



The McCarty Wireless Telephone---Finis

by **ROBERT O'BRIEN**

A series of lectures and demonstrations of Francis J. McCarty's audible wireless telephone followed the first public experiment conducted for the benefit of the war.

The experiment, as I have mentioned, took place at Ocean Beach, San Diego, California, in 1905, when Francis, the 17-year-old inventor, transmitting his voice by wireless from the Cliff House to a receiving apparatus a mile down the beach. This was in 1905, three years after his first outdoor experiment, during which he had talked across Stow lake to his brother Ignatius.

Reporters had left the receiving station impressed, and convinced that the tall, lank, dark-haired lad was indeed a wizard; through the magic of his strange wires and coils and arcs he had succeeded in demonstrating beyond a doubt that man could talk through space by means of the same principles that he could, with Marconi's wireless telegraph, send dots and dashes through space.

One of these subsequent demonstrations was at Hale Brothers' store; another was given at Native Sons' Hall. Ignatius, who recalls this exhibition, remembers a feature of it was an explanation by Francis of how wireless telephonic waves could be used in time of war to blow up a battleship.

Meanwhile, financing of the McCarty Wireless Telephone Co. had progressed, and construction was started on an experimental transmission shack in the Sunset sand dunes at a location which would now be at 45th avenue and Lawton street.

"Sometimes, while it was being built, we used to sleep in the shack," Ignatius said. "Frequently we'd wake up in the morning and have to shovel our way out the front door through sand that had

drifted waist-high against it during the night."

The beginning of the end of young McCarty's dream really came with the 1906 earthquake and fire. The city-wide disaster quite naturally interrupted not only his work, but public interest in it. Additionally, the company offices were moved to Oakland for the period of reconstruction.



Ignatius remembers that Francis at this point bought himself what was then known as a "rent-collector's cart," a two-wheeled carriage without a top; and in this he commuted between his home in San Francisco and the company offices in Oakland, taking it across the bay with him on the ferries.

One day in May, 1906, Francis left the offices at Broadway and 12th street and started down Broadway in his cart. Five blocks from the office a pedestrian darted into the road. Unable to stop his horse in time to avoid hitting him, Francis veered toward the sidewalk. The cart wheels crashed into the high curbing. Francis was flung from the cart. His body hurtled against a telephone pole, and minutes later he was dead. In another two weeks, he would have been 18.

It was a blow from which the

company and its operations never recovered. Francis, his genius and enthusiasm, had been the points about which they both revolved. With them removed, it was only a matter of time before the organization disintegrated. Value of the stock dropped, and the stock itself, in this crisis of the firm, was unwisely handled.

Ignatius attempted to carry on his brother's experiments, in a home laboratory in Fell street and at the shack in the sand dunes. One of his most active assistants here was William A. Horsfall, now a slight, bearded man with a scholarly air and vocabulary, who is a maintenance engineer at the Hall of Justice. In the years after the earthquake and fire, he and the McCarty's occupied adjacent flats in the same building.

"When I was working with Ignatius, I was just sort of standing by," he said the other day. "Ignatius had access to laboratory accommodations at St. Ignatius College, then in temporary quarters at Hayes and Schrader streets. Sometimes, we used to set the instruments up there."

In 1908 or 1909, a year or two after Lee de Forest's invention of the audion tube lifted wireless telephony from the realm of crude experimentation to that of practicality, there didn't seem to be much use in going on. Horsfall was there at the end.

"I accompanied Ignatius and a couple of priests from the college to the shack in the sand dunes," he said. "We went out in a horse and wagon, gathered up the equipment and material, and took it back to the college. After that, the station was abandoned."

Thus ended this obscure San Francisco chapter in the history of radio, the chapter that had opened in 1902, when 14-year-old Francis McCarty's invention carried his voice across Stow lake by the miracle of wireless telephony.