

ABOUT MICHAEL (MIKE) SWAIN

Joining his father's motion picture studio in Sarasota straight out of college in 1964, Michael Swain became Hack Swain Productions' Director of Photography. Over the next few decades, Mike shot hundreds of thousands of feet of 16mm film which eventually was donated to become the majority of Sarasota County's motion picture archive. In addition to the film, a complete 16mm editing bench was donated. The variety of productions, document the Sarasota area from the late '50s through the 1980s. Of major historical importance was a series of films including The History of Sarasota, The Sarasota Movie, The History of Manatee County, The History of Venice, The History of Clearwater, The History of Winter Haven, and The History of Polk County. All of this film was stored for many years in various county buildings without inventory or maintenance.

When Mike's business closed a few years ago, Mike began working part time at the Sarasota County Historical Resources archiving this valuable collection which by then, was in danger of deterioration. Mike was the perfect man for the job since he was the cinematographer for the majority of the collection and knew names, places, dates and other intimate details of most of the footage.

In assessing what had to be done at the start of archiving the film library, Mike helped create a data sheet to record details of each roll of film which would become an electronic data base for the entire library. Mike also established a protocol for handling the film. Each original metal can was to be replaced with a new plastic archival can and relabeled with a can number. Each roll of film in each can was to be given a "call number." Each roll of film was to be evaluated by hand-winding through a viewer, the data sheet filled out, and the scenes logged on a separate sheet of archival paper. During the viewing and logging stage, any repairs were made if needed and the film treated with a chemical fluid for long term archive storage.

Early on, it was obvious that any historically important film should be transferred to a modern electronic video format not only for long term storage but also to make the footage easily retrievable and available for public use. It was determined that commercially available film transfer systems were too expensive for the History Center's limited budget so Mike volunteered to build one at minimal cost. Once built, Mike's Motion Picture Transfer Station made it possible to transfer 16mm movie footage to three different mediums in a single pass to avoid unnecessary wear and tear on the film itself.

To date, approximately 60% of the film library has been treated, logged, and archived in new cans. The completion of this ambitious project is currently on hold until additional funds are available either from special grants or part-time county employment budgets. In any case, Mike Swain has done an outstanding job in conserving a unique and valuable historical resource.