

5 Things That Surprised Me

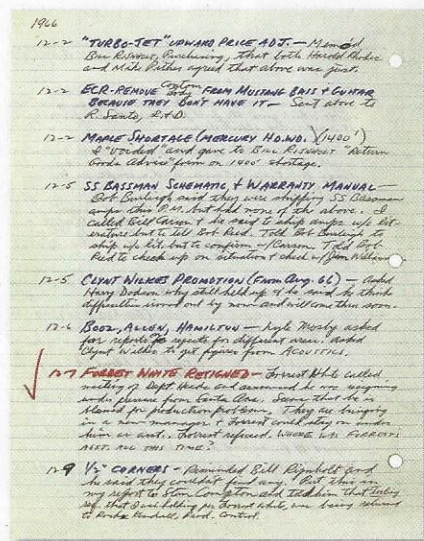
WHILE RESEARCHING THE FENDER ARCHIVES

BY TOM WHEELER

AUTHOR AND GP EDITOR EMERITUS TOM WHEELER SPENT A TON OF HOURS ROASTING IN A DUSTY, UNVENTILATED warehouse in Corona, California, searching through filing cabinets to unearth the “forgotten” past of Fender Musical Instruments. While we’re sorry for Tom, his discomfort was certainly a windfall for guitar players, as the fruits of his investigative labors—*The Fender Archives* [Hal Leonard]—is a beautifully rendered treasure trove of Fender facts known, unknown, and, until now, unremembered. —MICHAEL MOLENDA

FREDDIE TAVARES KEPT A DIARY

Freddie—who helped refine the Stratocaster—came to the company in 1953, and I found a stack of diary pages in his own hand. The diary was something I never knew existed, and the Fender experts I had spoken to didn’t know about it, either. Freddie would write things like, “Today



was our anniversary and Tamar and I had lunch at Shari's Restaurant. I had a salad." And he also documented events such as "Forrest White resigned today." Forrest helped Leo Fender turn this little shop into a factory, and had left under pressure from CBS, who had taken over the company in 1965. Through Freddie's journal, I discovered the litany of horrors Fender endured under CBS was beyond anything I'd ever heard. The workers were pressured to lower their standards and pass through parts they would have never accepted years before. It broke their hearts. Freddie wrote, "We'll hope people don't notice."

EVEN LEO FENDER NEEDED A KICK IN THE BUTT

Don Randall—Fender's marketing guru—was out in the field taking orders in 1948 and 1949, and Leo wasn't building guitars. He was fine tuning. From the sales team's point of view, Leo was a dawdler. But Leo's view was, "I'll send them when I'm good and ready, so if you're selling these guitars ahead of time, it's your problem." And I have these letters from Don—in beautiful penmanship—to F.C. Hall, later of

Rickenbacker fame, who was distributing Fender at the time, saying, "Get Leo on the ball now. Don't pay him. Get a gun or a goon squad or something. Make him put it out immediately and right—no duds."

