

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### PHILO TAYLOR FARNSWORTH - 1906-1971

Number 1137

January 1996

Philo T. Farnsworth is best known as the inventor of the purely electronic television system. He drew the first workable television design while a student at Rigby High School in Idaho. A statute placed in Statutory Hall in the Capitol Building at Washington, D.C. on May 2, 1990 is dedicated to the memory of Philo Farnsworth as the "Father of Television."

He was born August 19, 1906 in Beaver, Utah, and educated in Utah and Idaho schools. His parents encouraged his scientific mind; by the age of six, Farnsworth had declared his intentions of becoming an inventor. In 1919 at the age of thirteen, at the Bungalow Ranch near Rigby, Idaho, Farnsworth won a first prize of \$25.00 for his theft-proof ignition switch for automobiles. In 1922, at Rigby High School, he developed and sketched his first ideas for the electronic transmission of images for his high school chemistry teacher, Justin Tolman. It is important to consider that radio in 1922 was in its infancy, with only thirty licensed broadcasting stations in the United States. None of these stations were in Idaho; only one was in Utah.

Farnsworth graduated from Brigham Young High School in Provo, Utah in 1924. He entered the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Maryland, but was granted a release after his father's death. He attended Brigham Young University, but left at the end of his second year.

Farnsworth married Elma "Pem" Gardner on May 27, 1926. Together they moved to Los Angeles, California and Farnsworth joined the Crocker Research Laboratories to work with television technology. At the age of twenty, he produced the first all-electronic television image using his wife as the subject of the image. Farnsworth filed Patent #1,773,980 entitled Television System on January 7, 1927, and was granted the patent on August 25, 1930. By 1929 Crocker Research Laboratories had been renamed Farnsworth Television, Inc., of California.

A Russian immigrant, Vladimir Zworykin had also applied for a television patent as early as 1923, and a lawsuit emerged to determine who owned the basic patent for the electronic system that became television. The drawing Farnsworth had given to Mr. Tolman in his 1922 high school chemistry class provided the necessary proof needed, thereby preserving the television patent rights for Farnsworth.

Many have noted that the contributions of Farnsworth's wife, Pem, were significant. As his assistant during their forty-five year marriage, she took care of all correspondence and became an expert draftsman, working on many of his drawings. She provided the climate in which Farnsworth could continue his research.

At the age of sixty-four, Farnsworth held more than 300 United States and foreign patents, most of which made possible the television industry as we know it. Farnsworth died March 11, 1971. Among many other honors, there is a museum in Rigby, Idaho called "The

Birthplace of Television,” which was dedicated to Farnsworth in 1988. In 1983 the U.S. Post Office issued a Philo T. Farnsworth twenty-cent stamp, with the likeness of his face and his first television camera. He was also honored by his induction into the Inventors Hall of Fame and awarded an honorary Doctor of Science Degree at Brigham Young University.

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**(This information has not been edited.)**

*Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428*