RCA AR-812

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Donated by Dwight Heasty

This 1924 model is one of the first portable radios. With its carrying handle on top, we call it our “1920s Boom Box.” The two end compartments are filled with batteries. Made of solid hardwood with a steel chassis, it is as heavy as a big suitcase! It did not have a built-in loudspeaker, so you would have had to carry along a large horn speaker.

It is also one of the first superheterodyne-type radios—a superior way of designing a radio, invented by American radio engineer Howard Armstrong (who also invented FM radio). Even today’s radios are usually based on the superheterodyne principle. RCA controlled the superheterodyne patents during the 1920s and refused to license its competitors. If you wanted a superheterodyne portable in 1924, this was the radio you would buy.

It sold for $269 in 1924 (about $5,000 in today’s dollars). In spite of that high price, RCA sold a lot of AR-812s.