

PRESERVING LOCAL TELEVISION

Prioritization by Format

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- Les chaînes de télévision locales ont couvert et continuent de relater récits et événements tant régionaux que nationaux, tout au long de l'histoire de ce médium de communication de masse, et constituent une part importante de notre héritage culturel global. Des efforts accrus doivent être consacrés à la sauvegarde du reliquat des images vidéo historiques diffusées, avant qu'elles ne soient à jamais perdues. Étant donné les ressources limitées des dépôts d'archives audiovisuelles, les efforts de préservation devraient à l'heure actuelle se focaliser sur le format le plus ancien, et le plus à risque : le Quadruplex 2 pouces (2" Quad). L'article dresse un bref historique de ce format vidéo et illustre comment une petite université publique dans une ville ouvrière américaine a initié des démarches en vue de la préservation et de l'accès à ses collections au format 2" Quad.
- Lokale televisiezenders hebben gebracht en blijven zowel regionale als nationale verhalen en evenementen brengen doorheen de geschiedenis van dit massacommunicatiemedium en zijn een belangrijk deel van ons wereldomvattend cultureel erfgoed. Inspanningen dienen verhoogd te worden om te redden wat er nog overschiet van historische uitzendingsvideo's voor ze voor altijd verloren zijn. Gegeven de beperkte middelen van archiefbeheerders zullen de behoudinspanningen momenteel gericht zijn op het meest in gevaar zijnde videoformaat, 2" Quadruplex video (2" Quad). Het hiernavolgende is een korte geschiedenis van dit videoformaat en hoe een kleine openbare universiteit in een Amerikaanse arbeidersklasse stad stappen ondernam om preservering te initiëren en toegang te verzekeren tot zijn 2" Quad-holdings.

In a 2004 National Historical Publications and Records Commission-funded study, the Association of Moving Image Archivists noted, "saving the products of local television, both broadcast and cable, from television's beginnings in each community, is essential to preserving the history and culture of the United States"¹ Local television stations have covered and continue to cover both regional and national stories and events throughout the history of this mass communication medium.

The United States' Library of Congress issued a report almost twenty years ago finding the "nearly complete loss of local television news footage" from the years 1950 to 1975.² The study noted that less than ten percent of television news libraries have survived from this time period. The Library of Congress could find nothing comprehensively left of the local television stations and programming from twenty American states over this quarter century.

A major contributing factor to the staggering loss of this cultural heritage is the widespread use of video technology in television production. As the Library of Congress recognized, "videotape was never designed as a permanent preservation or recording medium"³. Another authority at that time declared, "Virtually all of the magnetic tape ever recorded older than...10 years may be in serious jeopardy" of complete loss⁴.

Mike Casey of Indiana University Bloomington wrote in 2009, "there is a 15- to 20-year window

of opportunity—less for some formats—to digitally preserve media holdings before it becomes impossible due to degradation or prohibitively expensive due to obsolescence"⁵. The Library of Congress' "National Recording Preservation Plan" published in 2012 declared, "many endangered analog formats must be digitized within the next 15 or 20 years before further degradation makes preservation efforts all but impossible"⁶. To meet this widely recognized and ongoing threat, efforts must be increased to save what is left of our historic broadcast video heritage before it is lost forever.

Given the limited resources of archival repository-



Fig. 1: Close-up of a larger 2" Quad open videotape reel.

ries, preservation efforts should be focused on the oldest and most at-risk video format. In 1956, 2" Quadruplex video (2" Quad) became the first videotape format to be a commercial success (Fig. 1). From that point until the late 1970s, the

vast majority of broadcast television was recorded onto this video format. Most television stations would get their money's worth by recording over 2" Quad tape multiple times. Video engineer Jim Lindner found that one reel of 2" Quad in his private collection had been recorded over 13 times, effectively losing 7.5 hours of broadcast history⁷. Representatives of the professional organization, Quad Videotape Group, have concluded that while the only complete recording that survives on 2" Quad is the most recent one, often there are several minutes of much older, and extremely rare clips at the end of reels. Consequently, comprehensive digitization is important in order to capture hidden and historically significant content at the very end of 2" Quad tapes.⁸



Fig. 2: An antique RCA TR-70C 2-inch Quadruplex Video Tape Recorder (VTR). The Vermont Public Television bought the 1,800 lb (approx. 820 kg) piece of equipment in 1976 and used it until 1991 (Photo credits: Vermont PBS).

