



THE SOCIETY OF WIRELESS PIONEERS



NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION, PART I



IN THE BEGINNING:

As originally founded. The Society of Wireless Pioneers stressed "bringing together into one organization, all of the men and women who have... earned their living as professional wireless or radio telegraph operators." An emphasis on "fellowship and fraternalism," was stated in the Preamble of the original Constitution and By-Laws document, but this aspect did not materialize to any substantial extent beyond the founding meeting, and a few subsequent local (in and around Santa Rosa, Calif) meetings. It soon became evident that the Chapters that formed would hold a yearly luncheon or dinner meeting. This has been almost the only "social" activity from the onset of the central Society activities.

The founding intention was (1) to "perpetuate the memory, heritage and traditions of all pioneer and veteran wireless (radio) telegraphers, to acquaint the public with the exploits and deeds of the many heroic wireless men and women who have proven their courage and valor in times of dire emergency or disaster and of the many wireless pioneers who have directly or indirectly contributed to improvement of the art."

(2) A central address bureau was envisioned, "...to provide all members with a central file where members pledge to keep their addresses current, and (to submit the names of) others, including non-members... so that members may have a central reliable referral point for contact with lost friends and associates."

(3) Fraternalism was furthered by sponsoring and initiating meetings for "...members in order to promote fraternalism and comradeship, through such 'get-togethers and reunions' where members may visit their old friends and indeed meet others whom they may have (communicated with) over the air or known by name for years but never met face to face."

(4) The Society promoted the dissemination of "...newsletters, rosters (and) other publications..." to foster "esprit de corps" among members and to keep members informed of programs, news and actions of the organization itself and of its individual members.

(5) Awards were provided for in the form of certificates and other means of recognition. Individuals nominated for awards were not necessarily to be limited to members of the Society. These awards were to be for outstanding services past or present to the pioneering of wireless, and for outstanding service to the furthering of the work of the Society.

(6) A lending library of books would be set up. Current and past books on wireless communications, electronics, ships and other nautical objects. Not only would the library function from the central address of the Society, but members

so-indicating, were to be listed as willing to lend their personal catalog of books upon suitable request from fellow members.

AS TIME FLEW BY:

All items of the foregoing were accomplished, some to a greater extent than others, and the Society grew in membership until it surpassed all expectations. Its growth occurred by way of the airwaves, since radio-telegraph or "CW" as it is known, is via Morse Code on the airwaves and a majority of the members are holders and operators of Amateur Radio licenses and radio stations.

One fact of life became quite evident a few years ago, from about 1985 onward: about 90 percent of our members were in their 80's and 90's, their early wireless contributions having been made before and during World War I. New members since about 1985 have been younger, now (1993) in their 60's to 80's. Longevity of our older members was fast causing a severe attrition in membership, as demonstrated by the fact that our total membership has reached 5,250 yet our current mailing list is about 3,000. Our senior members are expiring at a rate greater than new members are being welcomed into the Society. It is rare that a member "drops out" for any reason other than health or death; each member from the founding of the Society has been signed on as a LIFE member -- that is, the initiation fee is a one-time assessment, and if a member becomes inactive for any reason, such as an extended trip to other countries etc., his membership may be returned to active status without penalty regardless of the length of inactivity. Inactive members do not pay dues, and dues are NOT assessed retroactively.

The original "FRATERNAL" and social get-together plans soon proved to be impractical in practice because the cost of travel to a central meeting became prohibitive for most members. Further, their advancing frailty proved to be a deterrent. Therefore, Chapters came into being, located in various parts of the world. Meetings conducted by the chapters were quite popular, and a few of these have survived to the present day, such as the Southwest Chapter, and the Edelweiss Chapter in Switzerland and Europe. However, by far the best "attended" drawing-together has been the publications originating with the central activities of the Society, and these are not primarily, nor even noticeably fraternal in scope. The emphasis is educational, as is obvious to those who read our World Wireless Beacon and Sparks Journal.

Thus, the emphasis in the conduct of affairs of the Society has completely changed from "Fraternal" to "Educational." The change was gradual at first, but review of the records and publications of the Society bears witness that the change became most visible about the year 1985, and has become at present about 90 percent education and only 10 percent social --this latter as evidenced by the very few Chapters which are currently active.

THE DECISION TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS

Since its beginning, the Society of Wireless Pioneers, Inc., placed its emphasis on perpetuating, recording and preserving the work of all wireless (radio) operators who have created, developed, and used wireless (radio) communications for the benefit and safety of the public, worldwide. In later years, this work has quite obviously far surpassed its early beginnings; wireless (radio) has

embraced every aspect of the work done by wired communications (commonly referred to as "telephone" communications), and carried each new aspect into the realm of "wireless," that is, via the airwaves, and today, including "spacewaves."

