

**A Technical Guide to
Old-time Radio,
Recording & Audio
Production
2002 Edition**

(a.k.a. Tech Guide III)
By Bob Burnham



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(a.k.a. Tech Guide III)

By Bob Burnham

~ SPECIAL LIMITED EDITION ~

DEDICATION

This publication is dedicated to the victims and their families of the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001 on the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania.



PHOTO BY BOB BURNHAM

Further Dedications, Acknowledgements & thanks...



Ed Cole in his teenage years

This publication is also dedicated to the memory of **H. Edgar Cole**, broadcast engineer, radio activist and long-time friend. Ed passed away on September 19, 2001 after a brief illness. Ed was only 53. 15 years ago, he wrote an entire chapter of an earlier edition of this volume called "Maintaining and Caring for Your Tape Decks." He was also an authority on the CBS Radio Mystery Theater. Some of Ed's lesser-known writing has been reprinted in this publication for those who missed it the first time around.

Additionally, we acknowledge the tireless work of former NARA News editor, **Jim Snyder** of Mesa, AZ. Fifteen years ago, he also contributed a section about old-time radio dealers entitled "An Unbiased Viewpoint" to our previous publication.

Special recognition is also due to **Jay Hickerson** of Hamden, CT, publisher of **Hello, Again** for three decades, and his dedication as Chairman of the Friends of Old-time Radio conventions.

We also salute the work of **Bob Burchett** of Cincinnati, OH, Founder of the Cincinnati conventions and editor of **Old Time Radio Digest**. Bob did all the cover layouts on both volumes of the previous edition of this publication.

Additional thanks...

is also due to those who helped out in the past:

Andy Blatt... analyst, who handled current equipment research, and among the few survivors today of the original old-time radio vendors

Jerry Chapman... who wrote about tape recording and audio historian (his original Forward from 1986 is re-printed in the Ancient History section of this publication)

Jim Maclise... whose series, Private Eyes for Public Ears, also appeared in Old-time Radio Digest

Tom Monroe... who has written about and led convention workshops about various topics including one of the first on old-time radio collecting and the computer

Bob Proctor... long-time collector and writer who authored among many other pieces, "Lo-Fi" in a Hi-Age and War in the Oxide Trenches (both re-printed in this publication in the "Ancient History" section)

Terry Salomonson... whose most famous writing, *The Log - an Essential for the Collector* appeared in our publication as well as his excellent long-running "help for the collector" articles in Old-time Radio Digest (Bob Burchett's *printed* version). Terry is another OTR "survivor" who today devotes his time to archiving programs, improving the quality and providing research materials.

Joe Webb... Joe wrote about the history of collecting and trading old-time radio programs (his section on old-time radio history has also been reprinted in "Ancient History" section -- again, for those who missed it the first time around).

All of the above are responsible in various ways for the inspiration and motivation to create and complete this project. There's more about some of these people scattered throughout the text of this publication.

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2. A FEW PRELIMINARY WORDS



This booklet is mostly a collection of columns from the past 20 years that have been written and in some cases updated for this publication. Most — but not all — of those columns have been published in *Listening Guide Newsletter* (A BRC Publication), *NARA News* (a North American Radio Archives publication), or have appeared on the internet in various forms. I've also included some re-printed nuggets from the last edition of this publication in a section called "**Ancient History**." More often than not, the various columns and sections show dates as to when they were completed to give some added perspective.

You'll notice that this doesn't read like any other book. It probably reads more like a magazine. That has occurred out of necessity rather than design.

Also, I'm not trying to lure any new friends (or hopefully not make enemies), win any awards for grammar or literary content or make any profound statements here. If someone disagrees with some of the contents, feels it overly self-indulgent or is offended by something, I'd probably enjoy hearing from them. The bulk of what you do hold in your hands is an assortment of my stream-of-consciousness-style written pieces. The majority of the words here have been freely provided and available in the past. The cost covers production and marketing expenditures. In other words, by creating this publication, I'm neither looking to fatten my wallet or relive the response to my publications of the past.

So why AM I doing this, and why **NOW**? For a long period of time, in a land far far away and long long ago, I would get a lot of comments from people who liked the sound quality of the shows I had sent them. Achieving that "sound" occupied a significant part of my adult life. You can take the "Bob" out of old-time radio, but you can't take old-time radio out of "Bob." It's always there lurking underneath the "hood" of what I say and do, and how I approach my work today. Today, weeks and months may go by, and I won't even *THINK* about listening to an old show, much less partake of the actual act. But a lifetime of listening to and I think *IMPROVING* the sound of shows — at least that passed through my hands — is experience that has been incredibly useful both personally and professionally. I always felt like I should give some of that knowledge back to the group who helped me to gain it to begin with.

This publication is also sort of in response to just a few select individuals... I'm

referring to people like Jay Hickerson, Bob Burchett and Jim Snyder (to name just a few). Their tireless work in old-time radio to this day has finally provided sufficient inspiration to yours truly to begin and finish this project. If these names don't mean anything to you, these are just three of the **Masters of Old-time radio**. Their work and projects of the past and present are to be given *SERIOUS* consideration, if you are at all serious about old-time radio. There are others, but these people have achieved Grandmaster status in my book. To an extent, they are the unsung heroes of old-time radio.

There are also individuals in the broadcast industry I have worked with in the past and present. Many have inspired me at various levels in a *DIFFERENT* way. They have enhanced my knowledge and provided the support and inspiration for me to write what I have written. In fact, a sort of a *COMPANION* volume... "A Guide to Syndicating Your Own Radio Show" has been under development for some time.

I make no secret of the fact that I've been thinking about creating a publication like the one you hold in your hands for a long time. A long *LONG* time. Originally, I thought I might just update and re-print my 1986 book. I actually took a stab at beginning this process (which can still be seen on www.brcradio.com). Unfortunately, this volume turned out to be so drastically outdated and painfully unlike my mindset of the present, that only a complete re-write from top to bottom would be acceptable — a task I was hesitant to undertake. So by the end of 1999, that notion had been more or less abandoned.

Attempts to Legalize and Monopolize Leads to Apathy

But I was discouraged from putting together a newer publication for many other reasons, as well. I felt what was once a friendly hobby where trading of information and rare shows was now being ruled by a few commercial enterprises that forbid such activity — if not openly, but through their actions and attitudes. I predicted it 10 years ago and then saw it start to happen. One major commercial vendor and former customer who claimed to be the only legitimate human on the planet even decided he wanted to become my enemy. That in itself did not sour me on the old radio stuff, but it was, I felt, another indicator of the shape of things to come.

So I went into sort of a semi-retirement, dropping the old-time radio audio products from my catalog after 25 years. A handful of people seemed disappointed, but for the most part, no one seemed to care, which was fine with me! Yet I never quite lost my interest in writing about the nuts and bolts of radio show recordings. My on-going professional experience in the broadcast and recording industry has continued to evolve. I found more contemporary concepts (both "techie" and otherwise) were easy to weave and twist into something related to the "old" radio hobby. My columns, more often than not, told it "the way it as" (or "the way it was") on various topics that caught my fancy. That and especially the trials and tribulations of audio recording continue to be interesting topics for me to write about.

More recently, I've resumed reading some of the old-time radio internet chats. I have noticed some collectors are still living in the past. Others were still chatting about mundane things that really don't matter (at least to me) or affect the big picture as far as the future of old OR new-time radio (yes, I know, there were / are

exceptions). Somehow, there was something missing from when I had contributed when internet chat first started becoming popular in the early 1990s. Maybe there is still a need for my two cents there, but I doubt it. It is also quite possible that my own common-sense mindset no longer fits the profile of the typical net-savvy group of radiophiles. I have noticed, however, many old friends are still active on the internet and I am encouraged by that as well as those rare “newbies” who seem to possess intelligence greater than mine. As far as “old friends,” I use the word “old” with some affection. Ironically, when I decided to contribute my two cents Fall of 2001, my contribution was rejected twice. Someone’s server dumped my words in oblivion admittedly for petty formatting issues, but I took it as a sign. My forum is primarily in the REAL world, where real people, real equipment, real tapes and discs and real communication can take place in publications like this one. Let those internet-crazed people live in THEIR world, and I’ll live in mine, with only occasional ventures into cyber-OTR.

And speaking of “real” things...

What I really think has happened is the REAL world of old-time radio has migrated back to what it was after the nostalgia craze faded away by the end of the 1970s. Old-time radio, “OTR” or whatever you want to call it was and is a little known niche hobby mostly ignored by the general public, and appreciated by only a very select few. Today, as major clubs are struggle financially, and the popularity of conventions seems to have leveled off, or cancelled entirely, one realizes it’s not the “booming” hobby that it seemed to be in the 1980s.

Here’s another significant event:

Veteran old-time radio writer, Jim Snyder recently resigned as editor of NARA News. Working against old-time radio apathy that is so prevalent today, Jim spent seven years of developing it into the finest publication of its type. He set new standards for both service and content of such a periodical. He credits the writers for its quality, yet it was he who corralled them into one booklet four times a year. You’ll pardon the grammar, but Good Writers Inspire Others to Write Good. I feel some of my most varied and best work in recent years came from that long association. A major portion of the publication you hold in your hand would not exist without Jim’s recent encouragement and support (Thanks, Jim. You’re still “OK” in my book, despite having left Michigan for that dusty old state of Arizona).

I also realized over a time that my readership would remain comparatively small if I didn’t “reach out” beyond NARA News to a larger body of people such as those who purchased my 1980s publications. The internet is a very cool thing, but as I’ve already eluded to, there is something to be said about the effectiveness of *THE PRINTED WORD* that cannot be conveyed by a bunch of words scrolling up a computer display. For example, the writer has less control over things like typography, but mostly the printed word is something tangible that can be referred back to again and again, at any time or at any place. A CRT display connected to a box of technology patched into the phone system should not be required equipment to read a body of written works.

LOOKING BACK once again

And speaking of written works — or words actually — how did I end up generating so many for so long? Somehow very early in my life — I don’t quite know

how it happened — I developed this uncanny ability to put one written word in front of another and have the end result be something that communicated sometimes-useful information. In 4th or 5th grade I got pretty far in a school Spelling Bee, and I don’t know how that happened either. It just did! The next *REAL* trick was to accumulate enough information through personal experiences in life that would actually prove useful or applicable to others. That process took the longest, is on-going and will never end.

Along came the “TECH GUIDE” books and later, another newsletter...

The mid 80s came along, and I authored two handbooks whose function was to provide intimate details on the mechanics of how to collect radio shows, how to get the best sound, how to use equipment, which equipment was best and why, etc. etc. With a second edition, I attempted to create a multi-faceted resource tool with the information, tools and technology I had available at that time. A lot of people must’ve liked ‘em, because those publications are long out of print.

In the early 1990s, rather than create an updated version of the book, I published *Listening Guide Newsletter*. Unfortunately, during the time that publication was being produced, several vendors of old-time radio — myself included — found ourselves on the receiving end of a lawsuit for marketing a show long thought to be in Public Domain. Naturally, that put a damper on my interest in old-time radio and was a contributing factor to the demise of the newsletter. There is an “Ancient History” section of this publication that contains a re-print of an article BRC published about “the Shadow” lawsuit.

In the immediate years that followed, my work in the broadcast industry continued to blossom, although my profile in

old-time radio gradually declined. I did continue to attend some of the old-time radio conventions for a time.

Out of Semi-Hibernation & Where it All Comes from...

Long before the 1990s decade had concluded, however, I was coaxed out of my semi-hibernation to become a regular columnist for North American Radio Archives’ publication, NARA News. This “coaxing” didn’t take much effort, for it came from the previously mentioned veteran columnist, Jim Snyder.

My writings about the technical side of recording, my (sometimes controversial) commentaries on various political issues in the old-time radio world and my more whimsical articles actually had their beginnings in the mid 1970s. The background (once again) goes something like this: *News & Reviews* was a small circulation newsletter that eventually gave way to *Collector’s Corner*, a magazine which I co-edited with another old-time radio colleague, Joe Webb, and Bob Burchett gave it a **professional** edge. It survived and thrived for a time up through the early 1980s. I also made occasional appearances in *The Illustrated Press*, the publication of the Buffalo, New York-based club. I wrote at least one major feature for *Radiogram*, published by “SPERDVAC.” “SPERDVAC” (*The Society for the Preservation and Encouragement of Radio Drama Variety and Comedy*) is the largest non-profit old-time radio group. They are based in Los Angeles (I’ve been a card-carrying member of this organization, although I’ve been a **very bad boy** for not re-newing the past couple years).

As far as content of the booklet you hold, every single word in this publication is mine or provided freely by friends who have supported by efforts over the years. No one can call me a “bootlegger”

for publishing this book. While there is some strong opinions expressed, no one is slandered within the text, nor is anything reproduced that could even remotely require payment of royalties to any living creature — human or animal. It seems funny to make a statement like that, but having dealt with so much legal nonsense as a vendor, it seems appropriate given my frame of mind about the topic toward my latter years of marketing audio tapes.

Also be aware I do *NOT* claim to be the most knowledgeable person on the finest details of every single topic covered. In fact, there are probably mistakes in some of my assumptions, or an interpretation that may differ from someone else who actually may be more knowledgeable. But from a General Interest Standpoint, everything covered is coming from someone with a very diversified background, and variety of experiences.

And what of that background? Well, during the past 20 years, I have worked as a Broadcast Engineer, but I also have some experience recording live musicians, as well as handling more live radio broadcasts that I'd care to admit. Much of my working background was also as a Production guy (that's a big part of what BRC Broadcast Services handles today). If you dig a little deeper, I was also a successful On-Air host for several years toward the latter part of AM radio's "full service" heyday, and was heard on the air as recently as the late 1990s hosting various types of programming. I also spent an incredible number of years "mastering" thousands of old-time radio shows, improving the sound of vintage recordings using all kinds of technology.

A hybrid of old school and new school recording

I've spent countless years editing reel to reel tape with a razor blade, but more recently, have spent many hours editing audio in a digital environment using computers as well as other equipment. I possess sort of a hybrid of old and new experience. There are probably no cells in my body that know how to do anything other than being a radio/recording/musician-type guy (oh, I forgot to mention, I am also a musician). My work is my hobby and my hobby is my work, thus, some of the topics I talk and write about I do so with a great deal of passion.

I have a good broad knowledge of computers, yet I love vacuum tube electronics still being manufactured and in extensive professional use today (Apparently, audio in the form of electrons seem travel across a vacuum with a better end result than across a piece of microscopic sand!).

It's no longer the hobby some of us grew up with (duhhh, no kidding!)

You'll find this to be a recurring theme through some of my more recent columns presented within. For several reasons, the OTR "world" (if you want to call it that) has evolved back into the type of hobby it *BEGAN* as and remained through the 1960s-70s. OTR got a shot in arm when the nostalgia craze hit and lasted through much of the 80s (remember the full length Woody Allen feature film "Radio Days"?). The "hobby as we knew it" saw tremendous growth during that time, but by the 90s, began to level off and eventually decline and level off again to what it is. Yes, I've touched on these topics elsewhere in this publication, but in fact I've gone one step further: I've re-printed Bob Proctors "*Lo-Fi*" in a *Hi-Fi Age* from 1995. While this article is quite dated, the basic theme is still applicable today.

I think it's pointless to attempt to compile or quote statistics as proof this observation about old-time radio's decline. Who cares about statistics, anyway!? There are numerous signs that this has occurred. It is up to those who have an interest to take steps that will allow it to survive for another generation. Either that, or just let it continue to gradually fade and die a slow death.

So just what is "OTR" today, and how does it relate to the internet?

It is a small niche hobby that has both been helped and harmed by the internet. There is an entire section in this publication about OTR and the internet. The general public still knows nothing about OTR...and many don't care much about it, either even if they hear it actually exists. It has evolved into a topic that in mentioned in passing in history books, talked about extensively in short run special interest books, and of course, many websites devote volumes of space to it.

As a result of that internet presence, a new type of collector has emerged with hard drives and CDs stocked with MP3 collections. As a purist, and someone who works professionally in the recording and broadcast business, I personally don't have much use for MP3. I know what MP3s sound like, and maybe they're fine for OTR. I never considered them as legitimate recordings from a technical standpoint. But if they allow someone to hear shows that couldn't otherwise, that's cool by me. Those who get all huffy about the legalities can stick it in their ear...a pencil with a sharp point, preferably...rather than a radio show!

I know there are various organizations and businesses that would like you to think that OTR is something more than a "niche" market, and there are exceptions

to every generalized comment. The average adult — young or old — *STILL* has no idea there are 10s of thousands of shows existing. That's the way it was when the "hobby" got its start when people airchecked off the radio, and that's the way it is *TODAY*.

Maybe it can be said some businesses or organizations still peddle zillions of cassettes while the rest of the free world has already switched over to CD. But this is *ALSO* historically the very nature of the OTR hobby — to keep an obsolete format in "service" long after its obsolete — while a younger "sub-niche" is quietly letting their computers download MP3 copies all night. I'll have more on this elsewhere, but for now, dear reader, **welcome** to my **jungle of words!** It is time to finally let the show begin.

Introduction... To begin, there **must** be a beginning... somewhere... somehow...some **way**.

*This section originally appeared in **Radio Forum Newsletter** in 1991, co-edited and published by Ed Cole and BRC Productions. With Ed's permission and blessing we have since kept the several articles he authored available to a growing audience on the internet and in print.*

3. THIS THING CALLED RADIO

By Ed Cole

The late 1800s marked the development of what was to become the most popular means of communications ever devised. By 1880, the telegraph and telephone were the only two methods of long-distance communication in existence. Many experimenters were working quietly in the background experimenting with electromagnets. A theory, called the "**induction theory**" was developed, that advanced the belief that a current in one

wire could produce a current in another wire, even though the two were not connected. In 1864, James Maxwell, a British physicist, explained the theory by suggesting that electromagnetic waves existed that travel at the speed of light. In the 1880's, German physicist Heinrich Hertz performed experiments that proved Maxwell's theory to be correct. These ideas were expounded upon and put to a practical test in 1895 by an Italian inventor, Guglielmo Marconi. Marconi is credited with having sent the first radio signals through the air, using electromagnetic waves to send telegraph code signals slightly over one mile.

The first long distance transmission in this manner was in 1901 when Marconi sent code across the Atlantic. Much research and development took place after that demonstration, and in 1907, the triode vacuum tube was developed to facilitate radio reception. American inventor Edwin H. Armstrong developed the super heterodyne circuit in 1918, and through further efforts, became known as "the father of FM". The primary use of "wireless communication" at this time was in ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication. Thousands of survivors of shipwrecked vessels were saved by the use of radio. It wasn't long before numerous other uses were discovered for radio, such as in aircraft, law enforcement and the military. Further uses were discovered, and soon came the advent of commercial broadcasting as we know it today.

There is some debate as to what the first commercial radio station was. One school says it was KDKA in Pittsburg. Still others say it was WWJ in Detroit. WWJ began regular broadcasts on August 20, 1920. KDKA actually started as an experimental station in 1916, but broadcast the 1920 presidential election results on

November 2, 1920. On September 15, 1921, the government issued a license for regular broadcasting to WBZ in Springfield, Massachusetts, and commercial broadcasting began to mushroom from that point.

To provide broadcast material to several stations simultaneously, the NBC Radio Network was formed by the RCA Corporation in 1926. This period in history marked the beginning of "**The Golden Age of Radio**" in which performers gathered around microphones and sound effects men artificially created realistic sound effects for a wide variety of programs from comedies to drama to mystery to documentary, as well as numerous soap operas. It was radio at its finest hour — a period in which audiences were captivated and drew their own mental pictures of the scenes and situations that were being portrayed.

Radio was called "**The Theatre of the Mind**", a phrase originated by Orson Welles. Welles was responsible for "**The War Of The Worlds**" broadcast on October 30, 1938, that panicked the entire world. Even though the announcer stated that the broadcast was fictitious, persons tuning in on the broadcast believed it was **VERY REAL**. Thousands of people called the police and asked for instructions on what to do. Others fled their homes in panic, and still others were taken to the hospital and admitted for shock. One of the reasons why the announcement that the broadcast was fictitious was not heard could have been that Edgar Bergen/Charlie McCarthy were on the air during the same time period, and their show was more popular than the Mercury Theatre of the Air. It is doubtful that any broadcast ever made has had as much impact on the public as "**The War Of The Worlds**".

Many other famous shows that are well remembered were also on the air at this time, such as Fibber McGee and Molly, Duffy's Tavern, Henry Aldrich, Our Miss Brooks, The Great Gildersleeve, Jack Benny, Burns & Allen, The Shadow, The Lone Ranger and so many others. These broadcasts warmed the hearts of millions, and were never missed by their loyal followers. Amos 'n' Andy, one of my personal favorites, was enormously popular — so much so that even movie theatres stopped the movies they were showing to pipe in the adventures of Andy, The Kingfish (George Stevens), Sapphire, Shorty the Barber, Lightnin', Algonquin J. Calhoun and the other characters on the show. The series lasted from 1926 until 1960, and later became the basis of the Amos 'n' Andy television show. Its longevity demonstrated the enormous influence the show had on its audience. When the show went to television, the entire cast changed, with the exception of one of the performers, Ernestine Wade, who played George's wife, Sapphire. The radio characters Amos and Andy were both played by whites who were portraying blacks. A great uprising occurred a few years ago among groups that maintained that the program stereotyped blacks as a group to be ridiculed, and as a result, broadcasts or promotion of the series was strictly prohibited. This author could see nothing in any of the broadcasts that reflected this, and he has heard almost all of the programs.

Radio also brought into the home the music of the great bandleaders of the day, such as Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Glenn Miller, Guy Lombardo, Harry James and many others. It brought these great performers to the limelight, and was responsible for the majority of record sales of the day.

Many of the news reporters of the day

also became famous, and took their place in history as radio personalities — people such as Walter Winchell, Fulton Lewis, Jr., Edward R. Murrow, Gabriel Heatter and Lowell Thomas. News enjoyed enormous popularity particularly in the war years of World War II. Just as today, news at the time was highly political, because the governments of the various countries involved used the airwaves to broadcast their own propaganda. It was during the period of the Roosevelt administration that President Roosevelt used the airwaves to help gain support for his policies. He broadcast a series of informal talks known as "**fireside chats**" in which he took the government directly to the people. The end of radio's golden age around 1950 was brought about by the advent of television. However, contrary to popular consensus, radio's popularity continued as an entertainment medium.

In the middle 1950s, rock music became the craze of many teenagers and as well as adults. At that time, it was largely a take-off on big band music with more of a contemporary flavor. One song that comes to mind from about 1955 was Bill Haley's "Rock Around The Clock". I hated it, but it was enormously popular. The radio stations that were playing this type of music had the majority of the audience at the time. Rock music today has taken on an entirely different form as it has progressed through the years, but it still enjoys mass audiences. Its style puts it into a definite timeframe in history that is easily recognized. It has followed the state of the art in recording techniques and clarity. Since these have improved greatly over the years, it is not unusual to find many of the artists of music recorded years ago in the recording studio to re-master their most popular hits in state-of-the-art sound.

A popular format of late has been talk show radio, or all news radio. Both attract large audiences because of the timely information provided. Topics of interest to everyone are discussed, and many talk show hosts have an open forum where listeners can call in and discuss anything that is on their mind. This can vary over a wide range from personal marital or financial problems to how to get the plants to grow. A gauge of the popularity of radio can be seen from the sales of radio receivers. The portable radio has been very popular lately, as it provides personal listening. Portable radios now account for more than 75% of all radio sales. Radios are now installed in almost every automobile, providing a companion during those pleasure drives, or drives to and from work or shopping.

It was during the 1970s that FM became increasingly popular, and by the mid 70s, had surpassed AM in terms of listening audience. The reasons for this were clear: FM offered superior sound quality and freedom from man-made or natural interference. Another plus was that many FM stations were broadcasting in stereo, which provided a clearer rendition of the spatial dimensions in the original performances. Sales of stereo receivers skyrocketed during this time.

The United States has more radio receivers per person than any other country in the world, with an average of somewhat above two receivers per person. Australia checks in with more than one receiver per person also. The United Kingdom also boasts a saturation market with about one receiver per person.* These figures indicate that radio is enjoying continued popularity as a news and entertainment medium, and surveys show that this trend will continue.

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*Source: The Statistical Yearbook, 1986, UNESCO.

4. Marching through the recording technology timeline

(Some of the old techniques still apply, but the mindset is definitely different)

It wasn't too many years ago, when I thought all one needed to make a good quality recording was a commercial grade cassette or open reel deck, some good blank stock, a rack of analog processing gear and good source audio. Make sure all your audio wiring was balanced, take care to wire it in such a way as to avoid group loops, and finally, make certain your tapes heads were pristinely clean, in alignment and <gasp! gasp!> the machine was running on pitch. Adjust everything properly and you could easily create what you thought was a broadcast quality open reel or cassette master that if you wished, you could easily zip off in huge quantity on your high speed duplicating equipment. An extra generation of analog hiss didn't matter that much. After all, the range of FM broadcast stations stopped at 15 kHz anyway, and who could hear much above that range (other than females of the human species and non-human entities like cats and dogs).

All through the 1980s and bleeding into the 90s, it seemed like cassettes were the recording media of choice for consumers and open reels for the rest of us. As humans get older, their hearing actually gets worse. Technology has to in essence, work extra hard even from that perspective to keep up (although humans make some adjustments)! For that matter, technology had pretty much taken the analog medium to its limit as far as what could be achieved.

For decades, I operated a bank of professional and semi-pro open reel decks and commercial cassette equipment. I was

a huge consumer of analog recording media. As the 1980s turned into the 1990s, however, I became tired of replacing the parts in my Teac X-10R reel decks as well as tolerating the tape skew problems on my Sony TC-765s. Somewhere along the line in the early 1990s, I even located a used Sony TC-880 reel deck for next to nothing a machine I had drooled over in the 1970s, because it was so state-of-art at the time but no one could never afford. After working with it in the 90s, I ended up actually *HATING* the machine, especially when it stopped working after only a few months of use.

By then, I had given up servicing my own equipment, but had found a service shop that was particularly good with reel decks. I gradually cycled my machines through this shop. Actually the shop was a home business run by someone who previously had been Service Manager for a Detroit area stereo chain that had gone out of business! (So much for the stereo/hi-fidelity craze of the 1970s in the pre-video days). I soon got really bored even with this servicing routine, especially when the cost of Teac take up and supply motors (which only lasted 1-2 years) climbed to \$150 a piece! Eventually, I even abandoned one of my beloved Sony TC-765s (never picking it up from my service guy!). At least one of the Sony reel machines I had paid somewhere around \$800 for, brand new in the early 1980s. At one time, they were considered high-class machines. They had specifications that exceeded the Ampex, Scully and MCI pro machines of that era. What was yesterdays space age gear, however, is tomorrows junk.

In the process, I also soon abandoned every semi-professional and consumer deck I was trying to keep alive even if they were in perfect working order — and by

the middle of the decade was using Otari professional reel to reel machines exclusively. And if the cassette deck didn't carry a brand name like Tascam or Denon, I abandoned it as well.

Digital Arrives on the Scene

Then something happened. I probably still couldn't hear much beyond the range of FM broadcasting, but the cost of digital recording technology dropped. Drastically. Some of my favorite companies like Sony and Tascam introduced their own versions of digital recording gear. Major automobile manufacturers began making CD players in automobiles a factory-installed feature. Now suddenly, the concern wasn't if the heads were clean or the machine was running on pitch, but how pure and pristine the analog audio going into the machine could get. All those distractions we had with reels and cassettes were gone. Well sort of. With our older recordings, we still had to deal with the flaws that were already deposited on those recordings many induced by the equipment itself. So the cycle continues: If you go way back in time, the flaws of cylinder and disc recordings were of course, scratches, skipped grooves, thin audio combined with distortion. Eventually, we learned how to make records sound really good and how to fit two channels of audio into a single groove. Then along came game reels and cassettes, with their own set of problems such as tape hiss. So we invented schemes like Dolby noise reduction, better electronics and better tapes to make the hiss less noticeable. Next, DAT (Digital Audio Tape) came along in its earliest form, on reel to reel tape. But unless you were a recording studio or a rock star with a spare \$10,000 or \$20,000 lying around, you didn't have one of those. It would be a few more years

with the tiny cartridges known as today's DAT would become reality.

Now here's the funny part: With the advent of digital equipment, a new breed of audiophiles would emerge who insisted analog was actually better. Or perhaps it was people who had used or experienced the best of the best analog equipment: Studio reel to reel machines whizzing past analog heads at 30 inches per second. Think about it logically. What SHOULD sound better? An analog tape three quarters of an inch wide using that much tape for every SECOND of audio, or a modern equivalent? One popular modern format is half-inch tape inside a shell that looks suspiciously similar to a home VHS videotape (a format called A-DAT). This format converts slices of audio into a chain of ones and zeros, and fits 42 minutes of eight channels onto a single tape.

Here's the reality: With everything else being equal, the average person probably couldn't tell the difference in sound when you're considering equipment in the professional world. Modern methods, however, ARE more cost effective, and as I discovered many years ago with my old semi-professional reel decks, it is costly to attempt to preserve the old school way of doing things for the average person, or recordist either amateur or professional. If you already have the gear that runs at 30 inches per second, it's probably worth continuing to use it, if that is indeed, what your application requires. If you're the person paying the blank tape bill, it's not so easy of a decision, or maybe it is. It costs around \$300 for a single reel of that tape that will get you 15 minutes of recording time. Contrast that to \$10 for a single A-DAT cartridge that is good for 42 minutes.

