Chicago Section Holds Tenth All-Day Meeting May 11, 1985

Imaging technologies and the exciting advances taking place in every area of film and video were explored during the Chicago Section's 10th All-Day Meeting. The keynote speaker, William Smith, Allied Film and Video, gave an informative address on "The Role of the Changing Laboratory." He emphasized that it is the technology within the laboratory that is changing, and not the role played by the laboratory. The complete text of his speech appears below.

The meeting opened with a film, *Made In Chicago,* produced by Michael Dunn. The papers program included: "The Interface of Motion-Picture Film and Video," presented by Richard C. Sehlin, Eastman Kodak Co.; "Unique Film Production Techniques," Mort Goldsholl, Goldsholl Associates; "The Blue Max High Power Luminous Projector System," Jonathan Erland, Apogee Inc.; "An Overview of Dolby Film Sound Technologies and Equipment," William Mead, Dolby Labs Inc.; "Changing Concepts in Cinematography," Ed Ortman, Eastman Kodak Co.; "An Update on Special Effects Filters," Ira Tiffin, Tiffin Manufacturing Corp.; and "The Design of the Panavision Elaine 16mm Camera," Albert Mayer and Robert Dunn, Panavision Inc.

The presentations required two 35mm xenon projectors with scope lenses in addition to the normal 16mm xenon projector, slide projector, ten video monitors and a player.

Committee Chairmen for the All-Day Meeting were:

General Chairman: Norman Thelen, Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corp.

Finance Chairman: Paul Markun, Skylite Communications Inc.

Program Chairman: Richard Thomas, Eastman Kodak Co.

Sponsors Chairman: Benjamin Stone, Eastman Kodak Co.

Registration: Roland Johnson, Eastman Kodak Co.

Arrangements: George Halonen, Geo. W. Colburn Lab Inc.

Equipment and Operations: Jack Behrend, Behrends Inc.

Publicity: Robert Pittluck, Aerial Image Transfer Service.

The Role of the Changing Laboratory

By William H. Smith

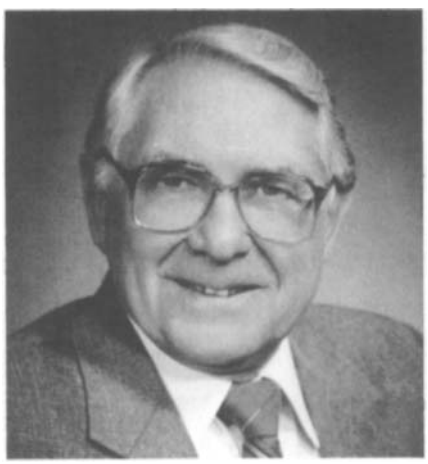
It's a pleasure to be back in Chicago. I guess you never really forget your old home town — especially when it's such an exciting and dynamic city as Chicago is. It's also a pleasure to be back where I started my SMPTE career, and I will always appreciate the chance I had to serve as chairman of the Chicago Section in 1959 and 1960.

In the 25 years since then, a lot has happened. Chicago has changed — mostly for the better. The Chicago Section has changed — all for the better. In fact, the subject of my remarks this morning is "change" — changes that affect all of us here — producers, sponsors, writer, editors, sound and camera people — the whole gamut of creative and technical people involved in audiovisual production.

Particularly, I want to reflect on the phase of the business in which I'm most involved — the laboratory. But I think the laboratory is only a symbol of what's changing for all of us — and what we see in the lab business, you can probably see in yours.

When I first thought about this topic, I was going to talk about "The Changing Role of the Film Laboratory," but the more I thought about it, the more I began to see that a more appropriate title would be "The Role of the Changing Laboratory." As you'll see, it's not the role the lab plays that's changing, it's the technology within the lab that's changing, and we have the choice of either embracing or rejecting that new technology.

There are a couple of often quoted, seemingly contradictory, sayings that come to mind when we talk about change. One by an ancient Greek philosopher is that "Nothing is permanent except change." The other, which you've all probably heard, is "The more things change the more they remain the same." Somewhere between these two sayings lies the fate of all of us.



William H. Smith

For those who might be hoping for some kind of a magic formula for survival, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. On the other hand, for those with an open mind (and perhaps an open checkbook), there may be something useful in what I have to say. (Speaking of open checkbooks — I'm reminded that last weekend, as I was watching the Kentucky Derby on TV, it occurred to me that the winner, Spend A Buck, *must* have been sired by the video industry.)

To begin with, let me say that my comments today pertain to the audiovisual segment of our industry — corporate communications, education, training, and motivation — *not* the entertainment or feature film business. Similarly, when I refer to video, I'm not talking about broadcast or cable television, but about video that's destined for eventual release via videocassettes. Also, the geography that I use as an example is primarily the midwest, but I think it's representa-

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tive of the entire country.

