


we were here.” If Maxo Vanka knew, he would be pleased with these geniuses and acrobats—and the congregation—who have honored his work with this ongoing restoration. 

Note:

St. Nicholas is an active church and is not open for mural tours except on Saturdays, 11:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m., and escorted visits. Weekend masses are at 6:00 p.m. on Saturday and noon on Sunday. Docent hours may be delayed or cancelled due to church activities. Please check Facebook and the church website for change or cancellation notices before arriving.

Bette McDevitt is a freelance writer and a long-time contributor to *Western Pennsylvania History*.

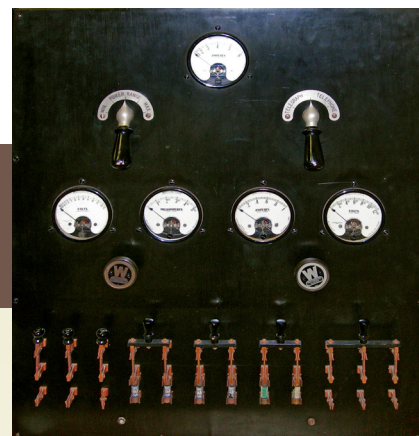


The original colors of the murals begin to come back to life as a conservator works across the surface.

The Society to Preserve the Millvale Murals of Maxo Vanka.



Smithsonian Connection



This replica transmitter retains some of the parts from the KDKA original.

Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, Bering Center, L2007.33.3.

KDKA transmitter, c. 1921

By Emily Ruby, Curator

In the early days of radio, people experimented with broadcasting by communicating via Morse code with a spark-gap transmitter. Amateur radio enthusiasts built homemade receivers to listen to these early radio wave communications. World War I put a temporary stop to this amateur communication, but war research also produced improved transmissions and by the end of the war, enhanced radio transmitters enabled audio to be broadcast via the radio.

When Frank Conrad, a Westinghouse engineer, set up shop in his Pittsburgh garage, he used the improved vacuum tube transmitter and began talking and playing phonographs over the air on his amateur station 8XK. It soon became apparent that he had tapped a new communication and entertainment market, and his transmissions became so popular that locals started to request songs. When

Conrad's bosses at Westinghouse heard of his hobby, they encouraged it as a way to sell more receivers and applied for the first commercial radio license. On October 27, 1920, they received the call letters KDKA.

The studio in Westinghouse's East Pittsburgh Works broadcast the presidential election results between Harding and Cox on November 2 of that year. A *Pittsburgh Post* reporter called in the results to the Westinghouse office and they were read over the air while music played between the updates. The broadcast, transmitted on this machine, is credited as the first commercial radio broadcast. Within a few short years, the radio business grew and radios became an essential feature in American homes. Conrad remained with Westinghouse for 37 years and held more than 200 patents when he retired.