

An Extract From the Diary of Dr. Lee DeForest
Transcribed and lightly edited by Robert Rydzewski

Nov 29. 06

Dear Mr. H _____¹

Replying to your favor of the 20th. I do not know much about the "United Wireless Tel. Co." but I know sufficient to calmly and truthfully state that it is just one more (and let us pray God the last) link in the shameful chain of exploitation expansion, watering and milking, stock jobbing, defaulting and swindling operations with which the decent, honorable, and humanitarian art of wireless telegraphy has been cursed from its very beginning.

A more shameless, bold-faced imposition has never been perpetrated upon a much-believing and long suffering public.

Look at what is "consolidated"! de Forest dropped entirely; Marconi not so much as approached; not a share of his Parent Co's stock actually purchased or controlled - his directors publicly & indignantly denying the grandiose misstatements of White in the preceding day's papers.

Look at his "ads" - knowing what you know about real wireless. Read his bombastic promises and recall the past!

Consider the present condition of the poor remnant which White² still keeps afloat; look at the pitiful wreck of the "factory" at Jersey City - the worthless junk-pile that represents thousands of confided dollars - at Atlanta's \$3000 station sold on the court-house steps for a paltry \$150 attachment - the farce at Columbus; the lone mast at Geneva; the Sheriff's notices at St. Louis - etc- Then read White's ads and the Curb's³ laundried quotations; at his worthy list of "notable" directors and officers, clerks, office boys, non-entities, operators.

Even the figureheads whose names might carry weight to the uninitiated get off this flimsy, piratical, phantom craft almost before its launching.

You know the actual possibilities and capabilities of wireless, and you know White too well to need further protestations from me. You know then what this "United Wireless", of already stinking memory, can be.

Of course I have now resigned from the Vice-Presidency and the "Directorate" (sans the mark) of the now comatose and moribund "American DeForest Wireless Tel. Co", and am considering what steps can be taken to prevent the further prostitution of my name in this wretched stock-swindle.

If ever [a] man was deceived in his fellow man, in the ultimate soundness of heart, and earnestness of mind, and honesty of purpose, of a once co-worker then I have been in Abraham White.

Once I held him dear as a Brother; and it is not his brutal, heartless treatment of me personally that has convicted him in my eyes. It is the now all-too-evident intention to betray this child of my effort and my brains and good years into the clutches of stock-pirates, ~~himself the blackest-eyed, the leader of them all.~~

It now seems clear that thru it all but one underlying, unwavering motive ran - hidden by vacillating lack of purpose, impulsive extravagances, unsound judgement and criminal mismanagement - the silent disguised amassing of a private fortune from the proceeds of the confiding of the poor and the provident. These people, thousands of them throughout the land, women and laborers, men of small means, believed in me, had confidence in my work, the results of which spoke for themselves.

They shared my faith in the future of Wireless & in the sagacity and the honor of this one to whom I had entrusted my future.

If rightly fostered, conservatively developed, thriftily directed, Wireless in this country would today stand on a firm basis, with a remunerative future absolutely assured. But Abraham White has betrayed me, has hampered my abilities and nullified my work; and heedless of advice or control, squandered the hundreds of thousands which were given to him by trusted people.

Now it is vanished, irretrievably lost - the project wicked; my name made one of ridicule and opprobrium. He has wasted these years of my life, and the public's savings. All are alike losers, says White and a small coterie of stock agents, who craftier, conscienceless, and farther-seeing than the rest, have grown opulent while we others toiled and gave of the best we had.

I have been in a crew of thieves, who made me, unwittingly, their chief accomplice; but in they end they must, if there is justice on Earth, sink with the craft they have so meanly scuttled.

As for myself I have offered to surrender all of my stock for a quit-claim to my Patent rights & inventions (if necessary thru [*sic*] him - De F. Co. to operate under the "loop patent" as a license). "The Co" i.e. White claims to use nothing of my origination now save that, so it is more than a fair trade on my part - a pitiable reward for those years!

I ask merely the chance to again begin with a free hand, in a field not free but rather crowded; to interest new (and honorable and genuine capital); to develop my ideas, to follow my heart, to vindicate myself.

The use of the alternating current, the telephone receiver, the tuning arrangements, a host of necessary mechanical arrangements, the loop antenna - all these, albeit many unpatentable, are my productions, at least independently & early conceived, and many other some-day-to-be most valuable ideas, justify the faith in me. Despite the scant support, the pitiful "Laboratory" facilities; the wretched Patent & Legal assistance I have met I have made good. Witness this history of my real successes.

And now with a rational and sufficient backing, by men who desire results, not robberies, I shall quickly stand before the world, as come into my own.

First of all my achievements today stands the Audion,⁴ child of my earliest experiments, conceived six years ago⁵ in the poverty and inexperience of a Faith-lit beginning. Given sound and intelligent Legal advice, with a Laboratory and an opportunity to stay there and this march of sensitiveness and efficiency would doubtless stand as it does today three years ago.

The Company would have escaped a most damaging litigation but [*illegible*]?- just that much more of prestige and income from which White had cashed his private dividends. No Company, with him at the helm, faced ultimate wreck, whatever patents and perfections of systems it might possess.

But you, little Audion, have been a fortifying companion to me in all the troubles of the months that are past; thru all their dark hours your light has alone gleamed dazzlingly bright to my eyes; my ears have harkened to your fluttering whisper amid the discordant stories of these crashing times.

As you glow, little Audion, have I been allowed to concentrate, since those months of disappointing study in Chicago before the Electrolytic "Responder". And right well have you

rewarded my thoughts and my study. Scarcely a step that was not in advance, each change was improvement.

Until tonight you rest on the table before me excelling all devices which man has achieved in sensitiveness to the infinitesimal forces I have built you to detect.

Yet, Audion, you are very old - older than the Earth, as old as the Sun, whose incandescent gases have for countless eons [*illegible*] in response to the electric waves which have been born in that awful photosphere, traversed with their light the infinite distances from other stars.

¹ The identity of Mr. H_____ remains unknown. Also unknown is whether this diary entry was DeForest's draft of an actual letter or not.

² Abraham White, DeForest's former partner.

³ Refers to the New York Curb market, an outdoor functioning stock market on Broad Street in the early years of the twentieth century.

⁴ Although we tend to think of the "Audion," DeForest's key invention, as the three-element triode, if the date above this diary entry is correct (and it appears to be) he had only invented the triode several weeks before and would not yet have known about its transformative abilities to detect, amplify, and oscillate. Almost certainly, in this ode to the Audion DeForest is referring to the two-element Audion (diode), which looked very much like the Fleming valve but unlike Fleming's was used in a circuit with a separate battery for the plate and headphones to make for audible detection. See Mike Adams' *Lee de Forest, King of Radio, Television, and Film* (New York, Springer, 2012) pp. 89-98 for more information.

⁵ This apparently refers to DeForest's earliest work with flame detectors.