The "Aroma" of Old Recording Technology

Sometimes an unexpected flashback to the past reminds me just how far recording technology has come. Occasionally, people bring me older equipment that was salvaged from someone's basement or a dumpster behind a radio station. Two machines that recently arrived were a Teac X-3 and a Pioneer RT-701. These model numbers will mean nothing to someone who has grown up in the digital age, but if you're over 35 years of age and were seriously into sound recording in the 1970s and 80s, you know what these machines were all about. They are consumer seven-inch analog reel to reel machines built and priced to be affordable for most people during the time they were popular. The machines that recently wandered into my hands were both in working order. I actually put the Teac into play mode, and let it run all day. There is something about that somewhat unpleasant smell of a Teac X deck that of the heated semi-conductors that are supplying voltage to its DC motors that I will never forget. I spent hundreds of hours of my life getting to know that odor. I remembered if that odor got to a certain strength and your rewind or fast forward were getting sluggish, you KNEW a motor was getting ready to go bye-bye! It's not like the plastic smell of a freshly opened box of 3-M Scotch reel recording tape (Whenever I smelled *that*, I KNEW I was about to make a recording that would come out great. I never met a reel of 3-M tape I didn't like). The heated Teac reel deck smell was yet another familiar reminder of that bygone era.

Now obviously in the year 2000, that old X-3 machine still seemed to work fine even after a day's burn-in. The shock came when I plugged a set of headphones into its headphone jack and turned up the output control. Although there was no tape on the machine, it sounded like I had

just been transported to the edge of Niagara Falls (Hmmm, that'll be handy if someone ever needs the sound effect!)! I was treated to an overwhelming blanket of hiss courtesy of the nostalgic electronics present.

When I later plugged in and operated the old Pioneer reel deck, I was reminded why I never liked those machines even in the 1970s. The clacky tape transport seemed to handle tape almost violently and the machine itself weighed a ton. It was hissy as well (and the list goes on and on) BUT it worked.

Maybe at one time I would have eagerly embraced these machines as old friends. In the past, the fact that they actually seemed to be in good working order would have been reason enough to adopt them as new additions to my family but not today. The fact that these decks are 20 years old and do still work is only evidence that they were never used much throughout their lives, and stored in a cool, dry environment or at least not operated and allowed to overheat through constant use, which they were not designed for!

So today, how do I personally feel about making a good recording? It CAN be an involved process, or it can be relatively simple and painless. Are you doing it for a living in the broadcast or recording industry or merely a home recordist? In either case, hiss and distortion are not the issues they once were, but the importance and complexity of setting good recording LEVELS is more important now than ever, but for different reasons. In the old analog days, low levels meant increased background hiss, and levels that were too high mean over-modulation. Today, good average levels are necessary to keep the level of audio above whatever the noise level is of the analog equipment

you still have, but over-modulation in the digital world will give you a completely unusable and unlistenable recording.

Depending on what is wrong with the machine, servicing a DAT or A-DAT is a task that generally can only be done by the manufacturer of the equipment. The problems that occur are increases in errors some of which may be undetectable but if the errors get beyond a certain point, the tape simply will not play at all. Contrast that to eroding analog recording equipment, which usually happens slowly. You may not notice as the heads gradually wear or slip out of alignment or the pitch shifts. But if you did an A-B comparison of a cassette copy versus a CD copy of the same source material, there would, of course, be no comparison.

In general, this is the mindset I am in today. At one time, I was cataloging, producing and marketing an audio cassette product in huge quantities. With the shift in public acceptance to the CD format, the tremendously improved quality standards, and the conveniences one has over the other, it is rare that I'll even listen to a cassette much less record one.

No one can predict for sure what will happen in the next ten to twenty years. Perhaps I will have become bored entirely with audio only and be more focused on multi-media — audio with video and interactive stuff. Perhaps one day someone will be bringing me one of those ANCIENT CD machines salvaged from the dumpster, with that obsolete audio-only format that only plays 74 minutes of two-channel audio. That'd make me real happy, because I could then play those really old disks I recorded way back in the year 2000. Then again, maybe not. Anyone have a use for a really bulky and heavy box that has a great Niagara Falls sound effect loop? Didn't think so.

5. A PARTIAL LIST OF CONTEMPORARY EQUIPMENT I'VE PLAYED WITH OVER THE YEARS THAT I THINK IS COOL:

Sony's Mini-Disc format — Maybe not QUITE quality of DAT or CD, but much easier to record and edit with.

Symetrix, DBX, Behringer and Rane processors and analog parametric equalizers. — These guys all make good stuff (and I'm leaving some out) and although even in the the professional category, it's all affordable

Various computer audio editing software.. — some good, some so-so. This is a topic in itself. I'll have an article coming out looking at specific packages at a later date

Those small Mackie mixers — I don't know how they jam this much quality and so much flexibility into such a small piece of equipment (and for so little money). They make great audio processors and related gear as well.

Any audio adapter box made by **Henry Engineering** — They're not the absolute cheapest in their category, but these familiar boxes with the light blue cover literally take a licking and run forever. They're not really exciting and usually hidden in the back of a rack somewhere, but they make interfacing equipment and doing audio right a relatively painless no-brainer

EQUIPMENT THAT IS FUN TO REMEMBER, BUT I CAN DO WITHOUT TODAY:

Anything mentioned in this article. Turntables, and almost any consumer equipment with big flashy silver front panels built in the 1970s or 80s AND the biggest bombs of home technology: Elcasetts, DCC cassettes and home Beta video. Also add to the list typewriters, dot

matrix printers and any computer older than 4-5 years.

OLD EQUIPMENT THAT IS STILL COOL IN THE YEAR 2000:

Any vacuum tube amplifiers, pre-amps or military electronic equipment that has a practical domestic use and of course, in usable condition. Antique radios SHOULD fall into that category. Cheaply constructed, mass produced equipment, however, is not as interesting to me.

PUBLICATIONS:

(these are not old-time radi-related; they are trade publications)

EQ Magazine — My all-time favorite magazine. Once you get the equipment, there is no better place to find out how the pros use it.

Radio World — Is it about programming? Or is it just about equipment? It's about both, but you decide. The best of of its kind. Good industry news coverage and editorial content as well.

Pro-Audio Review — what RWleaves out, this publication picks up.

Radio Shopper — huge classified ad section, and more.

BE Radio — I've gotten a few good tips from here as well.

NARA News — the journal of North American Radio Archives — if you're into the classic shows, and everything surrounding the recordings, this is the best publication available. Anywhere. Hands down (*Note: without Jim Snyder's leadership, the future of this publication is in question as of this writing*)

6. DUPLICATORS, START YOUR CD COLLECTORS!

Technology and the ever-changing nature of home audio recording has always had an impact on the type of equipment avail-

able for old-time radio enthusiasts. When was the last time you saw a single well cassette deck being offered in a mainstream retail outlet (those monster-sized twin-speaker radios don't count!)? Yes, it has indeed been "a while." Two-transport "dubbing" decks are now extremely common. The traditional use of these decks is for the making of convenience copies of cassettes for auto or Walkman-style playing, but obviously, that's not what this column is about.

For **SOME** OTR fans, those widely available multi-well cassette machines may seem a welcome evolution of technology and consumer demand combined with a format that has been around over 30 years. Many people, however, have already switched from cassette to CD format for their listening as well as recording needs. I personally now consider cassettes an outmoded medium in the same category as reel to reel tapes, but because I have so many cassettes and reels, the need exists to keep the older equipment in service even though it is never used to make new recordings.

Blank CD-R disks are now less expensive than cassettes and have numerous advantages. Double CD players have been available for sometime, but now there are a limited number of stand-alone CD duplicators are now available. In some cases, they are smaller than a double cassette deck.

The recording aspect of CD remains a mystery to some. Others have gone the less expensive route of CD recording by using their computer to do half the work, thereby spending half the amount of money for a PC-based CD burner versus "stand alone" decks that work somewhat like a cassette deck.

I personally have tried to avoid being anchored to a computer to do CD re-

cording. It's almost as repulsive as watching a DVD movie on your computer. Can you imagine "curling up" in your office chair to stare at a computer screen for a 2-hour movie, and hearing "surround sound" audio through two tinny-sounding plastic speakers?

Recording audio CDs via computer doesn't appeal to me for this and other reasons. It effectively turns what used to be office equipment best suited for writing columns like this (and organizing your collection) into a boring chore taskmaster (like duplicating audio). But there are many by necessity who are forced to take the least expensive route as far as equipment. Yes, I know there are many cool things you can do with audio processing on a computer, but that's not what this column is about.

One of the most affordable stand-alone CD duplicators that uses standard CD-R media (and not the more expensive media that has anti-copy restrictions) is the Tascam CCD-4000 CD duplicator (below). Tascam, of course, is basically the same company as Teac... who made the open reel decks we all knew and loved.

My previous columns suggesting methods of splitting a radio show into multiple tracks is applicable. This duplicator also presumes you already have a finished CD "master" prepared. You cannot create a new master from scratch on the CCD-4000. It has no analog or digital inputs. It is strictly a stand-alone duplicator, much like the high-speed cassette duplicators some OTR vendors have used for years. The CCD-4000, however, does have headphone jacks for each well and the ability to play audio CDs at regular speed through those headphone jacks.

The same logic used on double cassette decks of moving from left to right is used on this machine: The play transport

is on the left and the recorder (or "writer" is on the right side).small LCD display tells you what mode the machine is in, and if duplicating a CD, the progress is shown in percentage. Aside from the power switch and eject buttons for each CD drawer, there are just two buttons. There are no audio level displays or controls. Again, you need to have a perfect "master" already prepared.

Duplicating CD-Rs is somewhat like duplicating computer files. You get a mirror copy every time providing your media isn't defective. This duplicator, in fact, will also duplicate computer CDs and has a "compare" function that verifies the copy is identical to the copy. This function only works when duplicating computer disks, however, if the media is bad, the duplicator will catch it for you regardless of whether it is audio or computer data. At the beginning of the duplicating cycle, it "checks media" and at the end, if you get a message other than "Copy complete," you probably have a bad copy. I made about 120 copies and out of that group, had two bad disks. Your mileage and error rate is related to the master, and the brand and type of blank CD-R that is used.

The maximum speed of this duplicator is 8X, but 6 X, 4 X, 2 X and 1 X (real time) can be selected. Tascam recommends that if there is a high error rate, to use a slower duplication speed. This makes sense.out logically, 60 minutes of audio at 2 X will take 30 minutes to duplicate. At 4 X, it will take 15 minutes, while 6 X will take 10 minutes and 8 X will take 7.5 minutes to copy a full hour. This time, however, is not exact due to various factors. I tried playing a CD that had errors on a regular CD player. While all the tracks were shown, only the first one would play.

The finalizing process on a typical CD burner is a step that is saved until the CD-R is completely recorded. In a high-speed environment, however, this is not necessary. The index or "TOC" (table of contents) can be duplicated before the actual data or audio. If there is a power loss or unexpected interruption during the process however, the CD copy will be defective.terms of operation, I found this machine to be easier than a cassette deck, and this would seem logical with only two buttons to contend with. Changing modes, however, is a little tricky, although your need to change modes to begin with is probably minimal if all the machine is to be used for is to duplicate an audio CD.

The biggest design flaw could be removed simply by adding a Quick Copy button.

To make a CD copy, you simply load the master and blank CD, then close the drawers using the eject buttons (which are in awkward places). Next, move to the control button and using the same button, select various modes and copy. After closing the CD drawers, one actually must press this button three times to start the copy process.

This deck is easiest to operate if it is mounted in a rack at or above eye level. Though it has "feet" and easily placed on a table or shelf, it is harder to access the CD eject buttons with the drawers open.

Although the equipment I have is the "MKII" version, there is still room for improvement. Yet, for an all-business—no nonsense piece of equipment with flawless performance for what it is intended do to, the Tascam CCD-4000 is a good purchase. Street price is \$995, which is actually less money than a better grade cassette duplicator. Look for it in music stores, and professional and broadcast supply outlets (there's further informa-

tion elsewhere in this book about CD duplicators).

What about labeling? There are many pre-packaged software applications available for this purpose, and Avery (of course) has CD labels readily available. I personally found it handy to use Adobe PageMaker to do my own custom labels, but with a little patience, you will be able to accomplish the same thing with Microsoft Word. If you want curved lettering and extra fancy backgrounds, it will take a little more than the common computer office applications.

— October 23, 2000

7. OTR and DIRT Simply Don't Mix

No matter how many years that go by, I simply can't think of enough good reasons to **quit the OTR hobby!** It seems I'm not alone. There are a few clubs that have been around for over 20 years that I knew of while they were still infants. Most of them are managed by different people today than those who were involved in the 1970s, but somehow, the organizations have survived and in a few cases thrived.

Those of us who have "been around" can all count the publications that were popular 20 years ago that have long since gone away. The long-running publications, however (excluding the club publications) still in production today can pretty much be counted on one hand. One popular old time radio newsletter has been in continuous operation for almost 30 years by the same individual. I know the editor of NARA News (who I suspect fondly recalls the time when dirt was new!) was probably one of the charter subscribers of that publication while it was in its earliest years.

Like the radio shows themselves, some of the publications that I had involvement in, in the early days were even-

tually "**canceled.**" Radio drama was more or less replaced by television. My efforts in the printed OTR arena were replaced by other projects, and much of my writing drifted at least for a time, to the internet.

I was reminded of one of my early publications at this past Cincinnati convention in May. I met someone for the first time who I'd traded with in the 1970s. He was attending his first-ever convention. He had e-mailed me a couple weeks prior, more or less out of the blue wanting information on this convention, which I forwarded to him of course.

"By the way," I had written to him, "didn't we do some trading 'way back when'?"

He confirmed that we had. At the convention, he proceeded to produce an original letter I had written to him in 1978 (I had typed it using a Smith-Corona typewriter so many of us had back then). I had written the letter on the back side of a flyer for "**Collector's Corner.**" I was co-editor of this publication which had about a 5 year life. Perhaps it could be said it was the father of today's printed "**Old Time Radio Digest.**"

It is always an odd feeling revisiting your past unexpectedly. But just imagine my surprise when after reading the introduction in my old friend's brand new 1990s catalog I learned he had actually started in this hobby the same year and **MONTH** I was born! Yes, dirt **HAD** been around a while when I arrived on the planet - in fact, by the time *I* started collecting old-time radio shows, dirt was well on its way to **becoming a senior citizen!**

I then came to the realization that the relationship between PEOPLE in old-time radio and DIRT is extremely remote. In fact, it is probably not too far fetched of a

concept to realize that the mixture of old-time radio and PEOPLE equals some sort of fountain of youth. With that in mind, even if your faithful NARA News Editor *DOES* remember the day DIRT rolled off the assembly line, the fact that he has hung around old-time radio programs and its people longer than some of today's collectors have been alive, he has absorbed enough OTR's Elixir of Long Life to make him seem like just a kid (Okay, a TALL kid!). This is especially true when comparing any OTR person who has "been around" to those who have spent a large part of their life collecting stamps, coins or beer cans (and drank all that beer to build their collections!).

Now I for one, do not have a "beer gut," nor does your NARA Editor, or the Editor of that publication I mentioned that is nearing its 30th birthday. If we were doing a scientific study, I could probably invent some phony statistics that demonstrate that people who have been long-time writers or editors in the OTR Press have actually extended their life and their youth merely because of their interest and involvement in OTR. How else could one explain the untiring energy that obviously is necessary to sustain the activities these people have pursued for so many years?

There are of course, many people who HAVE in fact, *DONE THE DEED*: They "Quit the Hobby." They actually threw out or sold their collections, and even asked to be *REMOVED* from old-time radio mailing lists. They may have even told their once-favorite OTR club to "*STOP BOTHERING THEM* with renewal notices!" In some cases, sadly, these people died shortly thereafter. The morale of *THIS* story is (if there has to be one), that you can certainly stop acquiring NEW shows; maybe even *STOP* lis-

tening to your OLD shows; perhaps even *DONATE* the shows you *REALLY HATE* to a worthy charitable cause. Perhaps if you are starving and living under a newspaper on the street, it is permissible for you to even *SELL* your collection of shows to another collector, a club or even a vendor. But you can *NEVER EVER* expect to live a happy well adjusted life by completely severing all your connections to *The OTR World*. In fact, you might die if you do, and we wouldn't want *THAT*!

Now with all due respect, I know there are collectors no longer with us who *WERE* OTR fans up until their last breath. Some of them, however, have been immortalized with Awards named in their behalf. Your Editor and I (as well as other NARA Activists) both were honored with such an Award the same year, back when *DIRT* was a teenager. The reality of the situation then, is while OTR may not have given those who have passed on that curious OTR Elixir of Life/Fountain of Youth, they live on, if only in name on a handsome brass plaque.

On a slightly more serious note, just what is one of the key ingredients that keeps the many people whose columns appear in this publication regularly so active in OTR? Is it the fact that all of our reel to reel tapes are obsolete? Is it because in the 1990s, certain former hobbyist-collectors turned into greedy monsters and are trying to buy out the rights of every show on the planet? Is it because Jack Benny is still funny, or Suspense is still spine-tingling or a 60-year-old adaptation of a classic on Lux Radio Theater still has our ear glued to our tape machines? These things are in fact, all part of the climate of today's old-time radio hobby. They are what makes OTR good, bad OR indifferent. Obviously, there is good and bad in everything and OTR is no excep-

tion.

What actually keeps us old-timers "keepin' on" in OTR however, is *EACH OTHER*. It has less to do with the actual listening to the shows than what it might have at one time. It has nothing to do with the fun *I* may personally have twisting knobs and "tuning out" hiss with the latest audio processing contraption. It is actually more fun and interesting when an old friend whips out a long-forgotten letter I'd sent 20 years ago, and makes me think about *MY* relationship with OTR and DIRT, and also makes me realize how much better things are TODAY (compared to "back then" despite today's trials and tribulations in OTR). Things are better in OTR today thanks to our association with many people - some we never meet until that chance convention that both attend. Things are better thanks to the many of us who have been inflicted with this chronic case of OTR Friendship. I can see it written up in medical journals now: An absorption of OTR's Elixir of Long Life can only lead to one thing: Fewer "beer guts" in the world and more funny-looking people whose worst vice is conjuring up strange articles like this one!

Unlike Dirt and OTR, OTR and the Internet does have a **sort of** happy marriage and is widely used by hundreds of OTR fans today, largely in the form of electronic mail. OTR "cyberchat" (typing back and forth to someone or a group of people in real time) hasn't quite become as widespread among OTR fans., In general, in "live chat" 99% of the strangers one may encounter one will probably never meet, which may be a good thing. *In OTR, the various conventions do allow the scariest of us to emerge in the flesh.*

Next time, I'll present maybe another of my more technical columns. Mean-

time, stay out of trouble and try not to do anything I wouldn't do. Keep your heads clean, your ears to the grindstone, and keep taking OTR's Elixir of Long Life (oh yes, and if you want to "reach for the stars" while you're at it, that's fine too, but trust me, even up there, you STILL won't find a replacement capstan for that Sony reel to reel machine you bought in 1972).

— July 20, 1998

8. The Future of Old Time Radio

This is one of those topics that does seem to haunt some of us from time to time. With this column, I wanted to assemble a few thoughts that go a step beyond merely speculative meanderings and whinings, or "we must do this now or we are doomed" drivel. At various times, my commentaries suggested that maybe the OTR copyright fiends are one day going to *REALLY* emerge from some strange place in the sky. I wondered if these **Mean Vultures of OTR Copyright Hell** would one day snatch all of our OTR tapes away from us, after having high-priced Wall Street legal firms do a bulk mailing to every OTR club, every private collector and every hobbyist dealer demanding they immediately pay up or face a lifetime of solitary confinement after being questioned for hours by someone who suspiciously has copied the mannerisms of Jack Webb. Hey, don't worry, I'm just being overly dramatic here. Traditionally, there'd be a friendly advisory, before anything ugly would develop.

Other times, my writings have touched on the topic of our physical tapes rotting into oblivion, and/or having all these tapes but no equipment (that still works) to play them on. Happily, this column will NOT deal with these aspects of OTR directly. I thought, however, it might be worthwhile to dive into this discussion

by asking ourselves two basic questions:

Just how much is your collection of OTR tapes worth to you?

Just how important of a role does OTR play in your life?

If you're like me, *AT FIRST*, you might answer "I could live *WITHOUT* it just fine" to the first question and to the second, "NOT VERY, and it's a long way down the list from breathing oxygen and eating food."

But if you're also like me, and have spent a good portion of your adult life maintaining a least a surface interest in OTR. It's hard to imagine — even fantasy — what life *WOULD* be like without OTR at our disposal.

At least for myself, I think it's the type of thing that really wouldn't be missed until it actually *IS* gone. It's kind of like an old friend who has "assumed room temperature." You don't really start thinking much about them (or it) until they're not there. Then you remember what you once had.

As OTR fans, many of us who have been "around" for a while may take for granted the tens of thousands of shows that are in circulation. We may have several hundred or thousand shows in our personal possession, but we may never listen to them. Why is that? Are we bored with them? If so, why did we acquire those shows in the first place? Probably because they were fun to listen to the first time around. Or perhaps we went on a "trading frenzy" and acquired some shows simply because of their trading "value" with no regard paid to our personal interest in hearing them.

Maybe again, you're like me, and went on a preservation mission of some sort.

You decide to acquire a long running series that may *NOT* be your #1 favorite show, but you figure *SOMEBODY* you come across might be interested in obtaining copies from you. One example for me is Lux Radio Theater. I have over 400 Lux shows, but probably have actually listened to no more than 100 episodes. Maybe at some point I'll listen to more of them — maybe a LOT more — but maybe not. At one time or another, I have probably listened to every single one of the 900+ Suspense shows that exist, and periodically will RE-listen to them when I find sound quality upgrades.

I probably have provided copies of A FEW Lux shows no more than 5-10 times to others, after having them for probably better than 15 years. Obviously, I didn't land any great trades and certainly if I sold any copies, didn't even cover my blank tape costs for all those shows, so I'm still wondering why I collected that series to begin with! Perhaps part of it was I thought I *MIGHT* develop a later interest in the series and decide to listen to those I hadn't heard. Fat chance that'll happen anytime soon though, with my lifestyle and limited free time.

One piece of advice that makes sense is always given by syndicated radio talk show host and author, Dr. Tony Hyman. With regard to reasons people should collect stuff, he suggests that they should collect the items whether they be radio shows or rubber bands, because they *ENJOY* collecting them (and enjoy them *NOW*). Period. Forget about investment purposes or anything related to money. Although a business or two has managed to make a small fortune by its efforts to monopolize and corner the OTR selling market, you and I know that the radio shows themselves have no more significant monetary value, any more than a

popular favorite music recording purchased at a record store. Like it or not, OTR still represents sort of a niche interest. Some of those attempting to syndicate OTR to today's radio stations have met with great difficulties breaking into the top 5 markets, then if and when they do, in many cases, it's on a low-power station airing their programming a 2:00 in the morning! Of course, there are additional reasons for this which I'll refrain from commenting on at this time which perhaps are equally important or perhaps more significant factors. >From the title, obviously, you can figure out this article is headed toward trying to figure out what we have to look forward to as far as the future of OTR. The answer to the question first generates a new question. How far into the future do you want to look? A few days, a few months, a few years, a decade or more?

It's easy to figure out in general terms where we're going if we look at where OTR has been. In terms of the physical media on which we store shows, the answer is not real clear cut, but there are some clues.

Historically, the OTR hobby has been *VERY SLOW* to adopt new techniques, equipment and formats. That means that regular audio cassettes are going to be around as the preferred media for some time to come. Cassettes are "OK" but they are not the direction the rest of the world is headed in terms of home recording methods. You can, however, still buy them everywhere, so it's a safe bet nothing abrupt is going to happen during the next few years.

If you've been exposed to any of the newer methods of recording (i.e. recordable Compact Disk...CD, and especially Sony's Mini Disk, a.k.a. MD) you already know the relative ease with which any-

one can make mirror-image copies with relatively inexpensive equipment. You know all the features of, for instance, the MD format which are completely impossible with regular audio cassettes. So you really *WISH* you could flip a switch and suddenly your entire OTR collection has been magically transferred to MD or even CD, and everyone you know could also make the same switch. I guess while we are in fantasy mode, we should also flip switch #2 that magically and instantly fixes all the shows we have with bad transcription skips, hissy or distorted sound, or speed fluctuation.

Now let's flash back to reality. Here's what we DO have:

Lots and lots of shows stored in mostly analog format — either cassettes or open reels. Maybe we have the one or two commercially produced OTR titles on CD.

Is all this "*stuff*" we have collected going to be around in the future? If you're talking about next week or next month or next year, the answer is probably yes unless A.) Your house burns down and takes the tapes with it or B.) We die and our spouse/family member/significant other decides it has no value and tosses it all into the neighborhood dumpster or leaves it at the curb for weekly trash pick up.

When you think of OTR from this perspective, the very existence of it today seems very fragile and poised on certain demise sooner or later. In fact, it *IS*, but then again, so is everything! This gets back to a previous column where I pointed out that absolutely *NOTHING* can be made to last forever. With a bit of tender loving care though, anything — whether OTR, equipment or even organic matter — can be given a very long and

extended life, but there is a practicality factor that figures into every scenario.

I don't think we need to fly into panic worry about our analog tapes dissolving into oblivion anytime soon. Yes, some of those tapes may become unplayable, but there are easy methods of dealing with that which I have described in the past. I mentioned the OTR world is slow to adopt new technology. Well, to our advantage, certain factions of the professional world of audio are ALSO slow to kiss analog goodbye.

As a few of you may know, I do technical maintenance at several radio stations here in the Detroit area. It seems the larger the station, the slower they are to upgrade their facilities. It is simply harder and more expensive for them to make such a change (OTR collectors, obviously, are in the same situation). Several major stations in this area are still using analog reel to reel tapes and analog broadcast cartridges for commercials. Three, off the top of my head, are owned by CBS (two AM's and an FM), yet another powerful station owned by ABC-Disney is the same. Management executives have told me "Well, we're *THINKING* of converting to all digital in a couple years," or "Upper management doesn't simply doesn't want to make the investment yet, period."

Yet one smaller station put together several thousand dollars (and I do mean several like thirty!) to buy a bunch of Sony's professional grade MD machines, which for them partially though not fully replaced reel to reel and cartridge. A lot of smaller market stations have made conversions to all computer-based audio equipment, perhaps controlled by a central satellite feed, which allows their stations in many cases, to operate with a staff of less than five people total. In some cases, these changes were needed in or-

der for the station to continue to exist in these this curious economic times. In other cases, it was done simply because the owner of the station just wanted to see greater profit.

A comparison of these scenarios to OTR can be seen. The situations, however, are uniquely different in the sense that the pro facilities have already made the investment in pro equipment, since for them, it's their business. With OTR, since for many, it's still just a hobby, they have not or cannot or are not willing to make the investment in, for example, a professional grade reel to reel machine. At least two companies are still making reel decks for this use (though one has been hinting strongly that open reel equipment is going to be shortly dropped from their product line-up). But how many collectors are going to be willing to spend \$4,000 for a reel deck? Why in the world would they do this when they can call up a mail order place like Crutchfield, or go to a retail outlet like Best Buy and for a mere \$249, can buy Sony's basic Mini-Disk recorder. For another \$20, they could buy a 5-pack of blank disks, which will hold well over 10 hours of audio in monaural.

Of course, this doesn't answer the problem of how to play the existing tapes.

If it's cassettes we're talking about, there is still plenty of good equipment that is readily available, but with reels, you'll need to spend some money for the equipment. Unless you know what to look for and what to stay away from, you can get in trouble buying used reel machines — even professional decks.

So where ARE we going as far as OTR's future? I think the transition from cassette to whatever will more or less force itself on OTR collectors over a long pe-

riod of time, the same way cassettes affected reel to reel, and perhaps the transition will never be fully complete in our lifetimes! Someone, somewhere is still going to be able to play quarter-tracked reel tapes in the year 2030, the same way that if you looked hard enough, you can find someone today can play 78 rpm records and looked even harder still and you'd find someone, somewhere can even play Edison cylinder recordings!

I said practicality is a factor, and it is in this sense: Someone, somewhere, probably or at least hopefully, will have converted enough shows to a newer form which will mean that YOUR copies MIGHT not have much value or use. A more important question, perhaps is: Will OTR still retain its interest at a COLLECTOR level as we move into and beyond the digital age, or will many of our larger collections end up in the dumpster, when no one is around who cares about audio-only performances? Of course, I know there are a lot of younger collectors around who are very active today, but my guess if a survey were taken among all OTR fans who are involved at a serious level, the majority would be over 40 years of age, and the numbers of people below age 30 would be a VERY small percentage.

If you're among that younger group, consider yourself to one of the keys to OTR's existence into the future. In the year Two Thousand SOMETHING it'll be you that will be making the transfers from CD, Digital Audio Tape or whatever to digital SOMETHING. If you're like me, and just happen to fall into the "majority" age range, just make absolutely certain that you have a son/daughter/niece/nephew/grandchildren/significant somebody who will do something constructive with your tapes if you plan to hang onto

them your entire life. YOUR collection COULD be the one that has that one rare show that all the other veteran collectors' heirs have trashed! "Constructive," of course, doesn't mean erasing them and recording music in the place of the shows!

-August 18, 1998

9. Remote Broadcasts Yesterday & Today *(Bob's Radio History & Background Lesson for today)*

The concept of bringing the listener to "where the action is" is almost as old as radio itself. Literally thousands of historic moments in the news, sports as well as entertainment and music events have been broadcast live "from the scene." These broadcasts transformed listeners living rooms, automobiles and where ever they could take a portable radio, to a seat in the audience to witness an actual event. In the early years, comedians like Bob Hope and Jack Benny would take their shows on the road entertaining troops live or going to a different city just for the novelty of doing it and promoting the show.

Many people have made careers out of sitting in the broadcast booth at a football or baseball stadium, performing the play by play or other duties. News reporters have taken listeners to the scene of noteworthy events or disasters giving eyewitness reports. Of course, it is even more commonplace for this type of reporting to occur in the television industry, but radio was on the scene long before television.

Just what is a remote broadcast? In the simplest of terms, it is any broadcast that originates from a location OTHER than the main studio, although by today's standards, that explanation is far too broad. In many cases, even the "main studio" is in a location far removed from the

actual transmitting tower. From that perspective, it could probably be said that MOST broadcasts being aired today are "remote."

A remote by my definition, however, is (usually) a scheduled broadcast originating from a location that is different from the usual studio, and that is done for a specific purpose, generally on a temporary basis.

