National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

1941 Arvin Model 422



This week's rather non-descript artifact is a four-tube radio in a metal cabinet. At the time it was purchased, it was one of the cheapest radios available, selling for only $6.95 as well as one of the smallest (only about six inches wide). Lacking sensitivity it would have picked up only local stations. Its small speaker would have sounded tinny. By 1941 most American families had a large console radio in the living room; this "second radio" might have resided on a kitchen shelf or bedside table.

The story associated with this radio is what makes it popular with visitors. As the original owner and donor, Edward Fries, explained, "I purchased that radio on Saturday, December 6, 1941, but had not gotten around to unpacking it. On Sunday, December 7, I took it out of the box, put it on the shelf, turned it on, and the first thing I heard was that Pearl Harbor had just been bombed."

Those who heard that news bulletin will never forget the shock and sense of dread it instilled, not unlike people's reactions on hearing of the terrorist attacks of 9/11. As he pondered the implication of the news he had just heard, Mr. Fries affixed the now-yellowed and faded hand-written note which reads: "On this radio I heard the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Afternoon Dec. 7, 1941."

Fries never removed the note, and when he donated the radio three quarters of a century later, he emphasized how that radio news bulletin that December day long ago changed the lives of all Americans who heard it. It is still true today that in any sort of national emergency, we rely on our radios and television sets to keep us informed.

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!