

Nonprint media preservation

A guide to resources on the Web

by Katherine Pennavaria

Magnetic tape is just a disaster for an archival storage medium.—"Into the Future"¹

Do you know what the average shelf life of standard VHS videotape is? Ten to fifteen years. For CDs, the shelf life is yet unknown, but the best estimates don't go beyond 100 years. A book printed on acid-free paper will last 500 years or more, but for audiovisual media, the picture is truly sobering.

The preservation of film, CDs, and tapes is a problem almost all libraries have. Everyone wants to ensure the preservation of these recordings—the question is how. Well, every library that owns film and tapes can do something. Armed with sufficient information, librarians and their staff can at least improve the state of their nonprint collections, even if they cannot rescue them from their inevitable obsolescence. To this end, I offer here an overview of Web resources.

Note: The topic of ongoing digitization to preserve materials is outside the scope of this list of resources, but because it is related, I give a few references on this topic at the end of the article, including one that considers the validity of digitization as a preservation method.

General resources

• **American Library Association: Preservation Policy.** The ALA policy is essentially based on its goal of ensuring that "every person has access to information at the time needed and in a usable format." This policy statement (revised in 2001)

covers the preservation of digital information. *Access:* http://www.ala.org/Content/ContentGroups/ALCTS1/Publications10/Web_Publications/Preservation3/ALA_Preservation_Policy/ALA_Preservation_Policy.htm.



• **"Into the Future: On the Preservation of Knowledge in the Electronic Age."** If you need a wake-up call about the problem of nonprint information storage, order and watch a video called "Into the Future" (1997) by Terry Sanders. Funded by the Commission on Preservation and Access and the American Council of Learned Societies, this one-hour show presents incontrovertible evidence that digital and tape storage methods, which vary widely and are often incompatible with each other, are on a fast track to disaster: Digital data, which comprises today almost all government and institutional information, requires some kind of application to read it, and tape requires special machines. The question asked here is, will those applications and machines be around in 100 years? This powerful video can be ordered from the producers, the American Film Foundation, at their site. *Access:* http://www.americanfilmfoundation.com/order/into_the_future.html.

About the author

Katherine Pennavaria is the coordinator of Western Kentucky University's extended campus library in Glasgow, Kentucky, e-mail: k.pennavaria@wku.edu

• **Jim Lindner: "Magnetic Tape Deterioration."** In this article, which originally appeared in the February 1996 issue of *Video* magazine, Lindner gives his views on the subject of tape deterioration. Lindner is a major player in the videotape restoration game. As a result of his continuing efforts in this field (he testified as a witness and panel member for the Library of Congress study on videotape preservation), Lindner founded Vidipax, a company dedicated to videotape restoration (see Preservation Services). His manner of expressing himself is vivacious and effective: "Like so many lemming leaping off a cliff, hopeful technicians continue the search for a single 'Holy Grail' cleaning solution for master recordings." *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/lindner/tidal.html>.

• **John W. C. VanBogart: "Magnetic Tape Storage and Handling—A Guide for Libraries and Archives."** This 1995 report, a joint project of the Commission on Preservation and Access and the National Media Laboratory, was developed within the Commission's Preservation Science Research initiative. The initiative "encourages new techniques and technologies to manage chemical deterioration in library and archival collections and to extend their useful life." The report is somewhat technical, but includes some excellent illustrations and should be required reading for all audiovisual librarians. *Access:* <http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub54/index.html>.

Organizations

• **Association of Moving Image Archivists (AMIA).** AMIA fosters cooperation among individuals and organizations concerned with the preservation, among other things, of moving images materials. They publish a quarterly newsletter and maintain a discussion list (see Journals and also Discussion Lists). *Access:* <http://www.amianet.org/>.

• **Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC).** An international organization dedicated to fostering discussion on the subject of recorded sound, ARSC publishes a bi-annual journal (see Online Journals) and a membership directory, and holds an annual conference. They also maintain a discussion list (see Discussion Lists). *Access:* <http://www.arsc-audio.org/>.

• **Conservation OnLine.** A major conservation and preservation site that should be in everyone's bookmarks. CoOL, a project of the Preservation Department of Stanford University Libraries, is a "full-text library of conservation information." Many of the links that appear in this article are available through CoOL. *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/>.

