Watching TV

February 18, 2009, could mark the biggest milestone in television history since 1956, when restless viewer fingers were introduced to the remote control. On that day all broadcasts in the United States will go digital. People who own analog TVs will see only snowy fuzz unless they've bought a digital converter box. Here's a look at past—and future—landmarks. —Melody Kramer

1900 Russian scientist Constantin Perskyi coins the word “television” at the Paris World’s Fair to describe the transmission of still photos over electrical wires.

1925 The silhouette of a moving toy windmill is transmitted over wire circuits.

1936 First TV news broadcast in London, live from Alexandra Palace.

1939 RCA leads the launch of TV. By '41 the U.S. has some 7,000 sets.

1948 The U.S. goes from fewer than 200,000 sets to 975,000. The '47 Yankees-Dodgers World Series spurs sales in N.Y.C.

1954 NBC airs the first national color broadcast: the New Year's Day Tournament of Roses Parade.

1974 Two-thirds of U.S. homes have color TVs.


2007 Flat panels lead the U.S. market.

2013 Organic light-emitting diode (OLED) technology will create flexible screens as thin as paper.

2020 Using a keyboard, couch potatoes will rant on a scrolling screen bar, chat with producers of live shows.

TOP MODELS GE had the first U.S. set in '28. France’s was in '29. The first color TV hit in '48, rabbit ears (right) in '56. In '58, a space-age look flopped. Screen sizes: 5 inches in '72, 3-mm-thick in '08.

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