Minutes of the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Early Television Foundation

May 7.2023

Board Members Present: Dave Abramson, Dave Arland, Matt D’Asaro, Bob Dobush, Blake Hinkle, Dan Jones , Steve McVoy, Dave Sica

Members Absent: Geoff Bourne, Chuck Conrad , James O’Neal

Prior to the start of the meeting, Dave Arland briefly discussed the topic of this year’s sweepstakes prize:

Dave mentioned that Steve had informed the executive committee a few months ago about a potential donation. Steve explained that a person from California had contacted them regarding the donation of an RCA TRK-5. The individual claimed that the set had belonged to their father, who lived in New Jersey. The set had been purchased new and used for several years and had a service tag from a local shop inside. However, due to a flood in the basement, the bottom part had rotted, leaving the cabinet in poor condition. The donor had owned the TRK for a while before deciding to donate it.

After considering various options, we discussed the idea of donating the prize for this year. Initially, our first thought was to offer the 'Visionette,' but upon further discussion with the board members, we realized that it might be too niche and not have wide appeal. Consequently, we decided to postpone the sweepstakes, which is typically awarded at the convention. Instead, we will begin the sweepstakes next week, as soon as we have the necessary pictures taken and the setup completed. Ticket sales will be conducted online, and the drawing will take place in August.

Dave Arland knew someone who does excellent cabinet work. I'll now hand it over to Dave to provide more details on this.

Dave reported that it was Blake Hinkle’s suggestion that we consider funding the restoration of the cabinet. We found a skilled craftsman named Greg Ziesemer in Indianapolis who owns an antique furniture restoration business. He has worked with our state museum in Indiana and has previously done restoration work for both me and Blake. In short, the board has decided to fund the cabinet's restoration. We want to ensure that it is available for everyone to see, particularly once the sweepstakes tickets are available. Currently, the cabinet is located in the room around Nipper. It's worth mentioning that along with the restored cabinet, we also have the unrestored chassis and picture tube on display. Additionally, I brought all the remaining pieces that were left over, including the veneers that needed replacing. Restoring the cabinet was quite a task, as it arrived in poor condition, leaning like the Titanic. Thankfully, Larry captured some pictures when it first arrived, and it's now been restored to its original state. We hope that this investment will bring fruitful results and profits for us.

The meeting was then called to order by Early Television Foundation President Steve McVoy.

The minutes of last year’s annual meeting were approved and seconded.

Convention Attendance: We faced some issues with the attendance issue this year. Due to scheduling conflicts, some of our regular attendees and board members couldn't make it to the Convention. Steve introduced the board members present. We did have some absentees who were watching the live feed and they were able to reach out via phone with comments and question.

Registration got off to a slow start, but by the time of the event, our attendance was at approximately the same as last year, a healthy 110.

ELECTION:

We had four candidates, all highly qualified. One of them is a new face, while the other three are incumbents. They are: Dave Abramson, Barry Bennett, Chuck Conrad, and James O'Neill.

Barry Bennett expressed his interest in joining the board. However, there was some confusion regarding the availability of an opening. Barry was under the impression that a position was vacant when he submitted his application. Barry subsequently withdrew his name from contention and the three remaining members were elected.

We discussed Barry as a potential board member. It was clarified that his idea was not to displace anyone, but rather he saw it as an opportunity to contribute. Given his local presence and his valuable assistance with the museum, many members agreed that he would be a wonderful addition to the board. When a board opening arises, it was suggested that Barry be considered as a strong candidate. This aligns with our bylaws, as we elect about a third of our board members each year. Next year, we anticipate having three, possibly four, positions up for reelection.

FINANCIAL:

As previously shared, our financial statements indicate an income of approximately $42,000 and expenses of around $48,000. It's important to note that this doesn't indicate a deficit. We had a surplus from the previous year, as evident in the previous report. Our financial approach revolves around spending what we receive. We have sufficient funds from our sources to cover the museum's operations. The major expenses include Larry's salary, utilities, and insurance (which tends to be quite expensive.) Our income primarily stems from memberships, picture tube sales, and advertising revenue, although the latter has been diminishing lately. The income generated from advertising, including some generic and occasional inappropriate content, still contributes a few thousand dollars annually.

Overall, the museum is in a favorable position for the future. However, it has become crucial to address the upcoming issue regarding Steve’s long-term commitment. He just turned 80 and is willing to continue running the organization as long as possible, but at some point, the museum is going to be facing the problem of who runs it. It's by no means a full-time job, but there is a fair amount of work involved. We may be in a position where we have to hire somebody, and if that happens, the income will have to increase, and the board will have to deal with how to do that. However, that's not a problem right now.

We currently have about eleven thousand dollars in the bank. Prior to this auction and so forth, the last year we had a net income of about ten thousand dollars from everything in the convention. The convention itself breaks even or close to it to it in terms of the membership and admission fees. That just covers the cost of the event, the majority of which is the catering for lunch, dinner, and other expenses.

