

Broadcasting's past can be seen and heard again at this museum



By Jane Wingle

CHICAGO — The sign above the door reads "Fibber's Closet." Visitors slowly turn the knob, and timidly and yet curiously anticipate what will happen when it opens. Audible and spontaneous laughs are heard as a connected conglomeration of household items greets the inquisitive.

The display is among the nostalgic and historic memorabilia of the Radio Hall of Fame housed within the larger Museum of Broadcast Communications in downtown Chicago. Located at the convenient corner of Michigan Avenue and Washington Street, within the impressive landmark building of the Chicago Cultural Center, the MBC opened in 1987.

A video montage of the history of television provides an introduction to the museum and puts visitors in the reminiscing mode. From there a tour of the Radio Hall of Fame takes us back even further. The typical living room scene of the '30s and '40s, complete with soft chair, helps us remember how we "watched" the radio and intently listened to classics such as *The Shadow*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Inner Sanctum* and *The Romance of Helen Trent*. Perhaps you'll even be able to pick out the radio your family had in the collection of this necessary domestic appliance of yesteryear.

The authentic Charlie McCarthy flanked by Mortimer Snerd and Effie Klinker comprise part of the Edgar Bergen Exhibit, which highlights the career of one of radio's greatest personalities. Jack Benny's Vault features another legend and plays old broadcasts that revive fond memories.

Since its founding in 1988, the Radio Hall of Fame has been inducting members who include pioneers of the industry to current contributing celebrities of the air. Among this year's honorees are Garrison Keilor, Red Skelton and the Burns and Allen Show.

If the radio portion of the museum goes too far back for you, perhaps the television section will hit the recall button.

IF YOU GO

The Museum of Broadcast Communications, Michigan Avenue at Washington Street, is open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday. It is closed state and national holidays. Admission is free. Hour-long tours are conducted Monday through Friday at 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. but must be scheduled in advance by calling 312-629-6017. The tour charge is \$2. General museum information may be obtained at 312-629-6000.

The Museum of Holography, 1134 Washington St., is open from 12:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Admission is \$2.50 and children under 6 are admitted free. Group tours and rates available by calling 312-226-1007.

A mile west, at 1134 Washington St., quite a different experience awaits museum guests. The Museum of Holography, founded in 1976, expands the scope of this art form beyond the one familiar to most on credit cards.

A gallery of what appear to be blank photographs line the walls of the museum's small rooms. Only by standing approximately 4 feet from the picture and slowly moving from side to side does the viewer see the 3-D laser images. Light waves take on a different meaning as colors reflect and create moving objects. A rose glistening with dew transforms from a bud to a full flowering bloom. A woman celebrating the New Year drinks a glass of wine. Kaleidoscopes of purple, blue, green and red jet out at the observer.

Loren Billings, the executive director, describes the development of holography as being where photography was 175 years ago but rapidly growing into medical and technical applications.

Besides displays, the museum has a school and research center containing fully equipped labs and classes for beginning through advanced students of this medium. Lectures and workshops present holography as an art form and scientific discipline.

Be it on the cutting edge of an expanding area or recalling memories of the radio-television age, the Museums of Holography and Broadcast Communications provide additional excursion opportunities to the downtown Chicago visitor.

Jane Wingle is a freelance writer who lives in Golden.

