

## 9. ACCESS

To be of any educational or entertainment value, films must be seen. Virtually every repository provides on-site research access to its motion picture collections. But public access to film involves much more. Access embraces the full range of activities through which scholars, students, filmmakers, film enthusiasts, and the general public study and view film held by public and nonprofit institutions.

This chapter briefly discusses traditional on-site service to researchers in institutional reference facilities and describes other diverse and imaginative ways through which organizations are reaching wider communities.<sup>1</sup>

### 9.1 ON-SITE RESEARCH ACCESS

Providing service to researchers is key to every repository's mission. The challenge for film is finding ways to provide intellectual access to the content without endangering the original. Generally most organizations achieve this balance by providing access through film, video, or digital copies.

As mentioned in 5.2, videotape has become the preferred access medium for most repositories. It is inexpensive, convenient, and easy to use. VHS videos can be viewed on off-the-shelf consumer electronics equipment and are far less costly to make than film prints. As tapes become worn or damaged, they can be readily replaced. Because most researchers know the rudiments of operating a VCR, they can play the tapes without extensive instruction or supervision.

A number of repositories now videotape film originals during cataloging or when requested by researchers. Some organizations order these tapes from commercial video transfer specialists. Others create copies in-house on telecine equipment or with a modified projector and camera connected to a video recorder.



Some budget-minded repositories make low-cost videotape access copies in-house using an Elmo film-to-tape transfer unit.

For significant or heavily consulted items, a few repositories make higher-quality video masters as an additional level of protection for the original. Subsequent video copies can be generated from the video master without returning to the film source. As costs drop, preservationists are moving to digital videotape as the medium for the video master.

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1. The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAP) devoted the entire December 1997 issue of its *Journal of Film Preservation* to access. This publication is available on the FIAP Web site at [www.fiafnet.org/pdf/uk/fiaf55.pdf](http://www.fiafnet.org/pdf/uk/fiaf55.pdf).

Digital video is of sufficient quality for broadcast and can be output to DVD for researchers or to tape for licensing requests (see 9.4).

Using video or digital copies of works originally produced on film does not substitute for the experience of viewing the films themselves. The video and digital copies lack the resolution and pictorial qualities of film and when projected, do not offer the same visual experience. That said, video and digital copies can make films accessible to individual researchers without endangering film prints. Since many scholars and researchers view film for its evidentiary and documentary value, often access via video or digital copies will suffice.

Many film museums continue to give scholars the experience of viewing film copies instead of videotape. Although a few project reference film prints in screening rooms, most provide individual viewing on a flatbed editing table.

With the advent of video and digital copies, film repositories now enjoy a variety of options for serving on-site researchers. Digitization is sure to provide even more opportunities. As technologies change, the fundamental principle remains the same: Use copies to provide access to the film content and protect the original.

## 9.2 ON-SITE PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Preservation screenings are among the most gratifying activities for the preservationist. Viewing a newly preserved film with an audience, the way the film was intended to be experienced, is also a public way of demonstrating what has been accomplished through the preservation process.

A number of organizations make film exhibition part of their public programs. Some use the events as a means of sharing the results of preservation efforts and celebrating film preservation. UCLA, for example, hosts a biennial Festival of Preservation showcasing recent restoration and preservation work. The 2002 festival featured 23 programs over a four-week period and received wide press coverage. Preservationists often introduce the screenings and talk with the audience about the process of saving older films.



*Several Friends* (1969), directed by Charles Burnett, among the films showcased at the 11th UCLA Festival of Preservation in 2002.

Preserved film can also become an integral part of lectures and museum installations. The Utah State Historical Society illustrated a lecture on the exploration of the state's southern canyon lands with home movies taken by celebrated river guide Harry Aleson. In the early 1950s, Aleson explored and filmed many areas

that were subsequently submerged under the waters of Lake Powell. The society's program was so popular that it was repeated. The South Dakota Art Museum, part of the state university, took another approach. The museum made preservation copies of two films about prairie painter Harvey Dunn. One included the only known footage of the painter at work. The moving image material was used in an exhibit on Dunn that was installed for the museum's grand reopening in 2000. It should be remembered that before screening films, institutions may have the responsibility to secure permission from copyright holders and donors (see 8.6).

