

**STATEMENT CONCERNING THE CURRENT STATE
OF AMERICAN TELEVISION AND
VIDEO PRESERVATION**

**Submitted by
LINDA GIANNECCHINI
President**

**San Francisco/Northern California Chapter
The National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences
350 Townsend Street #307
San Francisco, California 94107
(415) 777-0212**

INTRODUCTION

My name is Linda Giannecchini. On March 6, 1996, I attended The Library of Congress Public Hearing on the Current State of American Television and Video Preservation at the Hotel Sofitel in Los Angeles. My attendance was suggested by William Murphy, study coordinator for the Motion Picture, Broadcasting, and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress; and by two of the invited speakers: Helene Whitson, Curator of San Francisco Bay Area Television Archive at San Francisco State University, and Steven Davidson, Director of the Louis Wolfson II Media History Center in Miami Florida.

I listened with great interest as the list of distinguished and well-informed speakers discussed the current status of television and video preservation as it pertained to public archives, video technology, education, and programming. There were many times when I wanted to be acknowledged to enhance a comment made or dispute a statement. Knowing I could not, and believing very strongly in the immediate need to recognize and act on this topic, I would like to respectfully submit my own personal statement as it pertains to television and videotape preservation.

I write this statement as a television and broadcast specialist with over 29 years of experience in the field. My multi-faceted resume includes experience in management, consulting, producing, directing, performance, the technical crafts, and education. I speak as an educator, who has taught a number of broadcasting courses at San Francisco State University and College of San Mateo in California. I have also been a counselor for media internships and cooperative education. I can emphasize the importance of discussing television history with students so they can comprehend how our industry has evolved to its present form. I have used examples of pre-recorded programs to discuss sets, lighting, camera angles, and direction. I can speak as a technician, having worked as a camera operator, videotape editor, graphics designer, sound technician and technical director. I can speak as a producer, director and production coordinator. My credits include national cooking and entertainment programs; as well as local award-winning public affairs, magazine-format and news specials. I feel my expertise in all areas of the creation, production and post-production of television and video programs makes me an expert on how an idea is formed and a tape is completed. It is however, as a manager and consultant that I feel I am most qualified to speak to the subject of American television and video preservation.

In 1992, I was elected President of the San Francisco/Northern California Chapter of The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (NATAS). Founded in 1957, the Academy now serves all the television markets in the United States through its 17 regional chapters. We are often mistaken for the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences (ATAS) which is based in Los Angeles. In the early history of The National Academy, Los Angeles was one of our local Chapters, but opted to remove itself and form its own separate organization with officers, governors, by-laws, etc.

The National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences is the premier and most recognized non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of excellence in television. The Academy awards the Emmy--the most prestigious, peer-judged honor in television--for outstanding creative achievement in programming and in crafts. We also have an International Council that gives Emmys for foreign television as well. Our purpose has always been to recognize and encourage high standards of quality programs by focusing public attention upon cultural, educational, and/or technological achievements in the television industry.

The San Francisco/Northern California Chapter, which was founded in October of 1961, has over 1,000 members and is the second largest chapter in the National Academy. It represents California television markets from Visalia to the Oregon border and includes Hawaii, and Reno, Nevada. Our membership are professional men and woman working in the television industry, in all capacities--at television stations, cable and broadcast production facilities, and independents. We also have Associate and Student memberships, recognizing those people who are not actively engaged in the television profession or who are currently enrolled in related educational majors at an accredited college or university. Membership renewals help finance collegiate scholarships each year and support a speakers bureau for colleges and other organizations needing informed guest lecturers. Our "Creating Critical Viewers" Project addresses the subject of media literacy in high schools.

IMMEDIATE ARCHIVE ISSUES

In 1991, our Chapter joined in a co-partnership with the Special Collections Department at the J. Paul Leonard Library at San Francisco State University to house and catalogue our entire collection of Emmy award-winning programming from 1974 to present. Each year, after our awards presentation in May, those videotapes that are Emmy award recipients are sent to Helene Whitson, Curator at the Special Collections Department. As time and help permit, Helene and her assistant, Meredith Eliassen on, then begin the permanent task of archiving. Our collection now numbers over 730 videotapes, mostly on 3/4" u-matic, with the latest entries on Betacam. Unfortunately, the most recent Betacam tapes (since 1992) cannot be viewed or evaluated as the Special Collections Department does not have a Betacam tape deck for playback. With the reality of educational cutbacks, it does not appear that Ms. Whitson will receive a Betacam deck in the near future.

- 276 -

Our NATAS Emmy collection originally was just intended to be kept at San Francisco State University so the tapes would not be destroyed when our former Administrator retired. Since the tapes were now in a library of a state university, we decided to also allowed interested students and faculty the opportunity to view these "video treasures." As the years progressed, our NATAS board came to realize we were actually saving a visual history of our Chapter and our community. Since our Emmy categories include programming in news, documentary, current affairs, investigative reporting, historical, cultural, religious, informational, entertainment, children, youth, sports, public service announcements, and promotion, we were archiving the different stories and concepts of those years. If we had destroyed those tapes as was our original intention, those recollections would now be lost.

