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## Chasing the UPI Photograph and Newsfilm Archives

In January of 2016, one of the most historic photo collections in the United States was sold to Visual China Group (VCG), a publicly traded Chinese company founded in 2000. With the announcement of the sale also came the news that VCG was handing the management of the collection to Getty Images, an American company servicing billions in debt, and the world's largest photo agency. With that, the 11.5 million photos that once belonged to the United Press International (UPI) picture library made the familiar passage from one steward to another, this time joining an umbrella collection of over 250 million images. The sister collection to UPI's photos, its hundreds of thousands of film reels, have also passed through many hands since their creation. They currently reside on two continents, under the care and ownership of the Associated Press, the former archrival of their namesake.

At its height, UPI had “7,500 customers, 6,000 employees, and 223 bureaus in 100 countries.”<sup>1</sup> In addition to its staff, UPI utilized countless unnamed stringers, and together these “Unipressers” documented the 20th century in words, photographs and moving images. As a news *agency*, UPI was not often thought of by news consumers who regarded the newspapers they were reading, or television broadcasts they were watching, to be the sources of their news. But those “delivery” systems could not have existed (nor exist today) without the news-gathering operations of UPI and its rival agencies that fed a constant stream of content to their subscribers. The following paper will give particular consideration to the *visual* materials created by UPI and its offshoots, charting the travels of these unique photos and film reels as they were passed along

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Haynes, *Picture This!: The Inside Story and Classic Photos of UPI Newspictures*, (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2006), 9.

over the years, victims of the financial decline of their parent organization. Equally important to tracking the physical materials, is following the path of the corresponding metadata, which sadly did not always travel with the items themselves. Ultimately, the availability and organization of this metadata is what makes collections as large as UPI's accessible and useful.

The entity that eventually became United Press International was first incorporated in 1907 as "United Press Associations," commonly referred to as United Press (UP). UP was a consolidation of several small telegraph news agencies owned by newspaper publisher E.W. Scripps. Due to restrictions on competitors, Scripps was not permitted to subscribe to the dominant Associated Press (AP) news wire service that had been founded in the previous century as a cooperative of *other* newspaper publishers. In response, Scripps founded his own global news agency, and from the beginning, its existence was driven by competition with the AP. Two years after Scripps created UP, another newspaper giant, William Randolph Hearst began his own news agency, the International News Service (INS). Eventually UP would purchase INS in 1958, and the merged agencies were renamed United Press International. Throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s, UPI was unquestionably the underdog to the AP, yet it was nonetheless a formidable presence. By the early 1980s however, it had begun a sharp decline, and the end of the 20th century was marked with unpaid bills, massive layoffs, multiple sales and two chapter 11 bankruptcy filings. In the year 2000, UPI was sold to News World Communications, the media arm of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. The day after the sale, UPI's most famous reporter, Helen Thomas, resigned after 57 years, marking the true end of the agency's significance in the mainstream news media landscape. This is where we find UPI today. It still exists, but its standing in the news community is extremely limited, and it has no bearing on the tremendous photo and film archives that it once created.

Part I: The Photograph Collections:

In 1924, E.W. Scripps added to his vast text-based news holdings by creating Acme Newspictures, a subscription-based news photo syndication service. Hearst had been the first to start a photo division when he created International News Photos (INP) under INS in 1910. Strangely, AP was late to the game, entering the photo arena in 1928, but as usual they still managed to come out on top by being the first to offer the revolutionary service of news photo transmission over the “wires.” AP’s launch of Wirephoto in 1935, followed within a year by Acme’s Telephoto and INP’s Soundphoto, meant that newspapers all over the United States suddenly had rapid access to the same images. The consumption of American news took on a new element of commonality as “it was now possible for a single image to define an event, to become the visual record, or indeed *the* record, of an event in the public’s mind.”<sup>2</sup>

As the public’s demand for newspictures grew, Acme expanded its operations. A 1937 article in *Popular Photography* reported:

Acme employs ninety-eight men in various offices in this country. In addition, it has thousands of correspondents in the United States, Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa. There is hardly a spot in the world from which it cannot get a picture.... Every day Acme receives an average of four hundred photographs from its various correspondents. Generally, they buy more than a third of these—at least a hundred and twenty pictures every twenty-four hours.<sup>3</sup>

These tens of thousands of photos generated annually by Acme would eventually find their way into UPI’s photo archive. In 1952, United Press, which had always been affiliated with Acme through Scripps, officially purchased the photo agency in a move to package text and images

