

MANUFACTURED IN PLANT A, C, F, and P, CHICAGO, USA

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I owned a radio labeled LaSalle about 50 years ago. The only identification was an orange and black plate on the chassis with several patent numbers stating that it had been manufactured in Plant A, Chicago, USA. (See Illus 1) No one had a schematic and as I had no patience, I got rid of it. Recently I came across photos of the LaSalle and the Crusader, identical Plant A radios alleged to have been built by Clinton Manufacturing Company, and I got to wondering, why couldn't I find a schematic?

WHENCE PLANT "A"?

The long and short of it is, that there was little hard evidence available for the company (or companies) that constituted the "Plant A" manufacturer(s), or the precise physical plant location(s), or how the plant letters were assigned, or who assigned them. One theory is that the Radio Manufacturers Association (RMA) assigned the plant letters as part of a patent "pool" (or "interchange") which tracked the number of radios built. In corresponding with the research division of the Consumers Electronics Association, which is the successor to the Electronic Components Industry Association (ECIA), which was the successor to the Electronics Industry Association (EIA), which was the successor to the Radio Manufacturers Association, there is no evidence that the RMA provided the plant letters or tracked radio production for the purpose of patent licensing. In fact, at the 1931 RMA convention, RMA President Morris Metcalf spoke of the failure after 3 years of negotiations to effect a patent pool. However, after an out of court settlement in 1931 of an anti-trust suit, RCA shared patent information with over 40 manufacturers of radio-receiving sets, so there was no need for a patent pool. The RMA did assign 3-digit Production Source Code *numbers* to manufacturers and suppliers sometime *after* 1942. I have a copy of the Photofact Servicer, Vol 7, Nos. 69 & 70 (1949), that was reproduced by Howard W. Sams which lists the *numbers* RMA assigned to each company.

Beside the orange and black 'Plant A' tags, there are also radios that have a yellow and black 'Plant C' tag, (See Illus. 2), (Monarch, Clinton model 1101, Silvertone model 7179); some Federal, Empire (General), Truetone, Climax, Zephyr, and Sonora (model LWU-181) radios have silver and black 'Factory F' tags; and some Aetna radios (model 605) have 'Factory P' on a white and black tag. The Plant C Monarch was distributed by Champion Research Labs of Lakeview, OH. I've even read a claim that the Airmaster 52A-120AM radio has a Plant 'S' tag.

It is believed that the Clinton Manufacturing Company, located at 1217 W. Washington Boulevard in Chicago, Illinois, between 1934 and 1938, is the source for Plant A radio sets. In my research, I found that there were three additional companies located at this address during part of the time period in question: the Rextron Radio Corporation, the Empire Radio Corporation, and the Earl Webber Company. As I found references to several companies with the same names prior to 1934, I felt that to research as far back as possible might determine what, if any, corporate relationships might have existed. The information uncovered is presented here for your consideration.

PRE-1934 Histories

Clinton

The first public reference to the Clinton name on radios goes as far back as 1922. The Clinton Radiophone Company advertised their “Clinton Crystal Set” and their “Vacuum Tube Receiver” in the July through November issues of Radio News magazine. They were located at 29 S. Clinton Street in Chicago, Illinois. There the trail goes cold. More than likely the company quickly closed shop like so many other companies in the 1920's.

Earl Webber Company

The first available public references to the Earl Webber company, are advertisements in various issues of Radio World, Radio Engineering, Radio Craft, and Radio Today magazines beginning in 1931. Prior to 1935, Earl Webber was a distributor for various manufacturers of test equipment. Between 1931 and 1935 they were located in the Daily News Building in Chicago, Illinois. It can be stated without a doubt that it is the same company throughout this narrative.

