

BOOK REVIEWS

Elisabeth Kaplan, Editor
The Film Preservation Guide: The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums

San Francisco: National Film Preservation Foundation, 2004. xi, 121 pp. Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. ISBN 0-9747-0990-5.

The National Film Preservation Foundation's (NFPF) *Film Preservation Guide* is not intended to replace any of the current literature available on various topics related to motion picture film preservation. On the contrary, as indicated by the subtitle, *The Basics for Archives, Libraries, and Museums*, the purpose of this book is to make the fundamentals of this technical specialty readily available for the great many archivists, librarians, and museum staff who have some quantity of film in their collection, but no knowledge or training in how to manage and preserve it. The emphasis of this publication project is clearly to get the information into the hands of people who need it, in a form that is useful. The book is available directly from the NFPF, for an \$8 shipping and handling charge; the contents are also available for free from the NFPF Web site (www.filmpreservation.org), where the user can select from PDF files of the various chapters, or a single PDF of the entire book.

As NFPF director Annette Melville relates in the preface, for many years motion picture preservation in the United States was the province of a very small number of institutions, generally oriented toward Hollywood feature films. But over a relatively short period of time, researchers have come to value a wide variety of moving images as unique historical and cultural documents, and many more organizations now collect them. This trend is illuminated further in the first chapter of the *Film Preservation Guide*, which references a survey conducted by the NFPF in 2002. Findings from this survey suggest that mixed media collections have become more common than not, with 90 percent of the respondents indicating that they are responsible for two or more media types, and more than 50 percent reporting that they have duties involving film and at least three other media types.

The nature of this trend pointed toward a gap in the available literature, so that same year the NFPF, the Image Permanence Institute at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation

at the George Eastman House began work to address it. With funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, they structured an interactive process that began with needs assessment workshops involving collection professionals representative of the ultimate end-user population. The resulting content was then reviewed by students at the L. Jeffrey Selznick School of Film Preservation, the editorial committee for the *Guide*, technical specialists, and, finally, members of the original needs assessment workshops.

The result is a compact primer brimming with information on a wide range of film preservation issues. The text is lean and to the point, with a minimum of technical jargon, and structured to help the reader find information quickly. Although the primary text is under one hundred pages, the table of contents is more than four pages long, with an entry point on roughly every other page.

Most of the book is devoted to core film preservation issues: the physical characteristics of motion picture film, film handling, duplication, and storage. These sections are well illustrated and include many useful sidebars (e.g., “Estimating Shrinkage: The Low-Tech Approach”) and tables (e.g., “Film Equipment by Function: Safe Handling Tools for Every Budget”) to help a new film preservation program get off the ground. One of the more detail-intensive chapters, “Understanding Film and How It Decays,” ends with a summary in the form of a full-page table that could easily be copied and posted above a film inspection area. Case studies—which were among the requests made in the needs assessment workshops—are also included at the end of most chapters. These essays relate practical circumstances that help underline and expand upon the concepts discussed in the preceding text.

Other sections of the book relate to topics that will be less foreign to many readers (e.g., cataloging, copyright, access), but that emphasize issues specific to motion picture film collection management. While most of the book is drawn from other published works, combined with suggestions and input from the various review stages, two chapters have bylines: “Cataloging,” by Paul Eisloeffel (curator of visual and audio collections at the Nebraska State Historical Society and a member of the editorial committee for the *Guide*), and “Legal Context,” by Eric J. Schwartz (partner in the Washington, D.C., law firm Smith & Metalitz L.L.P., and a member of the NFPF board of directors).

Eisloeffel briefly introduces the reader to the MARC format, the major cataloging resources (e.g., *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*, etc.), and moving image-specific works (e.g., *Archival Moving Image Materials: A Cataloging Manual*). The chapter also includes a discussion of two collaborative projects that will be of interest and utility to anyone beginning a moving image cataloging project: the Moving Image Collections (MIC) Web site, and Independent Media Art Preservation’s (IMAP) MARC database template. The IMAP MARC template is a very inexpensive way to get started on a moving image catalog in a standard file format. While the text correctly states that the template is used with

FileMaker Pro, note that IMAP has also released a version for Microsoft Access since the book was published. Its Web site (at www.imappreserve.org) has also been expanded and includes detailed tutorials on the use of the template.

Schwartz, in the chapter addressing legal issues, provides a remarkably clear and succinct explanation of copyright, the changes that have taken place in U.S. copyright law since 1977, and how this all relates to film. Other topics touched on include donor agreements, archival rights and responsibilities, and fair use. Public domain should have received more attention, though. Content can be in the public domain, but still have strings attached—a point only alluded to in a somewhat confusing example offered in the section on donor agreements. A more complete discussion of these sorts of pitfalls would be a good addition to what is still a very useful essay.

Throughout the text the reader is directed to resources where more information on a topic can be found, and the selected bibliography lists some of the most useful Web sites, listservs, and discussion forums alongside the printed works. With luck, these links will persist for the lifetime of this edition.

Other useful features of the book include lists of selected film preservation laboratories and equipment vendors, an eleven-page glossary of film preservation terminology, and a sample print condition report. Perhaps future editions of the *Guide* might include more media collection-specific forms, to augment existing resources like the ARMA International/SAA publication, *Sample Forms for Archival and Records Management Programs*.

As an archivist at a small nonprofit organization with a mandate to help preserve moving image collections across an extremely large, diverse, and far-flung state, I would like to offer a very hearty welcome to this publication, and thanks to all of the people who worked to put it together. Along with IMAP's MARC template, the NFPF's *Film Preservation Guide* will certainly become a valuable part of our institution's outreach toolkit. Now what we need is an equally up-to-date and affordable video preservation primer; perhaps the new National Television and Video Preservation Foundation could work with the Bay Area Video Coalition (BAVC) to issue a second edition of BAVC's out-of-print *Playback*.

KEVIN N. TRIPP

AMIPA—Alaska Moving Image Preservation Association