

# AMIA

---

ASSOCIATION OF MOVING IMAGE ARCHIVISTS

Statement  
of the  
ASSOCIATION OF MOVING IMAGE ARCHIVISTS  
for the  
Library of Congress'  
Report on the State of American Television and Video Preservation

April 10, 1996

- 53 -

## **AMIA Statement for the Library of Congress' Report on the State of American Television and Video Preservation**

*The Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) would like to express its appreciation to the Library of Congress for undertaking a Report on the State of American Television and Video Preservation. In 1993, when the National Film Preservation Board began its work to create a national plan for film preservation, AMIA joined many others in the moving image archive community -- including the Library of Congress -- in calling for a parallel plan for television and video. Now, the Library has stepped forward to answer that need. Dr. Billington, Mr. Tabb, Mr. Francis, Mr. Murphy and others at the Library deserve our thanks and full cooperation as they take on this daunting but much needed project.*

*In this first stage of the process, AMIA has prepared this written statement with two purposes in mind:*

- I. To provide information about the Association and its growing role within the moving image archive community; and,*
- II. To identify key concerns which should be addressed in the national plan for television and video preservation.*

### **I. ASSOCIATION OF MOVING IMAGE ARCHIVISTS**

The Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA) is a professional association established to advance the field of moving image archiving by fostering cooperation among individuals concerned with the collection, preservation, exhibition and use of moving image materials. The specific objectives of the Association are to:

- \* Provide a regular means of exchanging information, ideas and assistance.
- \* Take responsible positions on archival matters affecting moving images.
- \* Encourage public awareness of and interest in the preservation and use of moving images as an important educational, historical and cultural resource.
- \* Promote moving image archival activities, including preservation, cataloging and documentation, and access, through such means as meetings, workshops, publications and direct assistance.
- \* Develop and promote professional standards and practices for moving image archival materials.
- \* Stimulate and facilitate research on archival matters affecting moving images.

Since the late 1960s, representatives from moving image archives have recognized the value of regular meetings to exchange information and share experiences. Over the years, these informal gatherings -- originally known as the

Film and Television Archives Advisory Committee (F/TAAC) -- expanded from a handful of participants to several hundred archivists from over 100 national, regional and local institutions. In 1990, the name of the group was changed to the Association of Moving Image Archivists. In 1991, AMIA voted to formalize as an individual-based professional association -- the only one of its kind in the moving image archive field.

Currently, AMIA represents nearly 300 moving image archivists. Its members are drawn from a broad cross-section of film, television and video media: classical and contemporary Hollywood productions; newsreels and documentaries; national, regional and local television productions, including news, public affairs and entertainment programming; film and video art; amateur footage; and film and video programs reflecting ethnic and minority experiences.

AMIA is a 501(c)3 public benefit corporation, registered in California. It is governed by a board of seven directors who are elected by its members. The Association works to:

- \* Publish the quarterly AMIA Newsletter, and provide other publications and mailings of interest to the moving image archive field.
- \* Organize the annual AMIA Conference, which has assumed great significance on the calendar of archive-related events.
- \* Develop and promote standards in the field, especially in the areas of moving image preservation, cataloging, and access.
- \* Manage AMIA-L, a list server on the Internet which speaks to the special needs and interests of the field. AMIA is also developing a World Wide Web site.
- \* Conduct the annual Basic Training Workshop to help train new moving image archivists. AMIA is also working to establish scholarship and internship programs for the field.
- \* Initiate and coordinate advanced technical symposia, such as The Reel Thing in 1995. This year AMIA plans to offer professional-level symposia in both film and video preservation.
- \* Honor the work of archivists. Each year AMIA bestows its Silver Light Award in recognition of career contributions to moving image archiving.
- \* Sponsor special workshops, forums and symposia, as may be needed or desirable for the field.

AMIA maintains three standing committees -- Preservation, Cataloging & Documentation, and Access -- all of which deal actively with both film and television/video issues. In addition, two AMIA interest groups have been formed to focus specifically on television news and documentary collections and amateur footage (films and videos).

## II. THE NATIONAL TELEVISION/VIDEO PRESERVATION PLAN

AMIA is eager to work closely with the Library to help develop and implement the most effective national plan possible -- one which looks to the interests of all concerned: archives, educators and scholars, rights holders and the public. Drawing from the experience and expertise of our members, we believe the points listed below are crucial in formulating a plan which will earn widespread support within the moving image archive community and significantly enhance the state of television and video preservation.

