National Capital Radio & Television Museum

Artifact Showcase:

Phanstiehl Model 7



Carl Phanstiehl and James Troxel organized the Phanstiehl Electric Co. in 1907 to manufacture induction coils, soon branching out into auto ignition systems. Carl figured out how to replace costly platinum distributor points with cheaper tungsten. Other applications of refractory metals soon became an important segment of their Chicago-area business. Their "Balkite" brand rectifiers used in battery eliminators for 1920s radios also employed tungsten.

The Phanstiehl family came from the Netherlands, but during WWI, companies with German-sounding names sometimes sought to sound more American. Fansteel (still in business today) became its adopted new name.

By 1924 anti-German sentiment had died down. That year Carl created a separate new firm—the Phanstiehl Radio Company. The three-dial, five tube, Model 7 shown here was its first radio. It sold for about $150 (~ $2500 in today's dollars). Its circuit is similar to other three-dialers of the era. One unusual feature is the engraving at the top right of the front panel, which shows the approximate dial settings to tune in a particular wavelength. By 1927 the company was in financial trouble. It exited radio manufacturing and sold its RCA patent license to Majestic.

Cody Phanstiehl, Carl's son, was a publicity manager for WTOP radio, and then for many years, the spokesperson for Washington's Metro System. In 2006 Brian Belanger and Ken Mellgren did a video interview with Cody in which he shared memories of his father and the company. When the museum's members-only website is up and running, we intend to post this interview there.

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!