

# History of Heathkit 1926-2026

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# Agenda

- Introduction
- Origins: 1926-1940s
- Golden Age: 1950-1970s
- Computer Revolution: 1980s
- Decline: 1990s
- Resurrection: 2010s
- Legacy

# Introduction

Most influential electronics kit company of the 20th century.

- Empowered generations of hobbyists, engineers, and students to build radios, test equipment, computers, and even televisions at home.
- Brand became synonymous with hands-on learning and DIY electronics.

Backdrop:

- 1900-1945: Hams build almost all their equipment from scratch
- Kits were non-existent
- Commercial radios available (e.g. Hallicrafters, Collins, etc), but prohibitively expensive

Post World War II: Heathkit changed the landscape

- Kits are happy medium between scratch build and commercial purchase
- Affordable with professional performance + appearance

# Origins (1926–1945)

**1926 - 1931:** Edward Heath introduced a light aircraft kit, the Heath Parasol. Based out of Chicago

- Edward Heath was killed during a test flight in 1931

**1931 - 1934:** Company acquired by Walter Clinnin → International Aircraft Corp.

- Company went bankrupt in 1934

**1935 - 1945:** Howard Anthony bought bankrupt company at auction

- Restores name Heath Aircraft Company and bases it out Benton Harbor, Michigan
- Company produced small aircraft accessories , including aircraft radios.
- Company did well during war era with military contracts.



Edward B. Heath



HOWARD E. ANTHONY

# Origins (1926-1945)

*At last!*

- LARGE PLANE SAFETY . . .
- LARGE PLANE PERFORMANCE
- LARGE PLANE ENJOYMENT . . .

IN A PLANE YOU CAN AFFORD—

The HEATH PARASOL \$975

(Special equipment free for a limited time only)

COMPLETE



Plane nearly like the largest planes—the new Heath Parasol offers them more enjoyment than any other. Its regular construction of fabric construction and flying more enjoyable in all of aviation history!

"YOU fly it *just* like the biggest planes. It's as stable as a transport ship. And once you're at the stick—you're as proud as the owner of a \$10,000 plane!"

That's the way one enthusiastic owner describes the new Heath Parasol. For not even the largest planes are constructed with more care and precision. Into every Heath part is built 22 years of light plane experience. And as a result—large plane safety and performance are yours for the first time at a price you can afford.

*To fly it is to want it!*

Unless you have done the new Heath Parasol yourself—you can't possibly appreciate its value. Take it up to 10,000 feet. Fly 400 miles cross-country without a stop! Ride along at an 85 mile per hour clip. And put it through all the strains you've done in the largest planes. Then you'll begin to understand its tremendous popularity.

Observe its full vision above and below—and even dead ahead beneath you. Note its unparalleled low flying ease—usually 100

**THREE OBJECTS**  
more were desirable—now that what they say—

- the Parasol's construction was the best out of any airplane—2100 lbs. and more was built.
- Parasol was the first airplane that is a Parasol with no engine value.
- the Parasol's wings are 1 foot 11 to 11 1/2 ft. in on the top. They are built in place for twisting action.
- the Parasol has 100% of the safety, maneuverability and stability that is required.
- the Heath Parasol is the best flying plane and the most practical one. It's what you need for today and tomorrow.

FOR THE FULL STORY, WRITE TO: HEATH AIRCRAFT COMPANY, 1000 N. W. 10th St., Miami, Florida, or Chicago, Ill.

than one seat and a mile including gas, oil, storage, etc. And consider that it requires no airport or hangar as it lands on any field or even a highway. And with wings mounted on the sides it can be stored in a country barn or city garage!

*Act now and get extra equipment free!*

Don't sit back again this summer and wish you too could fly! Investigate the new Heath Parasol now. By buying now—you get such important accessories as balloon tires, motor starter, brakes, and metal propeller without a penny extra charge. They will add immeasurably to your enjoyment of the plane.

Don't delay another day. 10 cents in stamps or coin brings our large illustrated booklet. Mail the coupon below today.



YESTERDAYS • WINGS



## The Heath Parasol

*Under the Heath umbrella—airplanes and hi-fi kits*

BY PETER M. BOWERS

Many readers are familiar with the Heath-kits assembled at home by electronics and hi-fi buffs. Few, however, are aware that this firm is a direct descendant of the Heath Airplane Company, Incorporated, which between 1926 and 1933 produced kits for lightplanes. The Heath firm, then based in Chicago, built several different models, but the best known is the one simply identified as the Heath "Parasol."

