

# Wireless Fiends in San Francisco!

## Seiler Electric, circa 1909

By Bart Lee, K6VK, Archivist  
(From the CHRS Archives, and with research notes)

Paul Seiler came to California from Berlin in 1866 at age 21. He started a prosperous and long lasting electrical business. In 1909 he got into wireless telegraphy:

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When writing please mention "Modern Electrics."

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### YOU BET

**we have all up to date wireless supplies. We carry more wireless goods for the amateur than any other house on the Coast. Why pay express and freight, when you can get the goods right here at right prices? Detectors, Tuners, Condensers, Spark Coils from 1-2 to 4 inch spark, oscillators, coherers, lamps, Static machines, in fact, anything electrical you want. Call or write. It will pay you. PAUL SEILER ELECTRIC WORKS, Market St. San Francisco, Cal.**

M.E. August, 1909, Vol II, No 5 @ p 230

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When writing please mention "Modern Electrics."

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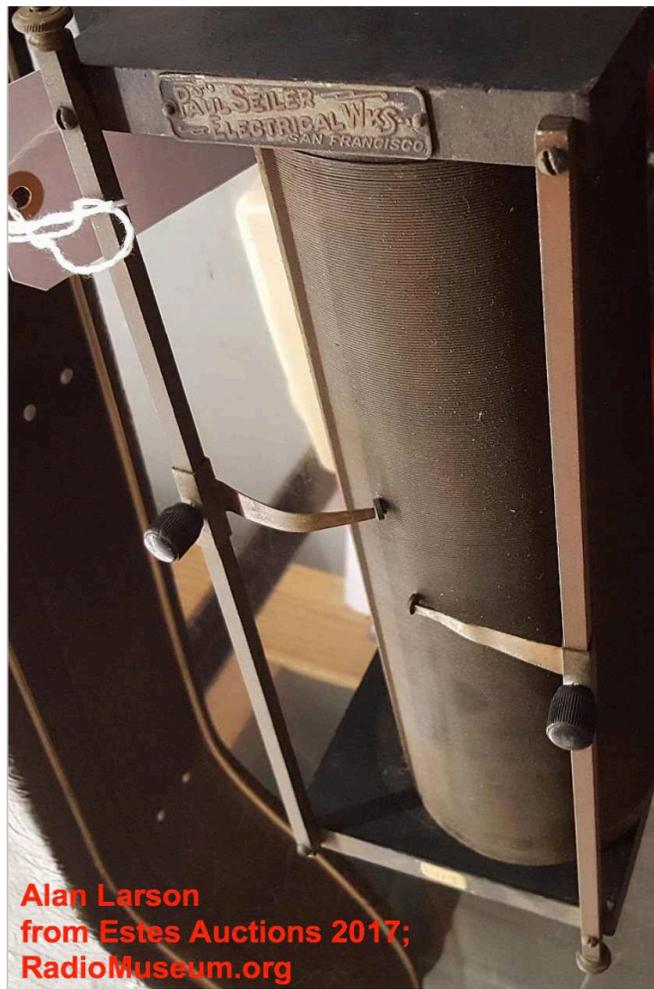
In a series of later ads in *Modern Electrics*, he addressed "**Wireless fiends**" on the West Coast, and suggested it made more sense to acquire "... wireless apparatus in *Frisco*":

**Wireless fiends save freight and expressage. Why order from the East if you can secure ALL wireless goods on the Coast? We carry largest assortment of wireless apparatus in Frisco. Can make prompt shipments. Call or send postage for catalog. Paul Seller Electric Works, Market Street, San Francisco, Cal. •(i)** M.E. Nov., 1911, Vol IV, No 9

The Oracles of the Internet suggest he ran his business life aggressively, even suing an early employer. RadioMuseum.org says:

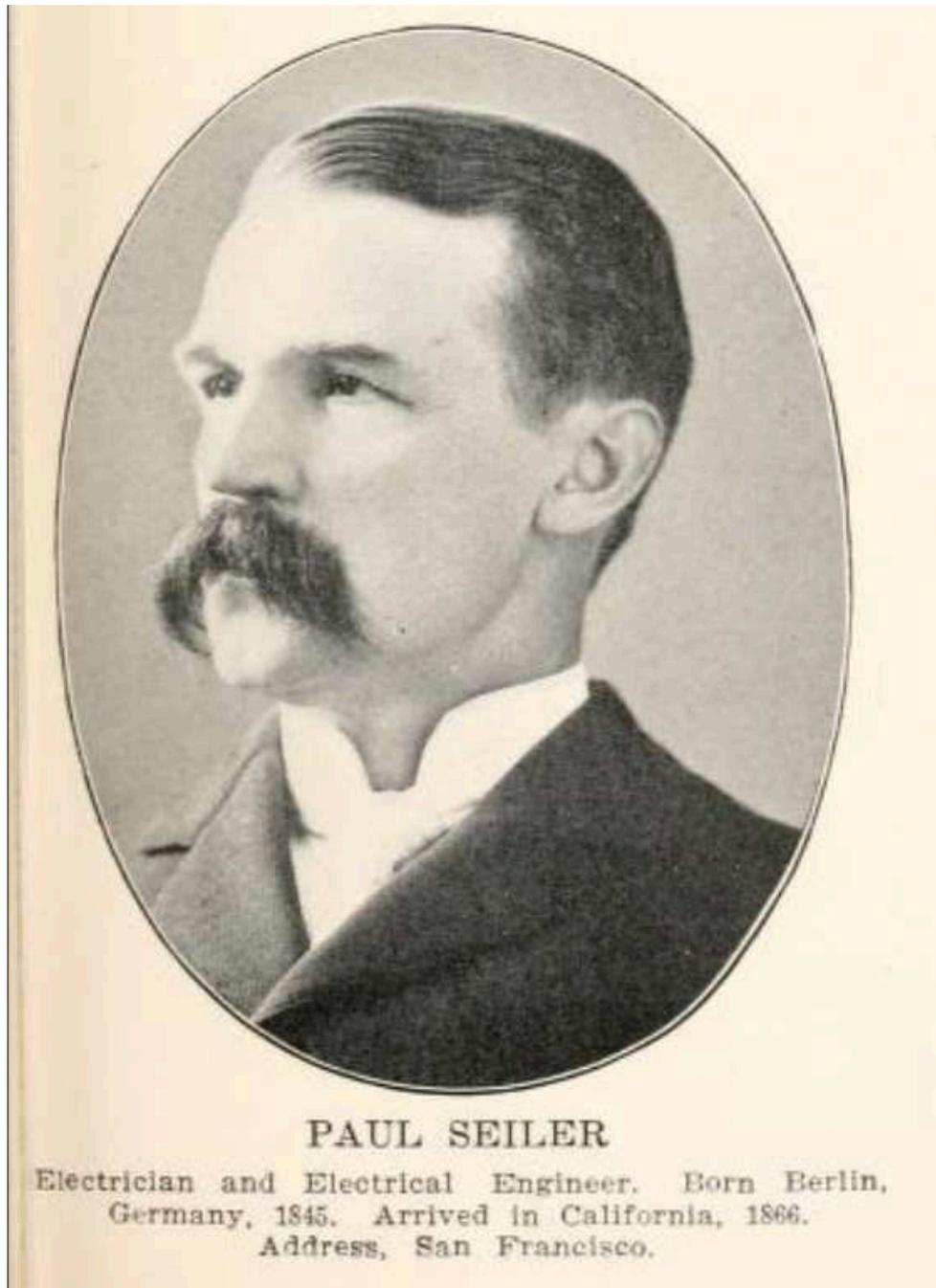
“The May 1889 San Francisco Directory lists Paul Seiler and James H. Beggs as proprietors of the Paul Seiler Electrical Works at 406 Market Street. From 1889 until the earthquake and fire of 1906 destroyed the business, Seiler's location is listed variously at 406, 408 and 406 & 408 Market Street. The Works were relocated to 845 Octavia Street, just outside the western limits of the fire's progress. In 1908 the business was moved to its final location at 322 Market Street, where it remained until at least 1916.”

