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Introduction

University of Baltimore holds the WMAR-TV news collection which contains approximately 4,000 reels of 16mm films, 300 reels of 1- and 2-inch videotape, and 139 linear feet of videocassettes. The content of this collection illustrates social, cultural, political and economic trends of everyday life and events around Baltimore city and the state of Maryland from 1948 to 1993. It also includes materials related to local events that reflect topics related to politics, the civil rights movement, African American history, and community stories.

Preserving these historic assets is crucial as they are first-hand visual representations of people, places, and events pertaining to modern American history. However, due to the size and complexity of this collection, Special Collections and Archives at the University of Baltimore has been facing several challenges to manage, preserve, and make WMAR-TV news collection available to the public. In this poster, I will review some of these challenges and explain how we have managed and overcome them at UB.



Deed of Gift - Copyright

WMAR-TV news collection was donated to the University of Baltimore by Abell Communications, Inc. in 1984. The collection is a gift to the University of Baltimore Foundation and located as a permanent loan at the RLB library. Advances in techniques and technologies in recent years have created ample opportunities to access Audio Visual materials and provided more reliable methods to preserve them. However, adoption of these new methods to preserve and provide access to the TV-news collection by the RLB library presented several challenges including copyright and permission to reformat the materials.

Do we have a solid permission to reformat the collection to the electronic version?

Can we make the footage accessible online?

Who owns the right?

To answer these questions, the library initially referred to the deed of gift which was prepared and signed in 1984. The effort ultimately resulted in revisiting the deed of gift document in a joint effort by the RLB library, WMAR, and UB foundation in 2019 and adding an addendum and memorandum of understanding to address these issues. Below is a summary of the addition:

- The Library can make the collection available to the general public for scholarly research
- The general public is allowed to use the collection for educational, research and non-commercial uses
- The Library will direct any request for commercial use to the WMAR station for licensing matters
- The Library can reformat and digitize the collection for preservation and access purposes
- The Library can provide access to the footage via online platforms in stream only mode
- Attributions should be given to the WMAR-TV news collection and UB Special Collections and Archives

Playback Equipment - Access

In their current format, most of the material in this collection are only accessible by U-Matic and VHS playback equipment and film projector. However,

- These tools have become obsolete. There are expensive
- They need regular maintenance. Specific skills and expertise are needed to work with these old machines
- Magnetic tapes like U-Matic or VHS, if stored well, can only last for 15 years without significant degradation. Films can last for many years. However, playing them with a projector and storing them in improper environmental conditions can damage the films and significantly reduce their longevity

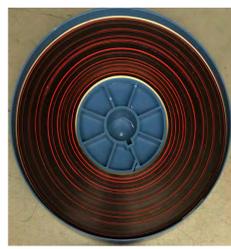
Here at UB:

- We don't have a projector to play the films which offers a level of protection before digitization
- Some of the films have a shot list (a shot-by-shot description of a film or video) which helps the researcher to find out what is inside the footage without viewing the film
- We have a manual hand crank to view frames from film reels which patrons can use in our public research room when the film doesn't have a shot list. Most of the tapes have shot list as well.
- There are VHS and U-matic tape playback equipment for patron use. However, to save the tapes for digitization capture, we encourage our patrons to use the shot list to identify relevant footage and skip viewing the tapes. Patrons can request digitization. In those cases, the reel or tape is mailed to an external vendor for digitization after receiving a written permission from WMAR station



- There are 570 digitized films and tapes in this collection which are the results of digitization projects in the past. These files were uploaded to [Internet Archives website](#) with metadata for access in streaming only mode. Internet Archives has a [Python Library](#), a command-line and Python interface, that offers programmatic access to archive.org in order to upload, download, and edit in batch process, quickest and easiest way to make files accessible.
- Requests for making copies of or using the footages are directed to WMAR station for permission

Item-level Processing



- For most AV media collections having an item-level description is appropriate and necessary
- WMAR is a local TV news. It contains raw news (including the date they were broadcasted) and some documentary programs and titled footages.
- All of 4,300 reels and 2185 tapes for WMAR-TV news collection have an entry in our [archival management system, ArchivesSpace](#).
- Raw News Footages are sorted in chronological order. A new unique identifier was assigned to the video tapes in 2016.



