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QST Issue: Apr 2003

Title: April Fool's

Author: John H. Dilks III, K2TQN

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April Fool's

The April issue of many magazines occasionally inserts an "April Fool" article to see how sharp their readers are. I admit to falling for more than one, most notably the "Fuse Tester" back in the 1970s in one of the magazines. It was a circuit that had a box, a switch, a light and a fuse holder. The box said, "If the light lights, fuse is good." But if you pushed the unlabeled switch, which was wired across the light, the fuse would blow.

I built a safer version with an isolation transformer later on and had a ball with it at work. I put it on the break room table at the local telephone company, with a pile of new fuses by its side. It was fun watching the puzzled looks on my friends' faces, as the fuses would blow, one right after the other. Usually by the second or third blown fuse they would catch on, and everyone had a good laugh. Of course the date was April first.

The "Milkotron"

I always enjoy reading the early *QST* magazines. Sometimes I spot an "April Fool" type article in an issue other than April. Such an article appeared in the November 1930 issue of *QST* on page 31, and until recently I thought it was a joke. It was titled, "The Milkotron, as told to the Old Connecticut Yankee, by Woody Darrow, W3JZ, of Philadelphia." It is about a strange tube built inside an old milk bottle by the De Forest Company. If you

have an old *QST* or the 1930-39 *QST View* CD, read it and you'll see what I mean.

Recently my friend Jerry Vanicek found a Milkotron tube and wrote about it in the *Tube Collector*, the publication of the Tube Collectors Association. I'll let him tell you the story.

The MILKOTRON, Another De Forest Invention?

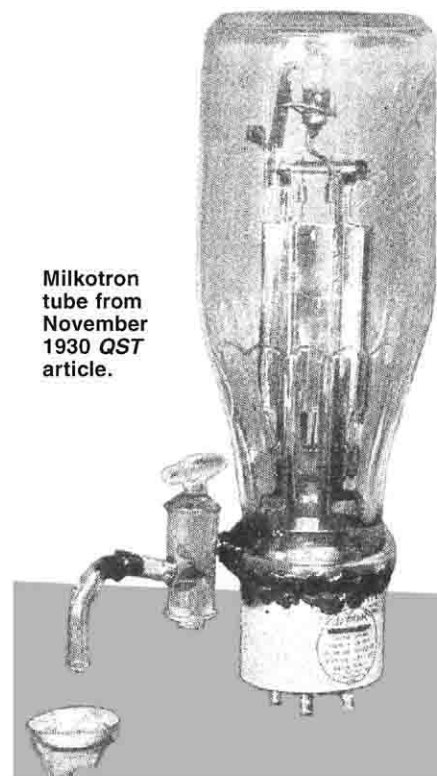
By Jerry Vanicek

Very little is written about one of the rarest of the De Forest tubes, the MILKOTRON. The writer first became acquainted with this device in 1964, while reading through a stack of old *QST* magazines. At that time I thought that the tube must have been long since destroyed.

However, in the 1970s I found a second reference to this unique device. The subject of the MILKOTRON came up while visiting Gerald Tyne. [Gerald Tyne, ex-8KN and a SK, was an expert and well-known author on tubes. His book, *Saga of the Vacuum Tube* is highly regarded.—Ed.] In answer to my questions, he produced a De Forest Company photograph of the tube. In the picture, the tube type is spelled in two different ways. The label on the envelope (one-pint milk bottle) states

"MILKATRON," while the label on the base says "MILKOTRON."

Until recently, the writer had found nothing more on the MILKOTRON. However, I recently bought an early



Milkotron tube from November 1930 *QST* article.



Jerry's Milkotron tube.

Profile: Jerry Vanicek

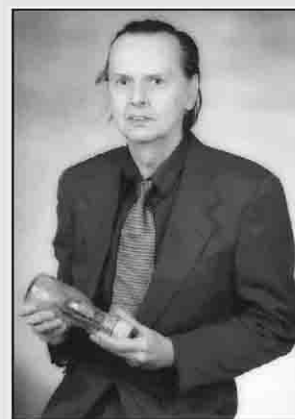
Jerry Vanicek is a graduate of Southern Illinois University with a degree in Electrical Engineering. He is retired. Although not presently licensed, he has held the Amateur Radio calls WA9RJD and KC9JS.

He is a Founder, Board Member and currently President of the Tube Collectors Association.

He collects items pertaining to, and has researched, the field of radio and radio related items for the past 38 years. He has been a member of the Antique Wireless Association (AWA) since 1968. He was awarded the AWA's highest honor, The Houck Award and has presented several lectures at National AWA conventions.

An author, he has written numerous articles for the following publications: *AWA's Review* and *Old Timers Bulletin*, *Antique Radio Classified* and the *Tube Collectors Association Bulletin*.

He has contributed a great number of exceedingly rare tubes to The Manhattan College Tube Display, which is one of the best in the country. For the past six years he has worked part-time as a volunteer for the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago. His work there is in the Special Collections Department.



Jerry Vanicek with his Milkotron tube.