RadioMuseum.org features a tuner:



Alan Larson  
from Estes Auctions 2017;  
RadioMuseum.org

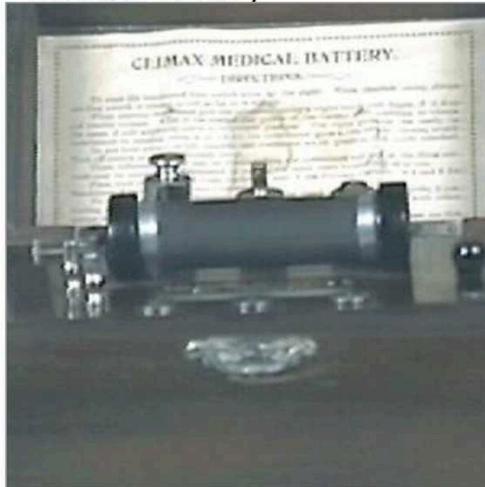
Paul Seiler, as a local industrialist, merited a photograph in the business trade press:



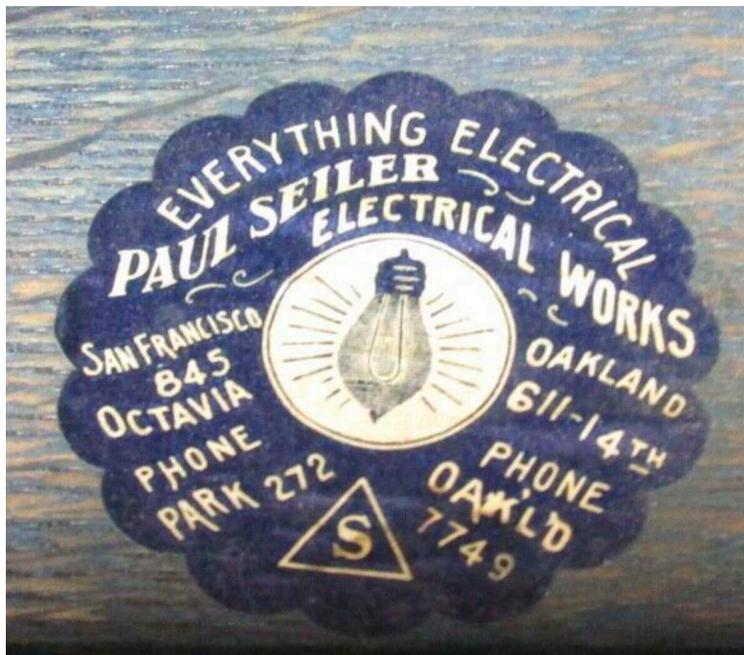
Internet Archive Book Image from "MEN OF THE PACIFIC COAST, CONTAINING PORTRAITS AND BIOGRAPHIES OF THE PROFESSIONAL, FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS MEN OF CALIFORNIA, OREGON AND WASHINGTON. 1902-1903" (1903)

Seiler also used some of his skills to make what we now call Quack Medical Devices. Maybe at the time, if only by the placebo-effect, they did enough good for patients to come back for more.

**Paul Seiler Electrical Works |  
San Francisco**  
medical battery



Oakland Museum, Mrs. Elsa Hunt Munson Roach H4257.20



Seiler's label, Oakland and San Francisco

A classic Quack Device from Seiler:



E-bay sourced.