In the early days of radio, a big band might originate a broadcast from a hotel ballroom where a live audience was present, giving the performance a "live" and spontaneous sound, although the band itself may be well rehearsed. In "olden" days, the announcers words were even scripted. This type of broadcast still goes on today on a more limited basis of both classical and rock concerts, although the style of radio programming today is to be LESS scripted and more spontaneous. In both cases, however, the purposes of the broadcast are similar to give the listeners a virtual seat in the audience as well as to promote record (or today, CD) sales. The second reason is to sell advertising time during the program generally at a premium price. The second reason is more important than the first as there are usually costs associated with doing such a program that would not be incurred if the program originated from the main studio.

Part of my interest and experience in the broadcast business is related to how the sound actually gets from point A to point B. If the remote actually occurs somewhere within close proximity of the main studio or control room, the simplest method is to merely use an extra long microphone cable! More often than not, however, a "remote" by way of its very nature, is not just a few hundred feet from the main studio, but miles away.

Radio has always been dependent on the Phone Company to help with issues of getting audio from point A to point B. In many cases, however, it is more appropriate for the announcer or his producer to take a recording device to the site. At that point, however, the broadcast starts to fall out of the realm of an actual live remote broadcast and amounts to merely a recording made "in the field." "Man on the street" interviews that don't rely on timeliness of the broadcast may be handled in this manner, as well as getting sound bites from individuals in the news to play during a newscast scheduled at a later time. This is known as an "actuality."

The remote broadcasts that are often the most fun are those frequently done for promotional purposes or in some cases, remotes which are done from an advertisers place of business. For an extra fee, the air talent, and his or her producer and in some cases, an engineer would travel to that location with microphones and appropriate equipment. Various methods would be used to get the audio from that site. In the early days, the Telephone Company would lease the use of special lines designed for this purpose. The better the quality, the more expensive the "loop." Also, the greater distance, the higher the cost, although the loop was always "on" and the connection was not timed.

Stations later found it more cost effective to use special low powered transmitters to convey the broadcast from the remote back to the main studio where it would be re-transmitted at the normal frequency.

Those transmitters are called **RPUs** or **Remote Pick Up transmitters**. They operate on high frequencies that are only receivable on special equipment. The problem with this method is the range is

limited, and the engineer must set up a special remote transmitting antenna prior to the start of the broadcast, which may or may not always be practical or even possible.

Another method of remote broadcast also involves the Telephone Company, but in this case, standard dial up telephone lines are used. While convenient, the problem with this method is the poor quality. The Comrex Corporation (incorporated in 1961) invented a method of squeezing more quality into a narrow bandwidth phone line in the mid 1960s.

Later technology allowed two or more lines used at once to provide near FM quality. The problem with this method is for greater distances, the cost would be high for an extended length broadcast. Each line in use amounted to a long distance call multiplied by however many lines were tied up.

As the 1970s turned into the 1980s, it became more commonplace for the larger broadcast networks and companies to employ satellite transmission for distribution nationwide at minimal cost. It was still necessary however, to get the audio from the origination point to where ever the transmitting satellite equipment was located. While trucks equipped with mobile satellite dishes were available, only the largest companies had access to them or could afford to rent them. These methods were also not practical for local events. Various methods using phone company lines made those "ground transmissions" possible.

The broadcast industry was among the first to use new digital technology provided by the Phone Company. This technology was used specifically for remote broadcasts. If you've ever heard talk of ISDN service among computer people,

this is the same service so widely used by broadcasters. The letters stand for Integrated Service Digital Network. This service was available and in use by broadcasters long before use of the internet became so widespread. In fact, there are a lot of luxuries today's broadcasters enjoy that simply did not exist while radio was still in its infancy. Behind the scenes in years long gone by, a separate telephone (with a rotary dial!) with actual humans getting and giving cues manually were the ticket to a smooth remote broadcast. There were no lap top computers for show producers or digital "return feeds" of the audio back from the studio. Before digital technology arrived on the scene, good ole human ingenuity was what made radio what it was.

My earliest experiences with remote broadcasts was before digital had arrived. My first station used one of those Remote Pick Up transmitters, or as they are affectionately known in the business, a "**Marti**" named after Marti Electronics the company that manufactured them, and still does today. The earlier versions of this equipment were basically small metal boxes full of tubes and a noisy fan on top. Either a telephone or a separate 2-way radio was used to communicate with the engineer back at the station separate from the "on the air" feed for cues.

The more typical method of handling a remote was only the air talent would be "on site" and somewhat else was back at the station playing records for you, taking phone calls and basically producing your show. A portable radio tuned in to the station at the remote site provided those at the remote site the ability to hear everything that was being aired.

A station I later worked for had a remote vehicle complete with tape machines, turntables and an audio console.

The air talent would do everything himself, although network newscasts and commercials would usually be originated from the station. The air talent would have to go through a ritual of signing on the Remote Pick Up transmitter to comply with FCC regulations. This would occur BEFORE the actual broadcast so listeners to the station would not hear this segment as it was transmitted only on the RPU transmitter. We would have to give the call sign and city of license, but only the studio could hear that segment. At the end of the broadcast, this ritual would be repeated before the equipment was shut down. During the course of the broadcast, the regular station IDs would be given, of course. Technically, your broadcasts were on two stations at once, but the public could only hear the main station. The separate 2-way radio could, however, be received on police scanners. This business band seemed almost like a private communication but it was merely another radio link that was government by the FCC just like the station AM or FM frequency the public was listening to. The stations Chief Engineer would have to remind personnel not to use foul language on the 2-way radios! I have many fond memories of those years as being the air talent.

There were some events that ran several days or a week at a time. A typical day for me during those promotions would be first reporting to the station to take care of general business, pull my music, a copy of the program log and any copy or bits I had prepared. I would then drive to the remote site where the engineer would have everything technically waiting. The station would pay an extra talent fee for my appearance. For some events, an entire day of remote broadcasts was scheduled. A promotions or sales

person might schedule on-site interviews.

For some events, I would be the engineer rather than the talent. In even later years, I would be BOTH the engineer and the talent and a complex on site set up and broadcast schedule would be established. Such was the case for many remotes I was involved with at Detroit's North American International Auto Show, which is generally a 10-day event. The station signs a contract that binds them to broadcast a minimal number of hours each day the show is open to the public. Technical and support personnel would hang their hats at the remote for the duration of the show. Air talent and guests would come and go, but someone would have to open up and shut down the display after the last program was broadcast. As Chief Engineer myself at that time, I was usually that person. The whole ritual could get to be a little hectic, or a little tedious, but the Program Director and I usually tried to make a party event out of it, which probably preserved our sanity.

I was also involved for a time with the local CBS stations' Detroit Lions pre and post game football broadcasts of a few years ago. Extensive use was made of digital technology. We had multiple feeds being sent and received from the station, plus a laptop computer connected by phone line to the studio that kept the air talents advised of callers who were waiting on the line, or other messages. The set up was comprised of two or three air talent with headset microphones. A producer had a wireless microphone to take questions from the audience, and the site producer and engineer (me) had wireless headsets to hear the broadcast and communications. There were also speakers on stands that I set up for the audience. After the pre-game broadcast, I would dis-

connect all the equipment and during the actual football game, load the truck and drive it to a local sports restaurant and repeat the set-up process for the program AFTER the game. There were a lot of things that could go wrong, but we used dependable technology, had some back-up equipment and I was never late getting the broadcast on the air. This was especially important due to the heavy sponsorship and the fact that we were also feeding about 30 other Michigan stations in other parts of the state. This was a complex remote that put great responsibility on the shoulders of the tech guys, but at the same time, it was kind of fun. I had the opportunity to work with some great air talent, met a few celebrities and usually got a free meal out of the deal.

Through all of my adventures, I became aware of a few things on a very first-hand basis: Remote broadcasts are an important part of most broadcast operations. They can create tremendous revenue, give the public a chance to see their favorite personalities in the flesh and generate a lot of publicity for everyone involved. Yet it is something that requires experienced people behind the scenes to make it successful or even possible. Of course, with modern technology, it is easily possible to do "simple" remotes with minimal technical expertise. The simplest remotes today involve nothing more than a cellular phone taken to a site for short "drops" or reports from the event. But many of those that have the greatest impact need extra behind-the-scenes help.

Today, it doesn't take hauling a roomful of bulky equipment as it might have for Bob Hope's broadcasts. But it does take a group of people who can keep track of lots of details, handle lots of planning and do some coordination.

The next time you see your local sta-

tion at an event, ask the personnel whether they use a Nexus, Zephyr, Hotline, Vector or RPU (or "Marti"). If they are uneducated promotion personnel or air talent, they won't know what you're talking about. If it's a set-up person or engineer, they'll be impressed and think you are in the business!

For the record in Bob's **Cap'n Hetrodyne glossary**, Nexus and Zephyr are both models of codecs (digital encoder/decoder) for audio on ISDN lines. Hotline and Vectors are basically audio modems (modulator / demodulator) that works on regular phone lines ("POTS" which stands for **Plain Old Telephone Service**). And as you learned earlier in this article, RPU stands for Remote Pick Up transmitter.

Virtually no references were consulted and no one helped in the writing of this column, except the elves in Microsoft Word hopefully caught all the spelling and typo errors!

- March 5, 2001

Bob's sidebar notes

A CAPSULE HISTORY OF MARTI ELECTRONICS, INC.

In 1947, George W. Marti obtained an FCC license and built KCLE in Cleburne, Texas. George's experiences in operating KCLE led to an idea for a product needed by his station and other broadcasters. That product was a portable VHF transmitter capable of sending high quality radio programming from a remote location to a VHF receiver located at the radio studio. Marti's product was called remote pick-up (RPU). Today, it is also part of a radio or television stations' electronic news gathering (ENG) equipment arsenal.

Marti Electronics, Inc. was estab-

lished in 1960 as a manufacturer of remote pick-up broadcasting equipment. Additional products were added to the Marti line of products to include microwave studio to transmitter links (STL) to transmit a station's signal from the studio to a remote transmitting tower. The company is still located in Cleburne, Texas.

10. Recording OTR in the digital domain:

An introduction to the trials & tribulations of getting started & doing it right. OR. Indexing discs for OTR, spoken word recordings & more

More and more of you are probably finding OTR in CD (Compact Disc) format slowly drifting into your possession. Perhaps you own commercial releases, or perhaps you have collector or hobbyist-vendor recorded CDs. You may even be "burning" your own CDs. Perhaps you have a CD recorder connected to your computer, or you may have a stand-alone CD machine that works somewhat like a cassette deck. It's also possible you have none of the above and you're actually dreading taking that step into a newer technology. Whether using a stand-alone CD recorder or one connected to a computer, both devices are fairly self-explanatory in operation. Regardless of what you use (or plan to use) a discussion about some of the anomalies of CDs and CD recording may be of some help.

For starters, a stand-alone CD recorder is the best direction to go for those who may be uncomfortable with computers, or completely foreign to the CD format. This originally was the most expensive route to take, but equipment is now available in this category for under \$400. Getting a computer-connected CD recorder may, however, get you a few more features and flexibility for similar dollars, IF you already have a computer with

enough speed and guts, and don't mind having to boot up your computer to record a CD.

The February/March 2000 Sound and Vision magazine (formerly Stereo Review) proclaims in one of its feature articles that "Today it's easier —and cheaper—to burn your own CDs."

What can that mean for OTR fans? It means exactly what I've been saying would happen for years: The ever-faithful analog cassette is already finding its place right next to those quarter-tracked reel to reel tapes as far as obscurity.

A CD recorder for the purpose of our discussion is the same thing as a CD burner. But why DO they call them "burners" to begin with? A quick overview of media may also be in order before we get too deeply into the logistics of what goes on and some ideas on how to do it best.

Commercial CDs consist of an aluminum layer of pits which represent the digital recording: A collection of ones (1) and zeros (0). Those pits reflect light from the laser inside a CD player back to the sensor which turns it into digital language that is converted into audio.

Recordable (blank) CDs contain a layer of chemicals that change their reflective nature when hit with a laser beam. That chemical laser basically melts and bubbles when hit with a laser. Realizing this, it's easy to discern where the term CD "burning" came from. The percentage of reflected light is less on home-recorded (or single copy studio) CDs in comparison to commercially stamped CDs. Its generally sufficient, however, to be playable on most players in good working order and not too many years old. These CDs will NOT however, play on home DVD (Digital Video Disc) players, even though those players may play commer-

cially produced CDs just fine.

Recording a series of separate tracks allows easy access to any part of the CD. In the case of music, it's a simple process to logically arrange tracks to contain individual songs. That doesn't answer the question about what to do with programming that runs say 30 continuous minutes. Does one just record one LONG track? That's the easy way to do it, but not the truly professional way to handle it. It's not the best way to set it up for the listener, either. Have you ever tried to find a certain segment within a 30 minute CD track on a standard home CD player? Its do-able, but very time consuming.

The best method is to separate the show into shorter segments. The next question you may have is how is this accomplished without tedious interruptions and pauses (during both record and playback). The answer is to add the tracks, or index the programming AFTER making the recording. For best results, you should master the audio *FIRST* onto either a DAT (digital audio tape) or MD (mini-disk), then use that disk or tape as your master for all future CD copies. MD is the best route for non-critical recordings and cost effectiveness, though DAT is better quality.

Before proceeding further, let's clarify a few things. My use of the word index here refers to merely adding or starting a fresh CD track. Some CD players have an index feature that is actually a sub-track within a track. This is not what I was referring to. The fact is that some DAT machines use the term index point or start index (or marker) to describe the start of a new segment or track. When you digitally copy a DAT to a CD, those index points on the DAT master translate into completely new tracks on the CD copy. In

MD machines, tracks are simply tracks.

Some CD "burners," MDs and DAT recorders also allow the option of automatically starting new tracks during pauses in the programming when the audio falls below a certain level. This may work out fine for song selections, but not for audio drama.

With Sony's MD, there is an edit function called divide that will allow you to very easily cut up long tracks into shorter ones. DAT equipment has an indexing function that allows you to set start code at various points of the recording. If connected correctly, the start index will trigger indexing circuitry on most CD equipment which starts a new track on the CD. If you connect your CD recorder to your DAT or MD player via either optical or coaxial cable, those tracks will correctly transfer to your CD copies as new CD tracks. A real plus of setting your recordings up in this manner is if you make a mistake, you can go back and fix it, before transferring to CD. Also, you create your own set of digital *MASTERS* in the process.

Next, you may be wondering how you should cut those recordings up. What criteria should be used that would constitute a new track? Obviously, this is a somewhat subjective issue that allows some creativity.

Here's how I would do it: The opening, each scene, station or commercial break and closing should be a separate track. If the listener gets interrupted, he or she can more easily find where they left off. If you were supplying these shows to a radio station for broadcast, this is exactly how they would want to receive them. I'm not insinuating in any way, that you should send shows to radio stations, though. I'm just using the concept to illustrate a point. This is the way major

shows such as the countdown music shows and others are formatted that are distributed on CD today. A built-in feature, of course, is the minutes and seconds tick by on the display for each track as they progress, just like commercially produced CDs.

If you use a MD recorder to set your tracks up, you can do it with the precision of 1/10th of a second — more than you'd ever need with spoken word recordings you're merely dividing up between scene changes, but that ability is good to have anyway. If you master on DAT, the start index is not quite as precision. It will take some experimentation before you get then knack. There's some "slop" caused by tape transport ballistics, but once you DO get you start indexes in the right place, you're all set. Its easier and safer to erase DAT indexes than have to redo divide marks on MD, though MD is more precise, and less chance you'll make a mistake with MDs "rehearsal" mode as well as the "Undo" feature on MD machines made by Sony.

You may wonder why you can't record straight to CD even from perhaps an analog open reel or cassette copy. Well, certainly, you CAN! There are advantages to doing this, such as saving time. If you're simply making the copy for archival purposes, and you want to use the cheapest media, this might be a worthwhile option. If you are planning on sending that copy to someone else, a bit more time and effort should be spent doing it the right way.

One of the disadvantages of recording straight to CD without going to a DAT or MD first is the nature of the media itself. If you're using the least expensive CD-R media, there's just one chance to get it right. If a mistake is made, you either have a bad track or a bad CD and have to

start again. CD-Rs cannot be erased. Another compatible media type called CD-RW will allow you to erase the last track you recorded or erase the entire disk, however, CD-RWs will not play on most standard CD players (while CD-Rs generally *DO* play on most CD players). After you complete your CD recording, there's also an important process called finalizing. This process writes a permanent index to the disk and takes two minutes. This makes your CD recording playable on most standard CD players, however, once you have finalized a disk, it may *NOT* be erased, re-recorded or added to, no matter what type of media (blank) it is.

Connecting digital equipment

This is the paragraph I *KNEW* I would be writing some day. I have a personal policy that I never write about something until I have a fair amount of personal experience doing it myself.

There are basically three styles of plugs used for digital connections. The optical or "**lightpipe**" plug is common on virtually all-home consumer gear as well as professional equipment. The coaxial is common on both professional and consumer gear, and has been around longer, but today, is not as widespread. Finally, the "XLR" connector is used for balanced digital connections and found only on professional equipment.

We're all familiar with the popular phono or RCA jacks and plugs, popular on home equipment for decades. As early as the 1950s, this type of plug was used to connect phonographs to radios or amplifiers. It was originally designed as a quick and inexpensive type of connector, and thought too flimsy for frequent use. Later designs proved to be greatly improved, and even gold plated plugs became popu-

lar as the hi-fi age turned into the stereo age as the 1960s rolled by. Interestingly enough, that very plug is one of the types that is also used for coaxial digital connections.

The **phone** plug (as opposed to **phonO**), or more commonly known **14" plug** was used for applications requiring more robust durability. Commercial recording equipment used them commonly as microphone and speaker connectors and musical instrument cables. There is however, no digital format that uses 1/4" plugs for digital interconnections, though the stereo version can be found as (analog) headphone plugs on digital gear. These are also called "TRS" plugs or Tip Ring Sleeve, referring to the three conductors seen separated by two black bands.

The "**XLR**" or Canon plug has been in use for decades for professional balanced audio line and microphone connections. This is its standard analog application, but it also is used with special 110-ohm cable connections in professional applications. They use an established protocol known as **AES/EBU** (*Audio Engineering Society / European Broadcast Union*) and the jacks are generally labeled as such. For general consumer use, I know of no advantage of using this over the others described for short cable runs and there is actually a disadvantage.

The "**lightpipe**" or optical connector is the smallest, the most common and simply snaps into place. The only real disadvantage is the cable itself is easily damaged, and you can't really custom build your own optical cables without special tools. The advantage is the pre-assembled cables come supplied with new gear, such as MD equipment.

If you're making digital copies, and have more than one option, either the "**lightpipe**" or **coaxial** connection is the

best if you need to have your index/track numbers transfer from one copy to the other. If you use the balanced (professional) interconnection, though the audio will copy perfectly, the indexing will not. As mentioned, if you're using either coaxial or balanced (*also known as AES/EBU*) connection, only use cables intended specifically for digital use to avoid getting data/transfer errors. Although the plugs look the same, the wire used in the cables is not. A video type cable will work fine for short coaxial runs. For the balanced connections, a special 110 ohm cable is needed. You need to purchase those from a music store, a broadcast or studio equipment supply house.

Most basic digital audio equipment also offers the familiar RCA/phono plugs (as well as XLR analog) for connection to amplifiers and other non-digital equipment such as cassette decks. You can, of course, use these jacks to make your connections for copying tapes between digital gear. In the old analog-only days, this is what we would do. If this is the method you choose today, you still get great digital copies but those copies would not be digital "**clones**." When you connect equipment in this way, the audio is first converted to analog before it passes through the cables, then in your record machine it has to be converted **BACK** to digital. From a logical standpoint, it makes more sense to save the extra steps and keep it fully digital. If you want to do some signal processing, however, and have only analog equipment, you have to choose but to send the audio through that double conversion process. More on this later.

A question that may arise is Does it really **MATTER** for spoken word recordings whether we make clones or simply **COPIES**? After all, we survived for years making nothing but analog copies, where

the copy was actually degraded with each copy of a copy. One has to realize however, that we are growing up with a generation that has never known life without the presence of digital audio. Twenty-five years ago, technology was much more primitive when compared to the year 2000. The standards of today are light years higher than what they were during the stereo-craze era. Sure, you may not be able to hear the difference (as far as one type of digital compared to another). I may not be able to hear the difference either, but someone younger than you or I *MAY* be able to hear the difference or at least *THINK* they hear the difference. If it means the difference between whether or not they'll give that recording a serious listen or not, I'd say it's worth that extra step. What you can actually hear depends on your age and gender.

Using the proper methods to connect digitally will maximize the chance that you'll have all your bases covered as far as consistency with the master, minimal problems in the process and ultimately, what your recordings will sound like. Indexing your recording correctly will also maximize the chance that the content will be given more serious consideration.

Cleaning up audio in logical steps

If you're anything like me, you still have a favorite piece of purely analog processing gear whether it may be a parametric equalizer, or another more advanced box that you still like working with. With digital technology at your disposal, at what stage (if at all) should you implement analog processing, or clean up? If you're transferring from older analog recordings (such as open reel or cassette masters), it makes the most sense to use the analog box during the first stage *BE-*

FORE you transfer it to a digital medium.

In my case, I use an Otari open reel deck (which I can also use to correct pitch errors, if any) that runs into a series of equalizer, noise reduction and automatic gain control modules. This allows good flexibility so that my final digital copy (whether it is on MD or DAT) is the most consistent and cleanest copy possible. Once in that digital mode, it is an easy matter to dump it to a hard drive-based (computer) clean up stage without any loss. Copying a recording as a computer file can take only minutes compared to real time copying. Once the recording that has been transferred to hard drive is cleaned up in a manner that is acceptable, it is then transferred back to a storage medium such as MD or DAT (or even CD), where it can be indexed as described earlier. If the recording is in monaural, it can be processed and stored as such, which takes less time as well as less storage space on some media. An MD, for example, will hold 148 minutes of audio in monaural. DAT is available in lengths of up to two hours, but some machines don't handle the thin tape. It's sort of like regular cassette in that regard: Use 90-minute DAT lengths at a maximum. With MD, there are only two lengths available: 74 or 60 minute which is doubled for monaural (60 minute MDs have been discontinued since this column was originally written).

Some of you may be aware that I began this series of columns a long long time ago. At one time, I was very active as a vendor of OTR and videos. My concern then was finding methods that would allow me to produce copies of programming that were superior to the condition in which I received them. That was quite a trick in the *analog-only* days. For the

most part, time was spent removing or at least reducing the imperfections of recordings created long before hi-fi or stereo were in our vocabulary, and improving the tonal balance and level consistency. I was to a degree, successful. Exact clones were not possible or even desirable back then, since the source recordings (even direct from transcription discs) were often far from acceptable. As equipment improved, so did our recordings, or at least MY recordings. There was (and probably still is) a lot of junk audio being circulated. Yet I would hope that in some way during that 25 year period, enough of my work got into circulation so that my cassette and reel copies found their way into enough of the right hands. Occasionally, someone found me through an address on a cassette. They had purchased some tapes I had done at one time or another at a garage sale for twenty-five cents a piece or something. Even when that occurred, however, if that cassette that I put out in a previous decade gained just one more OTR fan (having never sent out a tape with bad sound) then perhaps the effort put forth over the years was worthwhile. Back then, of course, indexing cuts and dividing up a show into tracks was unheard of and impossible, although CD recorders or "burners" actually became available in the early 1980s. The least expensive model, however, sold for \$7,000. Today, as mentioned earlier, you can buy one for the cost of a mid-priced cassette deck.

Is anyone loading OTR into his or her portable MP3 player yet? We'll save that discussion for another time!

Thanks for listening. As always, you can peek at my past columns (and the other projects that keep me so busy) at www.brcradio.com. If you have an OTR article page (or other info page) you'd like

to swap links with, be sure to contact me and we can do some "**trading**" (boy, haven't used **that** word in a long time!). These columns are also slowly being assembled into the painfully long awaited Tech Guide III. I know I threatened to have it out last year, but felt there wasn't enough of the right type of content at the time.

Finally, my comments are not meant to suggest or be construed as an endorsement of breaking copyright laws of any kind. It's up to you to determine if they exist and apply in your case.

Today, BRC Productions is involved in production and syndication of contemporary radio shows, as well as operating a music and voice over recording studio. We are involved in the creative process. We help our clients create the recordings and programming from scratch. We've done some of our own original stuff as well. See ya next time!

—February 15, 2,000

11. The Hobby Stuck in Time

I was active as a vender of old-time radio tapes for many years. I phased out the old-time radio part of my business a few years ago for reasons which I won't go into now, yet I remain in contact with a few old friends who still pursue those interests.

This column contains a lot of information and ideas about old-time radio that I may have been hesitant to share when I was truly active as an old-time radio vendor. A lot of my thinking might be put to good use to salvage things than are going on in old-time radio at a *HOBBY level that are eroding* — some **very** quickly. Most of my ideas are just common sense. At least to me. I'm not into glorifying the days of old-time radio purely for nostalgic purposes, or drooling over and over and over again over the

work of some dead (or nearly dead) performer. The product of their work was realized and completed a long long time ago. They are to be thanked, acknowledged and appreciated, but then it's time to move on! Radio performers were and are just like lawyers, accountants, teachers, musicians and the like. They were and are paid professionals. I'm interested in figuring out how their work (i.e. recordings of the radio shows) can best be used to entertain a new generation in the face of multi-billion dollar productions being released on DVD, and across the internet. The various old-time radio conventions across the country should be part of that effort.

Back in the 1980s, there was talk of putting together a Detroit area convention. I was willing to be one of the key supporters and activists if someone or group people were willing to make the arrangements. I had a mailing list of several hundred old-time radio fans in Michigan and Ohio that I surveyed. There was a handful of people (like three of four) more than happy to **"help out"** but we didn't have someone in Detroit like Bob Burchett in Cincinnati, or of course, Jay on the east coast. I simply did not have the time to do it myself. So that idea quickly went away.

Before we **chomp** further into the meat of this column, I first want to say my hat is always off to those who keep the various organizations in old-time radio alive. Their efforts can never EVER be repaid. The clubs and organizations that are the most active remain as such ONLY due to their efforts, for which they can never be thanked enough. I couldn't find anyone with that kind of time and dedication 15 years ago when there was talk of it in this area.

I mention all this because I don't

want people to get the idea that this column is meant to be taken as a criticism. It's not. I don't want to hear **"well, let's see you do better yourself — if you can't, then SHUT UP,"** or the ever-whiney **"if you can't say anything NICE then don't say ANYTHING."** Welllll... I may be quiet, calm, cool, collected, diplomatic, unassuming and even aloof in person, but in my regular columns, I don't mince too many words. Consider this column strictly as a series of observations from the flight deck, so to speak. I have not been deep in the inner workings of the old-time radio world for a couple years, but I am seeing the "ship" starting to tilt to one side. Organizations and businesses that never change the way they "do things" just because that's the way they "always did it" will cease to exist sooner or later. This is fact. (we make a quick transition here as the motion picture people would call it, a flashback..tho a brief one)

Think about "sinking ships" like the Titanic in old-time radio as you're carrying the last beloved Sony reel to reel machine that just died out to the curb on trash collection day. (Yes, you bought it brand new in 1977 and it was an exciting day. You remember staring at it for HOURS as you played that first reel of Suspense you received. No, it doesn't work anymore. No, you can't get parts or anyone to fix it. No, you haven't actually LISTENED to any of your reels in about 10 years, anyway once the cassettes started stacking up).

As the annual conventions on both sides of the country come and go each year, I remember how big of a part of my life those kind of events were, for so many years. I am often tempted to return (and one day, without warning, I shall!). Then after the fact, I discover I didn't miss too much that I hadn't already seen. I read

what people are writing of what goes on today at those conventions via the internet and various other sources. There are some loyal supporters who always report having a fantastic time. Those who have only attended a few conventions, usually bring back positive reports. Then I read about the features and guests at the conventions, and I realize it's the same group of people in many cases, doing the same things that were going on in the 1980's and '90's. With the exception of the involvement of those who have passed, it almost seems like an old-time radio convention of today is actually one that was frozen in time from another decade. And the comment is sometimes made that "there's not many radio legends still with us." Well, there won't be many radio **FANS** around to support these events not just for the same reason, but also because they've seen and heard everything there is to hear and old-time radio OR seemingly so.

I thought maybe a comparison to a historical landmark like The Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls would be interesting. You visit those places once, maybe twice or three times under different circumstances, and THAT'S IT! What are they? Well, one is just a huge hole in the planet, and the other is a big waterfall. Breathing the first time or two? Of course. Incredible photo opportunities? Absolutely. But would you spend your vacation year after year going to the same place? Of course not.

Then I read of the various smaller old time radio clubs and organizations who have their own conventions maybe with only one or two special "guests." And you know what? They may add a little local flavor, but it's the **SAME GUESTS** as the **"big"** conventions. Maybe some of them do well, others may break even, while still others probably lose their shirts with the

hotel expenditures and accommodations to cover out of town celebrity guests.

Maybe they're not as exciting as what **I THINK** they should be is because they don't focus their marketing (if any) to people like myself. They don't plan their program around the whims of yours truly.

Percy Sludge, the President of The Silver Radio Buffs of Lincoln Nebraska writes:

"That BOB, that crabby old columnist in NARA News... all he does is complain about how what we do is boring to him, and writes those stupid columns about CD recorders! Hey, doesn't he know we all just buy the double cassette deck on sale at Radio Shack! And K-Mart has a GREAT PRICE for a bag of blank cassettes..and who SAYS the Lone Ranger isn't the most exciting show on radio, anyway!?"

Those people like the above who are **stuck frozen in time**, could remain that way until the day Jay Hickerson reports that we have lost another **Old Friend**. Those they leave behind will find all their **lousy old cassettes** and throw them away or sell them in an estate sale for 2 cents a piece to some starving musician looking for a source of cheap blank tape. On the other hand, what if they find racks of CDs neatly arranged and cataloged in a corresponding computer database? They will more likely view this as something of value, and if not interested themselves, may seek to "unload" the archive on someone who has such an interest...thus, the shows "survive" in some manner. But this is merely a side bar note to the main focus of this column.

