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William T. Murphy  
Coordinator for the State of the American  
Television and Video Preservation Report  
Library Of Congress  
M/B/RS Division  
Washington, DC 20540-4690

Dear Bill,

Thank you for your inquiry regarding the preservation of television and video programs. As you know, Chace Productions is very involved in the restoration and preservation of soundtrack elements for the motion picture industry. However, many of our processes and services are also used for the preservation and restoration of video originated elements. Our experience in this area is that there are some problems which are more commonplace to video originated programs.

In the work we receive, the audio masters for video programs are generally produced separately from the "video" or picture element on some form of multi-track audio tape. Only after the mix has been completed is the final track recorded onto the video tape. Therefore, the most common problem we encounter is the physical deterioration of the magnetic tape audio master.

The physical deterioration is characterized by sticky tape and shedding oxide which can make the tape difficult or impossible to playback with satisfactory results. Unfortunately, these problems are well documented by the audio tape manufacturers and are blamed on their early binder formulations. Some of these early formulations deteriorated rather quickly, some in only a few years! When the problem is confined to audio tape, the recognized solution has been to either bake the tape at a low temperature or use lubricants to allow the tape to transport over the heads. However, there is some discussion, especially with respect to baking audio tape, that high frequency information is lost or tape print-through is increased. Additionally, the application of lubricants while necessary for the transport of the tape is usually detrimental to the continued preservation of the original element. The end result, in either case, is that the best obtainable copy has been made while the integrity of the original element has been compromised.

Therefore, I believe it is important for the television and video plan to foster the research and development of methodologies for less invasive means of transporting audio tape elements which exhibit the binder failure problem. In fact, the goal of this methodology should be applicable to the transport of both audio and video tape elements. While this R&D may come from the private sector, I would suspect that the delivery of a workable system might be hastened with grant type funding.

Another problem which frequently presents itself is the receipt of video programs recorded on obsolete or hard to find formats. Fortunately, there are some fine facilities which specialize in the video transfer of these formats. However, the new plan should recognize that these facilities exist solely on the commercial viability of offering these services. In the future, if the volume for these services is not sufficient, these resources are likely to disappear. Thus some provision might be made to ensure that rare and obsolete video formats are maintained at a subsidized or centralized facility in the future.

Finally, as in film preservation, video preservation must look to new and emerging technologies for the storage and access of the material. The goal, as in film preservation, being; reliability, cost effectiveness and ease of access. I believe this area is the most likely to be created and supported by the private sector. Nonetheless, a national plan might offer incentives to the private sector to ensure that the less well funded programs have access to the new technologies.

There is no question that the preservation of television and video programs is a multi-faceted problem. Certainly, the groundwork established by the National Film Preservation Board will be instrumental in helping to focus your efforts. As always, we appreciate the opportunity to contribute our experience and ideas for your review. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is anything further I can assist you with.

Kindest regards,

Robert J. Heiber  
President

RJH/mls