



Smithsonian

National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Kraft Television Theatre Oral History Project

NMAH.AC.0464

Mimi L. Minnick

1992

Archives Center, National Museum of American History

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Collection Overview

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Repository: | Archives Center, National Museum of American History |
| Title: | Kraft Television Theatre Oral History Project |
| Date: | 1947-1992 |
| Identifier: | NMAH.AC.0464 |
| Creator: | Blocki, Jim Cook, Fielder Durante, Al Green, Chester Courtice, Richard Dougherty, Marion Holland, Dorothy Holland, Fran Herlihy, Ed Hill, George Roy Myers, Farlan Jeffrey, Tad Kraft General Foods, Inc. Pratt, Lee Powell, Bob Wiener, Tom |
| Extent: | 4.3 Cubic feet (5 boxes) |
| Language: | English . |
| Summary: | Oral history interviews with fourteen former Kraft and J. Walter Thompson executives chart the evolution of Kraft's approach to television, from its pioneering efforts in the medium's infancy to the search to maintain identity in an increasingly competitive and fragmented media landscape. Casting, directing, and production of the live dramas and the commercials are discussed at length. Kraft's philosophy of advertising, its relationship with J. Walter Thompson advertising agency and NBC, and consumer outreach are also featured. |

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Collection donated by Kraft General Foods, Inc., on April 16, 1993. Oral histories created by the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution in 1992.

Provenance

Tom Wiener conducted interviews created by the National Museum of American History.

Related Materials

Materials at the Archives Center

N W Ayer Advertising Collection (AC0059)

Materials at Other Organizations

J. Walter Thompson Archives, Duke University

Kraft General Foods Archives, Glenview, Illinois

The Kraft General Foods Archives was established as an internal information resource for the company. ARchives staff will assist outside researchers whenever time and resources permit by answering questions over the phone or through the mails. Requests for direct access to archival collections will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Source materials documenting Kraft's television advertising efforts include: film and videotape copies of Kraft Television Theatre, Kraft Suspense Theatre, Kraft Mystery Theatre, Kraft Music Hall, and other Kraft-sponsored shows. Videotape copies of these shows can be accessed through the Museum of Broadcast Communication in Chicago, and through the NBC collection at the Library of Congress. Materials also include film and videotape copies of Kraft commercials, early 1950s-present; publications and magazine/newspaper articles about the various shows; company publications featuring articles about the various shows; NBC listings of production details about the shows (dates, producers, actors/actresses, etc.) Any requests for copies of pages from this listing must be cleared through NBC; photos of scenes from the shows as well as still photos of the actors/actresses who appeared in them; print ads supporting Kraft's television advertising efforts; casting lists for Kraft Television Theatre (incomplete); and musical scores for Kraft Television Theatre (incomplete).

Available Formats

Some television commercials have been digitized and can be viewed in the Smithsonian Institution's Digital Asset Management System (DAMS). See Archives Center for details.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Mimi Minnick, 1992.

Preferred Citation

Kraft Television Theatre Oral History Project, 1947-1992, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research but master tapes are stored off-site and special arrangements must be made to work with it. Contact the Archives Center for information at archivescenter@si.edu or 202-633-3270.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright restrictions. Contact the Archives Center.

Biographical / Historical

The Kraft Television Theatre Oral History Project is the result of a year-long study undertaken by the former Center for Advertising History. The objective of the project was to create a collection of oral history interviews that documented the history and development of Kraft Television Theater, especially the relationship between advertising and the origins of commercial sponsorship in the early days of television programming.

Oral history interviews with fourteen former Kraft and J Walter Thompson executives were conducted in 1992 by Tom Wiener, a free-lance writer and oral historian under contract to the former Center for Advertising History. Included were Ed Herlihy, the voice of many of Kraft's memorable commercials; James Blocki, Richard Courtice, Chester Green, and Robert Powell, the architects of Kraft's advertising and marketing strategies in the television era; directors George Roy Hill and Fielder Cook, who launched their successful careers at Kraft Television Theatre; Marion Dougherty, one of Hollywood's leading casting directors who also got her start on KTT; and Dorothy Holland, a veteran of Kraft's Consumer Affairs Department and the company's first female Vice President.

The oral history interviews chart the evolution of Kraft's approach to television, from its pioneering efforts in the medium's infancy to the search to maintain identity in an increasing competitive and fragmented media landscape. Casting, directing and production of the live dramas and the commercials are discussed at length. Kraft's philosophy of advertising, its relationship with J Walter Thompson advertising agency and NBC, and consumer outreach are also featured.

