

by Alan Douglas

There has been considerable confusion about the earliest history of Hallicrafters, evidenced by the fact that of several accounts in print, no two agree. In particular, they differ on who actually manufactured the radios (Hallicrafters had no factory until moving to the Case plant in Marion, Indiana in 1936).

Things start to fall into place if one constructs parallel time lines for the three Chicago companies in question: Hallicrafters, McMurdo Silver, and Howard. It then becomes evident that Silver's factory was transferred to Howard when RCA sued Silver for lack of a patent license, and that for a couple of years thereafter, Howard had the only license and made radios for both Silver and Hallicrafters. There is documentation for this: in an "open letter" in the *McMurdo Silver Times* for December 1936, answering charges in a similar letter by Scott in his promotional literature, Silver stated that "Masterpiece V radios...were built by men trained by me and upon the Howard payroll in its plant."

Silver production was transferred to Hallicrafters about September 15, 1936. In a letter written to William Orr dated July 12, 1978, Halligan said "We picked up some other private label business and even Mac Silver got us to build his special set." Silver acknowledged (in his "open letter") that his radios formerly built at Howard were now built "in the nearby plant of an R.C.A. licensee."

RCA seems to have been less than enthusiastic about riding herd on a bunch of unruly licensees scattered around the country, a job involving travelling to each company and auditing its books to assess royalties. RCA solved the problem in California by letting Gilfillan hold the primary license and take care of details. Indeed all the smaller companies were eventually required to build their sets under Gilfillan's roof. It looks as if RCA had a similar idea for Chicago, after suing Silver. Howard Radio Company, owned by independently-wealthy Austin Howard, had always been above the fray, content to make a small number of high-quality sets, and to simply sign up for whatever licenses were available. In 1929 his company had been bought by the Everett Piano Co. and moved to South Haven, Michigan. They had continued to make good radios during 1932 and 1933 (even a peewee set, probably the only one to use a power transformer) but the Everett owners may have been glad to sell the radio business back to Austin Howard in 1934. At any rate, Howard took over the old Silver plant on Belmont Ave., and had an RCA license when neither Silver nor Hallicrafters did. The timing is too coincidental to have been chance.

Not long afterward, RCA appears to have made another arrangement for licensing the Chicago independents, setting up a series of factories identified as plants A,B,C,D (later there were more). One story is that Westinghouse owned the buildings. Westinghouse had always been RCA's "enforcer", dating back to the 1920s when they owned the Armstrong regeneration and superheterodyne patents. It's suggestive that Plant A license plates on the backs of the chassis were orange, and the Westinghouse company colors were orange and black, but the original story came from a man who was superintendent of one of the plants.

By the mid-1930s both Hallicrafters and Silver had broken away from Howard and had their own buildings. Neither is still standing: 2900 S. Michigan Ave. is a parking lot, while the old Echophone plant at 2611 Indiana Ave. has given way to a condo/apartment complex. 1731 Belmont is still there, however. Silver's place of exile on North Paulina St. is the same old terra cotta office building/store. Hallicrafters' first locations are now the Marriott Courtyard Hotel (417 N. State St.) and a funeral home (3001 Southport Ave.) The Case plant in Marion, Indiana has been demolished. I am indebted to the Editor of the AWA Journal, Marc Ellis, for making pilgrimages to these in 1998, as I have no knowledge of things Chicago.

Notes, keyed to numbers at transition points on the timeline:

1. Hallicrafters was formed on January 1, 1933. In a letter written to H.L. Chadbourne on July 3, 1980, Halligan states that he left his sales-representative partnership and struck out for himself after Silver-Marshall had gone bankrupt and commissions had ceased. "I started selling things by mail under the name Halligan and Company. Silver's lawyer told me they owned a company named Silver-Marshall Manufacturing Co. and I could use that name on some of the things I was selling at 15 cents a nameplate."

