

DOCUMENTING ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY HISTORY: THE FRED SAMMONS ARCHIVE PROJECT RESOURCE

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INTRODUCTION

Fred Sammons is a figure well-known within the assistive technology (AT) and occupational therapy community (OT). His career helped orient the course of the AT and OT fields. Beginning as an industrial arts teacher and later becoming a clinician, he worked in prosthetics research and development, AT invention and marketing, and the creation of a successful multimillion dollar company that has now spanned decades. His products have been instrumental in rehabilitation, and continue to be tested in modern clinical research studies as well as in clinical practice ("Product," 2016). He has actively served in interdisciplinary professional associations including AOTF, AOTA, and RESNA.

Fred Sammons began his career as an occupational therapist in 1955 after having worked extensively with technology on his family's farm, studying to be an industrial arts teacher, and serving in the Army as a chemical researcher and on a Great Lakes iron ore ship. His company originated as a one-man mail-order operation called Button-King, which Fred Sammons ran in his spare time, continually expanded rapidly and eventually grew to having been acquired and resold several times..

Archiving Sammons' personal and business artifacts which span from his early life to the present through the Fred Sammons Archive Project at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM) creates research and educational opportunities for OT students and practitioners.

OBJECTIVE

Accumulate and Archive Artifacts

Fred Sammons' archival materials include a variety of personal belongings that he has saved throughout the years. Business documents and personal information add depth to the archives as a research tool with historical, technological, and economic value. The Fred Sammons Archive Project at UW-Milwaukee contains both physical and digitized references for students, educators, and practitioners to reference.

Full Historical Scope of Button-King and Beyond

Included in the archives are Sammons' company's catalogs, beginning with his very first 1958 catalog printed with a blue ink ditto machine and ending with catalogs printed by Patterson Medical ("Patterson Medical," 2016). Supplemental Additional business-related materials include pricing sheets, correspondence with vendors and manufacturers, and accounting records.

The archives also contain assistive devices sold by Fred Sammons in his catalogs, and prototypes of assistive devices that Sammons created himself. Autobiographical materials are also included, such as photographs, sketchbooks, letters, and personal items that shed light on Sammons' personal life and the qualities that propelled his success and innovation in the field.

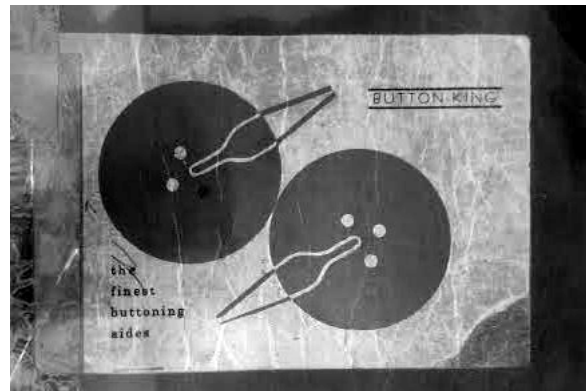


Figure 1: An early business logo for Button King, the first permutation of Fred Sammons' business, featuring an artistic print drawn and made by Sammons himself; the image shows two button-hooks, which were among the first products Sammons began manufacturing in his home and selling through his mail-order service

Researchers are working with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Golda Meir Library to enable full public access through their archival operations.

METHODS

Interviews and autobiographical information

The Fred Sammons Archive Project at University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee includes video-recorded interviews between Sammons and Professor Roger O. Smith, in which Sammons discusses his career and impactful events within his life. The videos contain explanations of the relevance of many of the more impactful physical archived artifacts. In addition, Sammons recounts events that shaped the field of OT and AT, his career, his life in general, and the historical context surrounding the development of the OT and AT education and practice.

Website

While these materials are available by appointment today, they will be accessible to the public online through the developing Fred Sammons Archive Project website planned to be unveiled in early 2017. Additionally, the videos are linked for media-sharing websites such as YouTube. The website's main purpose is to include a database of archived materials that are sorted by media type (video, photograph, or document), quantity (length of video clip, single photograph or multiple photographs, and single-page document or multiple-page documents), and date range. Over six hours of recorded interviews with Fred Sammons are available as full recording sessions or in segments. Four sessions have been recorded to date; with additional recording sessions scheduled. Full recording sessions consist of one complete edited session and edited segments consisting of coded and searchable video clips that are less than five minutes in recorded length.

Artifacts were donated to the university by Fred Sammons and consisted of a wide range of media types ("Reknown," 2015). Catalogs were sorted by name of publication (i.e., "Be-OK!" or "Enrichments") and date of publication. Other paper documents like pricing sheets, business expense reports, legal documents, business correspondence, and personal correspondences were sorted by date and subject matter. Photographs were stored in folders by estimated date range. Post-cards, signs, newspaper clippings, business cards, certificates, assistive devices, report cards, yearbooks, audio tapes, video tapes, and other assorted, unique belongings were sorted into folders or envelopes if possible and put into boxes. If there were accompanying photographs, letters, or other

paper documents, these were put into the same box.

Videos were recorded in four interview sessions, with a fifth session pending. Video sessions required the coordination of the UW-Milwaukee Video & Multimedia Production Department. Artifacts were transported to the film studio on campus. Professor Roger O. Smith engaged Sammons in one-on-one, unscripted questions that centered primarily around the artifacts and the historical events in Sammons' life. Four video filming crew staff members were responsible for video and sound quality.