• **Image Permanence Institute.** A not-for-profit lab at the Rochester Institute of Technology, co-sponsored by the Society for Imaging Science and Technology. They do collection surveys and consulting, among other things, and offer a free "preservation calculator" at their site. *Access:* <http://www.rit.edu/~661www1/>.

• **National Film Preservation Board.** A 1988 Act of Congress established this board, which is charged with defining the issues confronting film preservation in the United States. Their exhaustive and detailed reports are in the following files: *study.html* and *tvstudy.html*. *Access:* <http://lcweb.loc.gov/film/>.



Video

• **Erich Kesse: "Archival Copies of Video Tapes."** A policy and procedure statement from the University of Florida, useful as a template for developing your own policies. *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/kesse/kessvid.html>.

• **Sarah Stauderman: "Choosing Videotape Preservation Format: Some Rules to Live By."** This video contains some good advice to follow when you begin the process of transferring video from one format to another. *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/abbey/an/an22/an22-6/an22-606.html>.

• **Jim Lindner: "Confessions of a Videotape Restorer."** This is a short article that first appeared in the *AMIA Newsletter*. As he does in his article subtitled "Tidal Wave at Our Shores" (see General Resources), Lindner inveighs against the idea

ARSC))))))

of a "magic bullet" answer to the problem of tape deterioration. *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/lindner/lindner1.html>.

• **Jim Wheeler: "The Dos and Don'ts of Videotape Care."** A short, emphatic list that can be printed and posted for all collection staff members who deal with videotape. Most of the advice is familiar, but some items may not have occurred to collection managers, such as, "Before recording or storing non-consumer archival tapes, shuttle the tape to the end and back." *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/wheeler/wheeler3.html>.

• **Jim Lindner: "The Proper Care and Feeding of Videotape."** No-nonsense advice from the experienced Lindner that includes, "Know when you need professional help." *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/lindner/lindner3.html>.

• **CoOL: "Video Preservation."** This site has fact sheets and links to a number of video preservation services. *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/video/index.html>.

• **Jim Lindner: "Videotape Restoration—Where Do I Start?"** Lindner's advice comes from his three decades of experience working with videotapes in all conditions. He includes a checklist for establishing which tapes should be restored first. *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/lindner/lindner2.html>.

Audio

• **John R. Gibbs: "Audio Preservation and Restoration."** From the University of Washington Music Library. This site has an excellent bibliography with many active links to online articles. It includes information about film and video preservation and offers links to preservation service companies such as Vidipax and Henson Productions (both described in Preservation Services). *Access:* <http://www.lib.washington.edu/Music/preservation.html>.

• **National Parks Service: "Care of Archival Compact Discs."** Originally appeared as September 1996 *Conserve O Gram*, a technical newsletter published by the NPS. Includes a printable list of dos and don'ts, which appear in table form. This newsletter is also available at the NPS *Conserve O Gram* page; it is number 19.19. *Access:* http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons_toc.html.

• **Andy McFadden's CD-Recordable FAQ.** A regularly updated, comprehensive (it would take 11 pages to print) presentation on the subject, which

was originally developed (and is still maintained) as a Usenet newsgroup FAQ. Go here first for answers to just about any question related to CDs or CD-ROMs. *Access:* <http://www.cdrfaq.org/>.

• **Conservation OnLine: "Preservation of Audio Materials."** A good first stop, with many resource links and a thorough bibliography. *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/audio/index.html>.

Motion pictures and electronic media

• **CoOL: "Preservation of Motion Picture Film" and "Electronic Storage Media."** Detailed lists of resources from a prominent preservation site (see Organizations). *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/motion-pictures/> and <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/bytopic/electronic-records/electronic-storage-media/>.

• **National Parks Service Conserve O Grams.** In addition to "Care of Archival Compact Discs" (see Audio), I recommend the following two *Conserve O Grams*: "Preservation of Magnetic Media" (19.8) and "Care of Archival Digital and Magnetic Media" (19.20). *Access:* http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons_toc.html.

