GAME PRESERVATION FORUM

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

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The William A. Higinbotham Game Studies Collection contributes directly to the study of video games as popular culture and to their historical longevity. It invests in and is dedicated to:

- collecting and preserving the texts, ephemera, and artifacts that document the history and work of early game innovator and Brookhaven National Laboratory scientist William A. Higinbotham, who in 1958 invented the first interactive analog computer game, Tennis for Two;
- documenting the material culture of electronic screen-based game media.

In addition to game hardware and software, game-related ephemera is collected, which consists of: video and computer game magazines; game catalogs; strategy guides; game boxes and cases; game instruction manuals; video and arcade game promotional materials; game memorabilia; photographs of arcades; and original publications on video game history and culture. Students of all levels, faculty, visiting researchers, and remote users are invited to consult and explore this collection.

William A. Higinbotham

After reading an instruction manual that accompanied a Systron-Donner analog computer, William Alfred Higinbotham was inspired to design Tennis for Two, the first computer game to utilize handheld controllers and to display motion. It was also the first game to be played by general public, in this instance, attendees of “visitors day” at Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) in 1958. Learn More »
Goals

- **Research hub** for the history and work of early game innovator and Brookhaven National Laboratory scientist William Higinbotham as well as the material culture of games, consoles, handhelds, etc ...

- **A fully functioning Game Lab** where faculty, graduate and undergraduate students can access vintage consoles for research and entertainment.

- **Collaboration nationally** with other cultural institutions that collect, preserve, conserve, archive and exhibit videogame artifacts. The WHGSC has established ties with the Museum of the Moving Image, the International Center for the History of Electronic Games at the Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, NY, and the Lemelson Center at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, home to the Ralph Baer archive.
Game Laboratory

- Located in the Central Reading Room (Melville Library)
- Restricted access to students enrolled in games-related courses
- Glass cases exhibiting games and consoles
- Students able to study-play original games for the Atari 2600, Colevision, Nintendo (NES) Super Nintendo (SNES) Nintendo 64 (N64) and Sega Genesis
- In the future, we will add next-generation consoles and their games
Display in the Main Library’s central reading room.

In the 2010 Summer Session, students enrolled in CCS/DIA 396 Game History were given a curatorial project as their final assignment. Working in two teams, one group curated a display cabinet devoted to dedicated handheld electronic games. The other group curated a “material time-line” for game console storage media (e.g., game cartridges, cards, and optical discs).
Scans of original boxes will be displayed above the consoles in the near future.
Collection Development

Circulating Collection

- $2000 yearly allocation to acquire a circulating book collection (150 books)
- Online subscription to Games and Culture
- circulating game collection (131 games). Donated

Special Collection

- Primary, secondary, and special collections materials in their original formats including:
  - Original game consoles
  - Game cartridges and optical discs
  - controllers
  - Rare books on videogames
  - 2000+ volume video and computer game magazine collection
Within our education section of the William Higinbotham Game Studies Collection we have included information on videogame preservation. Here visitors can read a brief statement on the question “Why preserve videogames” and find a bibliography of published resources on the practice and study of game preservation as well as links to “preservation initiatives”, “game labs.” and “archives.”

The aims are two-fold:

**To help inform visitors** of the challenges and debates that shape videogame preservation.

**To provide education resources** so that videogame preservation becomes “demystified” for students and researchers interested in the serious study of videogames, especially history.

### Resources on Game Preservation

**Publications**

Preservation Initiatives, Game Labs, and Archives

- American Classic Arcade Museum
- American Museum of the Moving Image
- Computer and Video Game Archive, Museum of Michigan
- Game Preservation SIG/Digital Game Canon
- How They Got Game, Stanford University
- International Arcade Museum
- The Stephen M. Cabrinety Collection in the History of Microcomputing at Stanford University
- Preserving Virtual Worlds, Library of Congress
- Record/Replay
- Strong National Museum of Play, International Center for the History of Electronic Games
- The University of Texas at Austin, Videogame Archive
- University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Gaming Initiative
- The University of Michigan Computer and Video Game Archive
- Video Game Preservation SIG of the International Game Developers Association

- Enabling not disabling
- Awareness not isolation
- Inclusive not exclusive
- Communitary not proprietary
Enabling not disabling

If an organization or network develops, I would hope that its major aims are:
1) to support the preservation of videogame history;
2) serve as a non-profit entity to promote the awareness game preservation;
3) function as a database for preservation practices and directory for cultural institutions involved in the practice;
4) represent the interests of game preservation and those institutions involved;
5) service the coordination of efforts;
6) develop/provide guidelines for good practice;
7) invest across the history of videogame media;
8) be a forum where information and ideas can be exchanged in a collaborative spirit towards a shared common goal.
Game museums are popping up in game boutiques (Videogames of New York) and by way of collector organizations/retail stores (Digipress).

Will such museums last? What constitutes the usage of “museum” in these instances of “placing lots of game related stuff behind glass” and acquiring a 501c3?

An awareness of diverse preservationist efforts is necessary so that reinvented wheels don’t spin off. Sustainability and long-term vision.

Awareness not isolation
Inclusive not exclusive

A collaborative investment that works across cultural institutions, academic institutions, private collectors, and small museums. A “loose” understanding of “cultural institution” is necessary to account for the diverse range of efforts – amateur, professional, collector, educator, archivist, etc. invested in the conservation, preservation, restoration, and documentation of games.
Communitary not Proprietary

Aim for the “common good” of preservation rather than individual agendas.

Share

Assist

Support
Support for the WHGSC

- **BNL/SBU Seed Grant** to produce documentary of *Tennis for Two*: $9,000
- **FAHSS interdisciplinary initiatives grant**, SBU (Faculty in the Arts, Humanities and lettered Social Sciences): $6,000
- **Library**: funds to purchase books and magazines ($2000)
- **Academic departments**: funds to purchase archival supplies
- **Donations**: games, consoles, and TVs from students, staff, and the community
- **In-kind contributions**: time from library staff, web designer, and student assistants
- **Special Collections, SBU**: privately raised funds to support meeting

**Student Participation**

- inventoried extensive magazine collection
- created finding aid for collection
- curated game history exhibit
- provide feedback on Game Lab experience