### A. THE TELEVISION/VIDEO PRESERVATION FIELD

Arguably, the field of television and video preservation is not as well-defined as film preservation. The "players" are more numerous and varied; the scope of the preservation problem is greater and less amenable to clear-cut solutions; standards, principles and accepted procedures are not as fully developed; and the technological base is more complicated and less stable. For these reasons, the national plan needs to begin by gathering basic information and setting parameters which can serve as the basis for its recommendations. The plan should:

1. State the case for preserving television and video materials. Regrettably, this case is not as widely understood and accepted as it should be. The value of television programs and video productions -- as historical, cultural, social and artistic products -- must still be asserted, as must the need actively to preserve them.
2. Take into account the diversity of the television and video preservation field. AMIA itself reflects this diversity. Its members are drawn from international corporations, government agencies, private businesses, non-profit organizations, and all manner of cultural and educational institutions; they represent large, well-funded television/video libraries; one-person, under-funded archival programs; and every variation in between.
3. Redefine television and video preservation to include archival storage, cataloging and access, in addition to laboratory copying. AMIA's decision to create standing committees on access and cataloging, as well as physical preservation, reflects the central importance and inter-related nature of these functions.
4. Determine the scale of the television and video preservation problem. How much is being preserved? How much has already been lost? How much will be produced, now and in the years to come? With television and video, more than motion pictures, the scale of the problem will play a large role in determining the solutions.
5. Evaluate current efforts to preserve television programs and video productions. How are materials being preserved and stored? What types of materials are being preserved by non-profit archives? By producers, broadcasters, and rights holders? What types of materials, if any, are "falling through the cracks"?

6. Create programs for educating new moving image (including television and video) archivists and continuing education opportunities for those already in the field. A graduate-level degree program should be created at an American university. In addition, AMIA is currently seeking support from foundation and corporate sponsors to establish scholarship, internship and research grant programs.

## B. THE NATIONAL TELEVISION/VIDEO COLLECTION

The concept of a shared national collection -- held by a wide array of public and private institutions, widely divergent in philosophy, mission, size and location -- is fundamental in the field of film preservation. This concept should be explicitly embraced and meaningfully applied to television and video, where it assumes even greater significance because of the scale and complexity of the problem. Coordination and the sharing of responsibilities -- along with increased funding -- are the keys to an effective national plan. Specific applications of the national collection concept might include:

Coordinated selection guidelines, to insure maximum coverage of television and video productions in archival collections.

Shared preservation responsibilities, among public archives and between public archives and commercial producers/broadcasters.

Non-profit/for-profit partnerships, characterized by regular communications, shared information, jointly funded programs and projects, etc.

National or regional storage facilities, for use by archives which cannot otherwise adequately store their collections.

National or regional laboratory facilities, available for preservation copying and equipped to handle obsolete video formats.

Model donation and deposit agreements, to facilitate relationships between public archives and owners of television/video materials.

Selected non-profit archives designated as regional repositories for an expanded Library of Congress copyright collection.

In general, the plan should encourage, facilitate and affect an expanded sense of shared responsibility and a greater emphasis on cooperation and collaboration, among all constituents of the television and video preservation field. AMIA is dedicated to this approach, and serves as a principle forum for its practice. No doubt, not all of the ideas listed above can be realized, but they should be assessed to determine their usefulness and feasibility.

## C. PRESERVATION

In the area of physical preservation (laboratory transfer and storage), the national plan needs to:

1. Define the principles and components of a television and video preservation program. What constitutes physical preservation for television films and video productions? Such a definition should:

Establish basic principles for television/video preservation. For example: the need to distinguish between preservation masters and transfer (duplicating) copies; the advisability of retaining film copies after transfer to new video or digital formats.

Address the "formats" question? What constitutes preservation of programs on various video formats? On 16mm film? How does an archive sort out the maze of new formats which seem to come and go with alarming rapidity?

Approach television/video preservation as a process, rather than the creation of an end product. Storage, maintenance, periodic inspection, and re-transfer to fresh stock or new formats must also be part of a preservation program.

Characterize both the similarities and differences between motion picture and television/video preservation. Redefine the motion picture concept of a "preservation master" as it applies to television and video.

Take into account the diversity of archives and the disparity of their resources. To some extent, a sliding scale must be recognized -- ranging from cutting edge technology to lower cost alternatives -- with the idea that each archive does the best it can within its means.

2. Help archives create useful selection guidelines, and encourage coordinated collection building. Coordination among archives will help insure preservation of the broadest possible representation of television and video materials.
3. Emphasize the central role of climate-controlled storage in preserving television and video materials. In so doing, help archives evaluate their need to upgrade or replace existing storage facilities, and investigate the feasibility of regional storage centers for archives which cannot otherwise afford adequate facilities.
4. Address the problem of equipment obsolescence for older (and not so old) video formats. Possible approaches range from surveying laboratories capable of handling obsolete formats to creating a central repository where outmoded video recorders would be maintained for preservation use.
5. Identify the equivalent of "orphan films" in the television and video field, and prioritize their preservation by non-profit archives.
6. Encourage the research and testing of video and digital products from a preservation perspective, including new tape and disk formats. Disseminate product information useful to archivists.
7. Examine the impact -- realized and potential -- of new digital technologies in preserving and storing television and video materials. Propose criteria for assessing the suitability of digital formats as potential preservation masters.

