TEXAS BROADCAST MUSEUM

RETRO TECH

HAPPY BIRTHDAY FROM TEXAS

THE TEXAS BROADCAST MUSEUM TURNS 10!

INSIDE:

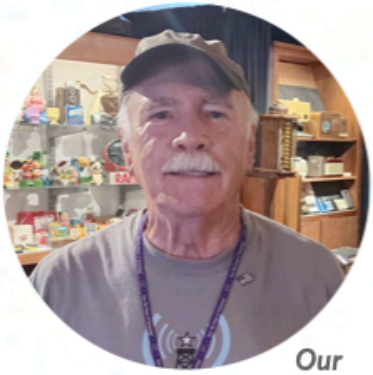
- *TEN YEARS ON THE AIR IN KILGORE, TX
- *THE MOST VALUABLE VINTAGE TELEVISIONS AND RADIOS
- *THE MUSEUM IN PHOTOS



ALWAYS FREE EACH MONTH SEASON 2 | ANNIVERSARY EDITION| SEPTEMBER 2026



Our Founder



Our Co-Founder

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

The Texas Broadcast Museum in Kilgore was founded by collector Chuck Conrad and opened in 2016 to showcase the history of broadcast media from early recordings to modern television. Now 10 years old, the exhibits just keep getting richer and bigger, while the plans keep growing. We hope you enjoy this special Anniversary issue of Retro Tech, where we explain the origins of the Museum and mission, explore the future, and share with you some of the treasures we have, and wish list items we hope to obtain and display. Thanks for 10 memorable years!

* Retro Tech copy editor - Mike Shannon

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Ten Years "On the Air"

The Texas Broadcast Museum Celebrates a Decade of Preserving America's Broadcasting Heritage

What started as one man's lifelong obsession — and a town dump with surprisingly good taste — has become one of the most remarkable broadcasting museums in the country

On September 15, 2016, the doors of a former car dealership on East Main Street in Kilgore, Texas swung open to the public for the first time. Inside, visitors discovered something they had not expected to find in a small East Texas city of 15,000 people: one of the most extraordinary collections of broadcast history in the United States. Fifty television cameras. A 1949 DuMont Telecruiser bus. A camera that had been in the room when Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald. Working radio studios. Edison phonographs. A microphone collection assembled over decades by a man who had received his first mic as a birthday present from his grandfather at the age of ten.

Ten years later, the Texas Broadcast Museum — formally known as the Texas Museum of Broadcasting and Communications — celebrates a milestone that its founder, Chuck Conrad, might have had trouble imagining when he was hauling discarded radios home from the town dump as a boy. The museum has grown from 8,000 square feet of display space to nearly 20,000 square feet across its main building, an additional 8,500-square-foot former newspaper building next door, and a purpose-built outdoor storage facility. It has received artifacts from partner museums in Ohio, Rhode Island, and Maryland. The museum has become a destination for broadcasting professionals, history enthusiasts, and families from across the country, described by Atlas Obscura travel guide as "a true jewel hidden away in East Texas."

It is also, somehow, still run entirely by volunteers.

The Man Behind the Museum

To understand the Texas Broadcast Museum, you have to understand Chuck Conrad — and to understand Chuck Conrad, you have to start at the town dump.

"The town I grew up in didn't have a trash collection service," Conrad recalls, "so you had to take the stuff you couldn't burn to the Town Dump. It was almost a social event, where you would meet other town folks. My father and I would go on a Sunday afternoon. I'd almost always come back with a discarded radio, TV or other electronics."



That childhood habit of rescuing discarded technology never left him. In high school, Conrad worked at a local TV repair shop, where customers who didn't want to pay for repairs would simply hand their sets over to him instead. In college, he worked at radio and television stations in Dallas. After graduating, he went into the live sound business, eventually joining Showco — which became one of the world's largest concert sound and lighting companies — before founding his own firm, Crossroads Audio, which remains in business in Dallas today.

Throughout those decades, his customers kept discovering that he liked old things, and kept bringing



them to him. Microphones. Cameras. Broadcast equipment of every description. When Conrad eventually sold Crossroads Audio, the new owners delivered an ultimatum: get all of this out, or we'll throw it away. It was only then, faced with the task of moving three decades of accumulated broadcast history, that Conrad fully appreciated how much he had gathered.

"I didn't realize how much I'd accumulated over 30+ years until I had to move it," he says. "As I moved things, I took pictures of the items, which eventually became the 'virtual museum.' One thing sort of led to another."

That virtual museum went online around 2000. The physical museum opened in Kilgore sixteen years later. The rest, as they say in broadcasting, is history.

The Crown Jewel: The DuMont Telecruiser

Ask Chuck Conrad which piece in the museum is his personal favorite, and he doesn't hesitate.

"That's probably the DuMont Telecruiser, since I had about 10 years of my life tied up in getting it and restoring it."

The Telecruiser is a 1949 mobile television production facility built into a Fixible bus — the first one DuMont ever built, originally purchased by what became KBTV Channel 8 in Dallas for the sum of $96,000. Configured for three cameras and capable of full live remote television production, it was in active use until 1972 and passed through the hands of a Kilgore oil family before Conrad tracked it down and paid Mrs. Terry $2,500 for it — plus another $500 to $600 to have it trucked to his east Texas home.



The 1949 DuMont Telecruiser as it looked when it was "rescued"

Then the restoration began. Conrad has a file folder full of receipts from that process. He has never added them up. "People ask me how much it cost to restore it," he says. "The answer is, 'I don't know.' I have a file folder full of receipts, but I've never had any desire to add them up."

The finished Telecruiser — described by visitors as the pride and joy of the museum — sits at the heart of the collection, a rolling monument to the ingenuity of early television production and the ten years of one man's life that went into bringing it back.



