

******Minutes******

ROUNDTABLE on SMALL GAUGE FILM

June 17-18, 2000
Sony Pictures Studio, Culver City, CA

Attendees:

Steve Anker, Grover Crisp, Karen Glynn, Lynn Kirste, Michelle Kribs, Sam Kula, Ross Lipman (June 17 only), Patrick Loughney, Anne Morra, Mona Nagai, Bill O'Farrell, Eddie Richmond, Karan Sheldon, Janice Simpson, Melinda Stone, Dwight Swanson, Linda Tadic (June 17 only), Toni Treadway, Ken Weissman

Not Able to Attend:

Michael Friend, Jan-Christopher Horak, Karen Ishizuka, Jerry Kuehl, Steve Leggett, William Murphy, Ed Stratmann, Dan Strieble

On June 17-18, 2000 a group of North American experts on the preservation of small gauge film met at Sony Pictures Studio in Culver City, CA. This selection of archivists, curators and technicians, (which was brought together by the Association of Moving Image Archivists Small Gauge Film Preservation Task Force) was invited to discuss selection, methodology and preservation issues involved in archiving amateur/small gauge film.

The meeting was funded by the Library of Congress and National Film Preservation Board whose mandate includes the study and investigation of film preservation activities. The purpose of the meeting was to determine collecting priorities, identify the small gauge film in existence, decide what is most important for institutions to collect, and determine ways and means to ensure its preservation.

AMIA President, Sam Kula, called the meeting to order and welcomed the attendees. Kula thanked the Library of Congress for funding the roundtable, the National Film Preservation Board (NFPB) for making the meeting possible and the AMIA members including the organizers and host members responsible for organizing the meeting: Karan Sheldon and Toni Treadway. Kula also thanked Grover Crisp at Sony Pictures for hosting the meeting.

Kula began by identifying two objectives:

- to help the Library of Congress with the study and investigation of film preservation and assist the Library in identifying suitable candidates for the National Film Registry, and,
- to develop a document to assist AMIA with planning for a small gauge symposium in 2001 and other preservation strategies.

SELECTION (SAT. 9:15AM - 10:00AM)

After the participants introduced themselves (Attachment D), Kula reviewed the meeting agenda and began with an overview of appraisal for acquisition and selection. Kula pointed out the importance of cataloging the universe of small gauge material, defining a rational way of approaching the prioritization of

categories for selection, and determining how best to identify small gauge candidates for the U.S. National Film Registry.

Kula identified a subset of issues falling into one of two areas of concern (technical and selection):

- restoration (the degree to which we restore)
- access issues
- how to make decisions regarding the demands of various formats
- funding
- adequate storage facilities

Many institutions are governed by institutional acquisition policies which that define their parameters for acquisition. In terms of selection however, efforts are constantly being made to develop a commonly shared standard set of principles - selection criteria. How is small gauge film distinct from other media and are there any criteria specific to these formats? Treadway emphasized the importance of determining what makes small gauge different. She asked others to think about why are we separating out small gauge, how it is different. Perhaps what makes this material difficult to manage is that it is dispersed, and that its fate is often in the hands of families or working artists.

Loughney suggested we begin by examining the Library of Congress National Film Registry appraisal criteria:

- historical importance
- cultural significance
- aesthetic qualities

These are broad, but may assist in broadening the group's view and may be a good place to begin. The group discussed these criteria.

Sheldon added the significance of technological landmarks, that is, what small gauge film picture and sound the technologies allowed/enabled people to do. Stone mentioned uniqueness and those images that are under-represented, highlighting the significance of the record of everyday life (i.e. the ordinary).

Several of the participants commented on the pejorative nature of the terms: "home movies" and "amateur film" and said they prefer "small gauge." Kirste suggested we consider the defining the characteristics based on content, not the gauge size.

Stone suggested we use award winners as a means of assisting with selection. Tadic pointed out the drawbacks of relying on singular judgments.

So what is the different between small gauge and other media? O'Farrell suggested "it's small" in more ways than one. Certainly the gauge size is small, but it is also perceived an unimportant, perhaps because it is not a commercial format and does not contain content that is perceived as commercially desirable.

