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CINE-GT 1800: Intro to MIAP

8 December 2016

Assemblage in Personal Archives: Scrapbooks and Home Movies

Personal archives take many forms, yet two in particular stand out as unique documentation methods of social and cultural history. Scrapbooks and home movies appear dissimilar initially, but upon further investigation commonalities surface. Each method relies on unique arrangements and selection, and the formats require an arguably higher level of effort and assembly beyond that of documentation formats such as photographs or journals. An examination of several scrapbooks and home movie collections (their content, their style, their metadata) leads to an argument that scrapbooks and home movies share significant characteristics as methods of personal and family memory-keeping. Not only that, but the two formats result in analogous challenges with addressing preservation and access concerns, and believe it would benefit both paper archivists and movie image archivists to view these types of objects in conversation with one another in order to gain a wider understanding of their place within 20th century cultural history.

This project is broken into two major sections. First addressed are a history and theoretical analysis of scrapbooks and home movies as methods of personal archiving—who assembles these images? What do they choose to commemorate, and how is it arranged? What can scrapbooks and home movies inform us about domestic spaces within 20th century American culture? In order to stake these claims, this project utilizes secondary research from the fields of American studies, communication studies, and anthropology. While scholars have written little in the way of direct comparison between home movies and scrapbooks, the latter have long been

appreciated as a crucial element of American cultural analysis, especially in relation to domestic spaces and women's work. There has been a noted uptick in scholarship on the subject of home movies within the past two decades, especially with the rise of journals specifically dedicated to moving image archiving, such as the Association of Moving Image Archivists' *The Moving Image*, which published its first issue in 2001.

Furthermore, the bulk of this research stems from digitized collections of scrapbooks and home movies available online through the Center for Home Movies' Home Movie Registry, the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center, the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collections, the Discover Nikkei project, and the Internet Archive. While utilizing the trope and content classifications set forth by the Center for Home Movies' 2010 Digitization and Access Summit, this research effort is predominantly qualitative rather than quantitative, as a result of the consciously small sample size of primary sources.¹ The objects that were chosen to examine for research (both scrapbooks and home movies) all have some form of descriptive metadata tied to them; none are totally orphaned films and can be directly tied to a specific time, place, and family. The films themselves—both 8mm and 16mm, black-and-white and color—are all silent, making this an analysis between forms of purely visual media (as the use of accessing digitizations of scrapbooks and home movies eliminated any consideration of these sources as objects as well). They all take place roughly in the middle third of the 20th century, from about 1930-1970, from varying corners of the United States. While an effort was made to depict a diverse spread of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, having the means to shoot home movies was a privilege in and of itself. Additionally, the analysis of these sources was confined

¹ Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit: Final Report. Culpeper, VA.

to collections that have been digitized and made available online, further limiting the pool from which to select materials.

The second section of this project examines practical issues of preservation and access that arise when addressing scrapbooks and home movies. Though the two methods consist of different formats—archivists and preservation specialists clearly face wildly different challenges when working with one versus another—scrapbooks and home movies have a great deal in common as well. This section will explore how these preservation efforts currently do and could overlap to enable more widespread research use and access, and how paper archivists and moving image archivists might learn from each other in this regard. This section will also address the current landscape of online digital collections for scrapbooks and home movies—as all of the scrapbooks and home movies examined for this project were accessed using these online access tools set up by various libraries, archives, and nonprofits.

As previously mentioned, this project encounters significant limitations in terms of scope and access, and is by no means intended to function as a conclusive final word on the issue of comparing these two methods. Rather, this analysis of home movies and scrapbooks suggests initial trends that emerged regarding the nature of personal memory-keeping, American family culture, and 20th century domestic life. Though scrapbooks were also made for a variety of purposes outside of the documentation of family life—such as fan-made scrapbooks about movie stars—this project concerns itself exclusively with the production of personal archives. Additionally, though home movies have played a crucial role in understanding moments in domestic culture around the world, this project intentionally limits its scope to the United States.

