

The Radio Catches On

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OVERVIEW

By the end of the 1920s, one out of every three American households had a radio. The following article, published in January 1923, describes the rise of broadcasting stations and what people were "listening in" to.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- What does the author mean when he describes Americans as "a home-loving people"?
 - What types of programs were broadcast on the radio in 1923?
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IT WOULD BE A COMMONPLACE REMARK to say that when wireless telephoning became practical, about the year 1914, no one dreamed that its use would ever be general or popular. Even two years ago few enthusiasts would have dared to assert that they would live to see hundreds of thousands of persons interested in radio-telephony. The rapidity with which the thing has spread has possibly not been equaled in all the centuries of human progress.

Americans are a home-loving people. When the day's work is done and the evening meal is over, the natural desire is to remain at home; one goes out merely to seek entertainment, recreation, and education which could not otherwise be had. There, perhaps, lies the secret of radio; for enterprising "broadcasters" bring to the ear, every hour and every day, wholly without cost to the "listener-in," a most amazing variety of entertainment and instruction.

These broadcasting stations are operated by manufacturers of radio supplies, who are repaid by the creation of a boom market for sets and parts; by newspapers and department stores, which see an advertising value in the new fad; and by amateur enthusiasts or experimenters. No one knows how many thousand persons each night are informed, before and after a musical selection or a talk, that "This is WSB, the Atlanta *Journal*"; or "This is WHB, the Sweeney Automobile School, Kansas City"; or "This is WOO, John Wanamaker, Philadelphia"; or "This is WDAP, the Drake Hotel, Chicago." One station in Iowa mailed printed programs weekly until 30,000 listeners had asked for them; and then it quit issuing printed programs.

Who are these radio fans? Strange to say, they are not mechanics, even though every set requires a certain amount of installation and most sets are either homemade or home-assembled. Among the menfolk at an office with which the writer is familiar, one in every three has a radio outfit. All were more or less homemade, no two are in any way alike, and every one gives

satisfaction. Two of them regularly pick up broadcasting stations 1,000 miles away. The most expensive set in the group costs less than \$75, including telephone receivers and batteries.

Even an outfit of limited range will bring to one's sitting room or fireside—through the turning of a knob or two, or the sliding of a cylinder—a variety of entertainment and instruction such as he could not himself have planned. Vocal and instrumental selections there are aplenty, as clear as though the artists were in the next room—solos, duets, quartets, whole choruses, symphonies, and even operas. But besides those offerings the radio fan "gets" varsity football or baseball games and professional prizefights, described from field or ringside; he hears church services from beginning to end; he listens to a Shakespeare reading or to a speech. Last month General Pershing spoke one evening to a radio audience from St. Louis; it is entirely probable that his voice carried to every state in the Union. The musical selections of WJZ, from Newark N.J., have been heard in England.

There are now more than 500 broadcasting stations scattered all over this country. The amateur listener is unfortunate, indeed who cannot hear any one that he chooses among half a dozen, while the more patient or skillful person can pick up one after another a score of stations. In and around New York, during any evening, a hundred-foot length of copper wire in one's back yard will receive messages sent out into the air from Boston, Schenectady, Newark, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Atlanta, Louisville, Indianapolis, Chicago, Davenport, Kansas City, and St. Louis. And a modest companion outfit indoors will permit the radio fan to select, one at a time, the station or the message he wishes to hear.

Installing a home set is a shortcut to neighborhood fame, a sure way to become known as a mechanical genius. But, in truth, no special knowledge is required. The novice needs to learn only one thing: Seek good advice, and follow it! A week of tinkering, off and on; and then a winter full of pleasant and profitable evenings at home.