

Finding Aid to the Living Books Collection, 1987-2004

Summary Information

Title: Living Books collection

Creator: Jeff Schon and Living Books (primary)

ID: 116.246

Date: 1987-2004 (inclusive); 1993-1997 (bulk)

Extent: 7 linear feet

Language: The materials in this collection are in English.

Abstract: The Living Books collection is a compilation of corporate records, financial documents, product development documentation, marketing materials, publicity clippings, reference materials, and more. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1993 and 1997.

Repository:

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

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Rochester, New York 14607

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Administrative Information

Conditions Governing Use: This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donor has not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, he has given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

Custodial History: The Living Books collection was donated to The Strong in January 2016 as a gift from Jeff Schon. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 116.246 and were received from Jeff Schon in 6 boxes.

Preferred citation for publication: Living Books collection, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong

Processed by: Julia Novakovic, May-June 2016

Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Lee-Merrow, Susan W.
- Schon, Jeff

Corporate Names

- Brøderbund
- Brøderbund Software, Inc.
- Living Books (Firm)
- Random House (Firm)

Subjects

- Brøderbund
- Computer games
- Computer games industry
- Dr. Seuss's ABC (Computer game)
- Educational games--Software
- Game design and development
- Games--software
- Green Eggs and Ham (Computer game)
- Living Books (Firm)
- Reading games
- Seuss, Dr.

Historical Note

Computer software giant Brøderbund Software, Inc. developed a series of "Living Books" multimedia CD-ROMs for children in 1992. The success of this product line spurred the creation of another company within Brøderbund which would focus solely on story-based, interactive software for children. In 1994, Living Books was formed as a separate company owned by Brøderbund and Random House, Inc. Living Books then hired Jeff Schon, an executive with more than 20 years of experience in animation and entertainment production, as its CEO and President. Under Schon's direction, Living Books acquired licensing rights to popular children's book characters, including The Berenstain Bears, Little Critter, Arthur, Stellaluna, and the works of Dr. Seuss. Between 1994 and 1997, Living Books products won dozens of national awards and sold millions of units.

In January 1997, Random House sold its 50% interest in Living Books back to Brøderbund. The Learning Company then purchased Brøderbund in 1998 and immediately terminated more than 500 former Brøderbund employees. Mattel acquired The Learning Company a year later, and subsequent transactions effectively rendered the original Brøderbund defunct. Living Books ceased operations as a result of the 1998 takeover, but publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt purchased the rights to the Living Books titles and content.

In 2010, Wonderful, Inc. established Wonderful Interactive Storybooks based on the original Living Books products, with the approval of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. As of 2016, these interactive story apps are available on Apple, Android, and Amazon.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Living Books collection documents the creation of Living Books as a separate company owned by both Brøderbund Software, Inc. and Random House, Inc. and its operations through 1997. Material types in this collection include corporate records, financial documents, product development documentation, marketing materials, publicity clippings, reference materials, and more. When possible, original folder titles as labeled by Jeff Schon were retained. Additional scope and content information can be found in the “Contents List” section of this finding aid.

The Living Books collection is arranged into nine series, two of which have been further divided into subseries. The collection is housed in 14 archival document boxes.

System of Arrangement

Series I: Corporate information, 1991-1996

Subseries A: Mission

Subseries B: Annual reports

Subseries C: Company meetings

Subseries D: Board of Trustees meetings

Subseries E: Agreements

Series II: Financial documentation, 1994-1997

Series III: Marketing and sales, 1993-1998

Subseries A: Market research and reference

Subseries B: Marketing plans and projects

Subseries C: Sales accounts and distributors

Subseries D: Sales conferences

Series IV: Product development, 1993-1997

Series V: Personnel, 1994-1997

Series VI: Correspondence, 1994-1997

Series VII: News and publicity clippings, 1992-1997

Series VIII: Reference, 1987-2004

Series IX: Miscellaneous, n.d.

Contents List

Series I: Corporate information, 1991-1996

Subseries A: Mission

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains information about the origin of Living Books through meeting minutes, planning materials, and more. Notes and reference from the Living Books “mission meeting” is also housed in this subseries.

Box 1

- Folder 1 “Origin book, 1994” - meeting minutes, partnership agreements, planning materials, spreadsheets; 1993-1994
- Folder 2 Living Books mission meeting - notes and reference, August 16, 1994

Subseries B: Annual reports

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds annual reports from Brøderbund, a parent company of Living Books.

For more information on Brøderbund, see also the Brøderbund Software, Inc. collection in the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play.