### 9.3 INTERNET EXHIBITION

Exhibiting films on the Internet is still in its infancy, but the presentation of the Paper Print Collection through the Library of Congress's American Memory project shows what is already possible. The collection contains more than 3,000 films registered for U.S. copyright protection between 1894 and 1915. At that time federal copyright law had no provision for motion pictures, but film companies could protect their work as still photographs and did so by depositing contact prints on rolls of paper 35mm wide. These copies proved more lasting than most turn-of-the-century nitrate film and were rephotographed years later, frame by frame, on film. Intended as legal documentation, the collection now provides the key to understanding the evolution of the motion picture in the United States.

For decades scholars consulted these early films at the Library and ordered copies for classroom use. Now thanks to American Memory, a large selection of these films is open to any computer user linked to the Internet. The motion pictures are indexed and searchable by keyword and title on the Library Web site, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov). Users may download copies. Because the paper prints are in the public domain and made available through a federal Web site, they may be consulted and reused in any way the user wishes.<sup>2</sup>



*What Happened on Twenty-third Street, New York City (1901), among the paper prints available on the Library of Congress Web site.*

### 9.4 LICENSING

Archival motion picture collections are a reservoir of historical and cultural documentation. What was once largely the province of scholars is becoming a resource for commercial productions and a supplementary source of revenue for

2. The Prelinger Archives, discussed in 4.4 and accessible at [www.archive.org/movies](http://www.archive.org/movies), provides another example of the film access possibilities afforded by the Internet.

some institutions. Granting permission to outside parties to reuse archival motion picture materials in other contexts is called licensing.

Many organizations strive to provide this extra service, if not barred by copyright or donor restrictions (see 8.1, 8.4). Generally repositories define a license for moving image materials in terms of territory, duration, and intended use.<sup>3</sup> The fee usually reflects these factors as well as the exclusivity of the license and the rarity of the source material. Repositories confirm the arrangement through a written contract or a licensing agreement, which specifies the terms of use and can provide protection from legal action should the materials be misused.

**FRAME ENLARGEMENTS.** For many years the making of frame enlargements—still photographs that reproduce a single frame of the motion picture—was a cumbersome operation that required specialized photographic equipment. Digital technology has revolutionized the process. Now single film frames can be captured as an image file using a digital camera or a film scanner. Videotape can also be reproduced, although the image will have lower resolution.

Some film archives offer digitized frame enlargements as part of their service menu for researchers. George Eastman House provides these reproductions for motion pictures that are represented by preservation materials and are in the public domain. Frame enlargements have long been a feature of scholarly cinema history publishing. As more institutions acquire scanning equipment and expertise, frame enlargements will undoubtedly become common in a wider range of publications. Repositories may license frame enlargements as well as footage.



Frame enlargement from *Kindred of the Dust* (1922), a Raoul Walsh melodrama preserved by George Eastman House.

**LICENSING FOOTAGE.** Documentarians, theatrical filmmakers, television news producers, music video creators, and advertising agencies all look for fresh moving image materials for their productions. Some organizations have been able to harness fees from such users to help pay for duplication and storage. The University of South Carolina Newsfilm Library provides a case in point.

In 1980, the university received 11 million feet of nitrate newsreel footage, and the rights to these materials, as a gift from Twentieth Century Fox. The Movietone News Collection includes outtakes, or unused sequences, that were filmed between 1919 and 1934 as well as selected World War II material. Users can search the

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3. For a discussion of licensing for museums, see Michael S. Shapiro and Brett I. Miller, *A Museum Guide to Copyright and Trademark* (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1999), 123–46.

online catalog at [www.sc.edu/newsfilm](http://www.sc.edu/newsfilm). The site also includes a rate card and sample films for Internet viewing. The newsfilm library fields some 150 requests a year. The licensing revenue helps offset the costs of maintaining climate-controlled storage.



