

WITH THE COLLECTORS

The G & F Searchlight Radio A Mystery Solved?

BY PAUL F. TURNEY

WEB EDITION

Some radios that cross a collector's path require serious research. Paul Turney shows great persistence in his pursuit of the history of the G & F Searchlight radio. (Editor)

At the Kutztown, Pennsylvania, radio show in the fall of 2008, I purchased the unusual and rare novelty radio by G & F Sales Co. of Chicago, shown in Figure 1. It has been referred to variously as the "Searchlight," "Spy" or "Disc" radio. Some cursory on-line research soon after my purchase revealed its origins to be obscure, and although an attached decal attributes it to G & F Sales, just who they were turned out to be a mystery.

One well-known guidebook claims that the set's manufacturer was General Radio, but this assertion turns out not to stand up to close scrutiny. The pedigree of this set has, in fact, been the subject of much debate, and feeling compelled to uncover the facts, I decided to shine a spotlight on the Searchlight and see just how many of its secrets could be revealed!

THE FIRST CLUE A PATENT NUMBER

A decal attached to the rear cover bears the wording "G & F Sales, Chicago. Patent Applied For." This is one of the few clues as to the set's origins appearing on its cabinet. However, it turns out to be one key to unlocking the mystery. Prompted by the words "patent applied for," I undertook a search of U.S. patents for the years 1935 through 1940, using the on-line "Google Patents" search engine, with keywords "radio cabinet." Although the search generated numerous hits, before I had waded through very many of them, design patent #109,040 surfaced, featuring this very set. See Figure 2.

I considered this a lucky break, as only a small fraction of the era's radio cabinets were ever patented. I'd been on several wild goose chases through the patent database on previous occasions, impelled by claims of "patent applied for."



Figure 1. The G & F Sales Co. Searchlight radio.

U.S. design patent 109,040 was granted to Irwin Feitler (as in *fighter*), on March, 29, 1938, the application having been made in November of 1937. This application date, taken with the "patent applied for" sticker on the radio would seem to date the radio to late 1937 through early 1938, a little later than the 1936 date sometimes attributed to it. But who was Irwin Feitler and what was his connection to G & F Sales?

G & F SALES AND IRWIN FEITLER

My subsequent research has led to finding that Irwin Feitler (1903 – 1990) was a Chicago entrepreneur known for, amongst other things, his involvement with South Side real estate. Of particular inter-

(Text continued on page 8)

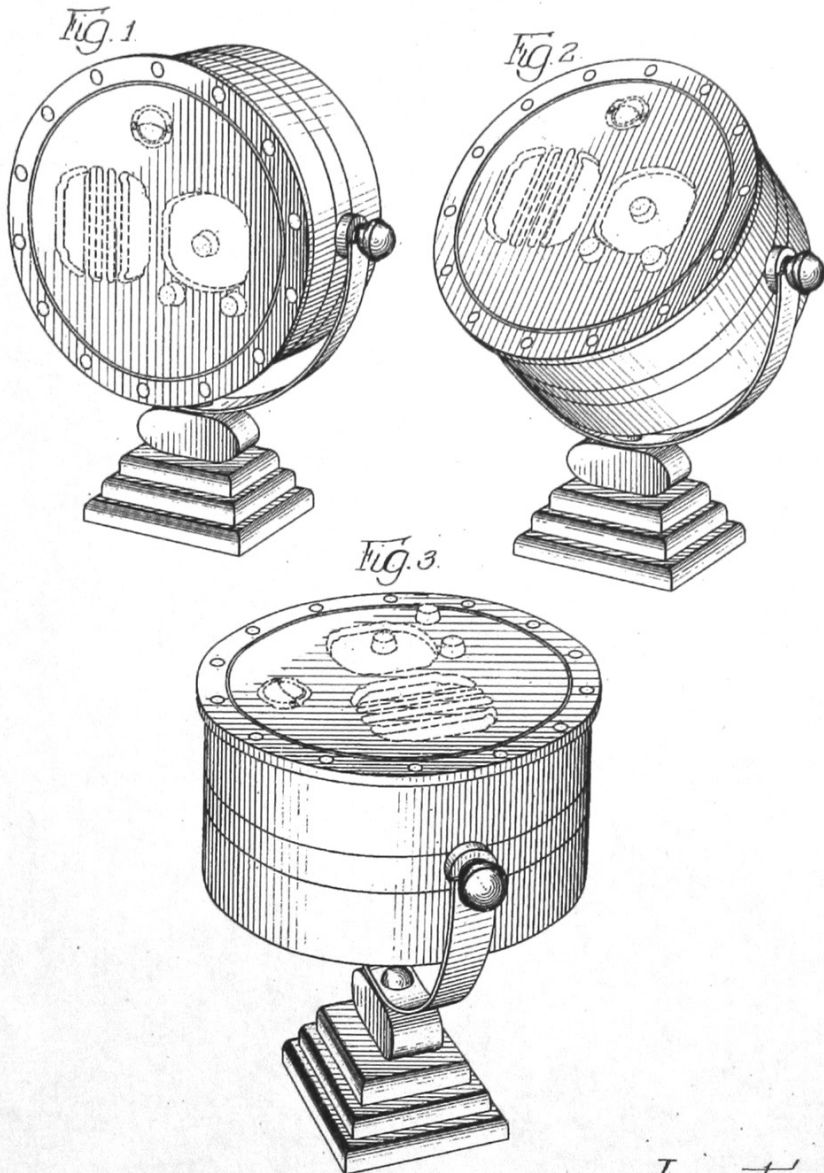
March 29, 1938.

