National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact of the Week:

1950s Zenith Z-985 Battery



The familiar 9-volt battery that powers most transistor radios, like the Duracell shown in the foreground, is about 1½ inches high and weighs about 1½ ounces. Compare that to the 1950s Zenith battery behind it, used in the famous Zenith Trans-Oceanic all-band portable radio. ***It is more than a foot wide and weighs nearly eight pounds!*** It was common for a radio battery of that era to weigh more than the radio it powered. The tubes in Zenith's Trans-Oceanics of that era required a 9-volt A battery and a 90 volt B battery, both of which Zenith combined in this battery package.

The transistors and integrated circuits used in modern radios require much, much less electric power than vacuum tube radios of the early 1950s. Not only were batteries like this Zenith big and bulky, they had to be replaced more often than the tiny batteries powering today's transistor radios. Zenith sold this battery for $4.50 in 1952 ($45 today). A 9-V battery today costs a tenth as much. Clearly, transistor radios have changed the paradigm.

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!