Our early founders were quite naturally primarily concerned with documenting the exploits and personal experiences of those who, like Marconi, Alexanderson and Beverage, were instrumental in the then-astonishing feat of communicating across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans without undersea cables --through the air. Far too little had been recorded of these and lesser-known feats. We (officers of the Corporation) are dedicated to finding and preserving every bit of information relating to early wireless pioneering, as it occurred in those 1800's and early 1900's. But in addition, we see that insufficient emphasis has been placed on later accomplishments in the field of wireless communications. Those involved in creating and enhancing the older methods relating to wireless are no less "pioneers" than were Messrs. Marconi and Beverage.

THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE WIRELESS SOCIETY

To reflect the changes brought upon the Society by the "explosion" of worldwide communications methods, changes in the Constitution and By-Laws were voted on by the membership at large. The Society has become a primarily educational organization through its publications and collections of memorabilia, these having been supplied primarily by the members. A Technical Associate membership was instituted to provide for close association with individuals who had never worked in radio or wireless for pay, but who had expressed an increasing interest in the work of the Society. These "TA's," as they are referred to, may not vote for Board candidates, nor hold office, but are otherwise on par with the regular membership.

Members and officers are alert to discover artifacts and documents relative to pioneer radio and wireless advances. The older members especially are urged to write of their early experiences, to share anecdotes as well as to document the facts. One of the most interesting events involving an SOS call and the saving of lives through the only means possible at the time was the sinking of the Titanic. Many articles covering different aspects of this sea disaster have been published in our papers.

While some of the society chapters have become inactive and have therefore dissolved as entities, a few remain. To these belong what little social activity remains. One notable active chapter is the Inland Seas Chapter, representing the Great Lakes area. The chapters publish their own newsletters, and support their own activities via contributions over and above dues of the members paid to the parent Society. The Society collects neither fees nor percentages of Chapter incomes.

The Society members establish radio "nets" that meet "on the air" at regular intervals, as practice towards communications services during natural or man-made disasters. These members hold Amateur Radio licenses. Such "drills" are virtually all held via use of the tried and proven Morse Code. Reports of these activities appear regularly in the World Wireless Bulletin, the quarterly publication of the Society, and thus are disseminated throughout the world.

An Awards Committee recognizes member and/or chapter accomplishments, bravery and/or outstanding service of individual members or groups during emergencies, and outstanding contributions of members. The awards are in the form of certificates of merit suitable for wall display. Although it has always been the intention of the Society to place its artifacts and papers in the hands of a suitable library and/or museum, it wasn't until this year (1993) that we can report the first phase as accomplished: a substantial gift has been made to the California State Library in Sacramento, and a lesser yet significant similar gift was made to the Sonoma County, California, public libraries. The scope of the Awards Committee activities was broadened to include placing these and future awards to individuals and institutions beyond our membership. The announcement of this aspect is reflected in the application blank enclosed, on the inside front page, lower left, entitled MARITIME & WIRELESS LIBRARY.

With this accomplished, the Founder and present Board of Governors desired to perpetuate and enlarge the charitable aspects of its work. Therefore, a new category has been introduced into the C & BL which, in effect, sets forth a yearly "Scholarship and/or grant endowment," either to a person struggling to bring about a needed innovation in communications, or to an existing or contemplated museum, library or educational establishment, or other worthy aspects of communications pioneering to be considered in the future. These awards may be in monies, publications, collections of hardware or publications.

A "member supplies" committee has existed from the onset of the Society, providing a central address for purchase of Wireless Pioneer stationery, emblems, badges, caps etc., on a cost-plus-shipping basis.

THE FUTURE

The present and future of the Society is and will be seeing an increasing number of younger members who were present at or are interested in the historical aspects of communications advances in technology and operations beyond that of CW Morse Code and voice. For example, teletype involves a different "code," termed Baudot. Western Union Telegraph made their teletype machines almost household words, but the fact that the early ones were "wired" through telephone wires was soon forgotten as means were created to send the Baudot Code over the airwaves. Individuals responsible for these innovations will be sought for their stories, and artifacts will be collected for display. The Society has a bright future as its emphasis on documenting the history of communications pioneering continues. One of the most important current endeavors of one member in particular is in acquiring photos, schematic diagrams, and interviews with the engineers and operators responsible for communications with the first man to "walk" on the moon. If he is successful, these will be published in the Society's SPARKS JOURNAL.

END OF PART I