I. FEITLER

Des. 109,040

RADIO CABINET

Filed Nov. 8, 1937



Inventor:
Irwin Feitler
By Cromwell, Grisk & Warden
attys.

Figure 2. The Feitler patent application for the Searchlight radio dated March 29, 1938.

(G & F Searchlight radio, continued)

est to our story is the association of Feitler with Gardner & Co., which started off, circa 1908, as a Chicago-based manufacturer of punchboards and pushcards. See Figure 3 and box.

A patent from 1923 (#1,582,596) names the company as a partnership of Granger, Gardner (who was Feitler's wife's uncle), and Fitzgerald, all of Chicago, and Steinau, of Evansville Indiana. A young Irwin Feitler joined the company in 1928. According to his son Robert, whom I had tracked down, by the mid-1930s, all the original partners had left, except for Granger, who by that time had partnered with Feitler. By the early 1940s, only Feitler remained as sole proprietor, assisted by his wife Bernice.

Through the 1930s and 1940s, Gardner & Co. grew to be a principal manufacturer of punchboards. However, with the march of time, government legislation and taxes rendered these items increasingly unprofitable. By the mid-to-late 1950s, the company had, under Feitler's stewardship, diversified into a manufacturer of children's toys and games, becoming known nationally as a toy company. One of its toys was the "Art Linkletter Spin-a-Ball," which debuted with much hoopla in 1958 at the height of the Hula hoop craze. Linkletter was also involved with this craze through his associations with *Link Research Corp.* and *Spin-a-Hoop Corp.* of Los Angeles. See Figure 4.

Under the trade mark "Gardner Games," Gardner & Co. manufactured a multitude of popular board games, including several featuring Walt Disney characters and themes. Surviving examples are collectible today and turn up often on Ebay.

From 1937 through 1946, Gardner's advertising and product packaging, along with sundry other materials I've encountered, displayed an address of 2309 S. Archer Avenue, Chicago. It's Robert Feitler's recollection that they occupied this address prior to these dates also. In 1946, they relocated a few blocks to 2222 S. Michigan Avenue, a much larger premises formerly occupied by the Hudson Motor Co., where they remained at least through the early 1960s. After this, I lost track of them. In 1963, Irwin Feitler opened a real estate brokerage firm, Irwin Feitler & Co., also at this address.

G & F PUNCHBOARD PRIZES

According to Robert Feitler, back in the 1930s punchboard heyday, Gardner & Co. established a novelty company to distribute punchboard and pushcard prizes. Using the initials of its founding partners Granger and Feitler, this subsidiary for a while went by the name "G & F Sales" (later the M.J. Lee Co.) and shared the premises with Gardner & Co. on Archer Avenue.

G & F probably did not work exclusively with Gardner & Co., but would likely have offered its inventory for sale to other punchboard manufacturers too, and per-

It's Really Hot!!

ONE OF A COMPLETE LINE OF FAMOUS GARDNER GIRL BOARDS

1000 FAST MOVING HOLES TO NAB THOSE NICKELS IN A HURRY

ORDER AS:

NO. 1000 REALLY HOT	TAKES IN: 1000	\$50.00
PAYS OUT:		22.71
AV. PROFIT:		27.29
MAX. PROFIT:		36.00

NOW READY!
A COMPLETE LINE OF
GARDNER
GIRL BOARDS
IN ALL TYPES OF PLAY

WRITE FOR CIRCULAR

LEADING PUNCHBOARD MFR. OVER 40 YEARS

GARDNER & CO. 2222 S. MICHIGAN AVE.
CHICAGO, 16 ILL.