Scrapbooks: Traditional Assemblage

Scrapbooks have centuries of history behind them, including a long and storied one within American culture. For the purposes of this analysis, scrapbooks refer to unique bound collections of materials created for personal use—photographs, newspaper clippings, artwork, greeting cards, ticket stubs, official documents, and even locks of human hair are not uncommon scrapbooking materials. Scrapbooks can commemorate a single event, chronicle the genealogy of a family, or any number of other purposes related to memory-keeping. As Katherine Ott, Susan Tucker, and Patricia P. Buckler argue in their introduction to *The Scrapbook in American Life* that personal scrapbooks are autobiographical, but selectively so. They avoid the confessional nature of diaries and are meant for sharing and display.² Additionally, these objects demand an interdisciplinary analysis that views scrapbooks both as visual and material culture.

The rise of printed ephemera and other printing technologies in the 19th century resulted in an explosion of scrapbook-making activity in the United States, largely by women and girls.³ While noting exceptions, Ott, Tucker, and Buckler argue, “In general, scrapbook and album making was considered a female activity, linked to traditional female concerns of holding families together and pre-serving nostalgic items.”⁴ This domestic activity results in the formation of family narratives, meaning that the women who created them wielded significant power in shaping the legacies of those around them.

² Katherine Ott, Susan Tucker, and Patricia P. Buckler, “An Introduction to the History of Scrapbooks” in *The Scrapbook in American Life*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. 3.

³ Todd L. Goodsell and Liann Seiter, “Scrapbooking: Family Capital and the Construction of Family Discourse,” in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 40, no. 3, 2011. 319.

⁴ Ott, et al. 10.

Historians, anthropologists, and archivists frequently use similar language to describe scrapbooks and home movies independently of one another. In her article “From scrapbook to Facebook: A history of personal media assemblage and archives,” communication studies scholar Katie Day Good argues, “Scrapbooks are rarely edited, nor are they ‘finished’ like formal publications. Instead they are messy, fragmentary, and highly individualized. Scrapbooks have not achieved the ‘official’ or authoritative status of published media like newspapers or books; rather, they tend to be personal collections of ephemera that are themselves ephemeral.”⁵ Here, Good is speaking of scrapbooks in nearly identical terms that moving image archivists use to describe home movies—particularly the commentary on their fragmented nature. Conventional movies maintain even less of an option for editing than scrapbooks, but the connection remains. Perhaps more than any other forms of record-keeping, unique and multifaceted narratives of history are formed through scrapbooks and home movies, and it is this fundamental connection that suggests the need for further exploration and comparison between the two formats.

Home Movies: Technology and Documentation in the 20th Century

Home movies first came into existence not long after the invention of moving image film itself, and became increasingly widespread in the United States as the 20th century progressed. Despite this proliferation of home movies that demonstrate firsthand the evolution of American life throughout the past century, the inclusion of the home movie into the ranks of supposedly archive-worthy canon took much longer. The first home movies inducted into the National Film Registry several years after the list’s creation—the infamous *Zapruder Film* in 1994 and the

⁵ Katie Day Good, ““From scrapbook to Facebook: A history of personal media assemblage and archives,” in *New Media & Society* 15, no. 4 (2012): 558.

compilation of Dave Tatsuno's Japanese internment camp footage, titled *Topaz*, two years later.⁶ The creation of Home Movie Day in 2002 and the establishment of the Center for Home Movies evince this shift toward recognition of the subject.

Just as scrapbooks, the creation home movies have few limitations imposed upon them. These amateur filmmakers are limited only by the amount of film that they possess, and can record whatever they choose in whatever manner they choose. As the 20th century progressed, 8mm and 16mm cameras became increasingly affordable and portable, further widening this consumer base and creating the opportunity for new filmmakers to emerge and capture their family memories on film. Not only are these two methods of personal documentation important for the analysis of factual information (i.e. what families saw as important to record or keep) but also from a stylistic standpoint.

Scrapbooks and home movies each maintain an undeniable creative element. Both scrapbook-makers and amateur home filmmakers make specific choices about what to create and how. For creators of scrapbooks, that comes in the form of selecting which materials to save, choosing specific arrangements, and through the addition of decorative embellishments. For those shooting home movies, this element of selection is slightly more complicated. Though it is true that home movies are not edited in a conventional sense—the majority of home filmmakers just shot footage, sent it to be processed, and watched the final product without tweaking it—these filmmakers do make decisions. They choose what to shoot, from what angle to film, when to cut, along with stylistic touches such as when to add narration (in films with sound), adjust

⁶ Daniel Mauro, "Of national 'Significance': Politicizing the home movies of the US National Film Registry" in *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 11, no. 2-3. September 2013.

lighting in a room, or do something to solicit a specific reaction from a subject (e.g. telling them to wave or make a funny face).

