

ABCNEWS

Film & Tape Library

47 West 66th Street, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10023

FAX COVER SHEET

DATE: 3/18/96

TO: Steve Leggett

COMPANY: Library of Congress

FROM: Joel Kanoff

TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES INCLUDING THIS PAGE: 7

IF ALL PAGES INDICATED ARE NOT RECEIVED,

PLEASE CALL (212) 456-4211

COMMENTS

21F6

Testimony Prepared for Library of Congress Hearing on State of Television Preservation

by Nancy Hiegel and Joel Kanoff

ABC News is a for profit, commercial network news organization providing news and public affairs programming. Although not widely seen at that time, the television network offered its first newscast in 1948. This was followed in 1952 by a weekly program called *All Star News*, and in the fall of 1953, eight months after ABC's merger with Paramount Theatres by Leonard Goldenson, ABC started a regular Monday through Friday news program anchored by veteran newsman John Daly. ABC broke new ground in the fall of 1958 with the introduction of early and late evening news programming, and in the late 60s, ABC joined the other networks and increased its evening news program to 30 minutes. Barbara Walters became the first anchorwoman of a network evening news broadcast in 1976. Under Roone Arledge's leadership innovative programs were introduced such as *World News Tonight*, *20/20*, *PrimeTime Live*, *This Week with David Brinkley*, and *Nightline*, the first regularly scheduled late night newscast of its kind to use satellite technology to bring together leaders and experts for in-depth discussions on the top stories of the day. Over the years, ABC News has built a unique and far-reaching news gathering organization domestically and throughout the world. Currently, among other capitals, there are bureaus in Beijing, London, Moscow, Paris, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo.

As you may well imagine, preservation of footage from past events and programming is of great importance in the television network news universe. While the majority of footage used is certainly newly shot, each show contains archival footage. In a typical *World News Tonight* edition, almost every spot contains older footage used to put a fine point on a subject, supply background, develop its history, or just remind us of the continuity of our way of government or of life itself. ABC News will continue to collect a wide variety of materials that reflect US and international news events, history and cultural trends, religion, science and technology, environment and wildlife. Our preservation efforts extend to footage of events of every society and at every level of magnitude, footage of people from the most famous to the obscure, the entire range of human social activities, flora and fauna from everywhere, landscapes, and even "still lifes" of objects. That is to say, besides news, the collection includes a great deal of generic footage--children in schools, people working in factories, ships and airplanes, beauty shots, aerials--that can be reused in a wide variety of stories.

Our core collection consists of approximately 850,000 units of film and tape dating to 1960. Another 60,000 tapes and kinescopes are off-air recordings of programs--current programs such *World News Tonight*, *Nightline*, *PrimeTime Live*, *20/20*, all-but-forgotten programs such as *Scope*, *Directions*, *ABC Reports*, the *Reasoner Report*, and *Now*. The core collection is film-based through 1975 (mostly 16mm color reversal), mixed film and U-Matic through the late 70s, U-Matic until 1986, and Betacam to the present. Roughly,

twelve percent of the core collection is film. About 47 per cent of the collection is Betacam, the rest 3/4 inch. That is the core News collection, used by all programs for production; we also have many millions of feet of film and many thousands of videocassettes in storage which are trims and production elements for documentaries and magazines segments. The further use of these is more restricted, so they do not circulate freely.

Roughly speaking, we save over 4,000 tapes a month, about 5,000 in a political year such as this one. No, we don't save everything; there isn't space. We immediately recycle A-roll with the correspondents' stand-ups, since we don't feel its important to save rehearsals for the final take, which is, of course, preserved on the air history. We recycle graphic builds and multiple camera set-ups of minor importance to the event recorded. But, with regard to subject matter, because we try not to pre-judge, and therefore not to dictate, what will be important to producers in the future, we tend to err on the side of inclusivity. By necessity, however, we do have to make some difficult choices. Moreover, one shot may serve for dozens of diverse future production requirements, provided that the computerized description is sufficient for it to be located objectively. Keeping these issues in mind, library staff carefully evaluate materials turned in by producers and camera crews at all our bureaus and decide what materials to permanently archive or recycle.

News production demands swift, accurate access of archived materials. However, the richness of the videotape recording greatly reduces the effectiveness of standard archival cataloguing methods. Key words and brief subject classifications at best do not do justice to, and at worst misstate and distort, the moving image. For that reason, an extensive account of the visual and auditory contents of the recording is necessary. Producers, researchers, and writers at ABC News rely on their ability to quickly get a functional verbal likeness of the recorded image from our computer system. In proposing retrieval requests to the system, these users may cast their net as narrowly or as broadly as they like. They may call up specific documents or thousands of documents, though they may not request thousands of tapes. Researchers may be seeking images that are primary to the reason that the tape was shot--for example, a sound bite from a speech given by President Clinton. The images may be secondary to the original purpose (protesters march after the speech), or the videotape may even offer more recondite information (a shot of a beautiful fountain in the park where the speech was given or even the hood ornament on the Presidential limo). Whatever the need, the system can retrieve large quantities of information rapidly. Finding the footage in the database is merely the first step; we must still pull the tapes from our warehouse and ship them to the production center, where they are scanned for appropriate material. Unlike the comparatively more relaxed research done by documentary filmmakers, the television news producer is forever working against the tightest of deadlines to get the footage cut into that evening's broadcast.

