



*Hilliard man plans museum to share his love and knowledge of antique televisions*

By KEVIN CORVO

Hilliard Northwest News Reporter

**W**hile most people dream of owning a big-screen television for Super Bowl parties, a Hilliard area man searches tirelessly for televisions with black-and-white screens the size of a Palm Pilot.

In only two years, Steve McVoy has collected 27 television sets manufactured before World War II and even more postwar sets. His newest acquisitions are the first color television sets, produced in the early 1950s.

The collection — which he hopes will soon be housed in a museum in Old Hilliard — arose from idle time on his hands after McVoy sold his interest in Paxton Cable and Coaxial.

But McVoy's interest in televisions actually can be traced back to his childhood, when he began working at a TV repair shop near Gainesville, Fla.

McVoy was 11 years old when his family got its first television in 1954. It was a 21-inch Admiral black-and-white set. The only channel it could pick up was a CBS station 80 miles away in Jacksonville.

McVoy attended college at Cornell but got sidetracked and opened his own cable business in Florida in 1965. In 1970, he moved to Central Ohio, where he continued to work in cable television until two years ago.

During the past two years, he has collected and rebuilt dozens of television sets, the vast majority of which are older than his family's first set.

"I needed something to do, so I began collecting

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—Steve McVoy  
television collector

televisions," McVoy said.

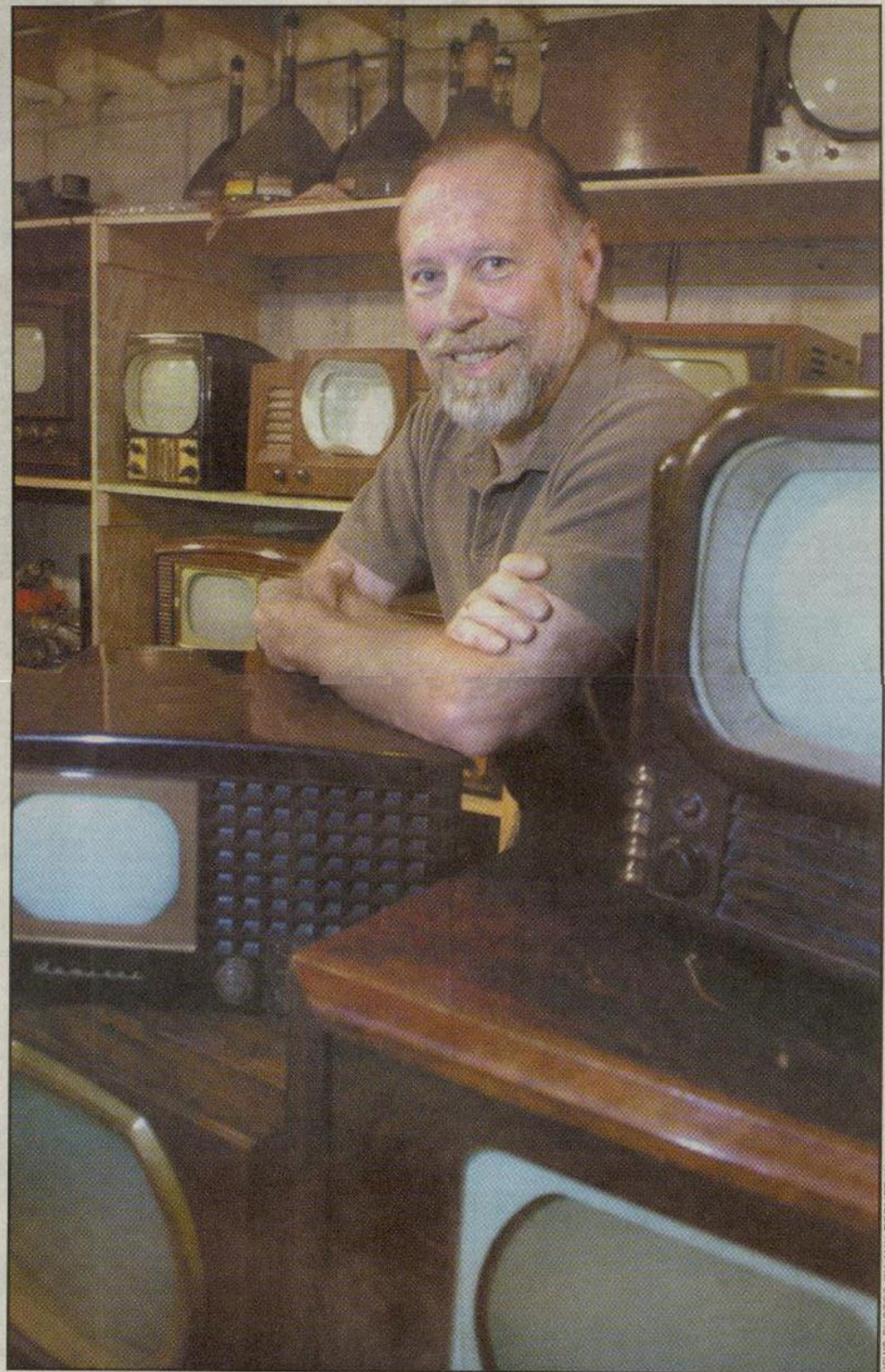
The rarest television in his collection is an English set produced by Baird in 1928. Only three are known to exist.

"A dealer in England told me about it, and an agent bid on it for me," McVoy said.

Known as a mechanical set, it received a signal that is no longer produced. The set was useless until another modern invention — the computer — made it possible to re-create the signal it received in 1928.

