

# *Distant Sparks\**

VOL. 15, ISSUE 1

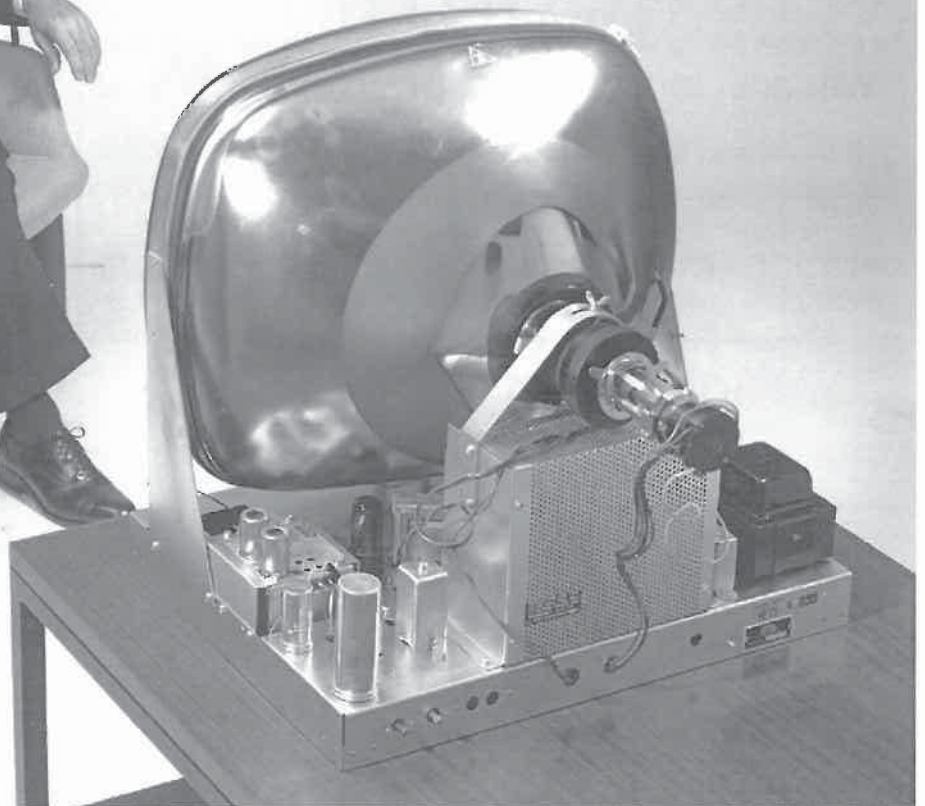
\*DISTANT SPARKS - TRANSLATION; 'TELEFUNKEN'

*Long Island Radio & Television Historical Society*  
(PRESERVING WIRELESS HISTORY)

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*Spotlight on  
Radio & TV Pioneer  
Frank A. D. Andrea*





# FRANK A. D. ANDREA

By Constance Gibson Currie

Success stories are always popular, but those based on the hard work, perseverance and imagination of the subject, are particularly so. The life of Frank A. D. Andrea fits this description to a T.

Frank A. D. Andrea was born in Italy on September 29, 1888 to Francesco and Philomina (Perone) Andrea. His father, a mason, contractor and bridge builder, died when Frank was 18 months old, his wife still in her teens.

Philomina took matters into her own hands, and traveling along mountain roads with her small child, reached Naples where she boarded a ship and sailed for the United States.

Arriving in New York City, she found living quarters in Chinatown. Not long after, Philomina met a man who dealt in junk and they soon married. They were to add three boys and a girl to the family. There were eight of them living together, one an uncle. From the age of 9 Frank helped his stepfather with his early morning scrap collecting rounds. He left formal schooling when he was 11, for though there was enough money for food, there was little else. Andrea later told interviewers that they always had shoes, but often their meals consisted of soup and bread

His first job was that of newsboy and Sam Shulsky in his article in the American Weekly of May 27, 1951 recounts the following story as told to him. Frank's route lay in two of the toughest wards of old New York – his own 14<sup>th</sup> ward, and the adjoining 8<sup>th</sup>.