Unidentified woman aviator (ca. 1920s), from Movietone News outtakes preserved by the University of South Carolina Newsfilm Library.

Institutions often waive licensing fees for educational uses that further public exposure and knowledge of their collections. West Virginia Public Radio, for example, ran a year-long radio series, *Time Trail West Virginia*, that used sounds to illuminate events important to the state. The West Virginia State Archives contributed sound tracks from news films without charging the usual fee.

If rights and agreements permit, institutions may also elect to offer selected material from their collections for free downloading and reuse over the Internet. Unrestricted collections of this kind are heavily used by teachers, students, and independent and community mediamakers and serve as excellent promotion for the repository and its activities.

## 9.5 LOAN AND DISTRIBUTION

Many film archives have active loan programs for 16mm and 35mm exhibition prints. Because of the value and expense of film copies, institutions lend generally only to exhibitors willing to take special care in handling and projecting prints.

Some depositories build lectures or special events around newly preserved films. The Harry Smith Archives reconstructed Harry Smith's *Mahagonny*, a kaleidoscopic portrait of the 1970s New York City art scene featuring appearances by Patti Smith, Allen Ginsberg, and other underground icons. The Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles hosted the premiere of the restored film along with a day-long symposium bringing together art historians, music specialists, and preservationists. The restoration has since been shown in film festivals around the world.

For films with a broad constituency, some organizations are turning to video and DVD to circulate copies outside their walls. Northeast Historic Film, for example, gives borrowing privileges to individuals and organizations that join as members. From a collection of 300 videos relating to northern New England, titles may be requested in person or by phone, mail, or e-mail. Roughly one-third of the lending library represents films in the archive's own collections. The video catalog is searchable on the organization's Web site, [www.oldfilm.org](http://www.oldfilm.org). Over the years the program has made thousands of video loans to schools, community groups, assisted-living facilities, and individuals throughout the region.

### PROJECTING ARCHIVAL FILM PRINTS

Film archives regard exhibition prints as museum objects and carefully control their use. They lend prints only to borrowers that exercise proper projection practices and routinely clean and service projection equipment. Poor handling harms the print and leaves damage that will be seen by the next audience. Guidelines for handling archival prints are posted on the Library of Congress Web site at [lcweb.loc.gov/film/project.html](http://lcweb.loc.gov/film/project.html).

The National Center for Jewish Film disseminates film as well as videotape. As a nonprofit distributor of moving images relating to the Jewish experience, it provides copies of Yiddish-language works preserved by the archive as well as independent documentaries and narratives. These copies are shipped to film festivals, nonprofit theater venues, community groups, synagogues, and schools around the world. Depending on the title, users rent 16mm or 35mm prints or buy videocassettes. Preview cassettes are available to researchers and programmers for the cost of postage.



*Love and Sacrifice* (1936), a Yiddish-language feature preserved and distributed by the National Center for Jewish Film.

## 9.6 COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Many organizations collect and preserve films relating to their region. These films can open a window into a community's history and forge a palpable link with the past. Often repositories bring such films back to the groups that created them. By reaching out in nontraditional ways, they are educating new audiences about their institution's mission and the need to collect and preserve film. The approaches taken by archives, libraries, and museums are as varied as the films themselves. Mentioned here are two examples.

The Florida Moving Image Archive takes its films on the road—literally. Each month it conducts three to four tours on buses equipped with video monitors for showing amateur and news films of Miami neighborhoods. Narrated by a local historian or archive staff, the tours provide insight into past events and changing urban neighborhoods. Often riders share facts and stories about the places and periods represented in the films. Over the years senior citizen groups, churches, schools, and architectural preservationists have arranged for special thematic charters. The tours have proved so popular that the archive recently branched out into

“illustrated history” cruises of the Miami waterfront. For the bus and the boat tours, riders pay a modest fee.<sup>4</sup> The tours have heightened public awareness of the archive’s programs and led to donations.

