

Here are snips of reviews posted on Amazon, Google and elsewhere, promoting the book: **Seth Shulman: The Telephone Gambit: Chasing Alexander Graham Bell's Secret**

A gripping intrigue at the heart of one of the world's most important inventions.

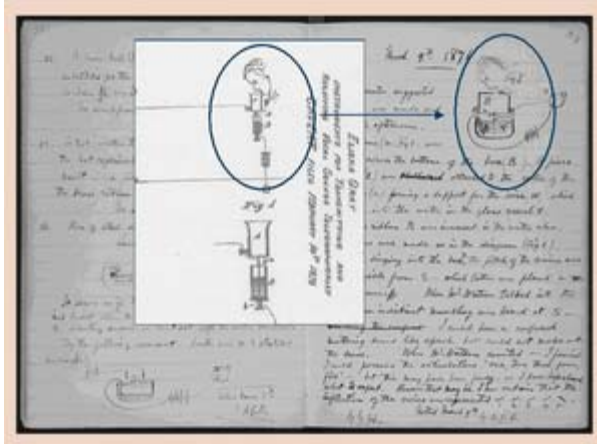
While researching Alexander Graham Bell at MIT's Dibner Institute, Seth Shulman scrutinized Bell's journals and within them he found the smoking gun, a hint of deeply buried historical intrigue. Delving further, Shulman unearthed the surprising story behind the invention of the telephone: a tale of romance, corruption, and unchecked ambition. Bell furtively—and illegally—copied part of Elisha Gray's invention in the race to secure what would become the most valuable U.S. patent ever issued. And afterward, as Bell's device led to the world's largest monopoly, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, he hid his invention's illicit beginnings. In *The Telephone Gambit*, Shulman challenges the reputation of an icon of invention, rocks the foundation of a corporate behemoth, and offers a probing meditation on how little we know about our own history.

Every schoolchild knows that Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. But did he? According to Shulman, Bell stole a key aspect of his design from a competitor, Elisha Gray. It was "one of the most consequential thefts in history" for Bell's telephone patent - submitted the very same day as Gray's - became the most lucrative in history, giving his company, American Telephone & Telegraph, a monopoly on this must-have piece of technology. *The Telephone Gambit* is a shrewd piece of historical detective work, written with the pace of a whodunit. The case against Bell is compelling. This "driven and talented young man" from a respected family (his father's elocution system inspired GB Shaw's play *Pygmalion*) paid a clerk in the patent office \$100 to see Gray's patent. He then stole Gray's ingenious idea of using a liquid in the telephone transmitter. It was "a blatant, wholesale act of plagiarism". Bell later felt "deeply ashamed" of what he had done, but he never admitted the dastardly act, and Gray died an embittered man.

ANY reader of detective stories knows to watch for subtle anomalies. A dozen years ago I spotted one while investigating the history of fibre optics. In an interview in 1921, less than a year before his death, Alexander Graham Bell had said that he considered his greatest invention to be the [photophone](#), an obscure device that modulated the intensity of reflected sunlight to transmit voices through the open air. The choice struck me as odd, but I didn't investigate it further.

[Seth Shulman](#) spotted another anomaly when studying Bell's notebook from the time of his 1876 telephone experiments. [Bell's sketch](#) of his voice transmitter was strikingly similar to a drawing [Elisha Gray](#) had included in a patent filing made at almost the same time as Bell's lawyer filed his telephone patent.

*The Telephone Gambit* is a 2008 book by Seth Shulman about the [Elisha Gray and Alexander Bell telephone controversy](#). It explains how an inside source at the patent office apparently enabled Bell to gain access to and to steal Elisha Gray's invention.



An illustration from the book showing the similarity between Elisha Gray's patent caveat and, several weeks later, the illustration of a telephone prototype in Alexander Graham Bell's notebook.

*The Telephone Gambit: Chasing Alexander Graham Bell's Secret* by Seth Shulman (W.W. Norton, 2008) notes that:

1. Bell's notebook records his making small incremental changes every day for months, mostly concerned with his wish to transmit multiple telegraph messages over a single transmission line using a system of critically tuned vibrating reeds.
2. On 12 January, 1876, Bell makes 3 copies of his original patent application.
3. On 25 January, 1876 one copy is given to George Brown to take by ship to England; but this copy has no penciled margin addenda and does not describe any sort of variable resistance telephone.
4. On February 14, 1876 Elisha Gray files a "caveat" (like a provisional patent application) for a variable resistance telephone.
5. Also on February 14, 1876 the Bell telephone patent is filed. But because no time-of-day stamp is placed on submissions such as caveats and patents, it is unclear which submission arrives first.
6. Bell's patent submission is divided into 5 parts, only the last one of which (penciled onto the margin of the original) describes a telephone. The main emphasis of Bell's patent is focused on telegraph technology, an area of keen interest to Bell's financially powerful sponsor Gardiner Hubbard, whose daughter Bell wishes to marry.

7. On February 19, 1876 the patent office says it will suspend Bell's patent for three months until it can decide whether or not to begin proceedings to determine whether Bell or Gray invented the telephone first.
8. On February 24, 1876 Bell leaves for Washington and is absent from his experimental work until he returns to Boston two weeks later.
9. Bell's patent is issued on March 7, even though most patents from this period take months or years to issue.
10. On March 9, 1876 Bell "introduces a striking contraption: a diaphragm with a needle sticking through it into ... acidic water".
11. Bell's striking contraption is similar to the one in Gray's caveat.
12. Bell does not manage to get the telephone to work until March 10, 1876, even though the patent office normally required a working model to be submitted along with the patent application.
13. On April 8th, 1886, Patent Examiner Zenas Fisk Wilber in a sworn affidavit admits receiving \$100 from Bell for showing him the original drawing of the telephone transmitter in Gray's caveat.
14. The world famous scene in which Bell and Watson make their first telephone call is described in his autobiography by [Thomas A. Watson](#) some year's after Bell's death. Bell's reluctance to talk about or celebrate this event is attributed to his everlasting embarrassment over his unethical treatment of Elisha Gray.