

Interpretation on the Air

Historic Sites Install "History Stations" to Invite Visitation, Participation & Donations.

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At Historic Fort Wayne (left), soldier reenactors render a salute at the raising of the colors. At right, a reenactor explains the details of his work to two attentive visitors.

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FORT WAYNE, IN: There is an old fort in Indiana that's trying some new tricks when it comes to promotion and community engagement. Built in 1976 and located in the heart of downtown Fort Wayne, the Old Fort is a replica of the final fort to stand in Fort Wayne, originally constructed in 1816. Operated by Historic Fort Wayne, Inc., the Old Fort is reaching out to locals and out-of-town visitors using a special radio broadcast. No, they are not buying time on local radio stations. The group recently took it a step further and bought its own "History Station."



Drive through downtown Fort Wayne now and you can tune into “Old Fort Radio – AM 1640” ([sample broadcast](#)). The new service provides an interpretive thumbnail detailing the Fort’s beginnings, updates on coming events and details on where to park when you get there. The broadcast even instructs listeners how they can volunteer during historic events and how they can donate to keep the Fort's programs vital and functioning.

Because the Old Fort is situated in a city park and its broadcast license is in the name of the city’s parks and recreation department, one plan is to promote the broadcast to park visitors within 2-3 miles to encourage them to tune in, get engaged and plan a visit. Street signs with a unique logo have been created (pictured above). A more rustic version, above left, has been designed to be installed at the Old Fort itself.



Left, Woodwright reenactor Kip Lytle tends to one of his many projects while conversing with curious visitors. Right, reenactor Malinda Pagel chats with visitors about the role of women and the intricacies of midwifery.

Public information liaison Malinda Pagel says that a History Station functions like a “point of purchase” display at a retail store. “A large number of people drive by our site daily in their cars. We’re not open every day and our large events occur over random weekends throughout the year. So, we’ve struggled to let people on the ground know who we are, what we’re about and when we’re open. This History Station on 1640 is a great way to communicate with potential visitors on the spot rather than sending them to a website address that they may have to recall later.”



Volunteer Jim Firestone installs the History Station antenna to put Old Fort Radio - 1640 AM on the air.

Since most every destination has a website, a History Radio Station adds an element of uniqueness to a site's communication mix that can set it apart. It tells the site's story using human voices to add character and vitality to the presentation. An oral delivery can be especially valuable for the very young, seniors and the visually impaired – groups who may not be able to take full advantage of traditional text-based communications such as brochures, on-site displays or the web pages.



Left - Herbert Hoover listens to an early radio broadcast. His historic site in Iowa operates a "History Station" that describes his life and presidency.

History Stations are in use around the US at well-known national historic sites such as Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, Fort Donelson National Battlefield, along the Natchez Trace Parkway and to interpret structures such as the Zane Grey home in New York.. State and local groups use the technology to interpret at historic homes such as Rippavilla Plantation, south of Nashville, Tennessee, at lighthouses like Big Sable Point in Michigan and at the San Jacinto and Palmito Ranch Battlefields in Texas. (View case studies and hear examples at links provided below.

Some History Stations, like the Old Fort's, are FCC licensed [Travelers Information Stations \(TIS\)](#) and have a range suitable to cover a city. [Unlicensed versions with a shorter range](#) are utilized to tell the story of historic homes and historic districts. They typically consist of a small antenna system with transmitter and a high quality audio repetition system. Both types of stations are available [through Information Station Specialists, Inc in Zeeland, Michigan.](#)

Malinda Pagel continues, "Historic Fort Wayne, Inc., is a donation-only organization, and it takes a lot to maintain our Fort in a way that is period-correct and historically accurate. Increasing our number of visitors may also result in an increase in our donations, which in turn allows us to stay open and keep the Fort in good shape for generations to come."

Listen to History Stations On the Air

- [Natchez Trace Parkway, TN, AL, MS.](#)
- [Rippavilla Plantation, TN.](#)
- [Fort Leavenworth, KS.](#)
- [San Jacinto Battlefield, TX.](#)
- [Old Fort, Fort Wayne, IN.](#)
- [Hoover National Historic Site, IA.](#)

Case Studies

- [Palmito Ranch Battlefield, TX - Big Sable Lighthouse, MI - Zane Grey House, NY](#)
- [Andersonville National Historic Site](#)
- [Crazy Horse Monument](#)
- [Great Platte River Road Archway Monument](#)

Contacts

- Author, [Bill Baker](#), founder of Information Station Specialists ([theRADIOsource.com](#)) and the American Association of Information Radio Operators ([AAIRO.org](#)).
- For more info on the History Station at Historic Fort Wayne: Email [Bob Jones](#). Visit website and Facebook pages: (<http://www.oldfortwayne.org/>) and (<https://www.facebook.com/HistoricFortWayne>).