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<sup>2</sup> William Hannigan, “Making American Images,” in *Picture Machine: The Rise of American Newspictures*, ed. Ken Johnston, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Gary Strider, “The Inside Workings of a National News Photo Service,” *Popular Photography*, July 1937, 17.

together and better compete with AP.<sup>4</sup> Given that Acme photos became one of the foundational collections within UPI's picture library, it's particularly fortunate that the same *Popular Photography* article also provides an insightful view into the metadata creation processes at Acme. "Every photograph [i.e. negative] is given a code number. A caption is written which clearly defines the picture, is numbered the same as the print, and pasted on the outside of the envelope in which the photograph is filed."<sup>5</sup> These negatives were then stored in Acme's "fire-proof morgue" and were searchable by means of a card catalog in which "each picture is card-indexed, listed, and cross-indexed."<sup>6</sup> Sadly, these index cards eventually went missing, but fortunately they had been microfilmed before they disappeared.<sup>7</sup> Acme also had the practice of keeping daily logs of the images that came into the New York picture office. The log books are filled with "hand-written chicken scratch,"<sup>8</sup> but with a trained eye, they provide an invaluable cross reference to the microfilm, particularly as they are organized by date.

The absorption of Acme's collection was coupled with the start of photos being created under the United Press name. UP Newspictures retained Acme's dual system of index cards and daily logs, and fortunately made the decision to create both on a typewriter.<sup>9</sup> Six years later, the photo library grew once again when the 1958 purchase of INS brought close to 50 years of INP photos to the archive. With the INP images came INP index cards and log books, all wonderfully organized and typewritten from the start!<sup>10</sup> UPI also acquired smaller news photo services to

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<sup>4</sup> Haynes, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Strider, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Donna Daley, interview by author, December 5, 2016.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

bolster its library, the most significant being Pacific & Atlantic Photos (P&A). As a result of these various purchases, there are some photos in the UPI archive from as early as the 1880s.<sup>11</sup>

Along with a massive acquisition of old photos, the late 1950s also brought a change to the manner in which UPI created *new* photos. At the time, most AP and staff newspaper photographers were using large 4x5 Speed Graphic cameras, but UPI photographers were encouraged, (and starting in 1960 required), to switch to 35mm cameras.<sup>12</sup> The smaller format cameras allowed UPI photographers to use available light and shoot many more pictures, changing the quality of their images and building up the archive very quickly. For once it seemed UPI had an edge on the Associated Press as “AP member papers began complaining that AP photos of events, shot with a flash on the camera, lacked the “liveliness” of UPI’s pictures of the same situation.”<sup>13</sup> UPI photographers, (and reporters for that matter), were also known for their scrappiness and drive compared to their AP counterparts, and they enjoyed quite a bit of success in the 1960s and 1970s when six of them were awarded Pulitzer Prizes. No matter how celebrated the photographers may have been however, no amount of talent and ingenuity could protect the photo division from the overarching financial problems of UPI.

The 1970s came to a close with a \$7 million loss in 1979,<sup>14</sup> and by the start of the 1980s, E.W. Scripps’ descendants, who still owned UPI, were looking for a way out. In 1981, UPI’s president, Roderick Beaton estimated that closing the UPI would cost an estimated \$60 million, primarily in pension payouts.<sup>15</sup> The Scripps family wanted neither that financial burden, nor did it want to be known as the cause of UPI’s end. The only solution was a sale, and in 1982, United

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<sup>11</sup> Ken Johnston, “Eye News The Story of Picture News in America,” in *Picture Machine: The Rise of American Newspictures*, ed. Ken Johnston, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004), 12.

<sup>12</sup> Haynes, 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory Gordon and Ronald E. Cohen, “The Sinking of UPI,” *The Washington Post Magazine*, December 10, 1989, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas B. Rosenstiel, “UPI—Buyers Paid \$1 But Was It A Bargain?” *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 1984, 4.

Press International was sold for \$1 to Douglas Ruhe and William Geissler, two relative unknowns who owned a small media company in Nashville, TN. The Scripps family was desperate to unload UPI, but they also wanted the company to persevere. To that end, they gave Ruhe and Geissler an initial payout of \$5 million in operating cash and millions more in pension contributions and debt forgiveness.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the financial assistance would have been enough for some new owners, but not Ruhe and Geissler. They made one poor business decision after another, and within a couple of years, the only way to make payroll was to sell off assets.