Empire

1. The Empire Phono Parts Company/Empire Talking Machine Company, 1916 through 1925. 429A Wabash Avenue, Chicago, and 2261 E. 14th Street, Cleveland, Ohio. Advertising various phonographs from 1916 through 1923 in the publication Presto Times. One advertisement in the April 28, 1925 issue of Radio World features the 'Empire 5', “King Of Radios”.
2. Empire Radio and Equipment Company, 1922. Located at 271 W. 125th St in New York City, They were listed as “Manufacturers and Distributors of Radio apparatus”; in Radio News January & February 1922, January 1923 issues, they advertised the "Empire Radio Telephone Receiver”.
3. Empire Radio and Supply Company, 1924. Located at 325 17th Avenue in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, they advertised in the October 1924 issue of Radio News as a general parts distributor.

4. Empire Radio and Music Company, 1925. Located at 246 Bowery Street, New York City. The first (and only) reference found to this company was a brief article in the April 4, 1925 Presto Times noting that this company had gone into receivership (no pun intended!)
5. Empire Auto Radio Corporation, 1931-1932. Located in Buffalo, NY, a notice of incorporation was posted in the October 24, 1931 issue of Radio World. That's all the info available.
6. Empire Electrical Products Co, 1926-1934. Schematics available in Riders Manuals 3, 4, & 5 show approval dates between 1932 and 1934 and company location at 102 Wooster St, New York City is indicated on them. Radiomuseum.org site notes that a factory was located in Kearney, N.J. in 1926. Radios were manufactured and receiving tube were manufactured or distributed by them under the Empire-Tron name.

Rextron

The first reference to a company named Rextron is in the December 1930 issue of Shortwave & Television (SW&TV) magazine, where Rextron tubes were advertised for sale from Radio Trading Company in NYC. In 1931 Rextron Tubes were advertised in several issues of Radio World, sales being direct from the magazine office address under several 'distributor' names, including Radio World. The Radiomuseum.org has a photo of a Rextron 201A tube, 'Circa 1925', but I can find no references prior to 1930. The label on the tube has “REXTRON” in capital letters, a crown, and the words “Made Better”, and another photo on the web shows it to have a reddish-brown base. Finally, In the March-April 1931 issue of Television News magazine, an advertisement from Rextron identifies the address as 38-40 Park Place, Newark, NJ. I have found no further advertising for Rextron tubes after 1931. However, from mid-1931 through 1935, the ARCO Tube Company operated from this same address. Advertising from Rextron and ARCO ran simultaneously in 1930-31, depending on the magazine. (The School of Communication Engineering was also located at this address in 1936.) While all very interesting, I have found no connection to Rextron Radio Corporation.

1934 – 1938 Histories

1217 W. WASHINGTON BOULEVARD

This is a three-story building constructed in 1914, and for many years housed the Paasche Air Brush Company, manufacturers of cabinet finishing equipment. As stated above, the following companies were located at this address in 1934: The Clinton Manufacturing Company, Rextron Radio Corporation, The Earl Webber Company, and the Empire Radio Corporation. Table 1 illustrates the companies using this address for the years 1933 through 1938.

Clinton Manufacturing Company In 1933, The Clinton Manufacturing Company opened for business at 128 N. Clinton Street. The president was Nathan Siegel, who owned Siegel Electrical Supply Company, located next door at 130 N. Clinton Street. He represented the CeCo line of vacuum tubes, among other products. In 1934, the business moved to 1217 W. Washington Blvd., across the street from the offices and studios of Chicago's power-house radio station WLS, and remained there until purchased (and absorbed) by Sonora Radio and Television Corporation in late 1938. James Fred in his December 1994 ARC article on Clinton notes that in 1937 the company President was Louis Eller. It is interesting to note that Eller had been the owner of a radio retail shop at 2702 W. Division Street in January of 1928 when "racketeers" bombed his store because he had joined the Mid-West Radio Trade Association instead of the racketeers organization. Apparently, Clinton was rough on their chief officers, as Radio Today also reported in 1937 that the company president was Joseph Kruglick. Ghirardi, in his Radio Troubleshooters Handbook, states that radios labeled Bostonian, Buckingham, Corona, Crusader, Cub, Federal, Harmony, Marshall, Nightingale, Pickwick, Silver, Universal, Westminster, and of course, Clinton, were all produced at "Plant A" by Clinton. Ghirardi's list cannot be considered complete, as the K-O and LaSalle labels are also Plant "A" construction, and some of the Pla-Pal radios have the Plant A label on them. The LaSalle labeled radios were distributed by Champion Radio Labs of Lakeview, OH. Some Airmaster radios distributed by Automatic Radio (Boston, MA) had Plant S labels. This would seem to indicate that these radios weren't exclusively marketed around Chicago. Rarely seen, some Clinton radios had the orange and black plate containing the Clinton logo (See Illus. 3) while deleting "Plant A".