On May 7, 1947, at 7:30 p.m. in New York City, advertising made a first significant step into the television era with the debut of Kraft Television Theatre. The program, which became the first regularly scheduled dramatic series on network TV presented weekly live adaptations of plays featuring performers familiar to New York theatergoers. Included in each week's installment were commercials for Kraft Cheese Company products.

Kraft's foray into a new advertising medium grew out of the company's progressive advertising policies and its long running association with its primary advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson. Kraft was founded by James Lewis Kraft, a Canadian-born entrepreneur who in 1903 began buying cheese from Chicago wholesalers and peddling it from a horse-drawn wagon. Through acquisitions of other companies and their established brands, as well as development of new products, Kraft's company steadily grew into a leader in the cheese and dairy products business.

As early as 1911, Kraft began advertising on Chicago elevated trains and billboards. In 1919, Kraft inaugurated a 70-year tradition of advertising in such national magazines as Ladies Home Journal and Good Housekeeping. Fourteen years later, looking for a vehicle to promote its newest product, Miracle Whip Salad Dressing, Kraft entered the electronic era with The Kraft Program, hosted by popular bandleader Paul Whiteman on the NBC Radio Network.

Soon renamed The Kraft Music Hall, the show also acquired a new host, crooner Bing Crosby. Crosby's relaxed style was mirrored in the Music Hall's commercials. As written by J. Walter Thompson staffers, they possessed a relaxed, conversational tone, extolling the practical uses of Miracle Whip, Velveeta and other Kraft products.

The Music Hall continued on the air until 1949, but by that time, Kraft Television Theatre was into its third season, well established as the leading dramatic series on the air. Kraft Television Theatre provided a unique laboratory for both its sponsor and Thompson. As with the Music Hall, Thompson actually produced the program: its staffers adapted the dramas, directed them, and hired the casts. NBC provided only technical facilities and crew. Each week, in effect, was opening night for a play that was performed live in front of bulky cameras, under hot lights. Working with modest budgets, producer-directors Stanley Quinn, Maury Holland, and Harry Herrmann took an important first step toward exploiting the potential of television to inform and entertain.

For its part, Kraft drew on the tradition established in its radio ads. From the start, Kraft acted as if it were a guest in the viewer's home, which led to a remarkably effective means of presenting its products. No human face was ever seen, only a pair of hands demonstrating the uses of the product, as a reassuring voice explained the virtues of Cheez Whiz, Draft Cheddar, or any number of products from Kraft's expanding line.

In 1958, after eleven years and over 600 programs, Kraft Television Theatre left the air. The show's ratings had slipped under increased competition from mystery and adventure shows filmed in Hollywood as well as quiz shows. Kraft's single sponsorship didn't end with the demise of the Television Theatre. It revived the Music Hall, quite successfully, with Perry Como, whose relaxed personality was a throwback to Bing Crosby. In later years, Kraft chose to be sole sponsor of several specials a year, including the Country Music Association Awards show. Although these programs were pre-recorded, Kraft continued to produce its

commercials live through the 1960's, with those same hands and that same soothing voice. Kraft's place in both television and advertising history is secure. Kraft Television Theatre launched a decade of live televised drama that is still regarded as the cornerstone of TV's Golden Age. And the Kraft "hands" commercials are a reminder of the effectiveness of a low-key, low-tech approach to promoting products as humble as Velveeta and Miracle Whip.

As part of a program to document and study modern advertising, the former Center for Advertising History selected Kraft Television Theatre as the last in a series of case studies of significant American advertising campaigns.

Scope and Contents

Oral history interviews with fourteen former Kraft and J. Walter Thompson executives chart the evolution of Kraft's approach to television, from its pioneering efforts in the medium's infancy to the search to maintain identity in an increasingly competitive and fragmented media landscape. Casting, directing, and production of the live dramas and the commercials are discussed at length. Kraft's philosophy of advertising, its relationship with J. Walter Thompson advertising agency and NBC, and consumer outreach are also featured.

Series 1, Research Files, 1947-1992 contains newspaper and magazine clippings, reports and scholarly articles about the history and development of Kraft, Kraft Radio Music Hall, and Kraft Television Theatre. Folders are arranged alphabetically by subject.

Series 2, Interviewee Files, 1992 contains the abstracts of the oral history interviews and additional information about the interviewee, such as resumes, publications and correspondence, when available. The files are arranged alphabetically by interviewees' last name. Each abstract begins with a brief biographical statement about the interviewee, and a note about the scope and content of the interview. The abstracts correspond to a timed message on track two of the research copy of each audiocassette tape. At the end of each abstract is an index to proper names (people, trade names, KTT episodes, etc.) and to some general themes addresses during the interview. A master index, located in the last folder of this series, combines these individual indices into a comprehensive listing. Complete transcripts are also available for most interviews.

