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WESTERN CINE

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TO: Steve Leggett
National Film Preservation Board
Library of Congress

MOTION PICTURE, BROADCASTING
AND RECORDED SOUND DIVISION

RE: Current state of film preservation at Western Cine

Western Cine Film Laboratory of Denver, Colorado has for the past decade, been extremely active in motion picture film preservation and restoration. 95% of our work is in the area of film preservation, although we have worked minimally with small restoration projects. Our lab has worked with Columbia Pictures (Sony Entertainment), Universal Pictures, The International Museum of Photo at George Eastman House, Southern Methodist University, and the Archives of the City of New York, as well as independent producers and other clients. We work in both 35mm and 16mm black and white and color, and we handle both nitrate and safety film base on a regular basis.

We perceived an expanding market in the film preservation field in the mid 80's. The confidence we had in our skilled technicians allowed us to cultivate a relationship with Columbia Pictures, restoring nitrate features. From that success we grew into a full-service preservation laboratory.

Over the years we have acquired and fabricated specialized equipment for handling aged and shrunken original and print. It is truly a specialized task and one that we pursue with great pride and dedication.

We believe that it is of paramount importance that the restoration movement grow both in terms of locating significant product and budget sources. Each month we note an alarming increase in the number of materials that show signs of vinegar syndrome and separation of emulsion from the film base. These effects continue to increase the speed of deterioration. The problems are not only with motion picture films but with magnetic materials as well.

In most cases it is too late to consider better storage facilities for film that is over 40 years old. Certainly we should provide a proper environment for newer releases to defer other restoration needs in the future.

Physical damage to film is a common problem and it is always necessary to inspect the film very carefully before running it through the machinery in the lab. Rips, sprocket damage, weak splices, surface dirt and deposits of all kinds are encountered and only experienced technicians can satisfactorily cope with the range of problems each project entails.

Three strip color originals and positives are also showing signs of aging and new intermediates should be prepared before our priceless color heritage is further compromised. Our experience has been that optical step printing on wet shrunken film movements is the best way to achieve maximum quality in the restoration of Technicolor, Cinecolor and other color systems.