Box 1

- Folder 3 Brøderbund 1992 Annual Report with reference, 1992-1993
- Folder 4 Brøderbund 1993 Annual Report, 1993
- Folder 5 Brøderbund 1996 Annual Report, 1996

Subseries C: Company meetings

Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses meeting agendas and notes from company-wide meetings at Living Books, as well as production meeting notes.

Box 1

- Folder 6 Company meeting agendas and notes, 1994
- Folder 7 Company meeting agendas and notes, 1995
- Folder 8 Company meeting agendas and notes, 1996
- Folder 9 Production meeting notes, 1995
- Folder 10 Production meeting notes, 1996

Subseries D: Board of Trustees meetings

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains Board of Trustees meeting agendas, notes, minutes, budgets, forecasts, and other plans presented to the Living Books Board of Trustees.

Box 2

- Folder 1 May 1994 Board of Directors’ Meeting - notes, correspondence, and agenda, 1994
- Folder 2 1995 Board of Directors’ Meetings - notes, minutes, and correspondence, 1995
- Folder 3 “Living Books 1996 Annual Operating Plan,” February 16, 1995
- Folder 4 Board of Directors Meeting Report, February 22, 1995, with Living Books 1995 Budget, February 1995
- Folder 5 Board of Directors Meeting Report, June 8, 1995, with Living Books Revised Budget and Forecast, June 1995

- Folder 6 Board of Directors Meeting Report, September 28, 1995, with Living Books 1996 Domestic Unit and Revenue Projections, September 1995
- Folder 7 Board of Directors Meeting Report, January 18, 1996, with Living Books 1996 Annual Operating Plan and 1996 Budget, January 1996
- Folder 8 Board of Directors Meeting Report, May 15, 1996
- Folder 9 "Three Year Strategic and Financial Plan, 1996-1998, Living Books," May 15, 1996
- Folder 10 Board of Directors Meeting Report and agenda, September 19, 1996

Subseries E: Agreements

Scope and Content Note: Within this subseries are agreements, contracts, and other reference pertaining to Living Books and Brøderbund.

Box 2

- Folder 11 Brøderbund and Learning Company merger - internal documentation, July 30, 1995
- Folder 12 Production and distribution agreement [Brøderbund and American Interactive Media, Inc.], 1991-1993
- Folder 13 Bundling agreements and reference, 1992-1994
- Folder 14 Columbia House proposal - reference and correspondence, 1994
- Folder 15 Affiliate distribution agreements, 1995-1996

Series II: Financial documentation, 1994-1997

Scope and Content Note: Within this series are budgets, financial statements, spreadsheets, memos, and policies relating to finances at Living Books.

Box 3

- Folder 1 1994 Budget - spreadsheets, notes, and memos, 1994
- Folder 2 1995 Budget (Part 1 of 2) - budget and notes, 1995
- Folder 3 1995 Budget (Part 2 of 2) - budget and notes, 1995
- Folder 4 1996-1997 Financials (Part 1 of 2) - spreadsheets, notes, and memos, 1996-1997
- Folder 5 1996-1997 Financials (Part 2 of 2) - spreadsheets, notes, and memos, 1996-1997

Box 4

- Folder 1 Financial statements - spreadsheets and memos, 1994
- Folder 2 Revised budget - memos and notes, 1994
- Folder 3 1994 Year-End Audit - spreadsheets and memo, 1995
- Folder 4 Expense approval levels memo, 1994
- Folder 5 Chart of accounts memo and draft chart, 1994
- Folder 6 Corporate cash management - policies and memos, 1995 and n.d.
- Folder 7 1996 Annual Operating Plan - presentation, February 16, 1995
- Folder 8 1995 P&Ls - revised budget and forecast with notes, June 1995
- Folder 9 1995 Revised Budget and Forecast - spreadsheets and notes, June 1995
- Folder 10 1995 Financial Worksheets - spreadsheets, notes, and memos, 1995
- Folder 11 1996 Domestic Unit and Revenue Projections - spreadsheets and notes, November 1995
- Folder 12 1996 AOP - spreadsheets, notes, and memo, 1995-1996

- Folder 13 1996 Production Costs - spreadsheet, 1996
- Folder 14 1996 R&D Budget - spreadsheet and notes, 1995
- Folder 15 1996 Budget Re-Forecast - budget and memo, 1996
- Folder 16 April 1996 Financials - spreadsheets and memo, 1996
- Folder 17 June 1996 Financials - spreadsheets and memo, 1996
- Folder 18 August 1996 Financials - spreadsheets and memos, 1996
- Folder 19 September 1996 Financials - spreadsheets and memo, 1996
- Folder 20 October 1996 Financials - spreadsheets and memo, 1996
- Folder 21 November 1996 Financials - spreadsheets and memo, 1996

