



# 1950's

## The early years

### – pioneer of aerial and audio technology

In the 1950's radio and television technology was advancing by leaps and bounds. The progress was mainly lead by the Americans but Europe—recovering from the war—was hot on the heels. In Finland television picture was first seen by the public in 1950 on a set placed in a window of a department store in Helsinki.

As to these tentative steps of experimenting with TV devotees in Turku ranked among the first. The television club within the Turku Radio Society boldly began testing with television transmissions. Based purely on enthusiasm the members of the Society were busy constructing simple TV sets and a transmitter, no less. One of these early enthusiasts was Olavi Ahonen.

A new word—ULA—standing for VHF band had been introduced to Finnish. The first six ULA transmitters went live at the end of 1953. The cutting edge technology was presented to the public by broadcasting music as ULA programs on VHF/FM frequencies. The new type of receivers sold like hot cakes. Dealers of radio sets just could not keep up with demand since the number of then required licenses for listening exceeded one million as early as in 1954. In terms of numbers of purchased licenses the south-west of Finland had the highest density of receivers both in terms of television and wireless sets and, thus, in the top of the league when it came to following the development. At the same time the Turku-based Asa Radio Oy was right in the middle of developing the first-ever Finnish TV sets, and another company engaged in radio business and located in the south-western Finland—Salora Oy from Salo—was absorbed in their own development projects. The first regular television broadcasts in the country were commenced as early as in the autumn of 1956.

< **The first live TV broadcast** from Turku was filled with good feelings and excitement. In the beginning, everything was based on the skills of enthusiastic TV hobbyists and partially self-made devices. Olavi Ahonen was already involved as a cameraman. *(photo: Turun Sanomat)*



**VHF radio** became increasingly familiar to Finns at the end of the 50's. The quality of sound was advertised as free of disturbances. The most expensive VHF radio sets had multiple loudspeakers, and the sound quality was "concert quality"—according to the ads. These new types of receivers sold in the blink of an eye. The number of radio licenses exceeded 1 million for the first time the next year. In southwestern Finland, the number of licenses was the largest in Finland, 340 licenses per 1,000 inhabitants.



**Radio master Olavi Ahonen.** When he founded the company, he probably did not imagine that it would be an internationally valued stock company 50 years later.



### Radio Master Seizes The Opportunity

Olavi Ahonen, foreman of Oy Sähkö Ab company radio service section in Turku, was inspired by the strides in transmission technology. Sähkö was in the business of repairing radio sets, telephones and other low-voltage fittings of the time. Under the leadership of Mr. Ahonen the workshop turned out to be something like a business incubator of the field for devising and churning up appliances such as fire and burglar alarms alongside audio and aerial equipment. Mr. Ahonen had, on his own initiative, acquired the highly esteemed Degree of Radio Master.

Having joined Sähkö soon after the war he had become acquainted with Mr. Pekka Valkama. Mr. Valkama had joined the company in 1944 having first taken on duties in the storeroom but moved over to the radio department the following year.

Keeping a close eye on the developments in his field of trade Mr. Ahonen fully understood the potential inherent in the new aerial technology. His employer, however, remained unimpressed and was not prepared to invest in production. Undaunted Mr. Ahonen managed to negotiate an arrangement with the head of the Oy Sähkö Ab radio department about setting up a business of his own manufacturing aerial amplifiers for Sähkö as a subcontractor.

< **Pekka Valkama** was Olavi's partner in technical and production issues since the early days of Teleste. Pekka's 'let's get it done' attitude can still be seen in Teleste's business culture.

v **Sähkö Oy** – the place Olavi Ahonen and Pekka Valkama worked and met each other in the 40's. This company has been where many of Teleste's current engineers had their summer jobs. (photo: Turku Provincial Museum / P. O. Welin).





O t e Turun kaupungin  
maistraatin pöytäkirjasta  
tammikuun 25 päivältä 1954.

56.

