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Uluulu At UH-WO: Moving History

DAN BOYLAN on November 13, 2013 at 12:01 am

Enter Uluulu: The Henry Giugni Moving Image Archive at the University of Hawaii-West Oahu library in Kapolei, then look right. You'll see a television set looping material from the archive's collection.

It can be unnerving. On a recent visit, I found myself watching a quarter-century-old broadcast of PBS-Hawaii's *Dialog*, the predecessor of today's *Insights*.

Seated to moderator Bart Friedo's right were Mufi Hannemann and Neil Abercrombie, to his left, Pat Saiki and former state Sen. Steve Cobb. By my reckoning, the show took place in the summer of 1986. The four guests were vying for the remaining few months in Cec Heftel's two-year term, vacated when Heftel resigned to run for governor.

Abercrombie won that special election, but lost the Democratic nomination to Hannemann, who lost the general election for the full two-year term to Republican Saiki.

Never mind; it was complicated.

So too is the work of Uluulu (the Hawaiian word for collections). “We’re involved in cultural and historical preservation,” says head archivist Janel Quirante, “specifically of moving images that are in danger of being lost forever to either physical deterioration or becoming technologically obsolete. There’s a short window in time in which to move them to digital.”

Quirante acknowledges that libraries across the state have collections of moving images, and that they are part of Bishop Museum’s mission as well, but “video tapes and motion-picture film are our sole focus.”

Uluulu’s origins were in that cherished congressional institution, the “earmark.” The late Henry Giugni served on Sen. Dan Inouye’s staff for decades, then moved up to the post of Senate sergeant-at-arms. When he died in 2005, Inouye asked the Giugni family how they would like their father honored. Daughter Heather, a filmmaker herself, suggested a moving image collection.

Inouye, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, delivered an earmark worth five years of federal funding. The funding ended after three years, however, when earmarks were eliminated by congressional budget cutters.

Quirante sees the archive’s first step as “educating the community on why it’s important to do this, to donate their materials and make them available as an educational resource. When they’re brought in, we have to inventory them and catalog them.” That has meant approaching filmmakers, news organizations, television stations and arts organizations.

So far, so good. Uluulu has brought in more than 20,000 items in the first four years of its existence. But therein lies a problem: storage capacity on servers at West Oahu and at Manoa, 50 terabytes of primary storage and another 50 of backup.

After Quirante places an acquisition on the priority list for digitizing, assistant archivist Koa Luke catalogs it, then passes it on to media specialist Robbie Omura. His is the grind. Transferring tape or film to digital is done in real time and in three different levels: a preservation level, an intermediate lower resolution level and at an access, streaming level on the Web. Thus far, more than 500 hours have been digitized; but there’s much more to do, boxes and boxes of news tapes and film of Hawaii past.

Take a look at uluulu.hawaii.edu.