The company did not start out to manufacture airplanes. Owner Edward Bayard Heath had designed and built his first airplane in 1908 and subsequently managed to stay in aviation. After World War I, he had a successful aircraft surplus and supply business and a flying school, plus he modified an occasional airplane, notably the Heath "Favorite," a 1922 modernization of the war-surplus Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny."

Several events for lightplanes with engines smaller than 80 cubic inches at the 1924 National Air Races encouraged Heath to return to original designs. In 1925, assisted by Clarence Lindstedt, he developed two models. The first was the design that was to become the Parasol and the other was an

all-out racer. Both were powered with converted Henderson motorcycle engines. These were four-cylinder, in-line, air-cooled models that were then in wide use by the police and were becoming popular with the builders of ultra-light airplanes. There were no small-displacement airplane engines readily available at the time. The 1925 racer was not a big winner but did well enough to attract attention to Heath designs.

Heath's Parasol was a conventional, single-seat design with the pilot seated under the wing and directly on the center of gravity. (The parasol design is a monoplane with the wing held above the fuselage by struts, rather than being attached directly to it.) The fuselage was welded steel tubing with wire bracing and the tail was a combination of wood and metal. Both were fabric covered. For the benefit of unskilled, amateur builders, the fuselage tubes could be joined by easily bent-to-fit, sheet-metal fittings secured by twopenny nails used as rivets, instead of by welding.

As a production shortcut, the first Parasol used the complete upper wings of a war-surplus Thomas-Morse S-4C Scout, the

"Tommy." The thin airfoil of this wing did not produce much lift, and with the engine delivering a bare 23 hp through an inefficient, high-speed propeller, the first Parasol was a marginal performer. Subsequent models used the original wing design with the new Clark-Y airfoil but retained the 25-foot wingspan of the Tommy.

The improved Parasol was a success and encouraged Heath to expand the business to include the manufacture of complete Parasols, the production of Parasol kits and the modification of Henderson engines for aircraft use. He also built propellers. In 1926, the factory-built Parasol, complete, sold for \$575, and a complete kit—less engine—was available for \$188. The sale of uncertificated designs and do-it-yourself kits was legal then—civil air regulations, aircraft type certification and pilot licenses were not adopted in the United States until 1927.

The Heath conversion of the Henderson engine, later to become the Heath B-4, is worthy of separate mention here because of its importance to Heath's own Parasol line and because it is one of the few non-aircraft engines in its day to be adapted successfully

A pair of early Heath Parasols is shown above. The 1925 prototype, back, has the thin-section Thomas-Morse wing. Subsequent models used the Clark-Y airfoil. The Parasol below is equipped with flat-bottom wooden floats. Until modern ultralights, the Parasol was probably the lightest floatplane ever built.



# Post - World War II Era

## Post-WWII Surplus Opportunity

- Late 1945, aircraft business slumped with end of wartime contracts.
- Anthony buys large stock of war-surplus electronic and aviation components with no game plan in place.
- The foundation for Heath's entry into electronics kits is laid through a serendipitous event





# Post - World War II Era

## 1946: Light Bulb Moment

- Surplus purchase contained large quantity 5BP1 CRTs used in radar installations
- 5BP1 were repurposed for oscilloscope kits
- Heathkit's 1<sup>st</sup> electronic kit (O-1 oscilloscope) would debut 1947
- First kits: Oscilloscopes, Voltmeters and Signal Generators



**Heathkit 5 INCH OSCILLOSCOPE KIT**

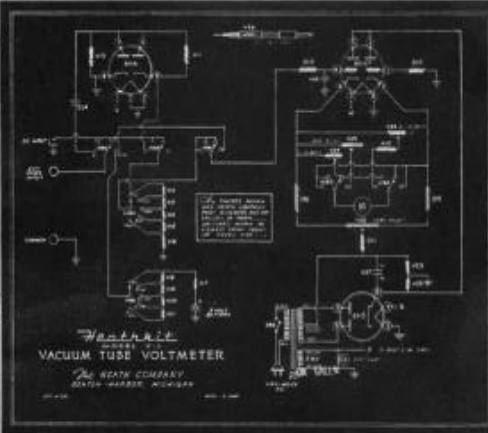

*Features*

- ★ Instant switching to plates or amplifier from front panel.
- ★ AC test voltage post on front panel.
- ★ External synchronization post on front panel.
- ★ Deflection sensitivity .55V per inch full gain.
- ★ Frequency response  $\pm 20\%$  from 50 cycles to 50 Kc.
- ★ Input impedance 1 Megohm and 50 MMF.
- ★ Sweep generator supplying variable sweep 15 cycles to 20,000 cycles.
- ★ All controls on front panel.
- ★ Cased electrostatically shielded 110V 60 cycle power transformer.

