

Artifact Showcase

Ham Radio Spark Gap

Before there was wireless with voice and music, radio was restricted to Morse code transmission (wireless telegraphy). Transmitters were of the spark type that employed a large diameter air-core coil to generate a high voltage. When the high voltage was applied across an adjustable gap between two closely spaced metal

electrodes, a spark resulted. Pressing the telegraph key with the proper spacing created the shorter dots or longer dashes of the code.



A few amateur radio operators (hams) began experimenting with wireless telegraphy shortly after the start of the 20th Century. Anyone wanting to create a ham radio station would probably wind a homemade coil to generate the high voltage. (By the 1920s, ham operators sometimes used the ignition coil from a junked auto, especially a Ford Model T, to generate the high voltage spark.) The ham operator might have purchased a spark gap like this one from a mail order catalog. The one pictured does not have a brand name. It is mounted sturdily on a marble base, showing quality construction.

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!