Käsiteltiin tässä kaupungista olevan radiomestarin  
Olavi Ahosen allekirjoittama, kuluvan tammikuun 23 päivänä  
maistraattiin esnettu näin kuuluva kirjoitus:

"Turun maistratille.

Viitaten ohjeiden todistuksiin, joiden mukaan hallit-  
sen itseäni ja omaisuuttani ja nautin kansalaisluottamusta,  
ilmoitan kunnioittaen ryhtyneeni harjoittamaan sähkö-  
teknillisten heikko- ja vahvavirtalaitteiden ja niiden  
osien valmistusta, rakentamista, myyntiä, ostoa, korjaa-  
mistä ja huoltamista tarkoittavaa liikettä toiminnalla  
Sähköteknillinen tehdas Teleste, omist. O. Ahonen tässä  
kaupungissa talossa N 32 Hämeenkadun varrella.

Turussa, tammikuun 22 päivänä 1954.

OLAVI AHONEN

Radiomestari Turun kaupungista.

Kirjoitti:

Pekka Asanti

Pekka Asanti, varat.

S.A.J. Turusta."

Kirjoitusta seurasivat asianmukaiset viralliset todis-  
tukset osoittaneen ilmoituksen tekijän nauttivan kansalais-  
luottamusta sekä hallitsevan itseään ja omaisuuttaan.

Kerrotusta ilmoituksesta oli todistukseksi annettava  
pöytäkirjanote. Paikka ja aika edellä kirjoitetut.

Vakuudeksi

Ilmo Hakas

Lunastus & leima 270 mk

Olavi Ahonen

In the beginning of 1954 Mr. Ahonen finally filed his Registration of Trade at the Turku Register Office concerning commencement of manufacture of radio and aerial components under a business name of his own.

### Being The First In The Market

As to the principles of operation, the Teleste guidelines could not have been clearer. The company was in the business of manufacturing distinct products designed for Nordic conditions of unsurpassed quality. Right from the outset Olavi Ahonen was looking for possibilities to expand the operation and in his view the best tool for this was provided by the high quality of the products.

Teleste's first product was an aerial plug socket, which hit the market in 1954. The production also included aerial amplifiers, VHF balancing transformers and related cords.

At first these products were made available to the electric outfitters in Turku and its surroundings to be used in their own installations. Ties were particularly close to Radio ja Antenni Oy company in which Olavi Ahonen initially had a holding. Radio ja Antenni was to become the first provider in Turku, if not in the whole of Finland, of master aerial systems designed for blocks of flats. In the early years Teleste too, along with the component business, was involved in available turnkey aerial installations for blocks of flats.

Ever since the beginning Teleste's business has included aerial and audio products. Pekka Valkama had been involved in the assembling of central radio devices with Oy Sähkö Ab and brought this knowledge to Teleste. Thus, he came to suggest to Mr. Ahonen that Teleste might as well pull it off and start manufacturing central radio devices. Consequently, the first central radio was delivered in 1958 to Central School of Piikkiö. Along came the production of smaller, so-called desktop amplifiers.

At the time the electrical design offices started to become general in Finland. These specialised in sizeable projects like hotels. For reasons related to a wealth of accumulated experience in making central radio devices Teleste became sort of interested.

Hotels provided an untapped market for the development of new applications for central radios. Central radios of those days originally consisted of a receiver for the receptionist, an amplifier and wall speakers in the rooms. If in the 1950's the visitor could call a cleaner or a waiter to the room by pressing an electrical push-button, there soon was a drive for this technology to be integrated to the central radio network. This in turn would bring in savings in cabling expenses since only the top suites were equipped with a telephone set of their own.



**Teleste's first product**—an antenna aerial plug socket—from 1954.

**A PA system** with its amplifier and tape recorder. The first PA system was delivered to a school—Piikkiö Keskuskoulu—in 1958.