Examinations of Digitized Scrapbooks and Home Movie Collections

This research effort examines four scrapbooks and four home movie collections, all of which have been digitized and made available for public use online, without any specific library logins or database access. The scrapbooks examined span the 1930s through the early 1970s, each demonstrating vastly differing methods of selection and arrangement. The four home movie collections vary in size, from five to over ninety reels. Similarly, the creators of these home movies chose to focus on varying elements of their family lives, but as with the scrapbooks, common themes and moments were present. In both formats, the creators made unique, conscious choices regarding which moments to commemorate.

Working chronologically, the first scrapbook in this analysis is that of Stella Smith Reed (1875-1971), who lived her adult life in Idaho Falls, Idaho. Her scrapbook, available for online access on the Internet Archive, consists of news clippings, letters, funeral cards, and significant handwritten notation. The methodology behind this handwritten notation is especially notable; the first several pages of Reed's scrapbook are filled with brief mentions of significant events in her life in roughly chronological order, yet interspersed with notes from decades later. For example, page four of her scrapbook contains primarily notes about 1939 (e.g. "John Arbogast died in spring of 1939," "Charlie, Wayne, Everett, and Davie went deer hunting in Oct 1939. Each got their deer"), yet also present are notes from 1956-57 (e.g. "David and Wayne sold their spuds on the Bellin place to Hurley in Oct 1956). This mismatched timeline was clearly intentional, even if done so solely for means of conserving space. Another unique element of

Reed's creation is that of her inclusion news clippings with no apparent connection to her family's life. For example, she includes a news article about the youngest mother ever to give birth, a five-year-old girl in Peru in 1939. While this piece was undoubtedly international news, it sticks out as a curious inclusion for Reed's own family record, further suggesting that these scrapbooks are deeply personal and singular items, providing unique insight into the mindset of their creators. Reed's extensive use of handwritten notation to describe life events is evocative of handwritten metadata that frequently accompanies the containers of home movies.⁷

The next scrapbook examined is the "Irwin Holmes Family Life Scrapbook, [1939-1967]," digitized and made available by the Durham County Public Library as a part of the DigitalNC project, one of the very few online institutions with a dedicated interest in making scrapbooks available for online viewing. The title of the Irwin Holmes scrapbook is slightly misleading, as it was not created by Irwin Holmes but instead by his mother, Althea Holmes. While the scrapbook exists as a part of a larger collection related to Irwin Holmes (who became the first black graduate and athlete in North Carolina State University history and a prominent local civil rights leader), this misattribution also speaks to a minimization of women's domestic work. The book itself is made up of photographs, handwritten notations, newspaper clippings, and homework assignments from Irwin's childhood.⁸

Esther Gilbert's World War II scrapbook demonstrates a unique balance of military career and personal travels during her time in Australia.⁹ Unlike the scrapbooks of Holmes or

⁷ Reed, Stella Smith, "Stella Smith Reed's Scrapbook: Detailing life in Idaho Falls, Idaho." *The Internet Archive*. Uploaded 30 August 2011.

<https://archive.org/details/StellaSmithReedsScrapbookDetailingLifeInIdahoFallsIdaho>

⁸ Holmes, Althea. "Irwin Holmes Family Life Scrapbook [1939-1967]." *DigitalNC*.

<http://library.digitalnc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/scrapbooks/id/85377/rec/4>

⁹ Gilbert, Esther. "Esther Gilbert Scrapbook, 1944-1946." *Betty H. Carter Women Veterans*

Reed, Gilbert's creation is limited to a very specific time period. Home movie collections frequently operate in the same realm, depicting one specific time within the life of a family. Finally, the Johnnie Parker scrapbook is an example of the ways in which decorative elements work to provide a comprehensive picture of an event. Using a wide variety of materials including matchbooks, place cards, photographs, newspaper clippings, and greeting cards, Parker amasses various perspectives on her family's life.¹⁰ Similarly, the continuous nature of home movie collections (in that they are not just a single snapshot, and frequently include a great deal of in-between moments) operate in a similar manner to form a more complete image of a family than a single still photograph or written diary can provide.

