

The 20's Decade

1920 -1929

By Don Kresge

Before 1920, there was much radio communication going on but it was all CW, or code as the non-initiated would call it. It was rapidly becoming competitive with telegraph and telephone. The voice idea, however, was only a plaything for the amateur experimenter.

One such experimenter was Frank Conrad, an engineer with Westinghouse, who broadcast talk and music to the local neighborhood from his radio shack in the rear of his home. As a result of his experience, Westinghouse decided to set up a radio station to broadcast voice and KDKA came into being. The success was so immediate that any sources of old sets, crystal or otherwise, were completely exhausted. To fill-in, Westinghouse had Conrad design a set which was put into production. One of these sets, Model "RC" is in this exhibit.

Tubes available at this time were type 01A. A good and serviceable tube but with a filament rated at $\frac{1}{4}$ amperes at 5 volts, it was heavy on the battery supply. So in early advancement, was the WD-11 tube which operated at $\frac{1}{4}$ amperes at 1.1 volts, making the 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ volt dry cell useable. This was quickly followed by the UV-199, which operated at $\frac{1}{18}$ amperes at 3.0 volts.

As AC power became available, other advancements appeared such as; the Tungar battery charger for recharging the 6 volt storage batteries; the "A"- "B" battery eliminator, which made these sets operable directly from the 110 volt outlet.

Most of the old TRF (tuned radio frequency) sets used three dials for tuning which was extremely cumbersome, so that the single dial set was urgently worked for. Circuit-wise therefore followed the Neutradyne and finally, the Superhetrodyne. Also by the middle of the decade, AC filament tubes were developed, eliminating the need for storage, etc. "A" batteries and the "B" battery eliminators were being incorporated in the same cabinet as the set itself.

By 1925, radio had, figuratively, exploded. By this time, there were over 750 radio stations in the country. The Radio Trade Directory of 1925 lists 514 radio set manufacturers, and hundreds and hundreds of parts suppliers.

The Superhetrodyne circuit coupled with improved tube types practically doomed to obsolescence any other circuitry. Also, with greater audio power and increased audio fidelity, the console began an entirely new concept and popularity in the radio field. The electro-dynamite speaker appeared at this time and power supplies came to be an integral part of the radio chassis.

The Depression put a considerable damper on radio sales, even though many manufacturers fell by the wayside, the radio picture looked extremely good for the future.

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