Finding Aid to the
Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC)
Collection, 1967-2015

Summary Information
Title: Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC) collection
Creators: Don Rawitsch, Laura Gilbert, Susan Schilling, Mike Palmquist, Dale LaFrenz, and R. Philip Bouchard (primary); The Strong (secondary)
ID: 2016.mecc
Date: 1967-2015 (inclusive); 1973-1998 (bulk)
Extent: 6.5 linear feet
Language: The materials in this collection are in English.
Abstract: The Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC) collection is a compilation of materials on the development of *The Oregon Trail* and other MECC educational computer programs, as well as various related news articles, journals, photographs, floppy disks, VHS tapes, and more. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1973 and 1998.
Repository:
Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
One Manhattan Square
Rochester, New York 14607
585.263.2700
library@museumofplay.org

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 donors have 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.
Custodial History: The Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC) collection was assembled by The Strong using donations received from Don Rawitsch, Laura Gilbert, Susan Schilling, R. Philip Bouchard, Dale LaFrenz, and Mike Palmquist in 2016. The materials were accessioned by The Strong under Object IDs 116.1232, 116.1234, 116.1302, 116.1591, 116.1595, and 116.1669, respectively. An additional donation was received from Gilbert in 2017 (Object ID 117.5438). These donors also contributed various MECC software and ephemera.
Preferred citation for publication: Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC) collection, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
Processed by: Robert Ramos, September 2016; Julia Novakovic, May 2019
Revision Note: Finding aid edited in May 2019 to incorporate Object ID 117.5438.

Controlled Access Terms
Personal Names
- Bouchard, R. Philip
Gilbert, Laura  
LaFrenz, Dale  
Palmquist, Mike  
Rawitsch, Don  
Schilling, Susan

Corporate Names  
- Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium  
- Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation

Subjects  
- Computer games  
- Computer games industry  
- Computer games--Design  
- Computer games--Handbooks, manuals, etc.  
- Computer games--Periodicals  
- Computer games--Software  
- Focus groups  
- The Oregon Trail (Computer game)  
- Video games and children  
- Video games and society  
- Video games in education

Historical Note  
During the 1960s, a group of teachers at the University of Minnesota’s College of Education (including Dale LaFrenz) incorporated computers into classroom learning via teleprinters and mainframe computer time-sharing. Minneapolis/St. Paul-area school districts and the College of Education established Total Information for Educational Systems (TIES) to provide service, training, and software for computers, making Minnesota a leader in computer education by 1968. Following the success of TIES, the Minnesota state legislature established the Minnesota Educational Computing Consortium (MECC) in 1973. (Later, the company’s name changed to Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation.)

MECC originally coordinated and provided computer services to elementary and high schools in the state of Minnesota, and later, developed popular educational software for use in schools worldwide. In 1985, MECC became a public corporation, wholly owned by the State of Minnesota. The state spun off the company as a private corporation in 1991. MECC became a publicly traded company three years later, and it was acquired by SoftKey International (later The Learning Company) in 1996. MECC continued developing software but was shuttered in 1999.

MECC is best known for the successful computer program *The Oregon Trail*, originally developed in 1971 by three student teachers (including Don Rawitsch). Players of the game learned about the realities of 19th-century pioneer life while leading a group of settlers in
covered wagons from Missouri to Oregon. *The Oregon Trail* remained extremely popular from the mid-1980s through the mid-2000s, releasing 15 different versions and spawning many imitations. (As the longest-published, most-successful educational game of all time, *The Oregon Trail* was inducted into the World Video Game Hall of Fame in 2016.) MECC also released other popular educational software games, such as *Number Munchers*, *Word Munchers*, *Math Munchers Deluxe*, *The Secret Island of Dr. Quandary*, *Spellevator*, and more.

**Collection Scope and Content Note**
The Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC) collection is a compilation of six separate donations from Don Rawitsch (co-creator of *The Oregon Trail*), Laura Gilbert (former Human Resources Manager at MECC), Susan Schilling (former VP of Development at MECC), Mike Palmquist (former software designer and producer at MECC), Dale LaFrenz (co-founder of MECC), and R. Philip Bouchard (lead designer of *The Oregon Trail* and *Number Munchers*). The MECC collection includes materials related to the development of *The Oregon Trail* and other MECC educational computer programs, as well as various news articles, journals, photographs, floppy disks, VHS tapes, and more related to MECC throughout the late 20th century. Additional scope and content notes can be found within the Contents List section of this finding aid.

The Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC) collection has been arranged into six series, four of which have been further divided into subseries. The materials are housed in nine archival document boxes.

**Related Materials**
The Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation (MECC) at The Strong includes donations from Don Rawitsch, Laura Gilbert, Susan Schilling, Mike Palmquist, Dale LaFrenz, R. Philip Bouchard, Paul Wenker, and Loren Sucher. Among these related materials are trade catalogs, books, software titles, user/teacher guides, and other ephemera.
System of Arrangement

Series I: Don Rawitsch, 1977-2015
  Subseries A: MECC internal materials
  Subseries B: MECC-related printed materials
  Subseries C: The Oregon Trail musical script
Series II: Laura Gilbert, 1982-1994
  Subseries A: MECC internal materials
  Subseries B: MECC-related printed materials
  Subseries C: Cassettes and tapes
  Subseries A: MECC internal materials
  Subseries B: MECC product inserts and advertisements
  Subseries C: MECC-related printed materials
  Subseries D: Dale LaFrenz materials
  Subseries E: Photographs
Series VI: Mike Palmquist, 1982-1998
  Subseries A: MECC market research
  Subseries B: MECC-related printed materials
  Subseries C: MECC program disks, manuals, and resources
  Subseries D: Oregon Trail-related books
  Subseries E: The Oregon Trail visual materials
Contents List

Series I: Don Rawitsch, 1977-2015

Scope and Content Note: This series contains materials donated by Oregon Trail co-creator Don Rawitsch, detailing the game’s invention and other information about the Minnesota Educational Computing Corporation. This series includes manuals, clippings, journals, newsletters, and other MECC-related material. This series has been further divided into subseries.

Subseries A: MECC internal materials
Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds annual MECC conference booklets from 1982-1989.

Box 1
Folder 1 MECC conference booklets, 1982-1985
Folder 2 MECC conference booklets, 1986-1989

Subseries B: MECC-related printed materials
Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses MECC-related newsletters, magazines, and other printed materials retained by Rawitsch. Also included within this subseries is an Oregon Trail user manual.

Box 1
Folder 3 City Pages newsletter, 2011
Folder 4 Classroom Computer Learning magazine, 1990
Folder 5 Classroom Computer News magazine, 1981
Folder 6 Creative Computing magazine, 1978
Folder 7 CUE NewsLetter, 1988
Folder 8 Jostens Learning and TCET educator’s guide, 1993
Folder 10 Monitor magazines, 1979
Folder 11 Oregon user manual, 1977
Folder 12 Social Education magazine, 1983
Folder 13 Technology and Learning magazine photocopy, 1990

Subseries C: The Oregon Trail musical script
Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds a script for The Oregon Trail musical created by Kyle DeGoey and directions for the 2015 Fringe Festival. (The location of the specific festival is unidentified.)

Box 1
Folder 15 Kyle DeGoey’s Oregon Trail musical materials, 2015
Series II: Laura Gilbert, 1986-1994

Scope and Content Note: This series contains materials donated by former MECC Human Resources Manager Laura Gilbert, including a Personnel Journal magazine, various business articles and essays pertaining to the development of culture at MECC, and an internally produced video from 1992.

Box 1
Folder 16 Personnel Journal magazine, 1994

Box 5
Folder 30 “MECC: One Year Later,” DVD (06:36), 1992


Scope and Content Note: This series contains materials donated by former MECC Vice President of Development Susan Schilling. This series consists of MECC internal materials, MECC-related printed materials, and various cassettes and VHS tapes pertaining to MECC and computer education. This series has been further divided into subseries.

Subseries A: MECC internal materials
Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses internal materials from MECC, such as forms, binders, employee booklets, and various papers. This subseries also contains a photograph of Schilling and MECC co-founder Dale LaFrenz.

