

Grants & Awards

Preservation & Access Project

Phase 2 Preservation Assessment

By Claude Marks, Director of the Freedom Archives, September 2004

Importance of the Mission

The Pacifica Radio Archives is, because of amazing historical commitment and foresight of hundreds of producers and station staff and volunteers, in the position of protecting an enormous collection of unique oral histories and cultural contributions representing a broad progressive movement of activists, intellectuals, authors and musicians. This collection carries with it the weight of preserving this work of our antecedents - a rich body of intellectual thought and artistic creativity.

This is a heavy responsibility, especially in an era where government is trying to erase collective memory and subjugate history, an era in which repression is criminalizing resistant thought and art and devaluing creativity and critical thinking. The youth of today as well as the generations to come depend on our efforts today to preserve and restore, as well as make more known and accessible, the riches that we hold. It is in this context that the vision of progressive archivists must concentrate on these thousands of tapes.

It is only in this context that the Pacifica Radio Archives should consider and undertake ancillary work - producing new programs, producing, duplicating and shipping 'premiums,' cataloging and processing current programs.

Strategic Planning must reflect the centrality of the archival responsibilities over the tasks of processing programs currently being produced. The work of downloading, cataloging and reproducing Democracy Now, Explorations, Uprising, LA Theater Works, Free Speech Radio News and producing and manufacturing premiums must be seen as secondary to the historical work, that, if not done, will result in the loss of 50+ years of material. I suggest that the staff members and volunteers of these other regular programs are already trained and fully equipped to fulfill the current demands or that the needs for replication-for-sale be outsourced.

A more specific analysis of staff workloads and how their time is spent on primary and ancillary tasks would be helpful. Currently one skilled technical person is almost fully dedicated to new program production. The other technically skilled person is, from initial observation and estimates, devoting 30-40% of his time to archival work- all the while multi-tasking. Support work for the actual primary archival and restoration process by other staff members could also be quantified to be able to fully evaluate how well the mission is being fulfilled.

The Pacifica Radio Archives must establish remastering procedures and protocols in keeping with accepted archival and restoration practices without compromising quality control. To date, there is no fully agreed upon digital medium for archival purposes. Periodic migration & re-mastering to other media should be anticipated and all recording and reproduction technologies and equipment must be maintained in good operating condition. Concurrent re-mastering to quality analog reel-to-reel tape should be continued, but should be done in real time and with an improved technical standard.

Remastering can only be accomplished in a control room environment with monitor speakers and limited external noise. This may require additional space and certainly a reconfiguration of the re-mastering work area as well as some investment of funds. This work should not be seen as just another multi-task. This is work that requires full concentration and that must be done with quality monitoring equipment in a quiet listening environment. This work is the most important part of long-term restoration. A more aggressive recruitment and training of volunteers can augment the staff effort toward accomplishing these tasks once the protocols and system are established and implemented.

The re-mastering process should include

- Determining the generation of the stored materials and
- Elimination of duplicate materials that are second or third generation
- **Master tape** information determined at this re-mastering stage should accurately reflect the quality of the recording and should also improve, in detail and accuracy, upon the current annotations of the tape contents
- It is at this stage that accurate and complete indexing of each tape can be completed

As I discussed with the Pacifica Radio Archives production staff, **equipment modifications and improvements** can contribute to the reduced necessity for baking. One of the sources of tape friction is the existence of stationary tape guides and surfaces on the existing Otari playback equipment. At the Freedom Archives we have found that this problem is also common to Ampex and Scully tape machines. We have also found that Studer tape machines eliminate close to 75% of our tape baking because of their non-friction/moveable guides on all tension arms. It may also be possible to make custom machine replacement guides on the existing Otari machines to eliminate points of friction. These points of friction increase emulsion degradation of masters, causing permanent damage to valuable tapes, and necessitating the time and labor intensive work of tape baking.

An improved database reflecting the knowledge gained from re-mastering should include:

- A universal subject list
- A consistent glossary of keywords and search terms
- Script 'equivalent' terms to account for synonymous queries, and

- Should be companionable to generally accepted library and archival standards, and to the databases of related archives.

We recommend use of **Filemaker-Pro** as a database application. It is far less expensive to design and modify as needs change, is fully cross-platform and is in wide use, allowing for cross-compatibility with other similar archival projects. Collaborative work and development of database standards should be an ongoing process.

The database can function internally on a highly detailed level, while at the same time be exported for use on the web to be accessible to the public in a less detailed way. This is easily accomplished with no additional data entry tasks and with minimal data management resources. The [Freedom Archives](#) public access catalog web interface is equally accurate, but appears in a more intuitive structure to the web user. This is accomplished through very basic, scripted web formatting and is totally self-manageable.

Current space limitations impact on both the technical ability to remaster and the ability to more appropriately organize and store the holdings. Clearly, the expansion of a controlled environment to accommodate the current holdings and future acquisitions must be reflected in any strategic plan. The current storage area already exceeds the weight tolerance of the building and must expand for both safety reasons as well as to accommodate the entire collection. **Space acquisition should be an immediate priority.**

Website and database interface should continue to develop in order to make the holdings more widely accessible to the Pacifica Radio community of producers, programmers and listeners, as well as researchers, documentarians, students, artists and the public in general.

- Current catalog databases should be integrated
- The platform and database application should be changed
- Collaboration to create more universal methodologies and database structures should be undertaken

Volunteer recruitment and community outreach are priorities that can extend the reach and importance of this archival work. An outreach strategy to diverse communities and educational/community institutions can generate enthusiastic and committed interns. This is a unique opportunity to work with progressive history and culture. Intern work can also be structured to comply with academic and work-study requirements at high schools as well as colleges and universities. Technical training as well as a long-term commitment to building these intern and community relations are a highly worthwhile investment in the future of the mission of the Pacifica Radio Archives.

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