The group identified a list of barriers to small gauge preservation:

- cataloging staff not familiar with rules for describing small gauge

- it's "small"; there is a lot
- there is so much it is an overwhelming curatorial task
- material is often received outside collections
- access: how is it seen
- new message for funders needed; little funder recognition
- it seems "foreign" and overwhelming, no cachet
- marginalization inside institutions
- "home movies" is pejorative term
- failure of organizations to collect
- copyright/rights problems and other biases
- who will copy it (available labs?) no laboratory support
- no generally understood selection criteria
- technical barriers - platforms do not exist
- material is being thrown out so is rapidly disappearing

A number of questions were posed. Lipman asked how we might make small gauge more accessible. Richmond stated we need more money designated for small gauge; institutions need to be more aggressive in their collection policies and those that don't collect small gauge at all, need to start. Can we provide institutions with the guidelines they need to know how to collect this format?

Morra described the low priority often given to this format in terms of funding and collecting. For example, initially her institution was hesitant to support the "Home Movies" exhibition. Later the director of the museum highlighted its success. Loughney stated that regional collecting is effective because of collecting organizations' relation to the creators and content. Loughney described the situation at the Library and stated that perhaps this is more of a regional issue because creators have an emotional stake in the material they create.

Richmond emphasized that our charge is to determine what makes home movies important and communicate that to institutions so they have, and understand, the criteria and know how to appraise this material. If our Task Force can do that, it will be of great service.

Some of the participants pointed out various possibilities in terms of sharing resources.

Anker noted that we must educate ourselves about the issues. Sheldon emphasized the need to educate not only archives, but the public. Lipman also noted the need to keep ourselves up-to-date. We need to be familiar with the territory first before attempting outreach.

Loughney reminded us that what we preserve shapes our history. Let us lead, let's not wait for the academics; we shape the field by shaping the available resources.

O'Farrell noted the value of guerilla archives tactics. We need to use our resources so we can make inroads into mainstream collecting traditions.

SAMPLES (SAT. 10:00AM - NOON)

In order to continue the discussion using concrete examples, seven clips were viewed and discussed:

New Left Note by Saul Levine (orig. 8mm, in artist's collection, 16mm copies in distribution) This film was presented by Steve Anker who explained that the filmmaker is living, a leading artist in 8mm film. This film was included in the "Big as Life" program a fifty night screening series of 8mm films that was curated by Anker of the SF Cinematheque and Jytte Jensen at the Museum of Modern Art. The group was asked to note the rhythmic use of cement splices, the jazz-like short edits and the challenges posed by making a preservation copy on film of this kind from 8mm edited original. Sheldon asked the group, "what can we do to make this kind of film more accessible?" In terms of the National Registry, Loughney suggested providing reference viewing copies to the Library for their convenience. Treadway also suggested providing more contextual information. Loughney reminded us that part of our job is education.

Dunham Family Home Movies (from Quinhagak, Alaska, 1956)

Presented by Dwight Swanson. This sample initiated a discussion about donor negotiations. Lipman stressed keeping watch over labs where work is outsourced to ensure the integrity of the filmmaker is maintained and that general care is taken.

Peter Lavelle Collection (orig. 9.5 mm, National Archives of Canada)

Presented by Bill O'Farrell. This clip initiated a discussion on the process of blowing up to 16mm, 35mm and video transfer as well as a discussion about having gates built. The National Archives of Canada offers transfer service (like AMIPA) which not only is revenue-generating, but also give the archives an opportunity to make contact with potential donors and educate the public on care and handling of small gauge film.

Treadway asked about outreach to labs. Sheldon described a program at her institution in which cards are inserted by labs in all transfers directing inquiries about archival material to Northeast Historic Film. This has been a successful program.

Featherlane Farm (orig. 8mm, ca 1949, National Center for Jewish Film)

Presented by Toni Treadway. A document of egg farming in New Jersey in which the filmmaking is clearly more sophisticated than what we might think of as a Home Movie. The filmmaker uses the camera, framing, in camera edits, and sequences to form a film that reads like a narrative. Research needs to be done to establish who the filmmaker was, what training and exposure to other filmmaking he or she had, etc. O'Farrell noted the value of public screenings in terms of identifying unknown film content.