The playback equipment needed to view 2" Quad tape is extremely expensive to purchase and maintain. 2" Quad machines and their proprietary parts are no longer available from any manufacturer. They are also very heavy and take up large amounts of space (Fig. 2). In addition, 2" Quad equipment requires an operator with decades of video engineering experience⁹. As a result, the analog video signals that are recorded onto this carrier are inaccessible today. Generally, archives

with 2" Quad do not even have the resources to allow researchers to watch the tapes. The only way to provide access to these unique moving images and recorded sounds for current and future generations is to pay specialized video engineers to digitize them.

Digitization of the world's surviving 2" Quad will make this historically important documentation available for study and will provide benefits to research, education, and public programming for generations to come, serving a vast audience: students of all ages, teaching professionals at all levels, professional writers and scholars, historians, journalists, artists, lawyers, architects, city planners, documentary and narrative filmmakers, the general public, and so on.

2" Quad in Baltimore

Like many American cities, TV came to Baltimore during the post World War II boom. WMAR-TV was the first television station in Baltimore and one of the first TV stations in America, going on air October 30, 1947. One year later, WAAM-TV followed suit. By 1953 approximately ninety percent of all households in Baltimore owned at least one television set¹⁰. Recognizing the potential of the new media, the Westinghouse Electric Corporation purchased WAAM-TV in 1957 and renamed it WJZ-TV¹¹. In 1959, WJZ-TV built the first three-antenna candelabra tower in the U.S. and shared it with the other major local Baltimore stations, WMAR-TV and WBAL-TV. "TV Hill" greatly improved broadcasting coverage in Maryland, and added new viewers in nearby Pennsylvania and Delaware¹².

In 1984, Abell Communications, Inc. donated the WMAR-TV Collection to the University of Baltimore (UB) Langsdale Library for research and educational use, with the current collection consisting of film and video materials dating from 1948 through 1993. In August of 2008 and early 2009, WJZ-TV donated their film and video library to UB, with over 20,000 items that span the approximate date range of 1960 to 2000. Both of these collections are held by the University of Baltimore Langsdale Library's Special Collections Department, whose main mission is to collect, preserve, and provide access to archival, printed, and digital resources that support the research and instructional needs of students, faculty, scholars, and the general public. Of the three major Baltimore television stations, only the WJZ-TV and WMAR-TV material survives, providing the only significant historical video documentation of the region and nation from a Baltimore perspective.

This extant viewpoint represents a rare and comprehensive historical record in a national patchwork of collections that is fragmented, piecemeal and threatened with extinction. A 1986 survey found that twelve archives with network television collections had a total of only about six thousand 2-inch Quad reels and 97% of these tapes were held in only six institutions¹³. A more recent survey of one-hundred and sixty-five television stations found that only eleven reported storing any legacy 2" Quad material¹⁴. With almost three-hundred 2" Quad reels and seven-hundred 2" cartridges, the combined WJZ-TV and

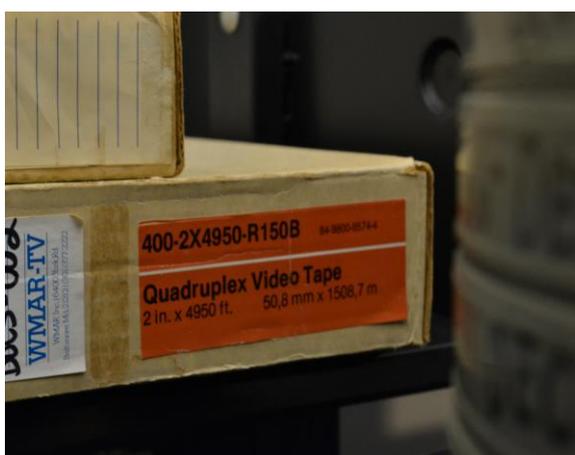


Fig. 3: Close-ups of original housings of 2" Quad reels.

WMAR-TV Collections represent one of only twenty-five institutionally held bodies of content in this format in the United States and, by volume, ranks as one of the top seven collections in the nation.

As recent events surrounding the death of Freddie Gray have shown, Baltimore City continues to

play an important role in the history of the nation. Baltimore's location in close proximity to the U.S. national capital also assures that much of the news content related to national interests. The 2" Quad from UB contains not only local station-created content used for re-broadcast, but also broadcast video from their network parents and other sister stations. This coverage takes on added importance when it is known that the U.S. national broadcasting networks either did not record broadcasts or discarded the majority of their recorded holdings created before 1968¹⁵.

