

Television History, The Peabody Archive, and Cultural Memory

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The Peabody Archive houses the programmes and associated materials submitted to the Peabody Awards Collection since 1941 for consideration for a Peabody Award. Programmes and materials relate mainly to local television programmes in the United States, however radio programmes are also included in the Archive spanning decades which reflect significant change in not only local, national, commercial and public stations, but also in broadcast technology and media platforms. Crucially, all entrants for the Awards are preserved in the Archive, not only those who ultimately went on to secure an accolade.

This edited volume is the result of a collaboration between the Peabody Awards, public historians and media scholars (p. vii) and a subsequent conference to present research aimed at highlighting a 'wider and deeper' (ibid.) look at U.S. broadcast history than the well-established discourse based on popular memory of the relationship of television to American society. Divided into three main sections, the collection considers: the Archive itself and what the texts, paratexts and metadata contained within it can tell us; the visibility, or otherwise, in terms of media citizenry and subjectivity; and a comparison of historical presentation of news particularly in a public service context.

Together, the collection of individual chapters looks beyond what is found in the Archive to consider how the materials and resources might change our collective understanding of television's past, and also how this reflective knowledge may impact on the ways that we all think about present day broadcasting, and into the future as technology, platforms and media consumption continue to evolve. Unusual for a media archive, the Peabody Archive collection is available to research and view online, making wide scholarly research possible. Although in the UK, media archives are generally available via Learning on Screens' *Box of Broadcasts*, only selected programmes broadcast from the late 1970s and 1980s are available, with a fuller repository available from the 1990s onwards. This can limit the research to this time period. While the Peabody Archive is not a full collection of all that has been broadcast, as a collection of all entries to the Award process, and not just the 'big networks' (p.30), it has enabled a wider range of scholars to access and contribute to discussion from a wider timeframe.

Television History, The Peabody Archive, and Cultural Memory demonstrates what is possible in terms of research knowledge when access is not limited by time, and will be of interest to students of media history generally, with those focusing on 'early' television development being particularly interested in the methodologies of mass archiving, enabling effective searches and analysis, as much as the topics for consideration. As a repository for award submissions, the Archive is rich in materials which otherwise might be referred to as 'diversity' in nature, allowing scholars of depictions of well-trodden media studies themes of race (pp.79-95 and pp.136-153), or sexuality (pp.116-135) to reflect on interrogate a variety of primary sources, and not solely those already curated as 'television history' before reaching challenging and challengeable conclusions. Beyond this, valuable histories of phenomena such as 'fake news' are traceable and well demonstrated in chapter submissions (pp.206-225).

This volume includes some of those initial considerations, which no doubt could be, and will be, expanded over time. There is a recognition that the dataset could, and should, be analysed 'from many more vantage points' (p.58). As such, it is not 'complete' or indeed intended to be a comprehensive discussion of the Peabody Archive. It does, however, meet

its expectation to be an introductory text to the Archive and the methodologies used to investigate its cultural significance to date. As the Peabody Awards remain ongoing, the Archive itself will remain as a growing repository for valuable material. This in turn may stimulate a raft of further and developing research, as well as acting as a catalyst for other media archives to realise the value of academic research, shining a light not only on their contents, but on the significance of their resources as cultural indicators in history.

Overall, as media history itself moves from 'recent memory' to celebrating a substantial journey, with institutions such as the BBC itself celebrating one hundred years of broadcasting in 2022, and reflecting on the digitisation of and access to its century-wide output and associated materials, the essays contained within *Television History, The Peabody Archive, and Cultural Memory* may contain enough hope and demonstrated academic value for a shift in making media archives available from a threat to an opportunity. The volume does a good job in demonstrating that a broad range of perspectives and research interests can flow from such access, availability and attention.

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