

# America's New Toy



**Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company**



In 1922, Americans went mad over a wonderful new toy. It was called radio. That year everyone wanted to buy a set. The trouble was that there wasn't enough to go around. People visited the homes of the lucky ones who had radios. To hear these radios, they had to use earphones. Everybody took turns listening. They were amazed. Imagine hearing voices and music that came from the air!

How did it all begin? An Italian inventor, Guglielmo Marconi, pioneered the first radio in 1895. But Marconi's radio could only send Morse code messages. It could not send voices or music. The code is made up of dots and dashes that stand for letters. It sounds a lot like static. Five years later, the first human voice was sent by radio. Soon there were thousands of amateur radio operators. They were called "hams." They talked to each other by radio.

In 1920, Dr. Frank Conrad set up an amateur radio station above his garage. He lived in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Soon, Dr. Conrad got a pleasant surprise. Many nearby "hams" were picking up his broadcasts. After a while, Dr. Conrad got tired of talking to these "hams." So, he began playing records for

them to give himself a rest. More and more people began listening to his broadcasts. They asked for baseball and football scores, too. Before long, a Pittsburgh store advertised radio sets that could pick up Dr. Conrad's broadcasts.

Dr. Conrad worked for the Westinghouse Company. The company thought that radio could mushroom into a big thing. It decided to build a station that would make regular radio broadcasts – as a business. The station, which was a little box-shaped room was built on the roof of the Westinghouse factory in East Pittsburgh. Its call letters were KDKA.

On the night of November 2, 1920, KDKA made the first regular radio broadcast in America. It broadcast the results of the election for President of the United States held that day. In the first broadcast, it was announced that Warren G. Harding was the winner. About 500 people heard the broadcast. They were excited about hearing the news "from the sky." Big stories were printed about the broadcast in the newspapers. Before long, everyone had to have a radio.



KDKA began broadcasting music by a "live" band. It played from a tent set up on the roof. KDKA also broadcast church services and speeches. The next summer, another station was set up to broadcast the big heavyweight boxing match between Jack Dempsey and Georges Carpentier of France.

The fight took place in Jersey City, New Jersey, on July 2, 1921. During the fight, the radio transmitter(sender) got hot and began to smoke. At the end of the fight, it melted completely. But 200,000 people heard the fight. Radio was a success. Soon stations began springing up everywhere.

In 1922, Ed Wynn, a famous comedian, was about to broadcast from a studio. But Wynn couldn't work without an audience. The announcer rounded up electricians, cleaning ladies, and telephone operators. They became the first studio audience. Soon they were laughing at Wynn's jokes. And Wynn was able to go on with the show.

Within a few years, radio became a big business. Businessmen formed companies called networks to broadcast shows coast-to-coast. Everyone listened to the news reports, popular singers, and comedy shows that were on every week. And everyone in the country heard the same news and entertainment at just about the same time. Today, many stars of old-time radio can still be heard – and seen – on TV.