The Heathkit 5" Oscilloscope Kit fulfills every servicing need. The husky cased power transformer supplies 1100 Volts negative and 350 Volts positive. Tubes supplied are two 6SJ7 amplifiers, 884 sweep generator, two 5Y3 rectifiers, and 5BP1 or 5BP4 CR tube. Grey crackle aluminum cabinet and beautiful grey and maroon panel. Chassis especially designed for easy assembly. An oscilloscope provides almost endless sources of experimentation in radio, electronics, medicine and scientific research. Detailed instructions make assembly fun and instructive.

**\$39.50**

Nothing ELSE TO BUY  
SHIPPING WT. 24 LBS.  
EXPRESS ONLY



**Heathkit VACUUM TUBE VOLTMETER KIT**

Everything you want in a VTVM. Shatterproof solid plastic meter face, automatic meter protection in burn-out proof circuit, push pull electronic voltmeter circuit assuring maximum stability. Linear DC and AC scales. Complete selection of voltage ranges starting with 3 Volts full scale up to 1,000 Volts. Isolated DC test prod for signal tracing and measurements of voltage while instrument is in operation. An ohmmeter section accurately measuring resistance of 1/10 ohm to one billion ohms with internal battery. Extremely high input resistance 11 megohms on all ranges DC and 6.5 megohms on AC. All these features and many more are the reasons hundreds of radio and television schools are using Heathkit VTVM's and recommending them to all students. Like all Heathkits, the VTVM kit is complete, 110V 60 cy power transformer, 500 microamp meter, tubes, grey crackle cabinet, panel, test leads, 1% ceramic precision divider resistors and all other parts. Complete instruction manual. Better start your laboratory now.

**\$24.50**

Shipping weight 8 lbs.

Nothing ELSE TO BUY

# Golden Age (1950s–1970s)

In the following decades Heathkit expanded into:

- Amateur radio gear
- Hi-fi audio equipment
- Televisions
- Scientific instruments
- Educational kits

**1950's:** Heathkit selling millions of kits per year

**1954:** Anthony killed with five others in plane crash from Pontiac, Michigan to Florida

**1955:** Daystrom Inc acquired the Heath Company

**1955:** Heathkit introduces its first amateur radio kits:

- AT1 transmitter and AR3 receiver



# Golden Age (1950s–1970s)

1956-1964: Heathkit produces numerous iconic AM/CW amateur radio kits

1962: Schlumberger buys the Daystrom Inc

- DX60 transmitter (crystal control) and HR10 receiver
- Mobile Cheyenne transmitter and Comanche receiver
- Apache transmitter and Mohawk receiver (SSB with external adapter)



# Golden Age (1950s–1970s)

- 1965-1973: Heathkit SSB transceivers: HW100 and SB101 are knocks off of Collins KWM2
- Individual transmitter SB401 and receiver SB301 SSB station also available
- Amplifier line included SB200 (2 x 572Bs) and SB220 (2 x 3-500z)



- 1950-70's: Heathkit produced variety of consumer kits in addition to amateur radio and test instruments
- Heathkit catalogs were thick and gave many hours enjoyment day dreaming about future projects



# End of an Era

1974: Heathkit introduce solid state transceiver SB104

1982: Heath Company sells last amateur radio the SS-9000

- Too complicated as a kit, offered as factory assembled only

Amateur Radio kit production ceases



# Computer Revolution (1970s–1980s)

- 1977: Heathkit starts offering computer kits
- 1979: Heathkit was acquired by **Zenith**, becoming **Zenith Data Systems**.
- Entered personal computer market early with **H8** and **H11**.
- Their most famous computer, the **H89**, became popular in schools and labs.
- The kit business continued for a while, but the rise of cheap, mass-produced electronics made kits less competitive.
- Hero Robot introduced in 1982 for \$1500

**THE HEATHKIT H8 COMPUTER**

The powerful, easy-to-use hobbyist's computer with the "intelligent" front panel featuring an octal entry keyboard and digital readout—plus a fully wired and tested 8080A CPU and systems software at no extra cost!