Pride and Joy: The Founder of the Texas Broadcast Museum - Chuck Conrad and the restored DuMont Telecruiser

A Few of the Highlights On Display

The scope of the museum's collection is, by any measure, staggering. Visitors entering the building on East Main Street step into a world that spans nearly a century of broadcasting history, organized not as a dry archive but as an active, navigable experience.

There are approximately 117 television cameras, several connected to switchers and monitors so visitors can see them in operation. There are working radio studios representing three distinct eras — one featuring a 1936 RCA console from WOAI in San Antonio, another with 1980s gear from KLBJ Radio in Austin. The DJ booth that was among the museum's original exhibits is still in use today. A fully functional television news and weather set invites visitors to stand behind the desk and read a teleprompter.

Among the historically significant artifacts:

- The KRLD-TV camera that was present in the Dallas police basement on November 24, 1963, when Jack Ruby shot Lee Harvey Oswald — an object that has been part of the museum's collection since the beginning and draws-invisitors who want to stand in the presence of history.



- A camera used in the production of ABC's *American Bandstand* in Los Angeles.
- A mixing board built for noted musician and vocalist James Taylor.
- One of ESPN's first mobile studio units, which cost a considerable sum to transport from Rhode Island to Kilgore and, Conrad admits, "the expense took a while to get over."



- A 1956 Ampex VR-1000 videotape recorder — one of the first professional video recorders ever made — donated by a New York museum, and delivered at roughly a dollar a pound for its four-thousand-pound journey to east Texas.

The museum also has a growing collection that reflects the full arc of recorded sound, from Edison phonographs through wire recorders, reel-to-reel machines, and home stereo equipment. A large microphone collection — reflecting Conrad's lifelong passion for the instruments that have carried human voices across the airwaves — remains a centerpiece.

And currently under construction, in a former laundry and utility room that represents the last available ground-floor space in the building: a replica mid-centruy era radio and television repair shop, scheduled to join the museum's exhibits in the near future.



How It Was Built

The museum opened to the public in September, 2016, but the project had been underway for several years before that. Conrad's core collaborators in those early days included co-founder Warren Willard, whose radio and Philco Predicta collections formed a significant part of the initial display; Jim Allen; Bryan Black; Gary Mason; and Conrad's wife, Diane. Phil Patterson joined shortly after opening. Dana Pearce, who had moved from Dallas to Kilgore just before the museum opened, came aboard readily. Scottie Rice became a major donor of old broadcast equipment.



Warren Willard as we imagine him with his radio collection

"Unfortunately, both Gary and Jim had the audacity to die," Conrad says, with the dry affection of someone who misses them, "so they are no longer with us, but maybe in spirit."

The museum owns its building outright and carries no debt — a deliberate and, Conrad believes, essential decision. "Most museums that fail do so because they do not own their real estate," he observes. "It wouldn't have been possible to get it started in a bigger city due to real estate costs." The choice of Kilgore, which some have questioned over the years — suggestions to relocate to Dallas, Los Angeles, or San Antonio have been floated and declined — was driven by practicality, affordability, and the basic fact that Conrad lives nearby. It has proven to be a sound one.



Phil "Mr. Fix-It" Patterson

The museum has built genuine partnerships with peer institutions across the country: the Early Television Foundation in Ohio, the Museum of Broadcast Technology in Rhode Island (whose staff has personally transported equipment to Kilgore and helped set it up), the National Capital Museum in Maryland, and the Museum of Radio and Technology in West Virginia. A recent large equipment donation went to the Texas Archive of the Moving Image in Austin.

"This is not a contest," Conrad says of the relationship with peer museums. "These people have all become friends, and we try to help each other."

The Next Ten Years

As the museum marks its tenth anniversary — likely to be celebrated on the weekend following the September 15 date, and perhaps tied to the 55th anniversary of the first CBS color television broadcast, which falls around the same time of year — Conrad is thinking about what comes next.

His wish list is characteristically specific: more space (recently fulfilled with the acquisition of a 21,000 squaret foot building next door to the museum); an early CBS mechanical color television, of which very few were ever made and practically none survive; and anything connected to DuMont, the pioneering television network for which the museum has become something of a natural home.



Screen capture of the first CBS color broadcast on June 25, 1951

Conrad is also thinking about permanence. "I'm currently working on endowment plans to ensure that it has a life past my time on Earth," he says. The museum will eventually need a paid executive director. The volunteer board and its all-volunteer staff, who have built something remarkable over the past decade, will need support to sustain it.

"I hope I'm still around by then," he says of 2036. "It is already one of the largest museums of its kind, and I think it will continue to grow."

Given what Conrad has already accomplished — starting from a town dump on Sunday afternoons with his father, through a career in live sound and broadcast equipment, through decades of collecting and restoring and preserving — there seems little reason to doubt him.



CBS Camera and Production crew with the new CBS Color camera

Plan Your Visit

The Texas Broadcast Museum is located at 416 East Main Street in downtown Kilgore, Texas, approximately 120 miles east of Dallas and 72 miles west of Shreveport, Louisiana, just minutes from Interstate 20. The museum is open Fridays and Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sundays from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Group visits and special tours are available by appointment.

For information, call (903) 985-8115 or visit txmbc.org

Volunteers, donors, sponsors, and anyone with vintage broadcast equipment that is looking for a good home are always welcome to reach out to us.

Here We Grow Again!

Kilgore's Broadcast Museum Is Expanding — Next Door



The Texas Broadcast Museum in Kilgore has outgrown its home, and this summer it did something about it. The museum, known for its sprawling collection of vintage radios, television cameras, and broadcast memorabilia, has purchased a 21,000-square-foot building next door to its current location on East Main Street, giving it badly needed room for a growing assortment of donated equipment.