Rextron Radio Corporation was listed as a manufacturer of 'Home' radios in the Trade Directory section of the November and October 1935 issues of Radio Today. To this day, I have been unable to locate a single Rextron radio, schematic, or any additional information on this company.

Empire Radio Corporation was located here in 1935 – 1936. Ghirardi lists 'General', 'Deluxe', and 'Royal' as Empire radio models. Radio Today lists them as a manufacturer of Auto and Home radios, and advertisements list a kit to add a tuning eye to existing radios. There is a picture of an Empire 'General' at <http://www.radioatticarchives.com/radio.htm?radio=8387> which is incorrectly identified as a General Radio & Television product, a common mistake. Empire-built 'General' radios were manufactured in Plant 'A' and Factory 'F'. In the August 1936 issue of "All Wave Radio" magazine, the Empire Radio Corporations 'Test-All' service instrument was reviewed. The instrument could be used as an output or capacity meter, resistance meter, resonance indicator and as a high-resistance AC, DC, and RF indicator.

The Earl Webber Company moved to this address in 1935 and stayed (probably) through 1936. I say probably, because there are advertisements in 1936 listing the 1313 W. Randolph address, and one 1937 advertisement listing the 1217 W. Washington address. This was likely due to the transition from the old address to the new, three-tenths of a mile away. Radio Today, Radio News, and Radio Craft magazines abound in product ads and company listings for the Earl Webber Company.

1227 W. Washington Boulevard

As mentioned above, Clinton, Rextron, Empire, and Earl Webber were all located at the 1217 W. Washington address. However, that doesn't account for every business who occupied the **building**. That building was assigned the address numbers **1217 through 1227**. From December 1934 through mid-1937, 1227 W. Washington Blvd. was the home of **Gaylord Manufacturing Co.**, alleged maker of auto, commercial, home radios, radio-phonographs and AMCO branded condensers, IF coils, and a distributor of fans, and the **Gaylord Coin Machine Corporation**. (Ghirardi lists the address for Gaylord Mfg. as 605 W. Washington Blvd., but more below.) Gaylord occupied 4,000 sq. ft. of space and the vice-president was E.S. Gaylord, a well known name in the coin machine business. The company president was Col. John C. Bohan, a Chicago building contractor. Radio Today listed this address as Gaylord's home from 1935 to 1937. That magazine also lists them as having at least 18 separate radio models, while the Sylvania database shows 29 models. I have yet to locate a physical Gaylord radio, although I have included below (illus. 4) an image of a radio dial on which is printed "Synkratone All Wave Radio" and "Custom built by Gaylord". I have been unable to find a reference to Gaylord Manufacturing after 1937, and no advertisements for AMCO at all. In the magazine 'Automatic Age', Gaylord Manufacturing Company advertised the sale of floor and wall mounted fans for industrial and commercial use. News and advertising about Gaylord Coin Machine were in the magazine during this period. In 1938, the **Radio Lamp Company** was located at 1227 W. Washington. This company manufactured radios built into working table and floor lamps. In 1939 it moved to 1313 W. Randolph St., where the Earl Webber Company had moved in 1937. Also at 1313 W. Randolph from 1938 through 1942 was the **John Meck Instrument Company**. Mr. Meck was also the President of Electronic Design Corporation located at 164 N. May St, and had another office at 430 W. Ellis. Meck produced sound systems, crystals, amateur radios, and eventually, televisions. **Boom Electric and Amplifier Co.** was located here in the early 1950's.

