



# National Center for Film and Video Preservation

at  
The American Film Institute

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

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OTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING  
ID RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

20 January 1993  
The Librarian of Congress  
Washington, D.C.

Written Statement for the Public Hearings on Public Law 102-307.  
The National Film Preservation Act of 1992.

As the study of motion pictures, considered a quintessentially American art, has advanced in the last quarter century, film historians and archivists have estimated that fifty percent of all films produced before 1950 have been lost. Great strides have been made in recent years in a concerted effort to preserve as many films as possible. Efforts on the part of archivists and filmmakers alike have created an increased national awareness of film preservation and restoration that has been aided by advancements in technology and professional expertise.

While the films themselves are the primary focus of preservation programs, documentation about the films provide invaluable information that aid archivists in their task of preserving and restoring films. We therefore urge the Librarian of Congress to consider the historical documentation of film as an integral part of the overall effort to preserve motion pictures.

Studio production records, corporate documents, state and local censorship files, records of the various motion picture industry organizations, such as the Hays Office, and the personal papers of filmmakers, contain factual information that can be used to determine the length of films at their release, the various versions produced and descriptions of each shot in the released print of a film. In most cases, descriptions of all footage shot of a production, including material removed from the released print due to censorship requirements, corporate expediency or the final editorial process of the filmmakers are important aids to restoration.

As the editors of the *American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States*, a project of the National Center for Film and Video Preservation at the American Film Institute, we have used available original documents to obtain factual information that is used in the preservation effort. The *Catalog* project, which began 1969, will, upon its completion, find, publish in book form and make accessible

through electronic means, relevant information concerning all theatrically released films produced in the United States. The *Catalog* has published volumes covering the years 1911-20, 1921-30, 1931-40 and 1961-70. At present, research for the 1941-50 volumes of the *Catalog* is in progress, and plans for publication of the volume covering films from the earliest time through 1910 is in the offing.

The information made available by the *Catalog* can be useful to the preservationist for decisions concerning the selection of films to be preserved; in identifying presently unidentified films or fragments of films; and in ascertaining accurate information regarding the length of films, color processes, formats and variant versions released.

The value of paper documentation has been demonstrated many times during the film restoration process. Two important examples are the restoration projects for the 1937 Frank Capra film *Lost Horizon* and the 1954 George Cukor film, *A Star Is Born*. In both instances, production notes, studio records and still photographs provided invaluable to restoration.


In addition, since the publication of the 1911-20 volume of the *Catalog*, several archives have been able to identify heretofore unknown films and film fragments by use of information within the work.

Unfortunately, the *Catalog* has not had complete accessibility to historical documents. Some documents, particularly those for early companies, have been destroyed or lost; other records are inaccessible to researchers because of restrictions placed upon their use by current owners.

We hope that the national film preservation plan that will be established as a result of the present study will address the concern that documents are important aspects of the overall preservation effort. Specifically, we would like the program to discourage the discarding or destruction of documents, at least until respected scholars and preservationists have had an opportunity to examine them and determine their relevance for preservation; to encourage proper care and storage of documents; to encourage the donation of documents on the personal and corporate level to institutions that can care for them; and to discourage excessive restrictions on access to documents by qualified scholars and preservationists.

Sincerely,

  
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