

SMALL TOWN

By Rafe Gibbs

When Ed Parsons decided to bring TV from Seattle to Astoria, he didn't let 140 miles of mountainous terrain (see map, left) discourage him. Above, he sets up a test antenna on one of the pine-covered hills near his home town

TELEVISION is going to town—your town. Never mind if your town is only hamlet-size, or more than 100 miles from a metropolis with a television station, or is hemmed in by some first-rate mountains. Television now looms as a distinct possibility for that corner by your fireplace.

What is the basis for such statements? It is the fishing port of Astoria, Ore. Astoria is located at the mouth of the Columbia River, just a couple of jumps above sea level. It is 140 air miles from Seattle, which has the nearest television station. Pine-covered mountains between Astoria and Seattle stand 4000 feet high, but folk in Astoria are enjoying telecasts from Seattle. And reception is good!

Who is responsible for bringing TV to Astoria? Some Astorians give credit to Ed Parsons; some to his wife. Here is why:

Mrs. Parsons, an attractive, dark-haired and dark-eyed former Canadian newspa-

perwoman, remarked to her husband one day at breakfast in the summer of 1948, "Ed, I wish we had pictures with our radio."

Parsons frowned.

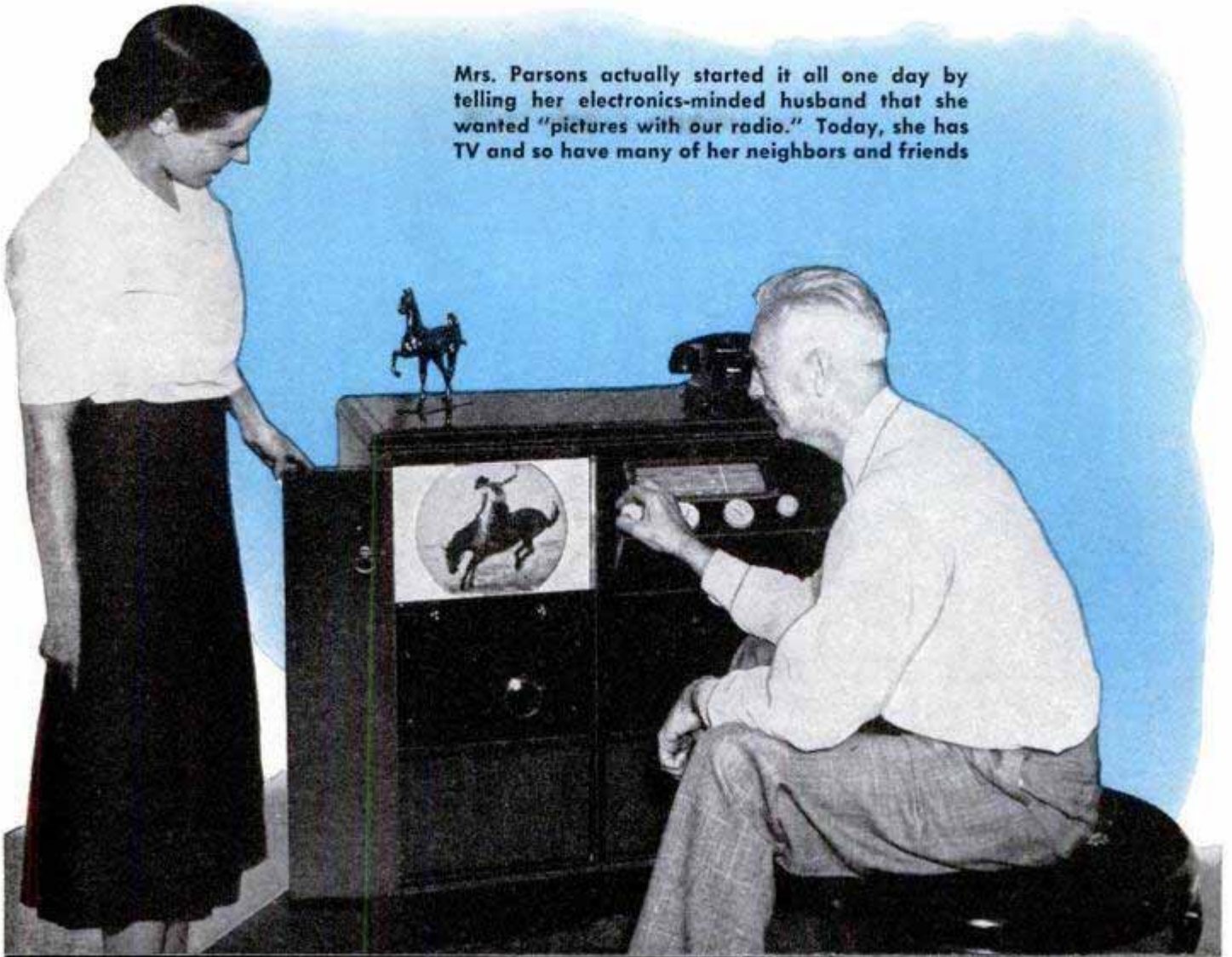
"We live in Astoria, you know. It just isn't being done here this season."

