National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

Sony FD20A "Watchman"



Integrated circuits and high resolution flat screen displays have enabled the development of remarkably small lightweight personal electronic devices.

In 1979 Sony introduced the "Walkman," a portable cassette tape player, and soon images of someone jogging with earphones in place and carrying a Walkman became ubiquitous. Given the success of the Walkman, Sony decided to do the same for television viewing. The company introduced the first "Watchman" in Japan in 1982 and in the United States in 1984. The first models were black and white, but later color versions were offered. Sony developed 65 different Watchman models until they dropped the line around the year 2000. Other manufacturers offered similar devices.

These tiny portable television sets were all analog, and when television broadcasting changed to high definition digital, Watchman sets immediately became obsolete. Today our smart phones allow us to view color TV programs anywhere there is WiFi available.

Anyone who was around when television broadcasting began and who recalls how large and heavy television sets once were (and how, at first, a rooftop antenna was required) cannot help but marvel at how far we have come in just a few decades.

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!