National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

Hallicrafters Model S-53A



Chicago-based Hallicrafters is well known for producing popular receivers for ham radio operators and shortwave listeners. Founded in 1932 by Bill Halligan, the company produced millions of radios until it was sold to Northrup in 1966.

A good example of a moderately-priced 1950s communications receiver, the eight–tube S-53A, made between 1950 and 1959, sold originally for $80 (around $800 in today's dollars). By comparison, Hallicrafters' top-of-the-line mid-1950s communications receiver, the twenty-tube Model SX-88, cost $600 ($6300 in today's dollars). While many ham operators coveted the SX-88, only the very affluent could afford to purchase one. An S-53A might have been purchased by a teen-aged ham who could not afford a more expensive receiver, or perhaps someone who liked to listen to shortwave broadcasts and wanted a receiver that performed somewhat better than low-end home radios with shortwave coverage.

During WWII Hallicrafters produced huge quantities of military electronics. In its heyday, many Hallicrafters shortwave radios had imaginative names ("Skyrider," "Sky Buddy," Sky Champion," "Sky Challenger.") While the S-53A did not boast such a name, Hallicrafters probably chose "Sky-" to reflect the fact that shortwave listening involved signals reflecting off the ionosphere. Radio collectors today are fond of these classic Hallicrafters models.

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!