

**Minnesota  
Historical Society**

COMMENTS TO ACCOMPANY THE TV AND VIDEO PRESERVATION SURVEY

The mission of the Minnesota Historical Society is to nurture knowledge of and appreciation for the history of the state by, among other means, collecting and preserving the records of human culture. These records are to be accessible to all. The culture of the latter half of the 20th Century *cannot* be understood or interpreted without the records of television and videotape. To make them accessible, they must be cataloged and disseminated locally and world wide. They must be made to survive longer than twenty or thirty years, the original lifespan of the magnetic medium. These tasks are expensive and must be undertaken with the assurance that the material is worthwhile.

One of the greatest challenges for media archivists is appraisal: deciding what to keep, certain that the resources invested in one set of records are well-spent. Is my institution's three million feet of television film the most important in the state? the region? Or should I be helping Archive X or Company Y preserve its footage because it has the most import? All footage, whether film or video, cannot be saved. The costs are astronomical. So where do we put our money? I believe that a national database of collection descriptions will help us toward answering some of those questions.

The most alarming fact about magnetic media is its short life span. All of us have time bombs ticking away in our storage areas, no matter how well their environment is controlled. If the binder doesn't fail, the playback machine has become obsolete and possibly inoperable. Can we hope for regional transfer labs with affordable rates? Will it be possible for non-profit agencies to set up such labs?

The most hopeful development in moving image archiving is the public's voracious hunger for images for the Internet and other world-wide communication entities such as satellite broadcasting. In addition, young people are requesting video material for their school projects. This generation would rather submit a video report than a written report. They are embracing media technology, whereas their parents and grandparents are still print-centered. With that much current and future demand, there will be market forces interested in television and video preservation. We cannot expect help purely in the name of cultural preservation. But once we are seen as viable content providers, there is hope we can recoup some of the tremendous investment we must make to keep this resource alive.

I must say that the Association of Moving Image Archivists is the most valuable resource a curator or archivist currently has. As network and teacher, it is unmatched. I would be much less effective as a cultural resource manager without it. Unfortunately, there is nothing comparable in the field of photo preservation, which is the other half of my job. It is vital that the television industry acknowledge and support the work of this organization.



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**APPRAISAL OF FILM, AUDIO AND VIDEO TAPE IN POLITICAL  
AND CORPORATE COLLECTIONS**

**INTRODUCTION:**

The assumption in appraising film and audio and video tapes in political and corporate collections is that the audio and visual information conveyed by the medium employed may be as important as the content of the film or tape. It is assumed that speech files, press releases, and related paper data - where they exist - will remain the major record of content. The audio - and especially the video - record will be preserved to answer the increasing demand to know HOW a candidate or company was presented to the public, and to provide a record of a person's appearance, speech patterns, and the "packaging" used to market both politicians and corporate products.

**CONSIDERATIONS:**

1. Films, audio and video tapes comprise a large and growing part of political and corporate collections. The audio and visual record is an important component of such collections, providing sound and visual information that has not been widely available before. Current use indicates that researchers in the future will use sound and visual information even more frequently than they do at present.
2. The format of the medium for film and audio and video tape makes it difficult to scan each item or series as is done with paper records. Appraisal of film and audio and video tape must generally be done without the opportunity to review each item by listening to or viewing it.
3. When item level review is not feasible, film and tape labelling must be used as a major guide to appraisal.
4. The impermanence of audio and video tape is a concern, although requirements for their housing are not materially different from the climate controlled conditions suitable for housing other archival records. Transfer to another medium may be necessary in the future.

