National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

Sylvania TV Model 21C529B



This week we highlight a 1959 black and white television set with a gimmick! Sylvania called it "Halolight."

In 1950 very few American homes had a television set, but by 1960, the majority did. The 1950s was a decade when TV sets were flying out of dealers' showrooms. Dozens of companies were manufacturing them. Competition was fierce, and so firms struggled to find something to distinguish their sets from those of competitors.

Early 1950s TV sets had rather dim pictures. During the daytime most people would have to pull down the shades to watch TV, and in the evening, room lights were usually left off. Some became worried that keeping your eyes on the small screens in a dark room hour after hour might cause eye strain. Rather than keeping ceiling or floor lamps on, many recommended purchasing a small lamp to place on top of the TV set to provide *some* light in the room without creating glare on the picture tube. Delighted lamp manufacturers rose to the occasion and aggressively marketed "TV lamps."

Sylvania saw an opportunity. By putting a softly lighted frame around the picture tube, which Sylvania called "Halolight," the company claimed that its models eased eyestrain and eliminated the need to purchase a TV lamp, as well as being attractive. (The claim that Halolight eliminated eyestrain was dubious, but it did help sell sets.) The metal stand shown here came with this set.

Sylvania's TV sets were generally well made. By 1959 picture tubes were much brighter so Halolight was no longer needed, and was on its way out. The Halolight set in our collection has a 21-inch picture tube—the most popular size for consoles during much of the 1950s. After 1960, TV sets began to split into two categories: bulky consoles with picture tubes larger than 21 inches, including color sets, and lighter weight portable sets with smaller CRTs.

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!