On May 22–23, 2017, more than 15 pioneering participants in the creation of the desktop publishing (DTP) industry met at the Computer History Museum (CHM) to exchange and record their recollections. The first day of the meeting was focused on technology development and evolution, and the second day was primarily about the history of the companies that made the desktop publishing industry a success.

The organizers of the meeting were Burt Grad, cofounder of the CHM’s Software Industry Special Interest Group (SI SIG), and David Brock, Director of the CHM’s Center for Software History. Jonathan Seybold, cofounder of the Seybold Report and founder of the Seybold Seminars, which evangelized for desktop publishing, helped plan and guide the pioneer meeting.

The meeting schedule was divided into five hour-plus sessions a day for which Burt Grad or David Brock led the discussions among the participants. Session topics included Xerox PARC technology; Postscript and other page description language; laser printers and fonts; PageMaker, FrameMaker, and TeX; the Seybold publications and seminars; Adobe, Aldus, Ventura, and Apple’s DTP business histories; and DTP pre-history at Rocappi and Atex. Participants included technology and business leaders of many of the activities and companies represented, including the founders of the companies listed above and principal technology contributors at Xerox PARC and Stanford University. Also in attendance were various members of the CHM’s professional staff and several non-CHM professional historians and independent scholars who are DTP and computing history researchers. The sessions were videotaped, and the audio will be transcribed; the transcripts and the videos will be posted on the CHM website for future historical study.

The meeting discussions revealed a fascinating array of organizational and personal interconnections, with the organizations having quite differing visions and motivations and interleaved evolutions, such that as listed below:

- Digital single-user text layout systems and production newspaper systems developed on quite separate paths until they came together as desktop publishing became ubiquitous.
- A surprising number of the meeting participants had in their backgrounds some work funded by the Department of Defense’s Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA).
- Xerox PARC developed key technologies and was also the source of many of the people who founded and built the successful businesses.
- Ad hoc collaborations spread DTP technology in some important cases: people from different companies met at and drew information from Seybold publications and seminars; Aldus (PageMaker on affordable machines), Adobe (Postscript interpreters for local laser printers and service bureau imagesetters), and a division of Apple (seeking finally to sell a lot of Macintoshs) worked together to develop what became a mainstream part of desktop publishing; Atex got its functional specifications for newspaper systems by having their early customers write them.
- Not surprisingly, companies had different approaches for working in the technology space that led to desktop publishing: Xerox PARC was working on the office of the future in its development of the laser printer and graphical user interface technology; Frame Technologies (FrameMaker) saw an opportunity to compete with InterLeaf in the work station domain; and Ventura Publishing saw an opportunity in producing desktop publishing software on the IBM PC rather than the Apple Mac.

It is clear that circa 1985 society and technology were ripe for easy interactive design and composition of written content of all types. Today, 30 years later, “desktop publishing” is perhaps too narrow a term; today, the DTP approach is ubiquitous and might simply be called publishing.

This pioneer meeting was the thirteenth such meeting organized by the Software Industry SIG since 2000 as part of the SIG’s mission “to collect, preserve and communicate information about the companies, people and events that shaped the computer software and services industry.”
EVENTS AND SIGHTINGS

Coinciding with this pioneer meeting, oral history interviews of five of the attendees were conducted, adding to the 124 oral histories the SIG had collected previously. Additional oral history interviews may be done later with some of the other attendees.

Prior pioneer meetings and other Software Industry SIG activities have resulted in six special issues of the *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* and another two dozen Annals articles, anecdotes, and biographies. Plans are in the works to submit content for another possible *Annals* special issue relating to the desktop publishing industry.  

References and Notes

1. See https://sites.google.com/site/softwareindustrysig/.