

# ANTIQUÉ RADIO

By Marc Ellis

## Behind the Scenes at Motorola's Museum



Terry Sinnott, Manager, Museum Collections and Exhibits, shows off some of the collection's early auto radios.

Last month, I had the opportunity to visit the Motorola Museum of Electronics and use its resources to tell you a little bit about that company's colorful history. In the process, I met Terri Sinnott, the museum's manager of collections and exhibits, who gave me a tour through the "backstage" part of the operation. I thought that

the behind-the-scenes activities were at least as interesting as the public exhibits, so I asked Terri if I could come back and do a follow-up column on how the museum's collections were acquired, catalogued, and stored. She graciously agreed.

Probably the best way to understand what happens behind the scenes is to trace the steps of the museum's acquisition process and observe how objects are added to the collection. But before we can do that, you have to know a little bit about the philosophy of this institution. Here's the museum's official mission statement:

*The purpose of the Motorola Museum of Electronics is to serve as the corporation's institutional memory and to encourage employees and other visitors to explore electronics technologies through examples drawn from the company's history and product applications. The museum's exhibits, archives, and related programs are part of a larger endeavor to promote public interest in science and technology and to show the vital role these play in improving the quality of life.*

In its role as Motorola's institutional memory, the museum acquires many items of interest to us as collectors—including samples of products, packaging, and promotional materials. However, items relating to the company's internal history are also sought, including service awards, company uniforms, and early equipment. On my tour through the facility, I spotted an old, straight-backed, wooden chair carefully stored on a shelf. Closer inspection showed that it carried a property tag bearing the original (Galvin Manufacturing Corporation) company name.

### **SIZING UP A PROSPECTIVE DONATION**

When it comes to company products, the museum staff does not collect every variation of every model of every piece of equipment ever manufactured by Motorola. A couple of huge warehouses would be required to achieve that goal.

Judgment on whether to

add an item to the collection depends on a mix of factors, including the rarity of the piece, its condition, and its significance in Motorola's history. Of special interest are products, such as the low-cost Golden View table-model TV of 1947, that represent Motorola's entry into a new product arena.

Pieces for the collection come from both inside and outside Motorola. As a matter of fact, Terri is still cataloguing a backlog of material that was put aside by the historically-minded company over the years.

When material is offered to the museum, all of the information available about the prospective donation is written out on a standard form to make evaluation as easy as possible. And the first step is to check the model number, if known, against a computer database (if you're curious about the software, the museum uses Q&A) to see if there's already an example in the collection.

Should the museum already own an example in good condition, the piece probably won't be accepted unless it's a real rarity or is in demand for special exhibitions. Certain items are considered "hot" because they are frequently requested for inclusion in artifact loans that are made available to other Motorola facilities or other museums.

### **THE FATE OF THE DIRTY TAXI SETS**

I had a chance to participate in the selection process first-hand because I



happened to have some Motorola items to offer the museum. For many years my garage has harbored a group of taxi transceivers acquired during the era when these sets were still popular with the amateur-radio fraternity.

I'd left a voice-mail message for Terri in advance of my visit, offering the items and listing the model numbers. She responded with a message ruling a couple of the units out because they were definite duplicates and asking that I bring a couple with me for closer inspection. Actually, I was quite embarrassed when I got around to loading them into the van. They'd become quite rusty and dirty since I'd last really looked at them a decade or so earlier.

If Terri was revolted by the sorry-looking equipment I'd dragged in, she hid it well. In fact, she assured me that the museum has occasionally had to remove disreputable items such as mummified mice from donated items during clean-up. However, I was definitely *not* invited to move any of my material into the building.

The museum's database had indicated that there appeared to be a model similar to one of my sets in stock and we went into the storage area to look at it just to make sure. Except for being free of rust and quite a bit cleaner, it certainly looked like mine. So much for that prospective donation!

The fate of the other candidate for adoption is still being decided. Its model number did not appear in the database, so Terri has begun a search of the company's archives (her standard procedure in such cases) to find out more about the equipment. If its



*The Motorola museum's massive storage cabinets would be at home on a battleship.*



*Handie-Talkie radios manufactured during World War II made an important contribution to the war effort.*

characteristics are sufficiently different from those of the models already in the collection, the set may yet be accepted in spite of its unpromising appearance.