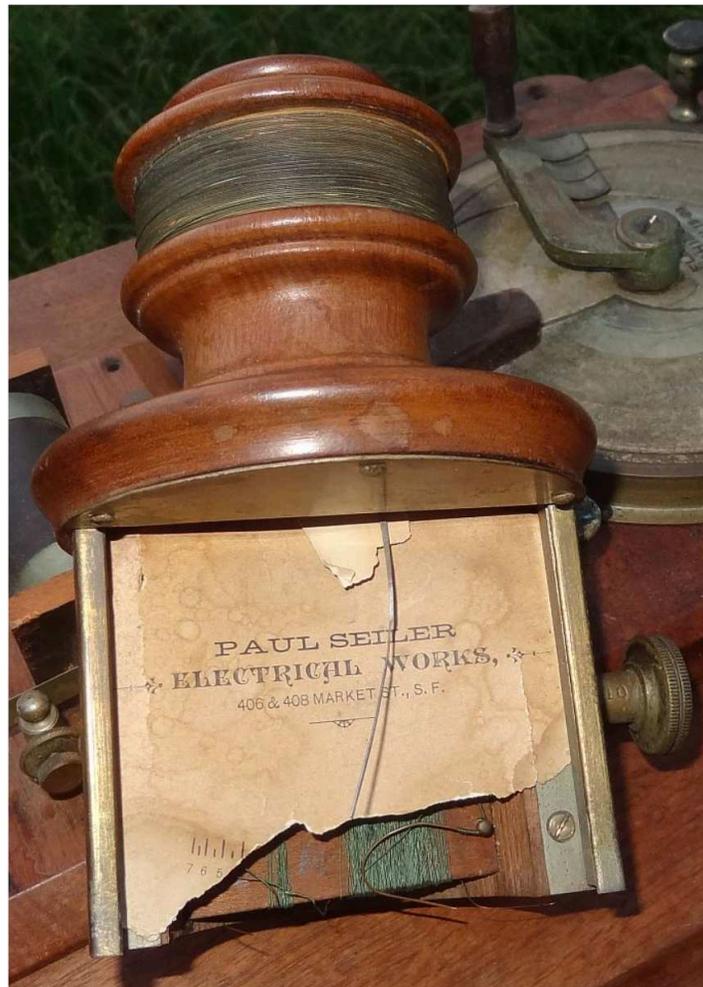
Some considerable artistry and technique appears in this wall-mounted Quack Device:



<https://www.antiquers.com/threads/wall-mount-current-regulator-thing-paul-seiler-electrical-works.18374/>



In the photo below, it looks like the lower, vertical coil has a primary and a secondary winding. The knob on the right maybe rotated the vertical coil. An indicator (electrical meter?) hangs vertically over the paper nametag, which is marked on its left side with 7 6 5 and presumably the arc continued to the right side. At the top sits a horizontal coil (inductively related to the vertical coils?). Connections, if any, cannot be discerned. The binding posts presumably permitted the connection of various instruments. Glow tubes, for example, could make for quite a show...



For a patient sitting in a Doctor's office more than a century ago, this device on the wall, and its electrical effects, offered formidable state-of-the-art medicine (and not much else actually worked in those days...)

Beyond Quack Devices, Seiler also made precision instruments, for example, seismographs.



Smithsonian, [https://www.si.edu/object/duplex-pendulum-seismograph%3Anmah\\_996607](https://www.si.edu/object/duplex-pendulum-seismograph%3Anmah_996607)

He held several patents, starting with an electrical insulator.

“An introduction to the Paul Seiler Electrical Works Catalogue of 1900 states that: "Paul Seiler, of this firm, has been in the electrical business on this coast since 1867."

“The earliest reference I've found to Paul Seiler working in the electrical business is with the firm of William Lundberg as a telegraph instrument maker for the years 1871 and 1872. From 1873 to 1877 he is listed as a foreman with the Electrical Construction and Maintenance Company of San Francisco. During parts of 1876 and 1877 Seiler was involved with Joseph Herz in the California Electric Power Company, manufacturers of telegraph instruments. This company, along with EC&M Co. and Pacific Electro-Depositing Works, was bought and reorganized as the California Electrical Works in June 1877. Seiler was appointed mechanic to the California Electrical Works on June 22, 1877, at \$200.00 per month. He worked his way up to manager and superintendent and sold five of his patents to the company during his employment.”

(From an article: Paul Seiler by Fritz Kettenburg; reprinted from *INSULATORS - Crown Jewels of the Wire*, May 1979, page 4.)

But by about 1916 or so, he had passed away. His estate got into a tangle. See *Estate of Seiler*, 176 Cal. 771, California Supreme Court, December 1917.

Paul Seiler made his way in California, starting at age 21 as an immigrant from Germany, with success in new electrical technologies, including wireless telegraphy. He seems also to have appreciated the then-new generation of “Wireless Fiends.”

(09 VI '22, v1.1 de K6VK) ##