

# Lee De Forest

## A Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Revised by Harry G. Heiss



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

Washington, D.C.

1997

Contact information: <http://lcweb.loc.gov/rr/mss/address.html>

Text converted and initial EAD tagging provided by  
Apex Data Services, 1999 January; encoding  
completed by Manuscript Division, 1999

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

Latest revision: 2004-12-01

## Collection Summary

**Title:** Papers of Lee De Forest

**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.

**Repository:** Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Abstract:** Radio pioneer and inventor. Correspondence, diaries, technical notes and other material relating to Lee 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.

### Names:

De Forest, Lee, 1873-1961

Marconi, Guglielmo, marchese, 1874-1937

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The status of copyright in the unpublished writings of Lee De Forest is governed by the Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, U.S.C.).

### Microfilm:

A microfilm edition of part of these papers is available on two reels. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan.

**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
ca. 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.)
ca. 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.

# Container List

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