#### **AFTER ACCEPTANCE**

At the time of my visit, several items recently accepted by the museum were arrayed on tables in the collection's workroom. Those included a couple of Bakelite-cased broadcast receivers, a toy Japanese cellular phone modeled after a Motorola product, a commemorative brick from an old company building, a knocked-down retail store display, and a small enameled company service-award pin. Prior to being

be removed, if necessary, without any damage to the piece.

Except in special cases, though, no attempt is made to restore an item to working order. The museum's aim is to stabilize each piece in the condition that it was received. To that end, the collection is kept in a storage room maintained at a temperature of 70° Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of 55 percent. That environment is considered optimum for the variety of



*Equipment too large for the cabinets, such as this group of Golden View TV sets, is stored on shelf systems that are installed around periphery of the storage room. Advertising items, test gear, and other TV sets are also located on these shelves.*

stored, each piece would be assigned a catalog number, cleaned (if necessary), photographed, and added to the database.

I was quite impressed with the meticulous handling received by each item. For example, individual catalog numbers were applied to both the service pin and its tiny spring retaining clip—just in case they might become accidentally separated. As a person who can hardly write his name legibly without a struggle, I was astonished at the perfection of the impossibly minute numbers that had been applied to the retaining clip. By the way, all catalog numbers are applied in a reversible manner—so that they can

metal, fabric, and wood materials contained in the collection.

The room contains rows of heavy-duty metal storage cabinets that would be at home on a battleship. As one walks between the rows, glass windows in the massive sliding access doors provide tantalizing glimpses of the treasures housed within. Galaxies of employee-recognition pins from all eras of the company's history, Handie-Talkie radios from World War II, examples of various stages in the development of the automobile radio, and company uniforms from facilities on the Pacific rim.

What won't fit inside the cabinets is shelved on a  
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system of open racks installed around the periphery of the room. Walking past those, I glimpsed a two-way radio base-station transmitter, laboratory test equipment of all kinds, advertising signs, shipping cartons for 1930's and 1940's broadcast receivers, a large collection of identical *Golden View* TV's, other TV's in exotic corner cabinetry, living-room console radios, and ... well I really can't begin do justice to the scope of the collection in the space I have available!

As you might expect, donations come to the museum in a variety of ways, some straightforward, some a little more unusual. Most frequently, people who are familiar with the work of the museum approach Terri via phone or mail and offer material they think might be useful. But folks sometimes drive up unannounced with a load of relics. When some, or all, of the artifacts are turned down, the prospective donor will often counter by asking the way to the nearest dump!

This is really an unfair tactic to use on museum personnel who, being in the preservation field, are understandably uncomfortable with the notion that such material might be trashed. Not that the approach works, because the staff really has to be selective about what is accepted. However, Terri and her assistant have developed a list of institutions that might be seeking various types of donations and will try to make appropriate suggestions.

Thinking that some *Antique Radio* readers

might be able to make valuable contributions to the museum, I asked Terri if there were any items she was especially looking for. She replied that although there is no "wish list," the museum would be interested in hearing about any Motorola-related material that might be available. Write to Terri Sinnott, Manager, Museum Collections and Exhibits, Motorola Museum of Electronics, 1297 East Algonquin Road, Schaumburg, IL 60196. You could also call Terri at 708-576-7814 or 708-538-2945; if you prefer faxing, the number is 708-576-6401.

Be prepared to tell Terri what the item is (broadcast receiver, 2-way radio, advertising piece, service award, etc.) and provide the model number, if appropriate. Describe the piece as carefully as possible. If it's a broadcast receiver, for example, indicate whether it's a table or a floor model, whether the cabinet is wood or plastic, etc. Also do the best you can to date the object.

Terri will respond in a timely fashion and, if the piece is suitable for the collection, will discuss acquiring it for the museum.

The museum would be pleased to answer queries regarding Motorola equipment in your own collection. They can often help to date pieces and/or provide schematics and technical information. When you contact Terri with your query, be ready to describe your equipment in detail just as you would if proposing a donation.

That wraps things up for now. As always, I look forward to hearing from you. Write me at *Antique Radio*, **Popular Electronics**, 500-B Bi-County Blvd., Farmingdale, NY 11735. ■