

## **A Brief History of Walker Radio Company in Albuquerque, NM (1947–2017)**

by Michael L. Wilson

Thanks to my father, Donald E. Wilson, for much of this information.

Leonard E. Wilson was in the radio business in Colorado. In the fall of 1946 he sold the last of his radio stations (KOKO in La Junta, Colorado) and started looking for something else to do. One of the people he talked to was Larry Walker, who owned the L. B. Walker Radio Company in Pueblo, Colorado—a seller of electronic parts. Len had been a customer of Walker's for a number of years, buying parts for his various radio stations. Walker suggested opening a branch somewhere. (At that time Walker had no other branches; later, he opened additional locations in Colorado.) They decided to open a branch in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which resulted in the opening of the L. B. Walker Radio Co. Inc. in Albuquerque on 6 May 1947, in the east half of the building at 114 West Granite Ave. There were originally seven people involved in the store: Len and Betty Wilson, Larry and Mildred Walker, Bill Thomas and his wife, and Margaret Johnson. Bill had worked at one of Len's radio stations in Alamosa, and Margaret had worked at KOKO.

After a few years, Walker sold his interest to Len because he wanted to open a store in Denver, which he did in 1952 or '53. The name of the business was officially shortened to Walker Radio Co. Inc. on 17 Sep 1953. Even though Larry Walker was involved in the business for only a few years, it continued to carry the Walker name because of concern that customers would be confused if the name were changed. Over the years, as the other original partners left, the Wilsons were able to buy their departing partners' stock, ending up with sole ownership in the early sixties. (There was a rider on the stock giving Len the first right to purchase the stock, which he did.) Len ran Walker Radio until the time of his death. Betty was also active in the business, acting as the bookkeeper and president of the company for many years.

After operating at 114 Granite for a few years, they decided to purchase two lots across the alley to the east. There were two buildings there. One building was torn down to make way for a parking lot, the other building was remodeled and became the new home of Walker Radio in early 1954. The new address was 102 West Granite Ave. (102 Granite Ave. NW after Albuquerque switched to the quadrant system for addresses).

The Wilsons' son, Don Wilson, joined the firm on 1 Jan 1959, having resigned his position as a staff geophysicist with the Sohio Petroleum Company in Casper, Wyoming. Don's daughter Catherine (Cathy) started working for the company while a senior in high school in 1975, assisting her grandmother, Betty Wilson, with the routine bookkeeping. Cathy eventually assumed full responsibility for accounts receivable and payable. Don took over the business after his father's death on 17 Sep 1981.

The business was growing, and they added on to the building to expand the office and the warehouse in 1975–76. However, within a few years they needed more space again. Don designed a new building specifically to meet their growing needs, and had it built at 3347 Columbia Dr. NE. They also changed the company's operating name to Walker Electronic

Supply Company, as of 1 Jan 1984. The full legal corporate name was Walker Radio Co. Inc., doing business as Walker Electronic Supply Co. They had to move out of the old building by May 15, but could not operate in the new building till July because of a zoning problem. So, they first moved to a temporary rented space at 3300 Princeton Dr. NE in May, and then were able to move to the new building at the end of June. Walker Electronic Supply Company opened in the Columbia location on 2 Jul 1984. (Actually, during the interim period, the business was spread across multiple locations because the Princeton space was not large enough. Accounting and bookkeeping operated from Don's home, and some of the sales staff was in a temporary trailer in the yard directly in back of the old building.)

Tom Bynon started working for the company in 1985. He and Cathy Wilson were married in October of 1987. Tom became an important part of the company, eventually becoming general manager, as well as setting up Walker's computer network and handling the shipping and receiving. It is also worth mentioning that, over the years, Don got important support from his cousins, Ernie and John Malovich, both financially and in advice. Ernie had a lot of experience as an entrepreneur, investor, and businessman, and John was a computer engineer who later got an MBA degree as well.

In 2005, Walker Electronics was at its peak. The company had eight full-time and three part-time employees. One of the part-time employees was in El Paso, where he provided technical assistance to the White Sands Missile Range for highly specialized intercom equipment that Walker was selling to them. Walker did a lot of business with Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories, Kirtland Air Force Base, Intel, and many other local businesses. Walker specialized in the MRO (maintenance, repair, and overhaul) market, especially in electro-mechanical equipment.

