Echo Park Film Center Preservation Proposal

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Contact Information

The Echo Park Film Center

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Los Angeles, CA 90026
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info@echoparkfilmcenter.org
http://echoparkfilmcenter.org

Hours of Operation:
Thursdays & Fridays 2 - 7 PM
Saturdays 12 - 5 PM
Event nights 8 - 10 PM

Staff:
Paolo Davanzo, *Executive Director*
Lisa Marr, *Operations Director/Youth Film Coordinator*
Rick Bahto, *Operations Manager, Youth and Adult Film Instructor, Projectionist*

*The author of this report would like to acknowledge Ms. Marr and Mr. Davanzo for their help in providing information and access to the Echo Park Film Center.

Executive Summary

About Echo Park Film Center

The Echo Park Film Center (EPFC) is a non-profit media arts organization located at 1200 N. Alvarado St in Los Angeles. Its mission is to provide "equal and affordable community access to film/video resources via five channels: a neighborhood microcinema space, free and nominal cost education programs, a comprehensive film equipment and service retail department, a green-energy mobile cinema & film school, and a touring film festival showcasing local established and emerging filmmakers."[1]

The EPFC works to fulfill its mission by providing free instruction, materials, and equipment for its youth classes, which are available for students under the age of 19. The EPFC also offers low-cost classes for adults and others who are "media-marginalized," i.e. those who lack media tools and software skills. Classes and workshops are taught at the EPFC's location in the Echo Park neighborhood, as well as on its 'Filmmobile'. The Filmmobile is an eco-friendly bus that serves as both a mobile theater and film school, and it takes the EPFC's programs on the road to "facilitate media arts exchanges."[2]

About the Student Film Collection

Each year the EPFC holds 4 sessions of youth classes (Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall), with each class containing between 25-40 students. Adult workshops are held throughout the year with approximately 40 people attending these workshops per year. The classes that the EPFC has taught since its founding in 2002 have resulted in a small collection of student films and videos. The subjects of these student films range from immigration, local culture, family relationships,

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[1] Echo Park Film Center. "Mission Statement." EPFC Mission & History. http://www.echoparkfilmcenter.org/about%20us/mission.html 27 March 2013.

[2] Echo Park Film Center. "Filmmobile." http://echoparkfilmcenter.org/filmmobile/filmmobile.html 27 March 2013

economic issues, homelessness, and the Los Angeles River. Free from the monetary imperatives of filmmaking, these works are a more honest depiction of Angeleno life. In the future, these films will serve as a time-capsule of Los Angeles in the early part of the 21st century, and will be a valuable information resource for scholars and historians in the future.

Challenges Facing the Collection

The EPFC faces numerous challenges in regards to the preserving this small collection of student films. The most pressing challenge is that the Student Film Collection is not cataloged or organized in any fashion. Because of this, any element (film reel, tape, CD, etc.) could be misplaced or lost, without anyone being aware it is missing. Other preservation challenges that exist for the collection include the methods and furniture in which the elements are housed, the lack of dedicated staff to organize and preserve the collection, and the absence of funds for tackling these problems.

Preventative and Conservation Recommendations

This report will make several recommendations for the preservation of these works. These recommendations include:

- Applying for grants to implement the recommended preservation and conservation methods.
- Purchasing materials for an 'emergency preparedness kit'. These materials would be used to clean and salvage any elements should a disaster such as an earthquake strike.
- Purchasing and installing an air purifier to filter out dust particles.
- Hiring interns from the University of California Los Angeles, Moving Image Archive Studies graduate program to catalog, organize, clean, and digitize the Student Film Collection.
- Purchasing 'Cloud Storage' to house the digitized elements of the Student Film Collection. Cloud Storage is offsite digital storage that is accessible through the internet at any location. This type of storage will provide a backup in case of a disaster and the elements are destroyed, and it will also provide protection against wear and tear due to accessing the physical elements on a regular basis.

- Purchasing tools and materials to inspect and clean the elements on a regular basis.
- Purchasing archival storage containers and new furniture to house the elements.
- Establishing a workflow for cataloging, cleaning, and digitizing new elements as they are added to the collection.

The Collection

The Materials and Size of the Collection.

