



Guide to the William H. Meek Collection

Creator: William H. Meek

Dates: 1944-1983

Extent: 5.34 linear feet, 1 record carton, 1 manuscript box, 2 oversize boxes, 2 small boxes

Collection number: X4708.2008

Catalog number: 102733947

Collection processed by: Bo Doub and Kim Hayden, 2015

Finding aid prepared by: Bo Doub, Kim Hayden, and Sara Chabino Lott, 2015

Sponsor: Processing of this collection was made possible through generous funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, administered through the Council on Library and Information Resources' Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant.

Abstract

The William H. Meek collection contains manuals, publications, promotional material, correspondence, and programming projects from 1944 through 1983 that document Meek's interests in computers, mechanical engineering, and the interlocking six-piece Burr puzzle. Meek was an instrumentation specialist at Dow Chemical Company into the mid-1960s, but he spent most of his life researching, evaluating, and acquiring early computer systems. He was greatly interested in analyzing the mechanics behind Burr puzzles and wrote his own computer programs to aid in his analysis. This collection is made up largely of manuals and technical information regarding the IBM System/3, and programming source code and tests in various early programming languages.

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Publication Rights

The Computer History Museum (CHM) can only claim physical ownership of the collection. Copyright restrictions may apply and users are responsible for satisfying any claims of the copyright holder. Requests for copying and permission to publish, quote, or reproduce any portion of the Computer History Museum's collection must be obtained jointly from both the copyright holder (if applicable) and the Computer History Museum as owner of the material.

Languages

Collection materials entirely in English.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of Item], [Date], William H. Meek collection, Lot X4708.2008, Box [#], Folder [#], Catalog [#], Computer History Museum.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Phyllis Meek, 2008.

Repository

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Biographical/Historical Note

William H. Meek was born in Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada, on June 2, 1917. He received his BA from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, and a master's degree from the University of Michigan. Meek first worked as a paint chemist for Ditzler Paints in Ann Arbor, Michigan. During World War II he joined the United States Navy and worked as a radar technician on the USS *Newcomb* from 1941 through 1945. After the war, Meek began a long career at Dow Chemical Company as an instrumentation specialist – designing, building, and repairing equipment for testing products sold by the company. He worked in the Technical Service & Development (TS&D) department at Dow's office in Midland, Michigan, for over 25 years, retiring in the mid 1960s.

Meek's main interests included computers, mechanical engineering, and puzzles. He was especially interested in the mathematics and design behind six-piece Burr puzzles, interlocking structures made up of six notched sticks that combined to make three-dimensional shapes. In order to analyze the mechanics of all of the different combinations and assemblies of these puzzles, Meek wrote his own programs in Fortran, BASIC, and various IBM programming languages and used early computing technologies to run these programs – including the

computer used for payroll at Dow. After retiring, Meek collected and used other computers. He bought one of the initial models of Radio Shack's TRS-80 Micro Computer Systems, a series of IBM and IBM-compatible micro-computers, and when he received word from his old colleagues at Dow that the company was retiring its IBM System/3 computers, he arranged to acquire those as well. Meek passed away on June 10, 2005.

Scope and Content of the Collection

The William H. Meek collection contains IBM manuals, publications, promotional materials from various computing companies, and Meek's correspondence and programming projects. The collection spans 1944 through 1983 with the bulk of the collection being from 1960 to 1978 during Meek's final years working for Dow Chemical Company and his early years of retirement. Of particular interest is a folder of correspondence and reports documenting one of Meek's projects at Dow for the establishment of a central computer at Dow's office in Midland, Michigan. This project involved a selection process requiring significant research and consulting with early computer manufacturers, mainly IBM, General Electric, and Scientific Data Systems. The collection includes a significant amount of manuals and technical information regarding the IBM System/3 and programming source code and tests in various early programming languages.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into 3 series:

- Series 1, International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) manuals, 1965-1982
- Series 2, Non-IBM publications and promotional materials, 1944-1983
- Series 3, Personal papers, ca. 1958-1983

Indexing Terms

Burr puzzles
Computer programming
IBM System/3 (Computer)
IBM System/3 (Computer)--Programming
International Business Machines Corporation
Meek, William H.
Puzzles--Data processing

Separated Material

Physical objects, including various computing devices, were separated from the main collection. Separated machines from this donation include an IBM 5213-3 printer, a hand-built computer in a plywood box, a 1959 Ultra-Matic calculator made by Friden Calculating Machine Company, and a universal potentiometer used to measure voltages. To view catalog records for the separated items please search CHM's online catalog at <http://www.computerhistory.org/collections/search>.

