

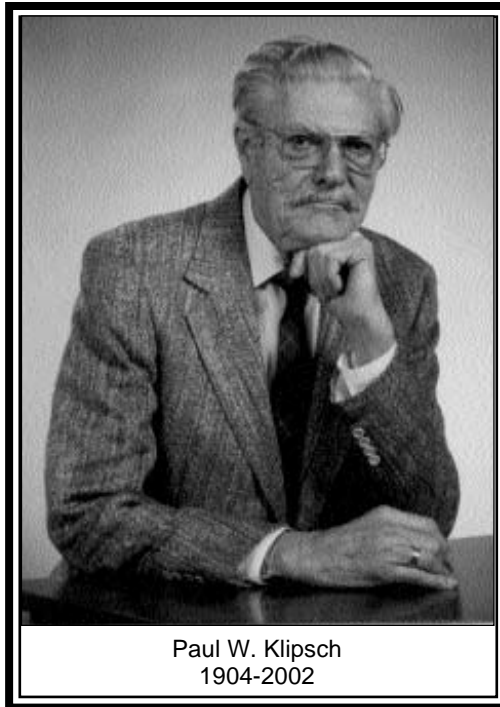
In Memoriam

Paul Wilbur Klipsch, legendary audio inventor and pioneer, passed away on May 5 in Hope, AR, at the age of 98.

Klipsch was born in Elkhart, IN, and spent his early years there. The family later moved to the Southwest, and Paul subsequently entered New Mexico A&M College (now New Mexico State University) at Las Cruces, where he received a B.S.E.E. degree in 1926. After working for General Electric (1926-1928) and the Anglo-Chilean Nitrate Corporation (Tocopilla, Chile, 1928-1931), he enrolled at Stanford University and was awarded the graduate degree in electrical engineering in 1934. It was at Stanford where he was influenced, as were so many others, by the entrepreneurial and charismatic Frederick Terman.

After the Stanford years Paul worked for the Independent Exploration Company (Houston, TX, 1934-1936) and the Subterrex Company (Houston, 1937-1941). At the outbreak of World War II he joined the U.S. Army and was assigned to the Southwest Proving Grounds near Hope, AR. Here, his extensive background in instrumentation, geophysics and metrology were put to work. He left the army in 1945, eventually attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Paul had shown an interest in audio from his early years, and by the late 30s a design for a corner low-frequency horn had jelled in his mind and in his workshop. He eventually received a patent on the first iteration of the "K-horn" in 1945. With a few modifications the traditional Klipschorn design emerged, and Paul decided to remain in Hope and set up a manufacturing operation. The startup was slow, and it wasn't till the early 50s that the high fidelity movement got underway. Even then, investment capital was hard to find, and Paul



developed Klipsch and Associates as a purely personal venture, setting up shop on the existing proving ground site. A small but intensely loyal dealer network throughout the country kept the company afloat.

All along, Paul had been hiring promising engineering students for summer work and acting as mentor to them. I met Paul in 1954, but it was not until my tour of duty with the U. S. Army was over in 1958 that I joined his company. Paul had wanted to set up the "Klipschtape" division of the company to provide demo material for his dealers, and I was asked to manage it. It was a roller-coaster ride for me, but somehow, with Paul at the Concertone (early tape recorder), we managed to produce about ten releases in two years, ranging from organ to jazz to choral works.

By 1958 I was, thanks to Paul's mentoring, enrolled at the University of Texas to study electrical engineering. No other career in audio has been as extended and as illustrious as Paul's. He was the complete engineer who could spin out meaningful numbers and analyses describing just

about anything you presented to him. His loves, in addition to acoustics, included trains and airplanes, and his patent contributions were in the fields of acoustics, geophysics and firearms. His honors include fellowships in the Audio Engineering Society, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and the Acoustical Society of America, the Silver Medal of the AES, memberships in Tau Beta Pi and Sigma Xi, induction into the Audio Hall of Fame (1983) and the Engineering and Science Hall of Fame (1997), and a listing in *Who's Who in Engineering*. In 1994, his alma mater, New Mexico State University, added his name to their Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering.

For many years, Paul's presence at an AES Convention or a Consumer Electronics Show was an invitation to observe his criticism of anyone who promised to break the laws of physics or violate common sense. Paul always walked away from such encounters in good form, more as a teacher than critic. Thanks to the addition of skilled marketing, his company has flourished over the past four decades, enjoying significant market share in the fields of home theater, concert sound, and motion picture sound. He is survived by his wife Valerie.

John M. Eargle
Los Angeles, CA

Editor's Note: Although several colleagues contributed their reminiscences of Klipsch, space limitations prevent us from publishing all of them. Two appear below.