The Student Film Collection contains the following items:

- 122 plastic reels containing approximately 6,100 feet of Super-8mm film. This is the equivalent of 51 hours of footage.
- 4 metal spools containing approximately 400 feet of 16mm acetate film. This is the equivalent of 11 minutes of footage.
- 395 MiniDV tapes containing approximately 23,700 minutes of footage.
- 2 Hi-8 tapes containing approximately 240 minutes of footage.
- 1 VHS tape.
- 5 compact discs (CDs) which contain approximately 3,700 megabytes of audio.

Significance of the Collection

As mentioned previously, these works will serve as a time capsule of 21st century Los Angeles. It is difficult to determine which items are the most significant, since many remain unlabeled and the

content of each item has not been documented. Therefore, the most potentially significant items of the Student Film Collection are those which are most at risk of deterioration.

The elements that are most vulnerable to deterioration are the MiniDV tapes and CDs. It is known that film can survive at least 100 years because there are film elements that still exist from the 1890s. However, the lifespan of MiniDV tape is estimated to be 10 - 30 years, but that figure is impossible to determine because the format has only been around since 1995. A simple internet search for "MiniDV tape preservation problems"[3] yields numerous posts on online forums of playback problems with tapes, such as "dropouts"[4] or the absence of image[5]. Film is relatively easy to examine to determine if there are deterioration issues, however, the same can not be said of videotape. The easiest way to determine if a videotape is deteriorating is to play it back, and this can cause further damage to the tape. Because tape is so vulnerable, there is a saying, "One copy is no copy," and the tapes in this collection are the only copies that exist. It is therefore imperative to make backup copies of these tapes as soon as possible by digitizing them and placing them in cloud storage. Not only is deterioration a problem, but the impending obsolescence of videotape is as well.

The CDs in the Student Film Collection are even more vulnerable to decay since their lifespan is estimated to be approximately 15 years. CD deterioration is caused by the oxidization of the aluminum that is used in CD manufacturing.[6] In addition, CDs are susceptible to damage from scratches when improperly handled. Since CDs are easy to digitize and take up little space on a hard drive, their vulnerability is not as serious as the MiniDV tapes.

Of the footage that exists on film, the reels that are not in containers are at the most risk for damage. It is not as imperative to digitize these films immediately, since acetate film deteriorates at

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[3] "mini dv tape preservation problems." https://duckduckgo.com/?q=mini+dv+tape+preservation+problems. Accessed 27 May 2013. 2:31pm PDT

[4] "DV Pix - Image Defects due to Tape Problems." http://www.adamwilt.com/pix-defects.html Accessed 27 May 2013.

[5] laurie_hammie. "MiniDV Tape Problem." 26 May 2011. http://www.videoforums.co.uk/camcorder-reviews-problems-shooting/36050-mini-dv-tape-problem.html. Accessed 27 May 2013

[6] Evenson, Laura. "The CD Time Bomb / Detractors say compact discs are deteriorating with age." San Francisco Chronicle. 14 January 1999. http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/The-CD-Time-Bomb-Detractors-say-compact-discs-2952580.php

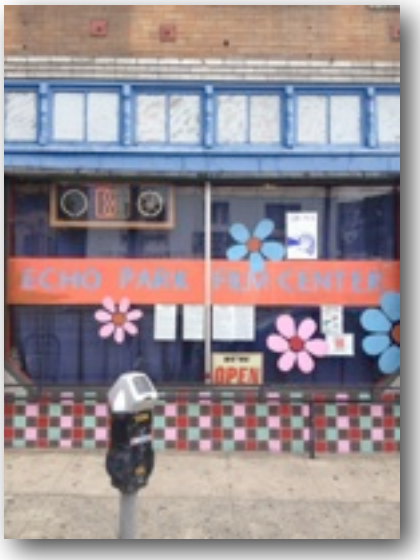
a slower speed than tape. It is recommended that these films be housed in new containers as soon as possible to protect them from damage.

Condition of the Collection

The condition of the materials in the Student Film Collection is generally very good, although as mentioned in the previous section, the condition of the MiniDV tapes is unknown. The health of the film elements can be attributed to the fact that they are too young to have experienced any significant deterioration. However, this does not mean that preservation should not be initiated, as it is significantly more cost-effective to prevent problems rather than fix them.

