National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

1948 Pilot 3-inch TV Set



While television had not yet reached small towns in America, by 1948 people living in major urban areas could purchase a television receiver, install a rooftop antenna, and bring programs of news and entertainment into their living rooms—*if* they could afford it.

The Pilot Corporation of Long Island City, NY, had been a leader in popularizing shortwave radio listening in the pre-WW II era. While the company did produce a few television sets, it was never a major supplier. However, its Model TV-37, this week's featured artifact, made modest history for its modesty.

In 1948 even table model TVs were bulky and hernia-inducing to lift. Pilot engineers set out to see how small, lightweight, and inexpensive they could make a TV set. (Most sets then cost today's equivalent of thousands of dollars.) Their goal was one that could retail for less than $100. They succeeded! Called the "Candid," the TV-37 weighed less than 15 pounds and sold for $99.50 (about ten times more today). A few dollars more could purchase a leatherette carrying case. A "rabbit-ear" antenna might have worked in homes in close proximity to a TV station transmitter, but otherwise this set would have required a rooftop antenna.



The only way to get the cost down this low was to use a tiny 3-inch picture tube. The museum's set pictured here has an optional accessory—a magnifying glass hung on its front to slightly enlarge the image.

In the early 1980s, when computers were as bulky and expensive as late 1940s TV sets, Osborne came out with its Osborne 1 portable computer that also used a 3-inch cathode ray tube, and in appearance, bore a remarkable resemblance to this Pilot TV. Is that where Osborne got the idea?

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!