Panel: “Explorations in American Culture”

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Title: “Empires of the Air: The Beginning of Radio”
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Abstract

“Empires of the Air: The Beginning of Radio” focuses on the contributions made by Lee De Forest, inventor of the Audion; David Sarnoff, the head of RCA; and Edwin Armstrong, the inventor of the superheterodyne receiver and FM, to the technology and business of radio. The paper considers who deserves credit for the invention of radio, examining both the historical record and scientific progress. It also traces the growth of the business and the earliest commercial broadcasts to identify the “birth” of radio. Because each discovery built upon the last, and early broadcasts were intermittent and experimental, no single person can be given the title of “inventor of radio” or “father of radio.”

Bibliographical Note

Most primary sources for this paper are from The New York Times, accessed via ProQuest; Radio News from the author’s private collection, and Documents of American Broadcasting. Secondary sources are technical histories and journal articles found at Helmke Library. The author of this paper is also indebted to his father, Larry, for his assistance in describing the technical aspects of radio.