One of the first things on the chopping block was the photo archive, which, consisting at this point of 11.5 million photos, actually earned the company over \$1 million a year in licensing fees.<sup>17</sup> Members of UPI management were stunned, but Geissler's position was: "Who cares about a damn picture library?" You probably only need to go back about twelve months for pictures.... It's of no use to us."<sup>18</sup> Clearly Geissler had no idea how frequently the organization accessed its file photos, and when he made a deal in early 1984 to give exclusive control of the photo library to the Bettmann Archive (owned by the Kraus-Thomson Organization), he didn't even put in a clause granting free access for UPI use. UPI received \$1.1 million as an advance payment on 25% of gross revenue for a ten-year period, a band-aid at best for the company. It also started paying Bettmann \$35 every time it needed to access one of its own photos, an occurrence that often happened several times a day.<sup>19</sup>

While the deal with Bettmann was devastating for UPI morale, it was a boon for outside access to the extensive UPI photo library. Bettmann's whole business purpose was to make images available to users. And at least Ruhe and Geissler had selected a steward that cared

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gregory Gordon and Ronald E. Cohen, *Down To The Wire: UPI's Fight For Survival*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 161.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Haynes, 17.

deeply about the photos in its care. The Bettmann Archive had been started in New York in 1936 by Otto Bettmann, a Jew who fled Nazi Germany with \$5 in his pocket and two steamer trunks filled with photographs.<sup>20</sup> Otto Bettmann was a consummate collector and ran a highly professional organization with informed and dedicated employees. By the time Bettmann sold his collection to the Kraus-Thomson Organization in 1981, it numbered 5 million images. When the UPI library came under its control in 1984, that number rose to over 16 million. In 1989, the Bettmann Archive consolidated its holdings to one location on East 21st Street in Manhattan, and a year later it purchased the UPI collection outright.

By 1991, the Bettmann Archive had a staff of 16 researchers,<sup>21</sup> utilizing Otto Bettmann's unique organizational system based on 47 categories from "Absurdities" and "Advertising" to "Zodiac" and "Zoology."<sup>22</sup> Donna Daley was one of those 16 researchers, and her contributions to this paper were invaluable. In the case of the UPI photos, Otto Bettmann's categories were further subdivided to accommodate the print files, but for the negatives, researchers utilized the card catalogs and log books that had been created with the photos themselves.<sup>23</sup> For this reason, although the UPI collection was unified as far as rights were concerned, from a metadata perspective, the various parts were still very much tied to their originating entities, (e.g. Acme, INP, P&A, etc.). Researchers knew that Acme's 4 x 5" index cards (now available only on microfilm) contained much more detailed descriptions than INP's smaller cards, but both contained the all-important negative number and subject.<sup>24</sup> Researchers also learned the quirks of the UPI collection, such as its inclusion of a complete card catalog for the P&A images but only

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<sup>20</sup> Helen Markel, "The Bettmann Behind the Archives," *The New York Times Magazine*, October 18, 1981, 120.

<sup>21</sup> Tony Case, "A Massive File of Photos," *Editor & Publisher*, February 23, 1991, 17P.

<sup>22</sup> Leonard W. Boasberg, "Getting the Picture: The Bettmann Archive Can Provide Any Photo You Want—Well Almost," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 11, 1986, E1.

<sup>23</sup> Daley interview.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

a limited stretch of years for the negatives themselves. Likewise, there was a gaping hole in the Acme negatives for a good part of 1947 and the start of 1948. According to Daley, at least a few times a month, a researcher would find the perfect record in a card catalog, but fail to be able to locate the corresponding negative. Most of the time, however, negatives were easily located within the (mostly) climate controlled storage area, and were handed off to the in-house dark room that could make both black & white and color prints. New prints received an amended unique identifier which, at least initially, placed a “U” (for UPI) in front of the negative number and added a suffix of Acme, INP, etc. when appropriate.<sup>25</sup> Per Daley however, who continued to work with the UPI collection through 2015, the naming convention did not always remain consistent; the suffix went away at some point and the “U” was sometimes replaced with a “BE” for Bettmann.