Series 3, Oral History Interviews, 1992 is subdivided into three subseries, representing each of three audio formats: original masters, research copies, and reel-to reel preservation copies. The interviews are arranged alphabetically.

Series 4, Television Commercials, circa 1950 feature commercials for a variety of Kraft products. They aired on Kraft Television Theatre between 1947 and 1958.

Series 5, Administrative Files, circa 1950 - 1992 are files created by the Center for Advertising History. Included in this series are bibliographies, briefing books, project proposals and budget, files on project consultants, deeds of conveyance, publicity, and Center publications prepared for the project.

Arrangement

The collection is divided into five series.

Series 1: Research Files, 1947-1992

Series 2: Interviewee Files, 1992

Series 3: Oral History Interviews, 1992

Subseries 3.1: Original Audio Tapes

Subseries 3.2: Researcher Copies

Subseries 3.3: Preservation Masters

Series 4, Television Commercials, circa 1950

Subseries 4.1: Master Copies

Subseries 4.2: Researcher Copies

Series 5: Administrative Files, circa 1950 - 1992

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Actors in the advertising industry
- Broadcast advertising
- Copy writers
- Product demonstrations
- Television advertising
- Television producers and directors
- advertising -- Food

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Audiovisual materials
- Commercials
- Interviews

Names:

- National Broadcasting Company
- Thompson, J. Walter (advertising agency).

Container Listing

Series 1: Research Files, 1947-1992

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Box 1, Folder 1 | James Lewis Kraft, 1974-1953 |
| Box 1, Folder 2 | Kraft, Inc. -- Through the Years |
| Box 1, Folder 3 | The Kraft Story, 1903-1978 |
| Box 1, Folder 4 | Kraft History |
| Box 1, Folder 5 | Kraft Broadcast History |
| Box 1, Folder 6 | The Show Must Go On: Kraft Television Theatre |
| Box 1, Folder 7 | Kraft Primetime Network Television History |
| Box 1, Folder 8 | Kraft Cable Television History |
| Box 1, Folder 9 | How Kraft Uses Commercial Time Slots (Ad Age), 25874 |
| Box 1, Folder 10 | Kraft's Stand on Television Violence |
| Box 1, Folder 11 | Kraft Night-time Network Television Policy |
| Box 1, Folder 12 | KTT, chronological listing,, 1948-1958 |
| Box 1, Folder 13 | KTT, alphabetical listing, 1948-1958 |
| Box 1, Folder 14 | KTT, reviews, 1948-1958 |
| Box 1, Folder 15 | Analysis of Kraft Television Specials (with management summary) |
| Box 1, Folder 16 | An Evaluation and Historical Survey of KTT 1947-1958, and Its Significance as a Successful Form of Commercial Television Theatre, 1964 Notes: by Donald Boyle, Temple University |
| Box 1, Folder 17 | Kraft Television Theatre, TV Feature Story, NBC Station Lineup, 1947-1957 |
| Box 1, Folder 18 | Kraft Broadcast Special Credits, 1977-1987 |
| Box 1, Folder 19 | Description of New Programs by Network |
| Box 1, Folder 20 | Primetime Network Television Schedule, 1974-1975 |

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| Box 1B, Folder 1 | Advertisements and Commercials -- Strategy |
| Box 1B, Folder 2 | Celebrity endorsements |
| Box 1B, Folder 3 | J. Walter Thompson advertising agency |
| Box 1B, Folder 4 | Kraft Music Hall |
| Box 1B, Folder 5 | Kraft Television Theatre History |
| Box 1B, Folder 6 | Public Relations and Consumer Affairs |
| Box 1B, Folder 7 | Miscellaneous |
| Box 1B, Folder 8 | KTT holdings at the Kraft archives in Glenview, Illinois |
| Box 1B, Folder 9 | KTT holdings at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. |
| Box 1B, Folder 10 | KTT holdings at the Museum of Television and Radio in NYC |
| Box 1B, Folder 11 | Project historian's research notes |

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Series 2: Interviewee Files, 1992

| | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Box 2, Folder 1 | Jim Blocki Notes: | Served as advertising and promotions director for Kraft from 1952 until 1981, when he became Vice President and Director of Advertising and Creative Services. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 2 | Fielder Cook Notes: | San Francisco, California. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 3 | Richard Courtice Notes: | Began his association with Kraft in 1939. He worked as a salesman and general sales manager at Kraft from 1948 until 1966, when he became director of marketing services. Courtice was named vice president of advertising and promotion in 1970. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 4 | Marion Dougherty Notes: | Joined KTT as casting director in 1950. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 5 | Al Durante Notes: | J. Walter Thompson's publicist for KTT. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 6 | Chester Green Notes: | Began his association with Kraft in 1937 as a unit manager. He served as a salesman, branch manager and general sales manager 1945 until 1957, when he was named director of marketing. He was senior vice president of corporate development, marketing and research through the 1970s. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 7 | Ed Herlihy, Notes: | Began his association with Kraft in 1946 as an announcer for Kraft Music Hall, and served as the voice of KTT from 1947 until 1980. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| | George Roy Hill | |
| Box 2, Folder 9 | Dorothy Holland Notes: | Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 10 | Fran Holland Notes: | The widow of Maury Holland, who joined KTT and J. Walter Thompson in 1948. Abstract and transcript are available. |
| Box 2, Folder 11 | Tad Jeffrey, | |