Resources

Building and Space



The EPFC is located in a storefront brick building, which houses four other ground-floor tenants. The EPFC's next-door neighbors in the building are a guitar store and a coffee shop. The tenant at the far end of the building is a vintage clothing store.

The front area of the EPFC serves as a micro-cinema and a store for film equipment rental and purchase. The collection sits in the back of the store, where class equipment and other materials are housed. Space in this area is at a premium, with little or no room to expand the collection.

May 25, 2013 - The front exterior of the Echo Park Film Center- Photo by Susan Etheridge.

May 25, 2013 - The area in which the collection is housed. Most of the collection sits in storage furniture, under the table which is covered by a vinyl table cloth (center). Shelving surrounds the area, and above there exists a separate storage area for additional equipment. - Photo by Susan Etheridge.

Staff and Volunteers

The EPFC has a paid full time staff of three: Paolo Davanzo (Executive Director), Lisa Marr (Operations Director, Youth Film Coordinator), and Rick Bahto (Operations Manager, Youth and Adult Film Instructor, Projectionist). In addition to the paid staff, the EPFC also has many volunteers who assist with screenings or classes. There are approximately two teaching assistants per class.

Although the staff and volunteers at the EPFC are highly skilled in filmmaking, they do not have expertise in cataloging nor preservation. It is because of this that it is recommended to hire interns from the University of California Los Angeles' Moving Image Archive Studies program to begin the preservation process and to teach the staff the basics of cataloging and preservation.

Budget and Sources of Income

In 2011 the EPFC brought in $239,725, of which $172,743 was in the form of grants. Currently 70% of the EPFC's funding comes from grants, while 25% comes from store revenue, and the remaining 5% comes from individual donations. The operating costs of EPFC's classes in 2011 were $210,085. This portion of the budget leaves little in the way of operating funds that can be allocated towards the preservation of the Student Film Collection. Funds for preservation must come from grants, and this paper will help to serve as the justification for achieving such funding.

Risk and Environment

Risk Assessment

The most significant threat to the Student Film Collection, as has been mentioned previously, stems from the fact that it has not been organized or cataloged. As a result, there is a substantial risk that any of the films could be lost and no one would realize their absence.

Since the EPFC is not located near a forest or any other natural surroundings, the risk of a forest fire is minimal. However, there is a slight risk that stems from the building neighboring a gas station on the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Alvarado Street. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most catastrophic and greatest likelihood of occurring, the risk of a serious fire (one that would threaten the EPFC) at the gas station is 2.

The threat of a serious fire is also mitigated by the fact that the EPFC is situated in a brick building and is 0.2 miles from the nearest fire department. This fire department, at 2144 West Sunset Boulevard, is estimated to be a 41 second drive from the EPFC.[7]

The EPFC is located in Los Angeles, and is therefore threatened by the increased risk of a serious earthquake. Although minor earthquakes occur frequently in Southern California, there has been

[7] http://maps.google.com Accessed 27 May 2013.

only one earthquake above 6.5 magnitude on the Richter magnitude scale during this century.[8] The collection as it stands now rests in two places, on a wooden bookshelf and in a plastic set of drawers. The materials on the bookshelf are at great risk for earthquake damage as they are not secured to the shelf and can easily fall off the shelf. In the event of an earthquake, the entire bookshelf could tip over. The materials that are in the plastic drawers rest under a table, and are well protected from anything falling on them in the event of an earthquake. Using the same scale used for the risk of the gas station explosion, the risk of an earthquake damaging the collection stands at a 3. This is because there is a greater likelihood of a serious earthquake occurring, than there is of a gas station fire.

The risk of a natural flood damaging the EPFC is minimal because the EPFC is located on the upper section of a hill. In addition, the Los Angeles area rarely receives storms of any significant size, and although parts of the city are threatened by tsunamis, the EPFC is more than 15 miles from the coast.[9] Also, the threat of water damage to the collection due to leaky pipes is minimal because pipes do not run above the Student Film Collection, nor is there a sink in its general vicinity. The risk of water damage to the collection is assessed at 2.