**\$37500**

**THE HEATHKIT H11 COMPUTER**

Two of the finest names in electronics, Heath Company and Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) combine to bring you the world's first 16-bit computer priced within reach of the general public!

**\$129500**

Heathkit/Digital Equipment Corp.® H11 Digital Computer

- Uses the performance-proven LS-11 CPU
- Executes the famous 400+ PDP-11/40 instruction set and powerful software
- Fully wired and tested DEC KD11F board
- 4096 x 16 read/write 806 semiconductor memory
- Mechanically superior bus with 58 high-speed lines
- Single-level, vectored automatic priority interrupt
- Efficient switching power supply with built-in cooling fan
- Backplane guide assembly for I/P and up to six I/O and memory modules

**no loose ends**  
All-In-One: computer, floppy, I/O, 16K RAM. \$1595\*

**New Heathkit® H89 All-In-One Computer**  
Heath takes the risk out of selecting a balanced computer system. Now, video terminal, floppy, keyboard and 8-bit computer are brought together in one self-contained, compact unit. Nothing hangs out.

**102K bytes storage**  
Built-in floppy disk system gives you fast access to programs and data. Each 5.25-inch floppy has more than 102K bytes of storage area, enough to hold entire files. The All-In-One comes with 16K RAM, expandable to 48K.

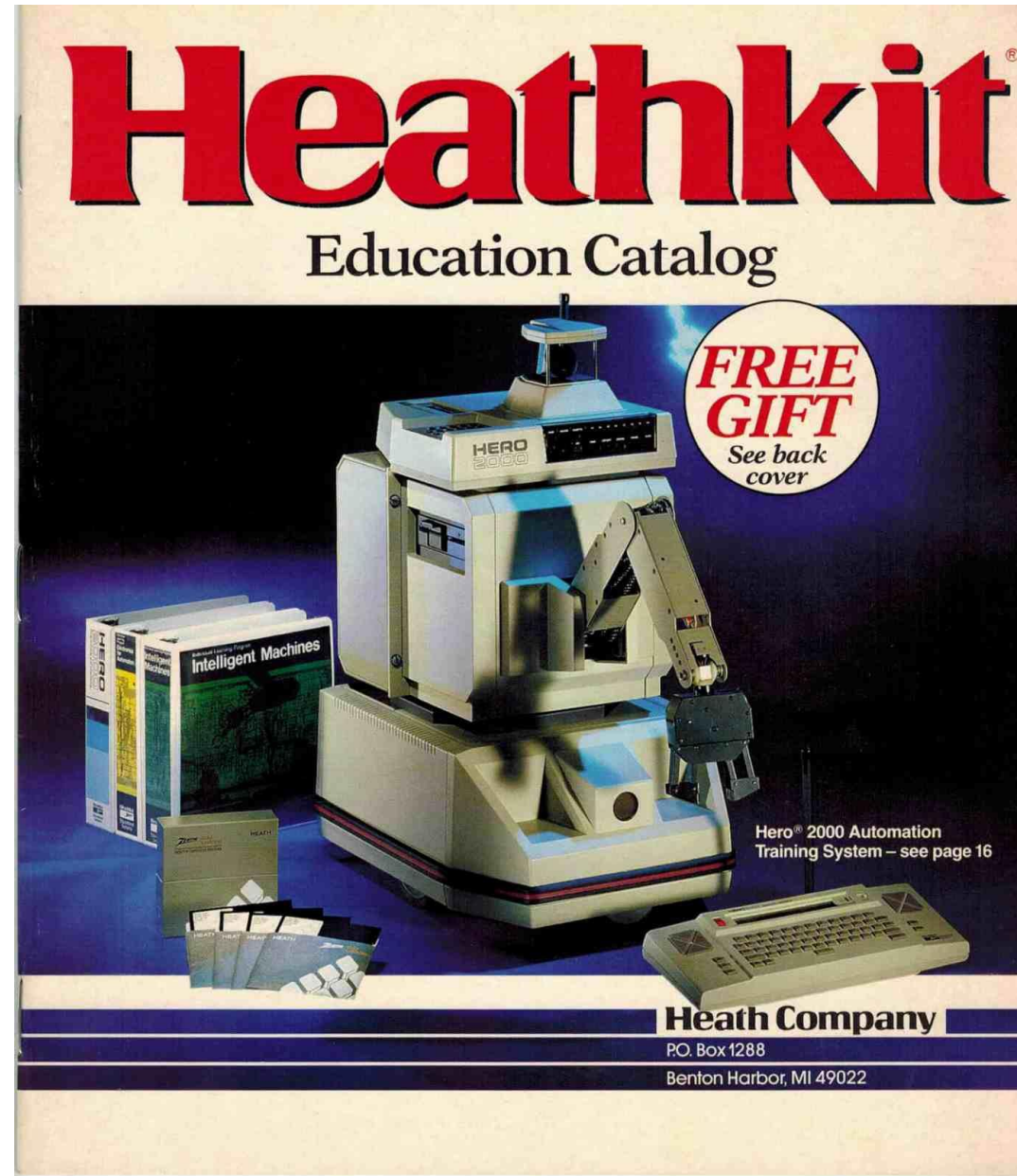
**Hundreds of uses at home or work**  
The All-In-One Computer runs programs written in MICROSOFT® BASIC and ASSEMBLY language. And it runs all current software written for the popular Heathkit 16 computer. You can choose from scores of practical programs for home and business.

**Learn by building**  
What better way to learn about computers than to build one yourself? The All-In-One is available in easy-to-build kit form, as well as completely assembled. Like all Heath electronic kits, it comes to you with its own step-by-step assembly manual and a nationwide network of service centers to assure smooth sailing.

**FREE CATALOG**  
For complete details on the Heathkit H89 All-In-One Computer and nearly 400 other electronic kits for your home, work or pleasure, send today for the latest Heathkit Catalog of values.

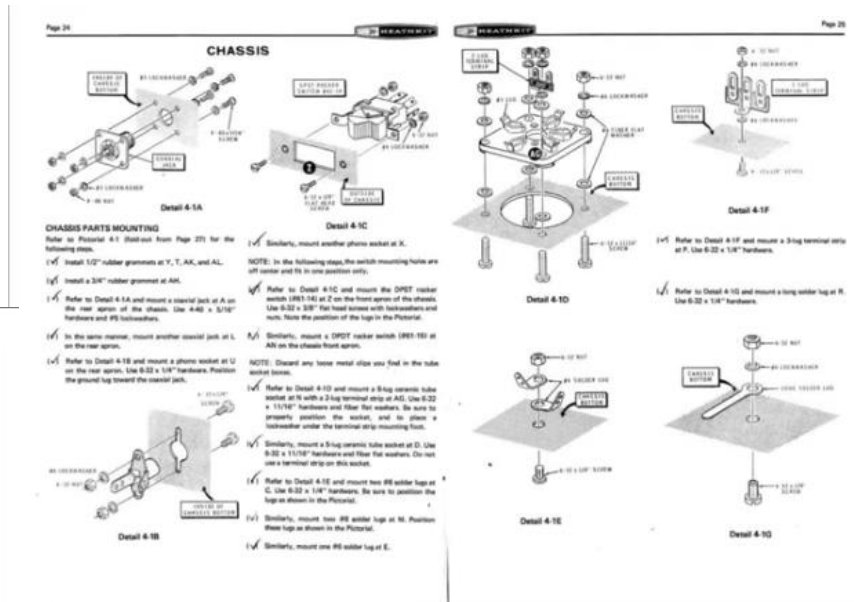
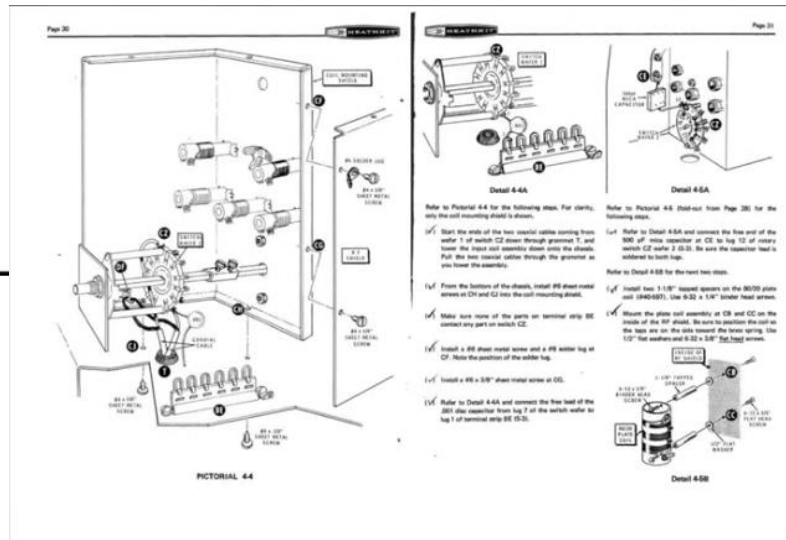
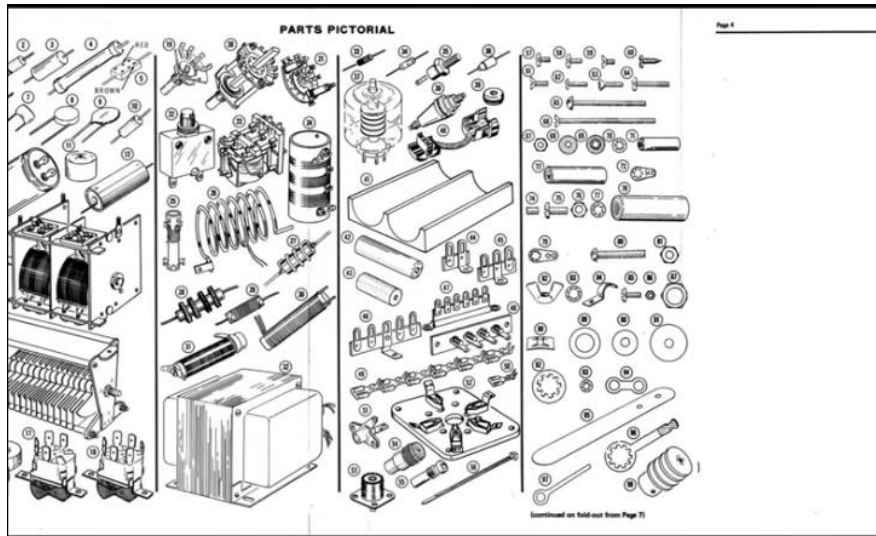
**Heathkit**  
HEATH COMPANY, DEPT. 610-080 BENTON HARBOR, MI 49022  
CIRCLE 17 ON READER SERVICE CARD