"But I still say I'd like television—and I know someone who could bring it to Astoria if anyone could."

Mrs. Parsons' eyes were on her husband.

As a youth, Parsons was a ham radio operator. As a man with prematurely gray hair that has difficulty staying in place, he still is—W7FKZ. He is best known as the owner and manager of Astoria's commercial radio station, KAST. But to some 1500 Astoria fishing-boat skippers, he is the man who sees that their radar, depth finders, automatic pilots and direction finders keep working. He also provides maintenance for aircraft and air-navigation aids. Owner and operator of Radio and Electronics

Mrs. Parsons actually started it all one day by telling her electronics-minded husband that she wanted "pictures with our radio." Today, she has TV and so have many of her neighbors and friends



TELEVISION

Company in Astoria, he is one of the West Coast's top electronics engineers.

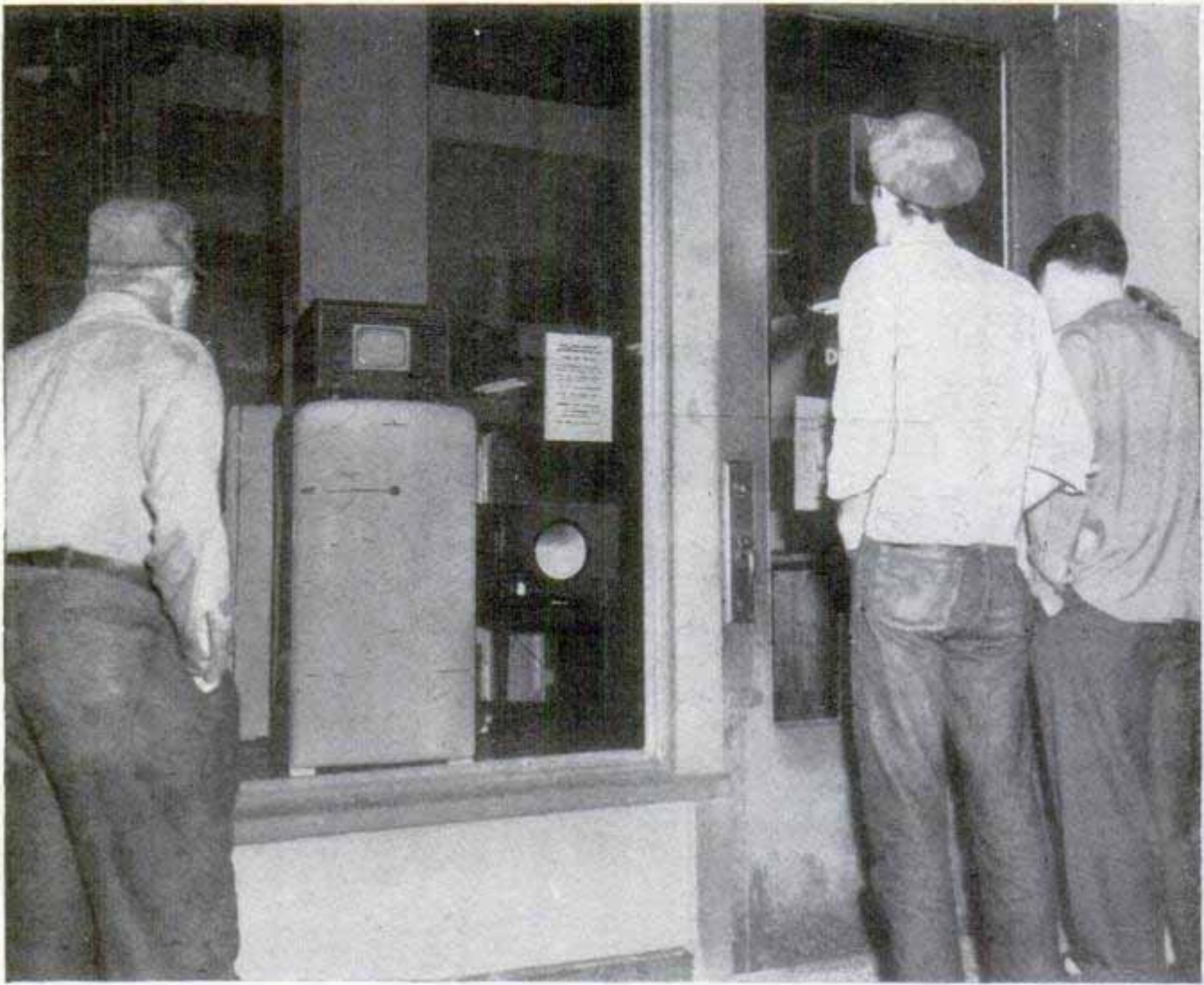
If anyone could bring television to Astoria, Parsons was the man. But could it be done? Fifty miles over fairly level terrain was generally considered as the maximum radius for consistent television transmission. There have been receptions in different parts of the United States from as far away as England, but they were freaks that flickered briefly in the night.