There are attitudes that one can have and comparisons that can be made between running an old-time radio **CONVENTION** and a "general" old-time radio business (whether it's tapes, books or whatever).

Aggressive and creative promotion, lots of marketing and creative business management and planning is necessary for any kind of endeavor to accomplish anything. Period. This is also part of why so many general business fail, intertwined with lack of sufficient funding.

In the mid-1970s, everyone was "doing" old-time radio as a dealer or collector basically the same. We didn't have as many shows to trade or sell, thus our "complete" catalog could be accomplished in 50 or 100 typewritten pages... (keyword: typewritten. Any collector who hand types an entire catalog in the year 2001 deserves to be abandoned by modern society). As the number of shows we had grew, those who were selling found the cost of copying and printing getting out of control as the number of fans grew. It then became accepted practice to charge a buck or two for the catalog which would gladly be "refunded with first order." The largest dealers would eventually charge anywhere from \$5-10 for a catalog.

This is where the *creative and logical* part come into play as far as running a business. As a vendor of old-time radio at the time, I spent a lot of time thinking about how to be "different."

I used to think "What can I do to make people *WANT* those tapes I put in a catalog? How can they be made more *valuable*. I mean, is that even *POSSIBLE*? Can I make those tapes *seductive*? Can I make the act of *BUYING* Jack Benny tapes almost like an instinctive animal act — *like breathing and eating*? I never figured that part out, but I did get a little weird putting a picture of one of the family cats on a catalog cover with an antique radio. Well, guess what, all the closet animal lovers in the *OTR* world became friends! Sometimes going a little off on the "*deep end*" has a positive side effect.

These are just a sample of the "*antics*" I pulled, realizing that the shows are just the same old re-runs that are in everyone else's catalog. I made my catalogs into mini-booklets and more frequently into brochures. I mailed them out bulk rate, selecting shows and features that were popular and trying to write a little "newsy" dialog. I watched what the huge multi-million dollar mail order companies were doing, and added my own "*twist*" to it for old-time radio fans. I emulated them using my own style. I never charged a dime for those mini-catalogs. I abandoned the "complete catalog" to the point of even annoying the "big time" old-time radio collectors. If I really wanted to trade, I would send them a list of what I had they were most interested in. Why waste paper and postage on all the extraneous shows that *THEY ALREADY HAD* anyway!? This was the time when the use of computers became more crucial to functioning in old-time radio, and I exploited it to the max. Let's see, how many shows can I fit into a brochure that requires only a *SINGLE* sheet of paper?

"Well, I got your SMALL booklet of shows with the cat on it... but how can I get your COMPLETE CATALOG?"

"Tell ya' what... I have a great deal! I just KNOW you won't want to pass this up! You can come to my office where all my masters are stored. It's just a hop, skip and a jump from Detroit Metro Airport. I'll rent you the extra office space in the back for about \$1,000 a week, and you can bring along your laptop computer. And I will allow you to go through the thousands of reels show by show to MAKE SURE you are able to identify and LIST EVERY SINGLE SHOW I have collected in the past 25 years. And... there's more... you

can print that list out and I'll even let you SELL that big VOLUME on the internet and keep all the proceeds! Howzat sound?"

"Well, I'm not sure if I have the time..."

"And on TOP of that, I'll let you record copies of every single show you want while you're here..."

"But is that LEGAL?"

"Don't get me started on THAT issue!"

Everyone wants your 7,000 page catalog for free, copies of your best shows and worst still, *your TIME*, but with some people, when it involves investing *THEIR* time, suddenly, they find excuses why it's not such a good idea. My method, again... give them the small list of shows they are most likely to want. In the process, you've saved a bunch of trees, large mailing envelopes *AND* postage. Plus, they get the shows they really want without having to hunt through hundreds of shows. It *SAVES TIME* for everyone and gets the list of shows they want to me sooner!

So what really is more irritating than people who want your "*COMPLETE CATALOG*" (which if you really still had one, by now would be an inch thick), complaining when you want to charge them for it, then keep it as *free "book"* to organize their personal collection and never order?? Those people who spent hours wondering if I will make them a "custom" cassette of 12 different items on the same tape for the same price... then whining when it turns out *NOT* to be an option... or when they say they already have the show on "side B" and wonder if I will "put something else" on that side. Those who have never been exposed to the *Wonderful World of Expensive Commercial Equipment* don't realize "side A" and "side B" are duplicated with one pass automatically.

For years (and likely to this day) the

\$5-15 Catalog Method (with a few hundred or thousand pages) is still the way some of the "mainstream" dealers operated. Yet as I mentioned, the really big (*non-old-time radio*) mail-order businesses were only sending out flyers, or small catalogs with just a few pages — in full color. They sent them out bulk rate like I did. This realization was what charged the way I ran my business in the early 1980s, and to this day, few of the *HOBBYIST* dealers still remaining have used the idea to any substantial degree (the "big time" old-time radio deals, however, *DO* use the methods I started using in the early days). I repeat again...why does someone need a list of *ALL* your shows, when they will probably order the exact same 10-20 shows the next 50 or 100 people will order? The time you don't spend packing phone-book-sized catalogs up for mailing is *BETTER* spent on improving the presentation *AND* quality of your best sellers (and *HOPING* you can create loyalty by doing these things).

Another thought: Hey, John Smith has a better copy of *The Adventures of Philip Johnson*, Private Sleuth-Dude... let's get a dub from. OK. Got it! But whoops, it's got a *SKIPPED GROOVE!* *Oh nooooooooo!* Well, let's edit the sentence from my old copy into the new copy. *Now* it's a *PERFECT COPY*... well almost. Now, George has better sound, but it has a bad hum. Do I have a filter to take that out... *YUP! But in the end, WHO CARES!*

You still have the *SAME OLD SHOWS*, even if you go into descriptive bragging about what you did to "fix it." *Big frigging deal!* People just want *the show*. They'll get it from you and that'll be the end of it. If it sounds better from you than the guy *YOU* got it from, *MAYBE* they'll become more loyal to you, but in the end, they don't give a rat's rear end

what kind of acrobatics you went through to **MAKE** it sound that way. All they know or remember is they had to **WAIT** more than a week for their \$3 cassette, and two of the tapes had duplicates on "side B" that they already had. *Oh nooooo!* You've committed the "sin" of a hard core collector! They don't **CARE** that their cassette was copied on a machine that you paid \$2,000 for, or that the labels are really pretty, or that you improve the sound by feeding it through \$5,000 worth of equipment. They don't **CARE** that you spend extra time packaging the tapes so the post office doesn't smash them to smithereens. They just remember that **PAINFUL** period between when they dropped the order in the mail to when the package of tapes arrived, and those two duplicate shows out of 20 that **THEY ALREADY HAD** (and it doesn't matter that you upgraded the sound twelve-fold). Yep, it's generation of instant gratification. And yes, I know there are **PLENTY** of exceptions. Many of my customers became good friends.

YET...As a vendor, thinking back (using **MY** methods) **YOU** remembered that they ordered those tapes from a 1-sheet brochure whose printing and mailing costs was only 1/10th the cost of a full catalog. See what I mean about the importance of thinking and managing a business **CREATIVELY**, and not just doing it the same way "you always did it"?

When you hear a popular piece of music you **REALLY LOVE**, do you really **CARE** that the musicians and engineers may have gone through hundreds of retakes, and 10 hours of studio time to yield five minutes of audio? Yet, in the production process, that CD may have only cost two cents on the dollar to pump out, then package and cellophane wrap. The recording industry has a system in place that promotes longevity and profitability.

Why not old-time radio? And I'm **NOT** talking about what **Radio Spirits** is doing. I'm talking about everything else going on in the "hobby."

Just like old-time radio hobby-dealers, in the area of conventioning (or any endeavor) there are always obstacles that seem to make change difficult. **There is tremendous resistance.** There are cost factors. There is risk. But sometimes **NOT** changing and evolving with the times and managing the business end creatively backfires. But if attendance stays relatively stable, or doesn't shrink noticeably from year to year, the attitude is don't fix it (right!) if it's not broken.

Even though old-time radio inherently is **OLD**, you can't live on the past. You have to rediscover "new" things, as well as reexamine and re-invent the old things. Why is it that the Beatles \$60 coffee table volume "story" about a group that ceased to exist over 30 years ago has been on the best sellers list for weeks in the year 2,000? The answer is obvious.

Why aren't the biggest of the old-time radio conventions in Newark, Los Angeles and Cincinnati doubling and tripling their attendance with each passing year?

Yet why does the conventions hosted by the National Association of Broadcasters show **TREMENDOUS** growth with each passing year?

These questions are perhaps oversimplifying the situation. Of course, old-time radio as I have said many times is a "niche" interest. But then again, so was radio itself. It was no accident that the government renamed the Federal Radio Commission to the Federal Communications Commission even when radio was still in its infancy.

So should we rename our beloved Old-time Radio hobby to Old-time Com-

munication? Surely not...and in fact, other special interest groups focusing on other aspects (other than shows) already exist.

What should probably be done is **RE-EVALUATE** what the various groups are doing in their conventioning activities. It is possible that this re-evaluation is already be taking place. Perhaps work is already underway by some enterprising souls to "save" the convention... or "save" the so-called "hobby." I hope so. To a degree, it is and will remain a political issue. As I mentioned, there is resistance to change. Always will be. Conventions that may governed by a committee could be staffed by a group of self-appointed volunteers. Anything that disrupts their level of involvement from certainly a convenience standpoint, may be vetoed. If that is the case, I don't see much hope for their efforts of yesterday and today for tomorrow old-time radio fans (if there are any). Sadly, the efforts of today could be wasted as their convention or their business or whatever they're trying to accomplish dies a slow death. Old-time radio really will become nothing more than just a "fad" that one or two multi-million dollar enterprises will continue to try squeezing every last nickel out of for as many years as they can out of those just "discovering" it for the first time. The newcomer "hard core" old-time radio fans (who are the real target as potential attendees) will never enjoy the benefits of those who came before. In fact, most of those people of the future will never exist.

If old-time radio fans wallow in the woes of how much the hotel room tab has gone up, perhaps they should think about moving the convention to the nearest Motel 6, or Days Inn and/or renting out the neighborhood high school gymnasium in which to hold the event. If the

interest is there to keep or improve the site of the existing convention, then they need to figure out a means to improve the **VALUE** of the convention to the hard core collector. And perhaps use a little creative thinking to bring more people like myself out of convention semi-retirement.

Wrapping up this column without making a few suggestions — completely off the top of my head — would probably be useful — if not annoying to a few people (and I'm good at that!), so here goes!

Rather than invite a fine performer like Peg Lynch (*again*), let's invite Tom Snyder, or Tom Leykis or any of the dozens of successful personalities who have graced the airwaves of radio OR television from the the **LAST** 25 years of radio (rather than the **FIRST** 25 years). Some of them grew up on old-time radio shows and would add their own perspective, not to mention attract a younger audience who are **CURRENTLY** listening. If they are willing to participate in a recreation of an old show, it **COULD** be an option. They **COULD** have fun, they **MIGHT** return the following year (at their own expense!). They **MIGHT** mention it on their **OWN** present day program (if they have one) and/or they **COULD** interest some of their colleagues.

Second... the biggest attraction for old-time radio people such as myself is the chance to visit with old friends. Many of us have seen enough recreations. Perhaps more time (or space) devoted to the socializing activity would be in order (also could be read as shorter "main attraction" programs). This comes from my memory of some of the **BEST TIMES** spent in hotel rooms **AFTER** the festivities.

Third... more scheduled **COLLECTOR-HOBBYIST** activities would be

helpful. Part of the problem here is there's too many lazy people like myself who could run such workshops who are content to just semi-retire or "lurk" in the background. Several years ago, there was a nice mix of these kind of workshops. Thanks to people like Don Aston, Terry Salomonson, Jim Snyder, Tom Monroe and many many others, we had some not only memorable conventions but USEFUL ones as well. If there is an interest on the part of involving any of the (you'll pardon the expression) "old-timer" old-time radio fans, perhaps providing them with some sort of incentive such as a complimentary admission for every day they do a workshop might be worth considering. I'm not hinting at anything. This is just stream of conscienceness writing.

Finally, by dispensing with *SOME* of the travel expenses of some of the out of town guests (if any) funds could be allocated toward promotion outside of the usual channels.

This is what probably what will happen when this column sees print: Resistance to change will rear its ugly head like a monster worse than anything Stephen King could ever imagine.

"That Crabby Ole BOB, he doesn't have a CLUE as to what he is talking about! We like it the way it is RIGHT NOW, thank you very much! Why doesn't he just STAY in semi-retirement from OUR hobby, and stop trying to STIR THINGS UP!? Just because he stopped PIRATING old-time radio tapes doesn't mean he's the Savior of Old-Time Radio! We wish he would stop writing those ugly and mean commentaries and just go back in his cave, writing about how to set recording levels on a Teac 2300SX reel to reel tape deck!"

Excuse me, but **Teac Corporation** stopped making that model 20 years ago. And **Mean Ole Bob** hasn't used or endorsed that model anytime during the past 10 years. And besides, no one ever said anything about Flying the Pirate Flag or that this column was anything more than a Series of Observations from the Flight Deck. If the ship is sinking, the guy who mops the floor in the engine room can't very easily change what's about to happen. Then again, they made some money with the Titanic before it did sink. And made a lot more money with the movie afterward. Too bad there weren't more survivors. And the best we have is the motion picture industry telling us how it might've been.

Yet if there are enough annoying "floor mopping" columnists like myself lurking somewhere beneath the surface, there may be hope. And if we get the right handful of people to take notice, there may be yet another glimmer of hope. There may actually be a rainbow at the end of the analog Never Change the Way We Do Things Tunnel of Oblivion that some old-time radio enthusiasts seem lost in.

— December 28, 2,000

12. Digital this 'n that

With all this talk about digital this and digital that, you may have resigned yourself to putting your old equipment out to pasture. Maybe you're thinking that the only place for a reel to reel tape deck will be in a museum next to Edison's cylinder recorder.

With the tens of thousands of people sending copyrighted music across the internet via the highly publicized "Napster" system, can old-time radio be too far behind?

First of all, old-time radio has historically always been "behind" as far as

technology, but second of all, sometimes that's a blessing! The artifacts and general hassle of sending audio over the internet make it somewhat impractical as far as complete old-time radio shows. It can easily take five hours of computer time just to "send" a single half hour show on a typical "dial-up" (regular phone line) connection.

For the third point, professional analog reel to reel decks are still in use (and in many cases preferred) in the biggest recording studios. These are not like the consumer machines that we knew and loved years ago, but the general principle of how they work is the same. In the year 2,000, it is far more expensive to work with the reel format. Professional studios that have this equipment also charge a much higher rate than the smaller digital only studios. Yet, many of the best recording engineers and producers to this day STILL prefer working in analog at some point during a project.

Wait a minute! Did I *miss* something? Is there something **terribly** wrong with digital that someone is not telling us? Digital is supposed to be the best quality there is. More and more old-time radio fans are finding *SOME* way to transfer some of their most beloved shows to CDs, or at least buying new copies commercially.

So what is it that is so very bad about digital recordings and MP3 audio (the most popular format on the internet for audio)?

The answer is the medium itself is not so bad, but the path it took to get there — if not in a professional environment — could give people headaches when they listen.

In order to fit all that audio into a practical format, a certain amount of information has to be compacted into a

smaller space or even thrown away. Understanding this may be easier if you are familiar with reel to reel. The higher the speed, the better the quality. Some of the early Sony reel decks would operate a 1-7/8 inches per second. You could fit three hours on one side of a reel, but the quality would be terrible. But if you doubled that speed to 3-3/4 inches per second, the quality got dramatically better, and you could still record an hour and a half of audio uninterrupted. That was pretty convenient for OTR as you could fit three half hour shows in those slots, and since reel tape was expensive in its earliest days, it seemed a good way to save money as well as shelf space. **But when you wanted to make a serious music recording, you REALLY had to double THAT speed to 7-1/2 inches per second.**

Recording studios that still use reel to reel are recording at 15 or 30 inches per second today. If they were using the seven inch reels we used to use, they would only get 22 or 10 minutes of recording time per reel, yet from that, they would get quality suitable for digital mastering.

When we recorded at lower speed on reel, the biggest artifact we would get is more hiss, and perhaps a recording that wasn't as "bright." The slightest flaw in the tape itself which might go un-noticed at high speed, becomes an audible "drop-out."

There are artifacts with the lesser forms of digital available as well. It rears its ugly head in the form of what we'll call digital "grunge" which is a form of distortion. When listening casually, it may sound reasonably good, but there will be something harsh about the audio that you can't quite put your finger on. Digital grunge can easily creep in when making repeated generations of copies through the analog inputs and outputs of a ma-

chine and/or computer.

MP3 audio downloaded from the internet sounds reasonably good, but it cannot compare with a legitimate recording. It is like comparing a cassette to a CD. But when you then take that MP3 and copy it to a standard CD in the standard format, you are subjecting the audio to yet another level of digital crunching. How many times can you expect to convert the spoken voice into a highly compressed string of zeros and ones (and back again) and expect it to still resemble something created by a human? I realize there are now an assortment of portable MP3 "walkman style" players into which you can load an assortment of audio. They act as sort of a "holding tank" of audio, and they are apparently well suited for casual listening, and would likely be well suited for old-time radio listening "on the go." But downloading MP3 files off the internet then making copies to CDs or even cassettes is not going to give you quality that compares to a "real" recording — and in fact, may have some of that digital grunge.

Some forms of digital crunching are more forgiving than others, but I'm not a very big fan on MP3 recordings.

The advantage of laying down a piece of audio on an analog reel deck spinning at 30 inches per second is **THERE IS NO DIGITAL CRUNCHING**. Basically, your old school style tape recorder converts acoustic sound waves into electrical impulses that vary at the same rate as the original sound. Those impulses are saved magnetically on that tape in a linear fashion, different but conceptually similar to a phonograph record which uses mechanical means via stylus.

With digital, frequencies and time have to be continuously sampled, then converted to strings of binary numbers. Each of those numbers correlate to a cer-

tain tone that occurred within a fractions of a second. It's amazing it actually works as well as it does. Ideally, the audio should go through that conversion process as few times as possible. In the computer world, if you make a copy of a file — whether it be an article like this, or a scanned photograph — that copy will be identical in every way. It will be an exact clone. If you copy a sound file in the same manner, the same will be true. But if you use the analog output from the sound card of your computer to feed, say a standalone CD recorder, there will be some loss, depending on how good your equipment is. The quality may actually be really good. You may not HEAR much difference, but there WILL be a difference. The people who say, "Oh, it's only old-time radio shows — they don't sound very good to begin with" *should be shot!*

In my earlier days of processing old-time radio shows, it seemed like it was always fairly easy to get a nice clean warm sound. I was working completely within an analog world. There was no smashing and knashing of audio into bits and bytes going on.

Today, while I no longer focus my efforts on old-time radio, I spend a lot of time producing talk radio programming, as well as recording live music.

I rely heavily on digital equipment for both kinds of activities, and find the recording studio environment presents the most challenges to get "that sound" without having "that nasty digital sound."

I cringe when I hear how collectors are getting their shows into CD format, knowing from experience how critical and totally unforgiving the medium is as far as over-modulation, and how nasty grunge can creep in on top of that.

For starters, there shouldn't be a lot of steps between the analog cassette or reel

master and the digital recorder. If you have analog equalizers or processors, that's not usually going to cause a problem unless that equipment is really old. You don't want to **ADD** more hiss that is already present!

If you are using a computer, use something better than the \$49 sound card that came with it. Macs are not too bad as far as how Apple ships them with on-board audio, but for serious work, I would use a better sound card. As an example, Digigram makes excellent sound cards. Don't do any serious audio work on a computer without a top notch sound card. **THAT** is the device that does your crunching from analog to digital. If you use a stand-alone CD recorder, then the recorder itself does the work.

In my case, when I'm doing a music project, I use a pair of Alesis digital recorders which have excellent industry standard converters. When those tracks are complete, I mix the audio down and add various effects, EQ, etc. as needed. I've experimented going from there to DAT, MD, CD, even cassette. The cassette and MD sounded similar... "OK" but not that great. The DAT and CD sounded the hottest, but too much digital grunge due probably to the "double conversion." The best mastering sound came from... are you ready... 2 track reel to reel on 1/4" tape! I experimented with 15 and 30 inches per second speed. For my application, there wasn't much difference. 7-1/2 speed was not acceptable, although for decades, this was the standard speed in broadcast stations.

I realize the average old-time radio person does not have a pro reel deck that will run at the higher speed. If their **SOURCE** tape is reel (or cassette) — and most of us used — and the master was **WELL RECORDED**, they may be a step

ahead, assuming storage conditions were reasonable.

In the earliest days of CD, most titles were labeled "DDD" "ADD" "AAD" signifying at what stage the recording process was analog and when it was digital.

With old-time radio, the first letter would always be A, signifying an analog recorder (disc cutter or early tape recorder) was used in the control room when the performers worked their magic.

The second A or D was the mixing or mastering stage that the recording went through. The third letter would always be D meaning the final copy was digital — a CD.

In the world of old-time radio hobbyists, the CDs being put out by collectors would be AAD if they took their CD copy directly from a cassette or reel master. The larger commercial dealers may have mastered their catalogs to a digital format, thus, the copies they send out would be ADD. There is no way to get a true DDD old-time radio recording unless you had a time machine and could take a digital recorder back in time to the exact studio where that show was originally performed.

The question that may remain is how you can make a CD sound better if you don't have the equipment or time to go through the trials and tribulations recording studios go through for that commercial CD "sound"?

The answer is two fold, and it's actually not much different from the advice I would give for making good cassettes. Find a brand of blank CDs that give consistent results with your CD recorder and stick to it. Second, be VERY conscience of recording levels. I've covered this in past columns. Never ever over-modulate a CD recording. It is better to under record than over record in the digi-

tal world. Finally, (and this is particularly true if you use the cheaper media), don't leave the discs out in open sunlight. You can easily turn that priceless show into an expensive beverage coaster.

13. Just what *IS* the best media for old-time radio?

(REVISITING THAT AGE-OLD TOPIC AS WE APPROACH THE YEAR 2000)

Cassettes, reels, DAT or Mini-Disc?

Technology is better than ever, and the costs are lower than ever, but there's some drawbacks

"...your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to preserve as many of radio's best comedies and mysteries as possible, in the best sound quality possible at the least cost. Good luck Jim. This DAT WILL self-erase when it feels like it..."

I know, it's a 1960s television show and not radio, but after all, that's what I grew up with before classic radio became embedded in my soul.

Nonetheless, I have always had this urge, this DESIRE to somehow insure that the tens of those of shows collectors have preserved don't "go away and vanish forever." Maybe that's why I am constantly re-mastering shows, but always SAVING the source master. Every few years, I also examine the aspects of the recording media we as old-time radio collectors are using.

I try to figure out if we're using the most cost effective yet most durable means of recording available for what our specialized needs require. I also read what others are saying about archival methods of preservation of recordings in both professional and real-world environments.

For years, the debate was: "Do I use open reel tape, or do I use cassettes?" For many years, reels were the preferred choice

especially among those with larger collections of programs.

The problem for OTR fans was that technology pushed the performance envelope of regular cassettes to new levels. Why is this a PROBLEM!?? Well it *REALLY ISN'T* a problem as far as I'm concerned, but many die-hard reel to reel OTR fans think it is because of their tremendous investment of time and money into their open reel collections. The general public — the masses — who used home recording methods for music or other non-OTR use embraced the convenience, superior quality and eventually lower cost of audio cassettes. The companies manufacturing consumer reel to reel equipment eventually ceased production of the consumer-grade open reel equipment and parts inventories gradually dried up on those now-obsolete reel decks.

Meantime, many OTR fans who had accumulated massive reel tape collections began a race against time: Would their old reel machines last long enough to transfer the shows to cassette? Or would they take the financial plunge and purchase a professional-grade reel to reel machine?

Some collectors began stockpiling "scrap" machines as sources for parts and did their own repairs. Others invested in professional machines. Still others with smaller collections scrapped their reel tapes and started new collections from scratch using audio cassettes.

Cassettes are now the most popular form for distribution and storage of OTR shows among most collectors, but that won't last forever either. One major dealer actually went to the expense of transferring his entire reel collection to digital audio tape (DAT) for archival purposes, then disposed of the reels. He *ACTUALLY DISPOSED OF HIS SOURCE MASTERS!*

This was a very foolish mistake as will be explained in part later.

Just what are the recording formats available to collectors?

1. **vinyl LP record** (none of us have a record recording machine so the practicality of this means is nonexistent). Some collectors in the 1970s, however, purchased vinyl LP re-releases that were commercially produced by various companies.

2. **reel to reel (analog) tape...** for many years, the "standard" and still in limited use in professional studios and broadcast stations. Consumer reel equipment has long been considered obsolete, but a handful of companies like Otari and Tascam are still producing professional grade open-reel tape equipment

3. **Digital Audio Tape (DAT)...** available in a few different styles. Equipment tends to be expensive, but far less expensive than a new pro reel to reel (analog) machine! The self erasure problem with DAT, however, is a very real one when the DATS are stored for some years. Also, the DAT recording media itself is prone to the same problems as regular analog reels and cassettes. Why someone would go to the expense and time to embrace this impractical format without a means of back-up is beyond my comprehension!

4. **Recordable Compact Disc (CD-R)...** available in a couple of different flavors. CD-R can only be recorded once, but the variety employing a gold dye are supposed to last 100 years. CD-RW can be recorded and played many times, but the cost of the blank disks is 6 times higher than CD-R. Themachines and the blank disks in general are very expensive and not practical for large OTR collections. CD recorders HAVE, however, dropped dramatically in price, but still remain somewhat out of reach for the average collector. DVD is the newest flavor of CD and

uses narrower bands, and a while a DVD-Audio format standard has been established, it hasn't yet been settled firmly. This format is several years from becoming readily available, although DVD-Video players are now available. This format, however, may never be practical or appropriate for storage of old time radio shows at the collector level. There are, however, some commercial CD release available. Perhaps the best example of this is the outstanding series on CD of Eddie Cantor radio shows, produced by Brian Gari, Cantor's grandson. It should be noted that Gari also accommodates those who want only analog cassettes.

5. **Mini Disk (MD)...** This is a Sony invention that shows great promise. It is physically the smallest format. It uses a compression scheme to maximize efficiency that "throws away" more bytes of sound than the other digital formats. For this reason, purists don't take it as seriously as other available digital formats. To the average listener, however, the sound is excellent, and the format IS cost effective. Each disk has its own housing with a sliding shutter similar to a computer floppy disk that protects the actual disk inside (unlike traditional CDs). There are several professional grade MD machines available, but the most popular is the basic consumer grade machine made by Sony which sells for between \$250 and 300. The disks themselves have dropped in price and a "6 pack" can be had for a little over \$20. Each disk holds 74 minutes of recording in stereo or 148 minutes in mono. They can be recorded and played back several times over, editing is possible and over 200 "cuts" can be indexed and labeled (the cut titles actually appear on the small display on the machine whenever you pop the disk in). These machines are sold through major retail chains like

Best Buy and Circuit City as well as mail order houses like Crutchfield. "Walkman" style portable MD players/recorders are also available. Perhaps the only negative for OTR collectors is the fact that a means to "high speed dub" MD is not available to consumers. Also, it has the built in anti-copy scheme, however, it is not activated if only the analog inputs and outputs are used (such as when coping programming from a standard cassette deck).

The biggest factor as to storage and stability of a recording over a long period of time is climate-related. Regular magnetic tape including analog reels and cassettes as well as digital tape are happiest at temperatures around 70 degrees and roughly 70% humidity.

Some sources state the shelf life of magnetic tape is only about 10 years, although there are widespread stories of collectors who have stored recordings well over 20 years with no physical degrading of the tape or the recording itself. CDs and MDs are said to be even more robust. Both are optical and completely immune to stray magnetic fields (which affect DAT and analog recordings very drastically). Recordable CDs may be affected by ultraviolet light, though MDs are relatively immune to light.

For the widest selection of OTR, the standard analog cassette appears to be the media of choice and will likely remain as such for several more years. There is nothing wrong, however, with starting an archival collection of your top favorite shows on a format like Mini Disk. There is also nothing wrong with purchasing some of your favorite releases, where available (such as the Eddie Cantor releases) on regular Compact Disk.

I know there are collectors who have used more esoteric means to preserve shows. One such method is the use of the

audio tracks of VHS videocassettes. Remember, however, that video tapes are also a *MAGNETIC* format. This method is essentially a highly sophisticated, yet at its root, an *ANALOG* means of laying the information on tape. This tape is also prone to the same troubles as conventional cassettes or reels. Also access to individual shows on a VHS tape is cumbersome at best, especially when recorded in 6-hour slow speed mode!

My final comment with regard to archival considerations is to realize that absolutely nothing can be made a totally permanent record. Nothing lasts forever, whether it be a recording, a piece of equipment or even a human body. Mechanical devices given an unlimited maintenance budget and a highly skilled technician can be given an extended life, but you reach a point of practicality when the cost of keeping the unit in service versus accepting new technology becomes a choice that only a fool would make a bad decision on. For example, if your faithful tape recorder wears out a rare part, you could probably get a machine shop to design and fabricate one for you from scratch for several hundred dollars. Next find a technician that still knows how to service open reel equipment and plan to pay him a handsome fee. In the end, all you've accomplished is restoring certain functions of a machine with say, 25-year-old technology. For far less money, you could have purchased a professional or semi-professional cassette deck OR a Mini Disk recorder and ended up with 1990's sound and performance rather than something hissy from the analog era.

If you have a huge reel to reel collection, you'll have to think seriously about buying a professional machine if the equipment you have is failing. If you want new equipment, you'd better make sure

your credit card has between \$3,000 and \$4,000 of credit available for one of these machines. On the used market, a 10-year-old pro grade reel to reel deck in good condition will cost \$1,800-2,000.