- 1980: Heathkit discontinued most kits and shifted toward educational materials.



# Why Heathkit Was Revolutionary ?

- Kits were **high quality, affordable, and educational.**
- Manuals were famously detailed, teaching electronics step-by-step.
- Building a Heathkit often cost far less than buying a finished product.



# Decline (1990s)

By the early 1990s, the economics of DIY electronics had changed.

1. Integrated circuits and surface-mount components made home assembly harder.
2. Litigious Atmosphere

Example, 1969 Heathkit GR78 assembly/user manual contained absolutely no warnings what-so-ever.

No warnings about the danger of lead solder, high voltages and other hazards.

Today a Heathkit manual would need at least 3 pages of legal disclaimers for everything from getting paper cuts from manual pages to being in the same room with a few inches of lead solder.

The kit era on a large scale effectively ended.

Ownership changes many times during final years

- 1989: Zenith Data Systems sold to Groupe Bull (France)
- 1992: Heathkit as kit producer ends production
- 1995: Bull sold Heathkit to a private investor group called HIG
- 1998: Heath/Zenith name and products sold to DESA International
- 2008: DESA filed bankruptcy
- 2012: Heathkit company exists for few years as **Heathkit Educational Systems**

Finally, company filed for bankruptcy

# Modern Revival (2010s–Present)

The Heathkit brand was revived in 2013-2015 with new leadership.

They began releasing boutique kits:

- Small radio kits
- Educational electronics projects
- Retro-inspired products

While no longer a mass-market force, Heathkit remains a beloved name in maker culture.

