

Ensor Farm (1875-1930s)
18995 W. 183rd St. – Olathe
National Register of Historic Places

The Ensor Farmsite and Museum, located at 18995 W. 183rd Street, Olathe (about one mile east of 169 Highway) was recently added to the Register of Historic Kansas Places. The farmstead, situated on forty acres left from the original 120-acre farm, includes a two-story Italianate house completed around 1900, barns, a chicken house and other outbuildings built from 1875 to the 1930s.



Ensor house, about 1970.
Johnson County Museum Collection.

The buildings and their contents illustrate the evolution of the Ensor family farm over a period

of some eighty years. However, two tall towers near the house indicate the site's truly unique history as the home of two radio pioneers. The towers, erected in the 1920s, supported antennas for the Ensors' ham radio stations.

Marshall Ensor (1899 – 1970) and his sister Loretta (1904 – 1991) lived on the farm from the time their parents purchased it in 1909. Marshall soon became interested in the new technology of radio communication, building his own crystal set in 1913. In 1917 he received a radio operator license and the call sign 9BSP. Loretta passed the amateur radio test several years later and began to operate under the call sign 9UA. While teaching Industrial Arts at Olathe High School, a career that spanned that from 1918 to 1965, Marshall continued to build and operate ham radio sets. The siblings operated their radios from batteries charged by gasoline generator, until commercial electric lines reached the farm in 1935.

In 1929, Marshall responded to the American Radio Relay League's request for volunteers to teach Morse Code to aspiring amateur radio operators. Over the next ten years Ensor, with the assistance of his sister, spent winter evenings teaching radio operations and code over 9BSP. It

is estimated that several thousand students learned ham radio basics by listening to his 60-lesson course.

For his efforts, Marshall Ensor was selected in 1941 as the third recipient of the Paley Award. This national honor was given annually to one ham radio operator by William S. Paley, president of CBS Radio. Mr. Ensor and his sister traveled to New York to receive the award, bringing home a



Marshall and Loretta Ensor and their radio set, 1941. Johnson County Museum Collection.

trophy designed by American artist Alexander Calder.

Loretta Ensor also received national recognition as a radio pioneer. After her brother's death in 1970, Miss Ensor continued to operate her ham station for several years. In 1974, the Young Ladies Radio League, a national organization, honored her for her fifty years as a ham radio operator.

Loretta Ensor died in 1991. The Ensor Farmsite is now operated by the Olathe Parks and Recreation Department.