For the past eighteen years, the ABC News Film/Tape Library has been committed to information access via full-text retrieval. With true full-text, any word string or

combination of strings contained in a data record can be discovered, simultaneously among all information fields, if need be. We are all familiar with the so-called Boolean operators--"and," "or," "not," etc.--used to associate the strings in the retrieval request. In 1978, we pioneered the use computers for full-text retrieval of the film/tape catalog with the mainframe application STAIRS (Storage, Tracking, and Information Retrieval System), and we have been served well by that system ever since. Today hundreds of producers, writers, correspondents as well as legal staff, rights and clearances, and executives in this country and around the world have access to the three central STAIRS files: footage, verbatim transcripts, and program information. As desktop computers have become increasingly powerful, we have found more ways to make our lives simpler by interfacing the desktop PC with the mainframe. Currently, we are developing a LAN-based system of even greater power and productivity than our mainframe can provide and we expect to persevere as the foremost example of how appropriate information technology optimizes collection access and boosts its cultural value.

Full-text retrieval is practically worthless without the hand of the diligent cataloguer. In the ABC News idiom, cataloguing refers to the descriptive shot-listing of the footage. The content field of a typical 20-minute field recording or feed can go on for pages, depending on the substantive density of the footage. In this scenario, cataloguers must ask themselves: among the many things I see and hear, what is important to describe here. Also, how might this material be utilized again, and, within the guidelines of the classification method, the style sheet, and the established lexical thesaurus, how will an army of different producers seek to access it--that is, what descriptive language will they use? To facilitate the Herculean task of our cataloguing staff, we have developed a proprietary software application that permits us to interface a standard PC with Betacam and U-Matic VTRs. It slugs SMPTE timecode into the document with one keystroke, while the F-keys control the forward or backward motion of the VTR. The cataloguer can program various other repetitive actions into the application.

Cataloguing is a lengthy and continuous process, and the focus and dedication required enjoins us from being as comprehensive as we would like. At present, we are able to fully shot list only a percentage of the new footage we acquire.. Decisions must be made as to the potential usefulness of the work and, ultimately, the significance of the story. Remember, everything does get a record in the computer, only the top stories are catalogued. Nevertheless, cataloguing brings in the clients. In the news film/tape world, the operative variant on "Build it and they will come" is "Describe it and they will use it." It is axiomatic that there is a direct proportional relationship between the quantity and quality of catalog detail and the use of particular tapes and film.

The mainframe provides excellent connectivity so that our producers working in the field can dial in. We have traditionally provided and continue to provide access to outside producers for the purpose of stock footage sales. In 1989, it occurred to us that what was lacking was a portable index to our holdings. This was in the dawn of CD-ROM technology, and in that format we were able to provide an excellent, word-searchable index to our footage with retrieval software every bit as powerful as STAIRS. We

distributed the disk to outside producers and researchers at a very modest price and sent many without cost to libraries and information resources throughout the world. Still, CD-ROM disks are out of date from the moment they are cut, and we look to the Internet and World Wide Web to provide the means to distribute information about our collection to outside stock footage customers, and to researchers in general. Right now, the entire CD-ROM catalog of news footage available for licensing from ABC News VideoSource is available on footage.net on the Web. We have great hopes for the future of electronic data and, in coming years, even retrieval of footage itself on the desktop. Unquestionably, the greatest benefit there will be the provision of low-cost footage access to educators at schools, universities, and non-profit organizations throughout the country.

As I said, the archive is a very meaningful part of the production fabric. In fact, the television news moving image collection has matured into occupying a rather enviable status. It is not by chance that now, at the end of this century of the moving image and electronic communication, that the television library has found new friends and loyal partisans. Having earlier learned the painful lesson that you can't go out and reshoot history, the networks are now more respectful of these valuable corporate assets and resolute that they endure. Besides the historical significance of this footage, there is an economic consequence. While the use of library holdings has enabled shows to keep costs down, entire program concepts--like the Twentieth Century project and documentaries we produce for cable-- have been developed around pre-existing footage. Cost center libraries have become profit center libraries

Preservation issues, a network-wide concern, have been amply dealt with by Michael Lang, Senior Vice President of our Broadcast Operations & Engineering Division, so I won't go into that except to say that the News Division in general and the News Film/Tape Library in particular, having a big stake in the success of the Media Conservation Facility, participated in the planning of the facility from the earliest stages, and we are confident that appropriate, careful procedures are in place for the preservation in logical stages of the footage in our charge. The News Library takes an active role in feeding the MCF first with the U-Matic air history cassettes most in jeopardy of serious electronic or physical degradation and monitoring the preservation dubs. Field cassettes and feeds are next on the agenda, though time and resources will dictate a more selective approach. The News Library will do the selecting. Done properly, the preservation of active TV news collections is a difficult and time-consuming task. The necessity of dubbing in real time is simply not harmonious with the size and activity of a network collection.

