

Phil's Fabulous Fakes: A Cautionary Tale

By Bart Lee, K6VK, CHRS Fellow, AWA Fellow

The late Phil Weingarten, long a member of the Antique Wireless Association, had been a friend of Hugo Gernsback and claimed to have inherited the McCandless vacuum tube making equipment that made Lee de Forest's Audions. I knew Phil 30 years ago. He provided me with valuable historical information — and he also offered to make some “replica” Audions for me. Phil seemed to think that he was just channeling Lee de Forest's spirit in continuing to make Audions on the same equipment in the same way as the originals.

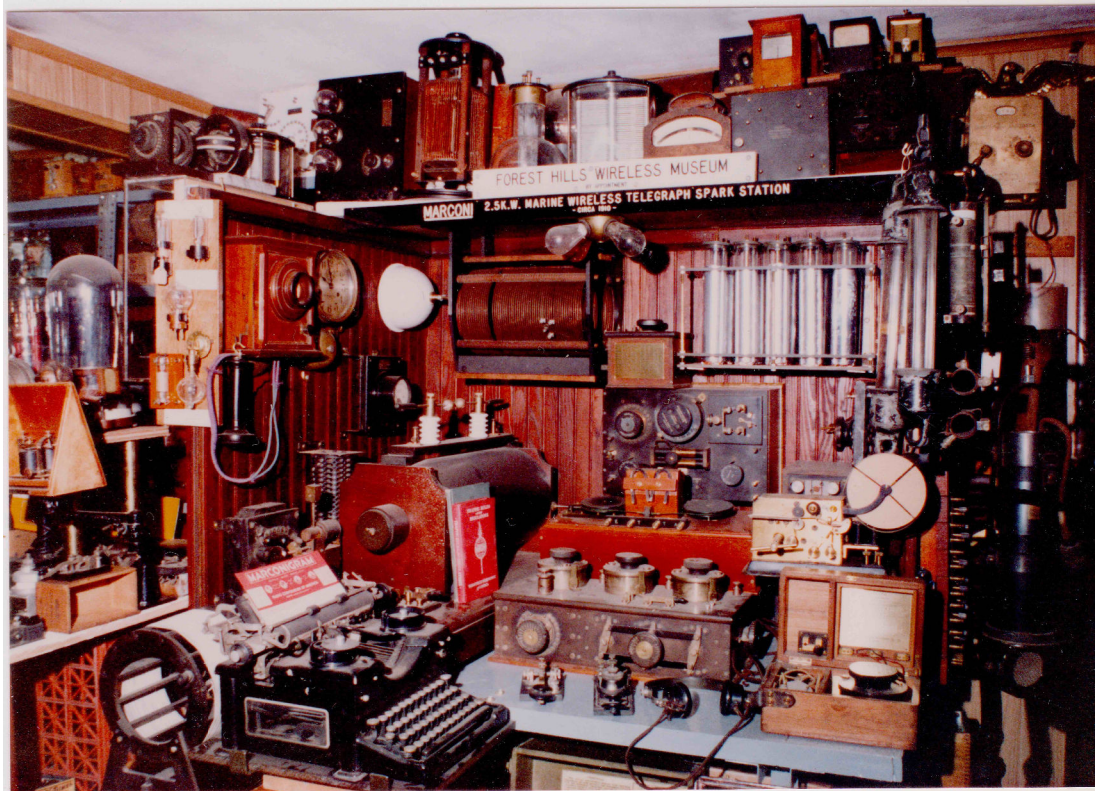
He did not, however, let on that he made replicas of various sorts. He sold them for what the genuine articles would go for, often for many thousands of dollars. Hard feelings ensued; Phil kept a pistol under his couch.

My friend Derk Rouhorst from the Netherlands bought a “Fleming Valve” from Phil, of which he was quite proud; he showed it to me at his home.



Derk was aghast to learn it was a fake. He came to the next AWA Conference (2007) to talk about it. He also put it in the auction as a “Phil Fake.” He more than doubled his buying price. In addition to the \$1,950 cash he got for it, he sustained his reputation as a sharp businessman.