It was with great sadness that I learned of the passing of Paul W. Klipsch. Paul was one of the true legendary pioneers in audio. To many, including myself, he stood above everyone else when it came to the

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understanding and creation of loudspeakers.

Klipsch was in his late thirties when he began to study the problem of sound reproduction in a serious way. He had always been interested in radio and sound. In fact, he built his first radio before the first commercial broadcasts. But prior to the 1940s, he worked primarily as an engineer and geologist. Following another passion, trains, he supervised the maintenance of seven electric locomotives in Tocopilla, Chile, from 1928-1931.

During World War II Paul was stationed at the Southwest Proving Grounds in Hope, Arkansas. It was during those years that the work that would make him a legend would begin to take shape. The initial work on his most famous loudspeaker, the Klipschorn, took several years. This was an extremely clever design for a horn-loaded loudspeaker in that the bass horn was folded around itself and used the corner of a room as part of the loudspeaker. After the end of the war, Paul committed his life to building loudspeakers, founding a new company called Klipsch and Associates in 1946.

By the end of his life, the Klipschorn had become the most successful and long-lived product in the history of audio. Today, in 2002, over 60 years after its initial design, the Klipschorn is still in production and still unrivaled in sound reproduction for the home.

Many who have written about Klipsch's life have noted that he inspired numerous careers in audio. This is certainly true. My own career is a prime example. The first time I heard a Klipschorn in the home of my next door neighbor, I knew I had heard something extraordinary. What I didn't know is that my life would be changed forever. It was another few years before I could save enough for my own Klipschorns, but once I had them, I could actually listen to music with the kind of satisfaction otherwise found only in a live setting. Later, with Paul's help, guidance and espe-

cially his loudspeaker systems, I was able to bring this kind of quality to symphony and ballet performances where sound reinforcement was required.

Then in 1979, I founded my present company and began my career in motion picture sound. Since then my work has involved hundreds of successful installations and taken me completely around the world while accumulating over 1.2 million miles. Without Klipsch's loudspeakers, I never would have bothered to do any of this, as nothing else would have or could have inspired me so.

Though widely known for his brilliance and sense of humor, to my surprise, Paul was also a controversial figure. There have been audio engineers who have strongly disputed Klipsch's design approaches as well as his published writings. However, as far as I know, none of the dissenters has produced a superior loudspeaker, let alone one that has stood the test of time for 60 years and counting.

Not many know this, but it is hard to find a loudspeaker behind a movie screen, or perhaps just about any horn-loaded loudspeaker that does not employ design features that were either invented by Paul Klipsch or enhanced by him. His patented K-5 treble horn of 1951 has been widely copied in one way or another. It was the first of what became known as the constant directivity horn. Some 30 years later, these horns became widely used in movie theaters and in other applications, while Klipsch had already completed two more product design generations. In 1982, he designed a tweeter for my sound systems that compensated for the coverage angle distortions caused by movie screens. It wasn't for another 17 years that other manufacturers followed suit.

In my view, this was typical of

Klipsch's career¹. He was years and often decades ahead of his time. He left this world better than he found it. Lovers of music and sound around the world will forever be in his debt and will forever enjoy their lives more because of his great contributions to loudspeaker design and stereophonic sound. For myself, I can only say, I owe him everything.

John F. Allen
Newton, MA

I want to express my sympathy for the world's loss of a truly gifted and unique genius, who made an indelible mark on the world of audio and the lives of many, including my own.

My life and work has been guided in some way—though obscure at times—by Paul's fascination with the reproduction of music ever since I heard a neighbor's "Shorthorn" in Fayetteville, Arkansas. I was determined to learn more about this "mystic" from Hope, who built loudspeakers of such uncanny realism. Learn I did, exchanged correspondence, visited frequently and was asked to fill a vacancy in engineering in November of 1974.

This was a different world. I also began to realize how special my acceptance into this flock was. As the saying goes, you had to pinch yourself to make sure you weren't just dreaming.

I later discovered that many engineers would have given their right leg for my position with Paul. What a responsibility and performance I had to live up to. As I heard Paul say of his acceptance of the AES Silver Medal Award in 1978, "I have stood on the shoulders of giants." I am proud to have at least rubbed elbows with one of those giants—PWK.

Gary C. Gillum
Ridgedale, MO

¹ Anyone interested in reading more about Paul Klipsch may obtain the recently published book: *Paul Wilbur Klipsch: the Life, the Legend*, by Maureen Barrett and Michael Klementovich. The book is available directly from the publisher, Rutledge Books, Inc.; 1 800 278-8533. ISBN: 1-58244-226-6. It is also available through bookstores as well as www.amazon.com and www.bn.com.