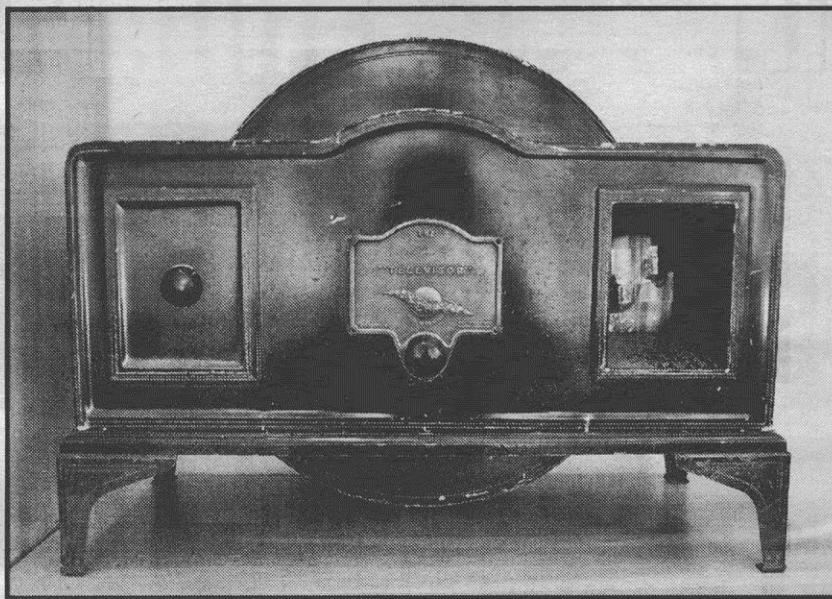
Baird televisions based on the old signal were produced in England from 1928 to 1936, when the British Broadcasting System revamped the signal. The BBC signal remained the standard in England until

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Steve McVoy wants to open a museum in Old Hilliard that is dedicated to antique televisions. There are currently no museums in the country that focus solely on TV sets, said McVoy, who is seen here surrounded by post-World War II models.





Included in Steve McVoy's collection is a 1928 Baird, the first commercially produced television set. The English TV, which still works, produces an image about the size of a postage stamp.

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1980, when it was improved.

### Slow-growing industry

The English had a jump on Americans when it came to the television. Americans experimented with mechanical television in the 1930s but did not produce many for commercial use.

"Picture tube technology existed, but it was difficult to project the picture," McVoy said, referring to a quirk of early TV designs.

The United States did not produce televisions for wide commercial use until the advent of the electronic television in 1939.

The first electronic televisions had a picture tube about 26 inches long. In order to keep the set close to walls, the tube was turned upright, and the screen projected the image backwards. A mirror on the lid of the set reflected the image to the viewer.

Sets with smaller screens – less than 9 inches – were viewed directly.

"A mirror-in-the-lid television had at least a 12-inch screen and cost about \$600. A new car cost about \$500. Obviously, not many of these (sets) were made or sold," McVoy said.

The vast majority were produced by RCA, and only about 30 are known to exist today.

"Before the war, virtually all television sales were in New York, because there were three stations in New York. Some were sold in Chicago and Los Angeles, but basically they were a hard sell," McVoy said.

About 7,000 television sets were produced in the United States before the war, about one-third of them manufactured by RCA, McVoy said. Zenith, Philco, Emerson and Westinghouse were other producers.

"Anyone who made radios also made televisions because they didn't want to be left out," he said.

World War II effectively halted the production of televisions, but when the war ended, the golden age of television dawned.

Virtually all television sets produced after the war were direct-view televisions. A 10-inch screen was most common. By 1950, a 15-inch screen was the standard, McVoy said.

As with every other new technology, quality increased and the price gradually decreased.

"By 1953, black-and-white technology was perfected," McVoy said, and television manu-

factures began to tackle the task of color.

Again, RCA set the bar, producing the first color television in 1954. The retail price of the first color television set was about \$1,295, McVoy said.

"They couldn't sell them at that price. They were enormously expensive. Besides, most people preferred a sharp black-and-white picture over a somewhat fuzzy color picture," McVoy said.

In addition, there were few stations that broadcast in color. In 1954, NBC became the first to do so, but it wasn't until the network unveiled its *Wonderful World of Disney* in the mid-1960s that color television sales took off, McVoy said.

### Television museum

McVoy has rebuilt to some degree every television in his collection.

"The first one I got was a mirror-in-the-lid television made in 1939. It was literally in pieces. I put the electronic components back together and had a wood shop refurbish the cabinet," he said.

Making many of his purchases via the Internet, McVoy said he spends about 30 hours a week pursuing leads or rebuilding televisions. His collection has grown to the point that he needs a place to store it.

"I thought about opening a museum even before I started collecting," said McVoy, who already has a museum site in mind. He has the property formerly known as Lee's Catering on Franklin Street in Old Hilliard under contract to purchase.

McVoy will petition the Old Hilliard Commission next month to allow him to open the museum.

"If I can do it, I'm shooting for August. It needs some interior work. I'll decorate each room like the decade in which the television in the room were produced," McVoy said.

Computer terminals in each room would provide information about the televisions. McVoy has already founded a nonprofit organization called the Early Television Foundation and a Web site, [www.earlytelevision.org](http://www.earlytelevision.org).

The museum would be open on weekends or by appointment for school groups or out-of-town visitors.

"I'm real excited about being able to do it. It's fun and a new challenge," McVoy said.