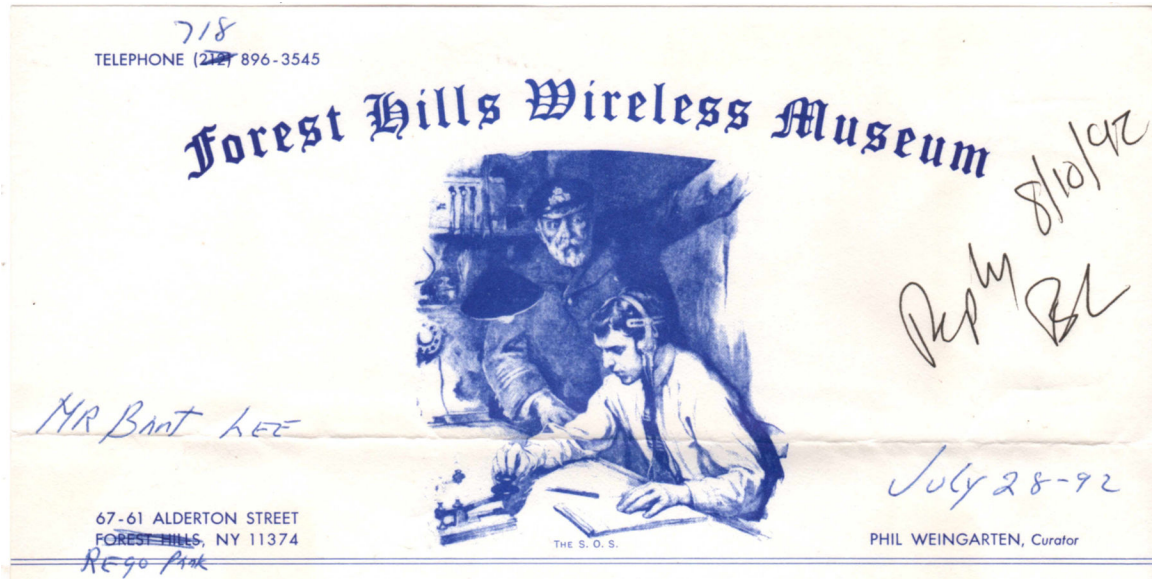
Nearby is a photograph of Phil Weingarten’s “Forest Hills Wireless Museum *circa* 1992 that he sent me: “... My 1910 Marconi Wireless Station (No Replicas) All Original & Authentic.” See Tom Perera (2020), *Phil Weingarten’s Fabulous Fakes*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc3RkT2288E>, and <http://w1tp.com/mawa7.htm> .



Phil Weingarten (AWA) Forest Hills Wireless Museum circa 1992: “... My 1910 Marconi Wireless Station (No Replicas) All Original & Authentic.” See Tom Perera, *Phil Weingarten’s Fabulous Fakes*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zc3RkT2288E>, and <http://w1tp.com/mawa7.htm> (de K6VK) ##

Today, with the passage of time, it might be hard to tell one of Phil's fake Audions from the genuine article. So, too, the replica Atwater Kent Model Five breadboards reproduced in the 1950s by various people, with AK parts.

Phil's 1992 stationery:



He was a real old old timer, who cut his teeth on New York's Radio Row. He had known the greats. He could be very helpful. But in the end, he was a crook, although I don't think he started out that way. It took a while for enough people to come to believe he was making and selling fakes: Audions, Fleming Valves, wireless keys, *etc.* Bruce Kelly, a founder of AWA, put the word out, and that was that, although it took a while. Later, Phil was willing to make replicas known to be replicas. Collegial organizations have a hard time dealing with bad actors...

RadioMuseum.org says:

"Noted forger Phil Weingarten produced copies of the Wallace Valve Detector that were sold as original examples. This is one of his reproductions."



There is no doubt that Phil was a talented glassblower. Tom Perera's video shows some of his equipment. Here's a photo Phil sent me:



A client of mine who *was* a criminal once told me that nobody starts out to be a criminal, but each little step in that direction soon adds up to criminality. It is also true that hardly anyone is entirely bad – or entirely good.

(Bart Lee, K6VK (2021)) ##