However, I should like to call your attention to the fact that the preservation of footage in active TV news archive commences well before the preservation dubbing takes place. The term "archive" here tells only half the story; the other half is best characterized by the words "circulating collection". In this respect, we are also quite distinct from other types of circulating TV collections--like entertainment collections--because of the volume of circulation and extent of re-use. At any one time, we have an average of close to ninety thousand pieces in circulation. And much like a public library, when original

materials circulate off the library premises, they are at risk, and we have to be concerned. Circulating tapes means tapes getting worn, damaged, or worse, lost. Each run across a recording head shaves some of the magnetic stratum off the tape. Unlike published materials, much of the footage we collect is irreplaceable. It is true that we are at the outset of technological changes which will obviate the term "wear and tear"--that is, the optical disk for storage of master materials--as well as the concept of actual, physical circulation--images will be distributed electronically and digitally. Yet, for many years to come we will be circulating our tape; there's so much of it. So, the point here is that we often can't wait for the scheduled preservation project to complete its good work, for we will always be beleaguered by physics as well as by the user who critically suffers amnesia when it comes time to remembering what he or she did with a cassette.

I would like to call your attention to the recent expansion of the News Film/Tape Library into three consequentially related areas, and I think that this will help to illustrate the new, broader interest attached to the Library unit. First, warehousing and last year's move to our own facility. Prior to March, 1995 the ABC News core collection--that is the roughly 850,000 pieces of film and video shot for hard news purposes--was stored at two sites, one on the west side of Manhattan, the other in Englewood, NJ; both were operated by outside contractors. As the newer material in the Manhattan site overflowed the storage space, it was shipped to New Jersey, so that year after year more and more material was subject to the vagaries of traffic patterns of Northern Jersey and the Upper West Side. Where you don't want to be is stuck on the George Washington Bridge with several rush orders for World News. With the support of the News capital planning and the network real estate people, we were able to construct and staff a modern, round-the-clock warehouse facility which gives us storage space for years to come. Located in an ABC operated building at 125 West End Avenue, the facility is carefully climate controlled, air filtered, and secure. Many of the issues we faced with regard to proper storage and dispatch have simply disappeared and our control over the collection is enhanced many times. The tapes seem happier, our producers are definitely happier, so are we. Of course, we still maintain a good deal of film and videotape at the site in New Jersey, our documentary elements and show prints and our magazine boxes. We generate between two and five 1.2 cubic foot boxes per magazine segment. This material is not catalogued, nor entered into the computer on a tape by tape basis; it remains somewhat restricted from everyday common use, and is not for sale.

Just as our management became convinced that the time was right to bring the collection "home", so to speak, where it could be curated more directly, they also saw a business incentive in licensing footage directly and without domestic representation to outside producers. ABCNews VideoSource was born into the busy, competitive stock footage market. Besides ABC News footage, VideoSource represents the large World Wide Television News collection as well as British Movietone News. Because it is located on the same floor as the storage area, VideoSource customers get fast access to the Collection. While separate from the library per se, VideoSource reports to the same director, maintaining an every day, working relationship with it that maximizes both the sales effort and the library's agenda with regard to preservation and security.

The third area of expansion is Rights and Clearances and Permissions. ABC News takes intellectual property and copyright issues seriously. Rights and Clearances permits us to be energetic in determining the copyright holder, negotiating for specific rights, reviewing or developing agreements, and finally acquiring the appropriate clearances. As anyone who has dealt with clearances or copyright--especially copyright of footage--will affirm, this is a complicated, very specialized process. If done properly, though, it can result in significant cost savings as well as freedom from litigation. On the other side of the coin, the Permissions area watchdogs program material which aired. It reviews requests from outside producers, corporations, and individuals who are seeking to include clips of our material in their television or film productions, educational presentations, or talks and--with approval of the Director and VP of News Practices--permits or denies such use. As you might imagine, we receive dozens of requests a week, but each requires individual attention, oftentimes a good deal of it. Among other benefits, centralizing Rights and Clearances and Permissions in the News Library system promotes information analysis and expedites its flow to other departments.

With the advent of the ABC News 24-hour channel, the Library is again taking a vanguard role in expanding its operations and facilitating the use of the footage it maintains in ever more challenging ways. A nexus of technological, cultural, and business advantages now in evidence, including the Internet, HDTV, interactivity, new digital video formats, recent mergers, and an end-of-millennium public that gives news a privileged place in everyday living makes this a time of extraordinary opportunity for the television news collection. At this juncture, it is especially important for the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and other government institutions to work more closely with the network archives, to sponsor specialized discussions or conferences devoted to the problems of the TV news collection in particular, and to cooperatively establish criteria for the ongoing deposit of network news materials.