

K2TQN

VINTAGE RADIO

Lafayette Radio

When I bought my 1937 Lafayette transmitter last year, I never anticipated the trouble I would have looking up the history of the company and I'm still not done. Lafayette Radio Company was big when I was a new ham and later when I was newly married. They had stores everywhere, advertised in all the magazines and had great catalogs to order from. With a company this big, how hard could it be?

My early years in ham radio found me shopping locally at either Almo Radio or Radio Electric. Both were Philadelphia based but had local stores near me. Almo was my favorite, as they had stations on display and were only a short walk from high school.

Joining ARRL brought *QST* magazine and their advertising had coupons to send in for mail order catalogs. Soon I had a pile of wish-books, which I read cover to cover. At times I would get dad to send a check for something I needed, but mostly I just read them. I remember ordering from World Radio Labs and Allied Radio.

Eventually a Lafayette Radio store opened nearby and I remember shopping there. Lafayette stores started to open around New Jersey. (They preceded the RadioShack stores which most of us know better.)

My first big purchase with Lafayette was just after I was married in 1964. Working for Western Electric then, they sent me to Newark, New Jersey, for a 13 week assignment. I had an uncle there who worked at the YMCA and he found me an inexpensive room to rent for the duration of my stay. The Y was at the corner of Central Avenue and about a half block away, at number 24, was a big Lafayette store. Soon I was visiting it often, mostly just looking. Nearing Christmas they had a sale on a solid state stereo component system, which I could barely afford.

I bought it as a family present to put in the home we were buying. I didn't know it then but that store was a headquarters for the company at one time.

Researching the company for this column, the information was hard to find and often incomplete or conflicting. I tried to sort it out and asked a few friends who I thought would know and they said about the same.

From Historian Alan Douglas, "The oldest notice I've seen is from November 1928, a little puff in *Radio Retailer and Jobber* describing the radio line of Wholesale Radio Service Company. According to Jim Millen (of National Radio Company), Lafayette was owned by Abraham Pletman and Leonard Welling."

A 1939 advertisement in *Popular Mechanics* mentioned 20 years of service and went on to say, "And so, today, Wholesale Radio Service Company becomes Radio Wire Television, Inc."

An Internet search produced this: Radio Wire Television, Inc of Florida was incorporated on Saturday, August 19, 1939 in the State of Florida and is currently not active. (Source: Public Record data — Department of State — Division of Corporations)

A 1940 ad with a coupon for a free 188 page 1940 Lafayette Radio catalog said, "Radio Wire Television Inc, formerly Wholesale Radio Service Co, Inc." The coupon said "Lafayette Radio" and listed seven stores.

In a 1951 ad they said, "Lafayette Div,

Radio Wire Television, Inc."

I found a great deal of information on the www.radiomuseum.org Web site. Ernst Erb, an officer there has quite a blog on the Lafayette Radio Company. One question he has is — who were the owners?

Samuel J. Novick

Continuing my search I found some interesting information about this company. I found online documents and newspaper stories about a Samuel J. Novick. It seems he was born in Russia in 1897. He came to the US in 1914 to avoid being drafted under the Czar. He worked first in a grocery store and next in a garment factory. Then he was a radiotelegrapher. After that he became a businessman.

A 1948 newspaper article said that Novick was so glib and deft in the subtleties of American corporations that the identities of his corporations cannot be told apart. (Radio Wire Television, Inc and Wholesale Radio Service Co, Inc) Novick was once quoted that the Lafayette name was "just a name used for a radio set."

During and after WW II Novick was also owner of the Electronic Corporation of America, which had a big contract to manufacture secret electronic radar equipment for the Air Force.

