Guide to the Perham History Files

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**Title:** Perham History Files  
**Date:** 1800-1980  
**Date (bulk):** 1900-1970  
**Collection number:** 2003-33  
**Collectors:** Perham, Douglas  
**Perham Foundation**  
**Extent:** 16.5 linear feet  
**Repository:** History San Jose Research Library  
San Jose, CA 95112  

**Abstract:** The Perham History Files were first created by Douglas M. Perham and continued by the Perham Foundation and Foothills Electronics Museum. The collection served as a quick reference file regarding people, companies, apparatus, and events relating to the history of early radio and electronics. It includes an array of materials -- ephemeral publications, news clippings, letters, notes, and photographs -- arranged in two series, Documents and Photographs.  

**Physical location:** History San Jose Collection Center  
**Languages:** The majority of the collection material is in English; several product brochures are in German and French.  

**Access**  
The papers are available for researchers by appointment through the Curator of Library and Archives.  

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**Preferred Citation**  
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**Acquisition Information**  

**Processing History**  
Processed by Catherine Mills and Roxanne Nilan, History San Jose Research Library, 2012, under a grant from the Council on Library Resources’ Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives program.  

**Related Collections**  
This collection is directly related to History San Jose’s larger Perham Collection (2003-1) by provenance and by subject matter, and is also related by subject matter to other collections at History San Jose that deal with the early electronics industry in the western United States.  
Associated material in other repositories includes the George H. Clark Radioana Collection at The Smithsonian Institution.  

**Other Finding Aids**  
History San Jose’s PastPerfect catalog, which includes many digitized images, is searchable at http://historysanjose.pastperfect-online.com  

**Biography**  
The Perham History Files are part of The Perham Collection of Early Electronics, the legacy of radio pioneer Douglas McDonald Perham (1887-1967), an early wireless experimenter and radio broadcaster. Perham’s career spanned the first 50 years of commercial electronics in the West — from his first teen-aged experiment with a Marconi coherer in 1898 to his retirement from Varian in 1953. As Federal Telegraph Company’s first American employee (1909), he built the company’s first four Poulsen arcs, and worked with Lee de Forest’s research team (1911-12). He installed experimental and commercial Federal wireless stations throughout California and Texas. In 1922, he built and operated one of Iowa’s first licensed radio broadcasting stations, WJAM, and the first affiliated with a newspaper (The Cedar Rapids Gazette). Coming back to California in 1928, he worked for many local firms, including Federal, Heintz and Kaufman, Dalmo Victor, Ampex and Varian Associates. Perham’s enthusiasm for preserving and sharing the history of his field led to a lifetime of collecting. His collection documented some of the earliest commercial work in electronics in the U.S. and on the West Coast, particularly the Santa...
Clara Valley, from the early 1900s to 1960. Many friends and associates helped him add to his collections well into the 1960s, including Ralph Heintz, Lee de Forest, and Russell Varian. Their donations included personal papers and ephemera not only from their business careers, but in many cases, their involvement in amateur radio. Perham’s original electronics museum was displayed at New Almaden, California, during the 1950s and 1960s.

In 1963, Perham’s collection was acquired by the Perham Foundation, a non-profit group made up of local electronics pioneers (many of them Perham’s personal friends). The Foundation raised funds in 1969 to construct the Foothill Electronics Museum at Foothill College in Los Altos, California. The Museum, opened in 1973, was operated by the College until 1979, and by the Foundation and its many volunteers until its closing in 1991, at which time the history files went into storage. During the Museum's history, the files continued to accrue material related to the Foundation’s growing collection of objects, photographs, publications, and archival collections.

Scope and Content Summary
The Perham History Files were first created by Douglas M. Perham and continued by the Perham Foundation and Foothills Electronics Museum. The collection served as a quick reference file regarding people, companies, products, and events relating to the history of early 20th century electrical apparatus, communications and electronics. It includes an array of materials -- ephemeral publications, news clippings, letters, notes, and photographs -- separated into two series, Documents (15 linear feet) and Photographs (1.5 linear feet).

The documents represent the bulk of the Perham History Files and include a wide variety of materials, from personal correspondence to patents, early radio trade catalogs to corporate newsletters from the 1960s. Included is Douglas Perham’s correspondence with collectors who wished to donate objects to his New Almaden Museum, as well as his correspondence with conference organizers during his early efforts to display his collection at conferences such as Western Electronic Show and Convention (WESCON) in 1957.