IMMEDIATE LOCAL NEEDS

I was very impressed by the credentials of the speakers at the March Hearings. Those representatives from Hollywood organizations like MGM, Paramount, Sony, Turner, Universal, Walt Disney, CBS, spoke about ways their individual departments and studios are preserving their network programming. In many cases, these individuals, recognizing the obsolescence of old tape formats and equipment, have dubbed their programs on to new digital formats. It's wonderful to have the equipment and budget to handle these requests. My personal concern is for the smaller, local television stations and educational universities who are on limited budgets and understaffed.

There have been so many personnel cutbacks and corporate takeovers on a local broadcasting level. I see it at our NATAS Chapter level, and I know it is widespread throughout our other Chapters. As new management assume control of stations, their major concern is to trim staff and win ratings. There is little need for tape preservation departments or local station archivists. Tapes of old programs or news stories are quickly destroyed to make space or erased and recycled. That leaves the burden of "saving our video treasures" to organizations like NATAS, who respect television excellence; or to specific archival organizations or educational universities. Non-profit organizations unfortunately do not have the immediate budget to maintain video archives. That is why we entered into a co-partnership with San Francisco State University. Since our entire operating budget is from membership and Emmy entries, we cannot afford to house and maintain our own television collection. We can only hope that individual grants can be written specifically to aid the real restoration and cataloging of our future collection.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

- **ESTABLISH LOCAL STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR TAPE PRESERVATION**

Based on the research that will be gathered from these hearing and supporting papers, I would guess that the Library of Congress will recommend certain standard and guidelines or procedures for tape preservation. If this recommendation does occur, I would strongly suggest it be implemented on a local community level. The emphasis at the hearings was for national preservation. Quite frankly, the national archivists for primetime programming and television specials are already in place. They are not the ones who need the help, support, money, and equipment. It is the local level people who are trying to protect their collections with a shoe-string budget and antiquated equipment.

- **SUPPORT FROM THE TELEVISION INDUSTRY**

If the television industry doesn't support television and video preservation why should we? It is their programming we honor for awards. It is their programs we videotape and playback each day. The television station management should recognize these facts and spearhead ways to protect and preserve their history.

- **SUPPORT FROM ORGANIZATIONS**

There are many dedicated and talented archivists who are currently doing all they can to protect, restore and maintain television and videotape. On a personal level I have witnessed the volume of work that has been accomplished by two of the very best archivists, Helene Whitson from San Francisco and Steve Davidson from Florida. They are both members of the Association of Moving Image Archivists. I have had occasion to meet other members of that organization, and I support their purpose and goals. I have asked both Ms. Whitson and Mr. Davidson to be guest speakers at our NATAS annual Presidents' Meeting, in San Francisco in September of 1996. It is my intention to educate the other Chapter Presidents and Administrators about the need to preserve Emmy collections like ours, and to support organizations like the Association of Moving Image Archivists.

- **SUPPORT FROM THE PUBLIC**

The public as a whole needs to be aware that videotape cannot last forever. As viewers become more conditioned to watching old reruns, and retrospectives, they must be educated on the dangers of poor tape preservation. Locally, the news programs of historical footage or the anniversary specials will soon be lost if organizations like NATAS no longer save programs and television stations destroy old tapes to make room for a new employee. Television stations and production facilities should do all they can to promote the need to protect our history through tape preservation. A national campaign with local elements should be implemented so there is total understanding and support for this worthy cause.

- 278 -

- **DONATE EQUIPMENT TO LOCAL ARCHIVISTS AND SCHOOLS**

It is indeed a tragedy to have a wonderful collection and no equipment for playback. Manufacturers should be made aware of the necessity of donating or leasing equipment to schools and archivists so they maintain their collections. It would be an excellent write off and a worthy cause.

CONCLUSION

I believe very strongly in the need to preserve our heritage through television and videotape archiving and preservation. I am angered when I hear that an education facility has "thrown out" an older piece of broadcasting equipment to make room for a newer one. I am saddened that the professional industry I work in generally doesn't recognize the necessity to save tapes. I truly feel for the professional moving image archivist who is frustrated each day because they know how to preserve their collections, but are ill-equipped to complete their tasks.

All of these feelings have prompted me to start a personal campaign to correct these problems at least in the San Francisco area. I am slowly gathering a number of supporters to research and investigate the possibility of forming a local educational community museum of television and broadcasting. I am also encouraging our other NATAS Chapters to look into similar opportunities in their cities. It is not the immediate answer, but a worthy one.

In order to preserve our local television programming, we must have a unified campaign from the government, private and corporate funders, the public, educators and the television industry itself. **The national preservation is really already in place.** The networks and production companies have solid support and money to protect our national programming. There are already national museums in key cities where the public, students, and interested professionals can view our videotape heritage. Now it is time the local archivists are given the opportunity and resources to do their jobs.