

A C A D E M Y F I L M A R C H I V FEB 9 1993

MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING  
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION**Statement to the National Preservation Board**

The Archive of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has existed as a part of the Academy Foundation for over twenty years. As the film collection of the Academy, the collection was created to serve the work of the Academy and foster the study of the motion picture as art and science. The Academy Archive now contains approximately 12,000 films and videotapes of diverse origin. Early cinema is well-represented in the Academy Film Archive by the Paper Print collection, preserved by Kemp Niver in conjunction with the Library of Congress, important collections of film by Melies and Lumiere, as well as negatives of Chaplin films and other masters of the cinema. In addition, the collection has extensive holdings of American silent film from the Blackhawk, Em-Gee and other libraries. Throughout the years the Academy attempted to collect copies of Academy Award winners and nominees. Although the core of our collection is comprised mainly of motion picture features, our holdings include a large number of shorts and documentaries. There are also many films collected for their value as examples of technical achievement in motion pictures, including the Technicolor collection of imbibition prints, reels and tests.

Over the years, the Academy has received the personal collections of many prominent Hollywood figures, such as Alfred Hitchcock, Fred Zinnemann, John Huston, and Sam Peckinpah. These collections often contain long versions or director's cuts of important motion pictures, as well as personal footage of family and professional life. Much of this material is of great value to scholars who come to the Academy to study the papers and other documents associated with these important figures of the cinema. The Academy Archive also has the most complete collection of the Academy Awards ceremonies, which have been recorded on film, kinescope and various video formats.

Our Archive has been a source of programming as well as a preservation facility. Those in the archival field will remember the Academy's catalytic role in the preservation of the paper prints. In addition, the distinguished nitrate collection of Melies films was entirely copied with funds generated internally. Currently, the Archive loans prints to a number of institutions, including the UCLA Film and Television Archive, the Pacific Film Archive, the Film Department of George Eastman House, the Los Angeles County Art Museum, the British Film Institute, the Cinematheque Francaise, the Pordenone Film Festival, and of course the studios.



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The Academy Archive is located in the Academy's Center for Motion Picture Study at 333 So. La Cienega Boulevard. This facility, which is shared with the Academy's Margaret Herrick Library, contains offices and workspaces for the Academy Archives, and a 1500 square foot, environmentally controlled storage area that has been stabilized at 50 degrees fahrenheit and 50% humidity. The vault houses all of the Academy's non-nitrate preservation material. The Academy Archive is actively involved with AMIA and FIAF. Other activities include work with a number of studios on preservation and documentation projects, and participation in the Film Director's Foundation.

Many of the most important issues concerning preservation today are being raised by our colleagues on this panel. We would like to raise two issues that should be taken into consideration in the National Preservation Plan, and although these remarks are directed primarily at preservation of feature motion pictures produced and distributed by major studios, they also pertain to the preservation of independent films.

1. *What is Preservation Today?*

When we say films should be preserved, or that a film has been preserved, what do we mean? There are a number of sources that define preservation in terms of using the original medium and gauge for preservation, making protection and duplicate negative elements, and so forth. In the archival world, we are often confronted with a single, more or less unique element, a nitrate negative, or a print or other element which is the only source for preservation of the film. In other cases, there are multiple sources for reconstruction of a film, and parts of different prints, negatives, fine grains and soundtrack elements are combined to produce a restored "original" version of a film. We generally presume that original version to be the longest release version of the film as indicated by contemporary reviews, studio records, existing film elements, etc. This reconstruction work often requires the collaboration of archives, studios, distributors and collectors. The first great era of film preservation involved duplication of physical materials that were often the property of archives, and frequently the films being preserved were in the public domain (such as silent films whose copyright had expired).

We are entering a new era of preservation. Although there is still a large amount of nitrate film to be preserved, the focus of preservation work is shifting from black-and-white nitrate film to color film on acetate base. Most of the original film elements are still the property of the studios, and most of the motion pictures are under copyright protection and are being exploited in ancillary markets. In the case of film since about 1950, there has been a proliferation of emulsion, screen and sound processes (EastmanColor film, Cinemascope, Techniscope,

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VistaVision, 3-D, 65mm processes, Cinerama, magnetic, Dolby and digital stereo systems, among many others) that make preservation choices more complicated. Although the color instability of the Eastmancolor process is well known, color separations are not always made for color films. Is a film originally released in 4-channel sound preserved if there is only a monophonic record of the soundtrack? Is a VistaVision film preserved if color separations have not been made from the negative in the original format? We need a definition of the technical minimum requirement for a film to be considered preserved. Often, protection elements are made but never tested. When an original element is destroyed or deteriorates, protection elements are sometimes found to be insufficient to reproduce the film. Standards should be established for quality control of preservation work, including test printing and examination of the sound and picture elements. Increasingly, motion pictures are created to be exhibited in a variety of different contexts and often in a variety of versions. Director's cuts, special editions for theatrical, cable or home market release, and other significant variants of the "original release version" may exist. A general policy which addresses the preservation of all important versions of a film should be considered.

If we are going to create a National Preservation Plan to address the problems of film preservation (studio production as well as film produced in other contexts), we need to define preservation more precisely in terms of standards for image quality, types of elements needed to protect a particular type of film original, quality control and other procedures such as documentation, storage, maintenance and access to preservation elements. The National Preservation Plan should support the emergence of standards for film preservation (such as those being studied by the Film Foundation), and promote the institutionalization of such standards through organizations such as SMPTE.

## 2. *The Future of Preservation*

The widespread apprehension of the physical limitations of film as a support for moving image storage and duplication has led archivists to the realization that motion pictures cannot be duplicated beyond a few generations without drastic and visible loss of image quality. With the rapid development of the electronic imaging sectors of science and industry, there may come a time when film (including stock, printing and processing facilities and expertise) becomes far less common, far less available than it is today. Unfortunately, electronic forms of storage appear to be considerably less stable than motion picture film. There is in fact no true preservation medium that will capture all of the information in a film image and store that information in a recoverable form for an archival period of time. Of all the types of representational material found in museums and

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archives, from bone, clay, stone and bronze to canvas and paper, the motion picture and the videotape are among the most ephemeral, the most temporally fragile. We submit that any true National Preservation Plan must include a research component that is directed toward two goals. The first of these goals is the identification and development of technology that allows the scanning of an original motion picture negative (or other film element) from film into the digital domain at full resolution, supports the preservation enhancement of the image, and allows the digital image to be transferred back to film at full resolution and without artifact. Such a system would overcome the inherent limitations of photo-mechanical duplication, the analog process which is the basis of all film preservation today. The second goal is the conceptualization and development of a true archival system for the long-term (more than 500 years) conservation of motion pictures that is robust, highly reliable, economical, relatively universal (in terms of technical standards and deployment), scalable (adaptable to any level of image resolution), flexible (in terms of transfer back to film or to other media), and low maintenance (in terms of storage environment and inspection requirements). We do not envision the conversion of every motion picture to this archival format, only the ones that have been identified as having the perennial importance. We do not see the development of these systems as public sector activities, but the National Preservation Plan and subsequent initiatives could provide a valuable stimulus and a forum for the conceptualization and validation of these systems. The work of preservation is necessarily one of looking to the past, and often of adapting tools of the past to recover our motion picture heritage. But it would be wrong for those responsible for this heritage not to look now to the future and take into account the immense changes occurring today in the regime of the moving image.