

# This Day in History... August 20, 1920

## Early Commercial Radio

On August 20, 1920, Detroit's 8MK radio station began daily broadcasts. Still in operation today, the station often claims to be the first commercial radio station, though a few others have also staked their claim on that title.

The evolution of radio technology spanned decades with contributions from several inventors. Guglielmo Marconi is often credited as the inventor of radio, and won the 1909 Nobel Prize in Physics with Karl Ferdinand Braun "in recognition of their contributions to the development of wireless telegraphy."

William E. Scripps is often credited with the creation of Detroit's 8MK radio station. His family ran the *Detroit News* and had long been interested in the advancements in radio technology. In 1919, Scripps and Thomas E. Clark proposed the creation of a radio station that could broadcast throughout the Great Lakes region. In early 1920, they gained the support of Lee de Forest, a radio pioneer whose Audion vacuum tube made radio broadcasting possible. The station received an amateur radio license and adopted the call sign 8MK. Their early broadcasts were called the "Detroit News Radiophone."

8MK began its nightly broadcasts on August 20, 1920, though these were largely test programs only heard by local amateur radio enthusiasts. Then on August 31, the *Detroit News* print an announcement on its front page that nightly radio broadcasts would begin that night. The news that night, which ran from 8 to 9 p.m., announced the returns from a primary election as well as vocal performances by Lois Johnson. The

*8MK initially operated under an amateur radio license.*

next day, the paper reported, "The sending of the election returns by *The Detroit News* Radiophone Tuesday night was fraught with romance and must go down in the history of man's conquest of the elements as a gigantic step in his progress."

Over the next few months, 8MK offered daily broadcasts that often included phonograph recordings with news announcements. They also reported on the heavyweight

championship bout between Jack Dempsey and Billy Miske as well as the 1920 World Series. In September they began weekly vocal concerts and on November 2, they reported on the results of that year's presidential election. 8MK later changed its call sign to WBL and later WWJ, which it remains today. WWJ considers itself "America's Pioneer Broadcasting Station" and where "commercial radio broadcasting began."

On November 2, 1920, KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania had its inaugural broadcast, also sharing the results of the presidential election. KDKA received its license in October 1920 and is often considered the first US licensed commercial broadcasting station. They would begin daily broadcasts in 1921. The station's engineer, Frank Conrad, had been broadcasting from the call signs 8XK and 8YK since 1916. KDKA was the first of several radio stations already in existence

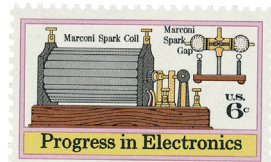
to receive a limited commercial license and is still in operation in Pittsburgh today.

9XM at the University of Wisconsin was another early station. It received an experimental license in 1914 and began transmitting Morse code in 1916. It first broadcast music in 1917 and began regularly scheduled news and music broadcasts in 1921. The station is still in operation today as WHA.

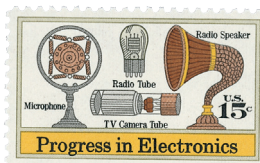
Springfield, Massachusetts's WBZ got its commercial license on September 15, 1921, and Newark, New Jersey's WJZ got its license on November 7. However, these stations changed cities, while KDKA and 8MK have remained in the same cities throughout their existence. There were also a few other experimental radio stations that began operating as early as 1917, but they didn't get their commercial licenses until 1922.



*By 1922 there were 30 commercial stations and by 1923 there 556. Today there are over 15,000.*



*Pictures Guglielmo Marconi's spark coil and spark gap, which enabled him to transmit across the Atlantic Ocean by wireless radio.*



*Pictures Emile Berliner's microphone Thomas Edison's vacuum tube, and Vladimir Zworykin's photoelectric cell.*



*Pictures the transistor, which made miniaturization possible and opened the door for production of pocket radios and computer parts.*



*Pictures de Forest's Audion vacuum tube, "a device for amplifying feeble electric currents."*

# This Day in History... August 20, 1920

## Early Commercial Radio

On August 20, 1920, Detroit's 8MK radio station began daily broadcasts. Still in operation today, the station often claims to be the first commercial radio station, though a few others have also staked their claim on that title.

