003 to present
William Aspray, December 2003 to present
Mary Hall, SGB liaison, January 2005 to present
Carol Hutchins, Pubs Board liaison, February 2005 to present
Michael Mahoney, December 2003 to present
Patricia Ryan, December 2003 to present
Len Shustek, May 2005 to present

1.2 State the purpose to the committee

The History Committee fosters preservation, interpretation, and collection of the history of the ACM and its role in the development of computing.

To this end, the committee provides guidance within the Association and carries out activities independently and in collaboration with other groups.

1.3 Indicate the organization of the committee

The History Committee does not have subcommittees or subunits. The committee meets as a whole.

1.4 List dates of committee meetings.

January 27, 2006 Face-to-Face Meeting, Computer History Museum, Mountain View, California

September 20, 2005 Conference Call
October 18, 2005 Conference Call
November 15, 2005 Conference Call
December 14, 2005 Conference Call
February 23, 2006 Conference Call
March 23, 2006 Conference Call
April 20, 2006 Conference Call
May 25, 2006 Conference Call

2. PROJECT SUMMARY

The History Committee has been focused on assembling source material on ACM's early history and contributions so that historians of science and technology and organizations can analyze and assess the role that ACM played and the lessons to be learned. A number of critical oral histories have been gathered and significant progress has been made in assembling an ACM archive. Progress has also been made at raising the visibility of our association's history, both within the SIGs (which each have their own history to tell) and with the historian community. As one indication, ACM SIGs, the Computer History Museum, SIAM, and volunteers are funding 4.5 oral histories, which when added to other contributions to our history effort represents over \$25,000 beyond that explicitly budgeted to the committee.

<u>Title of Project</u>	<u>Responsible Person</u>	<u>Starting Date</u>	<u>Status</u>	<u>Funds Budgeted</u>	<u>Funds Spent</u>
1. Oral Histories	Rick Snodgrass	June 2005	Ongoing		
2. ACM Archive	Pat Ryan	June 2005	Ongoing		
3. Turing Award Web Site	David S. Wise	July 2003	July 2005		
4. Developing ACM Retention Policy	David S. Wise	October 2005	Ongoing		
5. NMAH Transcripts	Rick Snodgrass	December 2004	Ongoing		

1. Oral Histories

Oral histories of the following ACM Presidents have been completed.

- Franz Alt, interviewed by Atsushi Akeru in February 2006
- Walter Carlson, interviewed by Tom Haigh in November 2005
- Bernie Galler, interviewed by Atsushi Akeru in January 2006
- Harry Huskey, interviewed by Bill Aspray in February 2006
- Anthony Oettinger, interviewed by Atsushi Akeru in January 2006
- Anthony Ralston, interviewed by Bill Aspray and Bernard de Neumann in January 2006
- Jean Sammett, interviewed by Tim Bergin in April 2006.

These cover the early history of ACM (1950–1976). Several oral histories of Turing Award winners have also been commissioned.

As of mid-June 2006, the oral history of Bernie Galler is complete and is being added to the ACM Digital Library, as is that of Turing Award winner Charles Bachman. The oral histories for Franz Alt, Walter Carlson, Anthony Oettinger, Anthony Ralston, and Jean Sammett are in the interviewees' hands, for final editing. The oral history of Harry Huskey is completed and in the interviewer's hands, for editing.

Note: The Computer History Museum videotaped the Harry Huskey oral history, which was done gratis by Bill Aspray. SIAM is splitting the costs of Anthony Ralston's interview (Bill Aspray also volunteered his time on this interview) and SIGPLAN is splitting the costs of Jean Sammett's interview. SIGMOD paid for the Charles Bachman interview.

2.ACM Archive

Archivists Elisabeth Kaplan and Carrie Seib visited ACM headquarters in December 2005 to survey physical files and have discussions with ACM unit leaders. They found that less than a third needed to be retained for archival purposes.

Total volume of files surveyed:

125 cf (83 boxes) from offsite storage
120 cf (60 file drawers) publications files onsite
41 cf (20 drawers) administration files onsite

286 cf. total surveyed

Total volume of archival value:

43.5 cf from offsite storage
14 cf from publications files onsite
28.5 from administration files onsite

86 cf total archival

This survey will aid in planning the headquarters move in August and will help reduce the amount of records held in offsite storage (it appears that as much as two-thirds of offsite storage could be considered for destruction). Their report also contained well-considered recommendations for how to proceed with a physical ACM archive.

