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Cable News Network

MOTION PICTURE, BRUADCASTI

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / STUDY OF U.S. TELEVISION PRESERVATION

My name is Kathy Christensen and I'm here to represent the CNN video archive. My position with CNN is Vice President for News Archives and Research.

In producing 24-hour news programming, CNN gathers a large amount of video from around the world on a daily basis. This material consists of video shot by CNN camera crews and items acquired from other television stations and news agencies. The role of the archive is to support the production needs of CNN's cable networks -- CNN, Headline News, CNN International, and CNNfn, as well as other endeavors such as CNN Interactive, the Airport Channel, and CNN NewSource.

The archive contains news video from 1980 to the present, and in terms of format, the collection consists of 1" reels, 3/4" cassettes, Betacam and Beta SP cassettes, with the largest percentage being on Beta tape. The format of archive material is determined by the production format of the network. Deadlines can be very short given the live, 24-hour nature of CNN, and archive video must be capable of immediate playback for editing purposes. Given that edit facilities at CNN are equipped with analog Beta machines, the predominant format of the archive is Beta SP tape.

The physical environment for the CNN collection is adequate, though not ideal. The temperature, relative humidity, and fire protection are that of an air-conditioned office setting. The CNN archive is relatively young and we are now beginning to address preservation issues. We have not yet devoted significant resources to a formal preservation project, though some of the early 1" reels have been transferred to Beta SP tape.

The main archive collection is housed at the network's headquarters in Atlanta, and for the most part represents material that is fed into Atlanta. We also have a number of branch libraries in various CNN bureaus, and these collections are made up of the field tapes shot by the bureau camera crews. The libraries in the larger bureaus catalog their material in the central library computer system. The Atlanta library has duplicate copies of only a very few items, and the tapes in our bureau collections function as backup for a significant amount of our news coverage.

The Library is responsible for determining what will be archived and what will not be kept. With round-the-clock programming, we do not keep a copy of every hour of CNN air. CNN consists of two types of material -- anchored news programs and feature shows, such as Larry King Live, Crossfire, and Inside Politics. We do archive the feature shows -- in a program collection. For the news shows, however, what we archive is not the program itself, but the video from the news that is covered on the program. We keep all edited stories by CNN reporters, selected stories from our affiliates, and the raw video associated with news stories and events -- material that lacks a narrative audio track and may be anywhere from a couple minutes to several hours in duration. There are exceptions to this policy and that comes for live coverage of major stories. We have, for example, CNN's program coverage of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the Oklahoma City bombing, the Soviet coup, the LA riots, and of course, we have each hour of programming for the six weeks of the Gulf War.

CNN video is cataloged in a computerized database which contains approximately 600,000 records. The majority of the records include both bibliographic data and video descriptions. Bibliographic data consists of the title, date, length, reporter name, type (package, program, raw, etc.), geographic locations and basic keywords (personal and corporate names, and subject terms). The video descriptions are detailed logs that tell you exactly what is seen. The remaining records consist of bibliographic data only.

Up until recently, no one outside of the company has had direct access to information about materials in the archive, with research being provided by library staff to clients interested in licensing video for rebroadcast or inhouse production use and to viewers who want a copy of a program or story for viewing purposes. We have now placed approximately 30,000 database records on a Website that is geared primarily to those individuals interested in video for production use. We are considering placement of the entire database on the Web to allow access for other purposes, such as research by scholars and historians.

As a professional librarian, my particular interests and expertise fall into the area of cataloging and access. The effort that we devote to physical preservation of video will have no real meaning without adequate cataloging. Intellectual control is essential. If you don't catalog a collection well, you simply have a roomful or a warehouse full of tapes. It's a dead thing. A morgue.

One of the most daunting aspects of a national preservation program is the sheer volume of television material that exists. And each month and year, it grows even larger. CNN recently began a project to place a copy of its Gulf War programming with the Library of Congress -- six weeks of 24-hour coverage. It took us three months to dub exactly one week's worth. I would like to see the Library of Congress establish a facility that would allow for off-air taping of television programs. This would obviously be a large undertaking. But it would centralize the process and eliminate all the resources now devoted to acquiring material from the networks. What the networks could provide would be the cataloging of the material, in digitized form. This is perhaps a pipe-dream on my part, but I'd like to at least put it on the table as we discuss preserving and providing access to television programs.

The archives of the news networks represent a distinct component of the country's television and video heritage. While entertainment programming provides an interpretive view of our culture, news video is an historical record of social, economic, and political issues and events, both domestic and international. The primary mission of a network news archive is to support the production needs of the network. Because preservation and cataloging are important factors toward meeting that aim, I believe we have a framework for coordinating the efforts of news archives and those of a national preservation program. I would like to contribute to establishing such a program, and I look forward to any assistance that the Library of Congress is able to provide.