UPI’s move to Bettmann also meant a change for how *newly* created UPI photos were logged. 1984 was the last year of daily log books, and 1985 brought a mainframe computer system with an electronic database. That said, only the new text records made their way into the database, and everything on the image side was still analog. By the mid-1990s, Kraus-Thomson’s president, Herbert Gstalder, knew that without a major investment in digital technology, the company would not survive. Enter Bill Gates, who had a vision of digitizing the world’s images and licensing them to users through his company Corbis, founded in 1989. To Gstalder, Corbis looked like the perfect solution to his problem. “We recognize the value of what we have at the Bettmann Archive in this new electronic world,” Gstalder said. “But the issue was could we take the Bettmann Archive into the 21st century the way they could, with their money

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

and long-term perspective? I doubt it.”<sup>26</sup> And with that, the Bettmann Archive was sold to Corbis for a reported \$6 million,<sup>27</sup> and the UPI photo archive changed hands once again.

By the time Corbis purchased Bettmann in 1995, it had already acquired several small collections upon which it had built its innovative digital database. Using the Getty Research Institute’s Art & Architecture Thesaurus as a foundation, Corbis data scientists refined their own system which took an extremely detailed approach to cataloguing images by subject and visual attribute.<sup>28</sup> Corbis gave particular consideration to tagging images from the perspective of a sales agent, e.g., what percentage of an image did a particular attribute represent? and how does iconography translate across national boundaries?<sup>29</sup> The Bettmann collection grew Corbis by more than 20 times over in one shot, and it quickly became apparent that not all images could be tagged in this manner and digitized. Those that were, however, were carefully entered into the database with a strong eye to provenance and verbatim transcription of all descriptive metadata.<sup>30</sup>

For researchers like Donna Daley, who kept their jobs under Corbis, the sale did not have much of an impact at first. Most of their time was still spent pouring through card catalogs, microfilm, log books, and file cabinets filled with negatives.<sup>31</sup> The good news was that now the images they pulled for clients would be scanned and added with their metadata to the Corbis database which became a searchable public-facing website at the end of the 1990s.<sup>32</sup> The big change came in 2001 when Corbis made a dramatic preservation decision and moved the physical materials from New York City to Iron Mountain’s underground facility in Western

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<sup>26</sup> Steve Lohr, “Huge Photo Archive Bought By The Chairman of Microsoft,” *New York Times*, October 11, 1995, D5.

<sup>27</sup> Gary Haynes, “Under Iron Mountain Corbis Stores ‘Very Important Photographs’ At Zero Degrees Fahrenheit,” *News Photographer*, February 1, 2005, <https://nppa.org/news/257> (accessed December 11, 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Kody Janney, interview by author, November 21, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Daley interview.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

Pennsylvania. While it was shocking for many in the news and image communities to think about millions of photos being “buried” under ground, from Corbis’ perspective, the rate of deterioration among the negatives in the New York archive was simply too great. By building specially designed vaults kept at 35% relative humidity, and with temperatures that would eventually be lowered to -4 degrees Fahrenheit, Corbis was planning for the permanent preservation of Bettmann’s photographs.

When the UPI photos moved to Iron Mountain, the card catalogs and log books went with them. Corbis researchers in New York still had access to microfilm of the index cards, but they lost the all-important ability to cross reference the cards with the daily log books. This task would now fall to the two Corbis employees at Iron Mountain who were responsible for fulfilling all “deep file” requests, still a completely analog process.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, in an effort to save money, Corbis stopped automatically creating high resolution scans and public digital records when they did deep file research, choosing instead to send low res scans directly to clients. Only when a client committed to licensing a photo, did Corbis officially enter the image into their digitized collection. Thus, the old way of building the digital archive through client requests was dramatically weakened, and considering that the vast majority of UPI’s 11.5 million photos have no digital record, most of the collection is still virtually unknown. A few years ago, Corbis started a project to scan all of the UPI index cards and make them available for public searches, but the effort was abandoned.<sup>34</sup>

After two decades under Corbis’ care, less than a year ago, the UPI photo archive changed hands once again. The transaction involved two parties, Visual China Group who technically bought the Corbis collection through an affiliated Beijing-based entity called United

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

Glory, and Getty Images who was given the exclusive right to license the images to the entire world excluding China. The sale was concerning on many levels. It's already known that certain UPI images, such as the "tank man" in Tiananmen Square will be blocked in China, and visual researchers are nervous that the Chinese owners could someday expand political censorship outside of China. For its part, Getty Images is extremely debt leveraged, and generally treats its historical collections as second-class citizens to the contemporary collections that provide the bulk of its revenue. Shortly before the Corbis transaction, Getty laid off long-time researchers that were familiar with their historical collections, and many new hires seem to know less than the clients they're serving.