So, Where does this take us?

The question now is, was there a relationship between the four companies located at 1217 – 1227 W. Washington Blvd. other than all renting space at the same location? So, time for me to present my theories based on the information I have compiled.

Clinton

I believe that Clinton was “Plant A”, “Plant C”, and “Factory F”, based, in part, on Clinton-labeled radios having Plant A or Plant C labels, and Empires' series of 'General' radios having all three. In my mind, it has made the case stronger since the photo of the orange and black tag with the Clinton logo. While not direct evidence to support the claim that Clinton was indeed the source for “Plant/Factory” radios, I believe that two additional pieces of information strongly point to Clinton. The next piece of information is that after 1938 the only Plant A radios were Sonora branded. Richard Arnold, in his August 2009 web-edition article in Antique Radio Classified “Sonora's First Plastic Radios, The Sensational Candid” (http://www.antiqueradio.com/Aug09_Arnold_Sonora.html) states that the Sonora KG-80 Candid contained the Plant A label. It demonstrates that radios were still being produced at Plant A as late as 1940. It isn't much of a stretch to speculate that with Sonora's purchase of Clinton and all its' assets at the end of 1938, it also included Plant A. Sonora also purchased Ferguson Radio & Television Corporation of NYC at the same time, and consolidated all the assets. Richard Arnold in the April 2007 web edition of the Antique Radio Classifieds (http://www.antiqueradio.com/APR07_Arnold_sonora.html) notes that sales of Sonora radios in 1939 was \$40,000; in 1940 they soared 500% to \$200,000. Sonora President Joseph Gerl was anxious to ramp up sales, and the purchase of the Clinton production facilities allowed him to accomplish this. The final piece of information is the contemporaneous and reliable source (Alfred Ghirardi, The Radio Troubleshooters Handbook), which asserts that Clinton was the source of “Plant A” radios. I have read theories and speculations that Pacific Radio, Hallicrafters and/or Howard were the source for Plant A radios or that a consortium of Chicago manufacturers became Plant A to create private label radios. I have seen no credible evidence to support those assertions.

Rextron

As I have been unable to find any trace of physical evidence of radios labeled “Rextron”, I believe that this company may have been the face of the distributor/wholesaler of private label Plant A radios. Although there is no evidence to support the assertion, one has to wonder, why a radio company with no radios? Finally, in 1936 – 1937 there were some ads in 'Shortwave Craft' for a Rextron Company located at 37 Lock Street, Newark, New Jersey. This company was a tube and parts distributor, and probably related to the earlier Rextron, given the Newark, NJ address. I cannot locate any further references to the name Rextron in Chicago after 1937.

Earl Webber & Empire Manufacturing

I believe that Earl Webber and Empire Manufacturing were one and the same. Earl Webber probably had their test equipment built in the same plant as the radios. It was co-incidental to its' move to 1217 W. Washington Boulevard that Webber stopped distributing other brands of test equipment and began producing its own. Empire came into existence and was located at 1217 W. Washington at the same time that Earl Webber moved there (1935), marketed radios with the Plant A, C, and Factory F labels, and also marketed a piece of test equipment. Empire ceased to market radios at the same time (1936) as Earl Webber moved to 1313 W. Randolph.

Gaylord Manufacturing

So, where does Gaylord fit in to this story, if it fits at all? Until I found the Gaylord dial face on the Indianaradios web-site, I was convinced that Gaylord was like Rextron, a company with no radios. The web-site Radio Museum (<http://www.radiomuseum.org/>) lists over 323,000 radios, but not a single reference to Gaylord or Syncratone. While I believe that Gaylord radios could have been built, I have yet to see or find one. Seeing the chassis of one would determine whether or not they were Plant A or C units. If I can obtain photo's or schematics I will update this article. For now, this mystery will have to be wait.

