

713 Richmond Ave.  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
February 22, 1993

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Steve Leggett  
Library of Congress  
M/B/RS Division  
Washington, D.C. 20540

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IN PICTURE, BROADCASTING  
RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

Dear Mr. Leggett:

This letter is in response to your memorandum and the request for information about film preservation in the Federal Register, dated November 27, 1992.

I have been a member of the Film and Television Archives Advisory Council and its formalized version, the Association of Moving Images Archivists, since 1981. I am a member of the Board of Directors for the Washington Film and Video Council and have been a member of that group and the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences since 1985. Because of this and my experience as the Curator of a national moving image collection, I have some insights which may be helpful.

**Current State of Film Preservation**

It appears that while large government motion picture archives are continuing to preserve film, albeit at a slow pace, many academic and commercial archives and historical societies cannot afford to do any real preservation. There are a few, of course, like the Universities of California and Wisconsin, who do preserve film properly, but they are the exception.

**Problems**

Film preservation is in dire straits, for the most part, due to a lack of funds. Unlike preserving a printed work, it is very expensive to preserve film properly.

Additionally, there is the problem of what constitutes "proper film preservation." Few standards-making bodies agree on the proper environments of storage or the proper element on which to transfer an aging film.

Technology is also becoming a problem since many documentary and educational film makers are shooting on film and transferring to video for editing, and then using a videodisc as the final product. Since video formats change so frequently, we may be left with a glut of programs no one can play, as there will be no equipment left on which to play them.

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**Priority**

New research shows that both nitrate and acetate-base film decays at the same rate if in the same environment. That means a nitrate film kept in a good environment may be in much better condition than an acetate one kept in a poor environment. Therefore, condition of the specific item, not just its base type, should be considered when making priority decisions.

Also, the film content's usefulness to historians should be considered when making preservation priority decisions. I do not agree with people who say that, in general, theatrical films should be the first to be preserved. Documentary films may tell more about society than the theatrical films and should be considered, at least as an equal, if not at a higher priority than theatricals.

**Plan**

I suggest that a preservation plan be created with the input of some copyright holders and as many archives, archivists, and preservation technical experts as is possible. Additionally, I suggest that the final plan be approved by the major film associations, with special attention to the Association of Moving Image Archivists. It will be these people who will be carrying out the plan, and if they feel that they didn't have a part in creating it, the plan will be no more than an unused document.

Sincerely,



Sarah L. Richards