

The Evolution of a Revolution: A History of the Radio Club of America

By Carole Perry WB2MGP
(All graphics courtesy: Radio Club of America)

We've come a long way from the days of Marconi courting one of Britain's most revered men of science, Lord Kelvin, for his support on his work with wireless telegraphy. Kelvin had declared he was a skeptic on the practical future of wireless, stating famously, "Wireless is all very well, but I'd rather send a message by a boy on a pony."

The term "wireless," that was deemed old-fashioned and out of date many years ago, has re-surfaced as the most modern and up-to-date way to define the transfer of information via RF.

Any history of the Radio Club of America (RCA) will read like a who's who of the captains of industry and visionaries who have continued to advance wireless technologies including amateur radio, radio and television broadcasting, paging and data messaging.

One Hundred Years Old

The RCA present membership gathered at Georgetown University Conference Center in Washington, D.C., this past November to celebrate its 100th year anniversary and to pay tribute to its founders and pioneers in remembrance, and honoring them by having exciting plans for the future. The three day gala event enabled the newer members to be in the presence of many of our members who worked with and were a part of the accomplishments of many notables.

RCA Wireless, a long-standing industry publication, has ranked many past and current RCA members in its "Wireless Hall of Fame," including Major Edwin H. Armstrong, father of frequency modulation (FM) technology; Martin Cooper, father of the first portable cellular phone; Fred M. Link, founder of Link Radio Corp. and father of two-way radio; Mal Gurian, CEO of OKI Telecom, responsible for OKI receiving the first FCC type-certification for a cellular telephone; James Dwyer, founder of CTIA, the Wireless Association that challenged the FCC in the 1970s to allow competition; Robert Galvin, president of the



W.E.D. Stokes, Jr., in 1926 photo. In 1909, as a 14 year-old, Stokes founded the Radio Club of America, originally the Jr. Wireless Club and before that the Jr. Aero Club. By 1910 young Stokes was addressing the U.S. Senate as a self-proclaimed "trust buster" intent on stopping a potential ban on amateurs using the airwaves by commercial interests.

family's business, Motorola, for 34 years; Jai Bhagat, who built a nationwide paging industry with John Palmer; Dale Hatfield, former chief of FCC's Office of Engineering and Technology; Jay Kitchen, who led industry trade PCIA-The Wireless Infrastructure Association, for ten years; Morgan O'Brien, who founded Nextel in 1987, and Arlene Harris, a 45 year wireless veteran, who founded Jitterbug; created the highly regarded SOS emergency phone, and who is also wife of Martin Cooper.

Origin of the Club

The story was told many times during the 100th Year Celebration about a group of young boys, back in the early 1900s, who were interested in flying, and formed the Junior Aero Club U.S. under the leadership of Miss Lillian E. Todd, recognized as the world's first female aircraft designer. The boys were: Frank King, W.E.D. Stokes, Jr., George Eltz, and Frederick Seymour. The young members of the club made model airplanes and attempted to fly them at the regular meetings which were held in a local armory.

The boys, still in their early teens, had also been interested in what was then known as "wireless." Mr. W.E.D. Stokes, Sr., called a special meeting of the Aero Club, for the purpose of forming a new club, with wireless telegraphy and telephony as its main interest. On January 2, 1909, the meeting was held at the Hotel Ansonia in New York City. In 1911 the name was changed to the Radio Club of America to include enthusiasts nationwide.

The early days of radio were real days of pioneering and darkness; days when traffic had to be handled with a coherer and a straight spark gap transmitter. The boys continued to meet and swap information with each other and gained the necessary



Edwin Armstrong, towering genius of radio, recognized by the Radio Club of America as the foremost figure in early radio history.

knowledge to build their own receivers and transmitters. It was amazing that these boys could communicate at all, but almost any night one could hear messages being exchanged between stations in New York City, covering distances of at least a mile or two.

The adventurous people who founded the Radio Club of America were, in a way, pioneers in a new age, the Electronic Age. As David Sarnoff (Honorary Member 1926) said, "It all began with radio; with spark coils and slide wire tuners. Over the years the principles of radio were applied to an ever widening area until today, electronics permeates virtually every area of our daily

lives."

