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Guide to the Steven Epstein Papers, 1941-2014 — 124.2287

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English

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong

The Strong

One Manhattan Square

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URL: <https://www.museumofplay.org/collections/brian-sutton-smith-library-archives-of-play/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
Creator:	Epstein, Steven R.
Title:	Steven Epstein papers
ID:	124.2287
Date [inclusive]:	1976-2014
Date [bulk]:	1983-1997
Physical Description:	8.15 Linear Feet (1 document box, 2 A/V boxes, 1 flat box, 1 oversized folder)
Language of the Material:	English
Abstract:	This collection consists of the papers of Steven Epstein, owner of the Broadway Arcade in Manhattan, New York and founder of the Professional & Amateur Pinball Association (PAPA). The materials are dated from 1976 to 2014, with the bulk of the materials dated from 1983 to 1997. The papers are comprised of newspaper clippings, correspondence, scrapbooks, promotional materials, VHS cassettes, and more.

Preferred Citation for Publication

Steven Epstein papers, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong.

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Historical Note

Steven Epstein was the owner of the Broadway Arcade in New York City, a game designer, and founder of the Professional & Amateur Pinball Association (PAPA). He was born in 1948 to David and Harriet Epstein. After graduating high school in 1966, Epstein attended and graduated from the University of Bridgeport, Connecticut. Epstein went on to take over the Broadway Arcade after his father, David's, retirement in 1984

In 1963 when David Epstein purchased the Broadway Arcade, pinball was illegal in New York City. The Broadway Arcade was considered a "redemption center" with Skee-ball machines and Pokerinos.

After college, Steven joined his father's business and advocated to change the legal status of pinball. Eventually, pinball was deemed legal by the New York City Council in 1976. Steven continued to advocate and market pinball attracting many celebrities to the Broadway Arcade – Lou Reed, Diana Ross, Brooke Shields, and Matthew Broderick among them. Epstein established the Broadway Arcade as a test site for pinball machine manufacturers' newest creations and established leagues and tournaments. In 1987, Epstein was forced to move the Broadway Arcade to a smaller location. The Broadway Arcade continued to be a success but urban renewal projects and strict anti-arcade zoning regulations forced Broadway Arcade to close on January 1, 1997.

In 1991, Epstein and Roger Sharpe created the Professional & Amateur Pinball Association (PAPA) to run and promote pinball tournaments, encourage friendly competition, and spread enthusiasm for pinball. The idea for PAPA began in the late 1970s when Sharpe, Epstein, and Lionel Martinez started keeping track of their competitions together. They developed the league scoring system from the data they collected. Along with tournaments, Epstein also published a magazine titled *The Flip Side* that created "a forum for players and lovers of the game to state their ideas, perspectives, and accomplishments." *The Flip Side* ran from late 1992 until 1995. In January 2004, Epstein transferred ownership of PAPA to Kevin Martin and in 2011 Martin transferred PAPA to the Replay Foundation.

In late 2013, Epstein and Steve Zahler opened Modern Pinball, a sales and interactive showroom for new and vintage pinball machines. Modern Pinball hosted tournaments and leagues, birthday parties, and brought pinball back to New York City. Ultimately, Modern Pinball closed permanently in July 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Steve Epstein was married to Sondra Walker Epstein and together they had two daughters. He facilitated an eating disorder support group for over 20 years, designed pinball games [*Barracora*], and resurrected the International Flipper Pinball Association. Steve passed away in June 2020.

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Collection Scope and Content Note

This collection documents Steve Epstein's operation of the Broadway Arcade and Modern Pinball (New York City), game design and development, and the founding of PAPA. The materials date from 1976 to 2014, with the bulk of the materials dated from 1983 to 1997. The papers are comprised of newspaper clippings, VHS cassettes, correspondence, marketing materials, sketches, proposals and more.

The majority of the papers relate to promotional efforts for the Broadway Arcade and include video news segments, newspaper clippings, audio recordings of radio interviews, "b-roll" footage of the arcade, branded stationary, photographs, and a pitch letter.

The papers also cover the start of PAPA and include handwritten notes and documentation outlining the vision for PAPA and tournament play, rules, and operator guides. The collection documents Epstein's effort to design pinball games and includes sketches, storyboards, proposals, and correspondence. Of

note are the project development notes for "Quadrasome," which was never published, but contains the script, notes, drawings, agreements, and more.

The Steven Epstein papers have been arranged into four series. The physical materials are housed in five boxes and one oversized folder. Additional scope and content information can be found in the Collection Inventory section of the finding aid..

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System of Arrangement

Series I: Personal, 1941, 1983-2009

Series II: Broadway Arcade, 1980-2014

Series III: Professional & Amateur Pinball Association (PAPA), 1987-1997

Series IV: Game development, 1981-1987

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

The papers were donated to The Strong in July 2024 as a gift of the Epstein family in honor of Steve Epstein. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under object ID 124.2287 and were received from Erica Santana in one box and one rolled container.

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and users of its library and archives.

