

Culture of Archives, Museums and Libraries
May 4, 2009
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Fundación Patrimonio Fílmico Colombiano

The Fundación Patrimonio Fílmico Colombiano (FPFC) is the largest moving image archive in Colombia and one of the largest in Latin America. Established in 1987, though built on the structure of an older archive, it now holds over 100,000 film, audio and video elements in its collection. In recent years, it has managed to properly maintain its collection while providing access in a number of ways, carrying out preservation work, and planning a new facility. Through the example of this archive, its collection and the challenges it faces, perhaps some lessons can emerge which other archives could learn from.

As background on the films that make up the foundation of the FPFC's collection, it is important to understand the early years of film production in Colombia. The history of cinema in Colombia goes back to the late 19th century, when Gabriel Veyre, an official representative of the Lumiere brothers, traveled down from Panama in 1896 and began screening films in various locations around the country. (Accion 16) The following decades saw further screenings of French and American films, but no films were actually produced in Colombia until 1915. In that year, Francesco and Vincenzo Di Domenico, Italian brothers who had settled in Colombia and opened a movie theater in Bogotá, began producing films. (Accion 36-37) Beginning with a series of short documentaries, later that year they produced the first Colombian feature-length film, *El Drama del 15 de Octubre*, a documentary about the assassination of General Rafael Uribe Uribe which had taken place the previous year. The local film industry continued to develop as more companies entered the production business, with the first Colombian fiction feature, *María*, being produced in 1922 and the first sound film *Flores del Valle* in 1941.

The story of moving image archiving in Colombia began in 1949 with the founding of the Cine Club de Colombia by Luis Vicens, a Catalan bookseller who had fled Spain during the Civil War. In 1954, Vicens, who was also a film collector, and a number of his associates from the Cine Club founded the Filmoteca Colombiana, devoted to collecting Colombian film. Marking the beginning of a long history of Colombian

involvement in international film archiving organizations, the Filmoteca became a member of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) in 1957. The organization changed its name several times over the years, first to Cinemateca Colombiana in 1957, then in 1979 to Fundación Cinemateca Colombiana.

(Largometrajes 302)

In 1986, the Compañía de Fomento Cinematográfico (FOCINE), a government entity devoted to funding Colombian film production, convened a national committee to discuss the preservation of Colombia's national film heritage. As a result of this meeting, a new organization was formed – the FPFC – which took over the collection of the Fundación Cinemateca Colombiana. The new organization was created as a public-private partnership; its board contained representatives from federal and local governmental bodies like FOCINE and the District Bureau of Culture and Tourism, as well as private organizations such as Cine Columbia, the country's largest film production and distribution company. The new organization was then admitted into FIAF in 1988, essentially taking the place of the Fundación Cinemateca Colombiana. After FOCINE was dissolved in 1992 following a corruption scandal, primary governmental responsibility for FPFC shifted first to the Ministry of Communications and then in 1999, to the Ministry of Culture. *(Largometrajes 303)*

The FPFC, as it exists now, is located in Bogotá, the capital and largest city in Colombia, in a building in the San Victorino neighborhood, a bustling commercial area. Offices for the FPFC's 16 staff members are located on two floors in the building; the office area also contains a small exhibit of old film and video equipment, paper files related to the FPFC's holdings, six video carrels for use by researchers, and a 140-seat theater. Elsewhere in the same building are the FPFC's film and video storage vaults. The building contains 550 m² of storage space, including climate-controlled vaults and a separate area for nitrate.

As mentioned earlier, the FPFC's collection is very large – over 100,000 elements. More than 90% of the titles in the collection are Colombian productions – while the FPFC does hold some non-Colombian titles, these are not considered a priority for acquisition, storage or preservation. (Orozco interview) The collection holds elements from the beginnings of Colombian film production up to the present day. As with many

other national cinemas, the vast majority of the early years of Colombian film are now lost. The earliest films in the FPFC collection are a number of titles from the mid-1920s, including complete versions of *Bajo el Cielo Antioqueño* (1925), *Alma Provinciana* (1926) and *Garras de Oro* (1926), as well as fragments of other films from that era. Other highlights of the FPFC collection include the first Colombian sound films from the early 1940s, and the Acevedo Brothers collection, consisting of 35 hours of documentary footage shot in Colombia between 1915 and 1955. (*Largometrajes* 303)

One major factor which has affected the FPFC's collection in recent years has been a change in the legal deposit law. In the early 1990s, a series of laws added moving images to the previously existing legal deposit laws in Colombia; at the time, these laws mandated that this material be sent to the National Library, which was the destination for all print materials. This law was amended in 2007 to designate the FPFC as the recipient of all moving image materials; at the same time, all such materials that had been collected by the National Library were absorbed into the FPFC collection. (Orozco interview) As would be expected, this influx of film and video put a serious strain on the archive's storage space, though the new construction mentioned below should alleviate this.