Museum founder Chuck Conrad told KLTV's Jamey Boyum that the museum's existing building, itself 19,000 square feet, has simply run out of room for the large, heavy artifacts that keep arriving. Conrad has a term for the problem: the donated gear, he said, is "gravitationally challenged." History, it turns out, weighs a lot.

Despite sitting right next door, the new building won't truly be part of the museum's exhibit space. "This isn't going to be a museum," Conrad said. "This is actually going to be a retail store. believe it or not, as well as light manufacturing where we will actually repair stuff. It's going to give us great shop space and a lot of storage."

The building itself has its own layered history. Originally a Ford dealership, it later housed a clothing manufacturer and, after that, a prison uniform maker. Conrad plans to lean into that showroom heritage: the old car sales floor will become the museum's new retail storefront, selling the kind of electronics that RadioShack once carried on Main Streets everywhere. "There is no physical RadioShack store anymore," Conrad noted, framing the shop as filling a gap left behind when the chain all but disappeared.

Much of what will stock the shelves is already sitting in the museum's back rooms. Conrad said the museum regularly receives duplicates of items already on



display, and, rather than let those pieces gather dust in storage, the museum plans to sell them. "In a way to raise funds for the museum and also to get the stuff in the hands of people who will appreciate it, we're going to have a display of products in here that we deem saleable," he said. One room in the new building will become a hi-fi demonstration space, wired with amplifiers, turntables, speakers, and tape decks that visitors can actually listen to before buying. The back of the building, formerly a garment-cutting room, will be converted into the repair shop itself, with the very rear of the building set aside as a delivery and receiving area.





As for demand, Conrad isn't worried about filling the space. He recalled being skeptical the first time the museum expanded into its current building. "The scary thing is, you know, the other building when we first got it, I said, 'oh we'll never fill this up'. Wrong," he said. True to form, the offers keep coming: Conrad said a Dallas TV station preparing to move to a new building has already been in touch about donating its old equipment once the move happens. The museum is aiming to have the new retail shop open to the public by November 1.

The expansion is the latest chapter in a busy year for the museum. Earlier in 2026, retired broadcast engineer Jerry Whitaker donated and helped assemble a working vintage radio studio built from late-1970s and early-1980s equipment — much of it salvaged for free from stations that were ready to throw it away, with the museum expected to cover only the shipping costs. That project gave visitors a hands-on sense of what it felt like to sit behind the board as a DJ decades ago.



Together, the studio build-out and the new building next door reflect the same instinct that has driven the Texas Broadcast Museum since its founding: as broadcasting stations across Texas modernize and clear out their back rooms, Kilgore is becoming the place where that history lands, gets repaired, and — soon — may find a second life in someone else's living room. As Conrad put it, only half-jokingly: "People seem to think we're the Salvation Army of old electronic equipment anyway. People dropoff stuff all the time."



THE CROWN JEWELS OF TELEVISION

What Is the Most Valuable Vintage Television Set in the World — and How Many Still Exist?

In the rarefied world of television collecting, a handful of sets have transcended mere nostalgia to become genuine artifacts of history. The debate over which one sits at the top of the throne is more complicated — and more fascinating — than you might expect.

Pick up a television remote tonight and consider for a moment that the device you're pointing at the screen is the descendant of an object so rare and fragile that fewer than 500 examples of the earliest models survive anywhere on Earth. The history of the television set is, among other things, a history of spectacular attrition: millions were made, used, discarded, and destroyed. What remains is a tiny fraction of what once existed — and a small community of passionate collectors and curators who have spent their lives preserving it.



Within that community, the question of which television set is the most valuable provokes genuine debate. The answer depends, as it always does in the collector world, on how you define "valuable" — and on whether you mean monetarily, historically, or simply in terms of sheer irreplaceability.

The 1939 General Electric HM-185 pre-war set with a 5" cathode ray tube

The Undisputed Champion:
The RCA TRK-12 Phantom Teleceiver



Original Phantom Teleceiver from the 1939 World's Fair

On April 30, 1939, David Sarnoff, president of the Radio Corporation of America, stepped to a podium outside RCA's pavilion at the New York World's Fair — a building designed in the shape of a giant vacuum tube — and declared that a new industry was born. Inside the pavilion, fairgoers encountered something that stopped them cold: a television set whose cabinet was made entirely of clear Lucite, allowing visitors to inspect every component from all sides. The message was deliberate. RCA wanted no one to suspect trickery.

This was the Phantom Teleceiver — a special version of RCA's TRK-12 model built specifically for the World's Fair to introduce television to North America. The TRK-12 had an unusual design for its era: its cathode ray tube was positioned vertically, projecting an image upward onto a 12-inch mirror mounted on the underside of the hinged cabinet lid. Viewers watched the reflected image rather than the tube directly. With its transparent Lucite cabinet revealing all of these internal workings, it was simultaneously a technological demonstration and a piece of theater.



1939 World's Fair visitors flock to get a look at the Phantom Teleceiver - the first glimpse of TV for most

There was only one ever made.

The Phantom Teleceiver is now considered the rarest television on the planet. It was made of clear Lucite, in order to show the public that no trickery was used to produce television. Today, it resides at the MZTV Museum of Television in Toronto, the personal collection of Canadian media executive Moses Znaimer. It is insured for one million dollars. An independent appraisal cited in museum documents places its value at five million dollars. Znaimer's own collection database notes that the Phantom Teleceiver "stands alone" artifact whose historical provenance places it beyond ordinary valuation methods.

One exists. Only one will ever exist. The debate, at this level, ends here.

The Runner-Up Debate: Pre-War Sets and the 450 Survivors

Below the singular Phantom Teleceiver, the conversation becomes considerably more interesting — because the question of value opens up into questions of rarity, condition, provenance, and the kind of historical significance that money struggles to fully capture.