“The Paul Kelly Boys ruled the 14<sup>th</sup>, they used lead pipes as their authority. There was a rival gang in the 8<sup>th</sup>. Normally no 14<sup>th</sup> ward boy in his right mind would cross Broadway into the 8<sup>th</sup>.” But young Andrea had to cross if he was to keep the job. So, he used the direct approach, one that would be characteristically his.

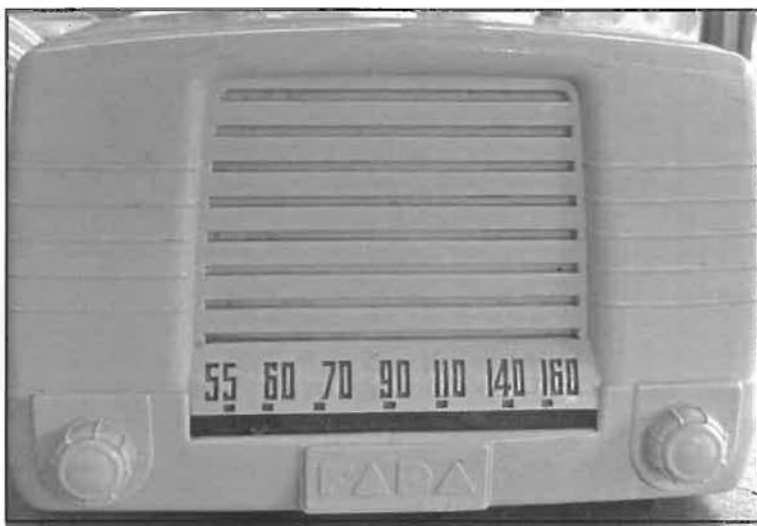
He said, “I started across the street the first day, in a minute the 8<sup>th</sup> ward gang started drifting from doorways. My heart was in my throat – but I needed the job. I had to go on. I walked right up to them. I said: I'm from the 14<sup>th</sup>. I got to deliver some papers, but I don't know where the streets are. Can any of you fellows tell me where the Sunrise Café is?”

The direct approach worked. The surprised leader of the 8<sup>th</sup> ward gang put his arm around Andrea. “Sure kid.” He said, “we'll show you.” He was never bothered by the 8<sup>th</sup> ward again.

Along with the newspaper job, he bought penny candy for one price and sold it for a penny higher, he also worked as a porter for the Denis Truck Repair Shop. Then began a series of jobs, each one adding to his knowledge and skills, and for the first seven years he was also attending night school.

At fifteen he became an electroplater for the I.P. Frink Manufacturing Company, but soon transferred to a larger firm where he did similar work and became an apprentice tool-and-die maker. At the same time he studied nights as a tool maker and machinist at the Mechanics Institute, New York City. For a time, in addition to his regular work he fought as a professional boxer. In 1913, he joined the Frederick Pierce Company, a firm which engaged in various kinds of experimental work. One of Andrea's early assignments with this company was to develop the tools to manufacture the Boyce Motormeters, engine heat indicators for automobiles. After the outbreak of the First World War in Europe, he was assigned to design the tools to manufacture parts for a new aircraft radio receiver, the blueprints of which were brought from Germany by an electrical engineer named Emil J. Simon. Andrea made the prototype. When Pierce decided they didn't want to manufacture the set, Dr. Lee DeForest, the perfector of the vacuum tube, agreed to take on the government order for 5,000 sets. However, he requested that Andrea be included in the deal. This took place and after the job was finished, Andrea became plant manager for the DeForest Company. Following the end of the war, Andrea's suggestion that the company's surplus inventory of 40,000 pieces for unassembled parts be offered to Sears & Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, rather than be sold for scrap was adopted, and Sears & Montgomery Ward purchased them all. Andrea then suggested that the company continue doing this, but DeForest declined, his plan was to develop the Audion tube.