➔ Entire current Heathkit product on next three slides:

**Limited Edition Heathkit GC-1006 Clock with Clear  
Top Panel**

**\$317.00**

*A Clear Upgrade.*

Shop now



**AMSAT CubeSatSim Kit - Heathkit Edition  
Educator Pack**

**\$1,369.00**

*Back In the Amateur Radio Game.  
Make Space.*

Shop now





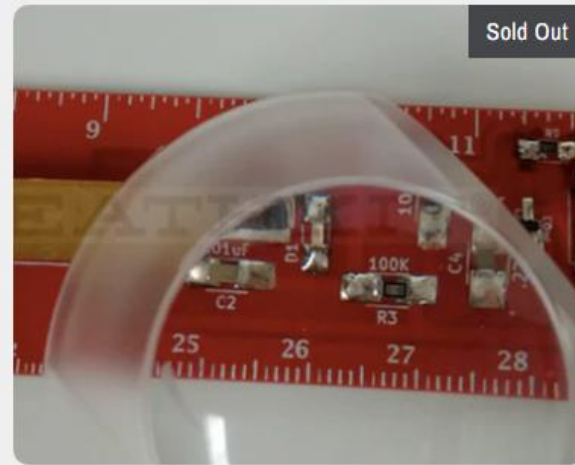
AMSAT CubeSatSim Kit - Heathkit Edition Educator Pack

\$1,369.00



Davis Wireless Vantage Pro2 Weather Station with Standard Radiation Shield and WeatherLink Console - SKU 6252, 6252M

\$1,369.00



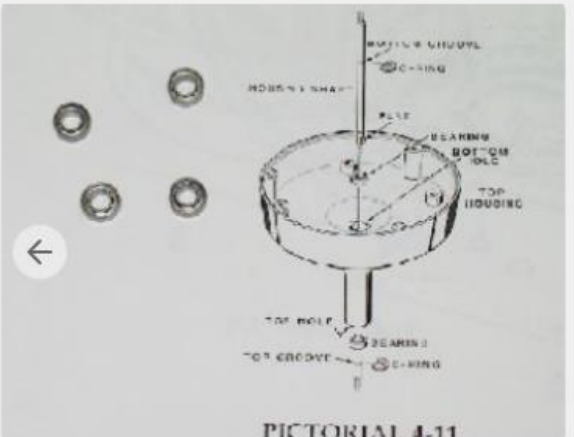
HeathRules™ CPO Active Ruler™: Surface-mount solder skills learning kit - ER-1001 (Code Practice Oscillator)

\$83.00



Adjustable DualView™ magnifying loupe for surface-mount soldering - GDP-1800

\$17.00



Weather Station Stainless Steel Bearings- 455-643P

\$62.00



Weather Station Temperature Sensor - 100-1727-1

\$35.00



Weather Station Wind Cup Assembly upgrade kit - 266-939-1

\$49.00



Wind Cup assembly upgrade kit for ID-1290/ID-1590 Weather Station anemometer - IDA-1590-1

\$42.00

Sold Out



Wind Cup replacement kit for upgraded Weather Station anemometer - 266-939-2

\$14.00

Sold Out



Display upgrade for Heathkit AJ-1510 / AJ-1510A FM Stereo Tuner - AJA-1510-1

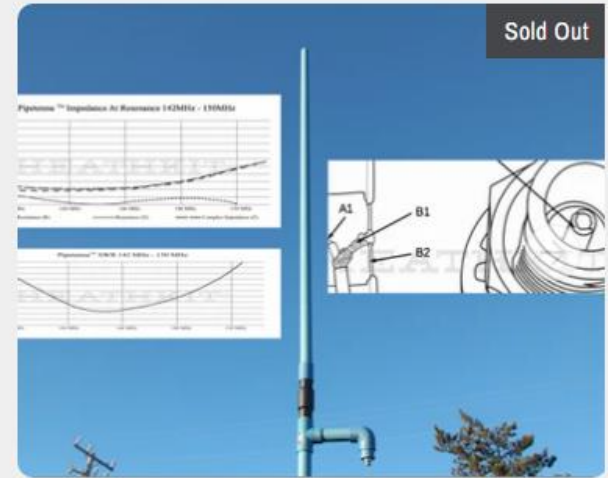
\$69.00



Factory Repairs - recent models

From \$56.00

Sold Out



VHF/UHF stealth antenna kit - Amateur Radio 2m/440 - AN-P2L Pipetenna™

\$207.00



Upgrade Dial Kit for classic HG-10 / HG-10B VFO - 464-19

\$28.00



THD Improvement kit for IG-18 series audio generator test equipment (meter buffer board ONLY) - IGA-18-2

