

CASE STUDY 1

Cooking Mama: Foodfight Emulation with oral histories



The Team: Georgia Tech Library's Retrocomputing Lab, also known as "retroTECH".

The Challenge: Showcase the original Game Boy games created by GT students through emulation and oral histories.

Cooking Mama: Foodfight!

Emulation with Oral Histories

Unit + Institution's name

Georgia Tech Library's Retrocomputing Lab, also known as "retroTECH"

Unit members

The lab is led and managed by Wendy, the Digital Collections Archivist and her team is made up of other special collections archivists, library workers in research services, and student research assistants. One team member, the Access Archivist, specializes in oral history methods.

The preservation/emulation problem: "Telling Software Stories with Emulation"

Unlike a computing history museum, or university research archive, the retroTECH lab is a digital projects lab. While **digital projects labs** are often seen as nontraditional library services, many in the United States support digital scholarship with software preservation and on-demand access to computing machines.

Computer science undergraduate students at GT will often develop their own GameBoy Advance games when learning the programming language C. Wendy and her team developed a **documentation strategy** to collect software developed by the GeorgiaTech community and oral history interviews about how software was designed and developed on campus. The team also wanted to showcase GT undergraduate students, so she reached out to instructors about interviewing students and **accessioning** their original Game Boy games.

Working with a team member who had **oral history** interview experience, Wendy was able to interview students about their games. We learn from the game designer, Arianna, that her Game Boy Advance game "Cooking Mama: Foodfight" is a **game hack** inspired by a NeoPets game she played as a kid and her passion for design and food. Another team member, a student worker with website development experience, built an online exhibit featuring the emulation, interview, and more information about retroTECH's mission.

The screenshot shows the Georgia Tech Library website. At the top, it says 'Georgia Tech Library'. Below that, there are navigation links: 'Find, Borrow, Request', 'Research, Help, Support', 'Spaces & Technology', and 'About the Library'. The main heading is 'CS2261 retroTECH Collection' with a sub-link 'Visit the retroTECH lab to learn more.' Below this, it says 'Fall 2018 Semester, Fall 2018'. The featured item is 'Cooking Mama: Food Fight!' by Arianna Pathammavong. A short description follows: 'Georgia Tech Computational Media student Arianna Pathammavong created a Game Boy Advance game called "Cooking Mama: Food Fight." The game is inspired by a NeoPets Ice Cream Machine game Pathammavong enjoyed playing as a kid, as well as her passions for food and design.' There are two main sections: 'Online Emulation' and 'Oral History'. The 'Online Emulation' section features a game cover for 'Cooking Mama: Food Fight!' and a 'START EMULATION' button. The 'Oral History' section features an image of a blue Game Boy Advance SP console and a 'VIEW ORAL HISTORY' button.

Figure 1. Screenshot/Video. The Cooking Mama: Food Fight! exhibit allows users to access an oral history and play an online emulated Game Boy Advance game from a GT undergraduate student who created a game in Computer Science coursework (class "2261") where students use to design games and compile code using Game Boy emulators.

<https://apps.library.gatech.edu/retrotech/cs2261>

Overcoming challenges: identifying and selecting subjects

With inclusive documentation strategies that feature student-work, there are potentially unlimited possibilities for gathering GameBoy emulation games from courses and oral history interviews from students, so one challenge for the team was choosing which projects to be featured in the collection of student-developed software. After interviewing and observing classes, Wendy discovered that students who had then become teaching assistants were ideal interviews because they could speak about their experiences learning—and teaching others how to design a game.

Where the emulation project lives

Users can also access a brief oral history of the game's development, motivation, and inspiration from the creator herself, an undergraduate student who created the game as part of her coursework for a computer science degree at GT. You can also play the game in an emulation of the GameBoy Advance software.

<https://library.gatech.edu/retrotech-online>

<https://apps.library.gatech.edu/retrotech/cs2261>

Discussion questions / Share-back prompts

1. What other ways could teams in digital projects labs, like RetroTech, gather software stories from their campus community?
2. The Online Exhibit places the software story oral history interview next to the emulation itself (Figure 1). What do you think this visual resource 'pairing' communicates to those who access the collection for the first time?
3. Where could oral history methods, like "software stories", really make a difference in new digital collections that feature the design and development of software?
4. Are there potential ethical issues that may arise from actively collecting documentation about game design or student work for an institutional collection?

Cooking Mama: Foodfight!

Running the activity For the educator

About the exercise

This discussion activity takes 10-20 minutes, and is designed for an audience of LIS graduate students or early-career preservationists. Before reading the case study together as a group, consult the Learning Goal and Terms to Introduce below. Once you have read the case study and described its context, ask participants to break into small groups for discussion questions and sharing ideas.

Learning goals

The Cooking Mama: Foodfight case study illustrates how oral history interviews, called “software stories” provide more context for the software objects we accession into our collections and how provide access to both the emulation and oral history documentation. The case study also illustrates how broad documentation strategies can present challenges in identifying, selecting, and curating new materials for preservation.

Terms to introduce

- Oral history methods, interview
- Digital projects labs in Universities
- Emulation
- Accessioning
- Documentation Strategy

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