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FOR ORAL PRESENTATION TO LIBRARY OF CONGRESS STUDY RE TV
PRESERVATION (3/19/96):

It is with a combination of some relief and awe that we come before this panel, the nature of which has been imagined as a hoped-for eventuality, now gladly arrived. While many eloquent voices are here to cry, we no longer face such a wilderness.

The preservation of entertainment programming as it applies to CBS will be addressed by other counterparts at the Los Angeles hearing. Today, in tandem with Mr. DeCesare, I will focus my remarks on the nature of CBS News Archives, our efforts in preservation and end with some suggestions addressing the mission of this panel.

CBS has the largest collection of its kind among the major networks, having kept and maintained more material generally in addition to having started earlier.

Dating principally from 1950 to the present, CBS News Archives has well over a million videotapes, including original field cassettes as well as program broadcasts, and several million feet of hard news film, as well as 80,000 containers of film and tape masters, prints, program negatives and outtake material from long-form documentaries and news magazine programs.

All materials are stored in Manhattan on approximately 60,000

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square feet of climate-controlled space. (All nitrate film was transferred to safety stock some years ago.)

In addition, copies of the CBS Evening News from the mid-'70s to present, and of many other CBS News broadcasts including special and documentary programs are on deposit at the National Archives via Library of Congress copyright registration. Significant donated collections of CBS news material for scholarly research and museum display are also part of the holdings of the Museum of Television and Radio (and continually added to), and of the JFK and LBJ Presidential Libraries.

We work with historians and researchers wherever feasible, and license news material for use in as wide a variety of circumstances as there are uses of reality-based pictures and sounds, from motion pictures such as "Forrest Gump" and "Apollo 13" to children's school reports. In addition to the CBS network, CBS News archival programming can be seen regularly on seven non-CBS cable networks.

In addition to the preservation of network-produced material, we have also been involved in the preservation of material produced by network-owned-and-operated stations, and to a lesser degree other affiliates.

Our preservation priorities are in two principal areas currently:

2" Videotape:

Of approximately 20,000 such tapes, we have roughly 10,000

left to re-master (currently to D2 and Beta-SP). Ironically, the tapes themselves are in better condition than anyone might have predicted. The urgency here is in the limited number of machines left to play them on, and the equally dwindling number of experienced technicians who can operate the equipment. The idiosyncratic variables involved in successful archival 2" playback include arcane skills such as knowing when, where and how to apply one's thumb to the tape path.

The other area of immediate technical concern is more straightforward, but of equal necessity. Three-quarter-inch U-matic cassettes from that format's introduction in the mid-70's are reaching the end of their lifespan now. This is not particularly a problem of equipment or personnel as the format is still used widely, but is an even greater problem due to volume.

The good news, which I know can be echoed by our colleagues at NBC and ABC, is that a substantive, thoroughly representative amount of national network television news has been preserved to date. The bad news is that a great deal yet needs to be done, particularly at the local level, if we are to avoid losing a significant portion of the means of understanding our social, political and cultural identity -- which is what television news represents.

Recommendations

While the national networks efforts are critical to our concerns here, more help and coordination of assistance is needed at the

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local and regional levels. Indeed, the recommendations to follow would also apply to network television preservation, but resources are understandably more limited at the local and regional levels.

If the national news presents daily swatches of the fabric of our lives, it is local news in all its particulars that often reveals the threads of that fabric. And if the national news can appear as a crazy quilt at times, so, too, does local coverage provide the warp and woof -- often literally, as well as figuratively.

But for the same reasons, a recording of the President's press conference may be only as significant as a tape of what Main Street in Memphis in March '96 looked like -- let alone of Oklahoma City in March of '95.

As it is a given that not even everything worth saving will be preserved, and that resources are finite, criteria for preservation at any level are necessary. But in addition to standard considerations such as uniqueness and content significance, at least one other condition should apply to local news material, invoking some test of content variety.

This would serve to include what by nature would necessarily appear mundane now, but whose representational value would increase with time. In that sense, we've occasionally wished we had more of the background material of the past which was discarded for having no anticipated news value then, but which would have uniquely

representational value today.

It appears obvious that even a limited nationwide program would necessarily require a coordinating function. To that end, we suggest the foundation of a nationally-directed office for television and video preservation coordination. Adapting some of the mechanisms established for motion picture preservation, such an office would

a) act as a clearing house for the identification of materials in need of preservation -- to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, to direct those with material to those who can provide needed transfer services, or to coordinate the combination of small amounts of material matched to facilities of greater capacity (not everyone can afford to build facilities for long-term storage, nor do they need to);

b) assist in the formation of relationships linking local independent stations or video producers with appropriate local or regional institutions (successful programs exist, as models);

c) administer and award preservation grants, and/or assist in coordinating the activities of preservation funding sources; as well, "preservation loans" to be re-paid from proceeds of subsequent exploitation by rights-holders;

d) help find "homes" for found, donated or other such materials; this could include linking rights-holders with "found" materials, or enabling the preservation of materials in private hands without compromising the ownership or the permitted or otherwise legitimate use of such materials (e.g. "home movies," as

well as "lost" television shows).

e) publish and/or otherwise publicize a humanly comprehensible explanation of copyright rules and guidelines for appropriate behavior with respect to such rules. (This in itself could take years, or prove impossible given expected changes and adaptations in light of developing digital applications, but it is not facetious, for it needs to be more widely recognized that were it not for copyright protection, little of what we're concerned with preserving would exist now.)

f) establish a website for information exchange.

Having scratched that surface, issues of access will require similar means of address and cooperative coordination. Accessibility will improve in tandem with preservation, and will indeed foster further preservation.

But for the moment, preservation must precede access.

Overall, we want future generations to be able to see this [clip of 3/18/96 Evening News] just as we are now able to see this [clip of 4/7/49 Evening News].

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