



BOOK REVIEW

Where Discovery Sparks Imagination

By John Jenkins

REVIEWED BY HOWARD STONE

WEB EDITION

Karen, my wife, isn't in love with old radios the way I am. Being an artist she appreciates a few Art Deco radios, a blue mirror Sparton or two, and a couple of Catalins. The sea of black knobs on hard rubber and Bakelite panel fronted radios just isn't very interesting to her. So when I talked her into taking a drive north from her brother's house in Chehalis to Bellingham, Washington, and visiting the American Museum of Radio and Electricity, I was really surprised at her response. She was excited and animated, going from one display to another. She was especially interested in the early discoveries about electricity. Karen was picking up some of the wonder that must have existed during the development of early electrical and radio technology. She was developing a greater appreciation for these early instruments. This had never happened before — or since.

John Jenkins, author of *Loud Talker, The Early History of Loudspeakers*, has now published another book, *Where Discovery Sparks Imagination*. In it, he tries to recapture the wonder, excitement, and mystery of these early instruments — what captured Karen's fascination. Written for the general audience and not a comprehensive collector reference, it nevertheless is a book that we as collectors and radio historians will really appreciate. *Where Discovery Sparks Imagination* contains more than 600 photographs of radios and electrical apparatus starting with the 1600s, the beginning of the electrical age, through the golden age of radio to 1950.

I believe the most fascinating part of the book for radio collectors is the sections on electrical apparatus other than radio. Like me, you may find especially interesting the electrical apparatus such as: static electrical machines, volta canisters, early

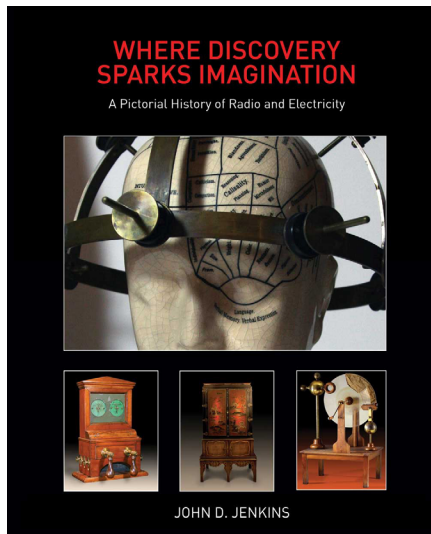
electrical motors, early telegraph and telephones, light bulbs, galvanometers, and induction coils. It gives people interested in early radio a peek into the environment out of which wireless developed.

The book next covers the wireless age, 1880-1919. Illustrated are some early Hertzian wave apparatus. These instruments give the reader a sense of how wireless came about. The American Museum of Radio and Electricity has a very good collection of Marconi Wireless equipment and some of its pieces are illustrated here. Also of interest is World War I radio equipment. When radio enters the home, 1920-1927 is the next section in the book. The book pictures some of the usual suspects, radios that most of us are familiar with, but Jenkins has photographed some radios I did not know existed. Also pictured is a good selection of Atwater Kent

breadboards. This section of the book ends with pictures of a number of crystal sets and loudspeakers.

Where Discovery Sparks Imagination next covers the golden age of radio to 1950. Here a number of classic radios of the 1930s and 1940s are pictured. Also a number of handsome console radios are shown. The final chapter includes a few selected pictures of the Jones collection of vacuum tubes. The museum holds over 20,000 tubes from a wide variety of manufacturers and countries of origin, and the reader will find a few of the more interesting ones are featured in the book.

What is right and wrong with the book? I think John Jenkins accomplishes what he set out to do — to capture some of the mystery and wonder of early electrical and apparatus. The book in many ways is a gallery guide of The American Museum of Radio and Electricity. It certainly is not an



exhaustive guide but merely touches the surface of many topics. I found myself wanting more, even though Jenkins clearly stated that he wouldn't cover topics in the depth that many collectors might want.

I think the book is especially good at depicting the context of the development of radio. You can see many of the instruments that preceded wireless and occurred concurrently with radio: a Volta pistol, scintillating tubes, electroscopes, an electric pen, a long-waisted Mary-Ann, a Nernst lamp, a Rhumkorff coil, a bi-polar electric belt, a needle telegraph, a Hush-A-Phone, a Fleming valve, a RCA Theremin, and many others. The quality of the pictures is excellent. We have come a long way from the fuzzy photographs I first poured over when I began to be interested in early radio technology. It is books like *Where Discovery Sparks Imagination*, RCA by John Jennings and the four volumes on British crystal sets by Ian Sanders

have advanced the study of early technology to a new level that I hope we can expect from future books on radio. I think readers will appreciate *Where Discovery Sparks Imagination*. I look forward to more books from John Jenkins.

"Where Discovery Sparks Imagination" is an 8" x 10" hardcover book containing 218 pages and over 200 photos. Priced at \$34.95, it is available from the American Museum of Radio and Electricity, 1312 Bay Street, Bellingham, WA 98225; A.R.C.; and other book sellers. Packing and shipping costs are available from sellers.

Howard Stone is Emeritus Professor at Texas Christian University. He has been collecting radios and tubes for over 30 years, and special interest is pre-1920 radios and tubes. He has a virtual museum on his website stonevintageradio.com. He can be contacted at stonevintageradio@gmail.com.