The collection covers not only early wireless communication and electronics, but also the history of electrical apparatus, electric lighting, and electric power. A large portion of the series is comprised of trade catalogs dating from the early 1900s through the 1950s for radios, radio components (batteries, vacuum tubes, headsets), electric apparatus (motors, generators, testing equipment), automatic telephones and intercommunication systems, motion picture lamps, arc lighting, electric equipment for medical purposes such as electrolysis, and sound reproduction and surveillance equipment. In addition, catalogs and magazines directed at the amateur radio operator, as well as radio broadcasting schedules, are included.

There are corporate publications from companies including Pacific Telephone & Telegraph, Western Electric, RCA, Edison, General Electric, Eitel-McCullough, as well as a nearly-complete series of Varian Associates newsletters and corporate magazines from 1959-1966. These later materials reflect the growing industry of klystrons and microwave technology, and the application of electronics in defense and industry.

Two direct sources of material for these files apart from Douglas Perham were William W. Hanscom and Lloyd Espenschied. Both donations are notable. Hanscom was a mechanical engineer in San Francisco who was initially involved in the manufacture and installation of electrical apparatus on board ships for the U.S. Navy and merchant marine. In 1909 he became a consultant engineer in the areas of building installations for light, heat and ventilation, power plants for steel foundries, manufacturing plants, and public buildings for the City & County of San Francisco. From 1914-1917 he was Consulting Engineer for the Bureau of Architecture, as well as conducting research work in radio telephony.

Hanscom was a licensed radio operator, and ran a transmitter and receiver from the roof of the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco that broadcast regular music programs. He was chief engineer to National Wireless Telephone & Telegraph, later the National Radio Company, conducting tests on their wireless telephone, or radiotelephone, between 1914 and 1919. Because of the broad nature of his consultant work, Hanscom was in touch with many companies to enquire about their products and ask for installation quotes, and he corresponded with both radio operators and wireless engineers, including Fred M. Sammis at Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America. His original research journals, diagrams, correspondence, and accumulated trade catalogs provide a rich source of material for researching early wireless, radio and electrical work in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Lloyd Espenschied’s original correspondence (1954-1955) with Lee de Forest is also included in the History Files. The correspondence began during Espenschied’s employment at Bell Telephone Laboratories, and continued after he retired. Among their topics is de Forest’s Nobel Prize campaign; a heated exchange about the merits of de Forest’s work provides insight into both men's personalities, as well as de Forest’s accomplishments compared to his contemporaries.

San Francisco Bay Area material of note includes correspondence between Jane Morgan, author of “Electronics in the West,” George T. Royden, and Frank A. Polkinghorn, about the history of Moorhead Laboratories, Inc. in San Francisco (1970); and a trade catalog from Moorhead Laboratories (1919) titled “Moorhead and his Valve.” Douglas Perham’s correspondence as a contractor with Dalmo-Victor Manufacturers during World War II offers a view of how military contracts affected the

In addition, there is a small amount of Lee de Forest material, including news clippings, correspondence with Douglas Perham, a St. Louis 1904 World’s Fair “Meet me at The De Forest Wireless Telegraph Tower” invitation, Radio News articles, and De Forest Radio catalogs and manuals (1914-1920), including the De Forest Radio Receiving Apparatus Catalog “D” (1920) and the Deforest Wireless Telegraphy brochure (circa 1904).

Indexing Terms

These and related materials may be found under the following headings in online catalogs.

Subjects
De Forest, Lee, 1873-1961.
Elwell, C. F. (Cyril Frank), 1884-1963.
Sammis, Fred M.
Varian, Russell Harrison, 1898-1959.
Varian, Sigurd Fergus, 1901-1961.
Ampex Corporation
Dalmo Victor Manufacturers (San Carlos, Calif.)
Eitel-McCullough, Inc.
Federal Telegraph Company
Foothill Electronics Museum
Institute of Radio Engineers
Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company of America
Moorhead Laboratories, Inc.
National Radio Company
National Wireless Telegraph & Telephone
New Almaden Museum
Radio Corporation of America
United States, Navy.
Varian Associates
Mare Island Naval Shipyards
San Francisco Bay Area (Calif.)
Bolinas (Calif.)
Amateur radio stations--History.
Telegraph, Wireless--History.
Radio--History.
Electric apparatus and appliances--Catalogs.
Electricity--Periodicals.
Electronic industries--California--Santa Clara Valley--History.
Communications, Military--Equipment and supplies

Genres and Forms of Materials
clippings (information artifacts)
correspondence
manuals (instructional materials)
newsletters
patents
photographs
research notes
technical drawings
trade catalogs