Box 2
Folder 1 Dale LaFrenz and Susan Schilling photograph, 1994
Folder 2 Form S-1 for MECC, 1994
Folder 3 MECC prospectuses, 1994-1995
Folder 4 “Meeting Effectiveness Session” binder contents, 1992
Folder 5 “Meeting Effectiveness Session” binder, 1992
Folder 6 “Oh, the Places You’ll Go!” booklet, 1998
Folder 7 Various internal MECC papers, 1992-2002

Subseries B: MECC-related printed materials
Scope and Content Note: This subseries includes various articles about MECC and its culturally and educationally influential computer program, The Oregon Trail. The articles included were crucial in guiding MECC’s organizational development.

Box 2

Subseries C: Cassettes and tapes
Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains various VHS tapes and a cassette tape, including internal company tapes and educational tapes. Also included in this subseries is a recording of Schilling’s speech at the National
Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) 1994 Annual Convention, titled “Making Kids Our First Priority.”

Box 8
Object 2 “For the Love of Learning,” VHS, n.d.
Object 3 “Making Kids Our First Priority,” audiocassette, 1994
Object 4 “This is Your MECC Life,” VHS, 1996
Object 5 “West to Oregon,” VHS, 1993

Scope and Content Note: This series includes materials donated by The Oregon Trail lead designer R. Philip Bouchard. (Bouchard also designed Number Munchers, another popular release by MECC.) The materials contain employee lists, charts, MECC magazine ads, product lists, and articles.

Box 2
Folder 9 Employee lists and organizational charts, 1981-1989
Folder 10 MECC magazine ads, 1988-1993
Folder 12 MECC-related articles, 1976-1989

Scope and Content Note: This series contains materials donated by MECC co-founder Dale LaFrenz, including MECC newsletters, publicity clippings, photographs, product information, company ephemera, and personal papers of LaFrenz. A notable item within this series is snippet of an original Oregon Trail Mod33 Teletypewriter paper roll. This series has been further divided into subseries. (The library stacks of the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play house LaFrenz’s 1978 two-volume dissertation, “The Documentation and Formative Evaluation of a Statewide Instructional Computing Network in the State of Minnesota,” along with titles from the Computer Assisted Mathematics Program series.)

Subseries A: MECC internal materials
Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses annual reports, company ephemera, prospectuses, and various MECC papers. A notable item within this subseries is snippet of an original Oregon Trail Mod33 Teletypewriter paper roll. The Teletypewriter was first used by LaFrenz in 1965 to connect to the Dartmouth GE Time-Share system. Rawitsch and his co-inventors coded Oregon Trail for input to a time-sharing machine, as displayed on the paper roll. The tape contains the line-by-line code, which instructed the computer how to execute the program.

Box 2
Folder 14 “MECC Fact Book,” 1992
Box 3
Folder 1  “Muncher Munchies” recipe book, 1992
Folder 2  Prospectuses, 1967, 1994
Folder 3  Various MECC booklets, 1973, 1992

Box 9
Object 1  *Oregon Trail* Mod33 Teletypewriter roll, n.d.

**Subseries B: MECC product inserts and advertisements**

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries contains various MECC product inserts, as well as MECC advertisements and software catalogs. Also included is a 1996 Honey Nut Cheerios box with a tie-in *Oregon Trail II* advertisement.

Box 3
Folder 5  MECC advertisements, c.1991
Folder 7  Various product inserts, 1996-1998

Box 6
Object 1  Honey Nut Cheerios box, 1996

**Subseries C: MECC-related printed materials**

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries contains articles and magazines about computer education and MECC, MECC company newsletters, and other printed material focused on computer education.

Box 3
Folder 8  *Electronic Learning* magazine, 1991
Folder 9  *MECC Educator* magazine, 1992
Folder 10  *MECC Instructional Computing Catalog*, 1982
Folder 11  *MECC Network* newsletter, 1986
Folder 12  *Reading On* teacher’s guide, 1982
Folder 13  *Systems Update* newsletter, 1974-1975
Folder 14  *Technology and Learning* magazine, 1990
Folder 15  *USERS* newsletters, 1975-1977

**Subseries D: Dale LaFrenz materials**

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries holds papers, awards, and other documents focusing on LaFrenz and his time at MECC, rather than MECC itself.

Box 3
Folder 17  “The Business of Education” presentation, 1997
Folder 18  Dale LaFrenz awards, 1997
Folder 19  Dale LaFrenz interview, 1995
Folder 20  Dale LaFrenz papers, 1982-1992
Subseries E: Photographs

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries contains photographs of LaFrenz, other MECC employees, the MECC facilities, and MECC products.

**Box 3**

Folder 21  Photographs, 1979-c.1990

Series VI: Mike Palmquist, 1982-1998

**Scope and Content Note:** This series contains materials donated by former MECC software designer and producer Mike Palmquist. This series consists of MECC market research, MECC-related print material, MECC program disks, manuals, and resources, books related to the Oregon Trail, and numerous slides and visual material used for *The Oregon Trail*. This series has been further divided into subseries.

Subseries A: MECC market research

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries holds market research materials conducted by both MECC and outside market research firms. The materials are primarily focus group studies, which gives insight into the minds of the consumers of the mid-to-late 1990s.

**Box 3**

Folder 22  Various market research materials, 1994-1998 [1 of 2]

Subseries B: MECC-related printed materials

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries contains a *Club Kidsoft* magazine, the literature front of the educational software company, KidSoft, Inc. *Club Kidsoft*, the first computer magazine for children, featured an article about the MECC computer program, *Amazon Trail*.

**Box 4**

Folder 1  *Club Kidsoft* magazine, 1994

Subseries C: MECC program disks, manuals, and resources

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries houses various MECC program disks, associated manuals, and resources for classroom application. Also included are two Jaz disks.

**Box 4**

Folder 2  *Freedom!* disk and manual, 1992
Folder 3  *MayaQuest '97: Lost Cities of the Rainforest* classroom resources, 1997
Folder 4  *MayaQuest* manual, 1996
Folder 5  *Oregon Trail Online* inserts and manual, 1996
Folder 6  *The Oregon Trail* disks and manual, 1991
Folder 7  *Wagon Train 1848* disks and manual, 1991
Folder 8  *Windy City* MECC binder contents, n.d.
Subseries D: Oregon Trail-related books

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds four books about the Oregon Trail utilized by MECC staff in the production of the Oregon Trail games. The original Post-It Note bookmarks placed by MECC employees have been removed, sleeved in Mylar, and placed in the front of their respective books. Each Post-It Note has the corresponding page number written on the back of the note. This has been done to preserve the significant information known to have been used by those employees in the design and production of the games.

Subseries E: The Oregon Trail visual materials

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains numerous photographic slides taken on and around the 2,170-mile Oregon Trail, which spans from Illinois to Oregon. The slides have been separated by their location taken along the Oregon Trail. (“Chuck” has not been identified, though his name was located on the original boxes of slides and has been preserved within the folder names.) Also included within this subseries is a CD-ROM titled “Oregon Trail Photo Catalog.”
Folder 17  Chuck’s slides: Middle Creek, 1995
Folder 18  Chuck’s slides: Pelican Creek Nature Trail, 1995
Folder 19  Chuck’s slides: Sylvan Lake and Mary Bay, 1995
Folder 20  Chuck’s slides: Yellowstone Lake, 1995
Folder 21  Oregon Trail slides: Beginning of trail, 1993
Folder 22  Oregon Trail slides: Chimney Rock, NE to Fort Lauramie, WY, 1993
Folder 23  Oregon Trail slides: Keeney Pass, OR to Laurel Hill, OR, 1993
Folder 24  Oregon Trail slides: Laurel Hill to Oregon City, 1993
Folder 25  Oregon Trail slides: Massacre Rocks, ID to Echo, OR, 1993
Folder 26  Oregon Trail slides: South Pass, WY to Massacre Rocks, ID, 1993
Folder 27  Unknown location, wildlife slides, 1994
Folder 28  Unknown Oregon Trail slides, 1994 [1 of 2]
Folder 29  Unknown Oregon Trail slides, 1994, [2 of 2]

Box 8
Object 8  "Oregon Trail Photo Catalog," n.d.