Let's try to examine what it is about our industry that is changing and why:

Of the four elements involved in the production and distribution of audiovisual programs — pre-production, production, post-production, and release — the lab has always been principally involved in the latter two, post-production and release. This is taken to include such things as editing, conforming, optical printing, titling, sound editing, and mixing, as well as the manufacture of release prints.

In order to put this business in some kind of perspective, let me take you back 30 years to a time when every city of significant size in this country had at least one laboratory — places like Des Moines, Iowa; Omaha, Nebraska; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota, all had a film lab. Many, like Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, New Orleans, Cleveland, Detroit, and Dallas, had two or more; and, in fact in the late 1950s, Chicago had 15 laboratories. In addition to that, most television stations had their own facilities for processing and editing film.

This was a time when black-and-white was as common as color, when filmstrips were accompanied by records, not audio tapes; when widescreen, CinemaScope, Cinerama, and Panavision were in their infancy; before Dolby Sound, before Super 8, and before the explosive use of videocassettes. This was a time when the giants in the 16mm business were companies like Colburn, Calvin, Capital, and Byron. But *change is constant.*

Looking at these same cities today, it's easy to see that the advent of video, with its enormous influence on the audiovisual communications industry, has brought a profound change to the film laboratory business. Many of these companies have disappeared, including the giants. In fact, within the last 18 months, five more laboratories have closed. Today laboratories exist and prosper only in the major metropolitan areas.

But the important thing to recognize is that the needs of the communications industry haven't changed — only the tools have. The same post-production and duplication services are still required, and what we see now are video editing and duplicating services springing up in all of these same cities across the country where once there were film laboratories.

And in the major metropolitan areas we find the same 15 or 20 companies providing post-production and duplicating services — but now they're video instead of film companies. So the post-production and duplicating needs haven't changed — only the technology and the "providers" to fill these needs have changed.

At the same time, other parts of our industry have been similarly affected: sound mixers have become audio sweeteners; film timers have become telecine colorists; cinematographers have become videographers.

But while all these changes are taking place, film continues to be the preferred quality method of origination, and 16mm negative sales continue to grow. Last year 16mm negative sales grew by 8 to 10%, and additional growth is predicted for 1985. These negatives, along with 16mm prints of existing and new programs, continue to be transferred to tape on the more than 150 film-to-tape transfer machines around the country for subsequent release in videocassette.

Simultaneously, the growth of videocassettes as the preferred method of release and distribution continues relentlessly. In just one month, March of this year, over one million VCRs were sold in this country, and approximately two and a half million have been sold in the first quarter of 1985. By the end of 1986, it is projected that there will be fifty million videocassette players in use. By comparison, it is estimated that there are presently only a total of 1.3 million 16mm projectors in use in the entire country, in business, industry, home and churches. And even more significantly, there are no more 16mm projectors being manufactured in the U.S.

Can you imagine what the film business would have been like if 50 million homes had had 16mm projectors? But the more things *change,* the more they remain the *same.* These changing tools of communication are all still addressing the same fundamental need to communicate — to teach, to learn, to inform, to motivate, to explain, to enlighten — yes, even to entertain.

If we accept the premise that film is in fact the preferred method of origination and source material, and that videocassettes are becoming the preferred method of release, then where should the interface of these two technologies take place? In our opinion, it belongs in the laboratory!

Labs are filled with people who are skilled and trained in the proper handling of film. Film editors and sound personnel employing film techniques and equipment still provide efficient, cost-effective means for finishing programs. Labs are also filled with people who are skilled and trained in achieving and judging quality images.

In our view, videocassettes should simply be one more item in the array of products and services offered by laboratories to the audiovisual community, along with slides, filmstrips, Super 8 cartridges. Labelle and Audiscan cartridges, and 16mm release prints. The fact that videocassettes may be the fastest growing and most cost-effective method of distribution should encourage labs to adopt video, not discourage them!

Laboratories are the natural and logical place for things like film-to-tape transfers, or tape-to-film transfers, for that matter. Editing, conforming, and mastering video is just as proper a function for labs as editing, conforming, and mastering film has always been. Admittedly, changing technology, changing systems, and changing skills are required; but the overall *needs* of the marketplace remain the same. It's simply a case of the laboratories rising to the occasion — just as all of you must rise to the occasion.

So rather than being discouraged by the decline in the popularity of film as a release medium, let's be encouraged by the exciting opportunities offered to us as we look for our new role as one of the changing companies involved in the post-production and release of programs for the audiovisual markets.

Welcome the changes and the opportunities they present to continue to play a part in the vital, exciting, and rapidly growing audiovisual communications industry. Let's be determined to remember that we're all in the communications industry — not just the film industry.

All opportunities — both film and video — are open to us, and there are many contributions we can make to the success and prosperity of "communications." In fact, there are ways we can bring cost effectiveness to an industry that is characterized by the escalating costs so often associated with a rapidly changing technology. And above all, let's all dedicate ourselves to the concept that new technology must result in more and better communication — not just in more and better technology.