The evolution of radio technology spanned decades with contributions from several inventors. Guglielmo Marconi is often credited as the inventor of radio, and won the 1909 Nobel Prize in Physics with Karl Ferdinand Braun "in recognition of their contributions to the development of wireless telegraphy."

William E. Scripps is often credited with the creation of Detroit's 8MK radio station. His family ran the *Detroit News* and had long been interested in the advancements in radio technology. In 1919, Scripps and Thomas E. Clark proposed the creation of a radio station that could broadcast throughout the Great Lakes region. In early 1920, they gained the support of Lee de Forest, a radio pioneer whose Audion vacuum tube made radio broadcasting possible. The station received an amateur radio license and adopted the call sign 8MK. Their early broadcasts were called the "Detroit News Radiophone."

8MK began its nightly broadcasts on August 20, 1920, though these were largely test programs only heard by local amateur radio enthusiasts. Then on August 31, the *Detroit News* print an announcement on its front page that nightly radio broadcasts would begin that night. The news that night, which ran from 8 to 9 p.m., announced the returns from a primary election as well as vocal performances by Lois Johnson. The

*8MK initially operated under an amateur radio license.*

next day, the paper reported, "The sending of the election returns by *The Detroit News* Radiophone Tuesday night was fraught with romance and must go down in the history of man's conquest of the elements as a gigantic step in his progress."

Over the next few months, 8MK offered daily broadcasts that often included phonograph recordings with news announcements. They also reported on the heavyweight

championship bout between Jack Dempsey and Billy Miske as well as the 1920 World Series. In September they began weekly vocal concerts and on November 2, they reported on the results of that year's presidential election. 8MK later changed its call sign to WBL and later WWJ, which it remains today. WWJ considers itself "America's Pioneer Broadcasting Station" and where "commercial radio broadcasting began."

On November 2, 1920, KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania had its inaugural broadcast, also sharing the results of the presidential election. KDKA received its license in October 1920 and is often considered the first US licensed commercial broadcasting station. They would begin daily broadcasts in 1921. The station's engineer, Frank Conrad, had been broadcasting from the call signs 8XK and 8YK since 1916. KDKA was the first of several radio stations already in existence

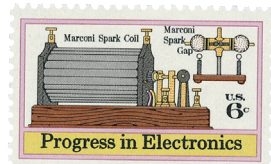
to receive a limited commercial license and is still in operation in Pittsburgh today.

9XM at the University of Wisconsin was another early station. It received an experimental license in 1914 and began transmitting Morse code in 1916. It first broadcast music in 1917 and began regularly scheduled news and music broadcasts in 1921. The station is still in operation today as WHA.

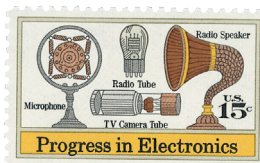
Springfield, Massachusetts's WBZ got its commercial license on September 15, 1921, and Newark, New Jersey's WJZ got its license on November 7. However, these stations changed cities, while KDKA and 8MK have remained in the same cities throughout their existence. There were also a few other experimental radio stations that began operating as early as 1917, but they didn't get their commercial licenses until 1922.



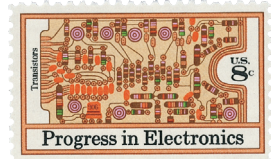
*By 1922 there were 30 commercial stations and by 1923 there 556. Today there are over 15,000.*



*Pictures Guglielmo Marconi's spark coil and spark gap, which enabled him to transmit across the Atlantic Ocean by wireless radio.*



*Pictures Emile Berliner's microphone Thomas Edison's vacuum tube, and Vladimir Zworykin's photoelectric cell.*



*Pictures the transistor, which made miniaturization possible and opened the door for production of pocket radios and computer parts.*



*Pictures de Forest's Audion vacuum tube, "a device for amplifying feeble electric currents."*