Unfortunately, the good times did not last. It was getting harder and harder to have such a small business because big national chains could offer lower prices, and it was getting so that they could ship things in very quickly, too. Convenient internet ordering online was taking off. So it was probably just a matter of time till Walker would not be able to stay in business anyway, but starting at the end of 2007 came what has been called the Great Recession—the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The economy went down sharply, and then stayed down, with a very slow recovery. That probably sealed the fate of Walker Electronics. Things were getting worse for them, and then Don died on 19 Jul 2009, which, of course, did not help. Tom and Cathy Bynon took over the business, but Walker never really recovered.

Over the next few years, Walker was progressively downsizing. In June and July 2011, they sold the building at 3347 Columbia and moved to a smaller rented space at 2615 Princeton Dr. NE. Then, in June 2015 they moved to an even smaller rented space at 2404 Candelaria Rd. NE.

Finally, on 19 Aug 2017, the remnants of Walker Electronics were sold at auction for only \$7,500. Much of the remaining merchandise was old and in little demand any more, but still, the stock and equipment should have been worth much more than that.



The building at 102 W. Granite, probably not long after Walker moved into it in 1954  
John Hopperton,\* Len Wilson, Bill Thomas



Around back

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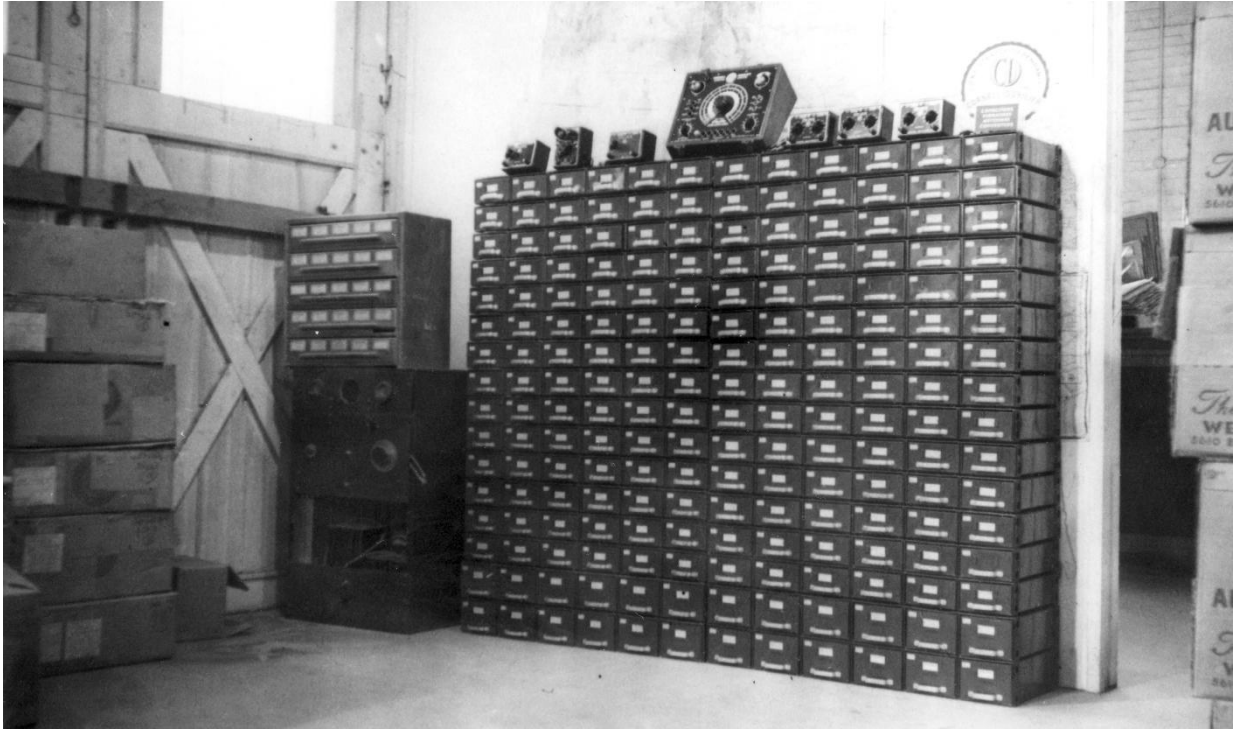
\* John Hopperton was a chemistry teacher at Highland High School. With three others, he started Albuquerque's classical-music radio station, KHFM, in Nov. 1954. He later was on the faculty at N.M. Tech and other universities.



Bill Thomas, Len Wilson, John Hopperton



John Hopperton, Bill Thomas, and Len Wilson with an unknown customer



Lots of drawers for small parts. This picture is from the 114 Granite location.



