

Western Electric and Northern Electric Tubes

Recently on a website there was a discussion about Western Electric tubes and their equivalent. There seemed to be an agreement that they made good tubes.

Many years ago I worked in a Northern Electric building (in Canada) that produced among many other things vacuum tubes. I don't remember a lot of details about the manufacturing of the tubes as I wasn't involved much with the Tube Room. I did walk by it several times a day and occasionally dropped in. The tubes types they produced were 417A's, 404's etc., some of the same tube types that Western Electric manufactured.

The Tube Room wasn't very big and did not have many employees. There were 2 or 3 vacuum turrets where the final assembly was done. This involved the placement of the glass envelope that I believe was melted to the base of the tube using electric heating elements.

Northern Electric was at one time the Canadian manufacturing branch of Western Electric. I don't remember seeing the actual assembly of the tube elements, only partially assembled tubes up to the final assembly . What I think what was



happening was that the different types of tubes were manufacture by Western Electric in the US and shipped to Canada for final assembly. This was probably done so a Made in Canada label could be placed on the tube. The labeling was done in yellow the same colour used by Western Electric. If the above is correct the Northern Electric tubes were pretty much manufactured by Western Electric in the US.

It would be interesting for me if anyone could confirm the above. My recollections of the details are very vague. It may be possible that Northern Electric at one time had a much larger Tube Room(s) and was capable of completing the full assembly of tubes.

BTW, as of this writing the WE 417A tubes are listed for \$174.95 each on the Tube Depot website. Not sure if they are selling any at this price.

September 5, 2012