

ECHOPHONE – THE LATER YEARS

Moves and a Cast of New Owners – The Saga Continues

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Introduction

As chronicled in this author's earlier *AWA Journal* article, "The Echophone Saga,"¹ Echophone was a brand of radio receivers that had remarkable longevity—from its introduction in the early 1920s into the 1950s. Echophones were initially manufactured by The Radio Shop in Sunnyvale, California,² as well as, in the brand's later years, by Hallicrafters in Chicago, Illinois. Along the way, numbers of other companies, in Los Angeles and elsewhere, were involved to a greater or lesser degree.

The changing cast of characters in Echophone's history and the circumstances that underlay the transitions from one to the next were described with varying degrees of certainty in "The Echophone Saga."³ Given the uneven nature of the available material, it was perhaps inevitable that at least one error would creep into the narrative; to wit, Hallicrafters acquired Echophone in August 1936 rather than earlier as indicated in "The Echophone Saga." Alan Douglas, who kindly noted the error,⁴ had himself previously fallen prey to it.⁵ He also had, however, subsequently discovered and corrected it.^{6, 7} Presumably his expectation was that he'd laid it to rest, only to find it having unwittingly been resurrected in "The Echophone Saga." A review of the circumstances surrounding Hallicrafters' acquisition led to the wider re-examination of Echophone's time in Illinois that follows.

The Early Years⁵

Echophone was introduced to the market early in the 1920s by The Radio Shop, a manufacturer of regenerative receivers. It

had the good fortune to have one of the licenses granted by Armstrong for his patented circuit before Westinghouse acquired it in 1920. The Radio Shop, initially a maker of products for the amateur market, adeptly availed itself of this circumstance as commercial broadcasting developed during the early 1920s.

As receiver design evolved through the 1920s, Armstrong's regenerative detector eventually fell out of favor, with a consequent decline of Echophone's market share, but not before Echophone had undergone robust growth during the early part of the decade. Examination of Echophone advertisements during this period reveals an evolving mix of entities, including branch manufacturing plants in St. Louis, Missouri, and Long Beach, California, and a national distributor, The Echo Corp., incorporated in Delaware with offices in St. Louis. The Radio Shop, with its non-transferable Armstrong license, vanished from the mix in 1925, by which time The Armac Corp. of Chicago, Illinois, had taken on the mantle of national agent for Echophone.

Echophone's subsequent decline culminated in its nearly vanishing from the market in the late 1920s. It reemerged from its hiatus near the end of the decade as The Echophone Mfg. Corp. of Los Angeles, California, with offerings shifting from regenerative to tuned radio-frequency (TRF) and superheterodyne designs. This shift brought it to the attention of Gilfillan Bros., which enforced patent licensing in the western states for RCA—the holder of key patents, and Gilfillan eventually brought Echophone under its wing. Echophone's success in Los Angeles led to a need for a larger plant, which was solved by a move to a plant in Waukegan, Illinois—where we pick up the story.

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With Wade

As noted in "The Echophone Saga",⁶ Echophone's 1930 move from Los Angeles to Waukegan, Illinois, had been precipitated by a need to expand production capacity. That its destination in Waukegan, 104 Lake View Ave., was that of a Gilfillan plant there,⁷ as is confirmed by telephone directories of the time,^{8,9} had, however, escaped notice. This involvement of Gilfillan Bros in the move to Waukegan is consistent with Echophone by then having their chassis assembled in a Gilfillan plant,¹⁰ a condition aggressively imposed by Gilfillan on companies, such as Echophone, that manufactured sets under Gilfillan's licensing agreement with RCA.^{11, 12}

Echophone did well for a time in Waukegan,¹³ and in 1932 became involved in early television. The details of its acquisition at that time by Clem Wade to manufacture video receivers for his Western Television also appear, however, to be somewhat more convoluted than previously appreciated. As reported in *Radio Retailing*, a trade publication of the time,¹⁴ rather than outright purchase of Echophone by Wade as previously indicated, this transaction involved the purchase of substantial stock in the company by Wade's company, Western Television, together with the agreement that Echophone would manufacture Western Television's receivers in addition to Echophone's own line of radio receivers.

In 1934 Echophone moved to 2611 Indiana Avenue in Chicago, at which time the company's management also appears to have been reorganized.¹⁵ Western Television had by that time succumbed under the combined weight of broadcast licensing issues, the transition of early television from mechanical to electronic scanning and a sluggish depression-era market for expensive home electronics.^{16, 17} Not until 1935, however, does Wade appear to have taken direct control of Echophone operations, having by the end of that year become president of the company.^{18, 19}

At Hallicrafters

The 1936 acquisition of Echophone by

Hallicrafters through a transaction in which Bill Halligan and Ray Durst purchased it from Wade^{20, 21} and its subsequent survival as a brand was, apart from the misstatement of the details of the acquisition described above, conducted as noted in "The Echophone Saga."²² Halligan, who owned Hallicrafters, was looking for a more satisfactory arrangement regarding both production facilities and licensing of RCA patents than what he'd achieved through his partnering with Arthur Case earlier in the year to form Case-Hallicrafters. In addition to Halligan's preference of the Chicago location to Case's Marion, Indiana, plant, Case held only a sub-license to RCA's patents and RCA was moving to end such arrangements.²³ It is not clear at what point prior to its acquisition by Hallicrafters Echophone had obtained licensing directly from RCA, rather than indirectly through Gilfillan, but that appears to have been the case.

Durst, who was an Echophone executive at the time, accompanied it to Hallicrafters, there to become vice-president. In 1954, upon Halligan's retirement from active management to become chairman of the board, Durst succeeded him as president of Hallicrafters until his subsequent retirement in 1955.^{24, 25, 26}

The Echophone brand lay dormant for a time after its acquisition by Halligan and Durst. This circumstance is not surprising, given that Halligan's reason for the acquisition lay in Echophone's resources rather than in its market, i.e., broadcast receivers, whereas Halligan's company, Hallicrafters, was focused on communications receivers for the amateur market. Echophone did, however, eventually reappear in 1940, but refocused on the latter market, with the introduction of the Model EC-1—the first of its "Commercial" line of relatively low-cost communication receivers.^{27, 28, 29} The EC-1 was followed within a year by the EC-2.³⁰

Curtailed of amateur radio activity, together with a shift to war production, limited promotion of the Echophone line during World War II with the notable exception of the memorable "Hogarth" series of advertisements.

pears to have begun with the company's acquisition of the latter; announcement thereof is notable by its seeming absence in the trade publications of the time.⁴¹ It is evidenced as well in the wartime series of Hogarth advertisements. The Echophone address in this series initially was given as 201 East 26th St., the same as previously noted in the EC-1, -2 and -3 product announcements. In late 1943 it changed to 540 North Michigan Ave., Chicago,^{42, 43} which it remained until the end of the series.⁴⁴ Curiously, this last ad-

dress was, at the time of Echophone's transition to it, the same as that of the editorial offices of *Radio News*,⁴⁵ one of the trade magazines in which the Hogarth series appeared. The 1945 advertisement introducing the Echophone EC-1A⁴⁶ is the earliest item in print to acknowledge Echophone's relationship to Hallicrafters that has been found by this author to date. In it the manufacturer is given as the Echophone Division of Hallicrafters, located at the latter's plant, 2611 Indiana Ave., Chicago.

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