Post-1938

A final note on the Clinton name. The Union Radio Corporation, located at 328 S. Paulina Avenue, Chicago, appeared in late 1946 selling war-surplus radio kits and the “Clinton Radio-Phonograph”. They were in business until 1947. There is no indication that Union Radio owned or purchased the rights to the Clinton name or were owned by Sonora.

The Earl Webber Company moved from the 1217 W. Washington Street address to 1313 W. Randolph Street in 1937. They were located there until 1940. They moved a final time in 1941 to 4348 W. Roosevelt Avenue where they remained until, presumably, they closed their doors in 1944. I have found no further references to them after 1944.

Chicago

In the 1930's, Chicago was the hub for electronics manufacturing. Many companies were within walking distance, and most were within 5 to 7 miles. All in all, Chicago was the home to at least 58 radio (RM), 71 electronic component (CM), and 13 test equipment (TE) manufacturers during the period 1935 – 1938. Several companies built both radios and electronic components. All had ready access to parts and components.

Apparently companies sharing the same address wasn't all that unusual. Besides 1217 and 1227 W. Washington Boulevard and 1313 W. Randolph, the following addresses were also shared by multiple companies during this same time-period. RM indicates Radio Manufacturer, CM indicates Component Manufacturer, and TE indicates Test Equipment:

2222 Diversey Parkway: ERLA (RM) & Sentinel Radio (RM)

4757 N. Ravenswood: Littlefuse (CM) & Sunot Engineering (TE)

2241 S. Indiana Avenue: Federal Radio & Television Corporation (RM), Pathe Radio & Television (RM), Ross Mfg. (CM), and Wm. Welsh Co., (CM)

2611 S. Indiana Avenue: This is a corner location. Hallicrafters & Silver Marshall, (Hallicrafters had acquired Silver Marshall), with Echophone (all CM) using the address around the corner in the same building!

549 W. Randolph: Globe Trotter (RM), Balkeit (RM) and Electro Products Labs (TE)

1250 W. Van Buren: American Phenolic Corp (CM) & General Transformer Corp (CM)

Private Labeling

Chicago was also a hotbed for private-label radio manufacturers and Clinton wasn't the only Chicago company building them. Belmont built for Goodyear and Western Auto, Climax built some units for Lafayette, Howard built for McMurdo-Silver, Warwick built for Belknap Hardware & Mfg and Aircastle (compare the dial faces of the Warwick 604, the Belknap BL-63, and the Aircastle 6758) and so on. The "Fearnola" radio appears to have been manufactured by Wells-Gardner, Continental Radio & Television, and Warwick at various times. In fact, Warwick Manufacturing is listed as the source for 36 (count 'em!) radio labels of their own and various other companies. Warwick continued in the radio and TV manufacturing business at least through 1962. They produced many television sets for Sears in the late 50's and early 60's. Coincidentally, Warwick was located at 1700 W. Washington Blvd, less than a mile due west of Clinton Manufacturing. And finally, we all know that Sears and Wards farmed out all their work.

Radio Physical Characteristics and Similarities

Plant A, C, and F radios were generally inexpensive and cheaply built, but there were some very attractive console units. Some Plant/Factory radios had exposed coils, some used tube shields others had metal dividers between tubes on the chassis. The coils look just like those produced by General Manufacturing Company in Chicago. Escutcheons, dial faces, and cabinets are common points in many Plant A radios. Compare the Silver-Marshall 146 and the Clinton 127, or compare the Silver-Marshall 139, the Empire 'General', Plant C's Monarch, and Plant A's 'Crusader' and 'LaSalle' to see dials and escutcheons with a common lineage. The Silvertone model 4431 has a cabinet similar to the Simplex U62, the Sherwood, and the Silver-Marshall 139 and 146. Clinton introduced a radio under the Clinton name that used the Silver-Marshall 139 cabinet with the model 146 dial! The Sherwood and St. Regis use the exact same cabinet and dial. The Airline radio models 62-177, 62-196, 62-206, 62-217, 62-282 all use the same escutcheon as the Plant A LaSalle/Crusader. Finally, the Clinton 153 and Empire General 623 are identical.