Online journals

• **The Abbey Newsletter.** By Abbey Publications, a not-for-profit corporation set up to encourage preservation of library and archival materials. They do not specialize in audiovisual material, but occasionally do publish articles related to that topic (see Bibliographies). *Access:* <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/abbey/an/>.

• **ARSC Journal.** Published by the Association for Recorded Sound Collections. Only a table of contents listing for current and back issues is available online. *Access:* <http://www.arsc-audio.org/publications.html#journal>.

• **International Preservation News.** A newsletter of the International Federation of Library Association (IFLA) Preservation and Conservation committee (PAC). It reports on the preservation activities and events that support efforts to preserve materials in the world's libraries and archives.



Available online back to 1997. Access: <http://www.ifla.org/VI/4/ipn.html>.

- **Journal of Film Preservation.** Published semiannually by FIAF Brussels, this journal provides a forum for discussion on all theoretical and technical aspects of moving image archival activities, and is available in PDF files from 1995 to the present. Access: <http://www.fiafnet.org/uk/publications/>.

Bibliographies and resource lists

- **"Directory of Information Sources on Scientific Research Related to the Preservation of Sound Recordings, Still and Moving Images and Magnetic Tape."** A long listing of organizations that can assist libraries with preservation of recordings, compiled by Margaret Child for the Commission on Preservation and Access in 1993. (See <http://www.dir.org/pubs/cpanews/cpanews.html> for further info on CPA). This list includes some of the organizations given here, though it does not include Web addresses. Access: <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/child/dirsound.html>.

- **Library of Congress: Magnetic Media Preservation—Selected Bibliography.** A short list of print publications, which appeared in 1990. Access: <http://www.loc.gov/preserv/bib/magbib.html>.

Commercial preservation services

- **Henson Productions.** Tape duplication and transfer are among their services. Access: <http://www.hensonproductions.com/>.



- **Vidipax.** Jim Lindner's company, as described above in General Resources. Vidipax bills itself, rather grandiosely, as "the largest and most advanced magnetic media restoration company in the world." At its site it offers video and audio format guides, and an extensive list of Web resources. Access: <http://www.vidipax.com/>.

Discussion lists

- **AMIA-L.** For ongoing discussions about film and video, you can join this e-mail discussion list sponsored by the Association of Moving Image Archivists. Messages deal with all aspects of moving images, including preservation. Subscription is open to the public. To subscribe, send an e-mail to

listserv@lsv.uky.edu and write "subscribe AMIA-L [your name]" in the message body. Access: http://www.amianet.org/09_Listserv/amiaL.html.

- **AV-Media-Matters.** CoOl (see Organizations) sponsors this moderated discussion list devoted to the preservation of audiovisual materials. Subscription instructions are on the site. Access: <http://www.topica.com/lists/AV-Media-Matters/>.

Conclusion

I have focused here on resources that can help in the storage and restoration of media materials. To cover thoroughly the subject of digitizing as a means of preservation would require a separate article. Digitization is very much a plausible option for preserving images and sounds, but it is not the only solution, and may not be the best one for your library or archive. Format obsolescence is a fact of life, however, so you'll have to deal with data transfer at some point. If you are considering digitization on a large scale, here are some resources that might help.

- **"Digital Preservation Needs and Requirements in RLG Member Institutions."** This thorough and extensive 1998 study, written by Margaret Hedstrom and Sheon Montgomery, is available in PDF or HTML. Access: <http://www.rlg.org/preserv/digpres.html>.

- **"Guides to Quality in Visual Resource Imaging."** A joint project between RLG and the Digital Library Federation, published in 2000 and offered only on the Web, this extensive publication is intended to be a Web-based reference created by experts in the art and science of digital imaging of visual resources (original photographs, prints, drawings, maps, etc.). It is designed to serve any organization considering digital conversion. Access: <http://www.rlg.org/visguides/>.

- **Jim Lindner: "Digitization Reconsidered."** In his customary colorful language, Lindner defines and discusses digitization, and concludes, "The solution is to have a strategy that does not count on one technology (either digital or analog) or technique." Access: <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byauth/lindner/digirecon.html>.

Note

1. Terry Sanders, "Into the Future: On the Preservation of Knowledge in the Electronic Age" (1997), funded by the Commission on Preservation and Access and the American Council of Learned Societies. ■