

This section of the TV museum houses post war black and white televisions from 1946 to 1950. Insert: A converted warehouse is home to the museum collection.

# Early TVs

## Collector Turns Hobby Into A Museum

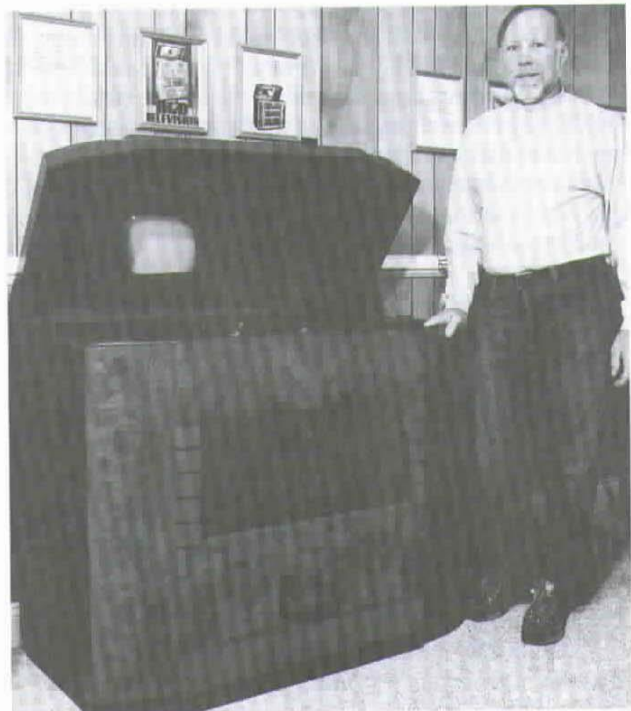
By Laurel M. Sheppard

In 1957, a ninth grader named Steve McVoy started his own TV antenna installation business. Both his business and life almost ended when he was nearly electrocuted while installing an antenna on a very steep roof close to a power line. "I carelessly let the antenna sway into the power line," McVoy recalls. "Fortunately, one of the supporting wires had become wrapped around a cast-iron vent pipe on the roof. The electric charge went from the antenna through the wire to the vent pipe, creating so much heat that it vaporized the wire." McVoy's only injury was burned hair.

McVoy's passion about television didn't stop. As a teenager, he continued working at a TV repair shop and later in life he owned a cable television company for 30 years in Columbus, Ohio. After McVoy sold this company in 1999, he was looking for something else to do. Collecting and restoring early televisions seemed a natural.

Like many collectors, McVoy began running out of room at home. Many of the other collectors he visited were in the same boat. "I thought these televisions should be accessible to the public," Steve says, "and since most were in private collections they were not easy to see."

So with the proceeds from selling his business, McVoy bought an empty 11,000 square foot warehouse in Hilliard (a Columbus suburb) that used to house a



Steve McVoy proudly displays a 1938 British television, the most elaborate and expensive of the collection, manufactured by Radio Gramophone Development in 1938. The RGD 382-RG has a 12-inch screen. Of 50 manufactured, only four remain.

catering business. After three months of renovating part of the interior, it took another two months to set up the displays. Finally, in November 2001, the museum opened its doors. Since then the museum has had over 900 visitors from 25 states and four countries.

Over 100 televisions are displayed in several rooms according to type and era. The oldest television is the mechanical scanning disk set made by the Merciers (a Columbus father and son who owned a TV repair shop) in 1928. The rarest television is an Andrea 8-F-12 from 1939, the only one of its kind left in the world. One of the most recent additions is a mechanical Western Visionette from 1929, which looks more like a safe with a small round window, than a conventional television. A Fracarro 30 Line and a GE 803 are two

other new additions.

Among McVoy's favorites include the DuMont Ra 113 for its huge size, the RGD 382-RG for its unique wood, the RCA 621 for its unique style, and the unusual telejuke, which combines a jukebox with a television. Another unique feature of the museum is a working 60-line flying spot scanner TV camera. Visitors can see their friends as they would have appeared on mechanical television in 1930.

McVoy is always looking for more TVs to add to the collection. He usually finds them from other collectors and occasionally on eBay or from dealers. Because the rarer ones are becoming harder to find, McVoy only adds a dozen or so new pieces to the collection every year.

McVoy's TV repair experience comes in handy since most of the TVs require some renovation. If the cabinet (usually made of plywood with a mahogany wood veneer) requires refinishing, he sends it to a local furniture repair company. Depending on the amount of damage, it can take anywhere from one to six months to complete the job. McVoy does all the electronic repairs himself. This involves disassembling the components, replating, and refinishing them if required, and then putting everything back together so the set can be tested.

"Sometimes it takes only two to three hours for the easy ones," explains McVoy. "Otherwise, it can take several hundred hours." His most challenging renovation was the Bell & Howell projection set because there were no diagrams to follow. "Most of the manuals for the American sets are readily available," explains McVoy, "either directly from the manufacturers (half are still in operation) or from libraries. Some of the British sets may have no documentation, but many of their parts are similar to the others."

Many of the parts (around 100 for each black and white set) are still available. Resistors and capacitors are easy to find, since modern ones operate the same as the old ones. There are large stocks of picture tubes for those sets made after WWII; otherwise earlier tubes are virtually impossible to find. "If I can't find a picture tube, I have two options: put in a more modern tube, or leave the old one in and have a non-working example," explains McVoy. For the pre-war sets, I prefer to leave the insides looking like they did originally, but this can be very time consuming."

Rebuilding one of these old tubes is also risky; 25 percent of the time they will blow up. "Although I have never had a problem," says McVoy, "you have to know what you are doing, since the power supplies from the prewar sets are strong enough to kill you."

His favorite part of collecting these televisions is the research. "I like learning historical tidbits about early television, as well as uncovering the technical data and parts that I need to get the old sets working," McVoy says.

Plans for expansion are in the works. The next step

## First Annual Early Television Convention

Early television collectors are planning their first annual convention and swap meet, to be held April 12 and 13, in Hilliard, Ohio. The event will include demonstrations of early television equipment, panel discussions, and presentations. Anyone having early TV equipment they would like to display or demonstrate will also be welcome. For more information, call 614-771-0510 or email [etf@columbus.rr.com](mailto:etf@columbus.rr.com).



This 15-inch color television, model H840CK15, was made by Westinghouse in 1954. At a cost of \$1,295, no wonder only 500 were made.

of the renovation will provide a permanent home for the temporary display of old TV cameras being exhibited in part of the warehouse. McVoy would like to have one of each prewar model and eventually would like to acquire some of the prototype prewar sets, which are extremely rare and expensive. "Since I still have 9,000 square feet left in the warehouse," says McVoy, "it will be a long time before space runs out."

The museum is located at 5396 Franklin Street, Hilliard, Ohio (a suburb of Columbus), and is open Saturdays from 10 to 6, Sundays from noon to 5, and during the week by appointment. For more information call 614-771-0510, email [etf@columbus.rr.com](mailto:etf@columbus.rr.com), or visit [www.earlytelevision.org](http://www.earlytelevision.org). □

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