National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

RCA Cassette Wire Recorder



Until the post-WW II era, radio stations used phonograph records for recorded content. Sound effects were often stored on standard size 78-rpm record discs. Longer programs were usually recorded on 16-inch, 33⅓ rpm transcription discs. Announcers would say, "The program you are about to hear is coming to you transcribed."

In the 1950s, tape recording became the preferred recording technique, first audio tape, and later, video tape was developed for TV stations But there was a brief period from the end of the war until tape recording proved superior when wire sound recording was used extensively. Instead of a flat tape, a thin steel wire was used, with the recording head imposing varying magnetization on the wire as it moved through the head, analogous to tape recorders. Wire spools could be reused; new content could be recorded over previously recorded material.

Most wire recorders were the reel-to-reel type and the Museum has several of those. An accidentally dropped wire spool invariably resulted in a tangle of wire that was a challenge to untangle. This week's artifact is a 1949 RCA Model MI-12815 *cartridge* type. The 30-minute cartridge, weighing several pounds, slips into the slot at the top of the player. The recorder in our current 1950s radio studio exhibit was used at a Baltimore radio station for recording commercials. This cassette has content from beloved Baltimore radio and TV personality, Bill LeFevre. While the recorder is heavy to lift, its carrying handle suggests that it was intended to be moved around.



NEW! WIRE RECORDER

Compact -- Light Weight -- Easy to Operate!

No Complicated Wire Threading Required!

Anyone, without previous recording experience, can make **life-like recordings of instrumental music, or the singing or speaking voice! Revolutionary new RECORDING CARTRIDGE provides full 30 MINUTES of program recordings**—is calibrated in minutes for easy reference to any particular program. **No wires to thread or tangle,** entire wire transporting mechanism is contained in the **cartridge,** engages with the fan cooled driving motor when cartridge is "plugged in". Recordings may be permanent, or "erased" at will of the operator—any number of cartridges may be recorded, labeled, and filed away for future reference; with instant selection of any program desired at any time! **Frequency response** is essentially flat from 100 to 5,000 cps.; **Neon Modulation Indicator,** on front panel, indicates over-modulation when recording. **Simple and quick to place in operation,** merely plug power cord and microphone in rear panel, plug in cartridge, turn on power, and record and play back as desired! **5-Tube Amplifier** provides 3-watts output for in-built 5" "PM" speaker and extra extension speaker if desired—terminals at back of unit for any 6-8 Ohm voice coil "PM" speaker. Only three controls on front panel for all recording or playback functions. In portable cabinet, with recessed carrying handle, size 9¾x12½x9¾"; wt. 24½ lbs. Complete with **RCA Aerodynamic Microphone,** 7' cord and plug, 8' power cord, one 30-minute recording cartridge, instructions.

Stock No. 32A34. "RCA" WIRE RECORDER (List Price $195.) **NET** **$127.40**

30-MINUTE WIRE CARTRIDGE, complete with minute-meter recording indicator. **RCA Recording Wire Cartridge.**
Stock No. 14A578. Net Each **$12.25**

The ad reproduced here quotes a price of $127.40 (almost $1400 in today's dollars) and promises "life-like" recordings.

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!