

Annual Report of the History Committee

For the Period: July 1, 2004 - June 30, 2005

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

1. BASIC INFORMATION

1.1 List of committee members

The ACM History Committee became a formal committee of the Executive Committee in June 2004 with a budget beginning July 1 2004.

Current members:

Richard Snodgrass, co-chair, July 2004 to present
David S. Wise, co-chair, July 2004 to present
William Aspray, July 2004 to present
Mary Hall, January 2005 to present SGB
Carol Hutchins, February 2005 to present Pubs Bd
Michael Mahoney, July 2004 to present
Patricia Ryan, July 2004 to present COO
Len Shustek, May 2005 to present Comp. History Museum

Prior members:

Robert B. Allen, July 2004 to September 2004 PubsBd
Thomas Haigh, July 2004 to January 2005
Mark Scott Johnson, July 2004 to December 2004 SGB
Elisabeth Kaplan, July 2004 to January 2005 Chars. Babbage Instit.

1.2 State the purpose to the committee

Proposed a mission statement (for EC and Council approval in March)

"The committee fosters preservation and interpretation 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 has no subcommittees or other subunits.

1.4 List dates of committee meetings.

Face-to-face meeting in New York City: February 25-26, 2005

Conference calls (one hour each):

October 18, 2004
November 15, 2004
December 13, 2004
January 26, 2005
March 21, 2005
April 18, 2005

May 23, 2005

2. PROJECT SUMMARY

Oral Histories Rick Snodgrass June 2005 Ongoing \$28K \$0

Oral histories of ACM Presidents Franz Alt (by Atsushi Akera), Bernie Galler (by Atsushi Akera), and Walter Carlson (by Thomas Haigh) and Turing Awardees Richard Karp (by Thomas Drucker) and Robert Tarjan (by Thomas Drucker) are in the process of being contracted, to be performed by the end of 2005 and transcripts completed by mid-2006. We will be contracting with David Anderson to interview ACM President Anthony Ralston (split with SIAM: \$3K each).

ACM Archive Project Pat Ryan June 2005 Ongoing \$10K \$0

We are arranging for Beth Kaplan and an associate to visit ACM HQ later in Summer 2005 to scope out archiving effort as preparation for HQ move begins. Later we will work with HQ staff to develop physical archive.

NMAH Digitization Rick Snodgrass January 2005 Ongoing \$2K \$2K

We funded the digitization by the National Museum of Natural History of some 1500 pages of transcripts of ACM Presidents Franz Alt, Herb Grosch, Alton Householder, Harry Huskey, and John Mauchly, and ACM influential leader Paul Armer, along with a round-table discussion at an ACM conference in 1967. Also working on another 1500 pages of oral history transcripts pertaining to computing hardware pioneers. These will be digitized and made available to all on the web, with indexing via the ACM Digital Library.

History Webmaster \$1K \$0K

The Committee contracted with graduate student Joe November, Princeton University, as webmaster for the ACM History Committee web site, starting February 2005. He is developing a prototype web site for the Committee. The Committee has discussed structure of this site and guidelines for data retention of committee records.

ACM Turing Award Web Site Committee May 2005 \$0 \$0

Tim Bergin was appointed by the Publications Board as Editor of the ACM Turing Award web site. ACM Publications staff built a prototype Turing Award web site from materials on hand.

Additional projects:

We developed a comprehensive list of potential interviewees

ACM Presidents: 20,

ACM Executive Directors: 6,

initial staff members and other influential ACM leaders: 10

ACM Turing Award winners: 46,

and listed extant interviews and oral histories known to our historians.

At the request of ACM Executive Committee, HQ staff sent a letter from the committee co-chairs to winners of selected ACM awards asking for information on extant interviews. There have been 24 responses to date, some quite lengthy.

We developed list of several professional historians qualified to perform oral histories of computing pioneers.