With improved access comes increased use and understanding. The 2" Quad materials at UB have recently been inventoried, and total approximately 270 hours of footage. Prior to this inventory, these materials were not accessible. Highlights from the inventory suggest that there are masters of several local television broadcasts and national broadcast news ranging in date from the early 1960s to the early 1980s. These items have not been logged or viewed in many years—the only available metadata without viewing the content is available through the tape labels, found on the containers and on the reels of tape (Fig. 3). Many archivists wonder how often these labels match with the actual content that has survived on the 2" Quad carrier. This knowledge helps organizations planning to spend resources preserving their most important 2" Quad recordings to do so with a relative certainty that the labels indicate the content they are paying for to transfer. UB decided to undertake digitization of a small sample of our 2" Quad reels to see if labels matched the content, if the content was regionally and/or nationally significant, and to gather usage statistics through our Internet Archive Collection¹⁶.

Three 2" Quad reels were digitized by a professional vendor and uploaded to the Internet Archive on April 28, 2015. As of July 17, 2015, these three videos have garnered a total of 1,334 views: prior to this, these videos had zero documented views at UB¹⁷.

The first reel was found to contain a 1968 WMAR-produced special entitled, "The "Soul" of Baltimore". This special was about Baltimore's Pennsylvania Avenue, the city center of African American culture and community in the twentieth century, narrated by Walter P. Carter, civil rights activist and chairman of the local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) at the time. Upon receiving the digital surrogate, an additional ten minutes at the end of the reel was discovered that had not been recorded over or erased¹⁸.

These "extras" include 1960s era broadcast footage of a promotional film for another WMAR program, "Lure of the Bay Country"; a clip from the

extremely popular and rare WMAR-produced game show, "Dialing for Dollars"; a Bumblebee Tuna commercial; and lastly, a clip of a nationally syndicated game show, "Truth or Consequences" with Bob Barker. "The Soul of Baltimore" documentary has been particularly relevant to watch and analyze in light of the April 2015 protests and uprising that brought national attention to Baltimore—with a large number of protests and events occurring around the Pennsylvania Avenue and North Avenue intersection, an area frequently discussed and shown in this 1968 documentary.

The second reel was the master of a 1969 WMAR-produced special, "Spiro T. Agnew: A Product of Conflict"¹⁹. While the Nixon Presidential Library has a 1-inch open reel video copy of this special, it is not digitized and is not an original master copy like the reel in UB's possession (Fig. 4). In addition to the almost 60-minute doc-

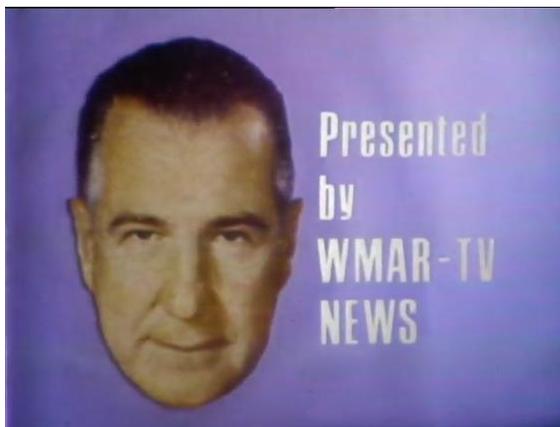


Fig. 4: A still from the digitized 2" Quad WMAR-TV program, "Spiro T. Agnew: Product of Conflict" (1969).

umentary, there is a lengthy clip after the credits of the then-current Republican National Committee Chairman Rogers Morton (a former House Representative for Maryland) talking to a panel of the press: Joseph Sterne (Baltimore Sun), George Herman (CBS News), and Bruce Morton (CBS News). This reel not only held rare archival foot-

age of US political figures within the documentary, but the extra footage is a unique glimpse into national political news coverage and the US Republican Party in 1969.

The last reel was considered to most likely contain footage of Senator Robert Kennedy's speech on March 2, 1967, proposing a plan to end the Vietnam War²⁰. This content cannot be found at any other archive and was not recorded by the Vanderbilt TV News Archive as this occurred one year before Vanderbilt began recording national broadcasts. Like the previous reels mentioned, the content on this was found to match the label: reporter Robert Mudd of CBS News introduces and gives context to Kennedy's speech, and also wraps up the story after showing clips of the speech²¹. This content was not made by WMAR-TV, although it was most likely recorded or received by WMAR-TV in order to rebroadcast multiple times in their own news broadcasts. This reel is an important example of the unique national news stories that are held in network-affiliated television station collections in regions across the United States.

Overall this sampling of our collections further proved that the 2" Quad video in UB's Special Collections Department is unique and significant on many levels, and bolstered our decision to make 2" Quad the highest preservation priority out of all our audiovisual materials. Given the short time-frame left for accessing this unique audiovisual content, I hope this article inspires other archives across the world to inventory, digitize and preserve some if not all of their 2" Quad videotape holdings before it is too late.