Environmental Conditions

The EPFC is fortunate in that the climate it is located in does not suffer from high humidity or seasonal temperatures that fluctuate greatly. High humidity and fluctuating temperatures can drastically increase deterioration in film. When subjected to these environmental conditions, cellulose acetate (film) undergoes an autocatalytic process which causes acetic acid and moisture to attack the substrate of the film, thus generating more acetic acid. This process is known as “Vinegar Syndrome” and once it begins, it cannot be reversed or halted but only slowed by lowering the temperature and relative humidity.

However, the EPFC does not maintain a constant temperature, because it does not have a climate control system of any type. As Paolo Davanzo, the Executive Director, noted, “There is no

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[8] Southern California Earthquake Data Center at CalTech. “Significant Earthquakes and Faults.” http://www.data.scec.org/significant/chron-index.html Accessed 27 May 2013.

[9] http://maps.google.com/maps?hl=en&tab=wl Accessed 27 May 2013

thermostat. This is California. We simply turn off all the power for the month of July and January and shut the windows. It stays rather "cool" because it is a brick building and the top floor insulates our space."[10]

It should be noted that a significant amount of dust covers the furniture and containers in which the collection is housed. As mentioned previously, many of the Super-8mm films are not in any boxes or containers. Because of this, they are susceptible to dust which can cause abrasions to the film if it is played without first being cleaned. In addition to the abrasions, dust can cause staining and become ground in to the film itself. If this happens, the film must be sent to a film laboratory to be "ultrasonically cleaned." Ultrasonic cleaning is a safe, quick and effective method of cleaning film, but it is an additional expense and the solution used to clean the film (perchloroethylene) is carcinogenic and environmentally toxic.

One of the biggest threats to materials in any collection is Ultra-Violet (UV) light, which can increase deterioration and decay as well as color fading. Fortunately the Student Film Collection is housed beneath a table which is covered with a vinyl table cloth, so little UV light reaches the materials. In addition, the collection is situated in an area with only two regular sized windows, which also reduces the risk of UV rays.

The ideal environmental conditions for the Student Film Collection at the EPFC to exist in would be in a climate-controlled setting in which both temperature and relative humidity[11] are constantly monitored and regulated. The temperature would be kept at a constant 68º F (20º C), and the relative humidity would be at 40%.[12] However, the financial costs for having such a system are prohibitive for an institution like the EPFC due to its financial constraints and small size. In addition to the temperature and humidity being at a constant, there should little if any dust in the institution.

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[10] Paolo Davanzo, <info@echoparkfilmcenter.org>"Quick question regarding the preservation project," 28 May 2013, personal e-mail.

[11] Relative humidity is the ratio of the pressure of the water vapor in the atmosphere to the pressure of the water vapor that is required to saturate the air at the present temperature.

[12] Schuller, Dietrich. "Technology for the Future." In Archives for the Future, edited by Anthony Seeger and Shubha Chaudhuri. India: Seagull Books, 2004.

Current Collection Housing

The Student Film Collection is stored in two separate pieces of furniture. A small portion of the collection rests in a cardboard box, which sits on the second shelf of a wooden bookcase. This portion of the collection consists of plastic reels of Super-8mm footage and 100 foot spools of 16mm film.

The bulk of the collection rests in a plastic cabinet that consists of series of 9 drawers and rests under a wooden table that is covered by a vinyl tablecloth. This portion of the collection consists of Super-8mm film, MiniDV tapes, as well as some CDs. Only a few of these plastic drawers are labelled, and a significant portion of the films and tapes are not labelled. Many of the Super-8mm films in both the bookcase and plastic drawers are not housed in containers of any sort. As a result, they are at risk for dust and damage caused by insects. The films that are in containers, are in containers that are not of acid-free, archival quality. Acid migration occurs when the acid in paper based containers migrates to the materials that are in direct contact with it which can cause structural damage to materials.

April 26, 2013 - The bulk of the Student Film Collection rests in these plastic drawers. - Photo by Susan Etheridge

The housing for the Student Film Collection is inadequate as the collection is growing at a rate that will soon outgrow its current storage situation. If at a minimum, each of the EPFC's students made one 50 foot roll of Super-8mm film or one 60 minute MiniDV tape, the collection would expand by 80 items per year, which is equivalent to one of the plastic drawers in the cabinet. This cabinet is already full, and can not accommodate any more materials.

