

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Original Muppets Find a Home

Collection donated to the Smithsonian

The original Kermit the Frog, his body created with an old dull-green coat and his eyes made of pingpong balls, has returned home to the nation's capital, where the puppet got his start.

The first Kermit creation from Jim Henson's Muppet's collection appeared in 1955 on the early TV show "Sam and Friends," produced at Washington's WRC-TV. Henson's widow Jane Henson donated 10 characters from the show Aug. 25 to the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History.

She said the original characters

provided five minutes of fun each night after the local news.

"I think people realized that if you put Kermit's face up there, it was just as powerful," Jane Henson, 76, said. "We were mostly just doing it to entertain ourselves."

The Hensons attended the University of Maryland and got into the TV business with Willard Scott and other pioneers while in college. Their connection to the area makes the Smithsonian a perfect home for Henson's original puppets, friends said.

"It's not just the puppets coming home, but in a way it's Jane and Jim coming home," said Arthur Novell, executive director of the nonprofit Jim Henson Legacy in New York City. "They started their careers, their lives in Washington."



Harry the Hipster (left) and the original Kermit, along with other early puppets of Jim Henson, are donated to the Smithsonian Institution, during an Aug. 25 ceremony at the National Museum of American History, in Washington, D.C. (AP photo)

The Smithsonian already has a familiar Kermit the Frog puppet made famous on "Sesame Street" and "The Muppet Show." But the original Kermit was more lizard-like, and a duller green. His body was made from an old coat thrown out by Henson's mother.

Some of the other early Muppets donated to the museum include the puppets that inspired Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch, as well as Sam from "Sam and Friends." The group also includes Henson's oldest surviving puppet, Pierre the French Rat. The puppets mostly mimed on the show and would lip-sync to popular music.

Curator Dwight Blocker Bowers said the Muppets will be a boon for the museum's collection.

"It certainly shows the Muppets at the beginning of the career of a large family of entertainers," he said. "More than anything, I think it shows the genius of Jim Henson."

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