We represented ACM on the Charles Babbage Foundation Collaboration Group. Out of six projects selected for further efforts, ACM is involved in half.

- + Making more oral histories available on the web (see above)
- + A second-level assessment of materials at ACM HQ and in storage, for their utilization in historical analysis
- + ACM Turing Award web site.

The Computer History Museum (John Toole) has a LaTeXed version of the Algol Bulletin that was sent to ACM and is now in the DL.

3. PLANS

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

SIGMOD funded a \$5K oral history from ACM Turing Award winner Charles Bachman. Tom Haigh interviewed him under contract and the transcription is being finalized. SIGMOD has also funded digitization of documents at the Charles Babbage Institute related to Bachman's work; copies will be deposited into ACM's Portal.

We survived an educational process in which the professional historians taught the computists that ACM "history" of importance to their profession is the history that only ACM can address, namely:

- the history of ACM, itself, as documented in records that ACM may already have, and in oral histories focusing on the development of the association.
 - the history of the Turing Award and its winners, as support for the public stature of the award and recognition of its funders, as well as the nuggets of history behind those selections.
- We hope that the interested SIGs will help on this tack.

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

Consistently with the point above, we targeted priority targets for funded oral histories, namely:

- surviving ACM presidents with tenures to 1976 or 1980.
- aging winners of the ACM Turing Award, especially those from whom oral histories have not yet been collected.

We developed a prototype contract for funded oral histories, including ACM ownership of copyrights on the products.

The funding of oral histories will in the future be split across two fiscal years.

There have been several changes to the Committee. Robert Allen left in September 2004, Mark Scott Johnson (the SGB rep) in December, and Thomas Haigh and Elisabeth Kaplan in January. Mary Hall joined in January 2005 as the SGB rep, Carol Hutchins in February as the Pubs Board rep, and Len Shustek (Chair of the Board of Directors of the Computer History Museum) in May.

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

Membership interlock with ACM-W.

John Toole will be meeting with ACM to go over the Computer History Museum's content that would be appropriate for the DL, especially a software archive that they have and/or are collecting. We are also working with Luanne Johnson and others of the Software History Center.

The Charles Babbage Foundation is working to leverage our funding of the NMAH to enable another 170 oral histories to be digitized and put on the web, at a cost of \$20K-\$30K.

Rick Snodgrass are working on a database of oral histories and other historical data on ACM Presidents, Turing Award winners, and other ACM award winners.

We plan a special issue of CACM for January 2007 to commemorate ACM's 60th anniversary (the birth date is October 2007).

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

Mary Hall has been added to the committee. (Phd., Rice University, 1991) While she has been active in SIGPLAN (she is program chair for 2005 PLDI), this is her entree into Committee/Board membership.

4. COMMENTS

While a few important projects occupy most of the Committee's annual budget, most of the work of the committee involves making connections, both within ACM and without. We are working hard to change the culture of ACM, so that, while still looking forward to new technologies and new ideas, ACM also invests some effort at preserving and interpreting its past role in computing.

History is now starting to appear on the radar within ACM. As but one example, two book proposals on history of computing have recently been received by Mark Mandelbaum. We have had discussions concerning history with the Awards Committee, the Publications Board, the SGB, and the HOPL-III organizers.

Many influential organizations involved in the history of computing are now well aware of ACM's efforts with regard to its organizational history and contributing to the history of computing.

- + Charles Babbage Foundation
- + Charles Babbage Institute
- + Computer History Museum
- + IEEE Annals of the History of Computing
- + IBM Archives
- + IBM's Canadian Pioneers of Computing
- + IEEE History Center
- + Smithsonian Institution, including the National Museum of American History
- + SIAM
- + Software History Center

As an example, we mention that the Librarians Index to the Internet for June 16, 2005 mentioned the nascent ACM Turing Award web site as a recommended site (see <http://lii.org?recs=026399>). The Pubs staff created this site, and it will get even better with an Editor now responsible.

APPENDIX

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