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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

MAR 20 1996

MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING  
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

Dear Steve:

Enclosed is my statement for the public hearings of the Library of Congress on the current state of television and video preservation. I am looking forward to the meeting in Washington D.C. on the 26th of March 1996.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

John Lynch  
Director

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I am John Lynch, Director of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive of Vanderbilt University. I have been an employee of the Vanderbilt Archive since October 1975, and I am the Archive's third director.

In 1968 Paul Simpson, a Nashville businessman realized that for television news programs there was no permanent product or artifact to be preserved. At that time the three networks were preserving the materials used to make the news, but they were routinely reusing the videotape copies of the program itself. Thus a program that was shared by millions could not be reviewed one week later.

The Vanderbilt Television News Archive was started as a result of his efforts to make television history as accessible as print. With just a few thousand dollars of donated money, on August 5, 1968, he founded the Vanderbilt Archive as a temporary experiment in the practicality of taping news programs for preservation and archiving. Since then Vanderbilt has been systematically recording and preserving a videotape copy of network evening news programs and of some news specials.

This has been done with remarkably little money and with a small staff. The largest amount ever spent in a single budget year by Vanderbilt was just over \$600,000 for the year 1991. This was in no small part a result of the extra taping done for the Gulf War. The current budget of the archive is under \$300,000. With this money, we will collect at approximately two thousand new news shows, and provide an online guide, adding over one million words describing the added shows, available via the Internet system. This guide will be used by more than 40,000 different people in the coming year.

For many, this guide will provide enough information for their research. These will be students or others needing calendar information concerning when an issue or person appeared on the news.

Two or three thousand people will need to order a video tape from the archive. We will lend materials to them as either full show duplications or as compilations of individual segments from different evening news shows.

Still another forty to fifty people will choose to visit the archive in person to do their research work.

These numbers do not reflect usage from our own campus, but usage by people beyond the Vanderbilt University community. The Archive has been used by the major research institutions, and communications schools throughout its existence, but now with the Internet, we are reaching small colleges and public and private

secondary schools as well.

All this has been going on for twenty-seven years and the federal grant money has been limited, but very important. We have had two National Endowment for the Humanities grants - one an access grant and the second a preservation one, and we have had one NHPRC grant. We also have an arrangement by which we provide the Library of Congress with video taped copies of news shows for a fee.

Meanwhile, the archive itself has been in, and remains in, a life and death struggle for its very survival. This survival has been accomplished with some donations from private foundations, some patience on the part of Vanderbilt University which has invested more than a million dollars into the archive, and a sixty percent reduction of the staff.

Yet, even with all these financial problems, the Vanderbilt Archive has built an Internet database, and thereby actually expanded the reach of its services. In doing so, Vanderbilt began to encourage questions by many whose needs it could not serve. In many cases because of its prominence on the Internet and reputation for providing service, Vanderbilt is called upon by researchers just beginning their work, and who need the help of archives with other collections and services. In these cases Vanderbilt provides phone numbers and names of the commercial network archives for those seeking licensing, or of other archives with different kinds of collections. This service or courtesy is not unique from Vanderbilt. All the archivists I know cooperate, whenever they can, creating an unofficial network of archives. This means that once a researcher locates any one of the several possible archives they are likely to be funneled to the most appropriate archive for their needs. However this does not guarantee a successful result for the researchers quest, because much of television is still unavailable to most researchers.

We at Vanderbilt have chosen a narrow field, the hard news programs of the three major networks and CNN, for our endeavors, and even so we cannot cope adequately with the full range of possible materials. This was most forcibly brought home by the Gulf War. In less then two months we collected two thousand hours of materials. That is \$30,000 in tape, and an even larger cost in labor, since we had to spend about \$30,000 for a temporary position and at least \$10,000 in overtime costs. This decision to spend \$70,000 had to be made quickly. On January 16, 1991, the air war began and so did the taping. If we had waited even one day, we would have lost almost one hundred hours of network coverage.

Yes, television differs from other kinds of materials being archived, and to understand the need for and the needs of television archives like the one at Vanderbilt, you have to consider these differences. Television differs from traditional

print publishing even in ways that movies and film do not. If you publish a book and sell even a few thousand copies, it will survive for decades or possibly longer with no intentional effort from an archivist.

