

The Radio Hotel A Brief Look, Way Back, in Amateur Radio

by Rick Hiller - W5RH

If you are new to the hobby, this Radio Hotel is targeted to you. You might know, intimately, microprocessors, operating systems, networking, applications, html, and all of the other wonderful portions of the current computer technology. And now being a ham, you are having a great time interfacing and playing with computers and radio. But, please, take some time this year and read about the history of ham radio.

The computer world had, and has, technology leaders like Kilby, Hoff, Cerf, Kahn, Roberts, Berners-Lee, Tomlinson, Gates and many more, as the developers of the IC, microprocessors, multi-network packet switching technology, ARPANET, OS's, etc. Plus, we've seen the merger of these developments into the current worldwide network architectures and applications. Ham radio also has its' list of technology leaders: Maxim, Godley, Grammer, Goodman, DeMaw, McCoy, Meyerson, Schwartz, Burdick, Youngblood and many others.

I recently reread the May 2020 QST editorial by Steve Ford, WB8IMY, editor of QST magazine. In it he commented on the fragmentation of the current and future times of Ham Radio, especially in reference to the publications. In a survey taken amongst a wide swath of licensees they found that younger hams could not relate to the "tradition oriented tone of QST", nor could they understand the technical articles presented. They didn't like the ham history or the vintage radio topics presented. SK listings were not at the top of their list either.

I realize that everyone is not interested in history, but if you love the hobby of Amateur Radio it is best, IMHO, to know from whence we came. Know that at one point we were nothing and almost lost our privilege to exist and our frequencies taken away. One man was mainly responsible for saving ham radio: Hiram Percy Maxim. This cat was a genius of many hats-- autos, guns, movies etc. but his work in lobbying the Washington pointed heads at that time was a blessing for which we hams should all be thankful.

Ham Radio started in the "teens" of the 20th Century as a de facto service, by relaying messages around the country. 10 to 50 to 100 miles maximum -- relay point to relay point. That is the way this "traffic" traveled. That is all radio could do at the time with the frequencies in use and the equipment that was built from scratch. There was not a DX Engineering store or even a Radio Shack in every town. To generate the spark gap produced modulation, there was an ignition coil from a Ford Model A in the barn and "iron wire" for the antenna purchased at the local feed store. But as higher frequencies were experimented with and radio technology improved (all thanks to the Radio Amateurs with an initiative to make their stations better) distances got longer.

Knowing ham radio history will provide you with a firm foundation on which to build and enjoy your newly found hobby. Keep in mind that the physics of electronics and radio has not changed. It is only the practical applications, implementations and the materials that we use that have changed. Combining the classic physics with the ever changing contemporary, physical tools allows us to move forward in the continual development of the hobby and the electronic world that surrounds us.

I can suggest a few books that I have read for your delve back into distant ham radio history: [200 Meters and Down](#) by Clinton Desoto, [Hiram Percy Maxim](#) by Alice Schumacher, [Hello World](#) by D. Gregory and P. Sahre and, finally, [Syntony and Spark](#) by Hugh Aitken. Also, [The Radio Hotel](#) columns in March, April and May 2016 of the BVARC newsletter document the origin and a few years of the initial history of antennas. More on this topic can be found on the BVARC.org/techpages under the title of [A Brief Look, Way Back, in Amateur Radio](#).

Enjoy your hobby.....73, W5RH