

Mark Heiss Interview: 5-21-2016

VRCM: Mark, tell me a little about your background, what you did for a living, how you got interested in collecting and how you got involved with the museum.

MH: I was born at Grace New Haven Hospital when my parents lived in Seymour. I later lived in Milford and then Woodbury, where I attended Nonnewaug High School. For college, I went to the University of Hartford in West Hartford. Eventually I settled in Prospect.

VRCM: When you went to the University, what was your major?

MH: Electrical Engineering, I have a B.S.E.E. My first job was for Dataproducts New England (DNE) in Wallingford. They made data communications test equipment. I was a hardware designer and did microprocessor design. This was at a time when computer boards were designed from discrete components: microprocessor, memory, address decoding and peripherals, mostly TTL logic.

While at DNE, I went to The Hartford Graduate Center, now called Rensselaer-Hartford, where I got my Master's Degree in Computer Science.

After DNE, I went to General DataComm (GDC) in Middlebury where I designed network-managed modems. These were modems used in "networked" applications like ATM machines, before there was the Internet. This led me into network management software development, because these distributed modems needed to be monitored from a centralized location.

After GDC, I worked at ADC in Meriden to manage network management software for their video-over-fiber multiplexers for the cable television industry.

After ADC, I worked for TranSwitch in Shelton. They made integrated circuits used for high speed data communications.

After the telecom crash of the early 2000s, I changed careers and moved to Pitney Bowes as a Business Analyst. I was involved in deployment of software that monitors mail insertion (envelope stuffing) machines at large mailing houses. Now I'm a Project Manager, in their Service Lifecycle Management team.

As for hobbies, when I was in high school I was cleaning my grandmother's barn and uncovered an Edison Home Phonograph; a cylinder phonograph that was my great grandfather's. I brought it home, fixed it up and caught the collector bug. I think I liked cylinder records because it seemed nobody else had ever heard of them, something about that really appealed to me at the time.

VRCM: Do you have your own little collection at home?

MH: I have a handful of phonographs and quite a few cylinder records. But I never really collected radios, strange considering my involvement with the radio museum, though I do like that kind of thing.

I've been aware of the Radio Museum for quite some time. I had a newspaper clipping from the museum when it was in New Britain and intended on visiting, but never made it. For all these years I had that clipping on my bulletin board and then one day I wondered, does that place still exist? I looked it up and found it in Windsor. So my wife and I came up and once I started walking around...

VRCM: you were hooked!

MH: Yeah. And I saw the phonographs. The museum didn't have a cylinder phonograph on display, which bothered me. I felt this museum *has* to have a

cylinder phonograph. There was a Home Phonograph in the back, missing half the parts. I took it home to see what I could do. I called all my friends who donated the missing parts and pieced it together and that's the cylinder phonograph we have on display right now. I've gone through the museum's display phonographs and fixed each one. They're all working now.

I really like talking about old technology, especially the phonographs. Being a docent here gives me that chance.

One more thing, I'm a big fan of jukeboxes. I currently have three – that's probably the most I've had at one time. I've also done some repairs on the museum's jukeboxes.

VRCM: Are parts easily obtainable?

MH: Not too bad. One of my jukeboxes took years to fix because it had a crack in the glass dome. It was a low production jukebox, so people with this model jukebox with good glass tend not to part them out.

One last thing I'll add... Being in close proximity to the ham club, everybody kept asking me about getting my ham license. So three years ago I read the ARRL Tech, General and Extra handbooks and got my ham license: KB1ZEE.

Being here at the museum I've made a lot of new friends that all share a common love for old technology.

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