Moving a Tobacco Barn---Robinson-Via Family papers, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution (1962, 1968, 8mm color film original) presented by Toni Treadway. The Robinson-Via Family had a tobacco farm in Maryland for many generations and recently gave the NMAH many of its things- papers, tools, clothes and some 8mm movies. The clip shows an overview of the tobacco field followed by scenes of a 100 foot long tobacco barn being carefully moved by an independent African American moving company.

Underwater Blue (orig. Super 8mm, sound, scratch, painted, 1981, artist collection) Filmmaker: Poli Marichal. Presented by Toni Treadway. An experimental film exploring Puerto Rican identity and issues.

Hints (9.5mm, Pathex home demo reel, donated to National Archives of Canada by Northeast Historic Film who acquired it in Maine.) "Hints," an introductory reel for home projectionists, was preserved to 35mm in 2000 by Bill O'Farrell.

APPRAISAL (SAT. 1:00PM - 2:00PM)

Sam Kula led a discussion on questions of appraisal with specific reference to the clips just seen and the selection and appraisal criteria described during the morning discussion. The participants put forth a number of ideas, described problems and posed solutions.

O'Farrell described the tactic of raising consciousness about high profile material in order to stimulate interest in other materials.

Loughney noted that many potential donors are identified through the manuscript division; he stressed importance of maintaining connection between moving images and archives with accompanying related textual material. His department at the LC has worked hard to dispel the notion of film only as an art form. To emphasize film's importance as a recording medium for culture and history.

Tadic suggested that the issues for experimental film might be different from amateur film, and the group explored this suggestion. Tadic stated that different types of film demand different appraisal criteria.

Richmond suggested that the Task Force continue its work and that the proposed symposium in 2001 be a strategic beginning to a long term initiative. Richmond suggested going to the NFPB and asking them to work with us in securing funding from other sources. Lipman also suggested looking outside of AMIA to the scholarly community like the University of South Carolina's symposium "Orphans of the Storm." Tadic agreed it would be worthwhile to involve archivists, filmmakers, labs, etc. Loughney, however, cautioned against waiting for the academic community and stated that AMIA is probably the most appropriate organization; certainly let's use Orphans, but use AMIA as our major vehicle. Loughney expressed his confidence in AMIA as having the competence to be an initiating organization.

WORKING GROUPS (SAT. 2:00PM - 4:00PM)

In the afternoon, the participants broke into three working groups to discuss three areas in more detail and make specific recommendations.

GROUP 1: APPRAISAL AND SELECTION

(Participants: Kula, Sheldon, Anker, Loughney, Morra, Stone)

This group was tasked with proposing a means for identifying representative amateur and small gauge film with cultural and historical significance for nomination to the National Film Registry. In order to assist with identification the group designed a list of categories:

- amateur cine clubs
- diversity of American life

- scenes of daily life
- celebrations/holidays/rituals
- political and labor film
- films by children
- milestones in development of small gauge technology
- art/avant-garde/experimental works
- nationally significant persons/places/things
- footage by and about women

The group expressed the opinion that throughout these categories, which are just a beginning, there should be care to ensure the aesthetic value of the material as appropriate, and to pay special attention to seeking out "quiet voices", including films by and about underrepresented communities, including the experience of women and children.

GROUP 2: LONG RANGE ISSUES FOR SMALL GAUGE FILM (Participants: Tadic, Richmond, Glynn, Kribs, Swanson, Simpson)

This group was tasked with identifying issues requiring further study and determining how to best study and to address these issues and put them in front of AMIA membership and others. Long term objectives of various stakeholders (major archives, regional archives, private holders, service providers). Best use of the 2001 Symposium. Possible funders for planning, funders for interim objectives.

The group began by outlining a three year plan called the "Small Gauge Initiative" that might be led by AMIA. The 4 components of the plan include:

Promote and Encourage Funding

The Task Force should identify (and communicate with) funders at the national and international level and work with the the NFPF.