What do I use? A combination of all of the above. I use Mini Disk to a limited degree, but I also have Otari open reel machines primarily for playback of source masters, and also do a tremendous amount of re-mastering to cassettes. I also realize that one day, I'll end up copying them AGAIN to another perhaps yet-uninvented format using equipment to improve the sound that as yet hasn't been developed. This whole process, however, will help perpetuate the whole preservation cycle as long as there's a human around to help it along!

- July 20, 1998

14. A Fresh Look...at CD Recorders and Cassette Decks

The proliferation of CD recorders, better known as CD "burners" and bargain priced blank media has given Sonys Mini Disc (MD) format quite a level of competition in the consumer marketplace. In the past, I have recommended MD for old-time radio use, but I don't think it has caught on. Perhaps hoping their MD format WOULD catch on, Sony was in fact, one manufacturer that was a little late in the game to unveil its own audio-only CD recorder. While the MD format has apparently succeeded at gaining acceptance for professional use, consumers (including old-time radio fans) have seemingly not embraced the MD format as readily as CD.

As the cassette format continues to fade, the popularity of CD for audio as well as for computer software has won universal acceptance. For Video, the DVD disc the same size as similar appearance

of an audio CD has also started to replace the familiar VHS video format. In fact the tentative release of even more advanced disc format DVD-Audio (promising even better quality and five times the recording length) merely hints at what form of equipment the next generation may be listening to their audio programming on.

If this is all new to you, and you still are clinging faithfully to your large collection of cassettes and cassette equipment, fear not. At least for now, cassette equipment is still readily available (and I'll have proof of that, later on in this column). The main thrust of this article is an attempt to take a fresh look at equipment that is available in the year 2001 for old-time radio collectors, and what they should consider for the future.

In the past, for both reel to reel and cassette, having a separate record and play head was a good thing. The biggest selling point was you could monitor the recording a split second after it was made to insure you were getting a good quality recording. While still available on cassette equipment today, this feature does not exist with digital equipment. The presumption is since the quality is digital, it will always be good. The fact is, when the equipment or media wears out, there are errors. When the errors exceed the capability of the equipment, the recording will simply not play, period. Disc formats like CD or MD can get "stuck" somewhat like a phonograph record having a groove that repeats. Improper handling of the disc usually causes this problem. Wear from PLAYING is not an issue (The disc is "played" by a laser beam rather than a stylus that makes physical contact). With both MD and CD equipment, this can also occur after the equipment ages several years and the laser is weakened or the transport is worn. This column, however,

is not about comparing the old with new, or how things can go wrong with digital equipment.

For years, my philosophy has been to use professional grade equipment. The extended use and demands old-time radio puts on a piece of gear to me, makes it the **ONLY** option. I know there are some collectors who intentionally (or out of necessity) would buy the least expensive brand or model they could put their hands on. Perhaps they would get reasonable service out of such equipment. I don't know about you, but I don't want to be the guy on the receiving end of those recordings. I don't want to be around when the deck goes off pitch, or the heads go out of alignment. I don't want to put a "master" I've just recorded on MY shelf with no assurance that it is indeed, a good recording.

As far as using pro equipment, the biggest stumbling block in the past has been cost. Someone who is in business to use it such as a recording studio or broadcast facility, can easily justify those costs, but perhaps not those at the hobby level. As technology advanced however, those costs actually dropped. When you recall what we used to pay for a good consumer cassette or reel deck, professional equipment today is actually bargain-priced. To illustrate, I've selected a few random models listed below available at the time this column was written. I've also added my own comments with the manufacturers list price. Obviously, the street price is going to be a lot lower.

The first category is CD recorders. I have completely ignored those that require a computer be attached. The quality of those models is severely restricted by the type of audio card installed in the computer, specifically by that part of the circuit that converts analog to digital. I

have also ignored the less expensive consumer models that require use of special "music" grade CD blanks. Those models have anti-piracy circuitry built in, and the special discs required are triple the price. Supposedly a portion of the price of the blank disc is applied to royalties for recording artists. I have no problem with this, but I don't think RADIO performers of the past get a dime of those dollars.

The models which follow are for professional use, thus, they will record and play any type of blank CD-R media. Be aware that the most popular CD-R media is a record ONCE format. Once the disc is recorded, you can't erase it. If you make a mistake, throw the disc away and start again.

I realize there are literally thousands of analog cassettes tapes floating around. There will still be a need to play those recordings. They are also still heavily marketed by certain dealers, and club libraries have a substantial number of cassettes available for borrowing. Again, for this brief list, I have mostly ignored consumer equipment and included list prices of a few professional and semi-professional models. As you will see, there are some real bargains available in this category if you really need a cassette deck. Pro equipment generally includes the ability to be rack mounted and extra balanced "XLR" inputs and outputs usually in addition to the familiar RCA ins and outs.

Finally, I realize that many collectors in the grandiose world of old-time radio may only be aware of the location of their neighborhood Radio Shack store, or the Circuit City or Best Buy in their town. Much of this equipment can NOT be purchased at retail locations in many areas of the country. For this reason, I've listed below four of my favorite studio and broadcast equipment suppliers. All will

ship equipment to your front door. All have on-line catalogs on the internet that you can browse on your computer. Most also have printed catalogs. Some even have great collections of vintage radio photographs on their websites. Take a look and when you need equipment, simply pick

up the phone and get the plastic out!
April 4, 2001

15. Old time radio, "Y2K" and hobbyist-vendors in "wait and see" mode

"The free lunch is over. Everyone's gonna be SUEd! And on January 1, 2,000, not

CD-R Recorder model comparison chart

Manufacturer	Model	List Price	Comments
Alesis	ML9600	\$1,699	This is a very advanced model that records an image of the disc on the built in hard drive and does not commit it to disc until it is organized and sounds the way you want. Alesis makes excellent studio equipment of all types.
HBB	CDR850+	\$1,350	This company also makes their own line of blank discs and tapes and is very highly rated.
Tascam	CDRW2000	\$1,125	A greatly improved version of an earlier model which I have a lot of experience with. Once you learn the idiosyncracies, it almost never fails, and when it does, it's because the disc is bad. A less expensive model is available that has the anti-copy function built in.
Marantz	CDR5000	\$0849	This is a manufacturer that has been around for a long time. Based on reputation alone, this model is probably worth considering.

*only our tape machines and computers will cease to function but **The World Will Stop As Well!***

(Oh noooooooo! Please pardon me while I recover from an uncontrollable fit of laughter!)

These things are what you may have been led to believe if you've read every piece of overblown nonsense the media — both printed and electronic — has been hyping about what will happen when this year is through. Also, if you've

absorbed any of the attitudes that have been existed on old time radio 'net discussions — both private and public — you keep hearing that the old-time radio show collecting hobby "as we know it" (whatever that means) is also destined for extinction, but for different reasons.

On the computer / Y2K issue, much of it is overblown fluff. For the record, "Y2K" stands for Year Two Thousand, also known as January 1, 2,000 when all the so-called fireworks will happen. In the 1960s,

(just a few) **Cassette Decks Available**

Manufacturer	Model	List Price
Denon	DN7620	\$650

Denon	DN720R	\$499
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Sony	TCWR565RM	\$330
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Tascam	102MK2	\$399
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Tascam	122MK2	\$1,499
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Comments

This is an interesting model. Both a CD player and cassette deck are included in one unit.

The cassette-only single transport version.

Dual decks are the most popular as far as consumer decks. This machine falls into that category. Its not a great machine, but for the money, not bad either.

I used the two-headed versions of this deck for several years. Theres a lot of plastic inside, but these are great sounding decks. Considering they are **not** built as ruggedly as the more advanced models, they do last a long time.

This is the broadcast industry standard. It is built like a tank. If you buy one of these, you'll never have to buy another cassette deck. This model is the two head version, has pitch control and all the bells and whistles

**Note: this information is a general guideline ONLY. It was current at the time this section was written.*

to conserve priceless memory, programmers decided that the date would be represented by three two digit numbers.

January 25, 1999 would be known as 01/25/99. Fifty years ago when radio was still churning out programming that is only available on tape or CD today, such things were never thought of as significant. A "computer" was a monstrous gadget with hundreds of relays and tubes that someone, somewhere in a laboratory was experimenting with. You only heard about them in scientific articles, or perhaps a reference was made to them in shows like "X Minus One." Computers were portrayed on radio back then as gadgets that made

lots of weird noises and spoke in robotic monotones. Actually, the line between computers and robots was blurred, as the technology wasn't fully understood at that time. We had only the imagination of science fiction writers to paint pictures of what life *MIGHT* be like 20 or 50 or 75 years from then.

Today, computers *CAN* speak. They can also record and play back with quality so startlingly accurate, that it's impossible to tell if it's "LIVE or it's a Pentium III." In fact, today, most major recording studios use computers to "master" their commercial releases. Yet last time I checked, my computer is still not wash-

ing my car, preparing my meals or taking out the trash. My computer will also function decades past the year 2000. That's because it's an Apple Macintosh, but the same claim can be made of any of the newer IBM/Pentium-based systems with current software and current "BIOS" chips.

Yet when the year 2000 rolls around, time will literally be catching up with those who perhaps bought home computer equipment early in "the game." Perhaps they used that system to enter the catalog of their entire collection, but did not keep their equipment up to date. Even that in itself is NOT a fatal problem! Just make sure you save copies of your most critical files to floppy disks or zip disks. You can always purchase a new copy of application software, but the files YOU create are yours alone!

You may have read that this so-called Y2K problem affects other equipment besides computer stuff. Perhaps to a limited degree, there may be some isolated cases of problems, but for the most part, this should not be an issue either.

So what if you have a reel to reel machine that you purchased brand new back in 1978 that still works perfectly, and is the only machine on which you can play your old-time radio tapes. Will it still work in the year 2,000? The answer is not only probably yes, it's *efinitely* yes.

Your reel deck is likely "Y2K Compliant" by its very nature — and for the same reason a brick or a bowl of soup or a can of Diet Coke, or your own human body is "Y2K Compliant." Any device mechanical, electronic or organic which does not require an electronic calendar for its most critical operations is automatically "compliant." Last time I checked, my body did not require calendar software or a chip with a calendar function built in to func-

tion. Yet what about all the utility companies who may have larger computer systems to contend with who produce vital things we need like electricity... Will they still be operating come January 1, 2000?

The answer to that can be surmised by realizing a simple basic fact: It does not require a calendar to generate electricity. In fact, you can generate electricity with nothing more than a magnet and a coil of wire. There may be some minor inconveniences and disruptions along the way, but those who are convinced that "the end is near" should wake up and smell the warm fuzzy peach-like flavor of reality. They should realize that the media and certain columnists are trying to paint a real life Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" scenario before our very eyes — *JUST* for the sake of selling publications or getting ratings.

And what about "the end of the OTR hobby (as we know it!)." It's like this, people: Old time radio is nothing like it "used to be," (whatever that means). Any such "changes" have been developing gradually for years. Jay Hickerson's "Hello Again" OTR newsletter recently made mention of two very well known and successful OTR entities being bought out by a major publisher.

More and more big money corporate monopolies have developed who are dedicated to putting fresh copyrights and legal restrictions on every show under the sun. The copyright issue bores me to tears, so don't write and tell me what they "can or can't do" in that department. The fact is the wind up of the 1990s also happens to be part of "the information age." Information is worth money and so is anything that can be acquired, re-acquired, rehashed or re-distributed. Legal eagles rule today.

It doesn't matter if at one time we all

THOUGHT a given show or series was Public Domain. Fact is there are people in OTR now with deep pockets and enough legal power to prove anything, regardless of whether YOU think their claims are legitimate. You may not like it or think they're wrong, but you can't change it. That's just the way it is. The "OLD SCHOOL" old-time radio "hobbyist vendor," has also become an old and tired dinosaur whose time lasted basically from the late 1960s to the present, with a peak perhaps somewhere in the middle of that cycle. There are plenty of private collectors who will probably continue to — you'll pardon the expression — distribute "bootleg" copies of old-time radio shows until a court order makes them stop, or at least someone with a legal letterhead scares them enough to stop. These are probably the same people who continued to illegally sell copies of "The Shadow," after nine hobbyist-vendors were sued over this series (see *Bob Proctor's War in the Oxide Trenches in the Ancient History section of this book*). This was the widely publicized case that stretched out for years and took thousands of dollars out of each of those collector-dealers wallets. The old-time radio hobby rallied to support the hobbyist vendors involved, but in the end, the bottom line was "The Shadow," a series widely traded and distributed as public domain for many years prior was now *OUT* of circulation except in expensive shrink-wrapped package in your favorite Barnes & Noble bookstore. Maybe that was good for "The Shadow," but I would be surprised if it broke any sales records at the retail level.

But none of this matters. It really doesn't. Forget about those hobbyist-vendors who "started" the OTR hobby. **Nobody cares about that anymore.** Some may still be involved in archival projects

from now until they day the die. They may continue to maintain private collections, and do many noble deeds in the interest of promoting old-time radio. But it doesn't matter that they once had catalogs the size of a New York City phone book, and at one time offered six hour reels of old-time radio recordings for a mere \$10-15 bucks. They may have actually been among the first "pioneer" dealers. They may have spent half their life and every free dollar finding shows and cleaning up the sound quality. But none of this makes any difference in the year 1999 or the year 2000 or ever for that matter. Like it or not, these people simply are no longer the "major players" in old-time radio. This is not a complaint, or a whine... It is not meant to belittle those hobbyist-vendors. It's merely a statement of fact.

That recent acquisition of a couple of the largest commercially successful old-time radio vendors (who alleged a level of legal legitimacy in old-time radio) by a major publisher is not "the beginning of the end." It is but a natural, inevitable step toward perhaps the only real means that old-time radio CAN survive, given the changes in society, technology and old-time radio's biggest enemy: Time.

Yet Time *SHOULDN'T* be an enemy! It shouldn't be the thing that puts people into a panic fearing for certain that their precious radio hobby or their very lifestyle is going to be snatched out from beneath them. Time shouldn't bring the fear of a technological Armageddon. Time should be our friend. Do you remember how comparatively rotten the cassette decks of the 1970's were? Both time and technology turned that medium into a quality that is as close to digital as it will ever get. Do you remember the silly antics between hobbyist-dealers and at least one not-for-profit old-time radio club who got upset

when their archive programs got into general circulation? Time has long put that senseless issue to rest as well.

Yes, old-time radio hobbyist-dealers "as we know them" (please slap me if I say that again!) will soon become fossil fuel, if they don't evolve and change the direction of their offerings. That room full of seven inch reel to reel tapes will cease to become their "inventory" of offerings, and those hundreds or thousands of cassette "masters" can probably be stashed in a box in an attic somewhere along with all their LP vinyl records.

The future of radio drama is what I call "New-Time" radio. Like OTR in the late 1960's and early 1970's, it is a fairly rare breed. But if you look under the right rock, or tune into just the right station at just the right time, you'll find it. If you *REALLY* look hard enough, you will find creativity and innovation that is light years ahead of the way they "used to do it." Of course, we can't in good conscience, fail to respect the work and perhaps genius of the producers, writers, directors and actors of the "golden" era. Yet we are coming up on the year 2,000. We still respect and admire the work of inventor, Thomas Edison, yet none of us use his patented wax cylinder "talking machine."

Radio drama's survival into the year 2,000 depends on this rare creature I call "New-Time" radio, but let's not limit it to JUST drama. While much of what is programmed on today's radio can best be described as homogenized junk (drivel that some high-paid consultant claimed would have mass appeal) — if you look deep (and I do mean DEEP) into the recesses of the most creative talk radio programmers and hosts (and NOT necessarily the "big" shows either), you will find hope. No, you won't always be able to find examples of your beloved "Theater of the

Mind," but if you look deeply, you *WILL* find *FOOD* for the Mind! You'll find creative, talented people having fun, educating each other, talking and even listening to *YOU*.

When was the last time you passively rolled one of your favorite "Suspense" or "Jack Benny" shows — likely a 50-year-old recording — and could relate it to much of what is going on in the world today? Maybe there was some historical value there, and certainly the entertainment factor is a major player (perhaps the reason you originally collected the tapes), but what does the escapades of Fibber McGee & Molly have to do with how you live your life today, anyway? Of course, if you are a Old-time Radio Hermit, you may be a hopeless case anyway, but if you've made it this far into this article, there's as much hope for you as the next person.

You've probably heard the media cite percentages of companies including utilities, government branches and other organizations who are *NOT* ready for the year 2000. It probably would be wise to hang onto copies of bank statements and other documents, but beyond that, I don't see the need for much more "preparation." Also, I don't know about you, but from my viewpoint, the audio tapes and equipment in my possession are not going to change their molecular composition any faster than they already have for the past several years.

I've written articles about coping with changes in the broadcast industry as well as changes in the classic radio show and tape collecting and archiving. They all reached the same conclusion. To quote one major fast food advertising campaign of a few years back, "change is good!" The only thing that we can *REALLY* count on from day to day is change. Tomorrow will

NEVER be exactly like today. Your favorite cassette deck model will never be exactly like tomorrow's newest model. People and businesses intentionally make changes in an effort to *IMPROVE* equipment, lifestyle, source of income, etc.

So we've been dealing with 1900's now for 100 years. I'd say it's time to get rid of that one and nine I've been writing on checks, letters, logs, college and grade school assignments all my life.

The people you may have traded classic shows with in the 1980s may no longer be part of your life. Some may no longer be alive. Still others may have become part of the menagerie that is now monopolizing the old-time radio hobby from a vendor standpoint. Perhaps yet another group have lost interest in radio tapes altogether... or maybe have a "passing" interest. They can't bear to get rid of their tapes, but never really listen to them anymore and aren't much in the market to acquire new shows.

From my standpoint, the changes and events I've seen (just in everything in general) are staggering — but of course, I'm looking at the broad spectrum of change that has encompassed all the years I've been alive. The actual events which lead up to the year 2000 I look at as merely a **punctuation point in time**. The evolution of change is actually a *GRADUAL* process.

So with this in mind, what about those "mom and pop" old time radio dealers? Is Big Brother Copyright going to swoop down and instantly demand jillions of dollars in royalties, their first child, and surrender of ones personal collection of radio tapes? Unlikely. It's going to be a *GRADUAL* process.

And what about those computers? Will they emit steam and smoke when the calendar turns to 01/01/2,000? Unlikely.

They will probably just sit there and continue to depreciate the same way they have been since the day they were purchased.

Finally, what about your favorite utility and your favorite bank and your favorite credit card company who sends you a bill or statement every month? It all like-likelihood, they will still be open for business after celebrating New Years Day. In some situations, perhaps a few of their employees will be hustling to resolve some issues they haven't had time to address that DO exist. Maybe you'll get a late bill as a result, but we've all experienced that before anyway, with the "dependability" of the postal services, as well as clerical or other errors.

What about me personally? I've become rather infamous or perhaps even notorious for the activities that I've pursued in old-time radio and the things I've written that have been published, re-published or otherwise quoted. In the last couple years, I've kept a bit of a lower profile — not intentionally — it's just been a *GRADUAL* thing.

Will I still be offering the same type of radio tape catalog that I did in the 1970s to present? Of course not. Even the articles and columns that I'm writing today differ dramatically from what I was writing in "Collector's Corner" in 1979. I still love all the gadgets and sound processing that can be used to improve the shows and record and play they back, but today, this is but a tiny slice of where my interests lie. But this transition for me, has also been a *GRADUAL* one.

Of course, some of my opinions, ideas and attitudes have evolved, while other thoughts I have had remain fixed. I'll still tell you no matter how famous it was, the Lone Ranger is still primarily a kid's show that most adults who don't remember it as a child won't get much out

of, compared to a show like Gunsmoke. Yet there are a few present-day dramas and even more contemporary movies whose content and quality exceed those of virtually any "old-time" shows. Today, there are audio recordings that exist on CD of music performances that provide me with a greater emotional response than "old-time" shows. This is not meant to imply that classic radio is not good or *IN ITS TIME*, wasn't the *BEST* form of entertainment available. But we must accept the fact that we're about to finish off the last of the 100 year run of 1900. Radio's golden and silver era took place somewhere in the middle of that 100 year run. People of this and future generations do not respond in the same way or for the same reasons to entertainment as they did during the forties and fifties due to tremendous cultural changes that have occurred in society. Their reference point is completely different. Despite this, the "old shows" will probably always be preserved for their historical value, even if their level of entertainment doesn't hold up quite as well in 2000 as it did in say, 1950 or even 1975. In another generation or in another fifty year span many of us will no longer exist. But we can probably count on someone, somewhere still having copies of shows that we preserved during this 100 year span. The so-called Y2K "bug" will be a laughable memory. All the politics and nonsense that were part of old-time radio collecting, clubs, vendors, copyrights, monopolies, etc. will be long forgotten. But the printed word — whether in a fixed means such as the journal you now hold — or electronic as you may have accessed via the internet — will survive. Someone somewhere will stumble upon this word-age from this OTR techie curmudgeon. They'll realize that he must've been among the early OTR Space Cadets who

predicted something better was needed to store OTR — something better than an Edison wax cylinder or quarter-tracked rust glued to a plastic strip on reels moving across magnetic heads at seven and a half inches per second. Now, isn't *THAT* a scary thought!? — February 21 1999

16. Out with the old... (in with whatever)

A recurring theme in my columns has been comparisons to old-time radio collecting "the way it used to be" to today. Sometimes they amount to little more than thinking-out loud-meanderings, other times it's a little more in depth or even controversial.

Sometimes, I'm been able to draw comparisons between other things that are going on in our lives and the OTR world. I've had a lot of distractions and changes in my life recently, and believe it or not, *THAT* is a small part of what has kept my OTR interest fresh.

Sometimes it seems like the OTR Hobby goes to sleep for a while, then wakes up for whatever reason, though it may be in deep slumber in one persons life, and wide awake and running a marathon in anothers.

For me, for the most part, my OTR interests in 1999 have not just been sleeping but in "hibernation." That's the word I used on the website. In going through some old files a few months ago, however, I was reminded of the OTR "Guide" books I published in the mid 1980's. Out of curiosity, I started reviewing the last version which saw print in 1986. I disagreed with so much that I had written back then, that it finally motivated me enough to start re-writing it. So my "rest" from OTR officially ended when that moment began! It's not that I've been overly productive or anything since then — but my mind set has definitely moved back toward what I

thought about OTR collecting then, and now.

So what has distracted me so much from OTR? Mostly what distracts MOST people from OTR... the other parts of their lives! My "day job" has always been in broadcasting. I could do a whole column on just that alone, but rather than bore you with too many details, I'll just give you a nutshell version of what "Bob" has been "up to."

Last December, I ended a 10 year tenure as Chief Engineer of a Detroit radio station with legendary call letters - WCAR - then had a stint in the Fall with a CBS-owned station with even more legendary call letters. If I were to mention the Lone Ranger, you'd know the station I was referring to. Then, the first half of 1999, I subjected myself to work for a very large company that owns over 200 stations - and became the sole technical guy for a group of five stations, mostly in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Finally, as this is being written, I've moved on from that and I'm about to start work as a technician for Specs Howard School of Broadcast Arts, which operates student-run stations as well as television facilities. As if this wasn't enough, in the meantime, my own business most of you know in OTR as BRC Productions, unveiled an expanded radio syndication service. At this point, I think we're up to producing and distributing close to 50 hours of live programming per week. It's mostly contemporary talk shows (sorry, no OTR!). My work in today's radio has given me a lot of food for thought and numerous ideas for this series of columns.

It also gives me a heightened level of respect for those people who in the past, produced the comedies, mysteries and the rest — using equipment which by today's standards is considered to be of Stone Age

vintage. Today, it's getting harder to imagine what life was like in radio before computers and digital editing devices. I remember years ago, spending many hours editing a program on reel to reel using a splicing block and a razor blade. That is still done to a limited degree at the smallest stations, but the majority have all gone a different route.

When one imagines that so many of the best OTR shows were even done PRIOR to and without the benefit of even a simple tape recorder, you have to appreciate the level of talent and rehearsal time that went into producing a "live" show — because it *REALLY WAS* live. Sound effects men made real sounds, or used massively clunky transcription turntables for pre-recorded segments. It's not like today, when you can record 250 cuts on a small disk (Mini-Disc format) up of to 144 minutes in mono, and achieve sound quality that is impossible to tell the difference between whether it's live or recorded.... and pay only about \$3 for that blank disk... Regular blank Compact Disks are even less expensive.

As you may know, radio drama as it was known as OTR today, actually disappeared as an indirect result of advancing technology. A group of radio technicians figured out a way to transmit pictures along with sound. Was that a good thing? Of course it was.

Was it good that a means was devised to make movies "talk?" Of course. I always laugh at people who whimper about the "demise" of the so-called "golden" age of radio. Hey, lets go back to the horse and buggy days, while we're at it. I'm sure we put a lot of blacksmiths out of work, and people who made a career out of cleaning up horse manure!

Unless you've lived under a rock for the past decade or two, you know that

eventually, home video equipment also became widespread. Videocassettes were able to yield very respectable quality indeed, but 12" laser disks could also hold entire full length feature movie in a digital format. Current technology, however, is sending that format to the same place where 8-track cartridges went. A newer format which is the same size as regular CDs has become widely accepted called DVD or Digital Video Disk, which can store twice as much information. A double sided DVD will store many hours of video with full surround sound stereo and the players are remarkably inexpensive... about the same as what you'd pay for a good quality cassette deck (I just bought a DVD player)!

Where does all this leave the OTR world? As I've said before, in the same spot it usually sits: Kind of as a niche interest among an elite group of people, mostly still using regular cassettes, although more people have started using CDs. (Yet, imagine storing eight hours of programming on a single disk. Audio *ONLY* versions have an even higher capacity).

I see the necessity of the format changes or this very gradual evolution in OTR to be just as important as it was for me make recent changes in my "day job" employment. Why did we stop using candles to light our homes in favor of the electric light? Because electricity is safer, brighter and more cost effective than candles.

Why did we stop using reel to reel tapes? Simple: Because affordable machines were no longer being manufactured in favor of better quality formats. And why in the *WORLD* are those beloved cassettes becoming passe' in modern society? For a medium introduced some 35

years ago originally just for office dictation, I think we've gotten some good long usage out of a media that has now run its course.

And just why did it take me 13 years to finally think about updating my "Guide" to OTR? I'm not sure. The time was just "right." Just a couple years ago, the Beatles, after having been apart as a band for some 25 years, decided the time was "right" to release a couple new songs and a whole series of basically outtakes of their recording sessions in the 60's. Of course, it helped that an unreleased John Lennon demo had been found that was recorded prior to his being killed in 1981. In my case, I cleaned up my files and physically saw how much had changed in OTR since the previous publication that I had done in "another life." That, perhaps combined with the realization that for the first time in my adult life, I've set the "working in radio station trenches" aspect aside to become a bit involved in the educational aspect was the last bit of motivation I needed.

— June 29, 1999

17. Old-time radio & the internet - 2002

This is an all-new section written for this publication and has not been published elsewhere.

A little background is in order. I try never to write about things unless I have some personal hands-on experience, of which I do on this topic.

The year was 1991. Yours truly had attached a computer modem for the first time, to a computer desktop graphics "powerhouse" of the era, a Macintosh II running at a whopping 16MHz. I also did all of my database and catalog layout work on this computer.

At the time, my modem was the most advanced of its kind: It also did fax and

voice mail, and cost nearly \$400 after adding in shipping. Fax was the standard 9600 baud rate, though data was only 2400 baud. Believe it or not, this was actually adequate for the era when most of what you could get on a modem was a text-based BBS (Bulletin Board Systems). This was basically another computer or server you called directly with your modem. If you logged into a lot of BBS systems in other parts of the country, your phone bill could get expensive. Compuserve was a bit more advanced and generally had a local access number, but you were limited to content and members who were on their system.

Nonetheless, my business, BRC Productions, turned out to be the first to offer classic entertainment and old-time radio products for sale via computer. It used an early "shopping" module running on BBS software made by a company likely no longer in business: Galacticom. The old-time radio "store" was actually fairly well developed, complete with a "check out" that took a credit card number. Many hundreds of product titles were available. The problem was in during all the years it was operating, I could count the "visits" on one hand! It was cool, and worked really well and was a great learning experience. Unfortunately, not many people who were interested in what I was interested in had computers with modems, or even if they did, did not know how to find me. There were a few of us that were using modems and running up our phone bills to correct directly to each other and do live "chat" teleconference over computers.

*"WOW! He sent his **WHOLE CATALOG** via computer. It only took one four hour link-up, and I could type the guy messages at the same time! The long distance charges shouldn't be more*

than \$25-30!!!"

Ah, excuse me, but did anyone ever think of sending a floppy disk in the MAIL, or picking up the handset of a phone and **SPEAKING!!!!?**

The problem in general at the time was finding others with similar interests AND computer capabilities. E-mail was readily available, but most people didn't not have e-mail addresses at the time. Mail **GROUPS** and newsgroups were common among the computer nerds of the time, but not much known outside of those circles. These were/are basically distributed text files that are accessed through communications software.

My first contact with the outside world to someone with a radio interest was through a series of electronic magazines called "Airwaves" and the rec.radio.broadcasting group operated by Bill Pfeiffer. This group was initially aimed at professional broadcasters (of which I was also one), but an interest in old-time radio led to development of a separate group.

Some people couldn't access newsgroups (luckily I could), thus a MAILgroup was developed on the topic by Bill called the "Internet OTR Digest." I don't think Bill realized for years, Bob Burchett had been publishing a **PRINTED** Old Time Radio Digest starting in the 1980s. Anyway, Bill's publication was more or less a text "magazine" that came pretty much **DAILY** in the form of regular e-mail. Sadly, Bill was later killed in an automobile accident, but not before hundreds of issues of fascinating "chat" about radio past, present and future were distributed.

One year at a **Friends of OTR convention**, I presented a brief seminar of OTR on the Internet, and shortly after, most of my friends could be reached via

an e-mail address.