April 26, 2013 - Materials in the Student Film Collection. On the left are Super-8mm film elements, and on the right are MiniDV tape elements. - Photos by Susan Etheridge

Preservation Plan

Short Term Goals (1-2 Years)

There are several steps that need to be implemented within the first two years of the establishment of this preservation plan. The first and most important, is to obtain a grant to fund the various areas of preservation, namely hiring interns and purchasing materials.

Immediately upon receiving funds, an emergency preparedness kit should be established. This kit should consist of paper towels and sponges to absorb any water that might surround the collection. It should also consist of several bottles of distilled water that can be used to rinse the materials, such as the MiniDV tapes, should a disaster such as a flood occur. Although the risk of a flood is minimal, one should always be prepared. In addition to this, if a serious earthquake occurred, there could be a lack of clean water to drink. Batteries and flashlights should also be placed in the kit, as the electricity could be out for days in the event of a disaster. Non-perishable food items that do not require electricity or water to prepare should also be placed in this kit.

An air purifier that uses a HEPA filter, should be purchased and installed shortly after funds are received. This purifier will be used to to curtail the significant amount of dust that surrounds the area where the Student Film Collection is stored.

Although a climate-control system would be desirable for the EPFC since it does not have any form of temperature or humidity regulation, this is not recommended for two reasons. First, the EPFC does not own the building it is located in, and second, this would require a significant amount of additional funding. The climate of Los Angeles is such that temperatures do not shift as much as they do in other areas in the country, and also the relative humidity is rather low.

After purchasing the air cleaner, the next step should be to hire an intern or two from the University of California, Los Angeles' Moving Image Archive Studies Program[13]. These interns would begin organizing and cataloging the collection, while simultaneously cleaning its materials. Preferably they will have taken at a cataloging class or had some experience in cataloging, or will have some experience handling film. In turn, these interns could inform staff and volunteers how the collection is organized, and how to clean and maintain its materials. The staff or volunteers could then pass this knowledge down to future interns. It is suggested that the cataloging be done using common software, such as Microsoft Excel. This will prevent the problems that could exist when staff, volunteers or other interns access the catalog because they will be familiar with the software. Interns should also develop a workflow for cataloging, cleaning, and digitizing materials as they come in.

Materials such as split reels and particle tacky rollers for cleaning the elements will need to be purchased. While cleaning the elements, they should also be rehoused in new containers. CDs should be placed in Corrosion Intercept CD protectors, which will neutralize all corrosive gases that come in contact with the disks. According to the vendor, Talas, these protectors have been shown to "greatly improve the life of conventional CDs."[14]

After cleaning, Super-8mm films should be wound to new archival grade reels and housed in polystyrene containers. These see through containers are sturdy enough to be stacked on top of each other, without damaging any of the film inside. In addition, labels can be easily placed either on top of the container or on the sides, which will allow easy identification of the films. The 16mm films should be undergo similar rehousing to archival grade films and containers. The VHS tape

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[13] UCLA Deparment of Information Studies: MIAS Program.
http://is.gseis.ucla.edu/academics/degrees/mias/program/program.htm

[14] Talas. "Corrosion Intercept CD Protectors."
http://apps.webcreate.com/ecom/catalog/product_specific.cfm?ClientID=15&ProductID=25304 Accessed: 28 May 2013

should be rehoused in a translucent polypropylene case. As for the MiniDV tapes, there does not appear to be a need to rehouse them, since archival grade containers can not be found.

During the processes of cataloging and cleaning, the elements in the Student Film Collection should also be transferred digitally using the film and video transfer equipment that the EPFC already owns. For best results in following preservation principles, it is preferable to transfer the footage from the MiniDV tapes using a Firewire cable and the same type of equipment the footage was recorded on. Doing this enables the retention of data in its original form without new encoding, loss of metadata, or digital generation loss. In addition to this, the timecode and recording information are also retained.[15] The digitized elements should then be uploaded to a 'Cloud Storage' system such as Dropbox.

