

MUSEUM  
(not ready for publication)

## A MUSEUM FOR NJARC

This is to provide some thoughts as to the feasibility of a "radio" museum in Monmouth County, to be owned and operated by NJARC.

### 1. WHY A MUSEUM?

Apart from a general view that museums are a good thing, people and organizations run them for a variety of reasons. In NJARC's case, the motives might be:

- Build the public's consciousness of "radio" - on whatever basis they prefer: funky old-time material that they hadn't encountered before, simple nostalgia, or true historical insight. Subject matter can be either artifacts (radios) or program material, preferably a mix.
- Draw attention to the hobby of collecting radios and other electronic equipment.
- Make the club more visible and thus attractive to new members.
- Preserve historic artifacts and papers for future examination.
- Lend radios and other equipment to other museums and TV/video program producers.
- Provide resources (artifacts and a library) for research by restorers and writers.

### 2. THE TARGET AUDIENCE

It is assumed that prospective museum visitors come from the general public and are of all ages. This is a hard group to satisfy because it requires both "hands-on" displays and more static exhibits. There is also a need to address more sophisticated visitors - radio collectors/historians, amateur radio operators, and electronics professionals.

### 3. THE MONMOUTH COUNTY ASPECT

A strong assumption is that an NJARC museum is to be in Monmouth County. No state has a richer heritage in radio-electronics development and manufacture than New Jersey, and one can point out numerous cases where Monmouth County figured prominently. Examples:

- "First use of radio in North America": Marconi's reporting of the 1899 America's Cup races off Sandy Hook, using a temporary receiving station at the Atlantic Highlands towers.
- Pioneering radio research by AT&T (later Bell Labs) at coastal sites like Deal Beach and Bradley Beach; later, radio astronomy research and satellite trials at Crawford's Hill (Holmdel). [The radio astronomy led to a Nobel Prize for W. O. Baker of Bell labs!]
- Early manufacturing - there wasn't a lot locally, but examples from 1924 are Mu-Rad and Mar-lodyne in Asbury Park, and Robinson Specialty Co. in Keyport. Later manufacturing included small defense contractors around Red Bank, including production of tubes by Bendix at Eatontown, the Electronic Assistance Corp. of Red Bank, and the Trad Television Corp. of Asbury Park.
- Early broadcasting: AT&T developers were doing experimental broadcasting from Monmouth County before WEAJ was built. WJLK in Asbury Park went on the air in 1926.
- Military radio-electronics: Ft. Monmouth figured in radio and radar development from the '20s. Examples: first Army radars, 1937-40; moon radar, 1946; Project Echo satellite project, 1960.
- Wireless communications: the reinstalled 1913 Marconi tower at Shark River, Wall Township, represents a role in ship-to-shore and transatlantic communications.

These are purely Monmouth County examples. It would be reasonable to cover any number of other aspects of radio history in neighboring counties or the rest of the state. For example, aircraft radio was developed with major roles by Western Electric/Bell Labs at Whippany, the Aircraft Radio Corporation at Boonton, and RCA Victor at Camden. The Boonton area has been a sort of "Silicon Valley" of electronic test-equipment manufacture from the '30s to today.

#### 4. SIMILAR OR COMPETING MUSEUMS

There is little museum coverage of radio-electronics NJARC-style in or near New Jersey. The following is believed to reflect the situation realistically:

- The Signal Corps museum at Ft. Monmouth is focused on Army communications-electronics. Its displays are new and quite good, and much of the material exhibited is unique. However, it suffers from lack of funds (a staff of one, and displays are not often rotated), limited operating hours (weekdays only), and a location away from public traffic.
- The Historical Electronics Museum outside Baltimore is dedicated to military equipment (mainly radars) of its sponsor, Westinghouse. Its facilities are new, the displays are fairly good, hours are long, and there are both professional and volunteer staff. Again, however, the subject is not "civilian" radio.
- The Museum of Broadcasting in New York City has new facilities, good funding, and long hours. However, its purpose is programming, mostly TV; there is no coverage of broader aspects of radio-electronic history or in artifacts. Likewise, the American Museum of the Moving Image in NYC is tied to film and TV programming, with some TV receivers.
- The Edison Historic Site at West Orange is a "fine tour" focused on Thomas Edison. It offers long hours and professional staff. There are phonographs and an Edison radio or two on display but, again, no dedication to radio-electronics.
- The Speedwell Village Museum in Morristown offers unique insight into the earliest (1838-44) development of wire telegraphy, as well as iron-founding and other industries. It operates only seasonally, on weekends. Again, there is no electronic content.
- The Bell Telephone Museum at 140 West St. in New York had unique early vacuum tubes, telephones, and other treasures. It was apparently crated up when the company moved to Holmdel in the '60s. Given the leaner funding of today's AT&T Bell Labs, nothing is likely to be heard from it. (Indeed, if the material still exists, it might be a source of loaned displays for NJARC.)
- The Atwater Kent Museum in Philadelphia displays a few AK radios, but only incidentally to its main mission of displaying Philadelphia history. It did put on a "Philadelphia Radio" exhibit a couple of years ago.
- MAARC's subsidiary Radio History Society plans to establish a museum in the Silver Spring area, similar to what NJARC would set up, but well outside NJARC's drawing area.

