

Finding Aid to the Penguin Software Collection, 1970-2013

Summary Information

Title: Penguin Software collection

Creator: Mark Pelczarski (primary)

ID: 114.52

Date: 1970-2013 (inclusive); 1982-1986 (bulk)

Extent: 1.5 linear feet

Language: The materials in this collection are in English.

Abstract: The Penguin Software collection is a compilation of game design documentation, correspondence, text drafts, publications, computer code printouts, and floppy disks created or used by Mark Pelczarski of Penguin Software (later Polarware). The bulk of the materials are dated between 1982 and 1986.

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 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 Penguin Software collection was donated to The Strong in February 2014 as a gift from Mark Pelczarski. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 114.52 and received from Mark Pelczarski in 2 boxes (along with a donation of published software).

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

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Revision Note: Updated in March 2018 to reflect additional disks in collection.

Controlled Access Terms

Personal Names

- Pelczarski, Mark

Corporate Names

- Penguin Software
- Polarware

Subjects

- Computer adventure games
- Computer games
- Computer games industry
- Electronic games industry
- Game design and development
- Games--software
- Graphics Magician (Computer file)
- Simulation games
- Transylvania (Computer file)

Historical Note

Mark Pelczarski established his first software company, MP Software, in 1978. Pelczarski, a high school teacher, had realized the graphic capabilities of the Apple II computer and developed a drawing program called *Magic Paintbrush*. Though the “MP” in “MP Software” could have stood for its founder’s initials or for its earliest published game, Pelczarski joked in an October 1980 issue of *SoftSide* magazine that it was for “Magnificent Penguin.” Pelczarski’s next graphics utilities sold under the label Micro Co-Op, which Pelczarski had started to sell Apple software by other publishers. He decided that publishing his own software would be more lucrative, however, and renamed the company Penguin Software, a callback to his earlier quip.

Pelczarski added features to his previous drawing program concept and released *Complete Graphics System*. Other programmers and independent game designers joined Penguin, collaborating on ideas to use vector graphics to store many images on limited disk space, which paved the way for the popular (and later industry-standard) *Graphics Magician*. Penguin intentionally omitted copy protection on its software, making it easier for users to back up their programs. The company’s success allowed them to expand production from graphics programs to home applications, educational games, and adventure games. According to Pelczarski, *Transylvania* (1984) was the first originally programmed (not ported) game released for the introduction of the Macintosh computer in 1984.

That same year, Penguin programmers storyboarded a series of educational computer games which would teach geography with the player as a spy, pursuing an evil villain around the continent; in 1986, several months ahead of Penguin’s release of *The Spy’s Adventures in North America*, Brøderbund Software published the first game in its *Carmen Sandiego* series, effectively (and erroneously) branding Penguin Software’s *Spy’s Adventures* series a copycat in the educational software market. Also in 1986, Penguin Software received notice from book publisher conglomerate Penguin-Viking that they would be sued for copyright infringement regarding the word “penguin” in their company name. Rather than face prolonged—and expensive—legal proceedings, Penguin Software changed its name to Polarware. Four Polarware employees soon purchased the company from Pelczarski. In 1988, Polarware was acquired by another entity and rendered defunct later that year.

As of 2015, Pelczarski lives in the greater Chicago area and is an independent software developer and consultant.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Penguin Software collection contains game design materials from games produced by Penguin Software (later renamed Polarware). Document types include correspondence, notes, game descriptions, computer code printouts, draft text, development and master floppy disks, and other game design documentation. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1982 and 1986. Additional scope and content information can be found in the “Contents List” section of this finding aid.

The Penguin Software collection is arranged in one series which has been further divided into four subseries. The collection is housed in one archival document box and one records carton.

Related Materials

The trade catalog collection housed in the library stacks of the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong has several Penguin Software product catalogs, c. 1983-1984.

For more information on the comparison between Penguin Software’s “Spy’s Adventures around the World” series and Brøderbund’s *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego*, see the Brøderbund Software, Inc. collection (Box 3, Folder 6).

The International Center for the History of Electronic Games also holds dozens of Penguin Software-published games.

System of Arrangement

Series I: Mark Pelczarski records of Penguin Software, 1970-2013

Subseries A: Correspondence

Subseries B: Game design documentation

Subseries C: Column text drafts and publications

Subseries D: Development and master disks

Contents List

Series I: Mark Pelczarski records of Penguin Software, 1970-2013

Subseries A: Correspondence

Scope and Content Note: This subseries contains select letters about game design and processes for Penguin Software. Of interest is the 2013 letter from Pelczarski to The Strong, which includes background information on particular documents and a list of the Penguin Software games which he donated to the museum.