There are only about 450 surviving pre-war TV sets in the world. They're very rare. A few turn up each year that we didn't know about. That figure, from Steve McVoy, founder of the Early Television Museum in Hilliard, Ohio — who has spent twenty-five years studying the field — represents the entire global population of television sets manufactured before the United States entered World War II in December 1941. Every set made after the war is, by comparison, relatively common. Those 450 are the genuine rarities.

The Standard RCA TRK-12 (1939)

The production version of the World's Fair television — in its standard walnut cabinet rather than the unique Lucite housing — is the set most collectors identify as the prestige piece of the American pre-war market. After circuit revisions and minor cabinet alterations, only the 9-inch and 12-inch versions were re-released in 1940, and renamed TRK-90 and TRK-120.

Research suggests no more than 120 American-made pre-war sets are left in existence today. The original TRK-12 price was $600 — equivalent to nearly $13,000 today — which meant that, in 1939, buying a television was roughly equivalent to purchasing a decent used car. Unsurprisingly, very few people did. Only about 600 units were sold in the first year. Of those, an unknown but very small number survive in working condition. At auction, a standard TRK-12 in good condition commands prices well into five figures.



RCA TRK-12 on Display at the Early Television Museum in Hillard, Ohio.

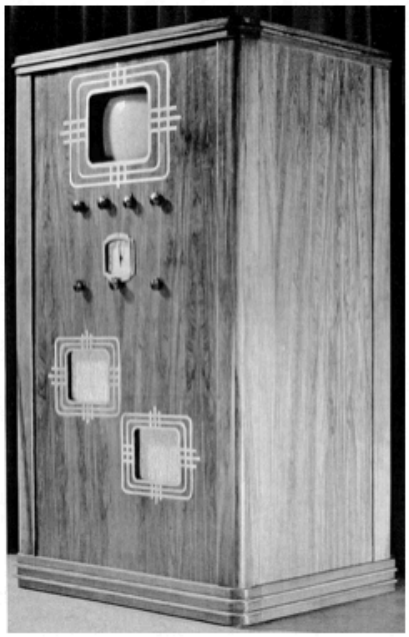
The Baird Televisor (1928–1930)

The earliest commercially-available television in the world was not American, but British: the Baird Televisor, the mechanical television system developed by Scottish inventor John Logie Baird and sold beginning in 1928. The Televisor used a spinning Nipkow disc to produce a rudimentary image — ghostly, low-resolution, nothing like what RCA would demonstrate a decade later, but genuinely functional and genuinely sold to the public. An original Baird Televisor in excellent condition can sell for as much as $20,000. They are not numerous; fewer than a handful of working examples are known to exist outside institutional collections.

The Baird Televisor makes a credible claim to being the most historically significant surviving television — it predates American electronic television by over a decade — though in purely monetary terms, it sits below the RCA pre-war electronic sets.



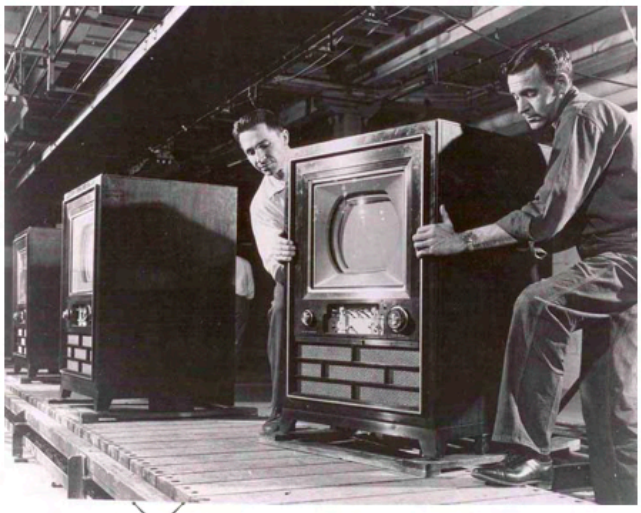
Baird Televisor on Display at the National Science and Media Museum: in Bradford, UK



The Farnsworth Pre-War Sets

Philo Farnsworth, the Idaho farm boy who invented electronic television and spent years in patent battles with RCA, manufactured a small number of television sets through his own company in the late 1930s and early 1940s. These are among the rarest American sets in existence. Totally original pre-war Farnsworth TVs run $16,000–$20,000 when they surface, which is not often. The MZTV Museum in Toronto, Canada holds what is believed to be the most significant surviving Farnsworth collection, including artifacts from his laboratory. Steve McVoy of the Early Television Museum has said that only three Farnsworth television sets built by the inventor himself are known to survive, all already in institutional collections. If a fourth appeared, he said, the museum would go to its donors immediately.

The RCA Victor CT-100 (1954) Moving out of the pre-war era and into the question of the most valuable color television, the consensus pick is the RCA Victor CT-100 — the first mass-produced color television set sold to American consumers, introduced in 1954 at a price of $1,000 (roughly $11,500 today). The CT-100 has a 12-inch screen and a cabinet that looks more like a piece of laboratory equipment than living room furniture, which rather suited the novelty of what it was doing. Functional units can fetch between $5,000 and $20,000, depending on condition. Working examples are notably scarce; the color circuits of early color sets are notoriously difficult to restore, and finding one that produces an actual color picture is the collector's equivalent of finding a unicorn.





The RCA Victor CT-100s on the factory assembly line in 1954



ONLY 25 WORKING RCA CT-100'S (PICTURED ON THE LEFT) ARE KNOWN TO SURVIVE. THE TEXAS BROADCAST MUSEUM HAS TWO IN THE RESTORATION PROCESS & ONE ON LOAN

The Design Icon Category: The Philco Predicta

Any serious discussion of valuable vintage televisions eventually arrives at the Philco Predicta — not because it is the rarest or the oldest, but because it is the most beautiful, the most distinctive, and the most culturally embedded television ever manufactured.

