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MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

AMERICAN ARCHIVES OF THE FACTUAL FILM

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

The American Archives of the Factual Film (AAFF): The Center for the Preservation and Study of Business, Industrial and Educational Film was founded at Parks Library at the Iowa State University of Science and Technology (ISU) in 1974. It is part of the Library's Special Collections Department. The AAFF is a nationwide archive and research center for the preservation and utilization of non-theatrical 16 millimeter films, including business, educational, training, public relations, and documentary films. The archive was begun with a significant donation of films and other materials by Ott Coelln, for over thirty years editor and publisher of *Business Screen*. Since then, the AAFF has collected factual films from a number of corporate and other sources. At present, the AAFF contains over 25,000 films, with over 12,000 individual titles in the collection.

These titles are accessible through AAFFCAT, a database searchable both locally and remotely, and through a card file available locally. Approximately 400 films are currently cataloged in MARC format and are available through our local online catalog, SCHOLAR, and OCLC, an international online library database. The AAFF has recently begun to work with the National Moving Image Database (NAMID) project to make its collections more accessible, and with NAMID's assistance we hope to have MARC records for many more films in the near future. These, too, will be entered into our local catalog and OCLC.

The films themselves are stored in a storage area in the basement of Parks Library, the main library at Iowa State University. Although storage conditions are not ideal, they are minimally acceptable, with temperatures averaging 70 degrees Fahrenheit and relative humidity averaging 50%. Plans to improve the storage conditions for the AAFF films are in progress: we are renovating a closed area in the basement in order to create improved environmental conditions, which will result in a temperature of 60 degrees Fahrenheit \pm 4 degrees, a relative humidity level of 40% \pm 5%, and six air exchanges per hour. This modification of the storage area will take place in 1993.

The AAFF collection faces a single, though important, preservation problem. A significant number of 16 millimeter safety films in the AAFF collection are affected by vinegar syndrome, a condition in which the acetic acid present in triacetate cellulose safety films both circulates within the film cans and escapes into the surrounding environment, affecting nearby films. Two factors will halt or slow the process of deterioration: improving the environmental conditions in which the films are stored and isolating those films affected by vinegar syndrome from those not already so affected. As mentioned above, we are improving the environmental conditions in which the films are stored. We are also seeking funding through a Title IIC grant application to locate and isolate affected films. This will

allow us to survey the entire collection of 25,000 films. A recent random survey of 1,133 films in the collection discovered 53 that were affected by vinegar syndrome. If this sample proves to be accurate, we can expect to find approximately 750 films affected by vinegar syndrome in the entire collection. If the grant application proves unsuccessful, we hope to find other means to undertake this important project.

We have not yet begun to create preservation copies of any of the films in the collection; our knowledge of the rarity and condition of individual titles is insufficient at this point to do so. We do, however, intend to apply for an American Film Institute preservation grant in 1994 once we have more knowledge of which of our films are unique or are the best surviving copies.

In summary, we are aware of the preservation problem that the AAFF faces and we are taking steps to combat it, both by improving environmental conditions for the collection as a whole and by isolating films affected by vinegar syndrome. We believe that the films in American Archives of the Factual Film constitute a unique and important part of the nation's film heritage, and we enthusiastically support a national program to preserve that heritage.

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