3.Turing Award Web Site

The committee spent much time this year reconfiguring the Turing Award website. Our plan now, in conjunction with the Pubs Board and with pubs staff, is to populate pages for a half-dozen-odd winners and build from there, utilizing domain-specific expertise from SIGs to complete these pages, while attempting to remain consistent.

4. ACM Retention Policy

In 1991 ACM enacted a draconian retention policy that resulted in the destruction of many valuable records. We wish to do better this time.

There are several sources of archival records: paper records stored in HQ, paper records stored offsite, electronic records (e.g., reviews and submissions in the ManuscriptCentral submission tracking system, as well as the Digital Library and ACM's web site), and paper records stored by volunteers. The committee is working with the Pubs Board on a policy for accessing data in

ManuscriptCentral, which is a core resource with many constraints. The committee has developed initial guidelines for ACM board/committee web sites, from an archival point of view (what information should be retained for future historical analysis). We have constructed an initial History Committee web site (<http://history.acm.org>) consistent with these guidelines. We are becoming aware of many records stored by volunteers; this information is disappearing as these volunteers retire and relocate their offices. What is needed is a consistent, coherent, overarching retention policy that reflects ACM's core values and responsibility to the information technology community.

5. National Museum of Natural History Transcripts

Most of the NMAH oral histories related to the history of computing have been digitized and made available freely on that organization's web site. The committee is working with them to finish this project. There are now 17 interviews at that were funded in part by ACM (http://invention.smithsonian.org/resources/fa_comporalhist_index.aspx).

3. PLANS

3.1 List projects that will be completed or terminated in the coming year.

The May 2007 issue of CACM will have a special section on the history of ACM. At that time we'll determine if future special sections or individual papers on the history of ACM are warranted.

We hope to have the (physical) ACM Archive established by the end of the next fiscal year, though populating and cataloguing activities under the direction of ACM HQ will certainly continue after that. We also hope to complete a retention policy over the next year (Beth and Carrie's report provide the seeds for such a policy).

We are working with the National Museum of American History to process a second set of interviews (about 1500 pages) and to make available some very early material (such as a talk by von Neumann). Some of this will be funded jointly with SIGMOD. Our hope is to finish converting all interviews at the Smithsonian that are directly related to ACM and its interests to freely-available web access (we are close).

3.2 List important changes or milestones in active projects during the coming year.

We plan to continue with oral histories of some ACM Presidents; most will be completed by the end of the next fiscal year. We also plan to interview a few of the most central staff members and other highly influential ACM leaders, to be determined.

We want to grow the Turing Award web site by utilizing the energy and ideas of the recently established group of ACM SIG History Directors.

3.3 List new projects or programs which are proposed or contemplated.

We plan to get the SIGs much more heavily involved, both in the collection and dissemination of their own histories (an article has already been written by Judy Brown and Steve Cunningham on the history of SIGGRAPH) and in the funding of oral histories of Turing Award winners. We are investigating history collection web software developed by the Computer History Museum for use by SIGs.

3.4 List details of plan to recruit new/younger members.

It is a struggle to get young people, who are naturally focused on the future (especially so when they are young computer scientists), interested in what they perceive is “ancient history.” But if we can tell our history in a compelling way, perhaps we can bring younger people into the fold.

We are excited to have Mary Hall on our committee; she is doing a wonderful job of more centrally involving the SIGs in our activities. In particular, she plans to increasingly involve the SIG History Directors, many of whom are younger members. We anticipate that some future members of our committee will come from those ranks.

4. COMMENTS

Some of the activities of the ACM History Committee are exciting. For example, the Turing Award web site has the potential to crystallize the accomplishments of many notable computer scientists for the world, including potential computer science majors, and the oral histories and ACM archive will be central intellectual resources for ultimately ascertaining ACM’s position in the development of our field.

Other activities are more mundane, even boring, such as development of committee/board website guidelines and a retention policy. However, such activities have the potential to streamline and focus work across the association, so that we can tell our history in the future and so that our current history won’t be lost. As a specific example, all the reviews of ACM journal submissions are held in a commercial database. It was the history committee’s initiative to develop policy on retention and (very controlled) access to this very useful yet very confidential data. As another example, records valuable to the Association have been and continue to be destroyed, because no one has considered the historical implications and value of those records.

No other body within ACM pays much attention to these issues. The ACM History Committee is unique in bringing together active historians, staff members, and volunteers from across ACM to consider broadly how to best bring ACM’s legacy to light and to ensure that the legacy ACM is now creating is captured for future generations.

APPENDIX

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