

## Tube Of The Month

# Tune-A-Lite

If you went into an electronics store and ordered a Tune-A-Lite, you would probably be referred to a nearby restaurant as they didn't serve any low-cal fish dishes there. You were about 80+ years too late for the electrical version.

In about 1931, a Professor Senauke of New York University invented a neon tube that could be used as a tuning device. Senauke made a bulb that contained a very long cathode and a very short anode. As you applied voltage, the neon would start to glow at the bottom and extend up as the voltage increased. The new AC powered sets were equipped with automatic volume control (AVC) which could supply a varying voltage as a station was tuned in. Duovac of Brooklyn initially produced and marketed these tubes and Atwater Kent built several sets that used the lamp. When Duovac failed, the production was taken over by another Brooklyn company, Amplex, which failed soon after. Some of the European tube companies developed additional features for the tube and variants were produced for several years. One interesting variant used a wire inside a small probe that ran up the inside of the bulb. When a strong station produced enough voltage to bring the glow level to the top of the probe, it would conduct and turn the audio on. No more tuning across any weak stations that would just make noise. Some tubes were calibrated up the side and these became some of the original S-meters. The applications were largely filled when they invented the "magic eye" tube in the mid-1930s.

Visit the museum at <http://n6jv.com>.