New storage furniture should also be purchased for the Student Film Collection, preferably furniture that maximizes space. Mobile stacking drawers that come in customizable sizes would be best for this since they can be customized to fit into any space and can be easily moved if necessary.

Medium to Long Term Goals (5-10 years)

In 5-10 years after the preservation plan for the Student Film Collection has been implemented, it will be important to review the process and see if any changes are necessary to the workflow. Items will still be cataloged, cleaned, and digitized as they enter the collection. Grants should be applied for as needed so that the "Cloud Storage" can be renewed on a yearly basis. In addition to this, grants can also fund the purchase of new cleaning tools to replace those that have worn out, and other items. Additional mobile stacking drawers and additional housing materials will need to be purchased as the collection grows. The elements in the collection should be inspected every six months, and the tapes should be rewound as well.

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[15] Rice, David. Lacinak, Chris. "Digital Tape Preservation Strategy: Preserving Data or Video?" 2 December 2009. http://www.avpreserve.com/dvanalyzer/dv-preservation-data-or-video/. Accessed 28 May 2013.

Project Budget and Materials

Description	Quantity	Unit Price	Cost
Emergency Preparedness Kit			
Advantus Rolling Storage Box with Snap Lid, 15-Gallon Size	1	$35.00	$35.00
Poland Spring Water 35 half-liter bottles	1	$17.00	$17.00
CLIF Mojo Trail Mix Bar, Variety Pack - 1.6 oz. - 24 ct	1	$31.00	$31.00
Maglite M2A01H AA Mini Flashlight and Holster Combo-Pack	3	$9.00	$27.00
Energizer Industrial "AA" Alkaline Batteries, 24/Pkg	1	$12.00	$12.00
Air Purifier			
Honeywell Black True HEPA Compact Tower Allergen Remover, HPA-050	1	$110.00	$110.00
Film Cleaning Supplies			
Rewinder plain, (for winding film)	2	$205.00	$410.00
Universal Shaft for Rewinder	2	$83.00	$166.00
16mm 400 ft Aluminum Split Reel	2	$64.00	$128.00
Particle Transfer Roller - PTR Film Cleaner Unit w/ 2 rollers	1	$910.00	$910.00
Archival Storage Containers			
Intercept 4 1/2" diameter CD Jewel Case Insert	10	$0.90	$9.00
Polystyrene 8mm Film Reel & Can Set 200ft (48/carton)	3	$125.00	$375.00
Preservation Quality Vented Film Cans 16mm 400ft	4	$5.00	$20.00
Preservation Quality 16mm Core 3in.	4	$1.05	$4.20
Sleeveless Dust Free Video Case 8H x 4 3/4W x 1 1/8"D Clear	1	$3.00	$3.00
DYMO LabelManager 160 Hand Held Label Maker	1	$16.00	
Storage Furniture			
Like-it® Translucent Stacking Drawers (Small)	12	$25.00	$300.00
Like-it® Casters White Set of 4	3	$6.00	$18.00
Cloud Storage			
Dropbox for Business (requires yearly renewal)	1	$800.00	$800.00
		Subtotal	$3,375.20
	California State Sales Tax	7.50%	$253.14
		Total	**$3,628.34**

Emergency Preparedness Kit:

Advantus Rolling Storage Box with Snap Lid, 15-Gallon Size
http://amzn.com/B0006VQPM0

Poland Spring Water 35 half-liter bottles
http://amzn.com/B0069FTP0G

CLIF Mojo Trail Mix Bar, Variety Pack - 1.6 oz. - 24 ct
http://amzn.com/B00CYTNETO

Maglite M2A01H AA Mini Flashlight and Holster Combo-Pack
http://amzn.com/B00002N6SN

Energizer Industrial "AA" Alkaline Batteries, 24/Pkg
http://amzn.com/B00CYS5344

Air Purifier

Honeywell Black True HEPA Compact Tower Allergen Remover, HPA-050
http://amzn.com/B003DKHEUS

Film Cleaning Supplies

Rewinder plain, (for winding film)
http://www.eepco.com/catalog4.htm

Universal Shaft for Rewinder
http://www.eepco.com/catalog4.htm

16mm 400 ft Aluminum Split Reel
http://www.eepco.com/catalog5.htm

Particle Transfer Roller - PTR Film Cleaner Unit w/ 2 rollers
http://store.christys.net/shop/product_info.php?products_id=1864

Archival Storage Containers

Intercept 4 1/2" diameter CD Jewel Case Insert
http://www.hollingermetaledge.com/modules/store/index.html?dept=26&cat=1375

Polystyrene 8mm Film Reel & Can Set 200ft (48/carton)
http://www.tuscancorp.com/8mm-film-reel.html

Archival Storage Containers (continued.)