From a letter by Halligan to William Orr of July 12, 1978: "Meanwhile, I had made a deal with Mac Silver's mother, who owned a name "Silver-Marshall Manufacturing Company," and I proceeded to put that name on various radio sets I was able to get from some of the local manufacturers and sold this stuff by mail. I also put this Silver-Marshall name on the first set designed by Ken Clough and sold that by mail too." (the S-1)

The Rider manuals show schematics for Silver-Marshall Manufacturing Co. from 4/26/33 to 1/29/34. Silver-Marshall Mfg. Co. had been a paper corporation which held stock in Silver-Marshall.

2. This date is unclear. As noted in (1), the last dated schematic for the Silver-Marshall Mfg. Co. is January 1934. The first Hallicrafters short-wave model, the S-1, appears in *Radio News* in April 1934. *Radio News* appeared about a month before its cover date, and ads had to be submitted two months before. The original eight-page flyer for the Skyriders is marked "Form no. 10M 334" which could mean he bought ten thousand in March 1934. Other than showing "Hallicrafters" on the nameplate, this brochure lists no manufacturer at all; it merely has a blank space "distributed by."

From a letter to me from H.L. Chadbourne dated February 15, 1980 recalling recent telephone conversations with Halligan: "Bill Halligan told me (according to my notes) that Howard made his original sets. Then he leased space in the basement of the Howard building and started building his own. Subsequently Hallicrafters expanded to occupy two floors of the building."

By the way, I stated in my vol.3 (p.61) that Halligan bought Echophone in late 1934. This is what comes of believing secondary sources. He didn't learn of Echophone until connecting with Case in 1936.

3. April 1936. From Vol. 1 No. 1 of a Hallicrafters house organ dated August 25, 1942, referenced in *Communications Receivers* by Raymond Moore, 1987/1991/1993/1997.

4. August 15, 1936 (same as reference 3) According to this text, RCA was discontinuing the issuance of manufacturing sub-licenses in 1936, and Echophone had also closed its doors, leaving a valid RCA license as its only asset. Halligan jumped at the chance to move back to Chicago and re-open the closed plant under the Hallicrafters name, abandoning his sub-license in favor of a real one. Things could not have been going very well in Marion, since the company's entire possessions fit on two trucks.

5. 9 months before 7/18/33 (mid-November 1932) according to Scott's "open letter." Silver-Marshall's bankruptcy sale was October 31, 1932. The entire sales organization shortly moved to Howard Radio Co.

When Silver-Marshall went bankrupt and was sold at auction, the new buyers tried briefly to revive the company in early 1933. When Halligan attempted to use his Silver-Marshall Mfg. Co. name, he was sued by these owners, but prevailed in court by showing that no business had actually been done by them. The decision was in November 1933.

6. This date is also unclear. The Masterpiece II brochure reprints a letter stating that its writer got his Masterpiece on May 26, and gives lists of stations received in June. One of H.L. Chadbourne's old correspondents said he visited the factory in July 1933. The brochure came with a covering letter dated October.

7. Approximately May 1934. Ads in *RADIO* for June and July show the new address. RCA's lawsuit over lack of a license occurred in April 1934, according to the "open letter" in the *McMurdo Silver Times* of December 1936.

8. About September 1, 1936, according to the "open letter" noted in (7) above. Chadbourne's informant also visited this location in July 1937 (and claimed to have seen radios being built, though Silver's official line was that only final testing and alignment were done there).

9. April 1934. The April issue of *Radio Retailing* mentions both addresses in different places, and in another news item says that Howard is moving his factory.

The original version of this Timeline appeared in the Antique Wireless Association *Old Timer's Bulletin* in November 1998, with a correction in May 1999.

The late H.L. Chadbourne of La Jolla, California provided the original inspiration for this Time Line, and also uncovered some of the source material. Ray Moore supplied a copy of the 1942 Hallicrafters house organ.

Alan Douglas, December 2007