Regarding the UPI photos themselves, as of now Getty is planning to keep them at the Iron Mountain facility. The index card microfilm that was previously accessed by Corbis' New York researchers has now been sent to Iron Mountain as well, leaving the two deep file researchers at the facility with absolutely no outside help when it comes to fulfilling research requests.<sup>35</sup> The most Getty researchers can do is create work orders that get sent to Iron Mountain, and search through the already digitized photos that were migrated from Corbis' website to Getty's. In general, research can be a tricky thing at Getty as the company is known for its numbers-based protocols that prioritize sales over all else, and impose stringent time limits on research. Their business model, as was Corbis' before them, is to sell the images that are already available on their website. With that in mind, however, a current search of "Bettmann," as the collection is known by Getty, shows just over 202,000 images out of a possible 16 million. Even more troubling is that of the 202,000, 68,000 of them show a date of "January 1, 1900" which seems to be Getty's default when its ingest system doesn't perceive data in the date field. A quick sampling of these 1/1/1900 images shows that many of them contain partial or complete

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

dates within the old Corbis caption, but that information is not picked up within a date-limited search that is constrained by the metadata in the specific date field. Daley is fairly certain that this date issue migrated across from Corbis, but at least when the collection was in Corbis' hands the images didn't feel quite as "lost" as they do among Getty's 130+ editorial photo collections. Of course Getty's records could be updated at any time, but the chance of that happening is extremely slim.

## Part II: The Newsfilm Collections:

On July 13, 1948, United Press announced that it was forming a partnership with Fox-Movietone to start a television newsfilm agency.<sup>36</sup> Fox-Movietone had been creating theatrical newsreels since 1928, so a complimentary arrangement was devised for "Movietone to supply the film, while UP moved it across the world."<sup>37</sup> By 1952, United Press Movietone Television (UPMT) was sending its subscribers "nearly 100 minutes of top news film a week."<sup>38</sup> The arrangement continued for a little over a decade, at which point the two companies parted ways. All of the UPMT film remained with the Fox-Movietone archive, and as such, its status falls outside the scope of this paper.

In 1963, the same year that UPMT dissolved, UPI went out on its own and launched United Press International Newsfilm (UPIN). UPIN had staff in New York, Washington DC, and London, and served a client list across the United States and Europe.<sup>39</sup> At the time, the only other major newsfilm distributors were Visnews, (eventually bought by Reuters), and Independent

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<sup>36</sup> Richard M. Harnett and Billy G. Ferguson, *Unipress: United Press International Covering the 20th Century*, (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 2003), 299.

<sup>37</sup> Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *The International News Agencies*, (Beverly Hills, California: Saga Publications, 1980), 238.

<sup>38</sup> William C. Payette, "News Develops as TV Staple; '52 Key Year," *The Billboard*, September 20, 1952, 11.

<sup>39</sup> Zuzana Zabkova, "The Rise of Television News Agencies," MA diss., Birbeck College, London, 2009, 45-46.

Television News (ITN) which had a smaller operation serving British clients only.<sup>40</sup> It was not long before UPI decided that it needed another partner for its newsfilm enterprise, and in 1967 it entered into a 50/50 partnership with ITN to create United Press International Television News (UPITN).

UPITN maintained two headquarters, one in New York that served the Americas and parts of Asia, and one in London that served the rest of the world. Each office was responsible for its own archive. In New York, there was no discernable difference for staffers when UPIN became UPITN, and all UPIN and UPITN film were combined in the New York Archive.<sup>41</sup> In London, UPIN staff were merged with ITN staff and the whole operation, including the archive, was moved into the ITN building. ITN had a more disciplined archival practice than UPIN, and it took the lead on archival management. For example, cameraman's dope sheets were systematically kept under UPITN whereas their retention was spotty under UPIN. ITN's archivists ultimately controlled the entire archive, and film from ITN, UPIN and UPITN was all merged in ITN's vault.<sup>42</sup>

Quite a bit of film was shot in the 1960s and 1970s, and although each headquarters was primarily only concerned with archiving footage that originated with its own office, London film frequently made it into the New York archive and vice versa. Every day, after each office selected and made prints of the cut stories that would be shipped out to their respective subscribers, they also made a fine grain pass of any stories they considered to be worthy of worldwide distribution, and that film was flown to the *other* office. If, for example, the New York headquarters agreed that a story from Paris was relevant to audiences in the Americas, it would make further prints, and add them to *their* daily subscriber shipment. When this sort of

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<sup>40</sup> Luke Smedley, interview by author, November 22, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

cross-Atlantic syndication happened, the receiving office would save the fine grain, creating at times, a story that was represented in both the New York and London archives.<sup>43</sup> The two archives had different naming prefixes—New York used “a00” for black & white, “c00” for color, and London used a “z” for everything—so it’s not obvious that the duplicate stories match up.