The Original Question

The original question was, “why couldn't I find a schematic?” The fact is, schematics were provided with the radio at the time of manufacture, usually pasted somewhere on the inside or underneath the cabinet, neither of which were very good places. They were printed cheaply and sometimes had multiple radio schematics on the sheet. Inside the cabinet they would get hot, dry out, and eventually tear and crumble. Those underneath (Illustration #5) were subject to whatever external environment the radio lived in, which explains the lack of schematics available. John F. Rider in his Perpetual Troubleshooters manuals omits private-label manufacturers. He obtained servicing information and schematics primarily from the radio manufacturer, not the private-labeler. I was hoping to provide some schematics with photo's to assist with identification and restoration. However, I still have a day job and that task will have to wait for another day. So, while having (I believe) solved the schematic mystery, I hope that I have also dispelled some of the myths that have surrounded the Plant/Factory conundrum, and shed some new light by narrowing the range of possibilities for what constituted Plant A. The final answer more than likely lies wherever corporate files and records go after a company goes out of business.

Credits, Notes, and Appreciation

Very special Thank You's go out to James Cross of Vacuumtubesinc.com, Kerry Donovan of Consumers Electronics Association research division (RMA), Michael Feldt of IndianaRadios.com, and Alan Douglas and Ludwell Sibley, both noted authors of valued electronic research books. Your willing and gracious assistance to someone reaching out from the 'ether' for help was greatly appreciated. Also, to Barry Van Harn and Jon Chamberlin, both fellow Michigan Antique Radio Club members. Both graciously allowed me to take photo's of the Earl Webber Model 50 (Jon) and Plant C Monarch (Barry) at the 2014 MARC Extravaganza. It was the first time I'd seen either equipment in the flesh. Also, special thanks goes to EXRAY, for the clear Plant A, Plant C, and Clinton tags. Thanks to Steve Sostrom for his assistance.