Pioneers and Visionaries

Undoubtedly inspired by the giants who came before, the Radio Club of America, throughout its first 100 years has included or been associated with the following notables:

- **Dr. Allen B. DuMont**, who perfected the first commercially practical cathode ray tube and developed the modern oscilloscope.
- **William Lear**, known for his patents in electronics and the Lear Jet.
- **Dr. Louis Hazeltine**, inventor of the neuro-dyne circuit.
- **John V.L. Hogan**, who held the 1912 patent of a single-dial tuning system for radio receivers



Lee de Forest and Allen B. DuMont in 1929. DuMont perfected the first commercially practical cathode ray tube and developed the modern oscilloscope.

and built the first high-fidelity radio station.

- **David Sarnoff**, who was responsible for bringing radio, and later television, into American households; became president of Radio Corporation of America, and later formed NBC. He was credited with transmitting news from the Carpathia regarding the sinking of the Titanic.
- **Frank Gunther**, the original developer of short wave radio equipment, who worked closely with military, police and fire departments.
- **Jack Poppele**, who built the original 250 watt transmitter for New York's WOR. In 1954 President Eisenhower appointed him director of the Voice of America.

In the Future

In its own subtle way, the history of an organization tells something about its future, too. History can be looked at and studied as a means of predicting and guiding goals and challenges in the future.

Here's what RCA Vice President Bruce McIntyre has to say:

"It seems hard to believe the Radio Club is 100 years old. As we look at the history of the Club, we see many names of people who were innovators, inventors, and leaders of the wireless industry. Today we have members from all facets of the wireless industry; lawyers, educators, journalists, inventors, innovators and industry leaders.

What is the future of the Radio Club? The future is you. The future is with the professional or the student who is considering a career in the wireless industry. As we move further into the 21st century, the wireless industry will



Dedication ceremonies of the IBCG Monument, Greenwich, Connecticut, October 21, 1950. Left to right: Paul Godley, Edwin Armstrong, George Burghard, Wilbur Peck, Orestes Caldwell.

continue to be dynamic. Changes will bring new technology and the evolution of existing technologies. We want you to not only be a part of the proud history of the Radio Club of America, but we also want you to be a part of the future as we look forward to the next 100 years."

RCA President Stanley Reubenstein WA6RNU shares his thoughts about the future:

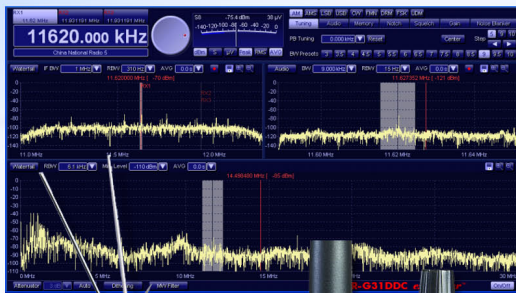
"The Radio Club of America has completed its first 100 years, and we are now beginning our second century. The Club has been called the first Amateur Radio Club in America, and also the first radio society. There are those who

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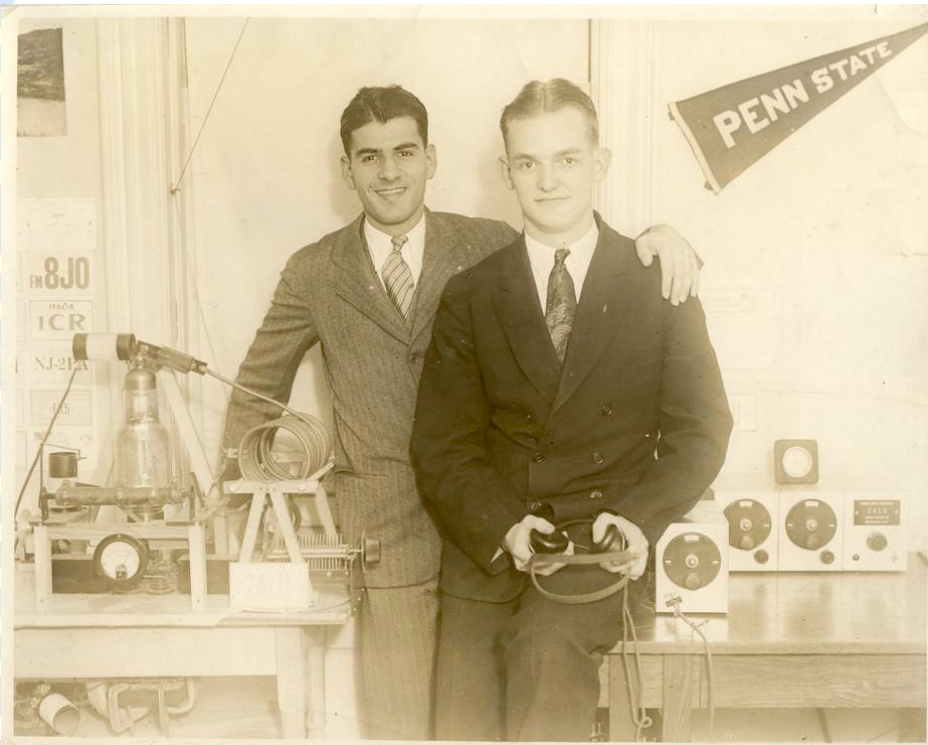
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Fred Link and John Knight in their Prospect Park YMCA room in Brooklyn about the time of the 1927 ARRL DX Contest. Knight 4DX, W2ALU, 6YY built the receiver for the initial W2ALU station; Link 3BVA, W2ALU, built the transmitter.