- > First the copies have been dispersed to several locations beyond the control of any single individual, and beyond the realm of destruction by any single disaster.
- > Next the material itself can be relatively durable when compared to video tape. Even when printed on acid paper the book may survive a reasonable amount of time on bookshelves with little or no care.
- > Finally a product exists. In television a video recording must be made. This is especially true of off-air archives of live broadcasts. Television, if it is a live broadcast, can be seen by millions of people and yet without some taping effort be unavailable for reference and research the very minute the show ends. While this is certainly not as true as it was in 1968 when Vanderbilt started archiving, it is still too near the reality.

The problem created by disappearing television is that the viewing public cannot examine its own recent history. With newspapers, the popular media throughout much of American history, a researcher can go to a local library and read back files to follow and review the progress of a story, but with television -- and this is in spite of the best efforts of Vanderbilt, the major networks, and others -- it is all too often the case that review of the progress of the story is both too difficult and too expensive.

In a children's book, The Giver, the population of a future society does not have the ability to remember the past. In our modern society, those of us who have access to the past speeches and campaign promises realize how powerful history can be. In the not too distant past, President George Bush claimed he never used the phrase voodoo economics to describe the Reagan economic plan, but an NBC reporter, Ken Bode, was able to find the video tape. This is the reason such material has to be available, and not just to the few, but to all. If you want to know what Presidential Candidate Bill Clinton promised, or how the Vietnam War was covered, you must be able to examine it.

The public purpose of archiving is access. In many cases it is for access in 100 years, because access today and tomorrow is satisfied by bookstores and libraries, or because the sensitive nature of the material, diaries and personal papers, requires limitations that are both reasonable and acceptable, but in the case of television much of what is shown publicly today will disappear to be never seen again. The prevalence of I Love Lucy being the exception. Reruns are one way that old television does come back to life, but it preserves a few shows and seldom will

it preserve a short lived series like Nichols. Reruns, rather than sitcoms or recycled materials in documentaries such as those on the new cable channels, are neither the primary purpose of or a replacement for the academic archive. The more educational documentary shows that recycle news are laudable, but they cannot be allowed to replace or prevent open access to the old news programs, or we risk a situation where one point of view is allowed access and use of the evidence while other's are excluded, the natural tendency is to ignore and sometimes to suppress all contradictory evidence.

It is precisely this problem which led to the formation of the Vanderbilt Television News Archive in August of 1968. At that time the news was routinely erased following a short period, described in a least one instance as a week after broadcast.

Even today, with the three major networks preserving their shows, access is a problem for most people. Vanderbilt serves these people, who need to see, examine and study the videotape of the show and for whom transcripts -- while quick and cheap -- are simply not accurate enough a representation of the audio and video broadcasts. Seeing a videotape of your grand children is a completely different experience from reading a letter.

We have in the recent past at Vanderbilt made tapes for our students to use of the Television War, that is the Vietnam War not the Persian Gulf War. They were quite surprised at the relatively small amount of graphic film coverage devoted to that war and the prevalence of talking head material such as the weekly body count figures.

It is only through viewing this television coverage that one can understand the late sixties and early seventies. Incoming Vanderbilt freshmen students will soon be children born in the eighties, but through this capturing of television they can go back to and see the feelings and emotions of the Vietnam War era. Tomorrow will be no different. When the million man march is a decade old, students will be able to come to the archive and look at the march, examine its promises and their fulfillment, just as we do now with older events.

Without access to these programs there is another possibility and that is one of not understanding. I am reminded of a Vanderbilt class which watched the Kennedy Nixon Debates of 1960. They had read about the debate and they had read some transcript material from the debate. They were inclined to believe that it was inexplicable how a television audience thirty years ago so misread the information before them. Then they viewed the tape. Afterwards I think they probably still believed that Nixon did in fact do better on many facets of the debate, but they saw that he did not do well in speaking to the cameras and through them to the American people. They now more fully understand that which only lives in the audio and video, and not in the transcripts.

It is through archives like Vanderbilt that this can happen, and it can happen for images and issues which we have not anticipated, and that we could not anticipate. The news is so diverse, moving as it does from country to country and politics to science, or business.