Four home movie collections were addressed, from varying sources and demographics. The Lulu Belle and Scotty Wiseman Collection from the University of South Carolina's Moving Image Research Collection offered a similar work/life perspective as Esther Gilbert's World War II scrapbook.¹¹ The Yamada Family Collection demonstrates a unique juxtaposition of family events—first, a Buddhist wedding and reception in 1930s Los Angeles, followed by films of that same couple's 25th anniversary celebration. The online collection only includes materials related to these events, in the similar way that a scrapbook might compare and track the passage of time within a family.¹² The Diminucos collection, available on the Center for Home Movies' website (though not seemingly affiliated with any specific archive), demonstrates a variety of genres and

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<http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/WVHP/id/10789>

¹⁰ Johnnie Parker, "Parker Scrapbook [1956-1967]." *DigitalNC*.

<http://library.digitalnc.org/cdm/compoundobject/collection/scrapbooks/id/259213/rec/5>

¹¹ Lulu Belle and Scotty Wiseman, "Lula Belle and Scotty Wiseman home movies." *Moving Image Research Collections, University of South Carolina*.

<http://mirc.sc.edu/islandora/object/usc-test%3A170>

¹² Tsuneko Yamada (donor). "Yamada Family Collection." *Discover Nikkei*.

<http://www.discovernikkei.org/en/nikkeialbum/albums/269/?view=list#collitems>

tropes later categorized by the Center for Home Movies Digitization and Access Summit in 2010, a list which will be discussed further.¹³ Finally, the Thomas F. Freeman Collection from the Texas Archive of the Moving Image is an example of a home movie collection of ample size—its coverage of materials ranging from graduations and church events to family trips to Liberia is indicative of the wide range of moments captured by midcentury American families.¹⁴

Preservation and Access in Home Movies and Scrapbooks

The issue of preservation and access plague archivists who work with scrapbooks and home movies. Secondary research concerning the preservation of scrapbooks frequently begins with some sort of alarmist statement: “When I open my archivist’s anxiety closet, I see ...scrapbooks,” “Among the multitude of preservation problems archivists and special collections curators face in their collections, arguably one of the most challenging is the preservation of historic scrapbooks,” and “Scrapbooks present a particularly challenging set of preservation issues to archivists” are just a few.¹⁵ Home movies can be similarly daunting for archivists. These collections can fall by the wayside for moving image archivists. Small archives and historical societies may not be equipped with film scanners, and even dedicated film archives

¹³ Diminucos Family. “Diminucos Home Movies.” *Center for Home Movies, Home Movie Registry*. <http://homemovieregistry.org/wp/category/diminucos-home-movies/>

¹⁴ Thomas F. Freeman, “The Thomas F. Freeman Collection.” *Texas Archive of the Moving Image*. http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php/Category:The_Thomas_F._Freeman_Collection

¹⁵ Sally Childs-Helton, “Evaluating Scrapbooks for Preservation and Access: Information or Artifact?” in *MAC Newsletter*, July 2009, 30.

Jennifer Hain Teper, “An Introduction to Preservation Challenges and Potential Solutions for Scrapbooks in Archival Collections.” *Journal of Archival Organization* 5, no. 3 (2007): 47.

Juliana M. Kuipers, “Scrapbooks: Intrinsic Value and Material Culture” in *Journal of Archival Organization*, Vol. 2(3) 2004, 83.

face major funding issues that prevent them from being able to scan entire home movie collections simply for the benefit of public access. These collections can be quite large, such as the aforementioned Freeman collection, currently held by the Texas Archive of the Moving Image, making a comprehensive scanning project quite daunting. For scrapbooks, scanning can prove a similarly complicated hurdle. As objects composed of a variety of complex materials, archivists must take great care in accommodating the needs of each type of material when looking to reproduce a scrapbook, and are likely wary to maneuver each page of a fragile scrapbook onto a typical flatbed scanner. Overhead scanners would be ideal for this task, but these cost-prohibitive tools are far out of reach for many small archives and historical societies.