In September of 1994, Lou Genco started his "old-time.com" webpage, and would shortly help myself and others to set up similar pages. Some of the earliest work Lou did for brcradio.com to this day is still in lurking deep "under the hood." By then, my server had dumped the BBS due to lack of use and incompatibilities with newer software and hardware, and the original old-time radio "store" slipped quietly into megabyte oblivion.

In the years to follow, an amazing growth of old-time radio activity on the web could be seen. Collectors would post full-length logs that previously required hundreds of pages of paper to send through snail mail.

Eventually, Bill Pfeiffer's Internet OTR Digest was revived and moved to Charlie Summers' OTR site and is still active today. I have subscribed to this list off and on over the years. In general, I have found the loosely moderated and fun-loving atmosphere of Bill's **ORIGINAL** group has eroded to a lesser group of MP3 fanatics who think they know it all (of which Charlie may well be one himself). If you post anything even remotely critical on Charlie's list, you get someone calling you up on the phone cussing you out and threatening legal action then posting all kinds of garbage about **YOU** on the list.

Also, if you send something to the list for posting that is not formatted according to certain specifications, or especially violates certain rules, it bounces back to you with a scolding message from Charlie. The subject will be in all caps (that translates to "shouting" in the internet world), and quoting a line from some dopey "Charter" (excuse me for being alive).

I have found much of the content of **TODAYS'** Internet "Digest" to the **SERI-**

OUS old-time radio fan is completely worthless. I mean **COMPLETELY** worthless, in my opinion (to which I am entitled). That is, unless you're interested in whether Bill Spier remembered to brush his teeth on the morning a certain broadcast of "Suspense" was produced.

This is as much the fault of the users as the moderator, although the moderator shapes the type of users/posters that are active. Clearly, however, I have never felt "welcome" on this list, although many old friends make occasional posts, and have encouraged my comments. Since Charlie took command, there has, however, been little that inspires me as much as the contributors made to certain **PRINTED** periodicals. (More on the specifics elsewhere in this book) or to Bill Pfeiffer's original OTR Digest. It just seems like some of Charlie's "sheeple" merely get together and cackle about a lot of nothing like a bunch of old hens. I know there are exceptions, but that is the general impression I get.

On the other hand, Lou Genco's old-time.com website is an incredible resource for radio fans. If there were a practical way to make a printed copy of the entire website, there would be no purpose to my printed publications! Lou's site is a great starting point for a gazillion other resources on the web.

Joe Webb's original recommendations for beginning old-time radio collectors (see page 70) actually still hold true today — 15 years later! The only thing I would add is get on a computer with internet access and go to old-time.com. Spend some time reading.

My comments on MP3s can also be found elsewhere in this publication. Don't get caught up with collecting MP3s.

A statistic I read recently somewhere pointed out that for the first time, the

number of people using the internet has actually **DROPPED**. All I can say is it's about time! Many of the internet businesses have closed up shop left and right, while the rest of us have merely become slaves to our e-mail.

When I first "went online," "junk" e-mail was not a problem. "Flame wars" and implied legal threats between and amongst old-time radio fanatics had not yet happened. This was also before daily "Digest" OTR publications were distributed by e-mail.

Today, the internet is like an addiction to old-time radio, only it's far far worse. With OTR you can listen to it for a few hours and then leave it for the rest of the day, and not think about it after that. With e-mail and internet access, many people feel compelled to not just check their mail once a day, but **MANY** times daily. It's not like the outdated U.S. Postal Service that delivers you mail **ONCE** a day except Sunday. You can receive mail from the internet every second of every day of every week. Of course, you can receive diseases through both types of communication. One makes your computer sick, the other makes **YOU** sick!

People also say, well at least junk e-mail doesn't waste trees, which is true. What it **DOES** waste is time. You can always grow another tree, but you can never get back time.

So what did we do before e-mail and the arrival of that horrific beast known as MP3 audio? We wrote letters generally attaching a greater degree of importance to them than a casual e-mail. We sent a fax when needed. We dropped audio tapes in the mail when the need arose.

We had more time to catalog and organize programming, to improve the sound of programming and (shock of shocks) **LISTEN** to programming. I know

there are people who have gone hog wild over listening to OTR on their computers, burning CDs on their computer, and madly corresponding with people and developing humongous old-time radio websites on their computers.

Maybe it's a promotional thing -- an inclination to want to "spread the word" on this (or any) topic. Perhaps there is a need to find as many possible people with similar interests that possibly exist in the world and share tips and programs. These are both seemingly noble and worthwhile causes. The problem is that the more we submerge ourselves into this virtual world on the internet, the more foreign things like conventions become to our nature. At its very core, the internet is an incredible tool for old-time radio - **but moderation the key**. Don't become a slave to it, and if you already have, take a vacation for a couple weeks where the web browser on your cell phone doesn't work. Leave the laptop behind. Take a stack of CDs of your favorite shows or music to listen to on the flight. Send me a letter when you get back saying what you thought of this book. It'll cost you 34 more cents than e-mail and it might take a week or two to reach me, but at least you'll be using MY postal address for something other than junk mail, bills and catalogs for things I don't want.

18. ANCIENT HISTORY

For reference and historical perspective, this section contains just a few reprinted segments from the last published edition of the book and some later material. Jerry Chapman's original Forward outlines some of my original concepts. It is presented on the pages that follow in complete in its original form

a.) Forward

by Jerry Chapman



Above: Jerry Chapman (left) with Bryce Jones (right) of "Airwaves" circa 1970s.

When Bob showed me a copy of his first book, I thought back to the days when I was new to the hobby and full of questions. Where do the shows come from? How do collectors find one another? What does AFRS mean? There was no handbook that I could learn from. It was my yearning for information about the hobby that prompted me to correspond with Bob.

I first contacted Bob in the Fall of 1974, when his business was called "BRC Quality Dubs." I was a Sophomore in college, and the hobby of collecting OTR [old-time radio] was not even a year old for me. I had sent Bob a cassette letter telling him about myself and asking him questions about himself and his business. When I returned to school after Thanksgiving break, I was delighted to find a tape letter from Bob in my mailbox, and quite surprised to find he was younger than myself and still in high school. I remember one of the ques-

tions I asked him was what tape deck he would recommend. His answer was Sony, for the reason that ferrite heads don't wear down. Of all the advice that I've heard about tape decks over the years, his recommendation was not only the most unusual, but one of those no-nonsense answers that turns out to really count! Many of us who have owned both Sony and Teac tape decks prove his answer is true year after year. I have seen Sony tape heads on equipment several years old that look like beautiful clear crystals. Even Bob, not always following his own advice, has replaced a few head blocks on his own Teac recorders.

Bob Burnham, Joe Webb and I shared a very special time in those years when consumer audio products were going through such rapid developments. Joe was a customer of mine in our first year of friendship. Joe would write complimentary letters with such interest, that it was a pleasure to write him back. The curious thing about Joe's correspondence was that he was so sophisticated. For months, every piece of mail from Joe would be written or typed on a business form with triplicate carbons. Joe kept a copy, and we could write a response back to him under the "To" column, send him that copy and retain one for our records. With such formal letters, I guessed Joe to be a businessman in his forties. I was quite surprised to find out that he was another student. Joe, Bob and I became a close-knit group of friends as well as competitors with our OTR businesses. We had no handbook. We learned by corresponding with other collectors and by experimentation. I remember the group of us obtaining first generation "Ziv" syndicated programs recorded from "ET" with too small a stylus, wrong EQ and disc skips [Editor's note: Frederich W. Ziv syndicated and distributed numerous shows in the 1950's on transcription disc or "ET" (Electrical Transcription) which resembled large phonograph records. Shows like Boston Blackie, Philo Vance and Bold Venture with Humphrey Bogart were among the

"Ziv" shows).]

We worked as a team. Bob and Joe used diplomacy to send me his original dubs [copies], and I worked on tightening up the programs and improving the sound. The equalization was too shrill for my JVC five band equalizer, and my solution was to "thread" one channel of the stereo equalizer into the other, and double the effect. It became even more useful when I bought a parametric equalizer. This patching method became a standard practice with Joe, and a recommendation in the first edition of the [old-time radio] Technical Guide. When I saw the first edition of this book, I really felt that it filled a gap in the OTR publications. I hoped that collectors who were just starting would hear of the book and would profit from Bob's experiences.

With this new edition, Bob has expanded the content in areas that will interest the experienced collector, and be more useful to the new collector.

The Listening Guide section was very interesting to me because of its opinion content. Bob uses a panel in the first part of this section. The General Comments tidbits were very funny and matched my sentiments exactly. I think those one-line reviews are the real Listening Guide, and the rest of the chapter reinforces the quotes!

Next, Jim MacIse grades radio detective shows and goes into a nice amount of depth. The chapter on dealers by Bob and Jim Snyder is good on editorial opinion (what do we expect when the publisher is a dealer himself!). Perhaps in a future edition, something will be written on the anti-dealer side. I do believe a case can be made that some currently restricted material would be circulated were it not for fear that dealers would profit from it. Ed Cole's article on tape deck maintenance contains good information. I would emphasize that tape heads should be cleaned often. In my experience, a dirty tape head affects the recording phase more than the playback, yet we seem to be more

concerned about the latter, because we can't "hear" the recording head. Demagnetizing tape heads in the seventies doesn't make an audible difference to me, so I wonder if it is as necessary as it once was? Perhaps the readers will write their experiences to Bob and he'll let us know what was said.

Bob Proctor's article has a great title. For me, signal processing was a most interesting side-aspect to the hobby. One piece of equipment that I have owned and overwhelmed me with its magic is Bob Carver's Auto-Correlator noise reduction unit. I have nothing but good things to say about it. It is easier to use than an equalizer, removes almost as much noise, yet does not alter the high frequency spectrum as an equalizer does. This unit can probably be purchased used as well, under the Phase Linear name: as a pre-amp or separate box. For the serious sound restorer, it is an essential piece of hardware to own, along with an equalizer, to remote hiss.

Andy Blatt's article on purchasing equipment has bad news: Reel decks are almost no longer available. The good news is that reel decks that cost several hundred dollars just a few years ago can be had on the used market for two or three hundred dollars today. One high quality reel deck that is still manufactured but not mentioned I saw in an electronics store here in Los Angeles recently: It is the Technics semi-pro reel deck. Because of its advanced tape transport, it might be just the machine to reduce scrape flutter (squeal) on poorer tapes.

Joe Webb's historical section on the hobby is interesting to the older collectors who lived through it and helped to make the history, as well as giving a background to newer collectors. I wrote the tape recording history because I love the machines. I have fond memories of the day I spent at Northwestern University, in Evanston, Illinois, and the day Bob and I spent together in Ypsilanti at Eastern Michigan University doing research.

Computers and old-time radio is a brand

new topic for this edition, and an area that changes all the time. Two views on using a personal computer are given. I commend Terry Salomonson for being specific and naming two pieces of database software. I think the computer database is the most significant help to collectors in the 1980's. It makes cataloging and notating the collection fun. It is the best way to go for the collector who is upgrading shows for sound, collecting complete runs of shows, or collecting multiple broadcasts of the same show. For example, Escape, which had east coast, west coast and AFRS [Armed Forces Radio Service] versions. Tom Monroe's method on computerizing is an interesting and less expensive alternative: Simply use a word processor and create a document for each reel. Being in the computer business myself, and recently an owner of an Apple Macintosh, I'm doing my best to convince Bob of the merits of an OTR database.

When I received the proof pages of this book in the mail, I thought I'd have to make time to read it all. It didn't turn out to be a problem. I started by reading Joe Webb's history of collecting before going to bed, and I put the pages down at 3 AM, when I finished the entire book.

— Jerry Chapman

Los Angeles

September 1986

2001 Comments from Bob: The same year this book originally went to press (1986), I acquired computer equipment and database software based on Jerry's recommendation. Fifteen years later, BRC still maintains some of its business operations on the current version of the same software package we originally started with.

MORE ANCIENT HISTORY

Joe Webb was mentioned in the previous section and is referred to elsewhere in this publication. He was one of the significant pioneering old-time radio

collectors starting in the mid-1970s. In 1986, the future "**Dr. Joe**" was also kind enough to contribute the following segment to this previous version of this publication, which is re-printed below for historical and reference use.

b. The History of Collecting & Trading Old-time Radio - Revisited

The Past, Present & Future of OTR

By Joe Webb

This great hobby is much older than people realize. It actually existed in the 1940s and '50s! Engineers, actors, directors and producers all at one time or another came in contact with disc recordings. Some discs were for permanent network or station files. Others were for their personal collections. Some radio fans owned home "wire" recorders, and saved favorite shows for later enjoyment. Home disc recording equipment was also available. In the '50s, reel to reel (tape) recorders became more readily available to consumers and a number of shows exist today only because fans faithfully recorded them in this format.

In the mid 1960s, as the children of the Eisenhower years reached adulthood, SOME kind of recording equipment in the home became more commonplace. With the final net-



Above: At Friends of Old-time Radio convention— Standing (L to R) Tom Monroe, Gene Bradford, Bob Burnham, Joe Russell, Joe Webb, Terry Salomonson. In front: (L to R) Jay Hickerson, Andy Blatt, Ken Karlberg

work radio broadcasts ending in 1962, a sense of loss was felt by a number of people. They realized that by having tapes of programs, they could again enjoy some happy memories.

Many radio stations began to clear out their attics and basements of electrical transcriptions. Engineers feeling guilty that an important era was being destroyed, saved recordings from the garbage dumps. Collectors and fans hearing that a particular station was throwing things away would volunteer to haul them away for free. Somehow, these fans found out about each other and started selling copies (as high as \$25 per hour in 1960 dollars!), and trading. Every program was considered valuable. It was assumed that few would ever be discovered.

In the late 1960s, some publications for and by fans began to appear. Finally, in 1970, the most significant one was born. Jay Hickerson's "**Hello, Again,**" still going strong to this day, was a newsletter that grew from his distribution of his trading catalog among friends. Finally, the hobby had a regular means of disseminating information about itself.

It was natural then, for hobbyists to want to meet each other. In 1971, an organization called SAVE (Society of American Vintage Radio Enthusiasts) held its first convention with Bret "**The Shadow**" Morrison as guest. Their last convention was in 1975. In 1976, Jay Hickerson was able to organize a convention called **Friends of Old-Time Radio**, which has been held annually since. At each convention, radio stars and technicians participate in program recreations and discussions. Collectors run workshops on particular aspects and issues of collecting.

Clubs began to form in the mid 1970s, the most notable being in Buffalo, Milwaukee, Los Angeles and Chicago. They published their own newsletters and set up their own lending libraries.

As conventions and newsletters developed, rebroadcasting of the programs grew in

popularity. The most significant shows of the 1970s were those of Chuck Schaden's (Chicago), John Dunning (Denver), Allen Rockford (Syracuse) and WRVR Radio in New York.

Dealers also did their part (well, most of them, anyway) in attracting new fans and increasing the awareness of the old-time radio hobby's existence to the general public, and exposing the hobby's publications and clubs to their interested customers.

The biggest problem a new collector has today is choosing the collecting strategies that will allow him or her to select programs from the large numbers of shows available in the hobby today.

There has been some concern over the future of the hobby. I am confident that new collectors are being found today. The best way of keeping the hobby strong is with good publications, and strong and competent clubs. Buying Groups, that is, collectors who pool their resources to buy from dealers, have become very popular of late. There is some concern that the availability of reel to reel equipment (or lack of) will have a negative effect on trading. I believe that the used equipment market provides a temporary solution to the problem, but that more collectors will turn to high quality cassettes and cassette duplicators in 5-10 years.

Of course, the promise of digital recording on tapes or compact disc holds the promise of excellent copy-to-copy duplication and the removal of sound quality degradation caused by duplicating on analog equipment most of us still use.

There has been concern that home video has had a negative effect on the hobby. I have seen little that shows any more decline in interest than the normal way that people change emphasis on hobbies over the years. In fact, some collectors have begun using their VCRs (video cassette recorders) as audio tape recorders ONLY, because of their low cost. Others are using video to collect movies of radio stars (such as Jack Benny movies, Lum & Abner mov-

ies, etc.) as well as old TV shows which were based on an earlier radio series.

It is important to realize that every collector has different goals. Some want every episode of a particular series, although others collect works of certain stars. When people reach their goals, their attitude toward the hobby doesn't really change — but their level of **INVOLVEMENT** does.

What follows are my ten recommendations to the beginning collectors.

c. JOE'S TOP TEN RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BEGINNING OTR COLLECTOR

1. You've got the best handbook of the hobby in your hands right now. Read it, and use it!
2. Pick up a copy of Jay Hickerson's *What You Always Wanted to Know About Circulating Old Time Radio Shows But Could Never Find Out* (In 2001, a more developed version of this publication is still available from Jay with a different title)
3. Get some collector, dealer and club catalogs to get a "feel" of what's available.
4. Set a goal for your hobby involvement.
5. Get good recording equipment.
6. Get involved in a good lending library, probably through a club
7. Start trading.
8. Go to a convention.
9. Read all you can get your hands on about the hobby.
10. And last, but not least, **LISTEN TO YOUR COLLECTION!!**

I have been involved in this hobby for over a decade. There are times when you do get what I call "OTR Burnout." One of the most important things one can do in setting goals is also to set the limits. It's easy to get excited about old-time radio, and therefore, easy to go "overboard."

Always remember that it's a hobby designed for enjoyment. Nothing enhances the fun of it all more than getting to know the people involved in it.

As I write this, I had not listened to a single program for two whole months, until the two I enjoyed yesterday. But I've been very active in gathering programs in that time, and cataloging my collection.

The best way to describe OTR is that it is a very multi-faceted hobby. There's always something different to do, and always a different way to enjoy it.

Good luck! Make the most out of OTR!

- Joe Webb

Glen Cove, New York 1986

d. Old Time Radio Publications of the Past

STAND BY...ON THE AIR
EPILOGUE
STAY TUNED
HELLO, AGAIN*
RADIO IN DEPTH
RADIO HISTORIAN
NATIONAL RADIO TRADER
NOSTALGIA RADIO NEWS
AIRWAVES
NEWS & REVIEWS
COLLECTOR'S CORNER
RADIO NOSTALGIA
THE SOUNDS OF YESTERDAY
THE GOLDEN YEARS OF RADIO & TV
LISTENING GUIDE NEWSLETTER

*still published. All others defunct

ANCIENT HISTORY CONTINUES

The nature of the collector is to collect and preserve everything that is perceived to be of value.

While the CBS Radio Mystery Theater was never commercially released on cassettes or discs (and probably never will be) collectors airchecked every single show aired on their local stations. Ed Cole's fascination with this series was what led him to his interest in old-time radio in general. Ed was also among the collectors who at one time possessed a copy of every single show that aired.

e. CBS RADIO MYSTERY THEATER - A look back at this "new-time" radio show

By Ed Cole

The date was January 6, 1974 at 10:07 PM EST when listeners to the CBS Radio Network via their local CBS affiliate got their first taste of what was to become one of the most ambitious projects in modern audio history — the beginning of the CBS Radio Mystery Theater. Renown actor, E.G. Marshall was at the microphone along with Agnes Moorehead and the cast of the first show, **"The Old Ones Are Hard to Kill."** To the listener who had no advance notice of the series, the opening sounded remarkably like "Inner Sanctum" which was also produced by Himan Brown and hosted for much of its run by Raymond Edward Johnson. And why not? Himan Brown produced both series, and everyone remembers the famous creaking door used on Inner Sanctum. The opening words on the CBS Mystery Theater set the stage for the drama and suspense.

"Come in. Welcome. I'm E.G. Marshall. Welcome to the sound of suspense...to the fear you can hear."

This was usually followed by a reflection on some aspect of human life, often in the "what if" theme which sets the stage for the drama which was to follow. Himan Brown was certainly no newcomer to producing radio shows. He had in fact, in his 40 years in the business produced and directed such serials as Dick Tracy, Joyce Jordan M.D. as well as the famous Inner Sanctum series of mysteries. It is not surprising that through Brown's associations, he attracted some really top-notch talent to the Mystery Theater casts. To name them all would take pages, but to name just a few; Agnes Moorehead, Mercedes McCambridge, Larry Haines, Mandell Kramer, Santos Ortega, Bret

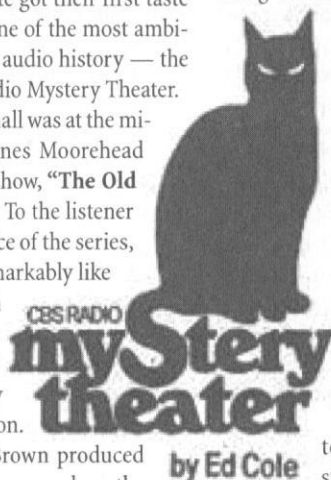
Morrison ("the Shadow"), Ian Martin (who also wrote many of the scripts), Fred Gwynne, Tammy Grimes and so many others.

I think one of the reasons for the show's success is not only did it have top-notch talent but actors who were willing to try almost anything different. And this had to be the case when one stops to realize that not only did this show run more than nine years, but it did so 365 days a year, seven days a week. Regardless of ones constructive criticism of the shows, this sheer volume of work is to be commended.

It may be true that perhaps one-third of the scripts were horrible and not much could be done with them regardless of who the actors were, but the middle third were very good and highly entertaining works. Mystery Theater featured some outstanding adaptations of classics by

Edgar Allen Poe, Shakespeare, etc. There was once an entire week of shows devoted to the works of Poe, most of which were excellent. If you're like me, you rarely get time to sit down with a book and read it through. Years ago I did read these Poe stories and I found the Mystery Theater's adaptation of them to be excellent. I still think about the night I heard Mercedes McCambridge in **"Carmilla"** (7/31/75) or the night I heard **"Dracula,"** also with her (5/2/74). I had collected many versions of **"Dracula"** on video tape in later years, but the thrill of radio, of using your imagination, added a new dimension to the enjoyment of this Bram Stoker classic. Again, as usual, marvelously adapted by the Mystery Theater.

As for the last third of the MT scripts, they go in with the middle third. Most all of the shows were complete dramas of the one-hour length. There were, however, a few that were done in five parts. **"The Legend of Alexander"** starred Russell Horton and was presented on



five consecutive nights beginning Monday, June 2, 1981. Mystery Theater opened its sixth season in January 1979 with a week of stories about Nefertiti, Queen of Egypt, starring Tammy Grimes in the title role. Another classic written by Victor Hugo that dealt with poverty and injustice in Paris was Les Miserables. Mystery Theater presented that also in five parts beginning Monday, January 11, 1982. It starred Alexander Scourby. The Mystery Theater version of Les Miserables was similar to the Les Miserables produced in 1937 and starring Orson Welles. The Welles version, however, was in seven 30 minute parts while the Mystery Theater version was in five 60 minute parts.

As if CBS felt they didn't have enough at the outset of Mystery Theater in 1974 with their acting staff and excellent scripts, they also began by giving away such things as clock radios, etc. They were given to people who would send in a card with their name and address, and preferably comments about the new shows. This was in the form of a drawing, and probably several hundred prizes were awarded each week. Beginning August 4, 1975, someone won a seven day, six night all expense paid trip for four to Disney World. This went on every week for four weeks.

The talents of the actors and actresses on the Mystery Theater cannot be diminished by the fact that most earned only about \$100 per script. Like Hi Brown, they believed in what they were doing and they did it well. There were no demands for \$10,000 per script, or as we see it today in the movies, \$1 million per script by top-rated personalities. I believe that says something about the dedication of the staff of Mystery Theater toward what they were doing. One of the main problems with getting more audience for the shows was the fact that most stations aired the shows late at night. CBS fed the shows over its network lines at 10:07 PM EST, and that excluded a good percentage of the possible audience for this excellent series. But in retrospect, I doubt that anyone my age or

older has ever driven down a highway at night on a trip without finding that marvelous companion, CBS Radio Mystery Theater, somewhere on the radio dial.

At the time of the 2,000th broadcast which was on Friday, June 29, 1979, there had been 1,035 first-run shows and 965 repeats. I'm sure none of us will ever forget this excellent contribution to radio history or the appreciation we feel toward all who brought it to us. Executive producer, Himan Brown has perhaps put it best in his comments during the last show, **"Resident Killer,"** starring Mason Adams. The show aired on December 31, 1982.

"These have been the happiest nine years of my 50-year career of creating radio drama. The response to all that we have been doing has been most joyous. The theater of the imagination once again became a vital part of all that radio is and can be. Unhappily, this broadcast marks the end of the CBS Radio Mystery Theater as part of the network's schedule. After 3,000 broadcasts, we hope we leave you with many fond memories. I want to say thank you to our listeners, to CBS, and the station you're listening to for the support and encouragement, and most of all, to the hundreds of talented writers, actors and technicians who helped stretch our imaginations. I hasten to assure you that, although this series draws its final curtain, radio drama lives. Until we meet again... and we will... thank you. Good night. Pleasant dreams." (Creaking door closes)

- H. Edgar Cole

Lakeland, Florida 1986

STILL MORE ANCIENT HISTORY

Bob Proctor is a prolific writer in the old-time radio press. BRC Productions published and helped to distribute many of the columns he authored in the 1990s. Primarily to give some further historical perspective on the history of old-time ra-

dio collecting, we are again presenting two of his most significant works. These articles originally appeared in publications such as “**Listening Guide Newsletter**,” “**Old Time Radio Digest**” and Jay Hickerson’s “**Hello, Again**” newsletter. They also appeared in Proctor’s own publication, his trading catalog, “**Listening Post**,” made available to only a selected audience. The first article is a meticulously detailed report on “the Shadow” lawsuit. When several of us in the old-time radio hobby were sued over this series, it changed the complexion of the hobby forever. Veteran dealers closed up shop. Some completely turned their back on old-time radio collecting. Others, myself included, “hung in there” for the duration.

All of Bob Proctor’s articles are of course, provided by BRC Productions as a public service for your non-commercial personal use only.

f. War in the Oxide Trenches

by Robert D. Proctor

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Collecting old time radio programs is now assuming all the appearances of trench warfare — all over The Shadow, a classic old time radio series which many collectors have held for years.

Premier Electronics Laboratories of Sandy Hook, CT is lobbing legal mortar shells at nine veteran collector/dealers (and two small other companies) saying they infringed upon Premier’s license from Conde Nast Publications of New York, the major conglomerate controlling The Shadow and its related properties.

Premier filed suit on March 16, 1989, in U.S. District Court, District of Connecticut...only 136 days after signing its Shadow agreement with Conde Nast to manufacture and distribute home-usage recordings. Premier demanded damages of \$100,000 from each defendant. Several Shadow defendants say

that even one such damage demand exceeds the total gross OTR-sales income from all defendants.

Until The Shadow lawsuit, selling old time radio shows was one of the most specialized “niche markets” of all commercial ventures...barely more than a handful of hobbyists helping other hobbyists. About 20 known collector/dealers serve about one U.S. resident in every 24,000—a fairly constant ratio since U.S. program collecting began on a widespread basis in the middle to late 1960s. The typical OTR vendor used standard domestic-style tape recorders, with sales profits usually barely enough to offset the vendor’s own program trading costs. Many vendors lasted a year or less, while only a handful continued their businesses for more than a decade...many branching out into non-related fields but continuing their OTR sales in what many veteran collectors recognize as a genuine love of The Hobby.

Most of these “survivor vendors” are now Shadow defendants: Don Aston, Rex Bills, Hal Brenner, Bob Burnham, Carl Froelich Jr., Charlie Garant, Dick Judge, Larry Kiner, and Pat McCoy. Named in separate Premier lawsuits were Stephen and Sharon Ferrante (Radio’s Past) and Gary Rost (Wireless and Rivertown Trading, Inc., both loosely affiliated with Minnesota Public Radio).

To simplify matters, the U.S. District Court combined these lawsuits under a single docket number (Aston’s which was the first filed by Premier). What was not simple to understand was why an essentially “mystery plaintiff” had brought suit against these defendants, without first sen-

known that Michelson no longer held the license to distribute The Shadow—and here the real story behind the Shadow lawsuits began to take shape.

Original Shadow owners were pulp-magazines giant Street & Smith Publishers, and Michelson (now age 84) held a truly genteel, Old School gentleman’s handshake agreement with

them. Michelson helped distribute The Shadow to subscribing stations, and after the series stopped production in 1954, Michelson entered the rebroadcast market, with an umbrella agreement allowing him to license individual radio stations, LP recordings and home-enjoyment tapes. Other powerhouse radio series he managed included The Green Hornet, The Lone Ranger, and Gangbusters.

Michelson said Street & Smith gradually shrank in size as its owners grew older, and in 1961, S & S was finally sold to Conde Nast Publications, one of the more widely distributed magazine firms. Conde Nast publications include Vogue, House & Garden, Self, Bride’s, Glamour, Mademoiselle, Gentlemen’s Quarterly, Vanity Fair, Gourmet and the subscriptions-only Conde Nast Traveler. Conde Nast is at 350 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10017.

As for Street & Smith, Michelson says, “Conde Nast swallowed them whole.”

Until the S & S sale went through, he added, rebroadcast royalties from The Shadow went into an escrow account. And then his nearly fifty years’ close association with The Shadow crumbled overnight. “Conde Nast told me my licensing arrangement had expired, and I was out the door.” Even more amazing to outside observers, Michelson says Conde Nast requested and received a list of all his Shadow franchisees, and in 1988 announced a bidding war among those former clients.

Michelson’s franchisees included The Mind’s Eye, Metacom, and Radio Yesteryear. “Metacom was prepared to bid more for the series,” Michelson said, “but they never got the chance. Conde Nast sold the rights to Radio Yesteryear.”

The CNP/Radio Yesteryear agreement was signed November 1, 1988, allowing Radio Yesteryear a five-year exclusive license to manufacture and distribute home-usage recordings, ending December 31, 1993.