The Alaska Film Archives of the University of Alaska Fairbanks has also taken its films into the community—the Alaskan native settlements of the North Slope and southwestern Alaska. With National Endowment for the Humanities funding, the archive searched its collections for moving images of Yup’ik, Inupiaq, and Athabaskan people and assembled 26 hours of raw footage. At pilot screenings at the Alaska Native Arts Festival and at Alaska Confederation of Natives meetings, it received guidance on how to present the materials to native audiences. It then took selected footage to four communities in spring 2003. In group sessions, more than 300 people viewed the images, identifying individuals, places, and events. To those who found pictures of family members the archive gave free frame enlargements and videos. For some, these images were the only known portraits of deceased relatives. The information gathered in the field was added to the university’s catalog records. The goodwill generated by this outreach project has led the archive to explore extending the effort to other regions.



Inside the bus on the Florida Moving Image Archive’s Magical History Film and Video Tour.

With video editing software now a standard feature on many computer systems, organizations are beginning to use moving images to tell their history and muster resources for film preservation. Johns Hopkins University’s Communications Office prepared a video titled *Institutional Amnesia* to draw attention to the plight of the university’s scattered film collections. The University Medical Center had been a pioneer in medical filmmaking, producing a film on hospital operations in 1932 and sending a motion picture camera with its medical unit during World War II. Other parts of the university filmed special events, sports, and student activities. The films were largely forgotten by campus administrators. Documentary filmmakers interviewed for *Institutional Amnesia* argued that Johns Hopkins was letting a national asset slip away. The video, which is viewable at [www.jhu.edu/~gazette/2003/21jul03/21amnes.html](http://www.jhu.edu/~gazette/2003/21jul03/21amnes.html), has helped bring about a new film preservation effort within the university library.

4. For more on the Florida Moving Image Archive’s outreach programs, see Patricia R. Zimmermann, “Magical History Film and Video Bus Tour,” *Moving Image* 3 (Spring 2003): 161–63.

## CASE STUDY: MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

***Sugar Bush, Chippewa Handicraft, The Moccasin, and Wild Rice Harvest (1935–47, 2,000 ft., 16mm, color, silent), preserved by the Minnesota Historical Society.***

Access to Native American moving images is important to the Ojibwe communities in Minnesota. Because so much of the Ojibwe culture is transmitted from generation to generation by spoken word and demonstration, moving images of elders at work can be an especially effective learning tool for children. The story of the Monroe Killy films illustrates how preserved films can be used outside the archive in new and inventive ways.



Making maple sugar, as shown in the Minnesota Historical Society's educational video of Monroe Killy's films.

Monroe Killy documented the life and customs of the Ojibwe in northern Minnesota on film in the 1930s and 1940s. He obtained permission from the elders to film wild ricing, maple sugaring, canoe building, tanning, and other traditional tasks. Killy edited the footage into four films with descriptive intertitles and distributed prints to schools and libraries.

The Minnesota Historical Society purchased the films and rights from Killy in 1976. The films caught the interest of the native community. The challenge became getting the images back to the groups they documented.

In 2000, the society received a grant to preserve the films and share videotape copies through the state's tribal education network. To connect with contemporary fifth- to eighth-grade students, the films needed contextualization, and the society engaged a Native American teacher to write a viewing guide. In developing lesson plans, the writer talked with elders and with Killy, then in his nineties.

The final product, titled *Ojibwe Work*, is a 36-page booklet and VHS videotape. The guide provides cultural background, lists locations, translates the intertitles into Ojibwe, and suggests activities for making the films come alive for students. The society donated copies to Indian reservations and schools across the state.

Educators have been enthusiastic. Wrote a fourth-grade teacher in the Cloquet School District, "The fact that [the Killy films] are so authentic and capture the more traditional Indian way without any 'Hollywood' filmmaking techniques makes them so interesting." A school administrator in Fond du Lac reported, "They illustrate the overall continuity of seasonal activities, yet students can note the changes that have occurred over the years. . . . The films are a real treasure."