Preservation Quality Vented Film Cans 16mm 400ft
Preservation Quality 16mm Core 3in.
http://www.hollingermetaledge.com/modules/store/index.html?dept=25&cat=147

Sleeveless Dust Free Video Case 8H x 4 3/4W x 1 1/8"D Clear
http://www.gaylord.com/adblock.asp?abid=2062

DYMO LabelManager 160 Hand Held Label Maker
http://amzn.com/B005X9VZ70

Storage Furniture

Like-it® Translucent Stacking Drawers (Small)
Like-it® Casters White Set of 4
http://www.containerstore.com/shop/storage/drawers?productId=10027583&N=62561

Cloud Storage

Dropbox for Business (requires yearly renewal)
https://www.dropbox.com/business/pricing

Appendix

Susan Etheridge
Professor Ellen Pearlstein
IS 432 - Issues and Problems in Preservation of Heritage Materials
4/30/2013

PROJECT 1 - ECHO PARK FILM CENTER

The Echo Park Film Center (EPFC), is a non-profit media arts organization located Los Angeles, California. According to its mission statement, the EPFC is, "committed to providing equal and affordable community access to film/video resources via five channels: a neighborhood microcinema space, free and nominal cost education programs, a comprehensive film equipment and service retail department, a green-energy mobile cinema & film school, and a touring film festival showcasing local established and emerging filmmakers."[16]

The EPFC provides free instruction, materials, and equipment for its youth classes, which are held for students under the age of 19. The EPFC also offers low-cost classes to adults and others who lack media tools and software skills. These classes and workshops are taught at the EPFC's Echo Park location, as

[16] EPFC Mission & History. "Mission Statement". http://echoparkfilmcenter.org/about%20us/mission.html. Accessed Monday, April 29, 2013

well as its 'Filmmobile'. The Filmmobile is an eco-friendly bus that serves as both a mobile theater and film school, and it takes the EPFC's programs on the road to "facilitate media arts exchanges".[17]

Each year the EPFC holds four sessions of youth classes (Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall) with each class containing between 25 to 40 students. In addition to this, it holds adult workshops throughout the year, with approximately 40 people attending these workshops per year. Subjects of the films students have made range from immigration, culture, family relationships, and the Los Angeles River. Free from the monetary imperatives of filmmaking, student films are a more honest depiction of Angeleno life. These films serve as a time capsule of Los Angeles in the early part of this century, and will be a valuable information resource for scholars and historians in the future.

The classes that the EPFC has taught over the 11 years of its existence have resulted in a small collection of student films and videos. The EPFC faces numerous challenges in regards to the preservation of these works, with the most serious being that none of the works are organized or cataloged in any fashion. Other challenges facing the collection include the methods and furniture in which they are housed, the lack of dedicated staff to organize and preserve the collection, and the absence of funds for tackling these problems.

In 2011 the EPFC took in $239,725, of which $172,743 was in the form of grants. Currently, 70% of the EPFC's funding comes from grants, while 25% comes from store revenue, screenings, and adult tuition, and the remaining 5% comes from individual donations. In 2011, the cost of EPFC's classes was

[17] Echo Park Center Filmmobile. http://echoparkfilmcenter.org/filmmobile/filmmobile.html. Accessed Monday, April 29, 2013

$210,085, leaving little in the way of operating funds to allocate towards preserving materials.

As mentioned previously, the lack of organization and cataloging is a huge impediment to the proper preservation of this small collection. I counted the following items in the collection: 122 plastic reels containing approximately 900 feet of Super-8mm film, 44 metal spools containing approximately 4400 feet of 16mm acetate film, 395 MiniDV tapes containing approximately 23,700 minutes of footage, 2 Hi-8 tapes containing approximately 240 minutes of footage, 1 VHS tape, and 5 compact discs (CDs) containing approximately 3,700 MB of audio. None of these items were organized or cataloged in any fashion, and numerous items were not even labelled.

