



Bob Paquette stands in his museum of microphones. He's been collecting since the 1950s and now has 700 of them. UPI

Museum's microphones tell century's historical events

By JILL M. SCHULTZ

MILWAUKEE (UPI)— The microphones in Bob Paquette's microphone museum participated in some of the major historical events of the century, but always in a supporting role — always overshadowed by the figure standing behind them.

He has a small mike a CIA agent is said to have taken from the lectern at Hitler's hideaway at Berchtesgaden.

And there's one like President Franklin D. Roosevelt used to warm a war-chilled nation in his fireside chats.

The big black boxy one in the corner — that's a condenser microphone that traveled with Admiral Byrd on one of his Antarctic expeditions.

And over on the side is the kind that made the ladies swoon as it transmitted the silky tones of Bing Crosby to a nation huddled around their radios.

Paquette, 53, has been acquiring them since the 1950s and now has 700 — which he says the largest collection in the country and probably in the world.

The Smithsonian Institution knows about Paquette. They've borrowed his microphones and sent mike enthusiasts his way. That's kind of a shock for a Milwaukee boy who started picking up the gadgets just for fun.

"The Smithsonian refers a lot of people to me and that's surprising," he said. "The first time they referred someone to me it scared me. It's always been a hobby for me."

His interest started with radios. As a fifth grader, Paquette beat a path to the neighborhood library, reading every book available on the talking machines.

Later he got a job with an electronics company and eventually started Select Sound Service, Inc., where he works today.

Paquette's museum is lined with shelves and shelves of microphones of all shapes and sizes.

Most are American, although he has some from Germany and England. Many are branded with the call letters of broadcast stations throughout the country, some now defunct.

His file cabinet is filled with copies of pages from old periodicals that show pictures or advertise mikes.

There are also books like "The Speaking Telephone, Talking Phonograph and other novelties," dated 1878.

He has some network microphones and microphones from motion picture studios — ones that no doubt have felt the sighs of the famous. But they cannot talk, and their pasts have been lost forever.

"I know a lot of these mikes have been used by a lot of top people. A lot of them are NBC mikes," he said. "But how do you ever verify who used them?"

For all the information he's gathered on the microphone, Paquette says he is still able to find more. The journalists were busy chronicling the historical events — not the history of the transmitter.

"What I've done through the years is to read all the original periodicals on the stuff and hooked up with all the people and talked to them," Paquette said. "It's amazing how little they knew about the industry. A lot of the oldtimers only worked on one area."

The people who added the most to his pool of information have been musicians and singers.

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