IGA-18-2

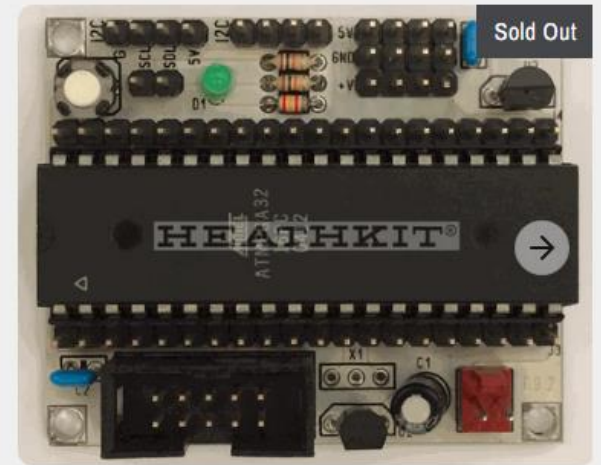
\$35.00



THD Improvement kit for IG-18 series audio generator test equipment (complete kit) - IGA-18-1

\$42.00

Sold Out



Introductory microcomputer/microcontroller experimenter kit - Heathkit Educational Systems®

EX-1001

\$69.00

# Impressions of Current Heathkit

Current Heathkit is different company than original company. New owners bought iconic trademark looking for quick cash.

- No focused product lines; random collection of kits and parts
- No catalog with hundreds items, just random items on website
- New kits are very expensive
- Many of their kits sold out perpetually.
- Do not see this phase of the company lasting long.

# Suggestions for a successful Heathkit:

## 1.Reboot classic kits using old and modern technology

- HW8 and HW9 QRP transceivers (new technology; e.g. SDR, uC)
- HW101 and SB101 transceiver (new technology)
- Linear amplifiers (SB200, SB200) Tube and solid-state versions
- Audio amplifiers: Tube and Class D solid state versions
- Stereo tuners: Incorporating internet streaming
- Digital design and experimenter kits

# Suggestions for a successful Heathkit:

## 2. Focus on new areas with specific product lines

- Affordable ham radio kits like QRP Labs and QRP Guys
- Leverage Arduino / Raspberry Pi into STEM products for schools:

### Examples

- Smart Plant Health Monitor
- Air Quality Monitor
- Intelligent Energy Monitoring System
- AI Security Surveillance System
- AI-Powered Doorbell
- Smart Mirror
- Autonomous Delivery Robot
- Robot with AI vision
- AI Pet Companion Robot
- Portable Cybersecurity Toolkit

# Legacy

- Heathkit shaped the DIY electronics movement.
- Its manuals are still admired for their clarity and educational value.
- The company inspired:
  - Amateur radio operators
  - Engineers
  - Computer pioneers
  - Makers and hobbyists worldwide
- Heathkit's influence lives on in today's maker movement, Arduino culture, and STEM education
- The kits became a rite of passage for electronics enthusiasts.
- Heathkit is no longer amateur radio or computer kit powerhouse. Others have filled void.
  - Amateur radio kits at affordable prices are sold by QRPLabs and QRPGuys
  - Entry level experimenter computers at affordable prices sold by Arduino and Raspberry Pi

# 100 years of Heathkit

- **1926-1934: Aircraft kits**
  - 1931: Edward Heath dies in aircraft accident
  - 1931: Walter Clinnin buys Heath Aircraft Company
- **1935-1945: Avionics**
  - 1935: Howard Anthony buys Heath Aircraft Company
- **1945-1950: Test Equipment**
- **1950-1975: Consumer products (TV, HiFi, Musical, etc) and Amateur Radio**
  - 1954: Howard Anthony dies in aircraft accident
  - 1955: Daystrom buys Heathkit
  - 1962: Schlumberger buys Heathkit
- **1976-1983: Computers**
  - 1979: Heathkit was acquired by Zenith
- **1984-2012: Educational**
  - 1989: Zenith Data Systems sold to Groupe Bull (France)
  - 1995: Bull sold Heathkit to a private investor group called HIG
  - 1998: Heath/Zenith name and products sold to DESA International
  - 2008: DESA files for bankruptcy
  - 2012: Heathkit exists for few years as Heathkit Educational Systems and finally files for bankruptcy
- **2013-present: Boutique kits**
  - 2013: Restructured under new ownership
  - 2023: Bought by Kirkwall

Questions ?