Related Collections at Other Repositories

The Jerry Slocum Mechanical Puzzle Collection at Indiana University has a collection of Burr puzzles and related books and documents.

Collection Contents

Series 1, International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) manuals, 1965-1982

This series contains IBM manuals for the 1800, 1130, System/38, System/3 and its components, and other systems from 1965 through 1982. The bulk of this series is made up of

System/3 manuals, which include user and reference manuals; installation, maintenance, programming, and troubleshooting guides; map charts; and pin and board lists. Also included are RGP II programming guides and reference manuals. Several of the System/3 manuals were originally housed in IBM Field Engineering binders. This series is arranged chronologically.

Series 2, Non-IBM publications and promotional materials, 1944-1983

This series contains materials documenting various computer companies and the computer industry, including brochures, periodicals, and manuals from 1944 through 1983. Included are brochures from several computer companies of the 1960s, such as General Electric, Honeywell, and Computer Control Company. Also included are periodicals from the 1960s that cover engineering and computing, and a group of Radio Shack newsletters from the 1980s that cover the latest computers. Of note in this series are a group of engineering manuals that includes a 1944 U.S. War Department technical manual for a range calibrator, a 1966 handbook for operational amplifier active RC networks, and an operational amplifier manual and engineering data charts put out by Data Device Corporation in 1965. This series is arranged alphabetically by folder title.

Series 3, Personal papers, ca. 1958-1983

This series contains correspondence, source code, and Burr puzzle data primarily relating to Meek's personal interests and projects. One of Meek's interests involved the mechanics behind 6-piece burr puzzles. This series contains Meek's design drawings, specifications, notes, and data regarding his Burr puzzle projects and analyses. Also included in this series are Meek's work-related letters and reports concerning a project for the development of a central computer in the Midland office of Dow Chemical Company. The main computer manufacturing candidates for this project were General Electric, Scientific Data Systems, and IBM. Other materials in this series include notes, source code, and microfiche relating to various computers and programs that Meek researched, acquired, and wrote in his own time. This series is arranged alphabetically by folder title.

	<u>Catalog Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Folder List			
International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) manuals			
Box 1	102686014	International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) 1800 and 1130	1965-1966
Box 1; 3; 4	102734125	International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) System/3	1970-1978
Box 1	102734127	International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) systems	1971-1977
Box 1	102734129	International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) System/38	1981-1982
Non-IBM publications and promotional materials			
Box 1	102655280	Computer Control Company, Inc. promotional material	1963-1965
Box 1	102655278	Friden, Inc. promotional material	1960-1963
Box 1	102655279	General Electric (GE) promotional material	1965
Box 1	102686001	General Precision, Inc. promotional material	ca. 1965
Box 1	102686016	Honeywell, Inc. promotional material	1965-1969
Box 1	102686010	Manuals	1944-1966
Box 1	102686017	Periodicals	1959-1980
Box 2	102686002	Promotional materials	1961-1983
Box 2	102734128	System/3 programming RPG II	1972
Personal papers			
Box 5	102734124	Burr puzzle data	ca. 1971
Box 2; 4	102685998	Burr puzzles	1978

	<u>Catalog Number</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Box 2; 4	102655287	Coding	ca. 1958-1966
Box 2	102686011	Dow Chemical Company automation and computer development	1959-1975
Box 2	102734130	International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) program tests	1969-1972
Box 2	102655286	International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) System/3 records	ca. 1983
Box 6	102734126	Programming output	ca. 1981