At this time, Frank A. D. Andrea, newly married, a new father and low on cash, decided to start his own company. He rented a little store in the Bronx, spent his \$300.00 savings on rent, went to an auction house where he bought four pieces of well used machinery which had to be repaired, and built benches. Frank got credit from friends and \$1100 of materials from the Bakelite Company. He was then broke. He persuaded Marconi Ltd., the predecessor of RCA to give an order for parts. Then Frank, his 16 year old half brother, John just graduated from High School, and a hired tool and die maker went to work around the clock. In three months, the order filled, the new firm FADA was ready for expansion. Broadcasting stations and radio receiver manufacture were the new thing on the horizon. Also, a growing number of amateurs were around, and they represented new consumers. So, they began manufacturing parts for crystal sets, running ads in magazines. Soon they were swamped with orders. Then they began the manufacture of "Do It Yourself" kits. Before they knew it, they needed more space and took over three more stores, and younger brother, John became the manager of the crystal detector department. But Andrea realized that soon DeForest's audion tube would make crystal sets obsolete, and so he began manufacturing parts, such as sockets and rheostats, for tube-type radios.



**FADA**

**MODEL 855**

**1950**

**Universal**

**Superhetrodyne**



## ANDREA BUILDING

*(Photos courtesy  
Andrea Electronics  
Corp.)*

When Prof. L. A. Hazeltine of Stevens Institute developed a neutralized circuit that eliminated the squeal out of reception, Andrea asked for a license for the circuit and his firm, along with twelve others he got licensed, began producing these sets in great quantities. He moved his company to Long Island City, and began expanding sales outside of the country. But in 1927 RCA sued in a patent case, won and Andrea lost the right to manufacture these sets. Refusing to be defeated Andrea began making sets of his own design. By 1928 his firm was one of the top five radio manufacturing concerns in this country, and that year he acquired more space for manufacture. But business was slowing down, and he was getting tired. In an interview for an article by Helen Dudar in the December 6, 1962 issue of the New York Post, Andrea was quoted as saying,

“Business was bad and I was tired,” “Some fellows came down from Boston and bought out my controlling interest, keeping me on as a consultant. I was 44 and I thought I’d spend the rest of my days fishing and golfing. Those were the most horrible years I ever spent. I couldn’t find playmates –after all, my friends were all working. Finally, my doctor said to me, “Listen, you got to get yourself something to do - you’ll go crazy.”

Andrea was also driving his wife, Concetta crazy and she urged him to start another company. So, again with limited investment, \$10,000 and the new booming technology, television as his goal, he formed Andrea Radio Corporation. In 1934 FADA was liquidated by its new owners, putting a number of Andrea’s old employees out of work. He was able to attract a number these including key engineers who had helped him turn out the FADA radio, to join him in this project. By 1938, the new company was selling a TV kit. But Andrea soon decided that this market was limited and so in 1939 the company began turning out the first television console models that also housed a radio and phonograph. A television set made by the Andrea Radio Corp. was displayed that year at the New York World’s Fair. During the Second World War, the firm engaged in the production of military electronics items.



In 1954, the Company began working on the development of color television, and in 1957 introduced a color set with a 21 inch screen. It also manufactured stereophonic phonograph equipment and other electronic devices, as well as parts for other communications manufacturers. Andrea Corporation also produced the guidance system for the first successful missile launched by this country. As a member of the electronics communications team headed by Collins Radio Co. subcontracting to the McDonnell Aircraft Co., prime contractor to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration the firm developed and produced the audio center in the Mercury Space Capsule, which center amplified voice communication between the capsule and earth.

During 1962-65 the firm developed and produced several types of high reliability intercommunication systems for installation in various military and commercial aircraft. From a \$10,000 starting investment, the company was reporting total assets of over \$3.3 million. During his lifetime, the company was still a family endeavor. His son and namesake, a graduate electrical engineer, was vice president in charge of manufacturing; his daughter Camille, was head of Andrea Distributing Corp., a sales firm she organized with her sister Phyllis; a half brother was personnel manager, another was factory superintendent and until his death, another was in charge of cabinet work.

Frank A. D. Andrea died in Manhasset on December 22, 1965. He and Concetta had three children, Frank Jr., and two daughters, Camille and Phyllis. Frank D. A. Andrea left quite a legacy. His FADA radios are still prized by collectors and appear on E-bay all the time, his contribution to the history of radio is remarkable and the company with his name still exists, this time in Bohemia, Long Island, New York

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Andrea Electronics Corporation