Issues and Players

Probably no other company has caused greater controversy within hobbyist circles than Radio Yesteryear and its album subsidiary, Radiola. Founded by former collector J. David Goldin, Radio Yesteryear and Radiola were the first truly aggressively-marketed old time radio products. Goldin (a former engineer at CBS, NBC, and Mutual) relentlessly criss-crossed the U.S. in a grueling number of guest appearances on radio stations large and small. Off-the-air tape recordings of many such “guest shots” were later offered for sale in the Radio Yesteryear catalog. Goldin also was interviewed (with photo) in The National Enquirer.

Clearly, there is nothing shy about J. David Goldin.

His handsomely-produced 1971 Radio Yesteryear catalog listed ten Shadow programs for sale (with “many others available”). But in 1973, a rubber-stamped message was added to these catalogs, saying Radio Yesteryear no longer sold copies of that series. Goldin denied in a 1973 letter that Michelson “had anything to do with this,” but did not elaborate.

Later, however, Radio Yesteryear did acquire (non-exclusive) Michelson licensing to sell The Shadow...while meanwhile, Charles Michelson himself was quietly helping to reverse some long-held bitter feelings in hobbyist circles toward “the merchandising of OTR.”

Hello Again (the longest surviving hobby newsletter), reported Michelson came to an October 1973 hobbyist conventions and spoke to a reportedly angry crowd of collectors. **Hello Again** said Michelson took the position that he had no objection to collectors who sell shows to other collectors. “His one objection is against those who sell his copyrighted material to radio stations for commercial broadcast.”

This was, Michelson recalled in 1990, a “live-and-let-live” approach to marketing old time radio programs. He recognized that within the relatively small world of The Hobby, such sales were by “the converted” to “the converted” and the area in which his own business inter-

est lay were rebroadcasting of programs to the "civilian" ("unconverted") general radio listener.

Michelson's live-and-let-live approach also extended to vendors who took **Radio Yesteryear's** example by advertising outside more traditional "in-Hobby" publications.

One Shadow defendant said, "I got a letter from Charlie that was a cease-and-desist letter over shows he thought I was selling to radio stations. I wrote back and assured him I was selling only to other collectors. That's the last I heard of it from him."

Meanwhile, **Radio Yesteryear** continued to market its products exclusively "outside the Hobby," at prices substantially higher than collector/dealers. A typical hour of Radio Yesteryear material sold for \$10 to \$12 (depending upon the intended marketing group), while collector/dealers charged the same prices for six hours of shows, on 1800-foot tape.

Radio Yesteryear's pricing strategies incensed so-called "purist" OTR collectors who insisted that no collector had the "right" to sell programs...much less at Radio Yesteryear's going \$10-\$12/hour rates. Beginning collectors were among the staunchest defenders of "mainstream" collector/dealers, saying that without these vendors, the novice collector could not cheaply acquire programs at all. Hobbyist vendors in turn contended (and often proved) their sales were barely enough to underwrite their personal trading costs...and unlike any other area of "memorabilia" collecting and selling, these same hobbyist vendors were cheerfully steering their customers to Hello Again and similar Hobby magazines, even if it meant that a former client would stop buying material from them, as they got into their own trading activities.

The issue of selling old time radio programs became a form of "tribal warfare" among hobbyists, and it affected almost no one...except "civilians," people who bought LPs and tapes from nationally-advertised

vendors...until they learned of lower-priced material within The Hobby (Later, in turn, many became avid traders, dropping their purchases of any kind.).

Then the mid 1980s arrived, and with it a noticeable decline in what for years had been a "live and let live" attitude.

Radiola issued a double album, *The Story of the Shadow*, featuring interviews with surviving key cast and crew members...as well as Michelson himself.

The 1985 album-interview provided lengthy information of Michelson's long association with the series. In 1988, this former Michelson licensee assumed total control over home-usage recordings, and 136 days later fired off its first salvo of federal lawsuits.

Charlie Garant says, "I got the summons on a Friday night. The following Monday I shipped them my Shadow tapes and sent a money order for the full amount of the money involved-\$64.50." Nevertheless, Premier continued its demands for \$100,000 from Garant, and the others.

The lawsuit have targeted only those collector/dealers who had advertised outside of hobbyist publications. In stark contrast to Charles Michelson's approach, none of the Shadow defendants was first sent a cease-and-desist letter. This single issue continues to be the central source of puzzlement to all defendants contacted for this article. They repeatedly stress they would never knowingly violate anyone's legal rights to a given item. A simple cease-and-desist letter by any copyright holder would have led to immediate withdrawal of contested material.

Larry Kiner, for example, withdrew *The Cinnamon Bear*, *The Saint*, and *The Hall of Fantasy*. Based on rumors alone that someone might object-also withdrew *Abbott & Costello*. "The same for any Arch Oboler material," Kiner said. "I do not want to offend any legitimate owner. Obviously, I would have done the same regarding *The Shadow*, had anyone had the

courtesy to ask!"

Co-defendant Bob Burnham agreed, in his article, "**A New Legal Problem for the OTR Dealer**," in *The Illustrated Press*. Burnham said the collector/dealers would have immediately retreated on sales of any contested material-with Burnham adding he would have even surrendered his master tapes, if necessary.

Like Garant, however, the other Shadow defendants all contend their actual sales have been minimal. The best reason offered: The Shadow was "traded out," much too widely-distributed among general hobbyists. "The 43 Shadow shows I copied during the [136 days] were more than I usually did in a year," Garant recalls. "In fact, when I was rounding up the tapes to send to Premier, I found some that had been packed away for several years. The Shadow was not a hot item."

Then the mystery behind Premier Electronics' demand for \$100,000 for each defendant began to clear up, once its ties to Radio Yesteryear became known. Then, as it became known that Premier Electronics now owned Radio Yesteryear, a few of the missing pieces in the Shadow defendants' puzzle began to fall into place.

A Case of Trademarks

Premier's Shadow lawsuit complaint states one of its attorneys had been admitted to the U.S. District Court in connection with Premier's 1985 suit in the California District, against Donald L. Aston and Aston's Adventures.

Aston's main catalog bore the title "**Yesterday's Radio on Tape**," which Premier alleged Aston had infringed upon its Radio Yesteryear trademark. In 1987, the California District federal judge ruled there had been no infringement.

It is at that juncture (several observers say) **that Premier Electronics Laboratories declared war on Don Aston.**

First came an appeal of the 1987 Califor-

nia ruling. Then Premier slid past its former franchisor, Charles Michelson for rights to *The Shadow*. Then, using intermediaries, Premier ordered and received copies of *The Shadow* from the defendants...and Premier filed its lawsuits.

According to a letter written by a Los Angeles attorney who handled Aston's trademark case, behind-the-scenes maneuvering came from a woman attorney who was later to file her appearance as counsel to Premier. She called Aston's trademark-case attorney, and said that [J. David Goldin] had demanded that the California [trademark] case "be resolved" before there can be any settlement of the Connecticut [Shadow] action. I advised her that [trademark case] was resolved and we had won and there was a reported decision. She said that it was up on appeal. I advised her that in my opinion the appeal would be unsuccessful. She nevertheless repeated her statement that [Goldin] demanded that the action in California "be resolved," which was clearly an indication that we should grant them the rights which the court has so far found that they are not entitled to and then, and only then, would they discuss the settlement of the California action.

...In my opinion, this Connecticut action was not brought for any legitimate purpose to solve any legitimate grievance or prospective grievance by Premier against Aston. Rather, it was brought solely for the malicious purpose of harassing Aston and forcing him to give up what he has already won. As you well remember, when [Goldin] met with Mr. Aston a few months ago [1988] he opened the conversation by telling the Astons that he was there to talk them out of what they had won in court.

One unmistakable feature of the letter above (and all other sources for this article) is that Premier's sole stockholder (according to the trademark -case complaint) is Jon Sonneborn...yet it is J. David Goldin whose name is almost invariably used. Goldin is believed to have sold his interest in Radio Yester-

year and Radiola, but an effort to confirm this from Sonneborn has gone unanswered.

Don Aston flatly states The Shadow lawsuit is Premier's "**retribution**" for losing the first round in the trademark litigation. The behind-the-scenes effort to "resolve" this case, before settling The Shadow lawsuit, tends to support this. Other Shadow defendants say that another probable cause of the suit is to utterly crush the same hobbyist vendors with whom J. David Goldin had either traded or competed, in his earliest years of OTR program sales.

Defendants (and, as events were to later show, Conde Nast) saw agreement in another area: despite offers of out-of-court settlement and even Conde Nast's offer to mediate the dispute, Premier had steadfastly refused to accept an end to its lawsuit. Aston says this was to keep the legal heat turn up on high, to force a trademark case "resolution," while others saw it as skillful legal maneuvering to delay a final trial date being set...and whopping legal defense fees would do the rest.

One such Premier maneuver required "*pro se*" [without attorney] answers from Shadow defendants, but once these were given, Premier refused to accept them... claimed the defendants were in default...obtained default judgements against them...and the defendants were forced to bear all costs in making a motion to vacate those default judgements.

One defendant learned to his horror, that his personal attorney had been disbarred and had not filed a "*pro se*" answer at all. The defendants' group-attorney managed to get this default judgement vacated, too-but this was conditioned upon that same defendant paying Premier over \$11,000 in legal fees.

Another maneuver: Charlie Garant had immediately surrendered his Shadow master tapes and the \$64.50 made during that contested period, and "while I was waiting for a reply, the lawyers filed a

motion for default."

Several Shadow defendants have tried to settle out of court with Premier, for real or imaginary damages, but Premier has refused. Meanwhile, \$200/hour defense fees continue to mount. In Don Aston's words, "**Whoever has the most money wins.**"

In fairness, however, Shadow defense has a proven track record in old time radio lawsuits: the same counsel which had successfully represented the late Arch Oboler and others, against J. David Goldin and Radio Yesteryear. The U.S. District Court now involved with The Shadow case had ruled against Goldin over Lights Out, according to The Federal Reporter, Second Series, August 1, 1983.

An OTR Groundswell

Soon after Burnham's *Illustrated Press* article, the Shadow case turned into an OTR groundswell.

Carolyn and Joel Senter formed what is now believe to be the first-ever appeal among general hobbyists, for legal-defense contributions to aid collector/dealers. **The OTR Defense Fund** (4003 Clifton Ave., Cincinnati, OH 45220) issued a Hobby-wide history-making appeal for money to defend the same OTR collector/dealers some hobbyists continue to deprecate even today...against another commercial program vendor.

The Senters said-in effect-that only a court could decide who was right or wrong in this issue. But the defendants deserved to be heard in court.

"Unfortunately, the price tag on 'due process' can become very high!"

More help came from the 1990 **Friends of Old Time Radio** convention in Newark-also breaking new ground by donating \$500 the OTR Defense Fund which came directly from the convention fund. An additional \$300 was collected from collectors attending the convention. Awarding the \$500 was FOTR mainstay Jay Hickerson (Hello Again editor/publisher).

Only days after FOTR '90, events jolted

into high gear, when the **OTR Defense Fund** learned of the newest wrinkle in the on-going Shadow battle...the corporate reaction by the all-but-forgotten new owner of The Shadow property, Conde Nast Publications.

One of the first steps for Premier to prove its case against the Shadow defendants required a "document inspection," wherein attorneys for Premier, the defendants and Conde Nast met to examine copyright certificates Conde Nast holds for The Shadow. At that meeting, a Conde Nast attorney expressed "concern about possible adverse publicity as a result of this case going against 'mom and pop' operations."

This, indeed, was the raw meat which the OTR collectors had been clamoring for.

The OTR Defense Fund swiftly contacted its network of benefactors, urging them to write Conde Nast board chairman Samuel I. Newhouse Jr., and company president Bernard Leser. The Senters asked writers to object to Premier having filed suit without first issuing a cease and desist letter to defendants, and to object to damage-demands amounting to 27 times "any real damages which could have ensued from any infringements the defendants might have committed."

Initially, more radical hobbyists were howling for an all-out boycott against Conde Nast Publications.

One plan called for picketing publicity-shy franchise bookstores, local news media coverage, and then parlaying this into national publishing and advertising media trade publications.

More direct pressure on CNP would come (others said) by simply not buying any of the company's magazines. Not including subscriptions-only Conde Nast Traveler, combined retail cover price of remaining CNP magazines sell for \$24.40. Of this, some 40% is written off in trade discounts to entice retailers to stock the magazines, for an adjusted one-month total of \$14.64. Multiplying by even half the 10,000 names on old time radio dealers' mail-

ing lists, this totals \$73,200 for one month and \$878,400 for one year...not wildly different from what Premier wants from all Shadow defendants.

The boycott fever against Conde Nast noticeably lessened in late December 1990, when Conde Nast brought out its own artillery (see "CNP Steps In," below). Meanwhile, the more bloodthirsty OTR fans continued individual all-out boycott assaults against Radio Yesteryear, in a form of "name brand recognition" which the California trademark case had not had in mind.

Also in late December, explosive new documentation and corroboration surfaced, on another Premier subsidiary, and its own heretofore unsung role in the war in the oxide trenches.

The Sandy Hook Connection

Sandy Hook Records, a second album subsidiary to Premier Electronics, has released dozens of LPs related to nostalgic music, radio broadcasts or movie soundtracks. Among them is Sandy Hook SH-#2110, entitled *Connee Boswell & the Boswell Sisters*. SH-#2110 states it is copyrighted in Sandy Hook Records' name. A convincing argument to the contrary is U.S. Copyright Office Form N-48483, registered in 1977, showing *Connee Boswell and the Boswell Sisters* "On the Air" was registered to Totem Records, one of three small-run LP labels operated by Shadow co-defendant, Larry F. Kiner.

Sandy Hook Records also claimed copyright for its SH-#2021 as well: Jack Teagarden "On the Air" 1936-1938. On May 13, 1980, the U.S. Library of Congress Reference and Bibliography section for Copyright Office records searches said this album was registered under SR-12-958, in 1978...to another Kiner LP label, Aircheck records.

Other Sandy Hook titles claiming copyrights were:

#2002 Bing Crosby "On the Air"

#2003 Al Jolson "On the Air"

#2016 Artie Shaw "On the Air" 1939-1940

#2020 Alice Faye "On the Air" 1932-2934 #2027 The Thirties Girl

Bibliographer William A. Moore said a records search from 1978-1980 "failed to disclose any separate registration for works identifiable as relating to Sandy Hook label under specific titles.

Kiner claims ownership to all these albums and has produced a list of some 68 Sandy Hook titles (#2001-#2110 inclusive) showing 51 albums are identical in content to LPs issued by other small-run LP companies, including Hollywood Sound Stage, Sunbeam, Sountrak, Joyce, Take Two, Giants of Jazz, Pelican, and Star Tone. Kiner's own Totem, Aircheck, and Spokane labels account for 14 of the 51 titles in dispute.

Independent corroboration of Kiner's listing comes from Sunbeam/Sountrak founder Alan A. Roberts of Van Nuys, CA (12 albums) and Hollywood Sound Stage founder Howard Goldberg of Flushing, NY (8 albums).

All 34 albums these three sources say were first issued by themselves, turned up in Sandy Hook Records catalogs, and in album jackets bearing Sandy Hook copyright notices. Kiner writers,

Most, if not all, of the Sandy Hook products were originated by someone else! Often, they even duplicate the artwork, simply removing logos, addresses, etc., and replacing with their own. In all cases the Sandy Hook records claimed a 'copyright,' and my research indicates that in all cases, none were issued.

Both Roberts and Goldberg concur, with Roberts adding: "It would be an easy matter to prove who brought them out first, and my editing was unique and [J. David Goldin] didn't bother to change any of that."

Kiner adds he has tried for several years to force Sandy Hook Records to withdraw albums replicating his own, without success. At one point, he says, a lawyer for Sandy Hook Records told him that if he did not stop "harassing" Sandy Hook over what they termed his

"unfounded claims," that Sandy Hook would sue him.

How come Premier/Sandy Hook/J. David Goldin/Jon Sonneborn group continue to sell and to list and to offer for sale my LPs that I have been complaining about? They've made no attempt to withdraw those LPs and apparently do not recognize my complaints or copyrights. What is the difference between the two?

Kiner has now filed a copyright infringement suit of his own, against Premier Electronics and Jon Sonneborn.

This countersuit was discussed years ago, Roberts said, between himself, Kiner, and Jim Bedoyan of Take Two records (whose Al Jolson album shows up as Sandy Hook SH-#2107 in Sandy Hook Records' list). Multiple sources for this article say this countersuit is not only "long overdue," but also that Kiner's countersuit is now expected to be among the strongest Shadow defendants' group defense weapons.

Even more devastating to Premier Electronics than allegations it too has infringed on copyrighted material (while refusing to settle its own case aimed at other "infringers") is the real impact of the newest wrinkle in this Shadow battle. Conde Nast Publications is also taking legal action against its own licensee.

CNP Steps In

Conde Nast filed an amended complaint and cross-claim on December 14, 1990 in U.S. District Court, District of Connecticut, seeking to become the sole plaintiff in Civil Case 89-135-WWE, the formal docket number for Donald L. Aston and now also the master docket number for all Shadow defendants

Conde Nast Publications alleges that Premier Electronics Laboratories breached its Shadow licensing agreement, by failing to allow CNP to pursue any infringement claims on its own, before Premier brought its own legal guns out against the present defendants.

This one almost seems like CNP was reading the **OTR Defense Fund's** letter before it was

ever written. The November 1, 1988 agreement stipulated CNP had the "exclusive right but not the obligation" to sue infringers, for a 60 day period following the later of: (1) CNP's receipt of a notice from Radiola or from another source regarding any infringement or continuing infringement, or (2) CNP's sending a "cease and desist" letter.

If CNP failed to take action, then Premier was allowed "the right but not the obligation" to commence its own legal action.

The reason that Conde Nast had not sent cease and desist letters, CNP's complain says, is because

Premier specifically instructed CNP not to send cease and desist letters to Aston's Adventures, The Golden Radio Library, Bob Burnham, Dick Judge, Carl Froelich Jr., Redmond Nostalgia Company, Radio's Past, Charlie Garant, Golden Age Radio, Stoneground Features and McCoy's Recording, Inc. ... In accordance with Premier's instructions, CNP did not send cease and desist letters to these persons. Thereafter, Premier commenced the subject litigation [against these defendants]. Not only did CNP not consent to this breach of the terms of paragraph 10 of the agreement, it vigorously protested Premier's action, but Premier has refused to cure its breach of the agreement.

CNP's complaint added they were therefore denied "the opportunity to amicably resolve all claims of alleged infringement of the licensed rights." (Emphasis added.)

Conde Nast acknowledged that most of the defendants "have made only limited sales of the infringing products at issue and have offered settlements including consent to injunctive relief and payment of damages."

Although CNP believes these settlement offers are a reasonable basis upon which a negotiated amicable settlement could have been reached long ago, Premier characterizes the offers as grossly inadequate and has failed to negotiate reasonably. Premier has even refused CNP's counsel's offer to act as an intermediary

in settling the actions.

Conde Nast asked the court to first add CNP as plaintiff in this case, to protect its Shadow property in a more direct manner; to have Premier found to have breached its licensing agreement; then to be permanently enjoined from commencing litigation against any unauthorized persons selling The Shadow recordings or using the CNP-trademarked character likeness in any manner.

Best of all: CNP asks that Premier be dismissed as a party from this lawsuit and that CNP be substituted as sole plaintiff herein.

Not-So-Hasty Conclusions

At stake here now is Premier Electronics Laboratories' own credibility, considering PEL's ongoing trademark battle with Don Aston (and the telephone call to "resolve" a trademark decision PEL had lost in court to Aston). Also at issue are 34 out of 51 disputed albums in Sandy Hook Records' listings for its SH-#2001 through #2110...some 14 albums having been issued by another Shadow co-defendant, Larry Kiner.

Taken alone, Kiner's claim to copyright infringement might seem fairly weak. Confirmation from two other LP producers...and from the U.S. Copyright Office...bring an entirely new and stronger emphasis to this claim. In that context, new meaning can be read into a memorandum of law filed by Conde Nast in conjunction with its amended complaint and cross-claim:

Based on what has transpired to date, it appears that Premier may not be pursuing the readily available settlements for reasons unrelated to the protection of CNP's copyright and trademark rights or the vindication of Premier's exclusive rights under the License Agreement.

The memorandum of law does not

mention the 1987 trademark case against Don Aston, or Larry Kiner's counterclaim against Sandy Hook's use of his LPs...but Conde Nast does mention how Premier has consistently refused to accept mediation-and its two 1989 letters asking that CNP not send cease and desist letters, according to paragraph 10 of the agreement.

In a sworn affidavit accompanying CNP's amended complaint, and its memorandum of law, CNP Editorial Business Manager William P. Rayner mentioned the background on why Conde Nast had complied with those two letters:

CNP was given no warning as to what Premier's plans were; it was entirely possible Premier planned to sub-license these infringers or to suggest they be left alone because of the minimal extent of their infringement. Instead, Premier commenced litigation...

It does not require a juris doctorate to see a measure of disgust held by Conde Nast Publications over the actions taken by its licensee. The evidence now in hand shows that CNP simply got sick and tired of all the legal delays in "minimal cases" which CNP felt could have been settled by simple cease and desist letters-had Premier not asked them to refrain, and then filed its Shadow lawsuits. Throughout all documents filed, the phrase "amicable settlement" recurs so often that it serves as Conde Nast's litany of its own philosophy toward infringements.

Another litany, this time from Shadow defendants: The Shadow radio series itself has been so widely traded that in-Hobby demand for that series has reached nearly rock-bottom levels. Yet Premier held fast to its demands for huge settlement figures from each defendant...even saying one defendant was "in default," after sending them his total sales for that series during their li-

censing period, and his master tapes.

Don Aston and Larry Kiner have presented credible reasons to show that Premier's Shadow lawsuit may well indeed have unseen motives-particularly the effort to "resolve" Premier's trademark case, and Kiner's 14 albums issued by Sandy Hook Records.

It does not help Premier's credibility when the U.S. Copyright Office cannot find Sandy Hook Records copyrights for the titles its album jackets stated were copyrighted in Sandy Hook's name. Nor can it help Premier's credibility when Jon Sonneborn won't even confirm J. David Goldin had sold Radio Yesteryear, Radiola, and/or any other former Goldin company to Premier.

Conde Nast in turn displayed its own credibility by producing the copyright certificates for The Shadow, at the document inspection meeting which Premier had brought about by its lawsuits.

It seems reasonable after Larry Kiner's claim-and other statements made by veteran collector/dealers-that Premier Electronics should now show copyright certificates of their own, for SH-#2001 through #2110 inclusive. Premier should also explain the motives for that refusal to settle The Shadow suit against Aston's Adventures, until the trademark suit is "resolved."

Premier should also explain how the prompt submission of Shadow master tapes and total proceeds of Shadow program sales during the contested period can constitute being "in default."

Possibly most importantly, Premier can gain maximum credibility by fully explaining the nature of its relationship to J. David Goldin. If Goldin did in fact sell Radio Yesteryear and Radio, then why was his name specified by the Aston trademark-case attorney when she called Aston's attorney? What had Goldin gone to California, to pursue this issue in 1988...three years

after Premier filed the trademark suit? Why has Goldin's name (and not Jon Sonneborn's or Premier's) name been used by more than two dozen sources contacted for this article? Would Premier have filed its 1985 California lawsuit, had it not owned Goldin's former companies? Why then would Goldin show such interest in these lawsuits...unless he had an active role in helping to orchestrate them?

Should that last part prove to be provably true, then we can further believe the collector/dealers are correct: that Goldin is going after those OTR vendors with whom he competed in his earliest days of selling programs...back in those days when Goldin himself withdrew The Shadow from his own catalog.

Finally, the credibility of Premier's claim (through its Sandy Hook Records subsidiary) that SH #2001 through #2110 inclusive are copyrighted in Sandy Hook's name...while the U.S. Copyright Office states otherwise.

The Library of Congress (which oversees copyrights) has a staff known internationally for their great pains to provide accurate, unbiased information in their reports. So if there are to be any money bets placed on this entire copyright discussion, the odds on Sandy Hook actually holding copyrights for its SH #2001-#2110 inclusive are precisely the same as the likelihood that a shimmering silver flying saucer will land in CNP president Bernard H. Leser's back-yard birdbath...whereupon little green men will disembark and request in flawless Queen's English that they be allowed the honour of marrying Mr. Leser's pet canary.

Who will reply: "**Aaawwwwp! Polly wants a copyright!**"

Conde Nast, after all, has shown its copyrights...all over a legal battle that might never have arisen, if not for Premier...a company Larry Kiner, Alan Roberts, Howard Goldberg, and the U.S. Copyright Office all say lack copyrights of its own. So now (at long and expensive last) isn't turnabout for Premier indeed fair play? ###

"LO-FI" . . . IN A HI-FI AGE

by Bob Proctor

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Collecting Old Time Radio programs is swiftly becoming a study in bleak ironies. In an age of interactive video games, and the lowest reading skills in recent U.S. educational history, we have a small but significant number of program collectors who stubbornly refuse to allow Change to win: we collect OTR material for its priceless intellectual value, as much as for its proven ability to entertain. Some of us simply will not give up the notion that content in OTR programs far exceeds the modern fare in today's revved-up world of media tie-ins, hyper-marketing, and multi-million dollar advertising hype.

The good news about **Old Time Radio** programs is its being a viable and vibrant alternative to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Garbage of today's mediocrity. More irony enters in, if you consider the 1980s, when overall sound quality of circulating programs took a quantum leap. Listenability of the shows improved tremendously...while The Hobby itself moved closer than ever before to becoming a technological dinosaur in its own time.

Open-reel recorders (serving the earliest collectors holding the most relatively uncirculated programs) is now on the Endangered Species list, in the consumer-audio marketplace. Open reel archival storage (and trading) is almost exclusively the tool of the veteran collector, who feels he or she has invested literally too much time and money on reels, to now attempt to switch to any other medium. These are the same people in OTRdom who now stand in open dread of the revolutionary changes brewing in domestic recording technology.

A dozen leading collectors who do sell recordings to other hobbyists all tell me that well over 90% of their sales are made on conventional Phillips compact analog cassettes. A few full-time OTR collector/dealers report they

don't offer open-reel tapes at all...and among those who do, its now widely felt that printing costs of open-reel catalogs aren't worth the return in sales. One such dealer admits he won't even bother listing a reel of material, until he first gets some mileage from listing the same shows on cassette.

Against these declining numbers in reel-to-reel collectors comes even more ironies. It took us three times longer to get televisions into even half of all American homes than the same market penetration period for the compact digital disk. Numerous market-watchers report that CD sales now outpace the analog cassette by a wide margin. The term record store is now archaic; today's music stores have almost universally abandoned vinyl L/P recordings, and a surprising number won't even offer analog-mastered cassettes.

Today's radio disk jockey won't even play a vinyl L/P, without first apologizing for the surface noise which most OTR collectors accepted as a given, in our own material. After the early 1980s, the typical radio listener or album-buyer found they had come to accept digital sound as the only acceptable standard for music listening.

Time and technology marches on. Today's \$200 cassette deck routinely offers features scarcely dreamed of, even by professional audio engineers of the glory days of Old Time Radio. The studio-quality epitome of 55 dB signal-to-noise ratio shot to about 70 dB only about 1970, and its extremely difficult today to find even a budget-brand receiver, amplifier or cassette deck with Total Harmonic Distortion ratings over 0.3%. . .when the typical 1970 semi-pro unit proudly boasted of even a flat 1.0% THD.

Against these developments came the lingering death of open-reel tape recording, when fidelity-conscious home-recordists eagerly purchased the new cassette equipment, and equipment manufacturers waged cut-throat wars to offer the noise-reduction Dolby, Dynec, Shotz,

and other processes which did give us far less hissy recordings.

Probably the best summary of change in public attitude comes in a Stereo Review cartoon by Rodriguez: . . .Open-reel tape decks?! Where've you been. . .in jail?

Digitized Delirium

In a sense, Old Time Radio program collecting became the orphan stepchild of domestic recording technology...or the aural equivalent to the sport of deep-water surf boat riding. Cassette-users caught the prevailing wave, while open-reelers are slowly getting sucked down to a horrific, lingering doom.

When the next wave in domestic recording slams ashore however, and true digital recording becomes available, you won't find a single survivor lying broken and bleeding amongst the analog driftwood. The very equipment we now use in OTR collecting is about to become as obsolete as the wind-up Victrola. That same market-penetration curve seen for CDs is about to assume the trajectory of an Atlas missile, for a digital technology which will leave analog in the dust and ruins of history.

Don't believe it? Call your local elementary school, and ask anyone who answers, What's the earliest grade that our kids first use a computer? Susie and Johnny Megabyte might not be able to tie their own shoes yet, but you can bet your bottom centime that they do know how to boot up and run a personal computer. These buoyant bundles of juvenile excess can discuss RAM and ROM and bytes and sampling rates...and to them, the world of binary digital mastering is not technobabble. These kids are already pre-sold on digital sound recording: Behind the cash register at your sterile Rap-O-Matic music store, you'll find Little Johnny Binary...who has probably only seen pictures of an open-reel recorder...and who can't begin to find out where you go for spare turntable parts.

Records? you mean that stuff like super-old 1970s albums?

Makes you want to stuff a fistful of CD jewel-boxes right down their gullet, when you mention reel-to-reel recordings of material from the 1930s-1960s. . . and there's a short glassy-eyed pause and the overly-polite reply: You mean, lo-fi? Since the dawn of recorded time, every young person who has consumed oxygen has instinctively known this one immutable truth about Old People: senior citizens over the age of 40 grow increasingly stupid, with each passing year. In short, Peter Pan and Darwin were right. We thought so when we sneered at Edison and Victrola recordings. Today's funky-up, freaked-out kids in the CDs only music stores are mumbling the same thing. . .only they're doing it over digital. Another (not-so-subtle) hint: shoestring budget AM broadcasters who go dark on the dial, unable to attract advertisers without sufficient audiences who increasingly want cleaner sound. A growing percentage of stations are completely rekitting into all-digital equipment and fiberoptic wiring, stepping back to analog only just before their transmitters.