Figure 3. An ad from July 1949 for Gardner punchboards.

haps even to the stores that bought the punchboards.

One of the items offered in G & F's prize catalog was probably the Searchlight radio. Another for sure was Majestic's contemporaneous Charlie McCarthy set, a model that, like the Searchlight, is highly prized by collector's today.

As a young boy Robert Feitler clearly recalls seeing the McCarthy sets in the G & F display room at the Gardner factory during his visits there. He also fondly remembers them on occasions being brought home!

The Charlie McCarthy radio was, of course, not exclusive to G & F, as it was available for sale to the public through stores and by mail order under various trade names. However, it is unknown whether G & F's Searchlight set was marketed only as a prize or whether it too was offered for sale to the public.

That G & F would have invested the time and money to develop a radio solely for use as a punchboard prize, without succumbing to the obvious commercial pressures to offer it retail, seems doubtful. Certainly punchboards were a highly successful means of advertising, having in one instance been credited with helping Zippo to sell 300,000 lighters during the 1930s and 1940s. On the other hand, I have never come across any vintage media advertising for the Searchlight radio to suggest that it was sold retail, nor have I found it listed in any of the trade magazines, though I'm still looking! So for the moment this issue remains unresolved.

That radios were a part of G & F's inventory is not surprising. Fortunes were being made in the flourishing wireless industry and this would not have escaped the attention of an entrepreneur like Feitler. Gardner & Co. and G & F were located right in the very hub of the radio industry at the height of its golden age.

Chicago was one of the era's key centers for radio manufacture, with some estimates placing as

many as a third of all U.S. sets manufactured there. Not only was it home to a number of the industry giants, such as Zenith, but also to a plethora of smaller independents, many of whom rose and fell in short order and about whom little is known today. Chicago was in fact very much the equivalent of the modern day Silicon Valley.

THE SEARCH FOR THE MANUFACTURER

The question to be addressed now was who manufactured the Searchlight radio for G & F? On this topic my pursuit of the Feitler trail ran cold, so I had to look for answers elsewhere.

My first stop was the website of Sonny Clutter www.radiolaguy.com, where an example of the Searchlight radio is featured. He claims that its chassis is the same as used in the Chicago, Ill., Hetro Electrical Industries' Models 10310-10610, Series B. Rider shows these models as sharing a 3-band, 7-tube schematic that does indeed exactly match the G & F radio's chassis, though the tuning range for each of the three bands is not listed.

In an effort to date the chassis, shown in Figure 5, I checked Radio Retailing's *Complete Line & Specifications* editions for 1936, 1937, and 1938 and found two Hetro models, the 10310 and 10510, listed in June 1937. They are described as "compact Bakelites" — the 10310 as a 2-band, 6-tuber, and the 10510 as a 3-band (including long wave) 7-tuber. Its tubes are the same as the 10310, but with the addition of an eye tube.

On the face of it, this data for the Model 10310 is inconsistent with Rider's data both for band and tube count. Furthermore, the 10510 data does not match the G & F radio, which has a police band but no long wave. However, these differences are reconcilable, if one presumes they shared Rider's schematic to correspond to a generic chassis, capable of being tailored by omitting the eye tube and by fitting alternate coils and bandswitches.

The story does not yet end, as I found a schemat-

Figure 4. An ad for the Gardner Spin-a-Ball toy from 1958 at a Saturday Spin-a-Hoop Contest. Irwin Feitler was mentioned in various newspaper write-ups as being "one of the personalities" who attended the grand event.

ic identical to Hetro 10310 — 10610 listed in Rider under Pacific Radio Corporation (844 W. Adams St,

(Continued on following page)

PUNCHBOARDS AND PUSHCARDS

Punchboards were an early gambling device comprised of a board into which many holes were drilled, each hole having sealed within it a small roll of paper bearing a printed number. Boards would typically be displayed in stores, where, for a small fee, patrons could punch out holes in the hope of revealing a number matching one of the lucky ones listed on the board, and thereby of winning one of the prizes.

Pushcards were slightly different in that there was usually a single lucky number concealed on the card and revealed only once all numbers had been pushed out. At this time the prize could be claimed by the holder of that number. In a sense, pushcards were forerunners of the modern day lotteries, though of course the winnings were rather more modest!