At the start of the 1970s, UPITN was fearful that it was falling behind its competitor, Visnews, in the United States. Visnews had a partnership with the U.S. broadcaster NBC, and UPITN wanted a network association of its own.<sup>44</sup> To this end, UPI and ITN each sold half of their shares to Paramount Pictures, who was hoping to establish a fourth US television network.<sup>45</sup> Nothing ever came of Paramount’s plan however, and shortly after, the movie studio sold its 50% to the *Sacramento Union* newspaper, owned by John McGoff. Without going into much detail, McGoff became embroiled in a controversy over suggestions that he was using his stake in UPITN to influence world news reporting on the South African apartheid regime. Needless to say, UPITN was scarred by the accusations, and in 1979 ITN bought back the 50%, raising its share to 75%.

The next big player to enter the equation was ABC who bought 30% of ITN’s share in 1981, and eventually owned as much as 80% by the early 1990s. Nine Network Australia also took a cut in the early 1980s, and in 1984, UPI under Ruhe and Geissler sold its remaining interest to the other partners for \$1.3 million.<sup>46</sup> By the mid 1980s, UPI’s reputation was so terrible that the owners of UPITN made the decision to rebrand the company as World Television News (WTN) in an effort to distance themselves from the failing news agency. WTN

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Chris Paterson, *The International Television News Agencies: The World From London*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), 59.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Alex S. Jones, “Despite Gains, Cash is Short,” *New York Times*, August 16, 1984, D24.

carried on creating and archiving news at its New York and London offices, shooting exclusively on video by the time of the name change.

The next big shift happened in the mid-1990s when WTN majority-owner ABC opened ABC News Videosource, a company created to license ABC news footage as well as WTN's New York archive, which contained the UPIN/UPITN film.<sup>47</sup> The WTN film (as it was now known) was stored in Fort Lee Film Storage in New Jersey, and was brought to Videosource for client screening on film or transfer to tape. With the exception of popular clip reels, tape copies were not archived, and the original film was screened or transferred as many times as clients requested. David Seevers, Videosource's head at the time, estimates that there were around 100,000 individual WTN assets, most of them quite short, and he confirmed that WTN reels were coming in and out of Videosource every day.<sup>48</sup> At some point in the late 1990s, the index cards containing the metadata about the WTN film reels were sent to either Jamaica or India<sup>49</sup> (sources conflicted) for computer data entry. The resulting database named "Concordance" vastly improved the searchability of the collection, and the Videosource's current head researcher still keeps a legacy copy for reference. ABC's database was kept separate, and the ID numbers for each collection were easily distinguishable.

Around the same time that the New York WTN film started its relationship with ABC's archive, the London WTN film was dissolving its relationship with ITN's archive. Ever since 1967, the UPIN/UPITN footage created by the London headquarters had been co-located in the ITN archive with independent ITN material. Thus, in the mid-1990s when ITN strengthened its ties to WTN's main competitor Reuters (formerly Visnews), WTN moved out of the ITN

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<sup>47</sup> David Seevers, interview by author, December 2, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Smedley believed it was Jamaica, but Sylvia Bitton-Netherton, interviewed by the author on December 2, 2016, said it was India.

building and took its film with it. The problem was that ITN, who had always managed the archive, had merged all of the UPIN/UPITN metadata together with ITN-only metadata into one set of microfiche. And now that ITN viewed WTN as the competition, it refused to hand over a copy of the microfiche, thereby separating the 20,000 cans of UPIN/UPITN film from their corresponding text records.<sup>50</sup>

To add to the complexity of the WTN/Reuters situation, in 1994, the Associated Press decided that *it* was going to enter the television news agency arena, launching APTV out of London. The agency was small, but well-liked, and it had undercut both WTN and Reuters when it came to pricing, putting them on the run.<sup>51</sup> WTN couldn't hold on, and in 1998 AP bought the news agency, started by its former competitor UPI, for \$55 million. Aside from a name change from APTV to APTN, not much happened for a while. Eventually, in the mid-2000s, AP got a New York footage sales office up and running, and took over the licensing operation from ABC News Videosource. Consequently, clients no longer had a way to view film in New York as AP's office lacked screening facilities. The only way to view and obtain the UPIN/UPITN material was to pay for an outside vendor to transfer the film unseen, a practice that continues to this day.