Bill Thomas, John Malovich, and Russ Ingram in May 1954



Receiving a delivery in June 1954



The parking lot getting paved in July 1958; note Len's ham radio antenna



Betty Wilson doing the books at home in 1956 (family watching TV in background)



Len's ham radio setup in the back office (1977)



Don Wilson in front of the store in 1960



Don at his desk in December 1963



Dan Benaka, Don Wilson, and a couple of customers in the mid-1960s



Part of the warehouse area in 1971



Steve Smith, Mike Wilson, Rob Wilson (no relation), and Don Wilson in the early 1970s



Walker's delivery truck in the early 1970s; deliveries were made all over town every weekday



Cathy Wilson working on accounts and Dorothy Wilson (Don's sister) helping with paperwork in 1977. This is in the office space that was added in 1976.



Becky and Dan Benaka in 1977



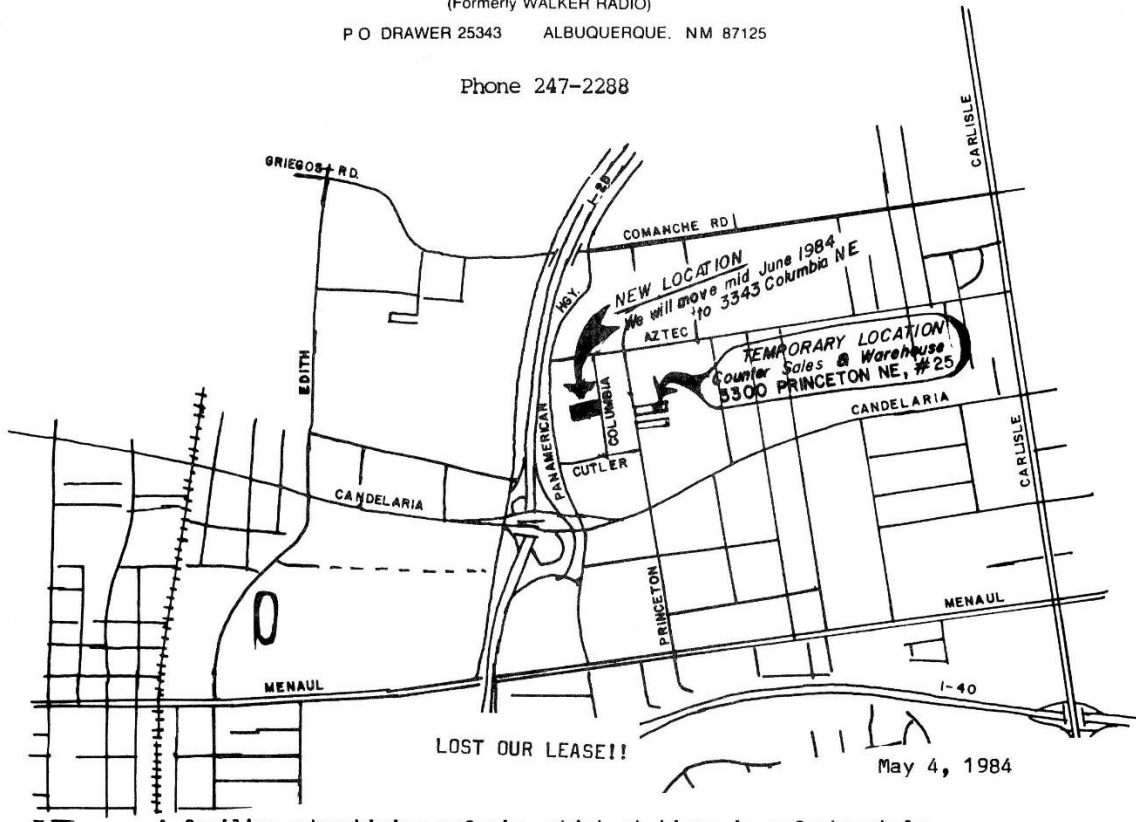
Beginning construction on the building at 3347 Columbia NE

# WALKER ELECTRONIC SUPPLY CO.

(Formerly WALKER RADIO)

P O DRAWER 25343 ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87125

Phone 247-2288



A familiar advertising refrain, which at times is unfortunately true. While we did not lose our lease as such, time has run out on us. When we sold our present facilities we agreed to be out by May 15, 1984. Unfortunately there were all too many delays due to actions of others beyond our control. SO—EFFECTIVE MAY 16, 1984 WE WILL BE OPERATING OUR WAREHOUSE AND COUNTER SALES FROM TEMPORARY FACILITIES AT 3300 PRINCETON, N.E., #25. We will move May 12 to 15, being closed May 14 & 15.