Home recording has gone from affordable portable open-reel decks which outweigh a ten-year-old child, to CD players the size of paperback books. Big Byte digital technology now threatens to make analog recording equipment totally obsolete within our own lifetimes...leaving the future of Old Time Radio program collecting in a far more precarious position than even our Hobby's gloomiest forecasters have led us to believe.

Major advances in recording technology are clearly warning us that unless we act now, the OTR Hobby will be dead and gone, by about 2010 A.D.

Convincing arguments for digital recording don't get much better than when Sony introduced its now-benchmark Digital Audio Tape recorder/reproducer. The DTC-75ES offers a staggering signal-to-noise ratio of more than -100 dB, and a Total Harmonic Distortion combined-channel spec of at least 0.0016%.

Sony offered a traditional A/B blind-comparison test of the DTC-75ES, to a panel of internationally-known golden-eared audiophiles. Both a CD and a DAT recorded directly from it were compared...and not one true audiophile could tell the difference. Pandemonium erupted when Sony then trotted out a second DAT cassette, and nobody could tell DAT #1 from DAT #2. . .even after learning that #2 was 750 digital tape generations from #1. Even the crustiest, dyed-in-the-wool Analog Audio Troglodyte can't argue with results like that. The aural hash generated from traditional tape duplication would be gone forever. What we can argue about is the built-in copying drawbacks being handed to home recordists in domestic digital recorders.

SCMS Serial Copy Management System is a copyguard technology specifically designed to block digital-to-digital tape copying on DAT or other domestic-model digital recorders. Record companies and music publishers forced SCMS onto equipment manufacturers, to prevent any widespread copying of commercially-recorded digital releases. The system (called "scums" by not-so-loving professionals) allows one digital copy from, say, a CD, but adds a digital "flag" into the actual audio track. This flag prevents another digital recorder from copying off the flagged DAT new master.

This probably won't interest the average home-recordist much, if we believe the equipment manufacturers claims that the average recordist makes only convenience copies, for private use on more portable mediums (including Sonys new DATman, a pricey portable DAT player). What it means to Old Time Radio program collectors, however, is nothing short of harrowing. The all-out effort to preserve copyrighted modern material will soon prevent us from making tapes from radios Golden Age.

Equipment manufacturers all make pious claims they intend to keep making analog cassette recorders/reproducers...but the cold truth is that compact disk technology dominates the retail industry, and the average home recordist

is by now thoroughly indoctrinated in "digital-good/analog-bad" thinking.

New Shoes for Your Dinosaurs

Buying spare parts for existing open-reel decks leaves the average OTR veteran in a neon blue funk over prices... and availability. The same can be said for finding analog cassette units which will stand up to rigorous OTR usage. As digital technology continues squeezing out analog equipment, we will increasingly see the need for new digital shoes for our analog dinosaurs.

The one shred of good news is that professional-grade DAT equipment can be found from Tascam, Sony, and others... and it does not employ SCMS circuitry. You're also looking at well over \$800 per unit.

...Choke, you say? Well, yeah, now that you mention it. A typical blank DAT cassette also retails for about \$8 to \$10. Double choke... uh huh. Entering the digital domain will not be cheap, nor will it be without its major cost: literally, the time required to re-master your old analog recordings. But factors are still far more palatable than trying to keep analog decks alive in our digital future.

Here's a few major advantages for going to a digital medium:

Editing. Even the truly inspired electronic editor can't hold a Pause button to someone accustomed to old-fashion razor-blade-and-splicing-block style physical tape editing. Tape wows and other unavoidable errors just don't happen with blade work... and now, non-destructive editing, in digital recording. The grand master is added to, not cut, with sub-code information which tells the copying deck to remove wows, clicks, pops and other add-ons. We're only a few keystrokes away from Microchip Heaven, electronic edits to within a portion of a single audio waveform.

Garbage Dumping. Digital Sound Processing can do the seemingly impossible, in salvaging audio gold from aural garbage. Unlike straight editing which physically removes a sec-

tion, DSP restores what the offending glitch is covering on a master in some cases, even recreating it to an eerily close degree. A July, 1968 live Doors concert at the Hollywood Bowl went amazingly sour when a faulty microphone connection caused lead singer Jim Morrison's vocals to sound like a collection of clicks and crunches for 15 apparently unusable minutes. Then a fledgling DSP company stepped in, Sonic Solutions, and put its NoNOISE prototype software to use. Working in 2000 frequency bands and more than 53 million computations per second, NoNOISE still had to work eight hours on that concert tape... but 12 of those 15 minutes were completely restored. New York Times writer Lawrence M. Fisher calls NoNOISE a kind of dry-cleaner for recordings.

If so, this new DSP technology caught on faster than bell-bottomed jeans at the Woodstock concert, with about 20 major DSP-equipment companies offering Digital Audio Workstations. Some systems work in relatively brief envelopes, of only a few minutes, while NoNOISE handles about 90 continuous minutes... using proprietary twin 800 megabytes of hard disk space, and a 8 MB of core memory.

Digital Sound Processing can now save the hopeless Old Time Radio Shows originally mastered on wire or other truly obsolete means. All this, for a DAT recorder costing less than a no-frills studio analog deck plus of course, the workstation, computer, and that all-important software. Sonic Solutions estimates a typical half-hour OTR show clean-up will cost \$3,500 including set-up time at one of the NoNOISE audio licensees around the U.S. Stated another way, if you're going to clean up more than 24 programs, you're better off paying \$69,000 for your own system.

Granted, only a lottery winner or a group of very serious collectors are likely to sift that kind of serious sugar. But historically, there's always been a trickle-down effect between professional and domestic recording and processing equipment. How long, then, before

NoNOISE OTR becomes a reality?

Forward Compatibility. The experts say that once a recording is made in any sampling rate in binary code, we are still far better-ahead than trying to find analog playback equipment in the future. Forward-compatibility means keeping competitive with tomorrow's storage technology... and DAT uses the CD-standard 44.1 KHz sampling rate. Even buying a translator unit will be far cheaper than re-kitting all over... again.

One early example of such damage-control came during the first wave of industry standardization. Sony's then-benchmark PCM F-1 pulse-code-modulation system was an extremely attractive digital mastering unit, simply translating analog into 44.081 MHz sampling rate digital audio... which then went onto any decent quality video recording tape. The pro market settled on 44.1 KHz for CDs and DAT recordings... but it took almost no time for sampling-rate translators to hit the markets.

Forward-compatibility, in short, means never having to look at your bins of glass-based or aluminum-based transcriptions, and know you'll never find a way to play them again. But aside from a sobering start-up price, the single greatest enemy now facing our OTR conversion to digital is time. Time is galloping past us as the entire domestic recording market gears up for digital... and its working against OTR because we now have hundreds of thousands of individual Old Time Radio shows which require digital re-mastering.

The second major problem facing Old Time Radio in the digital future: the so-called ideal storage medium. Translating analog wave forms into binary pulse code modulation is simple stuff... when you ponder than no true archival storage medium has been perfected, while the retail industry is on a toboggan run into digital, anyway. Bringing analog into digital is secondary, compared to the storage medium that gives us decades of problem-free access.

Battle Dispatches

Tremendous improvements in reproduction have completely obscured how we store that audio. In researching this article, I've found that at least one British study found DAT recordings tend to self-erase in the higher frequencies. And while a generation of music listeners are being pre-sold on digital audio, the first awful truth about that medium is that compact disks are not a "lifetime" storage medium.

In a telephone interview, Gerald Gibson, curator of the Library of Congress' Recorded Sound Division, told me of events suggesting it's even worse than we thought. He cited an unpublished draft report by the National Institute of Standards, which found that the average lifespan of a compact disk is from eight to ten years.

I attended a conference in Vienna, Gibson said, and saw them holding up a CD that was coming apart in chunks. Screen printing labeling inks had eaten into the disks substrate.

Gibson told me that both Philips and Sony had representatives attending the same conference, and both companies hotly denied the ink effect but even the most impartial observer found it difficult to ignore those shards of disk, lying on that conference room table.

Inevitably, the CD lifespan issue leaked out to the average audiophile... and the consumer-oriented audio magazines (which survive on manufacturers and music publishers goodwill) soon rallied around the Phillips/Sony flag. Michael Riggs at Stereo Review stoutly maintained, Essentially, [disc deterioration] is just a rumor. Compact disks are not indestructible, but they normally will not deteriorate on their own.

Gibson, however, quietly stresses that if the NIS study is upheld, the fate of compact disks should rightfully be held in doubt. He added that the Library of Congress has long held a firm policy to accept only the best copy of a given work for copyright purposes. This has

caused some Library staff members to now challenge a publisher from offering solely a CD copy.

Perhaps the silkscreen-ink issue is a red herring in our search for the ideal OTR archival method. Hobbyists would use conventional stick-on labels (if any at all), on the disks they do record. But contrary to Michael Riggs position, chunks does suggest that another (as yet unknown) factor might cause CD substrate erosion. High-stress injection-molded polycarbonates used in the earliest commercially-released CDs are like any other emerging product: design or material flaws could show up only many years later.

Overall (according to the CD manufacturers trade journal Optical Information Systems, constant technical progress is being made in CD substrate components and molding. Some pessimists immediately use that innocuous statement as proof that the NIS study might be right, after all.

So even if the NIS draft study is upheld (but its only the silkscreen problem), Old Time Radio program collectors may be halfway home, in search for a suitable long-term storage medium. The other half arguably is in persuading those technically-minded hobbyists that the self-erasure issue doesn't matter, since OTR programs are essentially only the human voice far below the "high end" frequencies debated by British researchers. But the battle is far from over, even then. Traders must still face what has become the pariah of home digital recording: SCMS.

The **Recording Industry Association of America** has strong-armed audio equipment manufacturers into preventing us from exercising our right to record and copy and public domain material... say, from prehistoric times to 1962 and the death of Old Time Radio Programs.

Certainly, a good technician could remove SCMS chips from a domestic digital recorder... and then you find yourself talking to the FBI,

if you need repair work and can find only an authorized dealer. Copyright laws are changing and as other recent OTR-related copyright events have shown us, the legal infighting is becoming as cold-blooded as a crack-house gang-execution.

Another entirely darker viewpoint returns us to the **Chunk Effect**... and anyone who's ever studied Machiavelli's *The Prince* may find this one has all the charm of a Borgia family reunion. One CBS/Sony engineer I interviewed on deep background told me: The army in the Old West wasn't the only one with forked tongues. CBS/Sony's the world's largest music publisher, right? Its simply good business to protest that NIS draft report, because how else can you convince people to buy something, if they know its not going to last forever, as the ads tell us?... Then there's the flip side: so what if the NIS study pans out? So much the better! Every ten years, you sell the same disks to the same people if that consumer wants to hear what we choose to sell them. Anybody with specialty interests like yours is just plain out of luck, unless somebody takes a risk and puts out a few CDs for you and only a few unless and until they catch on.

General Motors is credited with the phrase planned obsolescence, which Gerald Gibson pointedly declines to even discuss in general terms, including its very real long-term impact in the world of archival storage. (Considering the multi-billion dollar recording industry's political clout in Washington, we can hardly blame him.) Gibson does say, The Library does strongly prefer the analog disk as its main method of storage. It's the medium of choice. If LPs were good enough for space travel on board Voyager I, then its good enough for us. After more than 50 years of use, the analog disks technology is perfected. It seems unlikely that it will be made permanently obsolete.

Tom Owen (Gibson's counterpart at the New York Public Library) agrees. **"You could stick a wire coat hanger into a groove and**

get something."

That, my friends, is a bonafide **Helluva Quote**, as journalists phrase it. Its technically accurate, vivid as the human imagination can allow... and yet Owen (technical consultant and analog-restoration and equipment manufacturer in his own right) also touches on the fragile balance between old technologies and new approaches to saving our aural past.

Cold, cynical vivid truth continues to permeate the search for an OTR archival system. Our realpolitik CBS/Sony insider is telling the truth: abandoning LPs and going to commercial CDs is good business... and its our decision whether or not to buy a new copy of a beloved album. No sane music lover would dare suggest that CBS/Sony employs legions of Digital Thugs, to force us to buy anything... much less to buy it twice. But if the Chunk Effect (as I call it) is caused by something other than printing ink, then we do need to factor that into any reasonably Hobby-wide discussion on archival methods in our digital future.

Cynicism is absolutely unavoidable in this discussion and possibly quite necessary, as we struggle for objectivity.

Little Johnny Goldconnections (that avant-garde audiophile behind the music store cash register) will openly sneer at Gibson's earnest assertion that LPs are the medium of choice. Johnny will smugly remind us not only of the proven short-term advantages of CDs over LPs (lower background noise, wider signal bandwidth, wider dynamic range, almost-unmeasurable wow and flutter) but also a few cynical observations about the Library of Congress. Johnny fancies himself management material, and reads *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

He'll phrase it in **TeenSpeak** or **North American Yuppie**, but our Johnny will point out that the Library of Congress is verifiably the world's single largest repository of printed and recorded material. Devastating impact of federal budget deficit-reduction measures have left

the Library with negligible funding, to re-master into any new (albeit more permanent) medium.

They're stuck, smug Johnny observes. They have a budget to keep to, and so they have to defend their medium of choice, as the medium of choice. And our young **Mr. Gold-Connections** will then ramble on about the superlative advantages of his generation's CDs, while we remember that Rodriguez cartoon in defense of our reel-to-reel or cassettes.

Truth ever-precious in today's slick world of advertising hype can sometimes be all of the above, just as much as any one particular view. As a working newspaper reporter, I have interviewed some of the sleaziest and most polished political hacks and liars in recent memory... yet I was also struck by Gerald Gibson's very evident sincerity and institutionally-wide respect for objectivity and fairness. It's Little Johnny Goldconnections defense of his generation's CD versus our defense of open reel and analog cassettes... and Johnnys very true observation that the Library of Congress (just as much as you and I) are stuck (at least until funds become available) with our medium being the medium.

Is this re-mastering issue strictly philosophical, and another example of some writer trying to create a story out of nothing? I believe not. While **Tom Owens' Owl Audio** and **Mike Stosich's Esoteric Audio** both manufacture and sell high-quality equipment for restoring analog LP (or even Edison cylinder) audio... the other real truth is that consumer recording is racing headlong into a digital future, and to disseminate Old Time Radio shows to a significant number of newcomers, the Dinosaurs of OTR must begin NOW to study the digitally re-mastering / archival process. The very future of The Hobby demands no less.

We must personally choose our individual futures in OTR: we can remain hobbyists or we can genuinely serve future hobbyists, as archivists. We can collect analog recordings (increasingly, the cassettes, unless we buy pricey stu-

dio decks)...and still see a day in our lifetimes when analog audio dies altogether. I flatly predict this will be not later than 2010 A.D. and probably sooner...again judging from the exponential advances underway in the recording industry.

The average home recordist is not the OTR hobbyist and yet in analog, we've fortunately benefitted from equipment designed for the norm, both in using stereo decks for quarter track monophonic recording, and cassettes for casual listening. The cassette-users (naturally enough) will not be as alarmed by digital re-mastering, as are reel-to-reel users: the average cassette collector has far fewer recordings to worry about, and generally speaking, far more time to re-record their treasures.

The 1960s showed us the first-generation OTR Hobbyists, who may have actually begun far earlier, but didn't actively trade material on a wide basis until after original OTR did leave the air. Their technology was in genuine half-track recordings, which second-generation (1970s) hobbyists converted to quarter-track, and 1980s third-generation OTR collectors converted to cassettes. Fourth-generation collectors will break this chain of events, forever.

Dazzled by interactive video games, awed by super-clean CDs and the impending High Definition Television era, our Fourth Generationists are from the same sterile shores as Little Johnny Goldconnections...and like us, equally defensive about their own medium of choice. We dinosaurs of OTR can remain apologists for analog (and watch our beloved hobby die altogether), or we can come full-circle. We can embrace Big Byte technology itself (while awaiting the ideal storage medium)...and attract new converts, as OTR most certainly deserves.

Time is incontestably against us. A collection of 100,000 programs can easily round off to 40,000 hours of material. Not including set-up time, or down-time for equipment repairs, vacations, illnesses, or any time off whatsoever,

one person would have to work eight hours a day for 20 years, to re-master into any digital medium.

Our first challenge in planning ahead: recognizing we cannot stop the rush into digital, and the crucially important need to re-master, in any digital medium. This buys time, until Digital Audio Workstations do come down in cost, and restoration can succeed actual re-mastering.

Our second real challenge: a division of labor to achieve this transfer, more quickly than 2010 A.D. (or the death of analog, choose one).

We all have individual listening tastes, favoring some shows over others. So it doesn't seem too difficult to ask specialist collectors to re-master what they personally like, first, to avoid unnecessary replication of labor. This, friends, is brain-addled wishful thinking. These last 20 years in OTR have shown me that cooperation among Hobbyists indeed extends only so far. Then the dark side of OTR surfaces, along with some very real personality types, which novice collectors only suspect are there:

Cheap Charlie: Technology's changing every day, right? So why buy tomorrow's planned obsolescence? Besides: why re-master into any digital medium...and then have to do it all over again, when they do give us a true permanent medium?

Myron Myopic: This digital recording thing is just a fad, anyway, so why even think about historical preservation? Analog is here to stay: my repair tech told me so, even if he does have spare parts on back order.

Tommy Technobabble: Digital technology is hot, it's state of the art! If it's new, and costs a lot, it's just got to be good!

Squabbler ben-Anything: Digital? bah! I'm against it! It wasn't my idea, and besides, if I can't lead the parade to digital, then the whole idea just has to be worthless.

Scrooge McProgram: Serves you people right, if digital wipes you all out. I've spent years finding uncirculated material, and now you're

saying I've got to let you save it, in digital? Don't you mean trade it or sell it in digital? I'd sooner die in boiling head cleaner fluid, than allow you common rabble to get my shows!

Festus Jayhawker VonCopyright: I'm delighted! I'll copyright those re-mastered shows in my own name, then file nuisance-suits against my competition, while I dominate the market. I love digital!

Average Q. Collector: I'm running short on time to re-master into any digital medium. So do I let my collection die, when I do...or am I supposed to spend my kids college money, on equipment?

Whats Ahead?

The exhilarating, sweet 40-year ride of analog OTR is now about to end, for an admitted Hobby Minority who are looking beyond their own collections to attracting future hobbyists. The self-serving modern recording industry will protect modern copyrighted material, simply by forcing all home recordists to buy new (SCMS-equipped) equipment. Serial Copy Management System technology will become the Ultimate Ugly Truth about OTR in our digital future. SCMS stops any serial copy (third generation or more)...and to acquire another copy, you must again use that first-generation grand master...provided that you actually have it or know who does. This, above all other factors, is the ultimate danger to Old Time Radio program collecting.

Working from a purely analog source is hardly any better. If your digital recorders SCMS circuits can't find a digital source encoding-flag, your new digital grand master is given exactly the same code as a commercial CD or DAT release. From this you can record digital-to-digital copies, but each one has that same no-further-copies coding.

Doesn't sound too bad, does it? The grim reality is that trading OTR material becomes severely curtailed, searching for collectors whose digital grand masters will allow that one

additional copy: yours. And even then, you inadvertently become Scrooge McProgram, because even if you wanted to, you can't copy your master for others...unless it came directly off an analog master. The nature of the OTR beast is that any given analog recording passes through several collectors (and/or collector/dealers) before you get your copy. Unless you know who actually holds the unrestricted copies SCMS-code grand master, you won't acquire a copy you can trade.

In 2010 A.D., how many owners of digital recording devices will also have analog playback equipment in proper working order much less know where that same equipment can be fixed, if it does break down? By then, another Scrooge McProgram might well exist: Sure, you want a direct-from-analog master that'll let you make any number of copies? What's it worth to you?

In that light, our cynical engineer at CBS/Sony was far more correct than he ever dreamed. Perhaps only the OTR music collectors (big bands, major vocalists, etc.) will see those commercial releases...while the rest of OTRdom will see itself unable to acquire new material at all, unless and until someone does put out a few commercial releases (and only a few).

That, *mein freund*, is what's ahead for Old Time Radio program collecting strictly from the equipment side. Even scarier, the absolutely immutable truth that future listeners will treat analog-mastered anything exactly the same as you and I treat a wire recording. There is the savage irony that even if we do beat SCMS and acquire digital recordings we can trade, future listeners will flatly reject OTR material for its fidelity and not its content.

Time, the implacable enemy to us all, is against us. With a re-mastering project of more than 20 man-years, itself bad enough, comes the breathtaking advances in recorded sound that will lure the next generation of potential OTR program collectors away from the OTR

hobby. In 20 years we'll hear: My dad used to have a lot of that old analog junk, but I threw it away. And if you think that's exaggeration: how many Victrola disks do you own and still play?

So you are far more unique than you ever imagined, by collecting Old Time Radio programs. You not only are one in about 5,000 who does collect these priceless scraps of history. . .but also are about to be among the final generation to do so. . .unless we collectively act now.

Although our children may believe otherwise, we are not **Old Fogeys** who know nothing. . .and never will. For starters, we know there is profound truth in that statement, A mind is a terrible thing to waste. And the avid fan of Old Time Radio knows probably better than anyone else alive that we CAN recruit tomorrow's collectors, if we only meet them on their own terms.

You and only you can answer the question, How much did your imagination blossom, from Old Time Radio? Don't we owe it to society's heirs (if not our own) to acquaint them, too, with the Theater of the Mind? SCMS, aimed purely at modern copyrighted material, freezes out the great programs of the past, which were seldom copyrighted (or whose copyrights have since fallen into public domain). SCMS, unless we act now, will also freeze our contributions to historical preservation.

I, for one, am scared silly by digital remastering and by the idea that Tommy Technobabble might convince me to buy a recording system which won't survive even the time to bring lo-fi into the digital age. Yet without at least a few of us willing to take that first step (and quickly). . .that 20-year re-mastering process won't be done before analog playback equipment becomes a museum artifact. . .and the recordings only junk in a landfill, thanks to hi-fi heirs.

We do have knowledgeable professionals in broadcasting and audio engineering already within the OTR hobby. They need to combine their talents now, to give us straight-

forward technical advice for less technically-minded OTR hobbyists, so we too can chart our own journey to our digital future. We need professional advice, on how to keep the baby, while someone else is forcing us to throw out the bath water.

We need to know a legal way to coexist with the RIAA, to avoid SCMS by legitimate means. . .perhaps an archival DAT system, say 32 KHz sampling rate, with a mandatory bandwidth ceiling pegged at 12KHz. . .well below today's copyrighted DDD material. . .and well below even today's analog FM. For lack of a better name: OTR/digital. But to get it, we need lobbyists and others who can educate the RIAA that our hobby is not one of piracy. . .and that the RIAA does not have to make us walk the aural plank.

We also need to cooperate. . .**Scrooge McProgram be damned.** It was no less devastating to leave analog recording behind than to battle those relatively wealthy souls with truly rare material, who do have the money to afford studio-grade analog equipment. . .long after it's off the consumer market. These people will be able to afford to play the waiting game that you and I cannot. . .and they'll be a formidable challenge, if we are to salvage those programs from the inexorable ravages of time.

We average collectors can argue among ourselves and procrastinate and Old Time Radio will die when we do. Or you and I can do what the Library of Congress cannot: collectively remaster our programs, by spreading costs over a Hobby-wide basis. By doing so, we can tickle the imaginations of listeners unborn. . .giving them the same priceless enjoyment that OTR has given you and me.

We cannot surrender. Nor can we say, Let George Do It, and hope some other guy will bring lo-fi into the hi-fi digital age. We all must sit down NOW and actively cold bloodedly plan for the death of analog audio.

After all: these are the 1990s. **Lo-fi in a hi-fi age simply won't do.**

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The following section is the most popular piece on www.brcradio.com

h. AFRS AND AFRTS — THE FORGOTTEN SOURCE

by Bob Proctor
(from Listening Post)

The U.S. military's **Armed Forces Radio Service (AFRS)** provided superb wartime radio entertainment programming to U.S. troops, and, later, to their dependents overseas. **AFRS** later became the **American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS)**, but is presently again called **AFRS**.

Most AFRS material originated from U.S. civilian radio networks. CBS and NBC were major suppliers, with ABC coming onboard about 1947. AFRTS also imported Australia's *The Eleventh Hour* and *Walk Softly*, Peter Troy, and the BBC series *The Black Museum* and the *Gielgud/Richardson* run of *Sherlock Holmes* (this last an NBC donation).

Content was generally terrific. AFRS' enduring mark on Old Time Radio was its all-star wartime series *Command Performance*, which became the benchmark for all live radio performances by Hollywood and Broadway performers. Stellar casts of all-volunteers answered requests from active-duty listeners, and *Command Performance* is now regarded as the true start of Bob Hope's legendary Christmas specials (which were also aired by all four U.S. networks).

Certain differences do exist between civilian and AFRS/AFRTS programs. To avoid the appearance of endorsing commercial products, AFRS/AFRTS routinely deleted original commercials, and also changed series titles bearing a sponsor's name. (The *Jell-O Program* became *The Jack Benny Show*, to name just one example.) AFRS/AFRTS also substituted musical fills at programs' ends, to remove the common civilian-network practice of promoting other series in the network line-up.

A few of the AFRS/AFRTS commercials used to replace civilian spots are well worth hearing. Jack Webb did a long-running series of military security spots, and then-sgt. Howard Duff and Jeff Chandler also did a wide array of military-oriented announcements. Frequent other subjects ranged from American history, home towns, military awards, and courtesy tips when dealing with foreign nationals. Ongoing series of spots included "Joe and Daphne Forsythe," plugging U.S. Savings Bonds, and educational or health programs. These included SGLI -the Servicemen's Group Life Insurance program; USAFI -the U.S. Armed Forces Institute; or CHAMPUS — the Comprehensive Health and Medical Program in the United States (the military version of Medicaid for dependents). The "home town" spots in particular rank among the finest brief histories of cities ever done for radio.

Today, AFRS is located near Los Angeles and mostly provides programs by satellite, to hundreds of affiliates worldwide, ashore and at sea. Among these are Frank Bresee's excellent Old Time Radio rebroadcast series *The Golden Days of Radio*. In the 1970s, other rebroadcast series included Martin Halperin's first-rate *Mystery Theatre*, *Playhouse 25*, and *Sagebrush Theatre*. All include material still not released to many collectors.

AFRS/AFRTS versions of circulating programs are generally in much better audio fidelity than civilian copies, if such a show exists at all. Despite having no original commercials (or other minor differences as mentioned above), AFRS/AFRTS is still a major source of OTR material.

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19. Epilogue

The problem with doing a project such as this one is that with today's technology, it's hard to know when to stop! There are volumes and volumes of info addressed in the previous book that I've chosen at least for now, to save for another time. I again realize this doesn't read like any other book, but probably reads more like a magazine. That has occurred out of necessity rather than design.

There are also things I'd like to do that time doesn't allow for with certain deadlines approaching. Perhaps I'll do a supplemental booklet, perhaps a cross index, and maybe if I feel so inclined, try to figure out what shows people are listening to today — and why they STILL do that instead of or in addition to viewing the latest blockbuster (or classic) film feature on DVD in 5.1 or better surround sound on their big screen television.

I am thankful that my lifestyle today has allowed me the time to assemble this material...even if it did come together in sort of a hodge podge fashion, in three different offices in completely different locations.

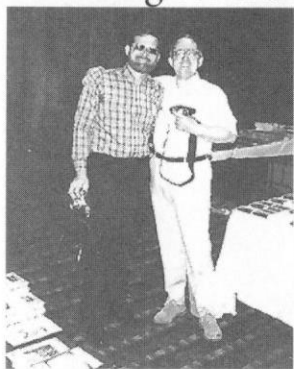
I am most appreciative that you, the reader, made it this far. I hope you've obtained a glimmer of useful information, been amused, perhaps even enlightened, annoyed or outraged. If so, it's a fairly safe bet we'll meet again.

Until then, I must stop and tend to the details that are necessary to complete the process of getting these words in your hands.

Thanks again for listening in. I've decided to stop now.

— Bob Burnham
October 10, 2001

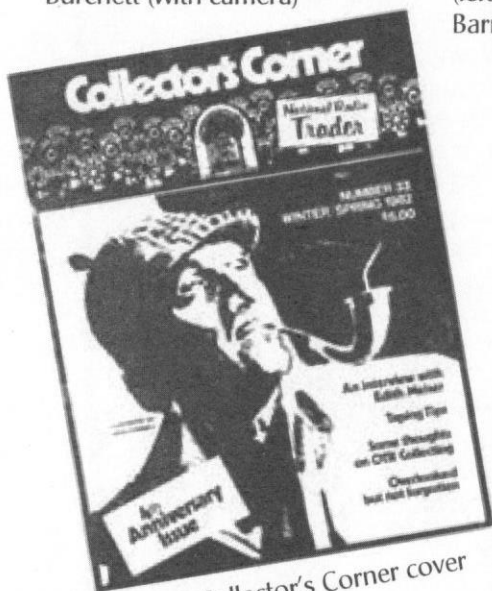
A Technical Guide to Old-time Radio, Recording & Audio Production 2002 Edition



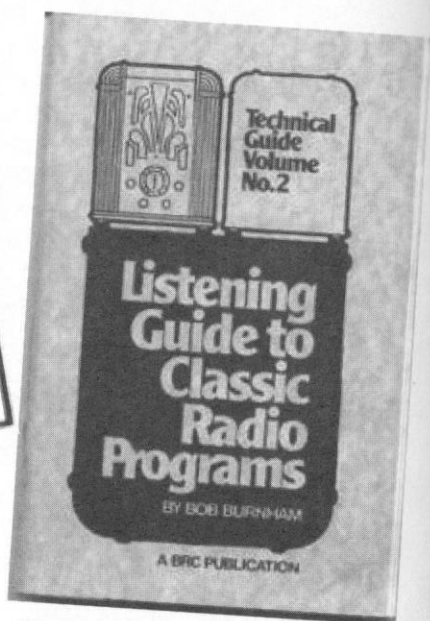
Terry Salomonson (left) and Bob Burchett (with camera)



(left to right) Don Aston, Ron Barnett, Bob Burnham



A 1982 Collector's Corner cover



Previous edition of the "Guide"



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