National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

Philco Sales Banner



This week we showcase a large (approximately 3 by 4½ feet) advertising banner currently displayed in the museum's atrium. It would have hung in the window of a Philco dealer or above a display of Philco radios in a department store.

For a time prior to World War II Philco was the country's largest radio manufacturer, but it was not founded to manufacture radios. In 1906 The Philadelphia Storage Battery Company emerged from a reorganization of predecessor firms. It produced batteries for automobiles and electric locomotives. As demand grew, the enterprise prospered. In 1919 it adopted "Philco" as its trademark.

Early 1920s radios required batteries, so Philco profitably manufactured and sold radio batteries and battery chargers. But by the mid-1920s it was becoming clear that AC radios that could be plugged into the wall outlet instead of requiring bulky batteries would be the next major development in radio. Philco jumped into the electric radio market, introducing its first line in 1928. They were well designed, priced right, and sold well. In just one year, Philco went from a start-up in radio to number three in sales, selling more than 400,000 radios in 1929.

In 1929 Philco's marketing department began touting its "balanced unit radios." The caption for the Philco magazine ad illustration below read "Pictured at the left is the distorted tone, typical of a radio whose units are only in approximate balance. Pictured on the right is the wonderfully true, clear tone which Philco achieves in every set by exactly balancing all electrical units in the set." That sounded promising, but a radio engineer comparing Philco's designs with those of competitors' radios would find no evidence whatever of any "balancing." The slogan was meaningless!

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!