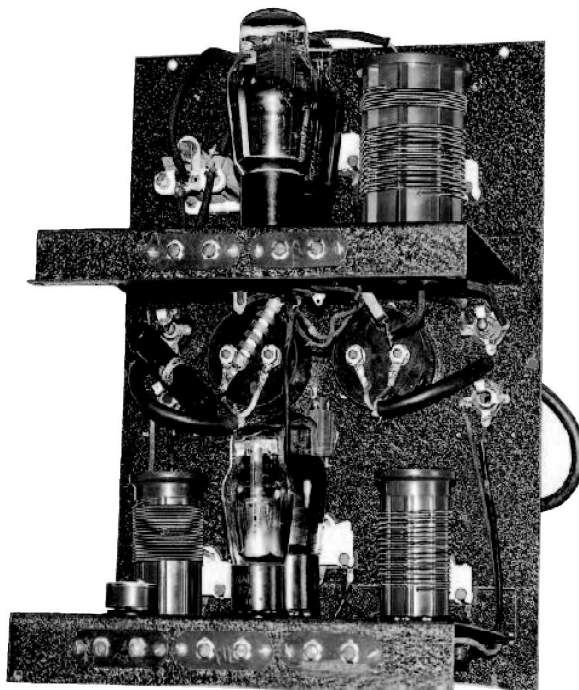
Lafayette Trutest Transmitter

I found this nice 1937 Lafayette Trutest transmitter (Jr) through a newsletter with photos of a radio meet I didn't attend. A quick phone call to the seller confirmed it was still for sale. I want to thank Bruce and Charlotte Mager of the Waves Radio Store in New York City, for sending a reprint of William Orr's, W6SAI, article "On the Air for Sixty-One Dollars — 1937" along with the transmitter. From this I was able to find the original article by Frank Lester,

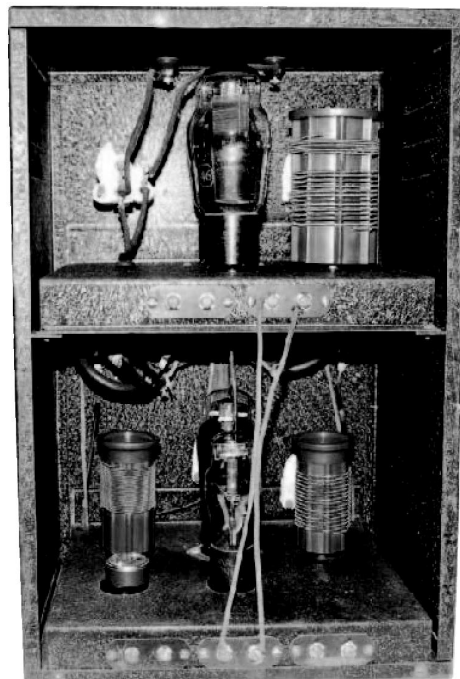
On the left is a 1935 Lafayette Professional 9 Superhet kit-built receiver next to the 1937 Lafayette Trutest factory wired and tested transmitter.



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Rear view of the Trutest with cabinet removed.



Rear view of the Trutest in its cabinet.

W2AMJ, in the 1936 *Short Wave Craft* magazine. Frank worked in the radio department for the Wholesale Radio Service Co at 100 Sixth Avenue in New York City. Frank and WRS produced a whole line of ham gear and were well-known among hams.

The Trutest is a three stage transmitter producing 25 W out on 20, 40, 80 or 160 meters. It sold for \$22.50 wired and tested with one set of coils. Its tube lineup is a triode 56 for a hot-cathode oscillator driving a 53 high-mu dual-triode with its sections wired in parallel. This in turn drives a pair of 46 tubes connected in parallel. The power supply was an additional \$8.50 or you could build your own.

If anyone has one, or coil information, please let me know.

Professional 9 Superhet

This kit radio was also designed by Frank Lester and it came out in 1935, the same year National was selling the HRO. According to Lester, many hams who could afford a nice HRO still wanted to build their own receiver, so he made this kit. I know of two of these receivers. The one pictured here is owned by my friend John Ruccolo, KC2UAK, who said, "I found that radio for \$10 at a yard sale in Milltown, NJ in the late 1980s. I bought it on a Saturday morning and went to visit my folks in South Jersey the same day. The radio was still in the trunk, so I took it out and showed it to my Dad. We 'smoke tested' it on the same workbench he built for me

when I was a kid (so I wouldn't mess up his workbench!). That's why I have fond memories of it. I have no idea how it did on CW, I can't remember if the BFO worked or not. You probably noticed that my set has ten tubes (not nine) because someone added a VR tube later on."

The other one is owned by Charles Cassidy, AC7GZ, who wrote an informative article in *Electric Radio* magazine #211 (www.ermag.com).

Check my Web site www.k2tqn.com for schematics, original article reprints and links. — K2TQN

All photos by K2TQN.

QST

Strays

QST congratulates...

♦ Barrett Kanne, W4TGA, who was awarded the Georgia ARES Ham of the Year at the Georgia ARES statewide meeting in January. The meeting was held at the GA Public Safety Training Center, Forsyth. — Greg Sarratt, W4OZK



TOM HART, AD1B

SKN experiment: Every year, I dust off my J. H. Bunnell Flame Proof Key and connect it to the rig for Straight Key Night. This time, I decided to run the audio through my Atwater Kent Model H horn speaker (circa 1926). The original base and audio driver are long gone and it now uses a modern speaker in the home made base. The photo shows setup before SKN started. The sound is reasonable, but the ambience is priceless.

— Tom Hart, AD1B

QST