Introduced in 1958, the Predicta was Philco's bold reimagining of what a television set could look like. In an era when most sets were boxy wooden cabinets, the Predicta separated the picture tube from the chassis — mounting the screen on a swiveling neck atop a sleek base, giving it the appearance of a space-age periscope. Multiple variants were produced: table models, pedestal models, the Holiday, the Princess, the Tandem (in which the screen sat on a 25-foot cable, completely detached from the chassis). Each was visually extraordinary.

A mint condition Predicta sells for more than many cars. The rarest variants — the Barber Pole console, the Siesta, the Tandem with its complete original cable — can command prices from $3,000 to well over $10,000 depending on model and condition. Predictas have appeared in advertising, in museum design collections, and in the personal collections of architects and industrial designers who prize them as mid-century objects as much as as televisions.

Moses Znaimer, whose encounter with a Philco Predicta Pedestal in the late 1960s launched his entire collecting career, once described it as the most beautiful television ever made. He has since acquired most of the known variants. That assessment, from one of the world's most knowledgeable television collectors, carries weight.

Philco Predicta Display at the Texas Broadcast Museum - Yes, they are all restored!



Item In The TEXAS BROADCAST MUSEUM

How Many Survive? The Numbers in Context

To put the rarity of the most valuable sets in perspective:

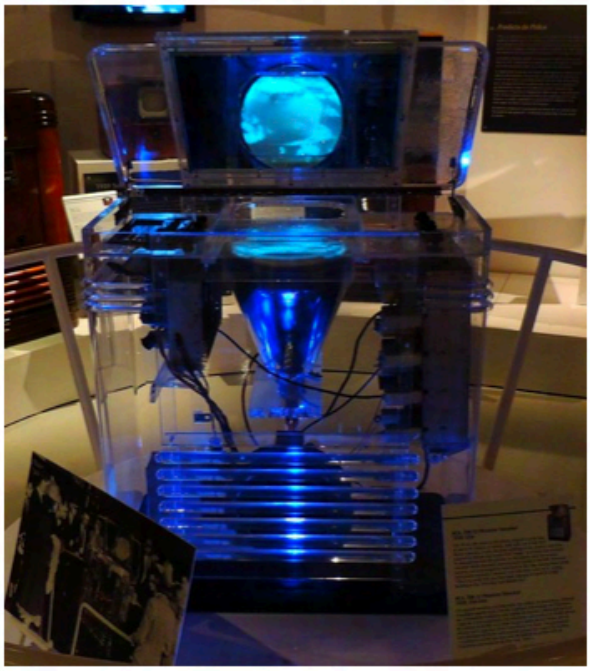
The pre-war American electronic television sets, in all models combined, number approximately 450 surviving examples worldwide. Of those, fewer than 120 are believed to be the RCA TRK-9 and TRK-12 models from the World's Fair era. Farnsworth sets number in the single digits for institutional-quality examples. The Baird Televisor has perhaps a dozen working examples known globally.

Collectors draw a sharp distinction between vintage pre-war and post-war television sets, as very few of the former were manufactured and only a few hundred still survive.

The Phantom Teleceiver stands entirely alone: one object, one provenance, one value.

For post-war sets, the picture is somewhat less bleak. The RCA CT-100 was produced in larger numbers but remains genuinely scarce in working condition. The Philco Predicta, produced from 1958 to 1960, exists in several hundred surviving examples across all variants — but mint, unrestored, fully functional examples of the rarest models remain genuinely difficult to find.

The Verdict



If the question is purely monetary, the answer is the RCA TRK-12 Phantom Teleceiver at the MZTV Museum in Toronto: one of a kind, appraised at up to five million dollars, insured for one million, and not available at any price.

If the question is historical significance, the answer is a legitimate three-way debate between the Phantom Teleceiver, the Baird Televisor — the oldest commercially sold television in the world — and a surviving Farnsworth set, representing the work of the man who actually invented electronic television. and spent the rest of his life watching RCA take the credit.

If the question is which set a collector with serious resources and serious knowledge would most want to find in an estate sale, the answer is almost certainly a working pre-war RCA TRK-12 in original condition, followed closely by a mint Philco Predicta Barber Pole or Continental console or a surviving CT-100 that still produces a color picture.

And if the question is which television set best embodies what made the medium itself so remarkable — the audacity of the idea, the beauty of the engineering, and the sheer improbability that it worked at all — the answer, almost everyone in the collector community agrees, is the clear Lucite box that stopped fairgoers cold in Flushing Meadows on a spring afternoon in 1939.

One exists. It is in Toronto. And, according to the people who have appraised it, no amount of money currently offered would move it.

Collectors interested in vintage television sets are directed to the Early Television Foundation (earlytelevision.org), the MZTV Museum of Television in Toronto (mztv.com), and the ***Texas Broadcast Museum in Kilgore, Texas*** *(txmbc.org), which holds one of the most significant collections of broadcast-era television equipment in the United States.*

THE TOP 10 MOST VALUABLE VINTAGE TVs



1) A vintage **Baird Televisor (1930)** mechanical television is typically worth **$12,000-$25,000** at specialized auction houses, with exceptionally rare models or pristine working units occasionally fetching **over $30,000**



2) RCA CT-100 (1954): The holy grail of vintage color sets. Fully working units in pristine condition sell for **$8,000 to $12,000+** due to their historical 15-inch color matrix and extreme scarcity (only about 25 working units are known to survive)



3) Prewar Electronic Sets (e.g., GE HM-185): Ultra-rare television receivers manufactured right before World War II regularly fetch **$8,000 to $20,000+** depending on cabinet condition and original chassis intactness



4) RCA TRK-12 (1939): One of the most famous pre-war console televisions, valued between **$6,000 and $8,000** for good-to-mint surviving examples



