

THE MISSOURI RADIO ARCHIVE

The Library of Congress Radio Preservation Task Force has asked the Missouri Broadcasters Association to help create a Missouri Radio Air Check Repository. The MBA has been working with St. Louis media historian Frank Absher to collect airchecks that preserve the history of radio in Missouri. The collection will be housed at the State Historical Society's St. Louis Research Center at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. It could become a template for other states to use.

Why is it important that YOU take part?

This nation is four years away from observing the centennial of KDKA's historic broadcasts of the 1920 Harding-Cox election returns that are considered the beginning of broadcasting as we know it. But Missouri will share that centennial. Absher has noted that on that same night, "Two boy-geniuses built a transmitter in their basements in South St. Louis and broadcast results of the...election. These men, William E. Woods and Lester Benson, built several more transmitters through their Benwood Company and eventually became station owners."

Missouri is less than *six* years away from observing the 100th anniversary of its first licensed radio station, WOQ in Kansas City, as well as its second licensed station, WOS in Jefferson City, and the third, KSD in St. Louis. Only KSD is still on the air, known today as KTRS.

Radio has been the voice of our communities for almost a century. It has informed and entertained Missourians through great events, terrible tragedies, economic disasters and economic recoveries, good and bad politics, the lives of our neighbors and the dangers from our enemies. YOUR station is part of that historical fabric.

In closets, attics, basements---even under your desks---are likely to be recordings that chronicle not only the history of your station but the history of your community and the history of our changing world.

But every day, as stations are sold or moved, that history is pitched into dumpsters by those who are not aware or do not care about the importance of radio to our national and state heritages. All of us must care enough about this medium we love to make sure its past and its present are there for our grandchildren to hear and understand.

Too many voices of our industry's grandfathers and grandmothers have been lost forever, the voices that told their communities what the weather would be, what the agriculture markets are, what new standards for living are being created at the local, state, national, and international levels, how our sports teams fared, what the big songs of the day are, what local businesses are selling and how they're selling it.

We must save what is left. What radio has been to this nation—and IS to this nation--is too important to be tossed into a dumpster. What we are doing in radio today will be important to our grandchildren in their understanding of the people, places, and events that are shaping the lives they will lead.

Daniel Boorstin, the former Librarian of Congress and one of the nation's most eminent Twentieth Century historians, believed that the "experience-at-a-distance" that radio began to provide almost one-hundred years ago has transformed American life more than anything else except for the automobile.

Syndicated columnist George Will called radio "The Electronic Back-Yard Fence" in one of his columns in 1979. But in the Summer of 1993, the Freedom Forum Media Studies Center called radio "The Forgotten Medium."

You and I know that radio was and is far too important to be forgotten. Here's what you can do to help the MBA build this archive or repository:

1. Managers and department directors of Missouri radio stations should enlist their staff members to take part in this project.
2. All staff: Search your station for recordings of programs, jingles, commercials, new stories and special programs, samples of regular programming, photographs, promotional materials, old (perhaps first-day) logs that show how programming was structured, interviews, and other materials of historical value.
3. Contact former employees and have them check *their* closets, attics, and basements for items to add to your station's collection. At the risk of being too dramatic, note that this is material that children and grandchildren will someday throw away after the former employee is gone.
4. Contact survivors of former employees (widows, widowers, children) and ask them to do the same thing. They probably will be glad to get rid of the stuff.
5. Label the recordings with names and dates. Provide names and dates for photographs. Make a list of the printed materials and include the dates for them.
6. If possible, digitize all of this material and send it to the Missouri Broadcasters Association. If that's not possible, send it to the MBA anyway. But digitizing the material makes it easier to archive through the MBA and lets you keep an easily-accessible copy of the material. Everything will have to be digitized before it can go into the State Historical Society archive.

Time is of the essence because more and more of these materials disappear every day. Please be proud enough of our industry and those who made it as well as those who continue to make radio a vital part of our communities and our state to help with this project. .

AND FOR OUR TELEVISION FRIENDS: We are only six years away from observing the 75th anniversary of licensed television stations in Missouri. If you have not created your own archive, this is a time to start.

Thank you for helping preserve this important resource for our Democracy.

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