

ANTIQUE RADIOS

In search of antique radios

IT ISN'T REALLY NECESSARY TO OWN AN antique radio to be part of the *antique radio club*. You can be a member whether you actually own an old set or not. All that's needed is an interest in yesterday's technology. So join us as we purchase and analyze different sets of a by-gone era. And then follow along as we restore those old radios—from chassis to cabinet—to better-than-new condition!

Newcomers to the world of antique radios often find that just reading about them isn't enough. They are soon overcome by intrigue, and their attention quickly turns to owning one—at least to begin with. But, where to look for antique radios can be a real problem!

Shops that deal in "fine antiques" may seem like the logical place to start, but you're not likely to find antique radios in such places. You may find an expensive beautifully-restored, wind-up Victorian or Grandfather clock; but few, if any, radios!

Most antique dealers (or antiquarians as they are called) do not consider an old radio to be antique, mostly because of strict guidelines that dictate the age of an item before it is considered an antique. Some collectables, like timepieces or photographs, date back over a hundred years. But radio didn't really get started until the early 1900's with the invention of diode and triode tubes (which we'll discuss from time to time).

Where to look for antiques

The classified section of the newspaper is a likely place to locate an old radio. It usually takes about two hours to go over the *for-*

sale column in the newspaper looking for old radios. Each ad must be read thoroughly, since there's no old radio category. Often the radio is buried in some obscure ad that reads: "For sale—sofa, bike, etc, and old radio."

Many fine old radios of all types and ages, and in various conditions can be found in the for-sale columns. However, most of them seem to have a price problem, because selling an old radio is only worthwhile if the advertiser can make a profit after paying for the ad. Often the antique radio is part of an estate sale. There are few bargains to be found at those sales because the commissions and heirs who'll be dividing the money keep the price inflated.

One radio in my collection that



FIG. 1



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was purchased through a newspaper ad is the the *Majestic* shown in Fig. 1. I found that old set buried in an ad that listed other household items for sale. I called to inquire about the set, but the description I was given left me hanging—"It's old, and has four long legs," is what I was told. But, since I couldn't think of any new radio with four long legs, I decided to check it out.

When I finally got to see the set, it looked exactly the way it looks in Fig. 1, an old *T.R.F. Majestic* in need of some work. But since I didn't have anything like it my collection, I had to have it. The front veneer was peeling and the grill cloth was torn, but those two conditions are common with old radios. Grill cloth and veneer repairs are not too difficult to do, and will be discussed in the future.

Looking in the back of that old *Majestic*, all the parts seemed to be there. However, there was a heavy wire-harness hanging from the chassis, which was laying on a shelf (inside the cabinet) above the speaker. Since it had been severed, rather than unplugged, there was no question that restoring the chassis would be a much greater challenge than doing the same for the cabinet.

Having a phone number to call about a possible *find* is often as bad as having none at all because the information that people give can be misleading. So be prepared to face disappointment at least nine times out of ten. At least half of what's called a *really old radio* in ads turn out to be table models from the 1950's, like the set shown in Fig. 2. However, take the time to check it out anyway. Who knows,

you just may find something worth the effort.

While things may sound bad for antique-radio collectors, all is not lost. There's always the flea markets and used furniture stores. A used furniture store may sell antiques, but reproductions are more likely. Of the two, flea markets seem to be the best place.

Flea-market operators rarely restore or repair their wares. That helps to keep the price down and more in line with what we're looking for—an antique radio that can be restored and refinished, at a reasonable price, of course.



FIG. 2

What to look for

By now, we all know what is meant by antique radio. But do you know what to look for when purchasing one? Your own individual needs and abilities play an important part in the selection process. For instance, if you're an expert in cabinet work, you can make allowances for appearances. If you're not, or you have no place to work, try to find a set with a passable finish. Many old sets only need some cleaning and a little polish to brighten up the cabinet.

However, even more important than the cabinet is the chassis (a metal base where most working components are mounted). Unlike mostly-wooden cabinet parts, chassis components can not be manufactured to replace those that are missing. Therefore, trying the set out before you buy is a big plus in your favor. But that's not always possible, especially at flea markets.

If you're at a flea market where

you can't see the set light up or listen for a little hum, do the next best thing; check the chassis for missing parts. And if you're not familiar with old radios, take someone along who is. Remember once you buy something at a flea market, it cannot be returned.

Missing loudspeakers is probably the most common problem associated with buying old radios. Everyone knows enough to check the chassis for tubes and other

components, but don't overlook the speakers, especially in the larger console models. Most of the early radios had the speaker mounted high in the cabinet above the chassis. Make sure the complete speaker assembly is there or you may never restore the unit to its original condition.

Other things to look for include dry rot in line cords, grill cloths, the inside wiring, and missing knobs. Remember these tips and happy hunting.

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