For the time being our phone number will remain the same and our inside sales force will remain in temporary offices at our present location since the phone company cannot provide us with lines at our new location until July 1, 1984.

While our service will not be "up to par" we are confident that we can keep problems to a minimum during the short time we must make use of temporary facilities.

Respectfully yours,  
WALKER ELECTRONIC SUPPLY CO.



At the beginning of the move in May 1984 (Cathy Wilson is at the left)



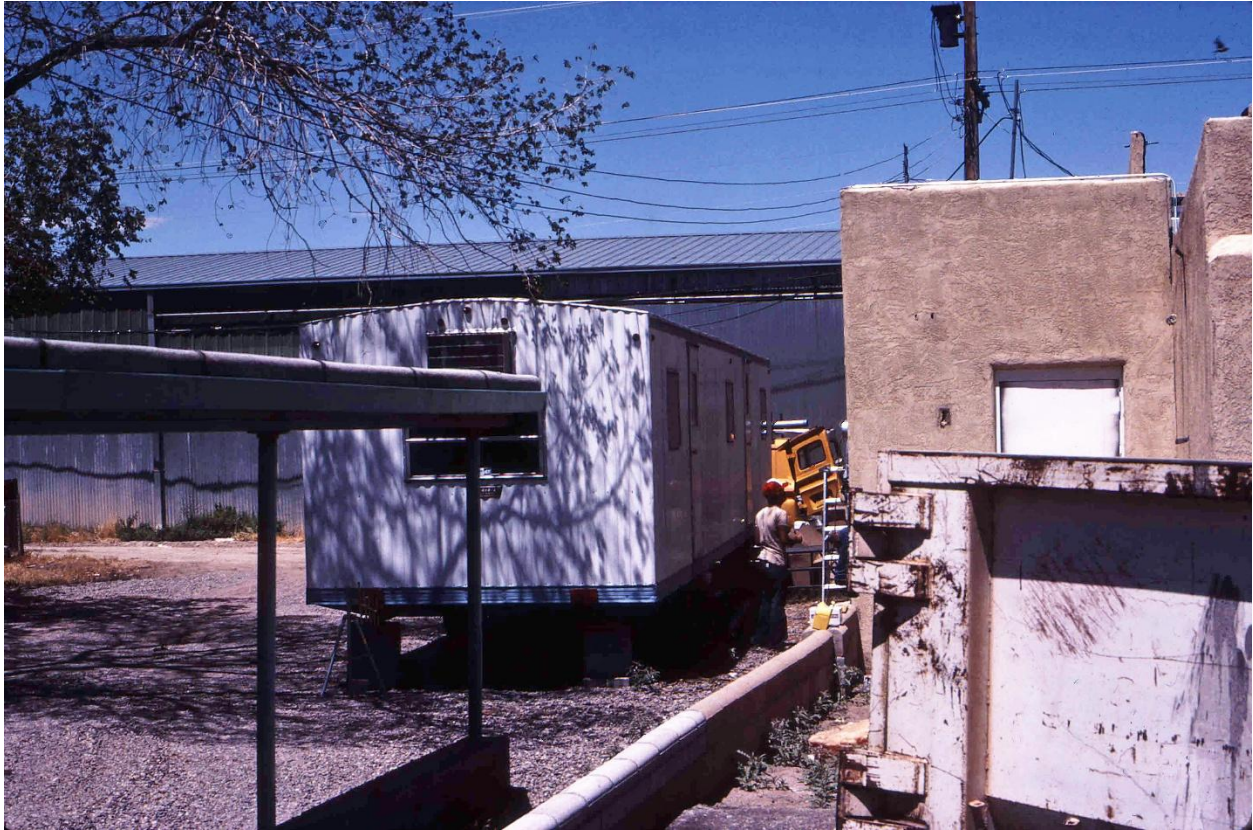
Moving the sales counter



The temporary location at 3300 Princeton NE



Bookkeeping was temporarily in Don's home



Some of the sales staff were in a trailer behind the old building



The building at 3347 Columbia NE (picture taken in 2011)



This picture and the one below are from the ISE trade show (Ideas in Science and Electronics) in 1997 (note that it says 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary). Manning the booth is Rita Martinez.





Janette Bynon (Tom's mother) and Cathy Bynon in the office, probably 1998



Tom Bynon in the warehouse shipping area, probably 1998



2615 Princeton NE in September 2011



The sales counter in 2615 Princeton NE



Some of the warehouse area in 2615 Princeton NE