## CRITERIA FOR APPRAISAL:

1. Ideally, only labelled films and tapes will be considered for acquisition. Labels with the most complete information, especially dates, will receive preference. Coded labels or sequence numbers assigned by filmmakers or others for control are acceptable when a list or a key to their meaning can be found.
2. Collections with only a few items of film or tape (five or less) may be regarded as exceptions to the requirements for labelling. In such cases, an effort should be made to review some or all of the items for appraisal and identification.
3. Within a large, well-labelled collection that spans several years, a sampling, usually by date, will be made. Contact with the donor and other background information will be used whenever possible to locate key items. After appraisal, some collections may be preserved as a whole at the recommendation of the curators and the Acquisitions Committee.
4. Film or tapes within a series or set (such as a political or advertising campaign or a run of public presentations) may be sampled by date or other appropriate criterion - for example to reflect the stages of the series or set (such as early, middle, and late political campaign); to represent one of several nearly identical groups (such as corporate runs of essentially the same advertisement directed at several major markets); or to illustrate a range of related topics (such as informational materials produced by a corporation for in-house or public use.)
5. Where possible, retention decisions will be made in correlation with written materials, especially where texts or transcripts duplicate the audio or visual presentation, or where schedules and other supplementary files are present to assist in identification or to document the full range of a series or set. Retention of film, audio and video tapes is especially important where paper records of the events do not exist.
6. Finished film and video tape will be collected. Outtakes and film components will not ordinarily be accepted.
7. Audio and visual biographies and company histories will normally be retained.
8. Films and tapes likely to be permanently available elsewhere in Minnesota will not normally be eligible for retention. These include tapes provided (for instance) to political candidates from such sources as Minnesota Public Radio and commercial radio and television. Tapes of meetings or the speeches of people other than the subject of the collection will not normally be accepted.
9. Film and tape available only in obsolete formats for which transfer to another medium for review, preservation, and access is technologically unlikely, will not normally be retained.
10. Items that relate to Minnesota but not to the collection being appraised will be offered to the Curator of Sound and Visual Collections for consideration.

from: Minn. Historical  
Society Collections  
Management Policy  
1994

### III. Collecting Policy

Consistent with its mission, the Minnesota Historical Society's collections focus on Minnesota and its peoples from ancient times to the present. Items are collected by the Society for their value in illuminating the past. The Society may consider for acquisition almost any material that has a documented association with the state's history and is in such condition that it can be maintained to ensure its lasting viability. In its collecting activities the Society seeks to be inclusive and to reflect the pluralism of Minnesotans.

The Society collects items that bear a relationship to Minnesota, to its peoples, and to their interaction with the larger society, both national and international. Minnesota is a collecting focus, but not a constraint, and materials in the collections may transcend the political boundaries of the state. The Society collects a wide range of historical materials from handwritten manuscripts to electronic records and from photographs to archaeological shards and historic sites. While some items are unique or rare, others were commonly available at the time of their use.

The collections are currently organized within these categories: archaeological items, art works, government records, historic properties, manuscripts, maps and atlases, material culture, oral history, printed materials, and sound and visual media. The Society generally does not collect natural history specimens. It does not collect human remains.

The Society cooperates with the collecting efforts of other organizations in the state including local, county, and regional historical societies, and other major cultural and educational institutions. Such cooperation is undertaken to foster economy, efficiency, and good will within this community.

## Sound and Visual Collections

The sound and visual collections include the photograph collection, music and recorded sound collection, and moving image collection.

The photograph collection of a half-million items in a variety of media includes fine art, commercial, and amateur photography and photojournalism, primarily by Minnesotans, from 1850 to the present. Identified images of Minnesota places, people, industries, activities and events are collected. The collection is strong in landscapes and portraiture, and in images of Native Americans, agriculture, lumbering, mining, transportation, and family life.

The moving image collection centers on news and documentary film and videotape produced in Minnesota or by Minnesotans. In addition to 3 million feet of KSTP television news film dating from 1948, the majority of the 2,500 pieces in the collection are commercially or independently produced films and videos. Home movies and amateur films are also part of the collection.

The 2,500-item music and recorded sound collection includes published music of all types written or performed by Minnesotans, speeches, audio books, and radio programs by Minnesotans. The Society has been designated by the state legislature as the "historic music center," the official repository for music published in Minnesota by Minnesota composers and performers. The collection does not include performance tapes or field tapes.