Nevertheless, to please his wife, Parsons decided to look into the matter. Television Station KRSC in Seattle was then about to go on the air and was making test telecasts. Parsons began to conduct some experiments of his own.

First, he had to find out whether there were any usable signals in Astoria from the Seattle station. Loading his car with frequency-survey equipment, Parsons prowled the streets of Astoria with all the sleuthing patience of a patrolman. Matter of fact, before he was through, Parsons covered all of Clatsop County.

With this compact eight-tube receiver-sender of his own design, Parsons picks up TV signals from Seattle and sends them out over coaxial cable to other sets





Stores in Astoria now sell TV sets and, just as in the big towns, passers-by stand outside, watching the show. Below, Parsons is well known among fishermen who bring their radio equipment to him for repair



The most logical place to pick up signals would seem to be hilltops, but it just wasn't that way. Parsons found signals on the sides of hills, in valleys and in other assorted spots. The KRSC signals seemed to come to Astoria in fingerlike bands. These bands were one to two city blocks wide. Within each band, the signal was constant from street level to building tops, but the signal in some bands was stronger than in others.

Invariably, the signals were in awkward places for experiments. But, finally, after testing the whole county, Parsons got around one day to working with his survey equipment at his own home, a penthouse atop a two-story building right in the center of Astoria. He picked up a signal, which meant a television "finger" was pointing right at his roof top. The signal was weaker than some of the others he had found, but for experimental purposes it would do and now he had a handy place to work.

To his home "laboratory," Parsons brought a standard television set and a variety of television aerials. He tried one aerial after another, but got no television. Most men would have given up at this point, but not Parsons. He is slow to quit. Ask the Astoria fishermen. When a skipper

comes into his shop with an electronics problem that can't be solved on land, Parsons goes to sea himself for the answer.

He kept on with his television experiments. He began to devise his own aerials, his own booster equipment. Then he installed telephone service from the roof of the penthouse to the living room where the television set stood, its screen as blank as a wall.

While Parsons experimented with aerials on the roof, his wife sat in front of the set. Making an adjustment, Parsons would telephone his wife:

"See anything?"

"Not a shadow."

This went on for weeks. The Parsons house became a clutter of aerials and other equipment. Then one day, Parsons called down to his wife and got the answer:

"A flicker."

The flicker progressed into faint images, into pictures, into consistently good reception with the touch of a dial. Mrs. Parsons, who had asked for pictures with her radio, had them from Station KRSC, now regularly on the air in Seattle, 140 miles away over the mountains.