In Nashville secondary schools we have two active projects. One group is looking at space coverage on the news and another is examining computer coverage. In both cases there is a lot to be learned about attitudes and myths in the popular media. There is also a secondary effect in that these students can now share a moment of the past. There are two powerful memories of the space program that never fail to put a tear in the eye -- one is Walter Cronkite and the landing of Apollo XI on the moon and another is the Challenger explosion. Through archives these students can review and share those events of the past, and such events are seminal in the understanding of American views regarding the exploration of space.

It is only by actively trying to preserve this televised material that it can continue to exist. But more than just preserving it, archive's must also make it available in such a way that all who need to examine the past in television can do it as readily as they can in the world of the newspaper.

Videotape is an absolute miracle for television archiving. It is the only appropriate, and inexpensive medium for preserving an otherwise live and electronic event. (Here I use "live" in an expanded way, for even though the program may have been produced on tape or film and rebroadcast), from the viewers perspective the event is very like a one-time live event, and if not yanked out of the air for capture, it may pass on to an "unavailable" status.

Many will tell or have told you about the serious problems of videotape. These include its ease of erasure, its various chemical self-destruction tendencies such as sticky-shed or stiction, the black goo that can render a tape with a perfectly good oxide and a strong visual signal useless because it will no longer pass through the guides on a tape machine. These are all too true, and it is just as true that while tape may last 25 years with reasonable quality, few formats have approached that age, and even the ones that have were usually not fully developed and widely available for much of that time. Archivists of television materials do not dare forget the  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch reel recorder that was available for two weeks before it became obsolete, or the Sony Beta home machines. A decision to use these formats quickly became a disaster.

Even if an archivist avoids these pitfalls of the worst and shortest lived formats, any significant time spent in video archiving will result in the need for format conversions. At Vanderbilt we now use  $\frac{3}{4}$ " U-matic cassettes and have since May 1979. Before that we used 1" type A open reel machinery by

Ampex. The latter ceased to be manufactured in the mid 1970's. In a combination of the three federally funded projects mentioned above Vanderbilt has converted all but eight hundred hours of the 1" type A collection to U-matic cassette. With this success and the remarkable longevity of the 3/4" format, the Archive has done very well. There are warning signs, however, of the demise of the U-matic format with 3/4" machinery now having only one manufacturer, the Sony Corporation.

By, before or soon after the year 2000, we at Vanderbilt will be trying to transfer all this tape (it will probably amount to 28,000 tapes with well over 35,000 news programs) to yet another format. This will probably begin the conversion that will never end, with the Vanderbilt collection always moving the oldest materials to the newest format in a constant process through the collection. Like all archives, Vanderbilt hopes for a digital disk technology that could improve both storage and access, but such a format must store the material without significant video and audio loss, and at a reasonable cost. Such does not yet exist.

Some requirements for any new format are the ability to restore the image viewed in the original manner on a video screen, a format likely to survive for a number of years, and a material with a life expectancy at least as long as the machinery should be available to play the material. Film is not an option because it does not restore the television experience correctly. Today it is videotape that best performs these functions. Tape is the one material that provides this ability to restore a proper television experience at a reasonable cost.

Television has to be experienced as intended, electronically through that picture tube. If, for instance, the scenes of the Jim Jones settlement suicide in Guiana are shown on television, they have one impact, but they would have quite another when viewed on the big screen at a movie theater.

As mentioned earlier, television has no natural artifact that the archivist can await and collect, as is possible with books, magazines, and to some extent even films. The television archivist must capture the moment in order to preserve it. A program not recorded on tape can instantly become unavailable. While this is no longer as true as it was in 1968, it is still very near to reality of many news programs. This need to be actively archiving creates its own costs and labor needs.

The other costly problem with television archiving has to do with breadth. In national news alone, you have all the programs of the big three, PBS, the CNN system of 24 hour multiple networks, the proposed new 24 hour networks, and what about the directed news shows such as that of Pat Robertson. Recently at Vanderbilt we did a project of recording all the available news for a 24 hour period. The number of hours available in Nashville, TN, was absolutely staggering, with two 24 hour channels the networks

normal daytime, overnight, and evening programs, local news in Nashville, Chicago and Atlanta, and the various small audience news programs such as those on the religious networks. No one archive can record all this material every day and also provide all the cataloging and services needed to make the material useful. This obviously requires a network of cooperative archives that encourage and assist each other and that funnel clients to the appropriate site.

