David Sarnoff Encyclopedia Article

David Sarnoff

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David Sarnoff

1891-1971

Russian-American businessman who became a pioneer in television and radio broadcasting. David Sarnoff was born in Minsk, Russia, and traveled via steerage with his family to New York nine years later. He spoke no English, but helped his family make ends meet by selling newspapers and holding odd jobs. At the age of 15, he learned Morse code (a series of dots and dashes representing letters and numerals) and became a junior operator with the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America. On April 14, 1912, he made history by picking up a fateful message relayed from a ship at sea: "*RMS Titanic* ran into iceberg, sinking fast." Sarnoff was soon promoted within the company, and in 1916 he suggested the first "radio music box." In 1921, he became general manager of the newly formed Radio Corporation of America (RCA), where he made headlines by broadcasting a fight between Jack Dempsey and George Carpentier to between 200,000 and 300,000 listeners, and at the same time making RCA a household name. In 1926, he formed the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) and helped launch television as a new broadcasting medium.