5) Bang & Olufsen BeoVision MX 8000 (2002): The final and most advanced CRT in B&O's iconic design series, fetching up to **$4,999** on the secondary market among retro gaming enthusiasts

THE TOP 10 MOST VALUABLE VINTAGE TVS (CONTINUED)



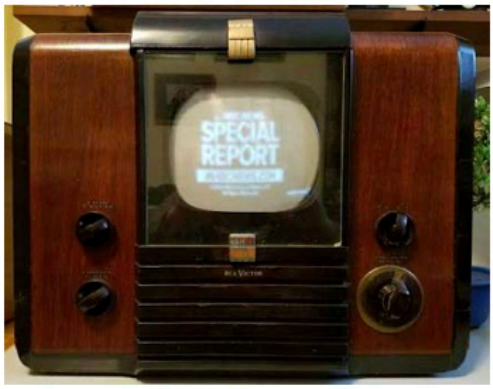
6) Sony Trinitron KV-3000R (1981): A luxury wood-veneer console featuring a massive 30-inch screen and Tamo ash wood finish, with units commanding **several thousand dollars** when available



7) Panasonic TR-005 "Orbital" CRT (1970s): This space-age, helmet-shaped portable TV is a modernist icon often trading for **$1,000 to $2,500** depending on the base and condition



8) Bang & Olufsen BeoVision MX 4200 (2003–2007): Highly sought-after retro gaming CRT TVs that regularly sell for around **$2,849**



9) RCA 621TS (1946): Highly prized for its styling and historical significance as an early post-war consumer set, fetching high collector premiums in restored condition



10) TIE: Hoffman TV Bar (1950s): Vintage units repurposed or kept in atomic-era cabinets sell for upwards of **$1,300**

*__Note -__ Many of the restored **Philco Predicta** sets from 1958-1960 can fetch prices from $1,500 (**Debutante** model) to over $5,000 (**Contiental** model), bur are less rare thanthe sets listed above. Also the **Admiral 10" Bakelite Mini-Console (1948):** A mid-century classic with strong collector value, routinely commanding **strong hundreds to low thousands** depending on restoration grade



THE GOLDEN AGE, PRICED

WHAT MAKES A VINTAGE RADIO WORTH A FORTUNE

There's a particular kind of magic in an old radio's glow — the soft amber light of vacuum tubes warming up, the static and crackle before a station locks in. For most of us, that's nostalgia; however, for a dedicated community of collectors, it's also serious money. While the average console gathering dust in a basement might fetch $50 to $150 at an estate sale, a handful of rare sets have sold for tens of thousands of dollars. Here's a tour through the radios that command the highest prices, and the reasons collectors will pay a premium for them.

The Catalin Kings

If there's one category that dominates every "most valuable" conversation, it's Catalin radios. Catalin is a colorful thermoset plastic used mainly in tabletop radio cabinets during the late 1930s and early 1940s, prized today for its jewel-toned reds, greens, blues, and butterscotch hues. Unlike the drab brown Bakelite used in mass-market sets, Catalin was cast in vivid colors that have aged into a warm, marbled patina collectors find irresistible.

The material's popularity is also its curse: Catalin is brittle, shrinks over decades, and cracks easily, so surviving examples in pristine condition are scarce. That scarcity is exactly why Catalin radios in vivid colors like red, yellow, green, and blue can sell for anywhere from $500 to $5,000 depending on the specific model and color combination. The rarer color combinations push prices even higher — some auction results for exceptional pieces have reached $10,000 or more for the most desirable Catalin sets.



Fada, short for Frank Angelo D'Andrea, is the name most associated with top-tier Catalin design. The company's F55 tabletop model, an early-1940s piece with a clean Art Deco layout, a horizontal grille, and a square dial window, is especially sought after in rarer color pairings like emerald green and yellow. The brand's famous "Bullet" design is another standout in the field, with rare color examples commanding four-figure sums and up.



Frank Angelo D'Andrea - Father of the Catalin Radio Design

The Console Aristocracy

While tabletop novelties get most of the attention for their looks, the true blue-chip investments in this hobby tend to be large wooden console radios from the 1930s — the furniture-sized centerpieces that once anchored American living rooms.



1930's Zenith Stratosphere

The undisputed champion here is the Zenith Stratosphere, a towering multi-tube console from the mid-1930s built with no expense spared. Exceptional examples of the Stratosphere have sold in the $5,000 to $15,000 range, and the finest specimens at major auctions have gone even further, with some reports of sales reaching $10,000 to $30,000 for the best-preserved units. Its reputation as the "holy grail" of console radios comes down to a combination of factors: limited original production numbers, an enormous and complex chassis, and a cabinet design that was ambitious even by Depression-era standards.

Not far behind is the Sparton Nocturne, a striking circular "mirror" console created by industrial designer Walter Dorwin Teague, featuring a large blue mirrored glass panel instead of a conventional wood front. Collectors have speculated it could be the single most valuable radio in existence, with informal estimates in the tens of thousands of dollars — one longtime collector guessed a working example could command something in the neighborhood of $70,000, underscoring just how much rarity and design pedigree can move the needle in this hobby.



1935 Sparton Nocturne Model 1186



Philco's 1937 Model 37-690, nicknamed the "King of Philcos," rounds out the console tier. It's a massive high-fidelity set built around a sophisticated 20-tube chassis with an elaborate speaker array, and it remains a benchmark for collectors chasing engineering ambition rather than just cabinet beauty.

1937 Philco Model 37-960



Small Sets, Big Money

Size doesn't always correlate with value. Some of the most prized radios in the hobby are compact "midget" sets designed to sit on a nightstand or kitchen counter.