At that time designers started to encompass the central radio installations with various additional functions such as alarm service. Therefore, the number of amplifiers and receivers was clearly on the increase. From the outset the interior decorators wanted to turn the hotel room speaker into a control panel. The number of conveniences was rising and the well-equipped hotels were flourishing mightily.

However, Teleste did not intend to expand the product range excessively. Instead, the philosophy was to operate within the narrow and specified sector of one's own expertise and make the most of it. The key to this was to be the first one in the market to come up with new applications.

### "We Have Often Outgrown Our Shoes"

October 1st 1957, Olavi Ahonen and Pekka Valkama entered a partnership agreement according to which Mr. Ahonen would assume duties of the Managing Director and Mr Valkama would take over the Technical Management. So far side by side with running Teleste both of these men were still employed by Oy Sähkö Ab. The time had come to put the faith in Teleste's decisive breakthrough. The number of Teleste's personnel had grown to five in a couple of years.

Original premises in Hämeenkatu 32 soon became hopelessly small. Teleste first moved over to Itäharju further from the centre but due to the continued growth the young company had to move again the following year to large enough premises allowing the work to be done out of home: In the early years of



**More than likely**, the antenna box of the previous page and this loudspeaker are the two products that have made the name Teleste familiar to many Finns over the years. The Teleste aerial plug socket could be found in almost every household; the PA systems are familiar from the school announcements that could be heard in classrooms and corridors through loudspeakers that bore Teleste logo.



**Sound systems** were not always large systems. Often, just a sound amplifier was enough. A new product was developed for this need: a tabletop amplifier. Many versions of the tabletop amplifier were made for various purposes, e.g., an orchestra and bar amplifier could be found in the catalogue in the early 60's.



**v The market place round about the mid-1950s.** The market place used to be the life and soul of the city centre at that time as people from the country would come to sell their produce, like they still do today (picture: Turku Provincial Museum / Hede Foto).

**^ Teleste seemed to outgrow its premises every two years;** in 1958, Teleste needed new premises again, when it moved to Sirkkalankatu 15. Turun Osuuskauppa had built a beautiful stone building after WWII called Uudenmaanlinna (castle of Uusimaa) on Uudenmaankatu. Teleste found its new home in a building in its courtyard. (photo: Turku Provincial Museum / C. J. Gardberg 1958).



Teleste Pekka Valkama had done part of the work in the basement of his private home; Olavi Ahonen was no stranger to working from home either.

The first regular lady clerk was Sirkka Mero and with her the total number of personnel rose to something like 20. All this growth, however, did not take place like a child's play. The following extract from a flyer from 1968 provides a glimpse of those early years: "Starting small and looking for a place in the sun amongst the powerful is never easy. Teleste, too, has first-hand experience of this. But thanks to the single-minded efforts the company finally managed to get a foot in the market and continued to advance year after year. Due to this we have often outgrown our shoes and due to lack of premises Teleste has been forced to move from one place to another at regularly intervals".



**Olavi Ahonen** is known to have said: "Pekka Valkama was involved in Teleste's business from the very beginning. From the days of our former place of work I knew him as a capable man who can take and bear responsibility. However, Valkama had this sometimes even embarrassingly explicit manner of expressing his views. He often complained about shortcomings, problems and half-finished issues. There was no way everything could be finished in a small firm like that. In order to subdue this criticism and to get him more involved in correcting these shortcomings I offered him a part-ownership. That did the trick. Pekka Valkama became even more energetic and efficient for Teleste—and put an end to the complaints".

**Ms. Taimi Träff** told she had come to apply for a post at the suggestion of her girl friend even though she had had no time to gain experience in the field. And for that matter, it wouldn't have been easy since the Asa radio factory and Wallac were the only local players. Taimi Träff said that that the forewoman on the soldering department wife of Owner-Manager Mrs Hilja Ahonen told her to take off her coat immediately and get to work. Only in the afternoon they came to ask for the name of the newcomer and sorted out matters like her expenses that were one mark and two pennies per hour. Ms. Träff having joined Teleste in 1959 was a loyal employee of the company for decades.