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Steve Legget  
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Dear Mister Legget:

Thank you for sending me the information I requested regarding the study of the current state of American television and video preservation and restoration in the United States. It is in the spirit of my current work toward a Doctorate in Library and Information Studies that I offer the following observations made while working over the years as a broadcast technician for a PBS station, a Cable TV establishment, a network affiliated station and an independent broadcasting station as well as consulting an educational institution in acquiring the news video collection of a local network affiliate.

## INDUSTRY

### A. CORPORATE

1. What is the nature of your organization and how does the production or acquisition of television and video materials relate to your company's goals?

a. The nature of broadcast establishments, whether cable, public, independent or network affiliated, is to inform, educate or entertain the public using an audio/visual medium.

b. The production or acquisition of television and video materials provide programming that can then be used to provide information and/or entertainment to the public. In addition, for commercial stations viewership or ratings are collected on the programming in order to establish rates and collect revenues from prospective advertisers.

2. Have you transferred or donated such materials to an archives or library?

a. My experience has been that broadcast stations rarely transfer or donate materials to archives or libraries because of the following reasons: they wish to maintain their immediate access to the collection; they are not willing to allow competing stations access to these materials for fear that the competing station(s) may rebroadcast these materials; they wish to maintain the integrity of the collection and are not willing to allow it to be subjected to the weeding policies of a separate institution; they are unaware that these potential recipients are interested in these materials or if they are aware, the equipment necessary to view the materials in their original format does not exist within the establishment of the potential recipient.

b. However, on rare occasions, broadcast stations do make VHS copies of interviews, sporting events or other news incidents for individuals or educational institutions who request them.

## B. COLLECTIONS

1. What are the size and date span of the television and video materials in your possession?

a. The size and date span of the television and video materials in the possession of broadcast stations is subject to the age of the station. The older the station the more likely that the collection will be larger and span a longer chronology compared to a more recently established station.

b. The size and date span of the collection is also determined by which collection one is referring to at the broadcast station. That

is to say, there is one collection of materials or library that consists of regular programming or entire shows, a second collection or library of just commercial spots and public service announcements, a third of highly edited opens, bumps and closes as well as promotions to upcoming specials or events, a fourth of news stories or packages, and a fifth of daily off-air recordings of day to day programming in fulfillment of regulations established by the FCC. Since each of these collections serves a different purpose they vary in size and date span.

## 2. What are the predominant formats?

a. The date span of the collection determines the number of formats that were predominant at a particular time. The range of these formats are 16 mm film, 2" video tape, 3/4 " video tape cassette, 3/4 " reel to reel, 1" reel to reel, and 1" beta cart.

Although materials held by television stations are almost completely in hard copy format, that is film or video tape, there exists new technology that allows the video information to be gathered onto a file server, downloaded to a mainframe and then edited using file information on the mainframe rather than time code on the videotape. The edited story is then played back during the news as a file rather than as a tape cued in a machine. This technology works completely without the use of videotape and should it become state of the art, future collections of broadcast materials will consist of files in databases rather than rooms of video tape reels or cassettes.

b. If one accepts other visuals and audio elements that are used within broadcasting the number of collections and formats expand even more. For instance, many interviews are done over the phone and the audio portion is edited with a photo from a separate collection or library of still photographs of varying formats. In addition collections or libraries of slides or graphics exist to supplement text or script that is read by a news caster, or are joined with audio cassettes during a commercial event.

3. What is the estimated rate of growth in quantities?

a. This is a difficult question. As local programming is supplemented by syndicated and network programming this collection of materials will certainly increase. However the largest increase will be in the collection of news materials. In comparison to the airing of programs or shows that exist as a single tape, newscasts consist of more raw footage shot locally by a varying number of photographers and are supplemented by the exchange or sharing of stories through satellite technology with other television stations across the nation.

4. What are the major problems you have encountered in managing television and video materials?

a. One major problem that I have encountered in managing the video materials in television stations is that little effort is made to offer systematic access to the materials. That is, classification systems are constantly being created and recreated and are as numerous as there are stations; cataloging of materials is usually done by an intern or someone who is educated in or has an interest in mass communications but is neither educated in or familiar with library and information studies; the high turnover rate of those performing librarian duties joined with the input of many other employees serving in a number of other capacities has created a lack of consistent subject and name authority control of those materials cataloged.

b. Materials are frequently electronically erased or degaussed in order that the tape be reused.

c. In many cases older materials are stored under improper conditions and are neglected. If these materials are not used within a given period of time they may be entirely discarded or if an attempt is made to revive them and they are no longer of high broadcast quality, yet may still be of use to scholars, they are usually discarded.

d. Lastly, broadcast stations, which strive for state of the art technology frequently install equipment that operate using a different format of videotape, often donating the older technology to

another station or simply discarding it. The next step is usually to discard any of the collection comprised of the older format since the equipment and personnel knowledgeable in operating the equipment to view the older format are no longer on the premises.

5. How do you decide what materials to collect?

a. Decisions on what materials to collect are based on their likelihood of being reused in the future, usually as part of a larger story or package. Candidates of materials likely to be kept are those of high local interest that may make national news or of individuals of high local or national profile. Most other materials eventually are weeded out for lack of use and the tapes are then recycled.