On the London side, AP's ownership eventually meant a huge boon for access. In 2009, the Associated Press started a major project to catalog and digitize the contents of the 20,000 film cans that had been sitting in a World War II era London bunker since leaving the ITN archive 15 years earlier. AP still had no access to the original index cards that went with the film, but they made do with the text that was present on the cans and reels. Usually this amounted to a shoot date, a syndication date, a title for the story, 4-5 words describing the scene, and an

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<sup>50</sup> Smedley interview.

<sup>51</sup> John Gapper, "ABC Puts TV News Agency Up For Sale: Media Competitive Pressures Take Their Toll," *Financial Times* (London edition), May 13, 1998, 34.

indication of whether the film had magnetic or optical sound or was silent.<sup>52</sup> When they were lucky, cataloguers might find an original dope sheet in a can, but more often, they were left to piece together the details of a story by watching the digitized film, and with the help of outside research, interpreting it through the metadata written on the material itself. By the end of 2011, all of the London film had been identified, digitized to HD specs, logged, and made available with extensive descriptions on AP's footage sales website, [aparchive.com](http://aparchive.com).

[Aparchive.com](http://aparchive.com) also hosts the records of the New York film, but they are not nearly as reliable as the entries from London. The records follow the same structure as their counterparts in ABC News Videosource's "Concordance" database, which of course makes sense as they represent the exact same collection. It would stand to reason that the Concordance records, which are a digital mirror of the original film index cards, had simply been ingested into [aparchive.com](http://aparchive.com), but that doesn't seem to be the case. Using the film ID numbers of five sample items from the Concordance database, only 2 produced records on [aparchive.com](http://aparchive.com),<sup>53</sup> and there's no discernable reason for the conflict. Further, film shot in Alabama in the 1960s that this author specifically had digitized in 2015, still comes up on the website marked "not digitized." The explanation for this is that anything over ten minutes in length (the Alabama film was longer) cannot be uploaded to the website, however AP protocol still stipulates that the online record should have been updated to indicate that the film does exist in digital form, but simply must be requested offline. [Aparchive.com](http://aparchive.com) also suffers from a similar date problem to Getty's, as the same Alabama film lists a date of 11/06/66 in the "shotlist extract" but the "summary" date, which is used for date-limited searching, shows 11/01/1900. Clearly a London-style overhaul of the New York collection would be tremendously beneficial, but unfortunately AP has no plans to do so.

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<sup>52</sup> Smedley Interview.

<sup>53</sup> ABC News Videosource's current head researcher, Sylvia Bitton-Netherton, sent the author a random selection of five WTN stories from the Concordance database on December 2, 2016.

For all of their travels over the years, the visual materials created under the umbrella of UPI are in fairly good standing in 2016. Certainly, more could be done to improve access to the items, but compared to some other news collections that are more or less off the grid completely, diligent users can often locate what they need within the old UPI collections. One lesson their past has shown us, however, is that access and preservation are at the whim of the current owner, and there's no telling what pressures VCG/Getty or AP will face in the future and what decisions they might make regarding their archival holdings. One final thought concerns provenance, and what is lost when the originator of an is removed from the record. What was once an Acme photo became UPI, then UPI/Bettmann, then Bettmann/Corbis, and now Getty Images/Bettmann. Knowing that a photograph came from Acme, or even just UPI, tells an important part of its story, a part that is fading away.

## Acronym Glossary

- AP: Associated Press
- APTN: Associated Press Television News
- APTV: Associated Press Television
- INP: International News Photos
- INS: International News Service
- ITN: Independent Television News
- P&A: Pacific & Atlantic Photos
- UP: United Press
- UPI: United Press International
- UPIN: United Press International Newsfilm
- UPITN: United Press International Television News
- UPMT: United Press Movietone Television
- VCG: Visual China Group
- WTN: Worldwide Television News

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