

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

NASM Film Archives

JAN 10 1998

MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

The Film Archives of the National Air and Space Museum has cataloged a collection of more than 6400 films and video tapes. More are added monthly. This collection documents the history of aerospace flight from the Wright Brothers to the Space Shuttle. The entire Archival Film collection of the National Air and Space Museum consists of almost 20,000 films. The film is cataloged with a computer database. This database is not "on-line" yet. However, if you wish to do research please write:

Mark Taylor
Film Archives Mail Stop 322
National Air and Space Museum
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
U.S.A.

You should specify what you are looking for (aircraft types, spacecraft types, persons, places, or dates). Topics that cannot be researched very well include subjective terms (fleecy clouds, early airplanes, biplanes, space, etc.). Objective terms (meteorology, Fokker DR-I, Curtiss Condor, Project Gemini, etc.) work very well. Moreover, you should describe how you intend to use this film - a script or project outline is acceptable.

Because many of these films are one of a kind the Museum cannot lend, or rent films from the collection. The Museum can arrange to have films or tapes copied at the expense of the researcher. A cost breakdown is given below:

Film to tape (any format) --- cost + 20%

Any video format that can be copied "in-house" U-Matic-SP, Umatic, VHS or Beta
\$40.00 per title.

Any other video format --- Cost + \$100.00 per title

A handling fee of \$10.00 per title

The research fee is \$40.00 per hour with a minimum of three hours (\$120.00)

Reproduction work starts only after the Museum receives payment. Turn around time is 25 working days (about five weeks) after the Museum receives payment.

The Museum cannot assure copyright clearances for all of the films in its collection. Therefore, we send a "Stock Footage Agreement" form to all researchers. You must sign this and return it to the Museum before any copies are released.

Archive size and scope

20,000 items - mix of film and video tape

Most of this material is release print material

There is some camera original.

6,500 items have been cataloged

The NASM collection covers the history of aerospace from the Wright brothers to the Space Shuttle.

The NASM collection specializes in film and video tape that documents aerospace history.

Preservation problem:

-acetate deterioration of film - "vinegar syndrome"

-lose of video images through attritional lose of video tapes as they age.

Preservation efforts:

Unfortunately, NASM does not have any long term film preservation program. It does have a conservation program where film is transferred to video tape and the film is then stored a low temperatures and low relative humidity.

NASM's Film Archive has a staff of one (1). This person is responsible for all cataloging, research, duplication, and database operations. There is logistical assistance from the rest of the NASM archives in accessioning, accounting, and administrative support. This low staffing effects many of the functions of the NASM Film archive particularly preservation and conservation efforts. The most critical resource for the NASM film archives is time.

NASM film conservation efforts are limited to about 750 titles per year. Most of these titles are picked because they are needed in some documentary production or other. All transfer work is done at an approved lab. When the film is transferred to video for use by the documentary producer a simultaneous Betacam-SP tape is made for NASM. These transfers are made on a telecine equipped with a liquid gate for scratch reduction. The film is then put into a proper container (polypropelyne) and stored at 40°F and 30% R.H. Any further video copies are made from the NASM's Betacam-SP master. It is hoped that this will leave the film master on the shelf undisturbed, for at least 10 years.

This process is somewhat self-limiting in that the end user will pick popular or cheap items for duplication and as more items are transferred to video tape the number of film to tape transfers is expected to decline. Consequently, some of the more important items that have less visual appeal are not being transferred to video tape. NASM will have to find ways to maintain the rate of film to tape transfers by other means.

Storage facilities:

The video tape is stored in the NASM building on metal shelves in a sealed room. Film is stored at a remote site in a refrigerated vault. This vault is kept at 40°F and 30% R.H.

Information and Access

The entire cataloged collection can be used by researchers in some way, subject to copyright restrictions. At a minimum, all cataloged materials may be viewed, but some may not be copied. Material is never loaned for screening.

Computer database

NASM's film collection is controlled using a database program called "Nutshell+." This software has no relational capability nor does it handle Boolean search logic. It is difficult to do efficient searches using this software. The system is not "on line" yet. Therefore, it is necessary for the film archivist handle each search. Research requests must be submitted in writing. The researcher should describe what they are looking for and how they intend to use it. This request should be as specific as possible. When the database research is done a formatted listing form the database is mailed back to the researcher.

An early version of the database was released in printed form six years ago and 80 copies were made. This list contained approximately 1200 items. Due to a problem with indexing, it was less than successful. A later version of the database, with 5000 items, was released as a hypercard stack as part of the "Footage '91" CD ROM for the Macintosh computer.

NASM Film Archives cannot assure copyright clearances on any of the material in its collection. The end user is responsible for rights clearances.