

**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. These donors also contributed various MECC software and ephemera.

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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

Series III: Susan Schilling materials, 1992-2007

Subseries A: MECC internal materials

Subseries B: MECC-related printed materials

Subseries C: Cassettes and tapes

Series IV: R. Philip Bouchard, 1968-1992

Series V: Dale LaFrenz, 1967-1997

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 9 *Journal of Educational Computing*, 1977-1978
- 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
- Folder 14 *The Computing Teacher* magazine, 1987-1988

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 and various business articles and essays pertaining to the development of culture at MECC.

Box 1

- Folder 16 *Personnel Journal* magazine, 1994
- Folder 17 Various business articles and essays, 1986, 1989-1990

Series III: Susan Schilling, 1992-2007

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

- Folder 8 *Oregon Trail* articles, 1993-1996, 2005-2007

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 1 “A Holiday Video Greeting Card,” VHS, n.d.

- 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

Series IV: R. Philip Bouchard, 1968-1992

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 11 MECC product lists, 1980, 1983, 1986
- Folder 12 MECC-related articles, 1976-1989

Series V: Dale LaFrenz, 1967-1997

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 13 MECC annual reports, 1973, 1977-1978, 1989-1990
- 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
- Folder 4 Various MECC papers, 1968, 1984, 1990-1992

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 6 MECC software catalogs, 1991, 1993-1994
- 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
- Folder 16 Various MECC-related articles, 1986, 1989, 2014

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]

Folder 23 Various market research materials, 1994-1998 [2 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.

Box 5

- Folder 9 *Windy City* MECC binder, n.d.
 Folder 10 *Writing Along the Oregon Trail* disks and manual, 1994

Box 8

- Object 6 *Amazon Jaz* disk, n.d.
 Object 7 "AT31 Dogs" Jaz disk, 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.

Box 7

- Object 1 *Maps of the Oregon Trail*, 1982
 Object 2 *The Oregon Trail: Yesterday and Today*, 1992
 Object 3 *Prairie School Detours*, 1990
 Object 4 *The Traveler's Guide to the Oregon Trail*, 1992

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."

Box 5

- Folder 1 Chuck's slides: Canyon visitor center, valley, meadows, 1995
 Folder 2 Chuck's slides: Clear Creek and Mary Bay, 1995
 Folder 3 Chuck's slides: Dark Mountain, wildflowers, 1995
 Folder 4 Chuck's slides: Dun Raven Pass to canyon, 1995
 Folder 5 Chuck's slides: Dun Raven, 1995 [1 of 2]
 Folder 6 Chuck's slides: Dun Raven, 1995 [2 of 2]
 Folder 7 Chuck's slides: Grant Village and Lake Pumice Point, 1995
 Folder 8 Chuck's slides: Hayden Valley and Sulfur Springs, 1995
 Folder 9 Chuck's slides: Hayden Valley, 1995
 Folder 10 Chuck's slides: Isa Lakes, 1995
 Folder 11 Chuck's slides: Lake Butte Trail and Lodge Pole Pine Forest, 1995
 Folder 12 Chuck's slides: Lake Hotel and Kepler Cascades, 1995
 Folder 13 Chuck's slides: Lake Lodge and LeHardy Rapids, 1995
 Folder 14 Chuck's slides: Lamar Valley and Sunsets Tower, 1995
 Folder 15 Chuck's slides: Lewis Lake and Lewis Pond, 1995
 Folder 16 Chuck's slides: Lost Lake Pond, 1995

- 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.