Box 5

- Folder 1 1996 Year-End Financials - data and spreadsheets, 1996
- Folder 2 Project P/L Statements - spreadsheets and notes, 1994-1996
- Folder 3 Financial Procedures - memo, December 8, 1996
- Folder 4 Final 1997 Budget - spreadsheets, 1996
- Folder 5 Structural P&Ls - spreadsheets, 1997-1998
- Folder 6 P&L reports, 1996
- Folder 7 Production expenses - charts and spreadsheets, 1994-1996
- Folder 8 Cost of goods (COGs) analysis, 1996
- Folder 9 Cost reports budget tracking, 1995-1996
- Folder 10 Financial summary spreadsheets, 1994-1996
- Folder 11 Financial statements drafts, 1994-1995
- Folder 12 Financial reference spreadsheets, 1995

Series III: Marketing and sales, 1993-1998**Subseries A: Market research and reference**

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds marketing presentations, focus group data, consultant analysis, and other market research on Living Books products and the educational software industry.

Box 5

- Folder 13 "Brøderbund Living Books Research Presentation," Macro Consulting, July 1993
- Folder 14 Living Books Customer Analysis, August 1994
- Folder 15 CD-ROM studies - "How Computers Live in Schools" and "CD-ROM Talking Books: A Case Study of Promise and Practice" reports, 1995
- Folder 16 "Living Books Corporate Branding Project - Management Interview Summary and Strategic Focus Map," PSL Marketing Resources, January 1996

Box 6

- Folder 1 "Living Books Corporate Branding Project - Branding Case Studies and Competitive Positioning Analysis," PSL Marketing Resources, January 1996
- Folder 2 "Living Books Corporate Branding Project - Trade Interview Summary," PSL Marketing Resources, January 1996
- Folder 3 "Living Books Summary of Learning," PSL Marketing Resources, January 1996
- Folder 4 "Living Books: International Market Opportunity Assessment," Class project for Global Marketing Strategy course, April 25, 1996

- Folder 5 Focus group data - Living Books and PSL Marketing Resources, June 1996
- Folder 6 "Living Books New Product Concept and Line Positioning Research," PSL Marketing Resources, July 8, 1996
- Folder 7 "Consumer Market: Penetrating Disney Territory," Global Touch, Inc. presentation for Random House and Living Books, August 28, 1996
- Folder 8 "Brøderbund and Living Books Merchandising Analysis," Technology Advancement Corporation, November 1996, with notes and Ed Auer information, 1996
- Folder 9 Outside consultant research on Living Books, 1996
- Folder 10 PC Data - reference and statistics, 1995-1997
- Folder 11 Software direct marketing - reference, 1995

Subseries B: Marketing plans and projects

Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses marketing plans, public relations guidelines, press releases, press kits, and presentations from the Marketing Team at Living Books.

Box 7

- Folder 1 PR Guidelines - policies, FAQs, correspondence, and notes; 1993-1995
- Folder 2 Marketing plans - presentations, notes, and memos, 1994-1997
- Folder 3 Media plan - memo and revised plans, 1994
- Folder 4 Plan-o-grams - descriptions and notes, 1994
- Folder 5 PR project status updates, 1994-1995
- Folder 6 General marketing expenses budget - memos and spreadsheets, 1995
- Folder 7 Press releases, 1995
- Folder 8 Marketing promotions notes, 1996
- Folder 9 Brøderbund's Living Books press kit with notes, 1993
- Folder 10 Living Books press kit, Spring Comdex 1994 - press kit, notes, and reference, 1994
- Folder 11 "Living Bookmobile" - notes, memos, and sketches, 1994
- Folder 12 *Dr. Seuss's ABC* marketing plan, 1995
- Folder 13 *Dr. Seuss's ABC* publicity planning and reference, 1995
- Folder 14 "Dr. Seuss presentation" to Brøderbund board, 1995
- Folder 15 CKS - correspondence, notes, and presentation on Advertising Strategy, 1994-1995
- Folder 16 CKS - Advertising and Media Strategy for *Dr. Seuss's ABC*, 1995
- Folder 17 *Dr. Seuss's ABC* publicity - press kit, notes, and publicity plan, 1995
- Folder 18 *Green Eggs and Ham* marketing plan - plan, presentation, test, and notes; 1996
- Folder 19 Living Books press kit, 1996
- Folder 20 *Stellaluna* press kit, 1996
- Folder 21 Internet information and strategies, 1996
- Folder 22 Brøderbund Kids Studio press kit, 1998
- Folder 23 Brøderbund marketing presentation, n.d.
- Folder 24 Brøderbund Software trademark policy with notes, n.d.