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Notes

- ¹ *Local Television: A Guide to Saving Our Heritage* [on line]. Association of Moving Image Archivists, 2004 (consulted on 15 June 2015). Report: Moving Image Archiving. 20 p.
<<http://www.amianet.org/sites/all/files/AMIA%20Local%20TV.A%20Guide%20to%20Saving%20Our%20Heritage.pdf>>
- ² *Television and Video Preservation: A Report on the Current State of American Television and Video Preservation* [on line]. Library of Congress, 1997 (consulted on 22 July 2015). Report: Library Science. 115 p.
<<http://www.loc.gov/programs/static/national-film-preservation-board/documents/tvstudy.pdf>>

- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Lindner, Jim. *Magnetic Tape Deterioration: Tidal Wave at Our Shores* [on line]. Conservation OnLine, 1996 (consulted on 22 July 2015). Paper: Moving Image Archiving. <<http://cool.conservation-us.org/byauth/lindner/tidal.html>>
- 5 Casey, Mike. *Media Preservation Survey: A Report* [on line]. Indiana University Bloomington, 2009 (consulted on 22 July 2015). Report: Moving Image Archiving. 132 p. <http://www.indiana.edu/~medpres/documents/iub_media_preservation_survey_FINALwww.pdf>
- 6 *National Recording Preservation Plan* [on line]. The Library of Congress, 2012 (consulted on 22 July 2015). Report: Moving Image Archiving. 89 p. <<http://www.loc.gov/programs/static/national-recording-preservation-plan/publications-and-reports/documents/NRPPLANCLIRpdfpub156.pdf>>
- 7 Lindner, Jim. *The Loss of Early Video Recordings: The Nixon-Khrushchev Kitchen Debates*. Media Matters, 1997 (consulted on 22 July 2015). Report: Moving Image Archiving. 5 p. <<http://www.media-matters.net/docs/JimLindnerArticles/The Loss of Early Video Recordings.pdf>>
- 8 *The Quad Videotape Group* [on line]. <<http://www.quadvideotapegroup.com>> (consulted on October 22, 2014).
- 9 Lindner, Jim. *The Loss of Early Video Recordings: The Nixon-Khrushchev Kitchen Debates*. Media Matters, 1997 (consulted on 22 July 2015). Report: Moving Image Archiving. 5 p. <<http://www.media-matters.net/docs/JimLindnerArticles/The Loss of Early Video Recordings.pdf>>
- 10 Zajac, Mary. Baltimore on Air: A Nostalgic Look Back at Maryland's Role in the "Golden Age of Television". *Baltimore STYLE Magazine* [on line]. October 2008 (consulted on 22 July 2015) <http://www.baltimorestyle.com/index.php/style/article/6354/>.
- 11 Goad, Robert S. *Behind the Scenes at the Local News: A Production Guidebook*. Boston: Focal, 1994.
- 12 *The Museum of Broadcast Communications - Encyclopedia of Television - Columbia Broadcasting System: The Museum of Broadcast Communications* [on line] <<http://www.museum.tv/eotv/columbiabroa.htm>> (consulted on 22 July 2015).
- 13 Gong, Stephen. National Film and Video Storage Survey Report and Results. *Film History*, 1987, vol. 1, p. 127-136.
- 14 Fain, Rob Jason. *Uncovering Local History: 16mm TV News film remaining in US Television Stations* [on line]. Rochester Institute of Technology, 2007 (consulted on 22 July 2015). Thesis: Moving Image Archiving. 120 p. <<http://scholarworks.rit.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4066&context=theses>>
- 15 The Vanderbilt Television News Archive contains only national networks broadcast footage since August 5, 1968. Web. 27 Mar. 2015. <<http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>>
- 16 *University of Baltimore's Langsdale Library Special Collections* [on line]. <<https://archive.org/details/ublangsdale>> (consulted on 22 July 2015).
- 17 According to the Internet Archive, a "view" is defined as one actual download of the video file OR one viewing of the video file, per IP address.
- 18 "The Soul of Baltimore". *University of Baltimore's Langsdale Library Special Collections* [on line] <<https://archive.org/details/WMAR-DOCS-002?start=58>> (consulted on 22 July 2015).
- 19 "Spiro T. Agnew: Product of Conflict". *University of Baltimore's Langsdale Library Special Collections* [on line] <<https://archive.org/details/WMAR-DOCS-001?start=31>> (consulted on 22 July 2015).
- 20 "Kennedy Proposes Plan to End the War". *This Day in History, The History Channel*. [on line] <<http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/kennedy-proposes-plan-to-end-the-war>> (consulted on 22 July 2015).
- 21 "CBS News: Robert F. Kennedy Speech". *University of Baltimore's Langsdale Library Special Collections* [on line] <<https://archive.org/details/WMAR-MISC-1132-002?start=47>> (consulted on 22 July 2015).