- Work with archives in regions to help provide them with resources and the support they need to obtain funding (e.g. prepare a Small Gauge Initiative statement regarding the importance of small gauge. etc.)
- Encourage new funding programs for small gauge and to encourage the expansion of existing funding programs to include small gauge.

Promote, Encourage and Facilitate the Collection/Preservation/Access of Small Gauge Film

- Within AMIA (2000 conference, newsletter: - newsletter insert, journal articles, special journal issue, website)
- Outside AMIA (conferences, newsletter, listserves, educational institutions).

To Coordinate and Assist the Creation and Collection of Information about Small Gauge Film (bibliographies, list of technical facilities/equipment vendors/ supply vendors, small gauge events).

Build Public Awareness (exhibitions etc.)

Examples might include: encouraging the National Film Registry Tour to include small gauge events, in their touring program; cooperate with other

international/national organizations and conferences.

The group recommended that the initiative be led by AMIA through a Task Force in consultation with all other AMIA committees and interest groups. Plans should begin now for the 2000 AMIA conference (incorporating small gauge concerns) and continue with planning for a symposium in 2001. The group recommended that the Task Force be finalized (whether a continuation or expansion of the existing Task Force) by August 2000.

The 2000 AMIA Conference: The Task Force should request meeting time during the week to advance planning for 2001 and interested people should commit to this and other work sessions.

The 2001 AMIA Conference

The group made specific recommendations for incorporating small gauge concerns into the 2001 AMIA conference.

Symposium. Plan 1.5 days or a thread of concurrent sessions offered throughout the week. Topics should include: cataloging, technical preservation, appraisal, public awareness, education and access. The symposium might be held at the Wittsel Theatre (350 seats max). Consider opening to general public. Work on the symposium will begin now and culminate at the event with the generation of guidelines, recommendations and templates.

Reel Thing. That the Reel Thing 2001 be dedicated to small gauge laboratory tests.

Archival Screening Night 2001. That the Task Force coordinate efforts to ensure that small gauge is included.

Working Session. That a meeting be held to review the ongoing initiatives.

TECHNICAL GROUP (Participants: Treadway, Crisp, O'Farrell, Lipman, Nagai, Weissman)

This group met to examine specific problems of preservation of small gauge film, discuss lab tests needed, and begin to define the technical criteria for preservation. Possible areas of interest and samples for The Reel Thing 2000 and 2001. The group recommended that the Task Force:

- develop a list of labs that handle SG formats
- examine the issue of copying SG to 35mm, 16mm, video
- define a preservation path
- ensure proper storage for preservation of original materials
- provide access to reference copies
- rationalize prioritized selection for copying

The group identified the problems presented by small gauge not being dealt with and asked how we might change the dynamic to ensure it is addressed? The desired result would:

- convince the commercial labs that if they make an investment they will receive a return on their investment
- obtain public sector support for small archives
- collect search for equipment from old defunct facilities
- storage - strengthen storage at a regional and national level efforts of archives
- increase and improve education about storage
- promote aggressive collection by archives to ensure the material exists as conservation strategies improve something to preserve
- produce FAQ sheets for AMIA web site
- select targeted film for film copying

Back to the Roundtable after breakout groups:

Following the reports by each group, the larger group discussed the recommendations. First the symposium model vs. the idea of threading the sessions was debated. Kula recommended we be creative and flexible in how we schedule conference sessions. Richmond stated that a thread of conference sessions is a good idea but may be undesirable if they are scheduled against other sessions (keep in mind diversity of constituency). Crisp suggested keeping the thread at a high level - plenary level. Richmond suggested two different types of sessions (if the decision is to go with sessions): speaker panels and working sessions.

Lipman asked if there might be a problem designating the Reel Thing as entirely small gauge. Crisp, the organizer, didn't think so; that technicians are interested in all things technical and emphasized that the program would, of course, depend on what was submitted for consideration.