The Catalin K-Series radios (K25 through K28) are a good example. Manufactured in Catalin colors ranging from red and green to butterscotch and transparent teal, these radios owe part of their appeal to a distinctive round "clock face" shape that fits neatly into the Art Deco aesthetic collectors chase. Despite measuring only a few inches across, rare color examples of these midget sets can be worth $1,500 or more.

Emerson's "Mae West" — a nickname bestowed by collectors decades after its release, evoking the curvy silhouette of the Hollywood star — and the Emerson 400 "Patriot," a red-white-and-blue Catalin set from the World War II era, are two more small radios whose visual personality has made them worth well beyond their modest size, with values commonly running from several hundred dollars into the low thousands for excellent examples.



1937 Kadette Clockette (Model 25)



Emerson Mae West

Early Radios: Paying for History, Not Just Design

Age carries its own premium, independent of styling. Radios manufactured before 1925, during the earliest years of commercial broadcasting, are valued as much for their historical significance as for their looks. These were often crude, battery-powered sets with exposed components and separate horn speakers rather than built-in cabinets. Because so few survive intact, and because they represent the literal birth of home broadcasting, well-preserved examples from this era can command four-figure prices even when their design is far less flashy than later Art Deco sets.



1940 Emerson Patriot Aristocrat 400 Bakelite radio

What Actually Drives the Price

Across every category, a handful of consistent factors separate a $50 flea-market find from a five-figure auction piece:

Rarity of color and model. For Catalin radios especially, color is everything. A common butterscotch or brown example might sell for a few hundred dollars, while the same model in a rare marbled red or teal can be worth ten times as much.

Condition of the dial glass. The printed dial face — often glass or celluloid — is one of the most fragile parts of any vintage radio. A perfect, uncracked original dial can sometimes be the single most valuable component on an otherwise ordinary set.

Original, matching knobs. Replacement knobs from the wrong era or manufacturer are obvious to experienced collectors and can reduce a radio's value by 15 to 40 percent, even if everything else about the set is excellent.

Working condition. A radio that powers on and plays is worth substantially more than one that doesn't, though the gap isn't as extreme as you might expect. Most vintage sets need their old capacitors replaced before it's safe to power them up at all, so buyers are used to budgeting for that work. A non-working radio with all its original, untouched parts is often preferred over one that's been sloppily repaired with incorrect components.

Design pedigree and nicknames. Sets that have picked up affectionate nicknames over the decades — the Sparton "Nocturne," the Emerson "Mae West," the Philco "Boomerang" — tend to have built-in collector recognition that keeps demand, and prices, high.

Geography. Where a radio is sold matters more than most people expect. Regions settled and developed earlier, like the East Coast and Midwest of the United States, tend to have more vintage radios in circulation, which can moderate prices. In areas where fewer sets survive, the same radio can fetch a noticeably higher price simply due to scarcity of supply.



Philco Transitone Model 49-501 "Boomerang" vaccum tube radio from 1949.

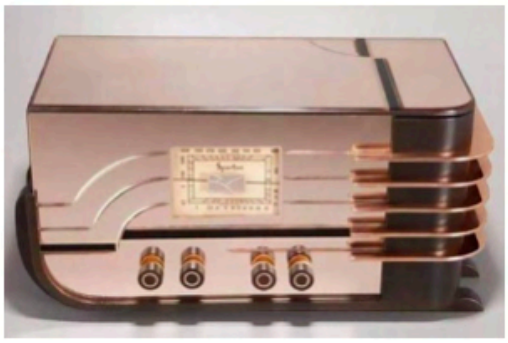
The Bottom Line for Would-Be Collectors

The vintage radio market isn't as frenzied as fine art or vintage watches, but it rewards the same kind of attention to detail: original parts, honest condition, and a documented model history. A dusty Bakelite table radio from the 1950s might be worth just enough for a nice dinner out, but a rare Catalin midget set in the right color, or a museum-quality Zenith Stratosphere, can be worth as much as a car. For collectors, the appeal isn't just financial. Each of these radios is also a small monument to the golden age of design — a reminder that the box in the corner of the living room used to be something people were genuinely proud to look at.

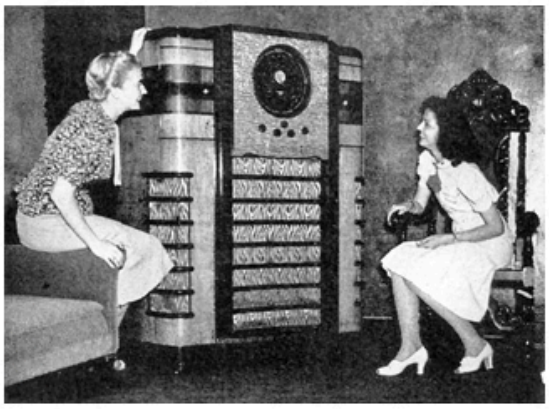
THE TOP 10 MOST VALUABLE VINTAGE RADIOS

1) Zenith Stratosphere (Model 1000Z): Widely considered the "Holy Grail" of antique radios, this 1935 massive 25-tube console with a separate speaker cabinet frequently fetches over **$20,000 to $30,000+** when found intact

2) Sparton Nocturne (Model 1182): Built in 1935 with a striking circular blue mirrored-glass face and chrome finish, this Art Deco masterpiece by Glen Schlageter routinely commands **$20,000+**



3) Sparton Model 557 "Sled" (Green or Rose): The standard blue glass Sled is worth thousands, but ultra-rare green or rose glass variations can command astronomical sums—with elite estimates reaching **$75,000 to $200,000** for a green model. Blue versions typically sell around **$17,500**