would dispute these ‘firsts,’ but what matters is that the Radio Club is over one hundred years old, and is still a viable entity in the world of RF communications.

“For our second century, the powers that be decided that we should not only continue our current philanthropic endeavors, but also be more proactive in our educational programs. With the assistance of seed money provided by Richard Somers W6NSV and management by Carole Perry WB2MGP the Youth Education Fund was created. Guided by the RCA Youth Education Committee, this program is designed to generate interest in communications technol-

ogy in students in grades K-12. Using amateur radio as a mechanism to encourage interest, not primarily to recruit new amateurs (though this has been a great by-product), the program assists amateur radio clubs, teachers, and schools to create their own technology programs. This is done via training, financial assistance, and donations of equipment to use in the programs that are created. A wonderful network of the teachers and schools being helped has been established with lots of support and encouragement from RCA membership.

“Recognizing that the transition from basically RF communications to digital com-

munications and control via Internet protocol had begun to bewilder technicians, the club came up with a solution. We now also provide an IP training course to communications professionals in conjunction with the Association of Public Safety Communications Officers (APCO).

“The times are changing and the Radio Club of America is doing likewise to remain a viable association.”

What We Do

As mandated by the Constitution of the Radio Club of America, Inc., its purpose is, “...To operate exclusively for charitable, educational and scientific purposes... and more specifically to study and contribute to the development of radio communication programs and provide a scholarship fund for needy and worthy students for the study of radio communication.”

Our fine scholarship program, which assists college students pursuing technical careers, and our Youth Activities Fund, which encourages creativity and technical expertise in wireless communications with students in grades 12 and below, are both clearly motivated by the spirit and intent set forth above.

RCA’s specific outreach programs, in addition to the Scholarship programs include: Education, Historic preservation, and Networking opportunities. “It is a rare organization in any field that can claim active participation by the past, present, and future of an industry. The many activities sponsored by the RCA give its members a perspective on where we’ve come from and an insight into where we may be headed.” – Elizabeth R. Sachs, Regulatory Counsel to the Enterprise Wireless Alliance (EWA).

Membership in the Radio Club is open to anyone who is actively involved in the wireless or broadcast industry, or the hobbyist and enthusiast who will commit to advancing the causes of RCA. We invite you to join us. For more information, call us at (303)948-4921 or visit us on the web at www.radioclubofamerica.org.

REFERENCES

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- The Radio Club of America, Inc. “Fall 2009 Proceedings”
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The author wishes to thank Mercy Contreras, President Emeritus, Radio Club of America, who contributed the archival photos for this article and all those RCA members who generously gave of their time to offer suggestions and to share their own experiences. Carole Perry WB2MGP is a Radio Club of America Director, Fellow, and Co-Chair of the RCA Education Committee. She last appeared in the December, 2009 issue of MT as part of the First Person Radio series with the article “Reading, ‘Riting and Radio.”



Top row L to R, Robert Famiglio VP/Co-Counsel, Ron Jakubowski Director, Richard Biby Director, Tim Duffy Director, Robert Walsh Director, Middle row L to R, John Belrose Director, Travis Marshall Director, Roger Madden Treasurer, Stan Reubenstein President, Bruce McIntyre Vice President, John Dettra Director, Robert Schwaninger VP/Counsel, Tom Tolman Director. Bottom row L to R, Elaine Walsh Director, Debra Baker Director, Carole Perry Director, Sandra Black Director, Vivian Carr Executive VP, Margaret Lyons Secretary, Karen Clark Secretary Photo taken at the November 2009 Centennial Board Meeting in Washington, DC.