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Writing Radio History

Sources and Methods

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AWA Review Author:

Radio Spies, 2002

Marconi's Transatlantic Triumph, 2000

Wireless Spies, 1990

Recipient:

AWA Houck Award for Documentation

CHRS Charles D. "Doc" Herrold Award

Perham Foundation, Silver Tube Award

2004 AWA Conference,
Rochester, New York

**Two Challenging Thoughts on History,
from Henry Ford:**

“History is just one damn thing
after another.”

“History is bunk.”

Mark Twain’s Variation on Santayana:

“History never repeats itself;
at best it sometimes rhymes”

**History is the story we tell the future
about the past. So, the historian tells
the story of how and why one thing
happened *after* another, and listens
for the rhymes ... Clio is the Muse of
History, Mercury is the god of
messages; radio history is the child of
their liaison.**

Overview: The Western World, uniquely, experiences history as the sequence and progress of events. The history of technology is a record of its progress from fire to electronics, with much in between and much along side; technology is a unique aspect of Western Civilization (as is political freedom and the two are related).

Electronic communications progressed from the telegraph to extra-solar space probes, from wireless at sea to high definition television. Radio is the historical heart of electronic communications, in both technical and social

dimensions.

The historian of radio seeks to tell a story, a true story, about it. The story elements can include material as diverse as Maxwell's Equations; personalities such as Tesla, Marconi, Fessenden and DeForest (and the likes of Sarnoff as well); incidents of larger historical significance such as the sinking of the *Titanic* or the interception and decryption of *Enigma*-coded German messages; objects and artifacts such as crystal sets, vacuum tubes, intercept receivers, black & white televisions; ephemera as diverse as

recordings of radio programs and radio communications, QSL cards and advertisements; companies such as Zenith and Crossley; marine, industrial communications and amateur radio; the radio fad of the 1920s, the short wave radio fad of the 1930s, radio at war in the 1940s, television in the 1950s, the citizens band fad of the 1970s, the cell phone of the 1990s. These are but a few of the stories that radio historians have told us. Many more such stories, large and small, await the learning and the telling.

The Secret of Successful

Research: Enlist others in your interest, by engaging them in theirs.

The Golden Rule For Sources:

Respect them! Thank people; conserve paper and artifacts; maintain and preserve research files.

Sources for Research:

1) People: (A) who were there; (B) who knew people who were there; (C) who are familiar with the topic; (D) who have themselves research the topic; and (E) context: places where the people made interesting events happen.

2) Archives. (A) Personal; (B) Family; (C) Company; (D) Interest group (*e.g.*, club); (E) Institutional (*e.g.*, museums); Government (*e.g.*,

NSA, Smithsonian); (F) Commercial (e.g., Corbis-Bettman for photos).

3) Publications. (A) Books (i) old and (ii) new; (B) Magazines and periodicals (i) old and (ii) new; (C) Newspapers (old); (D) Ephemera (e.g., post cards, QSL cards).

4) Internet: **7,920,000 Google hits** for

Radio History

— *so doubt freely !!*

Sources, Commercial, for Images:

1StopStock

Alamy Images

Amana

Orion Press

Comstock

Photonica

Corbis - Bettman

Picture Press

Digital Vision

PictureQuest

Fotosearch

SuperStock

Getty

Wire Image

Image State

Workbook Stock

Masterfile

Zefa

Mauritius

But generally the most interesting images come from period publications.

Nonstock

Four Rules for Writing:

- 1) Put the most important thing first;
- 2) Put everything that relates to the same thing in the same place;
- 3) Write in the active voice;
- 4) Avoid adjectives and adverbs.

The Golden Rule of Writing:

Write what you would like to read,
the way you would like to read it.

Four Rules for Research:

- 1) Do one thing at a time;
- 2) Do only that one thing at that time;
- 3) Save and organize all leads for next things to do;
- 4) Document all substantive information, sources, leads and doubts – write it all down (one side of the paper only, and back-up files).

The Golden Rule of Research:

Refocus research as findings open new possibilities: **the unexpected is a gift.**

Presenting Radio History

– telling the stories:

Give talks – to any group that will listen. Ask for feedback and responses. What worked, what did not, what are these folks interested in.

Use visuals: photos, drawings and contemporary graphics, diagrams and charts. Play recordings.

Show videos. Video your talk for reference. Solicit more information and interested people.

Write, write again and re-write.

Write locally first; your radio club, your local or regional newspapers and magazines (you can actually get paid for this).

Make any “fair use” of even copyrighted materials – not too much and for historical not commercial purposes. (Respect “paternity” and “integrity” by citing the source and making no change in the cited materials). “Transformation” makes copying legal.

Collect and revise local writings for larger articles. Utilize feedback from first publications. Seek more illustrations and buy them if need be.

The future of radio history is video presentations. Find moving images as well as stills; find old audio of programs and radio events and recollections.

You will often come across period ephemera and publications and sometimes photographs; **SAVE THEM !!**

ARCHIVISTS' RULES:

The goal is preservation,

– so protect from

acid,

light,

dampness and

injury.

The worst enemy is **acid** in the paper, so pH buffer if possible, isolate sheets (interleave), de-acidify if necessary, and for scholarly use, xerocopy or photocopy on to **acid-free** paper.

Use **acid-free** sleeves and carriers (enclosures) for each item; insert pH-buffered backs (and use **NO PVC**, which makes **acid**).

The next enemy is **sunlight** as it will bleach out **reds** quickly (and create acids by heat); use only UV- blocking plastic for framing and beware of displays in **sunlight**.

Protect from **dampness**: store materials flat but not under pressure; storage must be **COOL** (65-72 degrees) and **DRY** (45-55%) and stable;

no basements.

Never use Scotch tape, it leaves
irremediable residue.

Write only with a number two lead
pencil; it's eraseable.

Wash your hands often, but don't wear
gloves because you lose tactile control,
risking **injury** to ephemera.

Use archive boxes or three-ring binders for collections.

Danger: BLACKMOLD is toxic;
leave such challenges to professional conservators.

(These conservation tips are from Karen Zukor Conservation, Berkeley, California, via Bart Lee, 388 Market St., ste 900, San Francisco, CA 94111–
KV6LEE@gmail.com, correspondence is invited). ##