

THE ARRL BOARD OF DIRECTORS – HISTORICAL COMMITTEE

THE ARRL HERITAGE MUSEUM

Presents

THE HISTORIAN'S VIEW

Chapter four
Revised 5/1/2017

Invitation – the First ARRL National Convention 1921

In 2014 the American Radio Relay League celebrated its Centennial. The 100th birthday milestone was observed in many manners including the main attraction of a National Convention held at the Hartford, Connecticut Convention Center on July 17-19. More than 3,300 amateurs and interested parties from 40 different countries attended and helped blow out the candles on the cake at a banquet which 900 attended. This pinnacle event was the most recent in a succession of National Conventions beginning with the first which was organized only eight years after the founding of the association. The vitality and spirit of the participants of the earlier event have carried forward nearly a century inviting a retrospection of what occurred in 1921,



In its formative years the League made significant decisions which were to strengthen the federation and set it solidly on its successful future course. Organizing on a national scale, adopting QST as its journal, appointing a Secretary-General Manager, and maintaining its focus on the trunk line relay system it created were among these resolutions. And, a singular planned event bound the early constituents. Prompted by the era's interest in meetings, as evidenced by two highly successful District gatherings, the leadership determined to convene a full scale National Convention. This was an audacious action by the hardly eight year old League. The resolution was consistent with the spirit of enthusiasm and energy of the maverick hobbyists who had only tenuous regulatory stature. Just two years prior they had eluded the governing grasp of the US Navy and achieved distinct recognition. At the time the fraternity comprised less than 6,000 members among a total census of approximately 8,000 licensed operators whose numbers was rapidly increasing.

Like the rest of Amateur Radio the convention was a completely volunteer undertaking. The Chicago Executive Council (of affiliated clubs) suggested the idea and the ARRL Board of Direction (sic) heartily endorsed it. League headquarters provided prestige and logistical support and the volunteers at the Council attended to the planning and execution, as is still the case today with division, state and section conventions.

The elegant resort style Edgewater Beach Hotel on Lake Michigan in North Chicago was chosen as the primary venue. The nearby immense Sixth Regiment (Broadway) Armory accommodated the exhibitors, and was the locale for lectures and seminars. The Sheraton Park hotel was the secondary site and the Drake Hotel was the site of the principal banquet.



On August 31, 1921 President Hiram Percy Maxim convened the assembly terming the amateurs “pioneers” and exhorting them to be steadfast in their faith and loyalty to one another. Marking the historical significant of he expressed his awe of the tremendous speed with which the events in radio had advanced. Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover sent a radio message stating that the Department of Commerce was by Congressional action the legal “Patron Saint” of amateur wireless operators. Further, he stated that Department was anxious to be helpful in encouraging the important movement of amateur radio.



EDGEWATER BEACH HOTEL

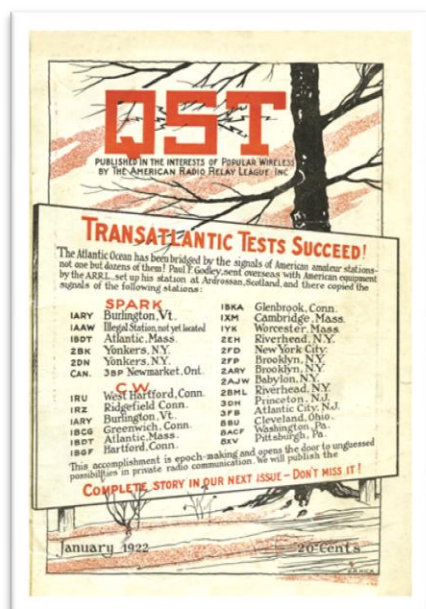
Among the attendees the principal interests were operating practice, the relative merits of spark gap transmitting versus the recent introduction of vacuum tube continuous wave transmission, and a lively technical debate on the definition of “power factor” and its measurement.



DELEGATES BADGE

Much conversation concerned the first transatlantic test earlier in the year. The objective of the test had been to achieve one way transatlantic communications from the United States' more effective stations to receivers in Britain. The test was scheduled for the nights of February 1, 3 and 5 of 1921. Twenty five almost entirely U.S. east coast stations were selected to transmit designated signals at precisely designated times on 200 meters. The Wireless Society of London arranged for 250 British listeners. The test was a failure! Not one of the U.S. stations was heard! The disappointment was attributed to several factors principal of which was the deficiency of the British receiving equipment and interference from U.K. commercial and military stations.

These conversations did not go unheard. A baseball game had been scheduled between the Board of Directions and the Chicago Council for the afternoon of the third day of the convention. But determining how to structure a future test took precedence. President Maxim withdrew the Board's participation in the event and summoned the Directors and staff participants to a full agenda executive session at the Edgewater Hotel. All but one of the elected Directors participated two of them by proxy. Routine matters including the acceptance of the affiliation applications of twenty three clubs were attended to before the major matter was tabled. Responding to the enormous interest in the Atlantic challenge, it was decided to mount a second transatlantic test in December of that year and to send a receiver expert to Scotland to listen for U.S. Signals. Receiver circuit designer Paul F. Godley who was considered...*“the most expert operator in the practical reception of short wave signals”* was chosen for the assignment. Thus within the context of one historical event another event of historical importance was set in motion. This second trial was not only a success but also settled the transmission mode debate with CW proving its superiority dethroning “King Spark”.

