



K2TQN

VINTAGE RADIO

Jack Irwin, Marconi Wireless Man

Shortly after Marconi invented radio he started to build stations on land and aboard ships. By using wireless, ships would no longer be cut off from the rest of the world while out of sight of land. During the very early days others were attracted for various reasons to join the wireless world. One of these was James Gordon Bennett, owner and publisher of the *New York Herald* newspaper. He was convinced that wireless would be useful to his newspaper.

At his direction, in August 1901 the Marconi Company built a station for him at Siasconset, on the island of Nantucket. Another station was installed aboard the *Nantucket Lightship No 66* 42 miles away, which would become the first point of contact for ocean liners bound for New York.

On August 16, 1901 the Cunard liner *Lucania* sailing from Liverpool was the first inbound transatlantic liner to contact the US from mid-ocean. The first message was received at the lightship and relayed by wireless to the Siasconset station, then by telephone to the *Herald* office in New York. This message took about 30 minutes to be delivered, which was blinding-fast speed for those times. The *Herald* exchanged news stories with the *Lucania* and the world became a little smaller that day.

In 1904 and 1907 the station was enlarged due to the increased work load. The station's call letters were MSC (for Marconi Siasconset). Sometime around 1906 Jack Irwin was assigned there as one of the four operators. Later that year a young 18 year old immigrant from Russia was assigned there as an office boy. His name was David Sarnoff. Irwin trained him to be an operator so that he could be relieved at times for shipboard duty. (David Sarnoff later became the

founder and president of the Radio Corporation of America.)

Collision and CQD

Just before 4 AM on January 23, 1909 while on the graveyard shift Irwin heard a

weak call for help: CQD CQD ATTENTION ALL STATIONS. DISTRESS. THE REPUBLIC RAMMED BY UNKNOWN STEAMER 175 EAST OF AMBROSE LIGHT. LAT 40.7, LON 70. It was from the White Star liner RMS *Republic* 60 miles away, which had just been rammed by the Italian liner *Florida* and was sinking. Irwin quickly took charge and contacted the *Baltic* and several other nearby ships, which all headed toward the *Republic* in thick fog. Six people were killed in the crash, three from each ship, but 1500 people were successfully rescued. The wireless operator aboard the *Republic* was Jack Binns who was also quite a hero.

For an excellent and accurate portrayal of this important use of wireless, you will want to see the PBS movie *Rescue at Sea*, parts of which were filmed at the New England Wireless and Steam Museum (www.newsm.org) in Rhode Island. The wireless room movie set with real Marconi equipment is on exhibit there. The video can be purchased at www.pbs.org.

Visit www.rms-republic.com for more on the sinking of the *Republic*. For an interesting story about the Siasconset wireless station visit www.nha.org/history/hn/HN-fall90-wireless.htm. For more about Jack Binns, the

wireless operator aboard the RMS *Republic*, visit www.jackbinns.org.

The reason I started the column in this way was to introduce you to Jack Irwin, a radio operator I have been researching for more than 7 years now. Jack made more history, which I will write about in next month's column. One hundred years ago this October he made history by using wireless to call CQD himself from an airship to a ship at sea. Again the rescue was successful but I'm ahead of myself. The story about how he got to the point where he needed to be rescued is really interesting.



HAGLEY MUSEUM AND LIBRARY

Operator David Sarnoff at the Siasconset station in 1908.



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

The Siasconset wireless station built on Nantucket for the *New York Herald*.



K2TQN COLLECTION

Jack Binns (left) and Jack Irwin meet after CQD rescue.

MORE AWA CONFERENCE NEWS

Dates: August 17-21, 2010

Tuesday evening, August 17, starting at 7 PM K2TQN will be presenting Don Mix's WNP 1923 adventure on the schooner *Bowdoin* to the North Pole. In a sense I'll be opening the festivities there with my talk, which will be followed by an evening of radio related movies presented by the AWA. The first will be PBS's *Empire of the Air*. The "AWA Cinema Pub" will have food and beverages available for purchase. So if you're just arriving you can attend the Don Mix presentation and movie while having your food and beverages.

On Wednesday August 18, the huge estate auction of Larry Babcock, renowned New York State collector, occupies the better part of the day. Afterward there will be an evening pizza party under the convention's huge outdoor tent and the AWA Museum Campus will have an open house. The museum is nearby and is a "must see." Please take time to visit it.

The AWA flea market opens Thursday, August 19, at 6 AM. At 11 AM the forums start inside the hotel with many well-known hams making presentations. They include Bart Lee, Tom Perera, Bill Holly, Bill Burns, Gil Schlehman, Marc Ellis, Tim Walker and Carole Perry. Also speaking are Mike Adams, Morgan Blanchard, Robert Murray, Bruce MacMillan, Lauren Peckham and Felicia Kreuzer.

The AWA flea market continues on Friday, August 20, at 6 AM. At 8 AM there is a book fair inside the hotel with hundreds of old radio collector books and magazines. At 10 AM the presentations start again till the 6 PM social hour and finally, at 7 PM, the annual AWA Awards Banquet featuring keynote speaker Carole Perry of The Radio Club of America. She will discuss her program of bringing ham radio into the public school system. Beginning at 9 PM the Old Equipment Contest room is open for viewing.

On Saturday, August 21, the second and regular AWA auction starts at 8 AM inside the hotel. Also on Saturday morning outside, the AWA flea market continues and is joined by the Rochester Amateur Radio Association in a joint hamfest. This is a fully ARRL sanctioned event with free admittance and reduced flea market space prices.

"This year's AWA convention promises to be one of the larger events in recent times," said Event Chairperson Roy Wildermuth, W2IT. "There are 4½ days of nonstop radio collecting, fellowship and just plain fun. I hope you will be able to attend."

The conference location is the RIT Inn and Conference Center (www.rit.edu/ritinn), 5257 West Henrietta Rd, West Henrietta, NY 14586, tel 585-359-1800.

The schedule was taken from preliminary information. Some times might change. For more and up-to-date information, and a schedule of events please visit www.awaconference.org. You can also visit my Web page www.k2tqn.com, which will have easy to click links for all the AWA activities and those mentioned in this column. — K2TQN

JIM KREUZER, N2GHD



A small portion of the AWA Babcock Estate Auction.

JIM KREUZER, N2GHD



Another group of lots from the AWA Babcock Estate Auction.

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