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How the 20th Century Changed Our Lives: I lived 76 of my years in the 20th century. I never knew a world without trains or automobiles, but there were almost no commercial airlines when I grew up. U. S. Mail service was excellent and cheap, and faster communication was available by telephone and telegraph, but this was expensive. Without notice, friends would arrive on a summer evening to sit on the front porch and chat, almost always welcome. Without air conditioning and during heat waves, people would sit on the bank of Red Clay Creek to cool off after their workday.

Home radios were first available in the 1920s, but in many areas there was almost no reception, and programs were limited. The big radio-phonograph combination unit on the first floor of Auburn Heights was the top-of-the-line offering of RCA Victor in 1928, the same year the company was formed by the merger of the Victor Talking Machine Company and the Radio Corporation of America. The phonograph portion had two heads above the 78-r.p.m. turntable: one a conventional Victrola head, and the other something called an "Electrola." The radio had two dials that had to be matched correctly to tune in a particular radio station. WBZ in New York carried Lowell Thomas's 15-minute newscast at 6:45 each weekday evening, and "Amos 'n' Andy" followed for comic relief. My parents first used the big radio to listen to Herbert Hoover's inaugural address on March 4, 1929. It meant nothing to this five-year-old.

In the 1930s, radios became much better, cheaper, and with many sending stations available in populated areas of the country. About 1936, I bought a small Sears Roebuck radio with push-button tuning (for about six stations) for about $20. Stern's Appliance Store at 7th and Market in Wilmington sold many radios of this type on the installment plan. By this time, at least three Philadelphia stations, two in the New York area, one in Baltimore, and two in Wilmington could be received most hours of the day without much static or interference. Sometimes stations were only "on the air" during prime time in the evenings; other times there were day programs for housewives and major league ball games for those who had time to listen (all baseball games were in the afternoon in those days). The audio quality of 78-rpm phonograph records improved drastically in the '30s, too, and albums featuring noted vocalists and composers made favorite holiday gifts.

While both radio and phonograph provided highly popular entertainment in the home, and "talking pictures" and their stars filled both city and neighborhood movie theaters, no one had really heard of television or thought about how it might change the American way of life when it came on the scene shortly after World War II. In the early 1940s, it was sometimes mentioned that pictures could be transmitted over the airwaves like sound , but nobody thought much about it or took it seriously. When almost complete mobilization to win the war ended in 1945, building automobiles and developing TV moved to top priority. In the late '40s, a new TV set might be set up in a shop window, and people on the sidewalk would stop for several minutes to look through the glass at the picture on a small screen. By 1950, small but heavy black-and-white TV sets were being sold to many middle-class families who had to erect all kinds of frail antennas to receive a picture. At Auburn Heights, we held out until 1956, when we bought a B&W Zenith set and erected an antenna on the east chimney. By Christmas 1957, we had an RCA color set, with very poor color in a beautiful wooden cabinet.

In the last years of their lives, my parents enjoyed TV, but they were not glued to it, and the set was used only a few hours each day. My mother liked afternoon programs such as “General Hospital” and “The French Chef.” My dad enjoyed “Gunsmoke,” “Bonanza,” and “Have Gun, Will Travel.” All of us watched the Tournament of Roses Parade in Pasadena on New Year’s Day.

Already, leisure time in America was consumed in a far different way than in centuries past. It was not until the 1980s that computerization, with all its ramifications and improvements, began to capture the time and imagination of new generations. Where do we go from here?

Work Report: On Tuesday, December 3, the following 12 volunteers attended the work session: Steve Bryce (in charge), Jerry Novak, Jerry Lucas, Ed Paschall, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Brent McDougall, Dave Leon, Bill Schwoebel, Jay Williams, Tom Bullock, and Tom Marshall. The Model 740 was moved from the museum to the upper garage, and the damaged vaporizer was reconfigured to make it 1½ feet shorter than the original length. The boiler was filled on the Mountain Wagon, as it had siphoned only partially. On the Model 607, new wiring and loom was run to the dash light and the side lamps.

The old frame from the Model 78 was moved from the back building to the museum attic, and a display case was also moved to that location. The Rauch & Lang electric was moved into the 740’s old spot to keep the museum’s center clear for the programs on December 11 and 14. The bottom half of the cylinder case, after being packed with new fiberglass, was replaced on the Model 87. The locomotives were cleaned from their runs on November 30, and terry-cloth towels were cut up for shop rags. On December 3 and 4, both locomotive boilers and their tenders were thoroughly washed. The line to the water tower was drained and blown out. On Wednesday, the winter doors for the railroad tunnel were put in place.

On Thursday, December 5, the volunteers numbered 13, as follows: Tim Ward (in charge), Tim Nolan, Bob Stransky, Bill Schwoebel, Bob Jordan, Dave Leon, Ted Kamen, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Eugene Maute, Gerhard Maute, Mark Russell, and Tom Marshall. Work continued on cleaning the body and fenders on the Model 750. On the 740, the vaporizer needed further refinement, so it was re-bent to accommodate the cast iron heat block over the pilot. The water column, including the three-tube indicator and low-water shut-off, was raised one inch on the Model 607.

The pilot was removed from the Model 735, and the U-tube vaporizer was found to be completely blocked. This was cleared, and the slots in the casting were cleaned. The boiler was filled on the Model 87, and library work continued in the office. A new old-stock 30-H.P. burner pan was taken to Henry Doeberiner, a sheet metal expert in Landenberg, for re-making the bottom to conform to the shape of the three-venturi burner being made for our Model K.

Mark Russell has volunteered to inventory and offer for sale on eBay the excess “O”-gauge Lionel equipment that was donated to us some time ago by Walter O’Rourke. We thank several donors of old (and like-new) towels to be cut up for shop rags. We are still looking for two 23” used tires for the rear of our Model 750.