

# The History Corner

By Nicholas M. Omale and  
Rebecca P. Butler,  
Northern Illinois University



Meck 1949 TV. Photo by N. Omale, 2013. Lee and Lida Cochran AECT Archives, Blackwell Museum of Education, Northern Illinois University

**M**any pieces of educational technology have historically originated from equipment intended for entertainment, including the television set (Saettler, 1990). This *History Corner* piece examines the Meck 1949 Television (TV), similar to the photographed model above. The Meck TV displayed nothing more than a simple black and white picture, hard to fathom in today's world, given the current prevalence of high definition smart TVs. The Meck 1949 Television was created by John Meck Industries in Plymouth, Indiana. This company initially began as a public address system and radio manufacturer before expanding to include the commercial production of television sets (Frisz, 2013). According to the *Chicago Tribune*, (1950) John Meck Industries "had produced 152,000 television sets in the first half of 1950, a total that exceeded the entire output for all of 1949" (p. B5).

In the 1950s, as television grew into a popular medium, the Meck TV was being marketed in rural areas (Wolters, 1950). Like most TVs of its time, the Meck 1949 model utilized an antennae system for receiving broadcasts. Other features of this TV included an on-off switch, a channel

selector, horizontal and vertical hold switches, brightness controls, loudspeakers, a screen, and tube semi-conductors housed in a wooden case (Early Television Museum, 2013; Radio Museum, 2014). The average retail price for John Meck TVs, which included a 12 ½ table model, and a 19 inch console model among others, was \$150.00 (*Chicago Tribune*, July 26, 1950).

The production of televisions sets such as the Meck 1949 coincided with a time when instructional television was emerging in various school districts nationwide, including the Philadelphia school district, a pioneer of "classroom-based instructional television" (Levin & Hines, 2003, p. 264), and in Northern Iowa public schools and homes with a Spanish program on commercial station Channel 3 (Petersen, 2014). As more households and schools acquired television sets, the access to educational programs delivered via instructional TV broadcasts increased (Levin & Hines, 2003, Saettler, 1990). The Meck 1949, and other vintage models produced by John Meck Industries, can still be collected from leading online vintage retailers and individuals.

## References

- Chicago Tribune*. (1950, July 26). Meck 6 Month TV total exceeds entire '49 output. *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*. p. B5. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1949-1990).
- Early Television Museum. (2013). *Postwar American television: Meck*. Retrieved August 1, 2013 from: [http://www.earlytelevision.org/meck\\_xa-701.html](http://www.earlytelevision.org/meck_xa-701.html)
- Frisz, T. (2013). *Meck Radios*. Retrieved December 16, 2013 from: <http://home.comcast.net/~n9dd/meck.html>
- Levine, R. A., & Hines, L. M. (2003). Educational television, Fred Rogers, and the history of education. *History of Education Quarterly*, 43 (1). 262-275.
- Petersen, B. 2014. Personal Interview.
- Radio Museum. (2014). Meck XA701. Retrieved January 12, 2014 from: [http://www.radiomuseum.org/r/meck\\_xa\\_701.html](http://www.radiomuseum.org/r/meck_xa_701.html)
- Saettler, P. (1990). *Evolution of American educational technology*. Englewood, CO: Brittain: Libraries Unlimited.
- Wolters, L. (1950, July 23). How you gonna keep 'em on the farm after TV? *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)*. p. NW8. ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Chicago Tribune (1849-1990).

\*Special thanks to:

1. Robert B. Ridinger, Social Sciences and Area Studies Librarian, Northern Illinois University. DeKalb, Illinois.
2. Steve McVoy, Early Television Museum. Hilliard, Ohio.