Box 1

- Folder 1 Letters from Mark Pelczarski to The Strong, re: contents of donation to museum, December 2013
- Folder 2 Agreement between Cursor Magazine and Mark Pelczarski for rights to football simulator program, February 1979 [first software sale]
- Folder 3 Letter and disk submission from Ray Gari to Penguin Software, September 1984 ["Double Res Animator" / "Double Hi-Res"]
- Folder 4 Note, "Conversion routines," and two floppy diskettes; from David Lubar, c. 1984
- Folder 5 Letter from Eagle Berns to Mark Pelczarski, n.d. [accompanied submission of "Pie Man"]
- Folder 6 Letter from Steve __ to Mark Pelczarski, n.d. ["Quest" and "Transylvania"]
- Folder 7 Letter from unidentified author to Mark Pelczarski, n.d. [RAMdisk sectors for Apple]

Subseries B: Game design documentation

Scope and Content Note: This subseries houses original game design documentation for various computer games produced by Penguin Software, as well as reference material, computer code printouts, and a flowchart with sample output produced by Pelczarski while in high school. Penguin Software titles represented in this subseries include *Spy's Demise* (1982), *The Spy's Adventures in Europe* (1986), *The Spy's Adventures in North America* (1986), and the well-known software program *Graphics Magician*.

Box 1

- Folder 8 Flow chart and sample output, "Baseball simulation," Mark Pelczarski, 1970 [written in Fortran IV]
- Folder 9 Draft text, "Documentation for Penguin Fast/Complete Fill Routine 2/26/84," Mark Pelczarski with assistance from David Shapiro, February 1984
- Folder 10 Draft program description and diskette, "Double-Res Graphics Magician Animator Notes," February 1985 ["Double Hi-Res Graphics Magician"]
- Folder 11 Draft game design documentation, command notes, and computer code printouts, "Picdraw," c. 1985
- Folder 12 Draft text, "Comprehend file notes," n.d.
- Folder 13 Draft software description, "Music Editor," n.d.
- Folder 14 Computer code printouts and handwritten notes, "Comprehend," c. 1985-1986

- Folder 15 Computer code printouts, game description, design documentation, notes, and floppy diskette; “Spywork,” c. 1985-1986 [“Spy in Europe” and “Spy in North America”]
- Folder 16 Loose diskettes, c. 1985-1986 [“Transylvania,” “Spy,” and “Comprehend”]
- Folder 17 Notes and diskettes, “Pic Looper,” c. 1986 [“Oo-topos” and “Pic Looper”]
- Folder 18 “Origin of *Spy’s Demise*,” n.d. [advertisement for Safe House Bar, Milwaukee, Wisconsin]

Box 2

- Folder 1 “Caribbean Cruising: A Sailing Simulation,” Mark Pelczarski and Jim Klink, unidentified publication, n.d. [probably “Expedition Amazon,” c. 1983]
- Folder 2 Reproduction of graphic design for box art [?], unidentified game, n.d. [probably “Expedition Amazon,” c. 1983]
- Folder 3 Hand-drawn map and notes, unidentified game, n.d.

Subseries C: Column text drafts and publications

Scope and Content Note: Within this subseries are draft text and computer code printouts written by Pelczarski for a recurring column in the magazine *Softalk*, which was published during 1980-1984. Pelczarski’s book, *Graphically Speaking*, published by Softalk Books in 1983, is also contained in this subseries.

Box 1

- Folder 19 Draft text and computer code printouts for Softalk graphics columns, n.d. [“Ground Up Graphics” column series]
- Folder 20 *Graphically Speaking: Portrait of the artist as a young Apple*, Mark Pelczarski, Softalk Books, © 1983

Subseries D: Development and master disks

Scope and Content Note: This subseries holds both development and master disks for Penguin Software projects. These 5” floppy diskettes were separated into plastic disk storage cases by Pelczarski prior to donation to The Strong. Original container labels are noted in quotation marks, while brackets describe the game(s) within each container. Many draft development diskettes have dates indicated on the disk label.

Box 2

- Container 1 “Tablet, Book, Roland,” 14 diskettes [*Spy’s Demise*], 1981-1983
- Container 2 “Utilities,” 11 diskettes [*Transylvania* and *Pie Man*], 1982-1984
- Container 3 “Mense stuff,” 8 diskettes [*The Spy Strikes Back*], 1983
- Container 4 “Midi,” 9 diskettes [*Crime Wave*], 1983
- Container 5 [unlabeled], 9 diskettes [*Pensate*], 1983-1984
- Container 6 “Game backups,” 13 diskettes [*Thunder Bombs* and *Bouncing Kamungas*], 1983-1984
- Container 7 “Games,” 13 diskettes [*Magician*], 1983-1985
- Container 8 “Games,” 14 diskettes [*The Quest*], 1984
- Container 9 “Onstage 7/20/90,” 14 diskettes [*Sword of Kadash*], c. 1984-1985
- Container 10 [unlabeled], 11 diskettes [*Compiler* and *Transylvania*], 1984-1986
- Container 11 “Utilities,” 14 diskettes [*Transylvania*], 1985

- Container 12 “Utilities,” 14 diskettes [*Transylvania II: Crimson Crown*], 1985-1987
- Container 13 “Coveted Mirror,” 7 diskettes [*Coveted Mirror*], 1986
- Container 14 “Utilities Appleworks,” 12 diskettes [*Oo-types*], 1986
- Container 15 “Utilities,” 15 diskettes [*The Spy’s Adventures in Europe* and *The Spy’s Adventures in North America*], 1986-1998
- Container 16 “Oo-topos,” 5 diskettes [*Oo-topos*], 1986-1990
- Container 17 Miscellaneous, 8 diskettes [*IBM Quest Master*, *Oo-Topos*, *Spy’s Adventures in South America*, *Spy’s Adventures in Europe*], 1984-1988 and n.d.