The group discussed the Task Force, the proposed ongoing duties and its structure within AMIA. Richmond recognized that small gauge concerns cross over many committees. Kula mentioned the 2000-2001 recent hiatus of AMIA's Inédits Interest Group and discussion ensued about possible expansion of the existing Task Force and how it might incorporate the Inédits group's history and concerns.

SUMMARY (SUN. 9:00AM - Noon)

Kula summarized the discussion up to this point and participants enlarged upon points previously made.

Funding:

Sheldon suggested a granting program at the front end like the NFPP program. O'Farrell suggested that the Task Force might wish to propose that the NFPP might like to do a offer a small gauge round. Weissman promoted the value of laboratory in-kind services particularly in relation to the development of equipment and services not on the market. Weissman suggested a system of matching grants (in-kind). For example, asking labs to build the gates.

Anker related issues from the recent MoMA "Big as Life" program; he outlined the problem with labs committing to working on essentially obsolete formats. Richmond stressed the value of having AMIA initiate and endorse a multiyear plan and outlined the benefits of having AMIA approach the NFPP. He pointed out that

NFPF dollars are actually from other sources; that if we work together to identify sources we could make sure there is enough funding to distribute to all formats including small gauge.

Loughney mentioned that the problem of stock production was discussed at the recent FIAF meeting in London. Their demonstrated interest might be an opportunity for us to continue this discussion with them. Perhaps we can identify niche companies (labs) that are willing to fulfill the need. O'Farrell suggested challenging the field to look at their holdings, and find the ability to do something with their small gauge collections. O'Farrell stressed the need to create the demand for lab services so that the labs build the necessary platforms; otherwise, the labs will not consider this a money-making proposition. Ideal: to have each archive identify one small gauge item to have copied. Sheldon recognized the desirability to develop a curated show ? a product to sell the concept. This might also help us to connect to scholars and filmmakers. Sheldon also asked if this initiative might require paid staff.?

Sheldon liked the idea of taking a package proposal to the NFPF. O'Farrell suggested encouraging the large institutions to put more of their dollars into the preservation of small gauge which will give more business to the labs which will in turn improve the available lab services. Swanson suggested conducting a survey to determine what archives have in their holdings. Treadway concurred by suggesting we ask institutions to look into their holdings to determine what they might have that needs preserving. Anker suggested establishing a timeframe - the showcase being the 2001 Reel Thing event. Stone suggested we approach a large commercial institution for funding.

Treadway asked who might make the funding inquiries? Is this a Task Force duty or might it be possible to obtain the donation of staff time from a large institution? O'Farrell asked about the next step: should we approach the Library of Congress for further funding to pursue our goals? Richmond answered that perhaps this is part of the Task Force's charge. That is, that in the report to the Library we request financial assistance to launch the 2001 symposium. Sheldon suggested that an interim step might be to ask AMIA for financial support to hire someone to prepare an introductory letter for a grant proposal to present to possible funders. Richmond noted he was a current member of the AMIA Board and that of course the group could approach AMIA Board of Directors. Kula concurred.

Further discussion revolved around the make up of the Small Gauge Task Force. Since the original Small Gauge Task Force was only tasked with coordinating the round table, the group decided it needed to:

- contact all the existing members to determine their interest in continuing;
- expand the existing Task Force by approaching other individuals about joining.

Those Members around the table that expressed their interest in working on the Task Force included: Ken Weissman, Bill O'Farrell, Michelle Kribs (2001 symposium) and Patrick Loughney. Others who preferred to continue in an advisory capacity included: Anne Morra, Karen Glynn, Dwight Swanson (outreach), Melinda Stone and Mona Nagai. Others not present who might be interested were identified: Dan Strieble and Bill Murphy. Toni Treadway agreed to continue as chair.

The group agreed we need a very active and dedicated Task Force (larger than the existing Task Force) to continue the work. Richmond suggested contacting AMIA committee chairs to recommend possible names. O'Farrell again suggested we find the funds to hire a coordinator. Treadway suggested we consider applying for an NEAH grant; because AMIA may wish to seek institutional support in the 2001 round of grants, and only one application is permitted per institution, and that perhaps an AMIA member organization could apply on our behalf of the initiative for August 2000. Swanson suggested his organization (NHF) might be able to assist.