With modern communication the latter will become more and more practical, but I think we must be careful not to codify this nature and structure. I believe history is the best instruction for this. Today Vanderbilt seems to be an accepted model, and very mainstream, but this was not true in 1968 when Paul Simpson, a news fanatic -- that is the kind of person who would try to view all three network news shows every night -- began his push to create this archive. Paul had no credentials, and little money. If we over codify we will prevent the next Paul Simpson, and besides just because two archives have much of the same material does not mean they are the same or duplicate institutions. At Vanderbilt we are designed for subject study across time and networks. This is quite simply what one can do best with our collection, but someone could use the same materials with a new index say based on camera and television techniques and technology, or programming formats and have a radically different operation. In reality of course this different archive might well not collect all the same tape, because collection policies are also affected by the particular archival mission of an institution.

Without a government program specifically designed for the protection of television much has been accomplished with the creation of the Association of Moving Image Archivists organization for instance, and the building of archives at several sites including Vanderbilt. Some of these are outgrowths of film collections, television award programs, communications studies schools or intense collecting frenzy of a few individuals, but they have each contributed in there own way to a growing national collection of television materials. Many of these archives are small budget small cost operations, some using either 8 millimeter or vhs tape. This is both a problem and a blessing. The blessing is that without them and without their collections on these inexpensive formats much more would be lost. The problem is that the video and sound quality is not of the highest order.

How to improve archiving and not kill these programs is a real challenge, and the one that faces the library of congress in this project. If for instance it is decided that to archive you must use a minimum level of video technology, this may be tantamount to closing many very useful collections.

Is money the answer? Of course every archive needs more money, so yes it is the answer, and yet there are other fundamental



needs. Laws regarding archiving, copyright, free trade, and taxes must all be weighed in the context of how they encourage or discourage preservation of materials, both for the corporate copyright holders and for the independent archives those that preserve materials for which they do not hold the copyright. In many cases these laws have a profound effect on preservation of materials and this should rightfully be considered in the legislation. It must also be understood that access to the materials is best offered by carefully writing these laws. Copyright and the monopoly it creates for a creator is necessary to encourage dissemination of materials and it is also the stuff which can encourage or discourage preservation.

Also, it must be understood that television does not create thousands or millions of copies of itself as does a record/compact disc of music or a book, and thus accidental preservation as a direct benefit of widespread dissemination is not likely. Whether it is an outside off-air archive or an internal corporate archive preservation is an active operation started soon after the creation of the program.

The government cannot do it. Television is too vast for anyone agency or even the federal government to archive on its own. There must be archives of different sorts and differing collections to preserve this vast realm of material. That day in October Vanderbilt attempted to capture every news show that occurred in one day as televised (including cable) in Nashville, TN, was more than 80 hours of tape, and we only did news programs. The Persian Gulf War lasted less than two months and we only taped CNN (the main channel not the Headline news) and the three major networks, yet it amounted to two thousand hours of tape. No it must be a distributed effort, even if for this reason alone, but there are other reasons. Multiple collections are the best natural protection against the single disaster.

Finally, two collections may have the same or nearly the same materials, but because of indexing and usage rules and procedures they may each do a better job of serving different audiences. I think this may sound more trivial than it really is; a collection can be organized for a particular subset of users. Sometimes this is the indexing alone, but more often it permeates the entire operation, affecting collection decisions, storage methods and storage materials. For the networks to use vhs as a primary storage material would be silly -- the quality would never be sufficient -- but many of the users of the Vanderbilt archive are unaffected by our use of 3/4" U-matic as the primary storage tape and our occasional use of VHS in an emergency. This is because of the work and use they intend for the tape.

Thus any plan must be one which encourages both corporate archiving and archiving by those outside the copyright holding corporations. Encouragement may go further than you think, but it will certainly have to involve some money to sustain that encouragement and aid from year to year.

Once again let me emphasize a poor plan could in fact kill many archives now operating and a good plan will encourage new archive creation along with growth, expansion, and sustenance of older institutions.