Conditions Governing Use

Though the donor has not transferred intellectual property rights (including but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, they have given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

Processed by

Stephanie Ball, August 2024.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Video arcades
- Pinball machines
- Pinball machines--Drawings
- Pinball machines--History
- Pinball -- Tournaments
- Game design and development
- Photographs
- Negatives (Photographs)
- Broadway Arcade (New York, N.Y.)
- Modern Pinball Inc.
- Professional and Amateur Pinball Association

Collection Inventory

Series I: Personal, 1941-2014

Series Scope and Content Note

This series documents the personal life and interests of Steven Epstein. It includes newspaper articles about Epsteins involvement with the ARKS Foundation [a not-for-profit to support recovery from Anorexia Nervosa] and an article in *GQ Magazine* about Epstein. The series also includes reference articles that discuss general pinball, Steve Kordek, a fictional short story about a pinball player, and "Profits ...in Pennies: Your Guide to Success in Modern Arcade and Sportland Operation" from 1941.

Of note are two proposals by Epstein for "Arcadia 21" and "The Great American Amusement Emporium." "Arcadia 21" and "The Great American Amusement Emporium" were proposals for two different family fun complexes that included an arcade or pinball component, cineplexes, restaurants, and other activities.

Title/Description	Instances	
Scrapbook - black portfolio, 1985-1997	box 4	object 1
Scrapbook - photo album, 1985-1997	box 4	object 2

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Series II: Broadway Arcade, 1980-2014

Series Scope and Content Note

This series documents Epstein's role in turning the Broadway Arcade into the "Pinball Capital of the World." The materials consist of newspaper clippings about the arcade, correspondence, promotional materials, photographs, and VHS cassettes.

Of note is the ad copy for the *Village Voice*. Epstein mentioned in an interview that advertising in the *Village Voice* was a turning point for the arcade.

Many of the VHS cassettes in this series contain promotional vidoes and b-roll used to promote the Broadway Arcade as well as television segments from MTV and other news channels about the Broadway Arcade. Some of the VHS cassettes have been digitized. The corresponding digital file name is indicated in brackets next to the title in the container list.

Title/Description	Instances	
Broadway Arcade news clips VHS cassettes [digital file B2Obj06_Silver Ball Cafe News Clips], undated	box 2	object 6-7
"Broadway Arcade Party" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj04_Broadway Arcade Party], July 17, 1985	box 2	object 4
"Broadway Arcade public relations Howard Sherman" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj10_Broadway Arcade public relations] , December 12, 1985	box 2	object 10
"Broadway Arcade UCP Telethon" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj01_Broadway Arcade UCP Telethon 19860119], January 19, 1986	box 2	object 1
"CNN Headline - TV ASAHI Pinball tournament" VHS cassette, undated	box 2	object 13
"Larry King Steven Epstein interview" audio cassette, undated	box 3	object 3
"Lou Reed video press kit: Mistrial and outtakes from Broadway Arcade" VHS cassette, 1986	box 2	object 9
"MTV News - Pinball Playoffs" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj02_MTV News Pinball Playoffs 19910227], February 27, 1991	box 2	object 2

"MTV Sharon and BWA" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj05_MTV Sharon and BWA], c. 1991	box 2	object 5
Newspaper articles, 1997-2014	box 4	folder 1
"Pinball-a-thon 'Flippin for Kids' 95.5 WPLJ-FM radio" standard audio cassette, c. 1983	box 3	object 2
"Pinball Channel 7-5" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj08_Howard Phillips interview], 1992	box 2	object 8
"Pinball Expo and Steve" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj14_Pinball Expo and Steve], undated	box 2	object 12
"Pinball repairs" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj03_Pinball Repairs], undated	box 2	object 3
"To: Walt Levine The Broadway Arcade - From JS Productions limited" VHS cassette [digital file B2Obj11_To Walt Lavine from JS Productions], c. 1980s	box 2	object 11
"Voice of America - Steven interview about pinball tournaments" standard audio cassette, undated	box 3	object 1

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Series III: Professional & Amateur Pinball Association, 1987-1997

Series Scope and Content Note

This series consists of documents related to the Professional & Amateur Pinball Association (PAPA) and includes VHS cassettes of tournaments, newspaper clippings, financial documents, rules and regulations, brochures, and correspondence.

Found in this series is the handwritten proposed tournament structure and rules, a competitive pinball vision diagram, and an annual report from 1994 on the state of PAPA.

Three issues of the periodical *Flip Side*, started by Epstein, and correspondence from around the world requesting subscriptions are in box one, folder 21.

Title/Description	Instances	
Newspaper articles, 1994-1995	box 4	folder 2
"PAPA pinball liner Blaze 103.5" audio cassette, undated	box 3	object 4
"PAPA 2 - AIS air checks" VHS cassette , February 1-2, 1992	box 2	object 14-15
"PAPA 3 Championships" VHS cassette, February 12-14, 1993	box 3	object 5
"PAPA 4 highlights" VHS cassette, 1994	box 3	object 6
"PAPA 5 press clips" VHS cassette, 1995	box 3	object 7

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Series IV: Game development, 1982-1987

Series Scope and Content Note

This series consists of game development documentation, project binders, correspondence, storyboards, sketches, and reviews of games created by Steven Epstein and others. The games documented in the series are *Barracora*, *Sharpshooter*, "Quadrasome," "Streamliner," and "Derby Time."

Title/Description	Instances	
"Quadrasome storyboard" VHS cassette [digital file B3Obj05_Quadrasome storyboard 1990], 1990	box 3	object 8

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