Subseries C: Sales accounts and distributors

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains information on domestic and international sales, statistics, agreements, notes, and other documentation from the Sales Team at Living Books.

Box 8

- Folder 1 Brøderbund Sales Meeting Living Books Products - presentation, August 1994
- Folder 2 International distribution notes, 1994-1996
- Folder 3 International strategy notes and reference, 1994
- Folder 4 International distribution, Australia - notes, correspondence, and draft agreements, 1995
- Folder 5 International sales, Brazil - notes, 1995
- Folder 6 International distribution, Italy - notes and agreement [Istituto Geografico DeAgostini], 1995
- Folder 7 International distribution, Japan - memos, notes, and draft agreements, 1994-1995
- Folder 8 International agreement draft, Spain, 1994
- Folder 9 International distribution, Spain - correspondence [Editorial Planeta DeAgostini], 1995
- Folder 10 Marketing/sales report memos and spreadsheets, 1995-1996
- Folder 11 Education marketing sales report statistics and reference, 1995-1996
- Folder 12 Sales account-by-account information, 1996
- Folder 13 Sales and returns spreadsheets, 1996
- Folder 14 Living Books historic sales spreadsheets, 1994-1996
- Folder 15 Sales report summaries spreadsheets, 1995 and n.d.
- Folder 16 Sales planning presentation and notes, n.d. [c. 1996]
- Folder 17 Living Books presentation notes and reference, 1996-1997

Subseries D: Sales conferences

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds Living Books' staff notes, schedules, and reference from computer software sales conferences between 1994 and 1996.

Box 8

- Folder 18 Comdex appointments, Spring 1994
- Folder 19 Bologna Book Fair report, n.d.
- Folder 20 Milia Exhibition notes and reference, 1995
- Folder 21 Random House Juvenile and Merchandise Group, Fall Sales Conference, April 1995 information, 1995
- Folder 22 E3 L.A. notes and reference, 1996

Series IV: Product development, 1993-1997

Scope and Content Note: This series houses schedules, memos, notes, scripts, layout, outlines, plans, budgets, and other information relating to the development of Living Books products. Also within this series are company documentation on product development strategies and production steps.

Some of Living Books' products were developed using code names; these are noted in brackets following each folder title, where appropriate.

Box 9

- Folder 1 *Arthur's Birthday* schedules, 1993-1994
- Folder 2 *Arthur's Reading Race* memos, agreements, and budgets, 1996 ["ARR"]
- Folder 3 *Between the Lions* product proposal, 1996
- Folder 4 *The Cat in the Hat* proposal and designs, 1996-1997 ["Mars"]
- Folder 5 *The Cat in the Hat* updates, memos, and reports, 1996 ["Mars"]
- Folder 6 *Dr. Seuss's ABC* notes, memos, and scripts, 1995 ["Snickers"]
- Folder 7 *Dr. Seuss's ABC* production binder - script, layouts, and model sheets, 1994 ["Snickers"]
- Folder 8 *Eager Ogre's Pet Show* proposal and project information, 1995-1997 ["Kit-Kat"]
- Folder 9 *Green Eggs and Ham* notes, outlines, plans, and budget; 1995-1996 ["Truffles"]
- Folder 10 *Green Eggs and Ham* media plan meeting, 1996 ["Truffles"]
- Folder 11 *Green Eggs and Ham* production binder - design document, 1996 ["Truffles"]
- Folder 12 *Little Monster at School* framework, source book, and activities, 1994
- Folder 13 "Musical Adventures Qualitative Research" final report, November 26, 1996

Box 10

- Folder 1 "Netpal project" - memo and strategy, 1996
- Folder 2 Netscape/Living Books collaboration - project update and correspondence, 1996
- Folder 3 Nickelodeon *Rugrats* - report, notes, agendas, budgets, design documents, and draft license; 1996-1997
- Folder 4 *Sesame Street* product proposal, 1995
- Folder 5 Seuss book list - reference, 1994
- Folder 6 *Sheila Rae the Brave* planning materials, notes, and schedules, 1994-1995
- Folder 7 *Sing Along: Maggie's Farm* product overview, 1996
- Folder 8 *Stellaluna* budget, 1996
- Folder 9 *Story Book Maker* notes, research, and design specifications, 1996
- Folder 10 "The Children's CD-ROM Storybook Competition Overview" chart, n.d.
- Folder 11 Living Books software engine development, 1994-1995
- Folder 12 Production steps, 1994-1995
- Folder 13 Product development strategy, 1996
- Folder 14 Product development process, 1996
- Folder 15 Production form template, 1996
- Folder 16 Publishing procedures - "Product Development Planning and Control Process," Knowledge Adventure, 1995
- Folder 17 1996-1997 Publishing Schedules - correspondence, notes, and schedules, 1996
- Folder 18 Product development schedules and budgets, 1996
- Folder 19 Research and design - 1996 Goals and Objectives, 1995