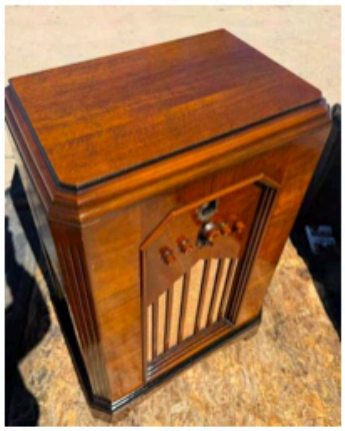


4) Crosley WLW Super Power Radio: Manufactured in 1937 to match the powerhouse 500,000-watt WLW radio station, these massive consoles command upwards of **$15,000 to $20,000**



5) Sparton Model 500C "Cloisonné" Catalin Radio: A 1939 Art Deco cabinet featuring a metallic sky-blue cloisonné front and butterscotch Catalin housing, retailing via specialty dealers around **$17,495**

THE TOP 10 MOST VALUABLE VINTAGE RADIOS (Continued)



6) EH Scott All-Wave Deluxe / Philharmonic: Custom-ordered high-fidelity chrome chassis receivers from the 1930s housed in elaborate custom master cabinets easily fetch **$5,000 to $10,000**+



7) McMurdo Silver Masterpiece (I through VI): Ultra-high-end custom competitor to Scott from the 1930s, prized for massive chrome amplifiers and commanding **$5,000 to $9,000**



8) Fada Model 1000 Catalin "Bullet" (Pastel/Rare Colors): While standard maroons are cheaper, rare color combinations (like blue with yellow/pumpkin trim) reach **$5,700+**



9) Capehart Changer-Radios (e.g., 400 series): Luxury 1930s/40s combination radio-phonographs with complex mechanical record changers sell for **$4,000 to $8,000**



10) Zenith 15-U-273 "Robot Dial" Console: Premium late-1930s high-tube count Zenith receivers with motorized or striking dial layouts fetch **$3,000 to $6,000**

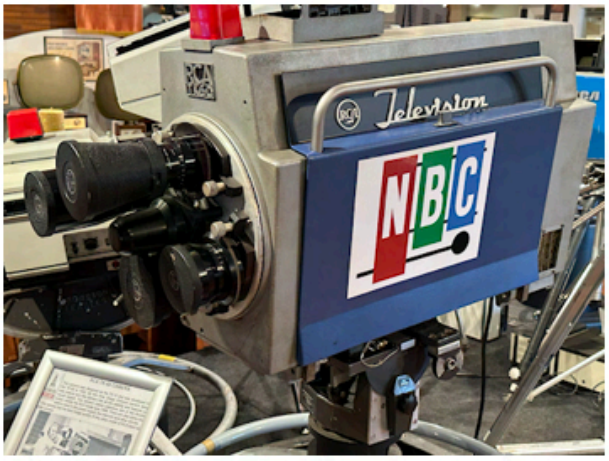
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117 TELEVISION CAMERAS ON DISPLAY









WIRE RECORDERS





100s OF RADIOs







All Shapes and Sizes







All Colors







Radios from the Very Origins of 1920s - 1930s Broadcast

RADIOS FROM AROUND THE WORLD



3 Walls of International Radios



And Even Some Radios from the Age of Propaganda in World War II



Rooms & Racks of Radio Styles

STEREOS, TELEGRAPHS, WAX CYLINDERS, SOUND BOARDS, PHONOGRAPHS & MORE















OVER 100 VINTAGE TVs ON DISPLAY



Mechanical TV



First Sub-$100 TV



Largest CRT TV & Heaviest TV



First All-Transistor TVs



Space Age TVs



Porthole TVs

The Entire Philco Predicta Line



OVER 100 VINTAGE TVs ON DISPLAY



Rooms of TVs

And the Color Sets







Projection TVs

TV Clickers Galore



RADIO STATION SETUPS

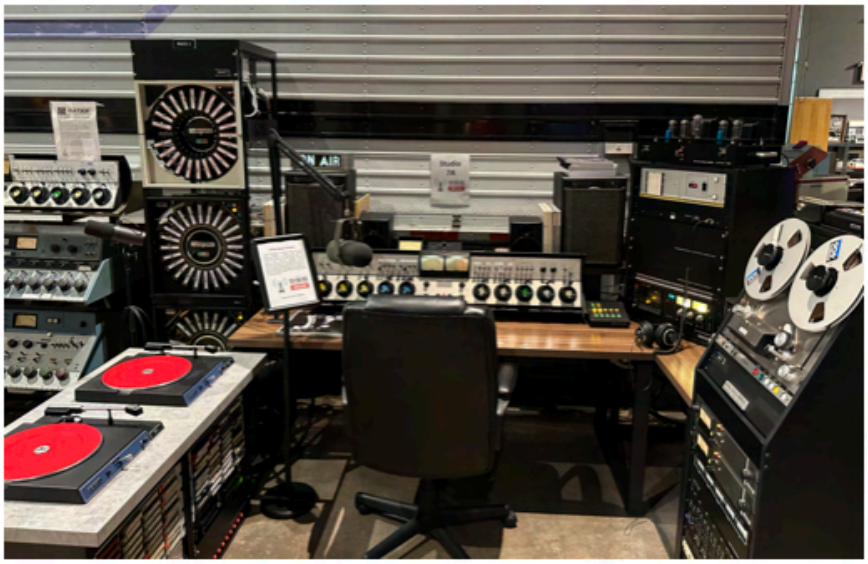












FIELD-USED TELEVISION PRODUCTION TRUCKS













NEWS STATION SETS & EQUIPMENT







One Full News Studio Set, One 5 Camera Modern Set Still Used Today, Boom Mics and Vintage Hand Drawn Weather Maps



All the radio station equipment used in the TV Series *"American Hostage"* was loaned by the Museum and is on display

MIC CHECK!



If it Captured Audio and Sound, no Matter the Era, it Probably is at the Museum



TOO MUCH TO SHOW HERE - YOU HAVE TO VISIT!!