During the 1930s and 1940s, it has been estimated that many millions of boards were sold as part of what was for a time a very lucrative business. Stores were often criticized by their non-gambling patrons for having their counters littered with the boards! Travelling salesmen

employed by the board manufacturers would sell the punchboards and pushcards to the retail establishments; the newspapers of the era frequently carried small "punchboard salesmen wanted" ads, promising "instant riches" to successful applicants. It was also not uncommon for school children and scouts to take punchboards door-to-door as a means of fund-raising, though this practice was quickly outlawed in many states.

Prizes would run the whole gambit of cash and merchandise, including candy, cigarettes, pens, neckties, lighters and even small appliances, such as cameras and radios! Richard Arnold in his ARC article from July 2008 gives one example of a punchboard featuring a Sonora radio as the prize, shown on that issue's front cover. An example of a Gardner board is seen in Figure 3.

Like so much ephemera from the past, vintage punchboards and pushcards have today become highly collectible. Good examples frequently turn up on Ebay. I recommend taking a look to catch a glimpse of the wide variety available!

(G & F Searchlight radio, continued)

Chicago), Models 3 & 11 (page 9-1). Therefore, couldn't this company, located as it happened just a short distance from the known addresses of Gardner/G & F, be the true manufacturer?

One clue is that the serial numbers of all G & F Searchlight sets I've encountered begin with "25-," an alleged hallmark of radios manufactured by the Pacific Radio Corp. Sets bearing the "Pacific" brand name are few and far between today, partly because the company is known to have been mostly a manufacturer of sets that it supplied to third parties for sale under their own brand names. Examples include American World, Best, Buckingham, Crusader, and Knight, to name but a few. It seems that G & F, and for that matter, Hetro, should be added to this list too.

As I browse around the web and through guidebooks, more sets come to light that add further credence to a Pacific Radio Corp - G & F Searchlight connection. For example, on the website of Michael Feldt (www.indianaradios.com), is a radio that was sold under the American brand name. See Figure 6. Other than the location of the tuning control, its chassis appears identical to that of the Searchlight. Moreover, it's surely more than coincidence that the two sets sport identical dials, complete with markings, and other than color, identical knobs too.

Michael Feldt attributes the set to Hetro, probably on the basis of its chassis, which matches the Hetro 10310-10610 series mentioned previously. In truth, the American and Hetro sets likely originated at Pacific Radio. Other examples clearly from the same stable can be found, with a little effort, on the web, and yet more examples can be seen in the Stein collector books, under "Pacific."

The findings reported here all point to Pacific Radio Corporation as having been the manufacturer of the G & F Searchlight radio. There can be no certainty about this, since there was so much interchange of design data and components among the Chicago independents at the time. Nevertheless, I feel comfortable with the conclusions and now present what I believe to be the key historical and technical facts behind this radio.

Acknowledgment:

I would like to thank Irwin Feitler's son Robert for his recollections, especially those from his youth regarding Gardner & Co. and G & F Sales Co. The information he supplied was most helpful in piecing together the story behind this radio.

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- Rider, John F. *Perpetual Troubleshooter's Manual*, Vol. 9, Hetro pages 9-11 and Pacific pages 9-1. New York: John F. Rider, Publisher, 1938.

Paul Turney has been collecting vintage radios on and off since he was a teenager. He has been a serious collector since 2001, focusing on sets from the 1930s and 1940s. You can see more of his collection at his website www.tuberadioland.com.



Figure 5. The chassis of the G & F Searchlight radio.



Figure 6. An American Radio with a chassis identical to the Searchlight, except for the location of the tuning control. Photo courtesy of Michael Feldt (www.indianaradios.com).

TECHNICAL DETAIL SUMMARY

G & F Novelty Searchlight radio, distributed by: G & F Sales Company, 2309 S. Archer Ave, Chicago., subsidiary to Gardner & Co, a manufacturer of punchboards and pushcards & later a national toy company.

- Design Patent for cabinet: #109,040 (Irwin Feitler, G & F proprietor), March 29, 1938.
- Model Year: 1937/38.
- Chassis (& cabinet?) Manufacturer: Pacific Radio Corp, 844 W. Adams St, Chicago.
- Chassis type: AC/DC superheterodyne (schematic: same as Pacific Radio Corp. Models 3 and 11, Rider, 9-1).
- Tubes, 7: 6A7 (mixer/LO), 6D6 (IF), 75 (2nd det/1st AF), 25L6 (AF), 25Z5 (rectifier), L49C (ballast tube), 6U5/6G5 (tuning eye).
- Bands, 3: standard broadcast (550-1600kc), police (1.8-5mc), short-wave (6-16mc).