FRED SAMMONS		
Exact sequence of Hospital Sales		
Oct 24, 1958	Children's Hospital of Buffalo	6.00
Nov 22, 1958	Salvation Army Hosp, Chicago	2.00
Jan 26, 1959	Rehab Inst of Detroit	12.00
May 13, 1959	Saginaw County Hosp, Mich	3.75
May 15, 1959	Kris Ill, Medical Center Chicago	2.00
Aug 17, 1959	Hermaville Rehab, Pa	4.00
Sept 26, 1959	Easter Seal, Kane County IL	4.00
Oct 28, 1959	Easter Seal, Elgin IL	4.60
Oct 31, 1959	Special School, Ottumwa, IA	4.97
Oct 31, 1959	Community Rehab, Canton OH	9.30
Nov 2, 1959	Craig Rehb, Denver	3.93
" 3 "	Handicapped Child Sch, St Louis	7.92
" 4 "	Easter Seal Chicago	4.80
" 4 "	Cerebral Palsy of Columbus OH	1.95
" 5 "	Univ of Ks, Med Center, KC, KS	13.37

Figure 2: Fred Sammons' first sales list, handwritten with dates, purchaser, and prices (F. Sammons, personal communication, 1968-1959.)

RESULTS

Artifacts and interviews

The Fred Sammons Archive Project revealed artifacts that dated from the early 1900s through the 2000s. Hundreds of catalogs, video and audio cassette tapes, sketchbooks, artwork, several hundred photographs, assistive devices, and thousands of pages of business records and personal materials are included in the archives.

Table 1: Example of video segment categorization criteria

Day	Clip Start	Clip End	Clip Length	Video Clip Title	Description of Video Clip	
1	0:17:32	0:21:35	0:04:03	Splinting	Fred explains the use of splinting patterns & fitting a splint pattern to an individual, manufacturing one's own products, & loyalty to one's product vs. loyalty to one's customers	
Corresponding Artifact # (green tags)		Artifact	Description Of Artifacts	Keywords	Found?	Location
28		thin document with splinting patterns	"onion skin paper"	orthoplast, synthetic rubber, Johnson & Johnson Co, velcro	Y	Box 8

The individual video recorded interview sessions' unedited run time was recorded as follows: 1:22:18, 1:32:48, 1:56:48, and 1:23:58, coming to a total of 6:15:52. Each session was broken into clips based upon content. Each clip was, on average, less than five minutes in total length, with between 20 and 40 clips per video. Video segments were coded according the day they were recorded, starting time, ending time, total length, qualitative descriptions and keywords, which artifacts if any were featured in the video, and where these artifacts would be physically located in the archives.

User interface and public access

The interface of the Fred Sammons Archive Project website follows principles of universal design in its development. The videos and website are intended to be useable by persons with disabilities. Equivalent text descriptions are available for images on the website. Closed-captioning can be made available for video files. The website will feature a user-friendly interface with adjustable font sizes and high contrast. Sans serif fonts and large buttons.

The Fred Sammons Archive Project website is intended to be a publicly used database resource for health service communities, educational institutions, and the general public in order to widely share knowledge of OT and AT and Sammons' influence upon them. The website will be free to users. Additionally, segmented video clips and full video sessions will be available through YouTube.

DISCUSSION

One of the great advantages of the Fred Sammons Archive Project is the depth of the materials included and breadth of questions that can be answered by the database. Key findings of the archives project possibilities for the future:

1) Educators, students, and clinicians have insight into Sammons' methods as a clinician, researcher, and AT developer.

2) Historians concerned with OT and AT evolution will find a wealth of knowledge within not only the prototyped devices contained in the archives, but will also find information contained within the hundreds of Sammons' business catalogs and local newspaper articles showcasing how new devices were being used to improve the quality of life of patients within the community.

3) Those concerned with entrepreneurialship will find valuable information within the video recorded interviews, catalogs, expense reports, and correspondences. Sammons himself never patented a product; thus, the importance of intellectual property rights within the context of product development and dissemination can be examined through a case-study of Sammons' interviews and records of his sales.

Table 2: Queries for future research

Research Questions...
What is the relationship between intellectual property and AT product development?
What makes an AT device commercially successful?
How do cost, quality, and need for product relate?
How do new materials change the course of product development?
What motivates hopeful inventors of AT?
How did low-tech AT change the OT profession?
What are various ways to enter the field of OT and how did this change historically?
What is the relationship of AT funding to product availability?
How did laws around health care shape the development of AT and the OT profession?

REFERENCES

(F. Sammons, personal communication, 1968-1959.)

Patterson Medical. (2016). Retrieved February 17, 2016, from <http://www.pattersonmedical.com/>

Product Search Results. (2016). Retrieved February 17, 2016, from <http://www.pattersonmedical.com/app.aspx?cmd=searchResults>

Renowned OT pioneer Fred Sammons donates collection to UW-Milwaukee Archives. (2015). Retrieved February 17, 2016, from <http://uwm.edu/healthsciences/news/renowned-ot-pioneer-fred-sammons-donates-collection-to-uw-milwaukee-archives/>