After scanning materials, if institutions are able to do so, they next need to make them available and searchable to interested researchers. Institutions handling both scrapbooks and home movies can benefit from efforts to tag these types of collections. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) can be a beneficial tool as well, both for scrapbooks and for the surrounding metadata on film cans, reels, and boxes that might accompany home movies. While initiatives like the Center for Home Movies and various moving image archives almost always make an attempt to transcribe metadata into the appropriate fields, it is rare for images of these reels or cans to ever be uploaded along with the content. Similarly to scrapbooks, this original, often handwritten notation can be invaluable, and should be taken into consideration when attempting to understand home movies both as visual and material culture.

Categorization is another crucial element to making these collections accessible to potential audiences. In 2010 the Center for Home Movies' Digitization and Access Summit composed a preliminary taxonomy for home movies, in an attempt to emulate the style of the Library of Congress' genre guidelines. This taxonomy was created with the goal of standardizing

vocabulary in order to make these films more searchable, and included genres like “Travelogue Film” and “Milestone Film,” along with common tropes such as “parades” and “the ‘check out our stuff’ motif.”¹⁶ Though this summit’s proposed list was meant primarily as an exploratory exercise, it shed light on commonalities seen across home movie collections. An analogous list for scrapbooks could prove extremely useful for archivists and researchers. Though these two forms are different media, as the above primary research demonstrates, they frequently portray similar events; even a flexible, shared taxonomy for both scrapbooks and home movies might play an important role in widening access to these collections.

There are numerous institutions and projects aiming to digitize and make available scrapbooks and home movies for online public access, and to varying degrees of success. The DigitalNC project is perhaps the only notable large-scale scrapbooking digitization effort, but their work is extremely thorough and comprehensive, in that they take time to scan each complex page in full color (including any foldout elements), OCR the text, and even make the entire files downloadable. While the Internet Archive is not interested specifically in the digitization of scrapbooks or home movies, this online repository contains them both in vast quantities; however, these materials often contain spotty metadata and their provenance is dubious at best, with only a username to identify who uploaded materials. Finally, the previously discussed Center for Home Movies recently launched a Home Movie Registry, a new online access point for digitized home movies. Though the website’s current form is not without its troubles—an imperfect search function and frequent crashes—the project represents an incredible effort to make these collections available and will only continue to improve as more home movies are added in the future.

¹⁶ Center for Home Movies Digitization and Access Summit 2010 Final Report.

Conclusion

Despite their obvious format differences, scrapbooks and home movies share a great deal, and archivists would undoubtedly benefit from viewing these objects in relation with one another. This project attempts to establish a framework for continuing this conversation in the hopes that these valuable materials can reach wider audiences. By bridging the divide between various forms of family memory-keeping, archivists and researchers can come to a fuller understanding of cultural history, and through preservation efforts and digitization, the unique shared characteristics of these materials can be optimized for wider access.

Appendix: Sample preliminary comparative taxonomy for home movies and scrapbooks

Genre as listed in Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit Taxonomy¹⁷	Description	Analogous potential scrapbook-related genre	Description
"Child-Made Film"	the film is the work of a minor, including films made in grade-school classes	Child-made scrapbook	It is not uncommon for these decorative books to be made in primary school classes
"Military Service Record"	the film is shot by individual serving in the military or at War. Leisure / Recreational footage is on a par with Action / Political footage	Military Service Scrapbook	See Esther Gilbert WWII Scrapbook for example; documents military service through the use of scrapbooking. Pictures, telegrams, military documents, etc.
"Travelogue film"	the film captures sightseeing images from travel beyond the home milieu. Examples: "Our Trip to Yosemite;" "Summer in Florida;" "Coney Island Boardwalk scenes;" "Israel 1973."	Travel scrapbook	Book that documents a vacation or trip taken by a family. Can either include a section within a larger scrapbook, or a book solely dedicated to the trip.
"Performance film"	the film captures a public performance intended as a personal record of a public event. Examples: High school Shakespeare play; Piano recital, Age 9; Dad leads Vespers service.	Performance scrapbook	Scrapbook that documents elements of a family performance. While likely includes photography of performance itself, it also includes ephemera (tickets, programs, etc.) and behind-the-scenes look into the performance.

¹⁷ Center for Home Movies 2010 Digitization and Access Summit: Final Report. Culpeper, VA. 10-20. http://www.centerforhomemovies.org/Home_Movie_Summit_Final_Report.pdf