National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

Clinton Model 440



By the 1960s when transistor radios took over the market, radios could be made small and lightweight. But in the late 1930s when the Chicago-based Clinton Manufacturing Co. offered this tiny four-tube radio, vacuum tubes were the only option, and vacuum tube radios tended to be big and heavy.

At the time this radio was made, it was about as small as a radio could be. It measures only 6½ by 5 by 4½ inches. The tubes and parts were jammed into the wood cabinet with no space left over. While the back was left open for air circulation, the confined space would have resulted in high temperatures. With the exposed tubes right at the back of the cabinet, anyone who accidentally touched one risked a severe burn

A four-tube radio like this would have performed poorly. It probably would have picked up strong local stations but not weaker far-away ones, and its tiny speaker would not have produced much volume. Its sound was definitely not Hi-Fi!

But for a space-saving radio in a kitchen or bedroom to listen to a local station while being easy on the wallet, this might have been the ticket. We display this radio in the same room with our magnificent 23-tube E. H. Scott 23-tube all-wave high-fidelity console of the same era. These two radios are about as far apart on the radio quality spectrum as could be had.

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!