Nation's only early television museum is located in Hilliard

By Kathy Lucas
Staff Writer

It's like step back in time.
For 59-year-old Steve McVoy, it's also a labor of love—a labor that began in November 2001 after he retired and sold his Eastside coaxial cable company.

That's when McVoy founded the Early Television Foundation Museum at 5396 Franklin St. in Hilliard.

"I was looking for something to do with my time that would be interesting, so I started collecting old sets," he said. "When I was a teenager I worked in a television repair shop after school and every once in a while we'd get some of the sets from the '40s and they always fascinated me."

McVoy's collection has grown to about 100 televisions, including several rear projections sets.

In fact, McVoy notes that there are only about 400 pre-World War II sets still in existence, half of them are American and the other half are British.

His collection also includes 28 pre-WW II sets, 21 of which he has working.

If he can get the parts—mostly hard-to-come-by picture tubes—McCoy plans to eventually get all of them projecting pictures.

He does the electronic restoration-work, while a Grandview company does the cabinet work.
Hillard resident Steve McVoy, founder of the Early Television Foundation and Museum, fiddles with a 1939 RCA TRK-9 pre-war TV set. The set is one of many displayed at the museum, which is the only early television museum in the United States. Out of room or needs money or something and puts one on the market, and we hear about it,” said McVoy.

Many sets are discovered somewhere in people’s homes—such as their basements, attics and garages—often times with the owners unaware of their potential value.

Because he has the only early television museum in the United States, McVoy said he is well-known among the estimated 100-150 early television (only) collectors in the world. McVoy said there is a similar museum in Toronto, Canada and two in England.

There are two sets which stand out the most, a 1951 Royal Sovereign and a telejuke. Both of these sets weigh about 400 pounds each.

Boasting a 30-inch metal picture tube, the Royal Sovereign is the largest black and white television ever made. It stands about four-and-a-half feet tall.

As its name implies, the 1946 Seeberg & Emerson telejuke is an eight-foot-tall, mirror-enclosed set which is a combination television and jukebox. For a nickel, you can select one of 20 songs from the jukebox. The 15-inch screen television is black and white. You can play either feature separately or at the same time.

McVoy believes he owns the only one of its kind in the world. He

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found his telejuke from a collector in Chicago.

Ninety percent of the non-profit corporation’s funding comes from McVoy and his family. Donations make up the remaining 10 percent. Eventually, McVoy is hopeful the museum will be self-supporting.

So far, 1,500 people from 29 states and four or five foreign countries have toured the museum. McVoy said people who visit the museum usually fall into one of three groups: senior citizens, students and those with an interest in the television industry, such as broadcasters or producers.

Admission is free. The hours are from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday.

During the week, McVoy offers tours by appointment. His phone number is 771-0510. You can also reach him via e-mail at etf@columbus.rr.com. His Web site can be found at www.earlytelevision.org.