AMIA Conferences:

Anker asked: will we have an 8mm projector available at the Reel Thing and at the Archival Screening Night or will original small gauge material need to be transferred to video for screening? Simpson offered to talk to the Screening Night Coordinator to determine available equipment, add a line on form encouraging small gauge submissions in anticipation of 20001 symposium, and ensure that the program adding a field to form which indicates the original format.

The group identified 8 opportunities this year to incorporate small gauge concerns into the conference:

- Reel Thing Technical Symposium
- concurrent sessions: "Issues in Small Gauge Film" & "Amateur Cine Clubs"
- Archival Screening Night
- Preservation Committee meeting
- Cataloging Committee meeting
- Access Committee meeting
- Diversity Task Force meeting

Each of these opportunities was assigned to a group member who will follow up , talk to the organizers and chairs to ensure that small gauge concerns are added to their agendas.

Questionnaire:

Kirste suggested preparing a questionnaire about holdings and handing it out at the conference like the Access Committee did a few years back. The questionnaire could inquire about holdings. Karen Glynn offered to draft the document for placement in the 2000 Conference Registration Package, the AMIA website, and the on-site conference package. Conference participants could be encouraged to complete their forms (at small gauge sessions) and return them to the conference registration desk or the AMIA Office.

Immediate Tasks:

Treadway will prepare an article for summer issue of AMIA newsletter reporting on this session by June 23. Sam Kula will write a report for submission to the Library of Congress. Simpson will communicate with the AMIA Conference Committee that the Task Force will need a meeting time during the 2000 conference.

Other ideas:

Sheldon suggested the Task Force discuss asking the NFPB to consider a

"Treasures" type project dedicated to small gauge, which would likely need a dedicated staff member (at NFPF or AMIA) for such a project. Might be more efficient to use the NFPF model as opposed to building a new structure within AMIA. Crisp suggested we see how the first "Treasures" goes before planning a second program. Potential problem with using the NFPF structure is that we might be limited to US material - AMIA is an international organization. Crisp noted that while NFPF is legislated to work with US material, it may not be restricted to using US labs - we would need to determine the parameters. Loughney suggested that perhaps the NFPF be dedicated to US materials and that the Task Force identify a Canadian body to deal with Canadian materials. Kula also suggested we link up with what is happening in Latin America and offered to alert FIAF about our plans for 2001.

Glynn noted Karen Ishizuka's 1998 symposium, "The Past as Present: The Home Movie as Cinema of Record" at the Getty Center Museum and her call on the AMIA listserve for information.

Weissman also suggested we check FIAF's website regarding available information on small gauge.

NFPB Report:

Richmond and Sheldon noted they would be reporting on this meeting at the National Film Preservation Board meeting tomorrow (June 19) and the annual NFPB meeting.

Kula thanked the Library of Congress, the NFPB, Karan Sheldon, Toni Treadway, Janice Simpson and Grover Crisp for helping to organize this meeting; and, Grover and Sony Pictures Studio for hosting the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at noon.

Minutes prepared by

Janice Simpson, AMIA Administrative Coordinator 7/11/2000

Proofread by Toni Treadway prior to posting on AMIA website March 2010

Note: An audio tape recording of this meeting has been added to the AMIA archives. Copies available to participants and AMIA members.

Attachments:

- Roundtable proposal with budget
- Meeting Agenda
- List of invitees with institutional affiliations and email addresses
- Participant biographies
- Suggested Readings and "Homework"
- Inédits Column, AMIA Newsletter No. 41/42, Summer/Fall 1998.
- "Getty Center hosts International Symposium on Home Movies," AMIA Newsletter, No. 43, Winter 1998.
- "Out of the Attic: Archiving Amateur Film," Journal of Film Preservation, No. 65, 1998.
- Report on 1999 Reel Thing, by Toni Treadway, unpublished.
- "Preliminary Types of 8mm & Super 8 Film" (email from Karan Sheldon, 6/5/00)

Meeting handouts

- - MOMA press release, program and cartoon on "Big as Life" exhibition
- - Pacific Film Archives schedule.

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