Thus it appears that "there is a place" for an NJARC museum.

#### 5. ORGANIZATION AND FUNDING

A successful volunteer museum requires leadership by a task-oriented curator and ongoing effort by a staff of trained guides. To do a proper job and maintain the interest of the public, it needs many more artifacts than are on display at a given moment, and the resources to rotate displays seasonally or yearly.

Funding necessarily comes, or fails to come, from the usual sources: corporate or governmental grants, private donations or bequests in wills, proceeds of a "museum shop," proceeds of donation auctions, etc. Effective public outreach requires consistent publication of a newsletter. Ideally, the museum owns its building.

It may be useful to review other volunteer radio-electronics museums comparable to NJARC's idea in terms of their structures and "performance."

- The ARCA - West Virginia Chapter museum in Charleston owns its building (a former school), and is apparently paying the mortgage from proceeds of its mail-order radio bookstore. Staff, and operating hours, appear to be small. Subject material is entertainment radio-TV. It seems to be a success despite remote location and limited objectives.

- The AWA museum is probably the long-run success story of the "industry." In one location since 1975, it has prospered under the single-minded enthusiasm of its founder-curator. The site is on a long-term lease from the local historical society, which has its museum in the other half of the building. The off-site storage annex is AWA-owned, on leased land. The museum covers professional communications somewhat more than entertainment radio, and has a huge assortment of "backup" artifacts in storage. The material on display is perhaps a third of the total holdings. Articles on display include numerous unique pieces (e. g., from Edwin Armstrong), but are weak on items of current vogue like transistor radios or post-1950 TV sets. The museum is widely known. It has no real financial need (makes no particular attempt to solicit donations or cull its collection). However, it suffers from a badly outgrown facility having safety-code problems, non-rotation of displays, an obscure location, a weak public-outreach program, limited hours (only seven hours per week, and then only during the warm months), and limited management controls over the collection.

- The Pavak Museum of Broadcasting near Minneapolis, which began as the estate of a long-term collector who willed money to start operation, is probably the best facility of its type (see feature story in the May 1994 *OTB*.) It has a professional curator and volunteers, owns its building (which was built for its use), is tied in with the local radio club (NARC), and operates long hours. Being "hungry" financially, it has approached the local broadcast stations for major support, and has heavy general public representation on its board. It has a strong "outreach" program to local schools, publishes a good bimonthly newsletter, and otherwise tries to broaden its base of support.

- The Perham Foundation (ex-Foothill) museum-in-storage failed after 15 years because its site, once thought secure, was retaken by the host college. It had good general-public displays, much unique material (one of the two surviving Federal arc magnets, Lee De Forest's papers), fairly long operating hours, and a good site in an accessible location. However, it also apparently lacks community/industry support, strong management, and an effective back-office. Publication of its newsletter is sporadic. It is now fund-arising for a permanent building, to opened ca. 1998.

- The NFWA exhibit at the Amherst Colony Museum outside Buffalo represents a low-cost/low-risk approach to museum operation. NFWA's small size precludes operating a museum of its own. Instead, the club provides a display, rotated yearly, at a regular public museum. (A typical display theme: Buffalo-made radios.) The Aug. 1993 *OTB*, p. 60, gives a good description of this display.

- The forthcoming MAARC museum is, of course, unformed as yet. MAARC's relatively strong management structure, and the location in the Washington metro area, should lead to success. However, the club is approaching the project cautiously, making it as much a library as a museum. The city of Silver Spring will donate free use of the building for the first two years.