

# Iron Mountain preserves precious recordings in old Butler County mine

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Beaver County Times



BOYERS, PA — Ozzy Osbourne once roamed the corridors of Iron Mountain.

Like countless music, movie and TV content-makers, Osbourne relied on the former limestone mine in Butler County to dig up treasured art.

It's where Osbourne heard for the first time in decades the original copy of his iconic "Crazy Train," as well as where he excitedly discovered an unreleased song that ... well, more on that in a bit.

But first, let's build the foundation for Iron Mountain Entertainment Services, an important, fascinating and highly secured site 45 minutes northeast of Beaver County.



## Treasure mountain

Iron Mountain, according to its Facebook profile, is in business to "protect and manage physical and digital assets from creation through storage."

Federal agencies and 95 percent of Fortune 1,000 companies utilize the 200-acre facility to store data and assets in a climate-controlled environment, Iron Mountain says.

Located 220-feet below ground and naturally maintaining a constant 55-degree temperature free of damaging humidity and sunlight, Iron Mountain houses a state-of-the-art data center, storage chambers, and digital re-mastering and conversion studios

The company's Entertainment Division preserves priceless original music recordings, films and photos tracing back to glass plate images from Civil War times.

Say a documentary maker needs film footage from the 1920s, or a record label needs an unreleased live version of a classic rock hit to be used in a German TV commercial. There's a good chance they'd find what they need in Iron Mountain's archives.

Much of what's stored there is confidential.

Though as he likes to tell guests on grand tours, Bob Koszela, director of studio operations at Iron Mountain, said, "I can safely say something you've heard or seen this week came out of here. It's that relative."

Perhaps while watching TV, you caught highlights from the early career of a sports legend.

"We probably had a part in it," said Koszela, a former staff engineer for Universal Music Group and Interscope Studios in California, where he recorded famed acts like Guns N' Roses, Motörhead, and Poison.

A former catalog production manager at the Universal Music Enterprises label, Koszela first heard about Iron Mountain when an archive quest sought an original master recording from Elton John. Told the facility he needed to find was in Boyers, Pa., Koszela first assumed that must be a suburb of Philadelphia, not a rural village in northern Butler County.

Koszela joined Iron Mountain Entertainment Services in 2012, bringing decades of experience in global archive management, record label marketing/promotion, production, licensing and media preservation.

In short, he thoroughly understood the digital supply chain, and how entertainment conglomerates need easy access to master recordings they are unable to safely or financially store on their own. In many cases, representatives of those companies don't fully realize what all they've got at Iron Mountain, whose vetted workers meticulously document whatever they can.

"We're often the eyes and ears on the ground for these media companies in London, New York, Nashville," Koszela said.

Major media clients will contact Iron Mountain with a specific video clip or audio recording need.

"A huge part of our work is clients just asking us for pieces. Like, 'Hey is there any footage of that or this? Or, 'The police chase... was that on that reel?'"

The staff locates the asset and transfers it to a digital file electronically sent to the client. Koszela said 99 percent of the time, the physical asset never leaves Iron Mountain.



## **Digital world potential**

The possibilities are endless.

"Imagine taking an old show and improving it," Koszela said, "making sure the quality of it is pristine with the highest resolution so it can be processed."

For instance, a 1950s television series could be given a clearer visual look to make it more eye-appealing for one of those vintage TV channels like Antenna, Cozi or ME TV.

"Consider the ways the world enjoys content," Koszela said. "Elvis recorded in the '50s and '60s. His songs are larger than life but pre-dated multi-track. Though the reality is, the creativity never stops. What if we now stripped away the guitar and emphasized his vocals and created immersive audio, like surround-sound mixes?"

Technology introduced in the past 10 years now, like spectral editing, enables us to create such musical separations from mono or stereo programs, and allow for those early recordings to be used in very new and creative ways.

It's absolutely new content being created as new content. It's exciting to see what's coming down the pike," Koszela said.





For Koszela, one of the engineers on Guns N' Roses near-fabled "Chinese Democracy" album, who recalls singer Axl Rose being surprisingly down-to-earth, there's a thrill to realizing all the original musical assets Iron Mountain preserves.

"It's almost staggering when I walk into the vaults and get a sense of how many are out here. I'll start seeing records, and be like, 'Oh, I remember this guy, I saw him open for so-and-so.'"

Though how did that all end up under a Butler County hillside?

## **Meet the Mountain**

"The misconception is that it's all musty, like some scene out of 'Raiders of The Lost Ark,'" Koszela said.

The walls are actually painted white, to effectively reflect light in the darkness.

Entering a hillside through a tunnel, visitors must go through a metal detector and security checkpoint manned 24 hours. The operation center likewise is staffed 24/7 by engineers ready to respond to any Iron Mountain customers.

The underground site formerly was owned by U.S. Steel, used for smelting steel operations in Pittsburgh. With 14-to-16-foot thick sediment, the limestone was accessed not by digging down, but by digging across, into the hillside. That created a labyrinth of mines.

By the early 1950s, the mines went silent.

"U.S. Steel was going to pull out the ribs — the columns that hold it up — and blast it, and let it settle in," Koszela said. "But then the federal government said, 'Hey, wait a minute' because it was the height of the Cold War and there might be a need to secure people."

When Cold War fears subsided, the feds sold the site, which became a mini-storage facility for RVs and boats. It became a data center in the 1980s, the flagship for Iron

Mountain Inc., which expanded into a multi-site global leader in storage and information management services with 225,000 customers.

By the 1990s, the Butler County site took on what Kosezla describes as "TSA-level security."

One of rock 'n' roll's most famous reformed bad boys cleared security and took a gander inside Iron Mountain.



Ozzy Osbourne and his son Jack trekked to Pennsylvania in 2016 for the fifth episode of their History Channel show "Ozzy & Jack's World Detour."

The episode's title: "Iron Mountain Men," playing off Ozzy's famed Black Sabbath song "Iron Man."

The loose concept was that Ozzy could pull the original, raw and unmixed "Crazy Train" recording off the shelf and listen to it.

With a film crew, music label officials and Iron Mountain reps forming a half-circle around him, Ozzy got teary-eyed listening to the original, pristine recording featuring his friend and guitarist, the late Randy Rhoads.

As "Crazy Train" ended, the tape kept rolling, and suddenly another song could be heard.

"Ozzy's like, 'Wait, W-w-w-what's that?'"

"That's you," we said. "Clearly that's you," Koszela said.

It turned out to be an Ozzy song forgotten for almost 35 years.

"He was floored," Kosezla said. "We all were. It was an unreleased, unheard song. And I grew up a huge fan of Ozzy and Sabbath, so I know their songs."

The record label people accompanying Ozzy started to look a little emotional, too.

"You could almost see the cartoon dollar signs in their eyes," Kosezla said. "Here was unreleased stuff, played on a tape, forgotten for many years."

Kosezla isn't aware of the forgotten song being released yet.

Ozzy, Jack and the History Channel film crew also spent an hour at the Corbis photo vault in Iron Mountain, where a representative of Corbis (now Getty Images) showed them several rare photos, including one of Ozzy and his wife Sharon from their 1984 wedding. Ozzy wasn't aware of that photo.



It became one of those 1 percent of the times where an Iron Mountain asset left the property.

They presented it to Ozzy as a gift.

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