Researchers can tune in to WRVA and hear

Virginia’s governors from James Price to Linwood Holton

The dedication of Byrd Field (1950), the George P. Coleman Memorial Bridge (1952), the Virginia War Memorial (1956), and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel (1964)

Dwight D. Eisenhower campaigning for president in Richmond (1952), John F. Kennedy campaigning for president in Norfolk (1960), and Richard M. Nixon campaigning for president in Richmond (1960)

First-hand reports covering Richmond tornados (1951), southwestern Virginia floods (1963), and Hurricane Camille (1969)

A memorial service for Senator Robert F. Kennedy (1968)

Coverage of Senator Harry Byrd’s 40th annual picnic at Berryville (1962)

An interview with Eleanor P. Sheppard, Richmond’s first woman mayor (1962)

The inauguration of College of William and Mary president Davis Young Paschall (1961)

Proceedings of the Virginia Constitutional Convention (1956)

Governor J. Lindsay Almond’s speech opposing school integration (1958)

Calling All Cooks, a Saturday morning quiz show (1949–1954)

Music from Jack Hunt and the Rhythm Ranch Hands (1952)

From its first broadcast on 2 November 1925, WRVA Radio evolved from a small community station broadcasting two nights each week into the “50,000-Watt Voice of Virginia,” a regional leader in radio over the course of the twentieth century. The Library of Virginia’s WRVA Radio Collection, acquired in June 2001 from a donation by Clear Channel Communications, records the development of the station as a business and its involvement in the Richmond community and Virginia as a whole. The collection provides valuable insight into the expansion of radio in the United States and contains broadcasts of numerous historically significant news events.
WRVA's inaugural broadcast from the Larus & Brother Company's Edge- worth Tobacco Factory in Richmond in 1925 made it the third operational radio station in Virginia. Despite its humble origins as a small, local station, WRVA's increasing popularity resulted in its expansion to a 5,000-watt, NBC-affiliated station with 24 hours of programming seven days a week by 1929, the opening of new studios in the Hotel Richmond in 1933, and full-time affiliation with CBS in 1937. A further increase in broadcasting capability for the station came with the installation of a 50,000-watt transmitter near Varina in Henrico County in 1939. New studios in a state-of-the-art structure in Church Hill designed by celebrated architect Philip Johnson were dedicated in 1968.

Since its establishment in the 1920s, WRVA has aired numerous popular news, music, sports, and talk programs, often with a focus on local and regional news and culture. Programs such as Sideviews on the News, the Capitol Squirrel, Legislative Roundup, Virginia Legislators' Interview, Our Schools at the Crossroads, Virginia Weekly, and Kemp's Konversations highlighted news events of local significance, while musical shows such as the Corn Cob Pipe Club, the Old Dominion Barn Dance, and the Sunshine Hour gained a wide popularity that spread beyond the boundaries of Virginia.

The Library of Virginia’s WRVA Radio Collection covers three-quarters of a century, from the station’s founding to the end of the twentieth century. It includes a wide array of materials related to the history of WRVA, including incorporation files, memos, meeting minutes, FCC license renewal applications, and newsletters; materials about its programs and listener responses to its programs; information on specific employees and announcers such as Alden Aaroe, Bertha Hewlett, Tim Timberlake, and others; and publications promoting WRVA and the Richmond area market to advertisers. The collection also includes photographs; sound recordings; and numerous other documents and memorabilia items related to the station.

The series of sound recordings included in the WRVA collection includes 637 CDs reformatted with funds provided by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. These recordings document an astonishing variety of programs, personalities, and events related to the radio station and its development. Popular musical programs and performers, including the Old Dominion Barn Dance and the Corn Cob Pipe Club, figure prominently in this collection, as do the station’s live reports and commentary on news events of local, state, national, and international significance between the 1930s and 1990s. Numerous special anniversary programs broadcast by the station provide a rich body of information on the station and its history, and feature synopses of important news events covered by WRVA throughout its history.

A detailed online guide is available (Accession 38210), and each CD is listed individually in the Archives and Manuscripts catalog. For details on using the collection, contact the Archives Research Services staff at 804-692-3888.

Visit the Library’s Web site for an exhibition with sound clips: http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/radio/index.htm

Compiled by Maggie Walker Governor’s School intern Mark Guerci September 2006

Top: The Old Dominion Barn Dance cast. Center: A remote broadcast from the 1940s. Left: The Edgeworth Dance Party at Camp Lee, 1941.