- Almost, all the video tapes have a shot list which was prepared by WMAR station during the creation of the master video tape. There were then added to the "note" field in ArchivesSpace to become searchable and assist researcher in finding relevant footage.
- Only some of the films have shot lists. Digitization seems to be the only way to access those films that don't have a shot list to make them available to the patrons.
- [Digital Objects](#) are added to the Archival Objects in ArchivesSpace for footages that have digitized files in Internet Archives.

Environmental Conditions



- In 2014, WMAR-TV news collection was moved from the old library building to a temporary location which eventually became the permanent location of the collection.
- All the WMAR films and videos are currently located in a secure room in the basement of a multipurpose University facility.
- Films are housed in labeled canisters (some ventilated plastic and some sealed metal) and stacked on library shelving.
- After using [A-D Strips](#) to detect and measure severity of "vinegar syndrome" in a sample of the film portion of the collection, a plan was made to change all metal containers to ventilated plastic canisters.
- Open reel quad tapes are in their original plastic cases, stored on the same shelving.



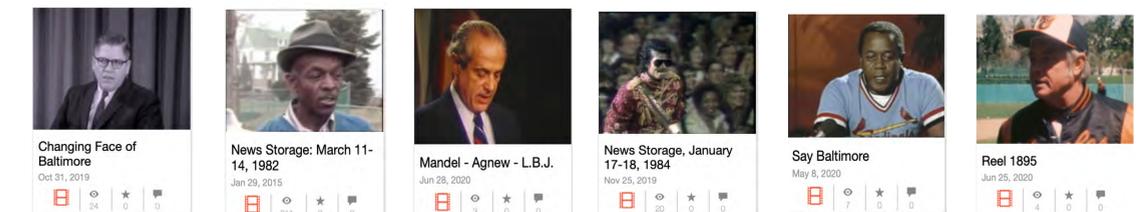
- Videocassettes with their original cases are sorted chronologically and placed in 12 linear-foot archival records boxes on shelves.
- The temperature of the room is regulated (both heating and cooling) by the building's general HVAC system, which is set for human comfort. There is a plan to add a separate HVAC system for the storage, as well as a walk-in freezer for damaged/degraded film.
- There is a data logger in the room to monitor the temperature and humidity. The data is collected monthly.
- The room has no known history of flooding.

Reformatting and Preserving

The ultimate goal to preserve the WMAR-TV news collection is digital reformatting. Fund for digitization costs, digital preservation plan, storage space for storing digitized files are among the challenges for a mass digitization effort. Here are some steps that we took before planning for digitization:

- The library appointed a task force to plan for a digital preservation program
- Digital Preservation taskforce suggested a 5 years plan to implement a digital preservation program. The plan is in the second year and in progress.
- Prioritizing magnetic media for digital reformatting
- The University IT department assigned a 90TB network storage space with a backup system to the special collections and archives upon the library request
- Investigating different funding opportunities
- Planning to outsource the digitization

Watch some of the footage from WMAR-TV news collection:



Special thanks to Aiden Faust, the head of UB Special Collections and Archives for coordinating the revision of the WMAR deed of gift and helping me to improve the access to WMAR-TV news collection.



University of Baltimore Broadcasting Collections

University of Baltimore Special Collections & Archives collects, preserves, and provides access to archival, printed, and digital resources that support the research and instructional needs of students, faculty, scholars, and the general public. Special Collections & Archives contains Baltimore regional audiovisual materials, with particular strengths in local television news footage and special programs from the second half of the 20th century.