Although DVDs have been made of the works students have produced, without proper organization it would be a laborious task to ascertain what footage exists on each item. Without knowing exactly what footage is in the collection, it is problematic at this time to determine which of these works is the most valuable and in the most need of preservation. Another difficulty that stems from this lack of organization is that it is difficult to provide access to these materials so they can be viewed on a regular basis. Periodic viewing of these items would increase their inherent value and the likelihood that they would be preserved for future viewing.

The EPFC is a small institution with only three full-time employees, supplemented by two teaching assistants per class, and 12-15 volunteers. None of these staff handle the items on a regular basis, and none are trained in archival methods. Due to the limited funding of the EPFC, there are not enough resources to hire additional staff, or to train them in archival methods. This is perhaps the main reason why the EPFC's student film collection remains unorganized.

Currently the furniture used to store the collection consists of one shelf on a wooden bookcase, and a series of plastic drawers in a plastic cabinet. The shelf contains a box which contains 50-foot plastic reels of Super-8mm films, and 100-foot metal spools of 16mm film in plastic containers. The plastic cabinet has numerous plastic drawers, only some of which are labelled. The materials in these drawers are composed of MiniDV tapes and Super-8mm films as well as some compact discs. The compact discs are in plastic containers, as well as most of the MiniDV tapes. Most of the Super-8mm films in the collection are not in containers that would protect them from dust or biological threats such as insects or mold. Those that are in containers are in non-archival quality paperboard boxes, which are neither acid nor lignin free.

The student film collection grows at a rate that will soon outgrow its current storage situation. If, at a minimum, each student made either one 50-foot roll of Super-8mm film, or one 60-minute MiniDV videotape, than the collection would expand in the amount of 80 items per year. This is the equivalent of one drawer full of the plastic cabinet that is currently used to store the student film collection, and this cabinet is already full.

It is important to note that a large amount of dust covers the furniture and containers that store the items in the collection. As mentioned previously, there are many Super-8mm films that are not housed in any box or container. In regards to the videotapes that are not in containers, they differ from the Super-8mm films in that they are somewhat protected by the shells that house the tape.

In addition to the lack of proper housing, the EPFC does not have a set of film winders, split reels and particle transfer rollers (PTRs); tools that would used to clean and repair film. PTRs are reusable rollers that have a urethane coating that

removes dust as film is wound through them. PTRs' major benefits are that they take up little storage and require no electricity to operate.

However, in order to properly maintain the films in the collection, an area that is free of dust and separate from the main areas of the center would be needed. Although this area could be small, no larger than 10 square feet, the EPFC does not have the space nor the resources to expand to accommodate such an area. The current workspace that could be used to clean the items is a large wooden table, under which the storage cabinet sits. This table is covered in a plastic table cloth, which is easy to clean and remove dust. Although this table is acceptable, ideally a "light table" would be used for inspecting and cleaning the films. An air purifier would be needed as well, in order to keep dust, mold, pollen, etc. to a minimum.

One of the main concerns the EPFC has is where and how to store the materials in the student collection. The EPFC can not have off-site storage, since once these materials are organized, they would need to be accessed on a regular basis. Digitizing the items and then placing them in 'Cloud'-based storage is cost-prohibitive for the EPFC's limited budget, and this would not eliminate the issue of storing the physical items themselves. Hard drive storage also is not a simple solution as hard drives can be easily damaged and lose information if not properly handled.

The EPFC realizes that a plan needs to be developed in order to preserve the materials in its student collection, and there are several issues that need to be prioritized in order to begin the preservation process. Although the collection is small, the EPFC would first need to obtain a grant in order to fund the various aspects of the preservation process. Once a grant is obtained the EPFC could address the staffing issue by either hiring a consultant or an intern to organize, catalog and

clean the materials. Since the collection is small, once it is organized, a part-time employee could maintain it. In addition to the tools needed for cleaning, proper archival grade containers and storage furniture would be purchased with the funds from this grant.