We make our money from the sale of surplus museum items and commission on other people's sales in the auction. So, we made about ten thousand dollars last year. We also received a fair amount of cash donations at the convention.

This year, we did substantially better. We had some high-income items. The Visionette was ours, the CT-100 was ours, and a couple of other things brought in a few hundred bucks. So, we made about ten thousand dollars between the sale of our items and commissions.

Additionally, we have the income coming in from the sweepstakes, which has averaged eleven thousand dollars in the last two years. With the TRK, it may be higher, but we're not sure how much higher.

So, we may have more cash than we need for our base expenses. We also have two projects to consider. The first one is the area here in the garage bay, which I'll talk about later. The other project is the parking lot, which we've been putting off and need to address.

If things keep going well, we may have the funds to complete both of these projects this year.

MEMBERSHIP:

Our membership is about 170 right now, compared to 160 at the end of last year. Most of our memberships come in during the beginning of the year when we conduct our membership drive and from people attending the convention. However, we do have memberships trickling in throughout the rest of the year, so it’s likely we’ll end 2023 with about 180 members.

During the discussion, there was anticipation expressed regarding the possibility of another Fall event similar to the previous one. The previous event was considered particularly interesting due to the presence of a 12-year-old boy, which reminded some attendees of their own early interest in this field. It was acknowledged that encouraging young enthusiasts is vital for the organization's future.

Some participants shared their experiences with other organizations focused on antique items such as radio clubs and clock clubs. They noted that these groups are facing challenges with membership as their existing members are aging and new recruits are scarce. Fortunately, our organization is experiencing the opposite trend, with new members joining. The hope was expressed that the 12-year-old participant and other young hobbyists continue to engage with our organization.

It was noted that the family had attended the previous year's event as well, and one attendee had assisted them in selecting their first TV project.

DONATIONS:

The next agenda item discussed equipment donations. The estimated value of donations received during the year was around $32,000. Among the notable items was a British console set, which had an interesting story involving an earthquake incident in San Francisco. Unfortunately, the picture tube was damaged in the fall, but it was mentioned that efforts would be made to replace the shattered tube with a newly blown dummy bulb. The organization still had some remaining parts of the old tube, which could be used for reference.

Another item mentioned was the Western Visionette, which was sold due to the availability of a superior example in the museum's collection. Additionally, there was the “Frankenset” TRK-12 that was sold for $100. In the past, the organization might have considered keeping it in hopes of finding a chassis elsewhere, but the buyer is discussing the possibility of purchasing a chassis from someone in the database.

It was acknowledged that finding a CRT (cathode ray tube) for the FrankenSet could be a challenge, but if successful, it would significantly increase its value.

In addition, John Folsom's donated a Silvertone version of the TRK-12, which is a beautiful set. We anticipate receiving more items from John as he continues to thin out his collection. This will be wonderful for our organization.

You may have noticed the Picturephone Model 1 out on display. This was recently donated by Ludwell Sibley who received it years ago from an engineer at Bell Laboratories when he worked there. Just to clarify, this is not the same as the Picturephone donated several years ago by Richard Diehl, which is a model 2.

During our monthly Zoom meeting, we had a presentation about a startup called Lucitron. They were working on developing a flat-screen technology during the early days, but unfortunately, the project didn't progress much. The images produced by the screen were of poor resolution, and the device only displayed black and white. Despite their best efforts, the company eventually went under like so many startups. The surviving model of the Lucitron is now in our possession, and we’ll be posting more information about it on our website.

SWEEPSTAKES:

We discussed the upcoming sweepstakes. It was suggested to give people more time to purchase tickets, so we have set the date for the sweepstakes in August. This will allow individuals sufficient time to buy tickets.

The company managing the sweepstakes advised us to extend the ticket selling period. They believe that the longer we have to sell tickets, the better our results will be. It seems reasonable to extend the duration of the sweepstakes to maximize our sales.

FALL SWAP MEET:

Regarding our fall swap meet, we tentatively plan to hold it in the middle of October. However, we are also considering scheduling it as early as the end of September. We need to take into account various factors, including scheduling availability for Larry and Steve, as well as the Ohio State Games. It was suggested that we expand the activities during the event to attract more people and potentially have a different clientele than our usual convention. This way, we can also sell items that might not typically move during our conventions.

One idea proposed was to organize a workshop where participants can learn and engage in a specific topic. Additionally, there was a suggestion to have a live restoration day, involving volunteers working on one of the museum's TV sets to demonstrate the process of repairing an old television. Dave Perdue, a skilled restorer who has worked on multiple sets, was mentioned as a potential volunteer for this activity.

Regarding the restoration demonstration, there were different perspectives on how it should be executed. While one suggestion was to take a working device and introduce faults in real-time, another perspective leaned towards having a chassis and demonstrating the step-by-step process of recapping and repairing a set. The latter approach was seen as an opportunity for people to observe and ask questions about the restoration process. The specific preferences and techniques of each restorer were acknowledged, as different individuals have their unique methods.

