



The University of Georgia

Main Library

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Steve Leggett
Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded
Sound Division
Library of Congress
Washington, D.C. 20540-4690

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MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

Dear Mr. Leggett.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit a written statement to be included in the Library of Congress' study of the current state of American television and video preservation

The need to preserve and care for film has received much notice in the past few years. Like film, television's ability to immediately document the history and culture of a time also makes it vitally important to preserve this medium. However, the mass quantity of materials and the unstable nature of magnetic media presents preservation problems unlike those facing film preservation.

My comments will be general but drawn from my experiences with the Peabody Award Archive. The Peabody Award Archive contains most entries for both television and radio to the George Foster Peabody Award since the awards program was founded in 1940. The Peabody Award is operated by the University of Georgia's Henry W. Grady School of Journalism, and is considered by many to be the equivalent of the Pulitzer for recognizing excellence in broadcasting. The Peabody Award Archive, under the administration of the University of Georgia Libraries, reflects the best in American broadcasting history. In many cases, the kinescopes, film prints, tapes, or radio transcription discs held by the Libraries are the sole surviving copies of the work. One of the unique characteristics of the Archive is that it includes not only nationally broadcast programs, but also locally-produced shows. A 1949 kinescope of *Meet the Press* sits on a shelf near a 1950 health food infomercial from a small Ohio station. This is a collection that continues to grow, as every year's entries--numbering approximately 1000 per year for the past three years--are donated to the Libraries after the awards process is completed. Currently, the television component of the Peabody Award Archive consists of 2,300 16mm kinescopes and prints, 1,500 2 in. videoreels, and 16,000 3/4 in. U-matic videocassettes.

Preservation problems encountered in caring for this collection are universal to many television collections, but there are some issues that do not effect us as strongly as they do other archives. For example, while we do have storage problems, they are not as severe as those faced by production-based organizations, whose collections grow on a daily basis. Areas for concern include proper environmental storage, preserving obsolete formats, and decisions regarding to what format materials should be transferred or preserved. Ancillary to technical preservation issues are those surrounding copyright, cataloging, and access. Funding, of course, is the essential ingredient that determines which of the above areas are pursued and to what degree.

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- **Storage.** Economical environmentally-controlled storage is needed, and also safe and proper storage of a wide variety of formats. Due to lack of space, some organizations might stack heavy film cans too high, and store videocassettes horizontally rather than vertically. As is well known, proper storage can prolong the life of film and magnetic media, but space and storage facilities require money. It would be useful if the final report included storage recommendations and ideas for economical environmentally-controlled storage. One possible solution for relieving the storage shortage problem is to investigate options for shared storage between two or more organizations.
- **Obsolete formats.** Television and video collections often contain formats no longer actively used (e.g., 2 in. and 1/2 in. videotape). Playback equipment for these formats and trained engineers to run them are in short supply. This can result in an archive's having hundreds or even thousands of videotapes in these formats, but the information on them cannot be accessed because of lack of equipment and/or staff and money to support the projects. For example, the Peabody Award Archive has approximately 1,500 2 in. videoreels, of which 90 have been transferred to 3/4 in. U-Matic. Again, shared resources might be one answer to this problem. A list of organizations with good equipment and trained engineers would facilitate cooperative preservation projects.
- **Preservation and transfer format.** Properly stored, film can last hundreds of years. Videotape is not so fortunate, losing its signal or experiencing other kinds of deterioration within a few decades or less. Because of video's short life span, there should be a strong impetus to preserve or transfer video within the next decade. But what is the proper procedure to "preserve" video? Is transferring a videotape to the same format or higher "preservation," or does this practice only prolong the eventual death of the tape's content, either from the original's age or fading away from dubbing generations? Digital formats are constantly changing, and there is the double-edged threat of those formats joining their 2 in. cousins in obsolescence, and the uncertainty of digital formats' longevity. A serious study with recommendations on this subject would be appreciated.
- **Copyright.** Before a work can be transferred or preserved, permission must be granted by the copyright holder. But if a work dates from the early days of television, especially if it was produced by a now-defunct station, it can at times be almost impossible to determine the copyright holder's identity. It would be helpful to have guidelines written into copyright law on what archives and libraries should do when the copyright holder cannot be identified, and how extensive a search must be performed before determining that the holder is unidentifiable.
- **Cataloging and access.** A collection must be cataloged, even if only at the inventory level, in order to access it. In cataloging television programs, practices vary according to an institution's needs and funding. A network archive might catalog by shots since staff would need to quickly identify clips for news stories; the catalog would tend to be on an in-house system not available to the public. An archive attached to a university might catalog in MARC format following national standards, and have its catalog available on the Internet. As always, the amount and detail of cataloging depends on the staffing the institution can afford. While it might not be feasible--or even desirable--to find a television cataloging standard all institutions can follow, communication between the different cataloging methods would be useful. Professional

organizations such as the Association of Moving Image Archivists and the American Library Association could be urged to facilitate a dialogue that would be beneficial to all catalogers.

- **Funding.** Given the mass quantities of material needing storage, preservation, and cataloging, most organizations with television and video collections cannot afford to meet all their needs. A television preservation granting program and fundraising efforts similar to those successfully pursued by the film preservation community could be initiated. Such programs could be joint projects between the federal government, non-profit and for-profit institutions, and individuals. Public awareness and outreach could be aided by travelling exhibits and programs on cable networks, similar to A&E's film preservation programming.

I am grateful that the Library of Congress decided to continue its important study of the state of film and television preservation in the United States. The finished report and recommendations will undoubtedly be useful to this complex field.

Sincerely,



Linda Tadic
Curator
Peabody Award Archive
University of Georgia Libraries
tel. (706) 542-1971
fax (706) 542-4144
email: ltadic@libris.libs.uga.edu