

The Story of PROGRESS



Seldom do radio amateurs organize a club that continues to be active over several generations of membership. Contrary to this, the South Jersey Radio Association has survived for half a century! Several good influences aided in this continuity. A dedicated charter membership carried the club thru periods of decline and the development of industry in the area brought new membership in growing numbers who participated with considerable ardor. Fortunately, documentation of the club's activity has been well preserved and from this the following story unfolds.

The need for a club for those interested in the technical development and operation of wireless communication became apparent to the early amateurs residing in the suburbs of Camden, New Jersey. Word was passed by the crashing spark of wireless telegraphy among those active in the area, that a gathering would be held in the early evening of June 12th, 1916, at the home of William G. Phillips, 140 Washington Avenue, Collingswood, N. J. Records reveal that the late Harry William Densham, 3EH, presided at the meeting composed of Messrs. William G. Phillips, 3AFD; George Haldeman, C. Waldo Batchelor, Leon W. Ashton, 3HO; William A. F. Pyle, 3WR; Gordon Kressel, 3BQ; William L. Kirby, Edward B. Patterson, 3YR; Henry Wetzel, Henry S. Byam, Taylor Stokes, 3ACM; and Roger W. Barrington, 3LY; who were to become the charter members of the new club.

The first officers of this club, which was named the South Jersey Wireless Association, were: C. Waldo Batchelor, President; George Haldeman, Vice-President; Harry W. Densham, Secretary and William G. Phillips, Treasurer. Directors were: Henry S. Byam, Leon W. Ashton and William A. F. Pyle. One of the factors in the choice of Batchelor as president was his membership on the Collingswood Borough Council and Influence in getting the use of the hall at the Fire House for a meeting place.

The South Jersey Wireless Association grew from this original group to about 40 members up to the time the United States entered World War I. Speakers on wireless were obtained from the membership as well as from outside authorities in Philadelphia and nearby wireless stations. Howard W. Shallcross, one of the operators at the Marconi station on Cape May, WCX, addressed the club and was elected an Honorary Member. Some of the early topics presented were: "How We Worked Atlantic City on 3/4 KW" by Messrs. Densham and Phillips; "How To Keep The Government From Kicking Us Off The Air" by Charles Stewart of St. Davids, Pa.; "How I Pulled The Fire Bell Rope Outside The Mayor's Office Thinking It Was A Ground Wire" by Anonymous. Topics like these, both serious and humorous, kept the members together in the early days.

When the United States entered World War I and the amateurs were silenced in April 1917, the need for wireless operators was very acute and many of the SJRA members responded by conducting a wireless school in the Physics Lab of the Collingswood High School. Bill Kirby, assisted by Harry Densham and Edward Patterson, was put in charge of the school. Other members of SJRA contributed toward the training of operators. Many who took the course went to advanced training at Harvard University Radio School conducted by the Government. At the close of the war in 1918, regular meetings of SJRA were held in the Council Chambers of the Collingswood Borough Hall. The word "Radio" was substituted for Wireless in the club's name about this time. Affiliation with the American Radio Relay League is noted in GST of May 1920.