The word got around town and its echo was the steady ringing of the doorbell at the Parsons' penthouse. Both friend and stranger came to hear, to see and to believe.

At first, Mrs. Parsons served refreshments to the guests—invited and uninvited—but soon their numbers made this impractical. It got so that when the doorbell rang, the Parsons would just call, "Come in, and have a seat," without even going to the door.

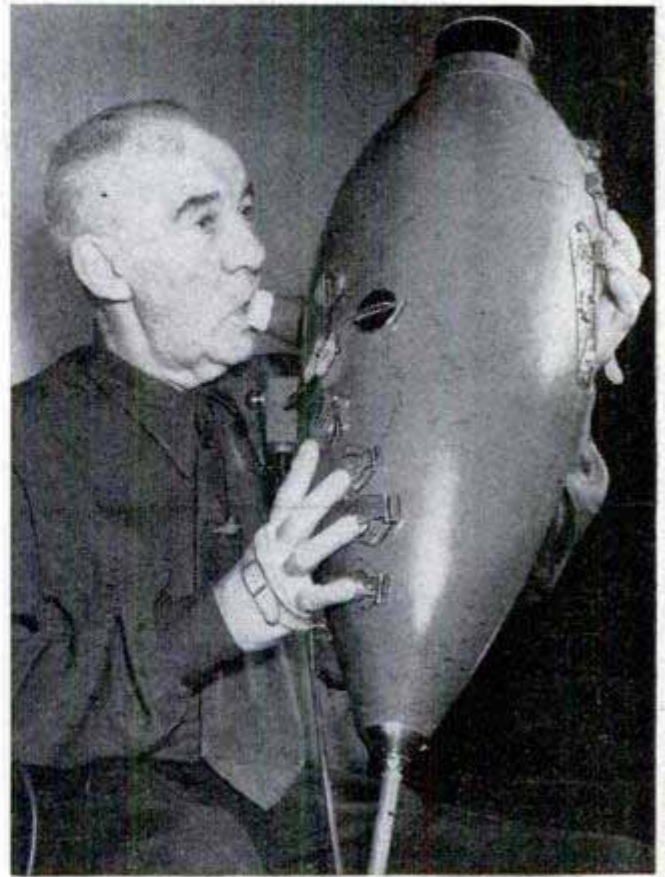
"You asked for it," Parsons told his wife, then added: "Something will have to be done."

Parsons had proved that television could be picked up efficiently over a considerable distance that traversed mountains. But now, somewhat in self-defense, he decided to try another experiment—to see if he couldn't send out what he picked up in Astoria to other residents of the town.

He began development of a receiving-sending unit. Starting with a three-tube system, he worked his way up to one with eight tubes. The unit was kept relatively simple. Relatively small, too, with a 12 by 14-inch chassis. And Parsons made it work.

He had no FCC license to resend a telecast, but there was no law against piping KRSC programs by coaxial cable to other residents of Astoria. He strung cable up buildings, down elevator shafts, through underground tunnels carrying utility lines. The cable went into private homes, taverns, stores. About 2000 feet is the limit of transmitting for Parsons' present equipment,

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Biggest "Sweet Potato" in World

Resembling a Navy blimp in form, an ocarina designed and built by Charles Lindsay of Washington, D. C., is made of wood and weighs 11 pounds. Lindsay says it is the largest ocarina in the world, and with it he can play any sort of tune. The instrument took about 500 hours to build.

Mushrooming TV

With television antennas springing up like mushrooms on the nation's roof tops, there are over three million TV receivers in use today and 42 cities have video broadcasting stations, according to the annual report of the Federal Communications Commission. TV network facilities link 24 cities. Using microwave, 136 relay stations send programs between cities and from studios or remote pickups to transmitters. Biggest advance during the year covered by the report was the linking of eastern and midwestern coaxial-cable systems. Simultaneous networking of programs could make possible the viewing of a program by about one-third of the nation's population. Frequency-modulation stations have also increased in number and now more than 100 million persons are within range of broadcasts from FM transmitters.

Our spinning earth is about 3,350,000,000 years old according to the estimate of Dr. Arthur Holmes of the University of Edinburgh, who used the rate of decay of uranium for working out the figure.