- Folder 20 Submissions titles - Current submissions - status report, 1995
- Folder 21 Submissions titles - Possible titles - reference and notes, 1996
- Folder 22 Submissions titles - Titles under consideration - notes, 1995-1996

Series V: Personnel, 1994-1997

Scope and Content Note: This series contains information about the staffing and organization of Living Books personnel. These materials include position descriptions, performance appraisal guidelines, compensation philosophy, team meeting notes, and more.

Box 11

- Folder 1 Living Books positions - job descriptions and evaluation guidelines, 1997
- Folder 2 Living Books positions - job descriptions, n.d.
- Folder 3 Job title classifications, 1994, 1996
- Folder 4 Staffing level reports, 1994
- Folder 5 Independent contractor guidelines, 1996
- Folder 6 Performance appraisal guidelines draft, 1996
- Folder 7 Performance evaluation process and notes, 1996
- Folder 8 Compensation philosophy research reports and notes, 1995
- Folder 9 Long-term incentive plan - research, notes, and reports, 1996
- Folder 10 Office plans, 1995
- Folder 11 Office procedures and information, 1996
- Folder 12 Organizational design - reference, 1995
- Folder 13 Meeting agendas and notes between Susan Lee-Merrow and Jeff Schon, 1995
- Folder 14 Jeff Schon schedules, 1994, 1996
- Folder 15 Manager meetings - performance reviews memo, 1996
- Folder 16 Efficiency Team - notes, 1996
- Folder 17 Innovation Team - meeting notes and emailed reference, 1996-1997
- Folder 18 Revised Brøderbund company purpose and mission statement, 1997

Series VI: Correspondence, 1994-1997

Scope and Content Note: Within this series are original correspondence folders between Living Books and other companies.

Box 11

- Folder 19 Correspondence - Anaya Interactiva, 1996
- Folder 20 Correspondence - Grolier, 1996-1997
- Folder 21 Correspondence - Tyndale House, 1994-1995
- Folder 22 Correspondence - Miscellaneous, 1996

Series VII: News and publicity clippings, 1992-1997

Scope and Content Note: This series contains clippings assembled and amassed by staff of Living Books. The materials cover product launches, reviews, and advertisements of Living Books titles, as well as articles about the computer software industry, early childhood education topics, and home computer usage.

Box 12

- Folder 1 Loose press clippings, 1992-1993
- Folder 2 Loose press clippings, January-December 1994
- Folder 3 Loose press clippings, January-December 1995
- Folder 4 Loose press clippings, January-December 1996
- Folder 5 Loose press clippings, January-August 1997
- Folder 6 Loose press clippings, n.d.

Box 13

- Folder 1 Press clippings, October 1994-November 1995 [previously in binder]
- Folder 2 Press clippings, January 1996-November 1996 [previously in binder]
- Folder 3 Press clippings, December 1996-January 1997 [previously in binder]

Series VIII: Reference, 1987-2004

Scope and Content Note: This series holds reference materials about competitors in the educational software industry, compensation survey details, trends and statistics in the computer industry, and more.

Box 13

- Folder 4 Softletter Executive Compensation Survey, July 11, 1994
- Folder 5 "Interactive Multimedia Software Industry Compensation Survey," The Croner Company, 1995 results, June 1995
- Folder 6 PC Data Reports - trends and statistics (Part 1 of 2), 1997-2000
- Folder 7 PC Data Reports - trends and statistics (Part 2 of 2), 1997-2000

Box 14

- Folder 1 News articles - reference on Dr. Seuss, 1987-1991
- Folder 2 Time-Life "I Love Math" book series - reference, 1993
- Folder 3 Random House Children's Media, CD-ROM catalog, 1996-1997
- Folder 4 Wiggleworks Scholastic Beginning Literacy System, press kit and reference, n.d. [c. 2003]
- Folder 5 Tom Snyder Productions - A Scholastic Company, press kits and reference, 2003-2004

Series IX: Miscellaneous, n.d.

Scope and Content Note: This series houses an undated troubleshooting guide and some parody sketches about a Living Books product character.

Box 14

- Folder 6 Little Ark Interactive Troubleshooting Guide draft, n.d.
- Folder 7 Stellaluna parody [bat-related] sketches, n.d.