

Breadboard Radio Receivers

If you wanted to own a radio receiver before the 1920s, the only way was to build it yourself. Prior to the beginning of commercially built radios in the early 1920s from the Crosley Radio Corporation, RCA (Radio Corporation of America), Westinghouse, GE (General Electric), and a few others, radios were home built using parts that were locally purchased or obtained via mail order.

Breadboard Radios



Often called experimenters, non-technical people joined radio clubs to develop the skills of radio construction; for example, housewives learned how to build radios. Because radio parts required a stable mounting, a wooden board was an easy solution, and boards readily available to housewives were abandoned breadboards.

Breadboards soon became the favorite mounting for anyone—even technical people—building a radio. The first commercially assembled radios conformed to the common perception that radio parts should be mounted on a board.

Among the early manufacturers of radios that capitalized on this concept were Alfred Carlton Gilbert of the A. C. Gilbert Company in Westville, Connecticut, and Arthur Atwater Kent, Sr., of the Atwater Kent Manufacturing Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The family radio was customarily located in the living room, and people often wore their Sunday best to sit and listen. Kent recognized this behavior and made radios from beautifully crafted parts mounted to an expertly finished wooden board to match the fine furniture of the living room. Using this concept, his company was extraordinarily successful and went on to become the country's largest supplier of radios.

You may have noticed that other early manufacturers of radios, including Crosley, used a wooden box with a hinged or removable lid. People wanted a lid to open, so that they could witness their fine radio in action.

In like manner the A. C. Gilbert Company, best known for its Erector Set and Chemistry Set, was one of the world's largest providers of science kits for young people from 1909 to 1967. The firm's radio was mounted to a wooden board and known as the Breadboard Receiver, commonly called a "breadboard radio kit."

You can see examples of Kent and Gilbert breadboard receivers in the Innovation 100 room display case. Additional Atwater Kent radios are in the Gray History of Wireless Collection.



The Atwater Kent Breadboard Receiver resembles radios made by experimenters that upcycled their breadboards as bases for the components.



This kit for the A. C. Gilbert Breadboard Receiver capitalized on the style of mounting experimenters used: namely, breadboards!

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4/10/2021