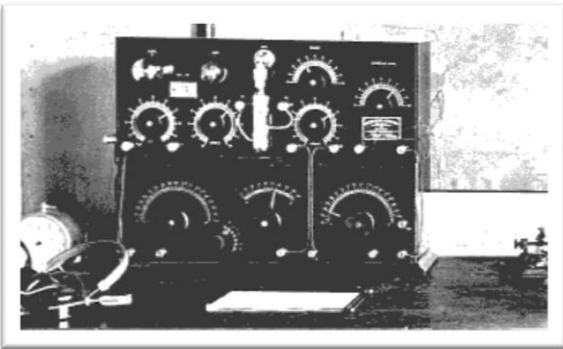
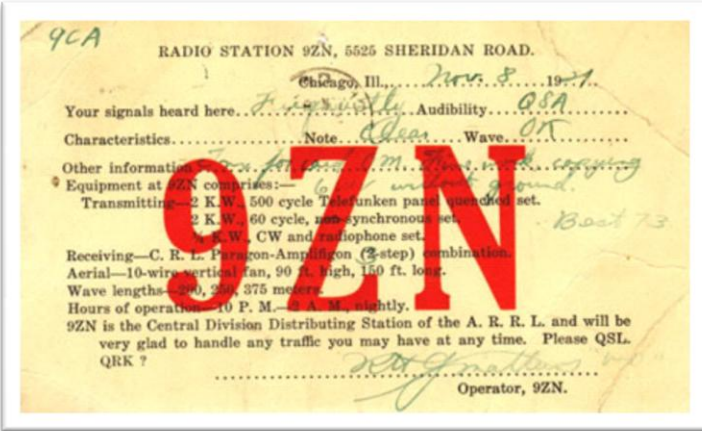


Addresses, seminars, technical papers, special interest group meetings were all important activities. The most prominent of these are detailed in the remarkable “Stenographic Report of the Proceedings of the American Radio Relay League Convention” the original typewritten version of which is shelved in the League’s Vintage Volume library. This report was prepared by George W. Johnson, Court and Convention Reporter and contains over 550 pages. The rendition captures the spirited ambience of the event.

A principal attraction was the “Radio Show” at the immense Broadway Armory. Over fifty manufacturers and suppliers exhibited the very latest in equipment, components and accessories. With only a few exceptions such as Westinghouse and the Radio Corporation of America the names of most of these exhibitors have passed into history and are now visible only in museums, i.e.....Hammond, Grebe, Tuska, Remler etc. Significantly all the exhibitors were sufficiently impressed with the potential of the fledgling organization to invest in this display of their wares and abilities.

Central Division Manager, R.H.G. Mathews, 9ZN was the Director General of the affair. An ARRL board appointee 9ZN not only directed the convention but also conducted tours of his impressive home station nearby.

9ZN was an active traffic handler with a score of 370 messages passed in the month of January of 1921 alone. Two years later he, Eugene F. Mc Donald and Karl Hassel formed the Zenith Radio Company deriving the company name from the call letters 9ZN (ZN-th). Among other achievements the trio designed and provided the radio equipment that the MacMillan Arctic Expedition carried on board the schooner Bowdoin in 1923.



ZENITH RECEIVER



9ZN "OPEN SHACK" WITH VISITING DELEGATES

The four days of the convention were thoroughly filled with activities serious and otherwise. For amusement there were dinners, skits, sports events and sightseeing and beach side events sponsored by the hotel including a cruise of Lake Michigan enjoyed by

800 delegates. The entire affair was a great success with something for everyone. More than twelve hundred amateurs attended from every district and almost every state.

Prior to adjoining the Directors voted to thank the Chicago Executive Council for their successful effort and resolved to have similar gatherings every two years. And indeed national conventions were held in Chicago in September of 1923, and August of 1925. The scheduled 1927 convention was cancelled as the Board recognized that it had become less of a national affair superseded by numerous Division and State conventions, Another National one was not held until 1938, again in Chicago.

And so the tradition has continued to 2014 as a vivid demonstration of the spirit and camaraderie which are the hallmarks of the unique fraternity.

**SUPPLEMENT
THE DELEGATES GALLERY
The Photo Mystery**

The images presented below were recently discovered in the personal correspondence files of Kenneth B. Warner, W1EH the first Managing Secretary of the American Radio Relay League. The files which were being prepared for archiving and contained letters and wires relating to the three national Conventions. One file contained a group of small “snap shot” personal camera prints in an brown envelope without any notations.

We at first believed that the photographs were taken at the first convention of 1921.

However, research now leads us to believe that they were taken at the third convention of 1925 primarily due to the athletic event shots and the fact that the WMAQ broadcast station was not licensed and operational until 1922. The badges worn by the delegates portrayed suggest that the design adopted for the first convention was carried forward to



VARIOUS DELEGATES



ATHLETIC EVENTS



WMAQ BROADCAST RADIO TOWERS ATOP DOWNTOWN LASALLE HOTEL-A GROUP VISITATION SITE

By: Michael W; Marinaro, WN1M
League volunteer Historian & Archivist
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