The FPFC has been very active in film preservation and restoration work since its inception. The FPFC mission statement lists a series of "Strategies of Preservation," which demonstrate a commitment to viewing film preservation as a process of which the actual lab work is only one part. These strategies are, in order: Investigation – the location of original materials and research into the cultural and historical context of the work. Identification and classification – determining the state of the materials and the preservation actions to be performed. Storage and technical supervision – maintaining the materials in storage with the proper climate controls. Restoration and physical duplication – creating new negatives and prints, as well as a restored video master. Indexing – creating or updating the catalog records for the title. Socialization – assuring public access to the title through projection prints, video copies, exhibitions and publications. Of course, while such plans may sound impressive, the true test of an archive is whether it can actually follow through on these commitments. While it is unclear whether the FPFC always meets these goals, it seems that it has been able to for many of its projects.

Consider its first major preservation and restoration project, begun in 1987, involving the film *Bajo el Cielo Antioqueño*. Partners in the project included the government of the region of Antioquia, where the film had been shot, the Colombian central bank, which has a long history of arts patronage, and UNESCO. As is the case with many countries, Colombia lacks film labs capable of doing preservation work. The FPFC deals with this particular challenge by making use of labs outside the country – in this case, work was done at the Fundación Cinemateca Nacional de Venezuela and the Filmoteca de UNAM in Mexico. On completion of the project in 1999, screenings of the restored version of the film were held in Bogotá and Medellín, the largest city in Antioquia. The FPFC also made the film available for international screenings and it was shown at MOMA in New York in 2001.

The above highlights the degree to which the FPFC is involved in collaborations with other archives and organizations, both within Colombia and internationally. As mentioned earlier, FPFC is a member of FIAF, and has frequently worked with other FIAF institutions – MOMA, for example, as well as archives in Spain and Mexico – on preservation projects. As with the MOMA screening of *Bajo el Cielo Antioqueño* or the screening of the restored *Garras de Oro* at the 6th Orphan Film Symposium in 2008, the FPFC frequently takes advantage of opportunities to send Colombian films abroad, seeing these screenings as a crucial part of its mission to promote Colombian film internationally. The FPFC is also an active participant in other FIAF activities and hosted the 1997 FIAF Congress in Cartagena. In addition to FIAF, the FPFC is a member of CLAIM, a coordinating group of Latin American moving image archives.

Within Colombia, the FPFC was instrumental in creating SIPAC, an organization of Colombian audio-visual collections. While the FPFC is by far the largest such archive in Colombia, there are others, including the Cinemateca del Caribe in Barranquilla and the Bogotá Museum of Modern Art. SIPAC holds an annual meeting for representatives of these collections, in addition to sponsoring training programs in moving image materials handling, constructing a national inventory of audiovisual holdings, and lobbying the government to allocate more funding to moving image archiving and preservation.

Given the large size of the FPFC's collection, one of the major challenges it faces is storage space. Just as the past ten years have seen a number of US archives – MOMA and Library of Congress, for example – build new storage facilities for their large collections, in 2007 the FPFC took the first step towards ameliorating this issue, breaking ground on a new Audiovisual Conservation Center. The Center, scheduled to be finished in 2012, will be located on the grounds of Radio Televisión Nacional de Colombia (RTVC), a public radio and television broadcasting company, in a more open area of the city near the national university. The facility will be shared between RTVC and FPFC and will include three buildings housing video and acetate film storage vaults, one building, physically separated from the rest of the facility, with nitrate film vaults, and a library and documentation center. The benefits from the Center for the FPFC will be numerous: it will allow for proper storage of the collection in a facility specifically designed for film and video, it will create a more usable workspace for visiting researchers, and it will strengthen ties with the RTVC, possibly leading to future collaborations.

Unlike many other archives, the FPFC does not have facilities that are open to the public, nor is there a regular screening schedule. While this may change with the building of the new facility, for the time being this shows that it has chosen to focus more on researchers as the primary group to make its collection available to. (Orozco interview) Other means of providing access include making loans to other archives and cinemathèques, both in Colombia and throughout the world, making available a circulating film and video library, issuing DVDs of films from its collection, and holding an annual screening series. The FPFC recently helped to organize an exhibit on the history of Colombian cinema at the Museo Nacional which drew heavily on its collection, using both moving images and other items – including posters, documentation, and ephemera. The FPFC has also issued a number of publications, including catalogs of feature-length Colombian films and videos, Colombian documentaries produced from 1915-1950, and Colombian film magazines and journals.

In conclusion, the challenges faced by the FPFC are not unique to that institution – rather, they are indicative of the types of problems that archives around the world must deal with. In particular, the FPFC offers insight into the workings of an archive dealing

with the need to store and manage a very large collection – one that is growing constantly through legal deposit. Certainly, it seems to be well-funded – a fact that may not be true of many archives. Yet the basic lessons still apply – provide the best possible storage conditions for a collection; whenever possible, initiate collaborations with other organizations, both national and international; and balance preservation and access, understanding that both are ultimately part of the same process.

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