

Oregon Historical Society
Moving Image Archives

1

The Oregon Historical Society's holdings exceeds 20,000 titles, including early newsreels, family movies, commercial/industrial films, scenics and wildlife, and a host of segments and outtakes produced by professional and amateur Northwest Filmmakers from 1902 to 1993. The Society's archives also preserves television news and documentary film from the early 1960s through 1985, by which time videotape had largely replaced film. The videotape collection includes over 1700 titles and is consistently growing.

The collections consist of approximately 8.5 million feet of 35mm nitrate & safety films, 16mm, regular 8mm and super 8mm safety films. The 35mm nitrate films are stored in a temperature controlled vault to minimize deterioration problems. Our safety film collections are housed on the third floor of our processing and storage facility. This space averages 70 degrees fahrenheit and has a relative humidity of 45 percent. Extremes in the weather may vary the temperature by ten degrees either way. Presently 97% of our safety films are stored in metal cans. Given the problems of safety film deterioration, our open space storage and the current use of tin plated film containers, our collections are, to a degree, at risk. Our television news collections, with magnetic sound tracks, are beginning to exhibit signs of the Vinegar Syndrome (1970s to 80s). Also, magnetic fullcoat stock used for preproduction sound is showing signs of similar deterioration. Our early 16mm collections are showing signs of the plastizers breaking down, causing drying, shrinking and some embrittlement. For small format films (regular & super 8mm) there isn't an economical, practical transfer medium. Producing preservation copies on 16mm is very costly, and the rumored demise of super 8mm may leave no small format stock available.

For the past thirteenth years we have received preservation grants from the American Film Institute. These grants have enabled us to make safety copies of our 35mm nitrate collections only. There has been little to no funding available to assist us in the preservation of our 16mm and 8mm collections. The amateur and industrial collections receive the highest use by our patrons. It is ironic that little funding is available to assist with the preservation of these valuable, historic collections.

For patron and staff use we transfer the films to videotape. A 3/4" master is made from the film original and then a VHS copy is made for use by our many patrons. Due to recent budget cuts the Moving Image Archives is staffed by

Oregon Historical Society
Moving Image Archives

2

one part time employee, who is assisted by trained volunteers. We are equipped with 16mm rewinds, viewers, splicers (tape & hot), footage counters, 8mm editors, 35mm to 16mm optical reduction printer and a 16mm/regular 8mm film chain. With the film chain we can transfer to 3/4", VHS or home Beta formats.

Generally we set preservation priorities based on the condition of the film. To prepare our films for preservation the film is inspected, then repaired in-house. If the film is nitrate and is slated for 35mm to 16mm transfer, the dry lab printing is done in-house. If the film is going 35mm to 35mm, or 16mm to 16mm the print work is done by one of a few laboratories with which we have contracts. When preservation work is completed, a fine grain negative is made, and an answer print is also made to check the new negative. Answer prints are checked for quality control by hand first and then by projection.

A research fee is charged when staff members provide this service. A fee is also charged for reproducing footage. Original footage is never loaned, but video previews are available for a fee, and materials may be viewed in the Archives for free. Currently 80%, or more, of our materials are available for use by patrons. A good portion of the materials are fully inventoried and cataloged. Our catalog consists of a subject index and public catalog, an on-line catalog is planned for the future.

Television news footage and theatrical films are well known and used; hence, these collections have sources for funding available. Not so the amateur, industrial, and educational materials held in regional collections. It is vital that the diversity of these historic collections and their uses, as source materials, be recognized and exploited for the benefit of the collections and the users of these rich resources. It is in these archived images of faces and cultures that those lives might reach through the curtain of time to touch our lives and help mirror our future. It is in the understanding and sharing of these images and the stories they tell that we may come to know and celebrate our shared heritages.

Michele Kribs
Film Preservationist

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

FEB 26 1993

**MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION**