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MIAP Final Project
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14 Dec. 2009

William K. Everson Collection

Throughout this semester, I have been working with the William K. Everson Collection located in the New York University Cinema Studies Department Archives at 665 Broadway, New York, NY. This project, though initially proposed as entailing a more extensive approach, has narrowed to focus on a few aspects, while still maintaining ideas for further development of the collection. In addition to a general collection assessment, I focused my main efforts on restoring the 16mm film prints in the Everson collection. Lastly, I have devised a plan for a better in-house storage system for digital media and metadata.

William K. Everson was an extremely influential figure among film students, scholars, and historians in New York City, particularly from the 1960s through the 1980s. He was a silent film historian and expert and was dedicated to preserving silent films **and B-films** from the 1940s, and earlier, that would have been otherwise lost or abandoned. He was founding member of the Theodore Huff Film Society, which also included Charlie Chaplin biographer Theodore Huff, film critic Seymour Stern, and *Variety* writer Herman G. Weinberg. This group screened many of Everson's silent films, for which Everson would prepare extensive Program Notes. These Notes were critical analyses of the films to be screened, as well as Everson's academic thoughts and opinions. Many of Everson's screenings consisted of B films, or those previously overlooked in an academic setting.¹

¹ Wikipedia "William K. Everson," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_K_Everson.

Everson, as a pioneer of preservation and an extremely knowledgeable film scholar, taught at NYU's Cinema Studies program from 1972 to 1996, at the New School for Social Research, and at the School of Visual Arts. Upon his death in 1996, his widow, Karen Everson, donated his extensive paper collection to the NYU archives. During the same time, NYU purchased a large portion of Everson's film prints, which are also partially housed in the NYU archives.²

As an invaluable component to New York University's Cinema Studies and Moving Image Archiving and Preservation programs, the William K. Everson collection holds thousands of original source materials. Proper storage and access to this Collection should be established and maintained so that students, historians, and scholars alike can glean information and research from Everson's extensive lifework and collection.

Paper Collection

The Paper Collection, which was donated to New York University Cinema Studies Department by Everson's widow, Karen, was acquired in 1998. It is located in room 638 of the archives and is currently being stored in regulated climate conditions. The temperature fluctuates between 68 degrees Fahrenheit and 73 degrees Fahrenheit, but it is usually maintained around 70 degrees F. The humidity is normally around 50%. Despite some fluctuations, the Papers are stored in good conditions in a controlled manner.

The Collection has been organized into thirteen series, with subseries where necessary. The corresponding Finding Aid, which is a work in progress, was originally begun by Charley Leary, but for the past five years has been reformed by Nate Brennan.

² "William K. Everson Collection," New York University Cinema Studies, <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/wke/bio.htm>.

Before Charley, MA graduate Alice Black and archivist Anne-Marie Cook worked on the Papers Collection. Nate's extensive work on the project has been integral to the progress of the Collection, and has allowed for a very simple, yet comprehensive index for the archival structure of the physical documents. Labeling on all materials is composed of a numbering system that matches the series and sub-series numbers and letters on the finding aid. The Finding Aid outline is as follows:

William K. Everson Papers Finding Aid

- Series I – Film society and film festival program materials
 - Sub-series A – Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society
 - Sub-series B – New School
 - Sub-series C – Misc. WKE Notes
 - Sub-series D – Film festival programs and catalogues
- Series II – Film industry materials
- Series III – Clippings files
- Series IV – Press materials
 - Sub-series A – hanging file press materials
 - Sub-series B – oversize press materials
 - Sub-Series C – double-oversize press materials
- Series V – Legal documents
 - Sub-series A – WKE related
 - Sub-series B – non-WKE related
- Series VI – Manuscripts
 - Sub-series A – manuscripts written by WKE
 - Sub-series B – manuscripts written by others
 - Sub-series C – WKE class notes
- Series VII – Screenplay, dialogues, continuities, and scenarios
- Series VIII – Correspondences
- Series IX – Film literature
 - Sub-series A – periodicals
 - Sub-series B – books
 - Sub-series C – published screenplays
 - Sub-series D – catalogues
 - Sub-series E – reference books by author
 - Sub-series F – reference books by title
 - Sub-series G – oversize literature
- Series X – Audio Materials
- Series XI – Photographs and film stills
- Series XII – Movie theater programs and handbills
- Series XIII – Miscellaneous

Access to the Paper Collection

Due to the immense quantity of documents and articles in the Paper Collection, simply organizing them into this comprehensive structure is quite a monumental task. Furthermore, because the original finding aid and organization was begun by Charley, but is now being continued and renovated by Nate, every document must be looked at a second time in order to ensure that it is correctly placed **according to** the structure of the Finding Aid and labeled correctly **within the Archive. Nate's Finding Aid outline and corresponding Word document listing all of these items is currently only available for employee usage within the Archive.** Lastly, because Nate has only been able to work on the Paper Collection sparingly for the past several months, the progress has slowed significantly. However, his structure has greatly improved upon the last organization of the Collection, and it is now beginning to near completion.

As of right now, Everson's book collection (Series IX, sub-series B), his Program Notes from his numerous film screenings (Series I, sub-series A-D), some Press Materials (Series IV), and a few Photographs (Series XI) are the portions of the Paper Collection that are available for access outside the archive.

Everson's books are currently available in the Study Center Library database, through Filemaker Pro, a program that allows for searching in any field of metadata (title, author, year, etc.) so they are fairly easy to access for students and faculty. **A user would access these materials by searching for them on a Study Center computer through the Filemaker Pro database and requesting the specific item needed, which would then be physically delivered to the Study Center from the Archive.**

The remaining portion of the Paper Collection that is accessible from outside the

archive, **while not physically accessible**, is available for **digital** public use on the Everson Webpage through the NYU Cinema Studies website, specifically through a URL in the NYU projects directory.³

Publication Attempts

The publication of Everson's Program Notes was discussed a few times, but nothing came of these attempts. On November 2, 1999, a meeting took place with Bill Simon, Richard Allen, Bob Sklar, Karen Everson, Ann Harris, and Cathy Surowiec. Although several ideas about the publication of Everson's notes were discussed, no plan was ever successful. In the spring of 2000, Ann helped Karen compose a package of material to be considered by Routledge, but it was eventually turned down. During this time, a former Everson student, Peter Rist, proposed the development of a self-published CD-Rom of the Program Notes, but this idea did not transpire.⁴

The publication of Everson's notes may be doomed to failure due to lack of funding and the extremely specific focus of the notes. Although they are undeniably valuable and rich with information, they concern such a narrow niche of film that they are difficult to pitch to a publisher due to the potential lack of sales. If funding were available, NYU could consider sending these materials out to be professionally compiled into one or more books or volumes. The final product could be made available at the Study Center Library.

The Next Phase

The next phase of access for the Paper Collection will be with other sub-series

³ <http://www.nyu.edu/projects/wke/>

⁴ Ann Harris, email correspondence, December 8, 2009.

within the Film Literature Series (IX). This will primarily include Periodicals (sub-series A), which make up a significant portion of Everson's Collection. Although the Periodicals are already compiled in a separate database (from the Books), this database is not currently in the departmental periodicals database, **but may be made available in the same manner as the Books in the near future.**

There are many pragmatic issues to consider with the proper access and care of the Periodicals, mainly due to the fragile condition of these materials. Archival dust covers, proper application of catalog labels, and the physical transfer and user handling of these materials all must be taken into consideration before they can be made available.

Further Access Suggestions

Further access to various Everson materials will need to be dealt with on a categorical and case-to-case basis. While some materials, such as the photographs, are relevant to public access, others, such as Everson's correspondences, are much too personal to be placed in the public, or even NYU departmental, realm of access.

Furthermore, as with the Periodicals, other portions of the Papers Collection are quite fragile, so their condition must be considered and preserved as much as possible. Access to the collection must not jeopardize the condition or integrity of the Collection.

In addition to the Periodicals database intended for use at the Study Center, access on the webpage should be considered for other portions of the Collection. **While some materials, such as the Periodicals, would be more appropriately accessed physically through the Study Center, others, such as the Program Notes, are more feasibly scanned into digital files for web access.** Miscellaneous materials, including Dracula,

Frankenstein, and Nosferatu dolls; reel-to-reel tapes; photographs, and film production materials can be photographed and uploaded to the webpage for immediate public access.

Another way to show these materials might include a showcase at a location on campus, such as at 721 Broadway, in the Tisch building, so that students concerned with film can gain familiarity to this invaluable collection. Display cases could include various books, periodicals, Program Notes, and film production materials in addition to the miscellaneous odds and ends, as a way to illustrate the broadness of the Collection. Pamphlets could advertise the webpage, as well as availability at the Study Center Library, in order to increase awareness among the NYU community.

Lastly, a browsing guide could be composed for use at the Study Center Library, which could list the books and periodicals in a single, printed document so that students and faculty could browse through the accessible portion of the Collection in a more tangible way, **since physical browsing at the Archive is not possible**. This would alleviate the necessity to know a title before searching for it, and allow for browsers to see the entire accessible portion of the Collection in one place. The guide could simply include book titles and authors, as well as the various periodical titles and dates of available issues. This guide could be created from printing pages from Filemaker Pro, or compiling information from this program into Microsoft Word. It would differ from the Finding Aid because it would only include items available for use at the Study Center.

Digital Media

PhD student Charley Leary and archive director Ann Harris began the Everson Collection webpage in 2006 as an easy way to make portions of the Everson Collection

publicly available. Initially, the website was located in the Moving Images Archiving and Preservation web directory, so Howard Besser was the sponsor. Later, Charley applied for a separate URL within the NYU projects directory, and Ann Harris replaced Howard and is currently listed as the sponsor. Charley Leary produced a large amount of work on the website, in addition to his initial organization of the paper materials, until he graduated in 2007.

Following Charley, Cynthia Su, a Cinema Studies undergraduate managed the website until she graduated and left to work at Criterion. Cara Shatzman, a Film and TV undergraduate, followed Cynthia with website management, but she recently left this fall to work at Criterion as well. Her participation with the Collection may continue when she is not as busy at Criterion. Currently, Andrew Chan, a Cinema Studies MA second-year student is the manager of the website.⁵

Currently, the website consists of Everson's Program Notes, various film Press Kits, a few photographs, and a Finding Aid for the entire Everson Paper Collection. Although the **online Finding Aid, which is a different document from Nate's Papers Collection Finding Aid**, is a complete list of the entire Collection. **It is available in PDF or HTML format**, and fulfils its purpose, **but** it is mainly inoperable to an average web user **because it is merely a giant list of every piece of source material in alphabetical order with no links or other searchable capacities**. The application of links to items within the Finding Aid would transform it into a more practical, functional list.

Problems with the Digital Workflow

⁵ Ann Harris, email correspondence, December 8, 2009.

Numerous issues pervade the management of the website, including disorganization, lack of consistent or standardized workflow, lack of computer science knowledge among staff, precarious back-up methods, erratic management, the quick turnaround of staff, and the lack of staff trained to work on the website. All of these problems plague the website with perpetual incompleteness. Although the webpage is in working condition, and is satisfactorily presented and managed, these problems are critical hindrances to the overall quality of the Collection.

Specific complications with the website are a result of the faulty HP desktop computer **and its Windows operating system** used for creating the webpages, which often times crashes, resulting in corrupted or lost files. Furthermore, because there is not a standardized workflow, different staff members have used different methods to create the webpages, and therefore, files are stored in various locations. Paradoxically, this problem is mute at this time because Andrew is the only employee working on the website.

Although Cara created instructions for the conversion of Program Notes from TIFF files to HTML, using Photoshop Express, an optical character recognition (OCR) program, and Dreamweaver, specifics of the workflow remain undefined. The proper storage and location of files remains arbitrary. The two external hard drives which are supposed to mimic each other, and have back-up files of the conversion of these Program Notes in its entirety do not necessarily contain the same files because they must be manually managed **by the employee currently working on the webpage**. Lastly, the location of files on the internal hard drive of the HP desktop computer is sometimes extremely disorganized, making it difficult for newly trained staff members to learn and complete the work of the website.

*Suggestions for Digital Media Archiving*⁶

Immediate, short-term solutions to these problems include the establishment of a standardized workflow with meticulously detailed, written instructions of how to work with the website. While Cara's preliminary model for the instructions is quite helpful, it is not detailed enough for an incoming staff member. Furthermore, the disorganization of the multiple storage locations for the files needs to be repaired to a coherent and consistent structure.

A more lasting solution for the entire digitalization process concerns the hardware, software, and equipment. A small business network can be set up on the sixth floor of 665 Broadway for the sole use of the Archives. This network will be wired to all the workstations on the floor, as well as wirelessly available to laptops or disparate workstations through a wireless router. The network server will run Linux Ubuntu, which is much more reliable and stable than Windows or Mac, and can be specifically arranged to cater to the needs of the Archive. **Ubuntu is more reliable because it is open source, allowing any user to look at the source code; it elucidates bugs faster; and it receives updates sooner for the end user. Furthermore, the non-profit ideology of Linux and the widespread use of Linux as a server platform worldwide is arguably superior to the ideals and user capabilities of either Windows or Mac.**

2 x 1 TB drives with redundant data storage will be housed within the server box, which will provide a stable and easily accessible back-up system for everyone at the Archive. Although there will be two drives, using RAID (Redundant Array of Independent

⁶ All digital media networking suggestions derived from consultation with Matt Bogel, computer scientist and willing candidate for the set-up of the network at 665 Broadway.

Disks), they will appear as one drive to users, and Ubuntu will make them “act” as one single 1 TB drive, while simultaneously allowing for an automatic copy of all of the data on the second drive. In this way, system crashes that could jeopardize the files or result in the total loss of documents will be prevented due to the mirroring, duplication, and striping of data across the two disks. It will also allow for parity data and detection of internal problems.

Although the server will run Linux Ubuntu for faster and more efficient processing, users at their various stations throughout the Archive will still be able to use the pre-established operating systems of existing computers. Therefore, access to the server will be immediate and simple for users at 665 Broadway. Outside access will be permissible under the jurisdiction of the network administrators at 665. In this way, uploading webpages to the NYU projects directory server will be as simple and easy as before. Also, computers connected to the network can remain the same, using existing operating systems and programs, as only the server operating system will necessarily be running Ubuntu.

The cost of this network set up can be as low as \$500, and will not only benefit the Everson Collection, but also the entire digital realm of the Archive. Users will be able to use this secure storage space for all other projects at the Archive, which will save time and money in the long term. It will prevent the loss of files from individual computers or drives, and eliminate the constant use of highly unstable and breaking flash drives that seem to be used for the backup of many projects within the Archive.

Film Collection

The Everson Film Collection was acquired in 1998 when the sales contract between Karen Everson and Tisch was signed, despite a lengthy legal process and a multitude of departmental meetings. At this time, Tisch also signed a deposit agreement with George Eastman House to manage and store 4380 reels of primarily 16mm prints. An additional 380 16mm prints were delivered to the NYU Cinema Studies archive, where they are currently housed today. Even though both the Papers Collection and the Film Collection came entirely from Everson, they are considered different entities because Tisch purchased the Film Collection while the Papers Collection was donated.⁷

Storage and Cataloging

All 380 films in the NYU archive are stored in **the best** climate conditions **feasibly possible at their location**. The temperature is usually stabilized at 66 degrees Fahrenheit, with 36% humidity, **which, like the Papers Collection, is vigilantly controlled and maintained**. These films are all catalogued in the departmental database, available at the Study Center Library, and will soon be merged with the video collection. Additionally, a paper catalog of the films is located on inspection cards at the archive, which contain metadata concerning film repairs, repairers, the number of splices, whether or not the film was cleaned, and other inspection information. These cards are stored alphabetically by film title, and contain the call number of the film in the upper right-hand corner, which begins with "ES," standing for Everson Shorts, and is followed by a four to five digit number. Various NYU student inspectors, including current employees Liza Greenfield and Zack Lischer Katz, have worked on these films. A database for the George Eastman House

⁷ Ann Harris, email correspondence, December 9, 2009.

films is, and will likely remain, separate from the NYU archive.⁸

Repairing the Film Collection

Despite the excellent conditions of the climate in the film archive, most of these films are lapsing into disrepair due to minimal usage and previous improper use and storage. I spent the bulk of my time and efforts for this project restoring the films to better storage conditions, which mostly dealt with going through each film to see if maintenance was required.

This process included checking for tape that no longer held the leader down, re-leading when the leaders were missing, re-labeling leaders and cans, and rewinding films if they were poorly wound. Proper tail leaders (red) and head leaders (blue) are tape spliced to the film, are six to eight feet in length, and contain the following information twice on each: "Tail/Head, Property of Department of Cinema Studies – NYU, film title, and film call number." This metadata corresponds with the film can and the catalog card for each film. Academy leaders were also added to films that were lacking them, in between the head leader and the start of the film. The academy leaders were hot-spliced to the film, and tape spliced to the head leaders. **Hot-splicing is usually the preferred method of splicing, as opposed to tape-splicing, because the bond is stronger and will last a longer projection life. However, tape-splicing must be used to attach the tail and head leaders to the film because these leaders are usually made solely of plastic, with no emulsion or base, but rather a solid, single material. Hot-splicing is done by scraping the emulsion off of the film, applying a splicing cement to the scraped area,**

⁸ Ibid.

and then pressing the other piece of film onto this area with a hot-splicer. The heat bonds the two pieces together in a lasting hold. Hot-splicing is impossible with plastic leaders because the cement does not adhere to that material.

After leader repairs, each film was rewound tightly and properly, with the tail leader not taped to the reel (to prevent unnecessary tension when the film reaches its end in projection) and the head leader taped down to prevent unwinding and looseness during storage. Each film was then re-shelved to its proper location, in ascending order of the call numbers. **I repaired approximately 280 of the 380 Everson films, spending about 25 hours on this portion of the project.**

Suggestions for Further Access

Although these films are readily available for departmental use through the database, the digitization of the films for academic purposes would help to preserve the physical condition of the films **because it would limit improper projection use, if, through better advertisement of the Collection, these films became more usable and, more importantly, it would** make departmental use easier. While these films should be available for projection, people might be more enticed to make use of them if they were not only available in the film format. **Furthermore, since these films are rarely projected now, digitization would promote their existence within the NYU community. This could be performed** on the telecine transfer, **owned by the Archive**, by converting these films to AVI files, which would then be available for transfer to DVDs or for immediate digital use within the new archive network. **Digital backup of these films would be done in exactly the same manner as the suggested methods for backup of website**

materials using the new RAID server. However, because NYU does not own the copyright over these films like they do of the Program Notes (which were purchased from the original owner's widow), copyright violation may be committed if these films were made accessible on the Everson website. Digital use within the NYU community, however, would be much less prone to copyright violation due to the Fair Use provision of copyright law and the academic usage act that permits this, even though it may be terminated at the end of this year.

Conclusion

The Everson Collection has become a tripartite system. In addition to the Papers and the Film portions, the Digital Collection now exists, and though it overlaps with both other parts, it must be considered another important aspect of the whole Collection.

This assessment and in-depth documentation has evaluated the entirety of William K. Everson's legacy that is now housed in the archives at 665 Broadway. Although the Collection has been assessed in very good condition, there are many improvements that can be arranged and performed, as I have listed throughout this report. In addition to the immediate efforts of repairing the films, I am also proposing a plan for the improvement of the digital realm as well as various other suggestions for modes for better physical access to Everson's Collection. The Everson Collection contains thousands of irreplaceable materials, many of which are the sole existing documents of silent films from the 1920s through the 1940s. This invaluable Collection deserves to be properly preserved and made as accessible as possible to the public and NYU community.

Contacts

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