#### D. ACCESS

In the area of access (especially educational, scholarly and public access), the national plan needs to:

1. Emphasize the role of meaningful access as an integral component of any preservation program. Preservation without access is incomplete.
2. Foster communication and cooperation among rights holders, archives and the research and educational community, with the twin goals of:

Facilitating research and educational use and expanding public access to archival television/video materials,

While protecting the legal and economic interests of rights holders.

3. Explore methods for bringing television and video materials to researchers, rather than forcing researchers to travel to the materials. Possible approaches include:

Agreements among archives and rights holders to permit inter-archival loans and exchanges.

Use of online technology to enable archive research centers to access television/video materials from distant repositories.

4. Promote agreements among archives, educational institutions and rights holders that would permit the off-air taping of a broader range of television programming for teaching and research use.
5. Simplify the process of rights clearances for the educational and scholarly use of television and video materials. The process which now exists -- complex at best, and in many cases indecipherable -- serves neither the interests of educators nor rights holders.
6. Emphasize the value of professional cataloging in providing meaningful access to television and video collections. Put simply, access is not possible without at least a minimum level of cataloging.
7. Encourage the sharing of collection information among archives, studios, networks and other television and video holding institutions. Develop guides to facilitate access to television and video collections which are available for educational, research and public use.
8. Examine the impact -- realized and potential -- of digital formats and computer technology in accessing television and video materials.

#### E. FUNDING

Increased funding for television and video preservation is the bottom line for any national plan. With it, all other elements of the plan are possible; without it, very little can be done. Here is where the plan must be creative, bold and successful.

1. Campaign to increase public awareness of the need for television and video preservation. Ideas include:

Travelling exhibits and programs, showcasing the collections and preservation work of archives and designed for national and/or regional audiences.

A documentary on television/video preservation, and/or short public service announcements aired by participating networks, television stations or cable services.

A "festival of preservation" similar to AMC's annual preservation festival for motion pictures.

2. Provide archives with information and support materials to assist with local fundraising.
3. Encourage federal, state, local and private funding agencies to establish grant programs for television and video preservation (including laboratory copying, storage, cataloging and access).
4. Promote non-profit/for-profit partnerships as a means of sharing preservation related expenses (for joint restoration projects, storage and retrieval, public exhibitions of mutual interest, etc.).
5. At the appropriate time, expand the mandate of the proposed National Film Preservation Foundation to encompass all moving images, including television and video materials.

\* \* \* \* \*

AMIA, through its Executive Board and various committees and interest groups, will be pleased to assist the Library of Congress in researching and finding solutions to the issues listed above. Currently, AMIA's Preservation Committee is working on two specific television and video related projects: a manual for the care and handling of video tapes and a directory of archival film and video laboratory services. The Access Committee is planning a special edition of the AMIA Newsletter which will focus on questions of access, including reports on innovative access projects and programs. The Cataloging & Documentation Committee has proposed and hopes to work with the Library on the revision of Archival Moving Image Materials: a Cataloging Manual (AMIM), in part to better accommodate the cataloging of television news collections and video productions. And AMIA's two active interest groups -- News & Documentary Collections and Inedits (Amateur Footage) -- are specifically concerned with types of moving images integral to the television and video preservation plan, and are working on several projects dealing with these materials.

Many of the issues discussed in this statement echo those identified by the National Film Preservation Board's plan for film preservation. This should surprise no one, since in many ways the fields of motion pictures, television and video converge. At the levels of production, distribution/transmission, teaching and



research, archiving and preservation, they increasingly constitute one field -- moving images. For this reason, AMIA recommends that the Library avoid duplication of effort by combining any parallel and compatible initiatives which emerge from both national plans.

Finally, AMIA urges that the Library continue to be guided by two essential principles in conducting this project:

- A national perspective which recognizes the significance of the project for the archival television and video community as a whole; and,

- A commitment to collaboration, which recognizes the intrinsic value of involving the archive community in both designing and executing the plan.

To the credit of both the Film Board and the Library, these were the hallmarks of the study and plan for film preservation, and AMIA applauds the Library for taking the same approach with this project.

For its part, AMIA will work diligently with the Library and all interested parties to achieve the promise of any national plan designed to insure the preservation of America's moving image heritage.

Submitted by:

Maxine Fleckner Ducey  
President, AMIA

April 10, 1996