

Lee De Forest Papers

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Washington, D.C.

1997

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<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

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<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms998006>

LC Online Catalog record:

<http://lcn.loc.gov/mm78018168>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Revised by Harry G. Heiss

Collection Summary

Title: Lee De Forest Papers

Span Dates: 1884-1955

ID No.: MSS18168

Creator: De Forest, Lee, 1873-1961

Extent: 375 items ; 4 containers ; 1.6 linear feet ; 2 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English.

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Summary: Radio pioneer and inventor. Correspondence, diaries, technical notes and other material relating to De Forest's inventions in radio and electronics and their effect in sound recording and transmission, efforts to exploit his discoveries through various business ventures, and his competition with Guglielmo Marconi in the field of wireless communication.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

De Forest, Lee, 1873-1961.

Marconi, Guglielmo, marchese, 1874-1937.

Organizations

Yale University--Students.

Subjects

Electronics.

Inventions.

Preparatory schools.

Radio.

Sound--Recording and reproducing.

Sound--Transmission.

Wireless communication systems.

Occupations

Inventors.

Radio pioneers.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Lee De Forest, radio pioneer and inventor, were given to the Library of Congress by De Forest in 1955.

Processing History

The papers of Lee De Forest were arranged and described in 1955. The description was revised in 1997.

Copyright Status

The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Lee De Forest is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Lee De Forest are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on two reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition as available.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Lee De Forest Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

| <i>Date</i> | <i>Event</i> |
|---------------|---|
| 1873, Aug. 26 | Born, Council Bluffs, Iowa |
| 1896 | Ph.B., Yale University, New Haven, Conn. |
| 1899 | Ph.D., Yale University, New Haven, Conn. |
| 1900 | Joined Western Electric Co., Chicago, Ill. Designed alternating current transmitter Developed electrolytic receiver |
| 1901 | Founded American De Forest Wireless Telegraph Co. (later United Wireless Telegraph Co.) |
| 1905 | Developed first model of audion amplifier |
| 1906 | Developed triode vacuum tube Married Lucille Sheardown (divorced 1907) |
| 1908 | Married Nora Blatch (divorced 1911) |
| 1910 | Broadcast voice of Enrico Caruso by radio from the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, N.Y. |
| 1912 | Sold telephone repeater rights to American Telephone and Telegraph Co., which used his three electrode vacuum tube in first transcontinental telephony Married Mary Mayo (divorced 1930) |
| 1913 | Demonstrated first oscillating audion tube Became vice president, Radio Telegraph Co. Became vice president, De Forest Radio Co. |
| 1916 | Made first radio news broadcast Established radio broadcast station |
| 1919 | Patented phonofilm device for making talking pictures |
| circa 1920 | Published <i>How to Set Up an Amateur Radio Receiving Station</i> (New York, N.Y.: De Forest Radio Telephone and Telegraph Co. 32 pp.) |
| circa 1922 | Published <i>Wireless in the Home</i> (New York, N.Y.: De Forest Radio Telephone and Telegraph Co. 32 pp.) |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 1923 | Demonstrated sound on film at Rivoli Theater, New York, N.Y. Organized De Forest Phonofilm Co. |
| 1926 | D.Sc., Yale University, New Haven, Conn. |
| 1930 | Married Marie Mosquini |
| 1934 | Established Lee De Forest, Inc., Los Angeles, Calif. |
| 1942 | Published <i>Television, Today and Tomorrow</i> (New York, N.Y.: Dial Press. 361 pp.) |
| 1947 | Edison Medal of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers |
| 1950 | Published <i>Father of Radio</i> (Chicago, Ill.: Wilcox and Fallett. 502 pp.) |
| 1951 | Vice president, National Association for Better Radio and Television |
| 1961, June 30 | Died, Hollywood, Calif. |

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Lee De Forest (1873-1961) span the years 1884-1955 and include biographical sketches, booklets, correspondence, diaries, drawings, essays, newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs, poetry, and research notes. De Forest was a pioneer in wireless communications who made possible the long distance transmission and reception of the human voice, which led to the foundation of the radio industry and long distance telephone communication. His inventions, particularly the audion amplifier in 1905, the triode vacuum tube in 1906, and the oscillating audion in 1913, revolutionized wireless communications and earned him the title, "the father of radio." De Forest also perfected the phonofilm method of sound recording and the glow-light recording of sound films, made important contributions to the development of television and high speed facsimile transmission, and invented radio therapy and the radio knife.

The collection contains letters from De Forest to members of his family, friends, and business associates, with only a few to fellow scientists. The correspondence is arranged chronologically. A subject file contains biographical material on De Forest, published and manuscript scientific writings, photographs of early audion tubes, and technical schematics, sketches, and notes on several of De Forest's inventions. The subject file is arranged alphabetically by type of material.

De Forest's diaries, or notebook journals, span the years 1891-1949 and contain references to the difficulties encountered in the early years of his career as he struggled for recognition in the face of persistent lack of funds and inconstant friends. There are frequent allusions to his inventions and business ventures, both successes and failures, descriptions of the natural world, and original poetry. The diaries are arranged chronologically and have been microfilmed.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged by type of material or topic.

Container List

| <i>Container</i> | <i>Contents</i> |
|------------------|---|
| BOX 1 | Correspondence, 1884-1950, undated (29 folders) |
| BOX 2 | Subject file Clippings, 1890-1953, undated (2 folders) La Lumière Électrique, 1911 Photographs Early audions, undated Personal, undated Printed matter, 1904-1950, undated Schematics, sketches, and technical notes, 1910-1911, undated (2 folders) Yale University, New Haven, Conn., entrance examination, biographical sketch, and class book form, 1892-1937, undated Writings, 1896-1955, undated Diaries Microfilm edition available. Shelf no. 17,174 |
| BOX 3 | Vols. 1-15, 1891-1902 |
| REEL 1 | |
| BOX 4 | Vols. 16-23, 1903-1949 |
| REEL 2 | |