Philo Taylor Farnsworth Biography

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Biography

In the late 1800s several European inventors were demonstrating photomechanical television systems, systems that relied upon a spinning disc that would scan an image and then play it back. Though these systems enjoyed moderate success, it was clear that an all-electronic device would provide a clearer image while using less energy. The eventual inventor of the all-electronic television was a Russian immigrant named Vladimir Zworykin, although a young man from Utah named Philo Farnsworth is credited with the prototypes. As young boy, Farnsworth had heard about the European advances in television technology. While still in high school he drew out a schematic for an electronic television, but did not as yet possess the skill to build the device. After two years at Brigham Young University he finally found financial support for his television, and he began working on its development. Three years later he debuted the first phase: an electronic camera called the "image dissector." The costs to complete Farnsworth's television were becoming too great for his financiers to carry. In the early 1930s the project was handed to the Philco Corporation, whose greater resources allowed Farnsworth the freedom to devote his full attention to his invention's completion. Within a few years he had demonstrated a working model to the Franklin Institute. In 1938, however, Philco withdrew its financing, and Farnsworth was forced to seek other support. When World War II began, Farnsworth's television project was suspended indefinitely. By the time the war had ended Zworykin--with the help of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA)--had completed his own electronic television, the iconoscope. Though Farnsworth's design was still considered viable, the RCA system was quickly made the industry standard. The Farnsworth Television and RCA soon became the electronic research arm of the International Telephone and Telegraph Company (ITT), with Farnsworth remaining as a research consultant. All told, Farnsworth was awarded more than 300 domestic and foreign patents in fields ranging from television to atomic energy.