It was noted that audience considerations should play a role in finalizing the activities and their formats. The discussion highlighted the importance of tailoring the events to the interests and expectations of the attendees. Further brainstorming and planning will be required to determine the exact activities and their logistics.

NEW DISPLAY AREA:

We addressed the new display area, which we've been thinking about for some time now due to the extensive work involved. Although we can hire someone for the construction, our main challenge lies in organizing all the equipment we have. We devised a plan to begin with the ceiling installation, to allow the space above the display area to be used for storage for the CRTs now on the floor in that area, followed by constructing the walls. We can then proceed to frame them and cover with plywood, creating a storage space above for the CRTs similar to what we have over the CRT rebuilding area.

To make this happen, Dan Jones and Blake Hinkle have offered to come down on a weekend to assist us with the project. Additionally, Steve knows someone who can provide affordable carpentry work, and they will be responsible for that part of the project. Once everything is relocated, we can proceed with the rest of the setup. We should also consider enlisting additional volunteers to assist with moving items. This would greatly expedite the process.

Furthermore, during our conversation on Friday, Steve brought up the idea of consolidating the smaller European room into the larger one. Initially, we intended to use it as an exhibition area. However, it was suggested, perhaps by Dan, that the exhibition space should be closer to the museum's entrance.

Considering the time constraints, it would be beneficial to consolidate the smaller European room into the larger one. We have several duplicates in the British prewar room, so we can streamline that area by combining similar sets. This way, the smaller room can be transformed into an exhibition space. It's a feasible solution, and it will allow us to have some engaging displays even if the entire setup takes longer than anticipated.

Furthermore, we noticed a growing interest in more modern equipment among visitors who appreciate the older items but don't remember the sets they had during their childhood. Hence, it was proposed that we create a section featuring modern equipment from the CRT era onwards, showcasing a few examples of each.

We believe this approach will attract new enthusiasts to the hobby. It's surprising to see the number of people on platforms like Facebook expressing interest in vintage sets and even considering prices that we would find absurd. It's a whole world out there that is genuinely fascinated by this area of interest. Therefore, our plan is to complete these changes by the end of the year.

Another item discussed was the possibility of expanding the museum display area to include the CRT rebuilding room. This would involve filling in the designated space and providing informational signs to describe the purpose and function of each piece of equipment. It was seen as an important project to pursue.

DE-ACCESSIONING:

Regarding the question of auctioning or raffling off some of the British sets, the consensus was against it. We feel a strong responsibility to preserve our collection, and our policy is to consider auctioning or selling only duplicate sets in worse condition. Some individuals have expressed interest in certain high-value items, but those will be placed in storage if they cannot be tastefully displayed elsewhere. We need to bring this topic up with the board and reach a final decision on the matter.

INVENTORY:

During the discussion, it was highlighted that we currently lack an inventory of the items on display. This poses a significant concern, especially considering that insurance is our biggest expense. We need to be prepared for unforeseen events, such as a fire, which could potentially destroy irreplaceable artifacts and even pose a hazardous waste risk if picture tube flyers are involved.

To address this issue, it was suggested that a committee be formed to inventory our collection for insurance purposes. Additionally, it was mentioned that we may not have a record of items loaned to the museum versus those that have been given as donations. This lack of information could lead to complications in the future, particularly if families of deceased donors request the return of certain items.

While it was mentioned that some initial work has been done on the inventory by Larry, it was agreed that a more structured process is needed. In the past, other museums have hired specialized university students with expertise in museum studies to conduct such inventories. This could be a feasible option for us to consider in the future.

Furthermore, having a comprehensive inventory becomes even more crucial when thinking about potential scenarios where we might need to vacate the property, not necessarily due to a fire but for other reasons. Understanding what we have and why it's important will help us make informed decisions in such situations.

FIRE SUPPRESSION SYSTEM AND INSURANCE REVIEW:

Regarding fire safety measures, it was acknowledged that a fire detection system is necessary. However, concerns were raised about the potential damage caused by sprinklers, as they could harm the collection. A non-water system was deemed necessary. It was agreed that a reliable fire alarm system should be installed, with careful consideration given to protecting the invaluable items.

We discussed insuring the collection, although many if not most of the items in our collection are irreplacible therefore paying for cash compensation in the event of a loss might not be a worthwhile investment.

We decided that doing a video walkthrough of the entire collection would be a good first step toward inventorying and valuing the collection. During the walkthrough, the person doing it can , mention what each set is, the model number is, and so forth. That would be some evidence, at least until we get what we really need.

Matt D’Asaro volunteered to start the process with research into fire suppression systems and report by the next board meeting.

Dave Arland will look into options for insuring for the collection, to be discussed at the next board meeting.

There was a motion for adjournment, which was seconded and approved.