### C. PRESERVATION

1. How is television and video preservation defined in your organization and what have been the major accomplishments (for example, inspection and monitoring, reformatting, and restoration)?

a. Video preservation in television is often defined practically and simply as shelving or storing a tape for later use. Little is done on site to restore or reformat until a particular story is needed. No inspection or monitoring of the integrity of the quality of the tape collection is performed.

However, in some cases, materials that are older than a pre-defined date and are considered potentially usable in the future are often stored remotely by a third party and are subject to climate control and other preservation procedures not enforced at the broadcast station.

2. If reformatting has taken place, what format (or formats) was selected for the new master?

a. If a tape has been reformatted for use at the station that format selected as the new master is presently either 1" reel to reel or a 1" beta cassette.

3. Can you identify significant losses of valuable television and video materials?

a. Valuable television and video materials are open to interpretation, but if we approach the collection of materials as possessing valuable cultural information that ranges from sporting events to the bicentennial, then I would say that we are constantly experiencing the loss of valuable materials. One is more likely to find a sporting event from the 60's on film, the format of that era, but is unlikely to find bicentennial events of '76 on videotape since the videotape on which it was recorded has lost its electronic image over time, or has been weeded out of a collection for a number of reasons determined by the individual station that owns it.

4. What organizational resources (full-time staff, equipment and funds) are currently devoted to preservation?

a. Space devoted to storing the materials is limited and frequently less than proper for the correct storing of these materials.

b. Staff devoted to the preservation of these materials usually consists of someone on staff with a professional background education in mass media rather than a librarianship and/or interns.

c. Equipment consists of makeshift shelving, cardboard boxes and a tape machine or two to view the material.

d. Funds for the preservation of the materials are not spent at the station itself but are spent for the correct preservation of materials when they become remotely located or stored with a third party.

5. What criteria are used to determine preservation priorities?

a. Often the preservation priorities of television stations are less the preservation of individual videotapes but preserving the materials related to a particular tape along with the tape itself. For instance, on an edit log multiple stories may exist on one cassette or reel. To this end the index, scripts, shot sheets, people involved with the stories and the classification record of each story is preserved with the cassette or reel.

#### D. INFORMATION AND ACCESS

1. To what degree are the television and video materials in your custody described in hard copy or in a database?

a. As computer technology has been incorporated into the broadcast station, specifically in the news room, descriptions of collections have become completely stored in a database. While the older hard copies still exist for the older part of the collections, no effort to retrospectively enter the information into the database is attempted.

2. Under what circumstances is information about your company's television and video materials made available to outside individuals or institutions?

a. I have never observed any circumstances under which information about the availability of the company's video materials to outside individuals or institutions was made. The only service that I have observed that relates to this question is the copying or dubbing of materials to VHS tapes as a result of requests made by individuals limited to a few educational institutions or those who were part of the subject of the material itself.

b. A stop gap program that may allow institutions outside of the broadcast station information about what may be available is simply to obtain the satellite rundowns of those stories exchanged on a daily basis and a rundown of the stories run during the news. For information about regular programming or commercials a copy of a programming log created daily by the traffic department could be made available. Having this information available, potential users of the information may selectively decide ahead of time what may be useful to them.

3. Under what circumstances are the television and video materials in your possession made available for use by researchers outside of your organization?

a. Related to the question above, certain materials may be copied for a limited and select few in order that they may be used

outside of the television station. The broadcast stations are not in the habit of making an entire collection of materials available for use by researchers for a number of reasons. Probably the most important is that a staff that operates this library may consist of only one or two persons, if a librarian exists at all, and as such their priority is to take care of the needs of the reporters and/or other staff members. Secondly, there is the question of the availability of the equipment necessary to view the material. Equipment within a broadcast station is constantly used for one reason or another, and to make that equipment available to a researcher is impractical for the station. Lastly, the classification and cataloging of materials created and implemented by a television station is often unique and while it may be familiar to those employed at a particular station, the scholar may find it cryptic and unfamiliar.

#### E. COPYRIGHT

1. What new legal incentives might encourage television and video preservation?

a. What may encourage television and video preservation and the transference or donation of collections to archival and educational institutions is a method of promising those that donate the materials that no other competing station can use the material for broadcast purposes. I have found that this alone is the single dominant barrier preventing the donation of material. One effort toward that end may be to have those who may use the donated material to identify themselves and their affiliation and to have them sign an agreement that, under the levy of a fine, they will not copy the material viewed for broadcast purposes.

#### F. STORAGE FACILITIES

1. Under what physical conditions are originals, masters, and reference copies stored (for example, temperature, relative humidity, air filtration, fire protection, and security)?

a. The physical conditions under which originals, masters, and reference copies are stored at the broadcast station is often less than

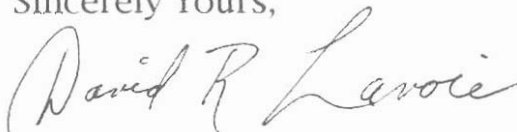


desirable. No precautions are taken for climate control consisting of temperature, relative humidity and air filtration. Often materials are shelved or boxed improperly at the station under no additional fire protection or security and are left to the individual container in which they are stored as the only protection against the adverse effects of outside elements.

b. However, those materials that are eventually turned over for remote storage, since the broadcast station cannot warehouse on site all of its collection, are often given more professional preservation treatment.

I hope that you will find my observations and comments helpful and, should you wish further elaboration on the above, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David R. Lavoie". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

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