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Illustration 1



Illustration 2

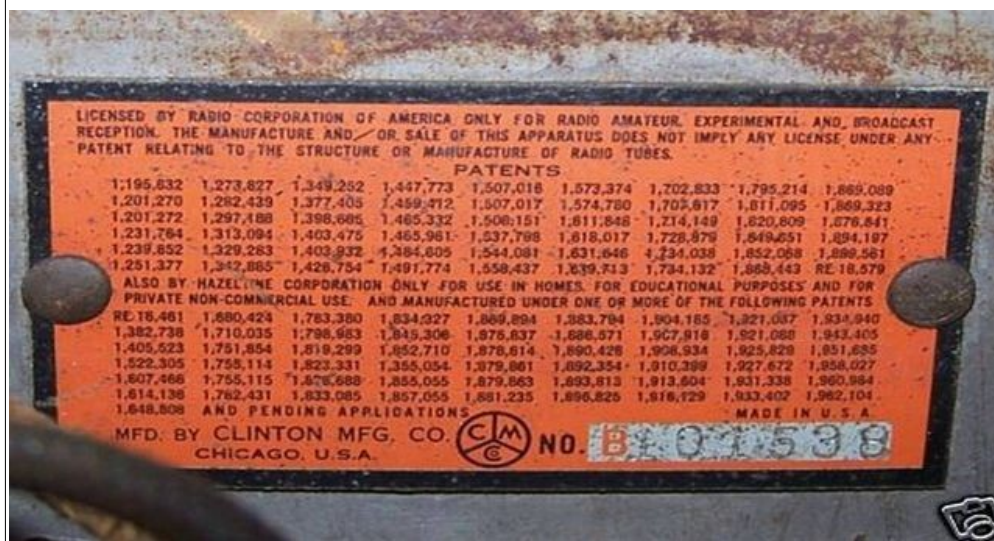


Illustration 3

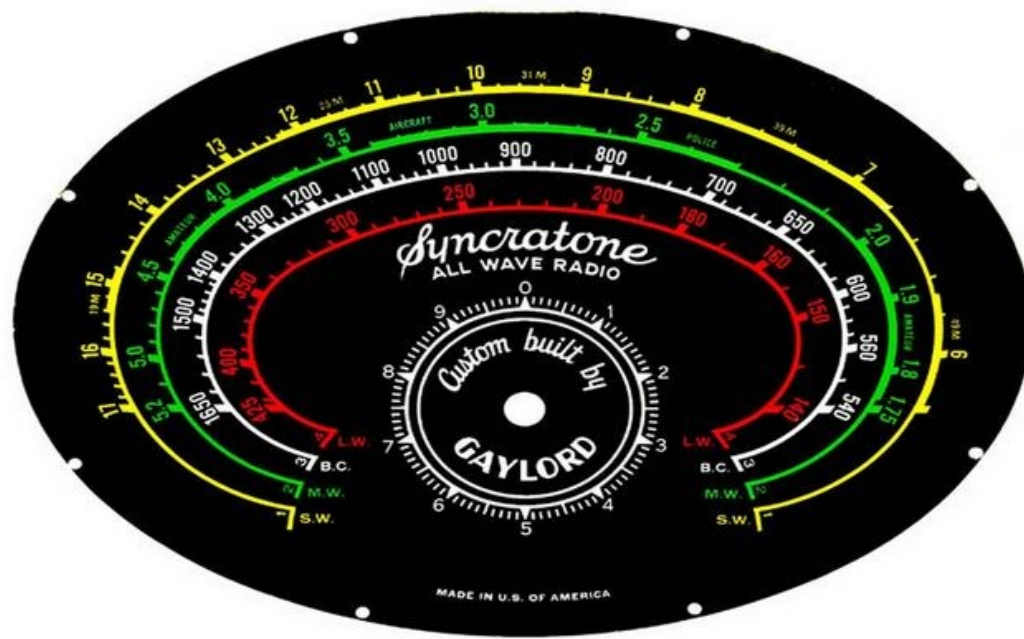


Illustration 4



Illustration 5

R A D I O M A N U F A C T U R E R S	CLINTON MFG. CO., 1933	CLINTON MFG. CO, 1934 – 1938					SONORA RADIO CORP				
			REXTRON RADIO CORP. In Nov & Oct 1935, 2 references in "Radio Today" as a 'Home' radio mfg.	REXTRON, 37 Lock St, Newark, NJ, Tube and Parts distributor, advertising in Shortwave Craft magazine.							
			EMPIRE RADIO CORP, 1935 – 1936, manufacturer of Auto & Home radios and radio accessories, ad in Shortwave Craft, May 1936.				EMPIRE RADIO MANUFACTURING, 1939 – 1941, 114 E 47 th St. NYC, manufacturer of sound systems.				
N O T E S	Address info from December 1994 ARC magazine, Vol. 11, #12	Ghirardi states that Clinton sub-brands or models are: Clinton, Corona, Crusader, Cub, Bostonian, Buckingham, Federal, Harmony, Marshall, Nightingale, Pickwick, Universal, and Westminster, and that all were produced at "PLANT A". Ghirardi's list is by no means comprehensive, as they also produced LaSalle, K-O, and some Pla-Pal radios. Clinton Mfg Co was purchased and closed by Sonora Radio Corp, November, 1938									
Chicago Address	128 N. Clinton St.	1217 W. Washington Blvd.					2626 W. Washington Blvd.				
	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1940-1944	1944-1945	Sept 1946
Chicago Address			1217 W. Washington Blvd.		1313 W. Randolph			4348 W. Roosevelt			
TEST EQUIP MFG			EARL WEBBER CO, 1935 – 1944, Distributor and Manufacturer of Test Equipment								

Table 1