Notes: Started his advertising career with J. Walter Thompson and became advertising manager at Kraft in 1950.

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| Box 2, Folder 12 | Farlan Myers was interviewed on April 16, 1992 in Los Angeles, California. Abstract available. |
| Box 2, Folder 13 | Bob Powell, Kraft's advertising manager from 1972 until 1984, when he was named director of advertising and marketing services, was interviewed on August 12, 1992 in Highland Park, Illinois. Abstract available. |
| Box 2, Folder 14 | Lee Pratt, the NBC production manager assigned to KTT was interviewed on July 6, 1992 in New York City. Abstract available. |
| Box 2, Folder 15 | Master Index |

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Series 3: Oral History Interviews, 1992

Subseries 3.1: Original Audio Tapes

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| Box 3 | Jim Blocki, 1992 February 4 |
| Box 3 | Fielder Cook, 1992 April 13 |
| Box 3 | Richard Courtice, 1992 May 14 |
| Box 3 | Marion Dougherty, 1992 April 15 |
| Box 3 | Chester Green, 1992 June 24 |
| Box 3 | Al Durante, 1992 July 8 |
| Box 3 | Ed Herlihy, 1992 March 10 |
| Box 3 | George Roy Hill, 1992 March 10 |
| Box 4 | Dorothy Holland, 1992 August 11 |
| Box 4 | Fran Holland, 1992 April 13 |
| Box 4 | Farlan Myers, 1992 April 16 |
| Box 4; Folder 8 | Tad Jeffrey, 1992 May 13 |
| Box 4 | Bob Powell, 1992 August 12 |
| Box 4 | Lee Pratt, 1992 July 6 |

Subseries 3.2: Researcher Copies

| | |
|-------|------------------|
| Box 5 | Jim Blocki |
| Box 5 | Fielder Cook |
| Box 5 | Richard Courtice |
| Box 5 | Marion Dougherty |
| Box 5 | Al Durante |
| Box 5 | Chester Green |

| | |
|-------|-----------------|
| Box 5 | Ed Herlihy |
| Box 5 | George Roy Hill |
| Box 6 | Dorothy Holland |
| Box 6 | Fran Holland |
| Box 6 | Tad Jeffery |
| Box 6 | Farlan Myers |
| Box 6 | Bob Powell |
| Box 6 | Lee Pratt |

Subseries 3.3: Preservation Masters

| | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Box 7 | Jim Blocki |
| Box 7 | Fielder Cook |
| Box 7 | Richard Courtice |
| Box 8 | Marion Dougherty |
| Box 8 | Al Durante |
| Box 8 | Chester Green |
| Box 8 | Ed Herlihy |
| Box 8 | George Roy Hill |
| Box 9 | Dorothy Holland |
| Box 9; Box 8 | Fran Holland |
| Box 9 | Tad Jeffrey |
| Box 9 | Farlan Myers |
| Box 9 | Bob Powell |

Box 9

Lee Pratt

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Series 4: Television Commercials, circa 1950s

Subseries 4.1: Master Copies

| | |
|--------|---|
| Box 10 | Kraft Historical Reel #01: Kraft Television Theatre |
| Box 10 | Kraft Historical Reel #10: Kraft Products |
| Box 10 | Kraft Historical Reel #20: Kraft Products |

Subseries 4.2: Researcher Copies

| | |
|--------|---|
| Box 10 | Kraft Historical Reel #01 Notes: Digital reference copy in the Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) |
| Box 10 | Kraft Historical Reel #10 |
| Box 10 | Kraft Historical Reel #20 Notes: Digital reference copy in the Smithsonian Institution Digital Asset Management System (DAMS) |

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Series 5: Administrative Files

Box 12

| | |
|--------|---|
| Box 11 | Bibliography |
| Box 11 | Briefing Book |
| Box 11 | Brochure |
| Box 11 | Consultants |
| Box 11 | Progress Reports, Schedule of Work |
| Box 11 | Project Proposal and Budget |
| Box 11 | Photographs (Copy Prints), circa 1950s-1992 |

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