

B. F. McNamee

and his Moorhead & Kennedy Associations

By Floyd A. Paul

Bernard Francis McNamee was born in Michigan in 1892. Until 1914 his training had been in civil engineering and pedagogical work. In 1914 he became interested in practical radio and obtained a radio amateur license, circa 1915.

O. B. Moorhead had been a telegraph operator on shipboard and traveled the world. He visited De Forest in the East and saw how early tubes were being made, and returned to the West Coast with an idea. He made the acquaintance of Cunningham, quit his shipboard job and, joining forces with Cunningham, hired a glass blower. They rented a second floor shop in the industrial section of San Francisco in a warehouse and started experimenting with gaseous tubes. Their first tubes were crude and sold through a real estate office to ship operators. The purpose of this peculiar sales outlet was to make it difficult for De Forest to find him.

McNamee was working for an electrical contractor on large buildings in 1915 when he first visited Moorhead. He remembers that Moorhead had a pump and manifold which would accommodate ten tubes. The tubes were on the pump all day. Moorhead came to McNamee's home and saw that he had more meters and testing equipment than Moorhead had. He was impressed and gave McNamee his left-over tubes that behaved in an anomalous manner. McNamee would run tests on these tubes, take data, and return the tubes and tube curves to Moorhead, and in becoming more involved, went to work for Moorhead full time. From 1920 to 1922 he was the chief engineer of Moorhead Laboratories. (See *Pacific Radio News*, March 1921, for a B. F. McNamee/Moorhead Ad.

The company made fairly large quantities of various vacuum tubes including amplifier, oscillator, and electron relay tubes. For a while Moorhead tubes were the only tubes available in quantity.

For a few months in 1922 McNamee worked for a Mr. Frank Reiber who owned an x-ray manufacturing business in San Francisco. He started in the shop and shortly became a trouble shooter in the field. During this employment, McNamee became the first Radio Editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* wanted him to write a column once or twice a week and answer all letter inquiries to the paper. He would go into the paper from 8 to 9 A.M. and then onto his job at Reiber's. McNamee also wrote articles on crystal detectors, tuning super-regenerative circuits, and tube applications for *Radio* magazine in 1921, 1922, and 1923.

The Kennedy Radio Company was located nearby the Moorhead shop. Kennedy Radio became a subsidiary of Wagner Electric. McNamee became acquainted with Mr. Wagner, the owner. Wagner Electric had an empty eight story building in St. Louis, and McNamee visited St. Louis when production moved to that city. He became an employee from 1922 to 1926 and was a production engineer. He designed supervised and managed all testing and electrical measuring equipment used in the production of Kennedy sets: At the Kennedy plant in St. Louis, McNamee met a Charles Lauritsen and they became good friends. Lauritsen had become chief engineer at Kennedy, and had been a partner in a company called Bryant Radio Company in Palo Alto in 1922 to 1923. The company made and sold several hundred radio receiving sets. Before that time, Lauritsen worked for the Federal Telegraph Company in Palo Alto, and while there developed a reliable and effective ticker equipment. In 1926 he became associated with the California Institute of Technology as a physicist.

In 1927 McNamee had returned to the San Francisco area with Charles Lauritsen and was employed as an engineer by the Magnavox Company of Oakland, California. He was involved in designing and building improvements on evacuating equipment for vacuum tubes, as well as tube testing equipment, and the design of improved "power" tubes.



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B. F. McNamee
2436 Stuart St., Berkeley, Calif.

Pacific Radio News, March, 1921

He came to Hollywood in 1927 and met U.A. Magnum at Echophone on 968 No. Formosa. He worked there for several months designing radio circuits. He then met Fritz Falck of the Advance Electric Company, located on 260 West Second St., in Los Angeles. He was designing radio circuits for Falck in 1928 and 1929.

In late 1928, RCA brought suit against the Advance Electric Company and Fritz Falck. (See Advance Electric Co. article in *SCARS Gazette* in May 1986.) Both B.F. McNamee and Lauritsen provided Defendant's affidavits for the court records in January 1929. Their technical discussions centered around the Alexander-son and Lowenstein patents.

In the early 1930's, B.F. McNamee went east to Fort Wayne, Indiana, to work for Kennedy again. Little is known of his employment after that time.

REFERENCES

The Institute of Radio Engineer's year books, 1927, 1929 and 1932.
January 1929 District Court of the United States Law suit papers of printed affidavits on motions for temporary injunctions. RCA vs Fritz Falck and Advance Electric CO.)
January 1986 interview with Mr. B.F. McNamee retired, living in Laguna Hills, California.

AWA AUCTION

At the AWA auction in Canandaigua, NY, on September 26, the following items were sold. Radiola IIIA, no tubes, \$40. Jefferson rejuvenator In box, \$25. AK 35, no tubes, fair, \$14. 85 Zenith, large dial, \$75. GM cathedral, light green, \$75. Radio Girls on the program (book), \$15. Motorola 7" TV portable, \$70. Murdock 3-dial ES-32, \$55. Dayfan, transformers open, no tubes, \$25. Emerson plastic GP375, \$280. Philco Predicta TV, \$95. Crosley Trirdyne, \$70. Loose coupler (Greenwood Collection), \$109. AK "L" horn, good, \$60. Rad10la UZ1325 horn, \$60. Garod 3-dial, \$60. Double Button mike (no name), \$45. Hopalong Cassidy (unknown condition), \$95.