



MEMBER



HILLTOP HONEY FARM  
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February 18, 1975

William Breniman  
P.O.Box 530  
Santa Rosa, Calif. 95402

Dear Mr. Breniman:

Having read Prof. Scott's item "Wireless Pioneers" in the AARP-NRTA news bulletin it might interest you to know that on July 13, 1916 I was issued "License for Radio Operator, Commercial, First Grade" Number 14666 after examination at the Brooklyn Navy Yard (NAH). I was born Dec. 17, 1898. My career as a brass pounder is of no importance. My junior and senior high school years were as a cadet at Staunton Military Academy. During the summer of 1917 I was assigned <sup>by the Marconi Wireless Tel. Ltd.</sup> to the S.S. Rio Grande (KEG) of the Mallory SS Line and made four trips between ~~Pier~~ 36 North River (NYC) and Brunswick, Georgia, transporting freight. Upon graduation from SMA I enlisted in the regular Navy with rating of striker, served 14 months (USS Pennsylvania), and discharged with rating of Elec(Radio) 3rd class. My father was Captain in the Aviation Section of the US Army Signal Corps. He was a self-educated electrical engineer (Ref. Who's Who, -prior to 1950) and befriended a Yonkers, N.Y. high school boy eager to learn about wireless from the co-author of the book "Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony" by Walter Massie, and Charles R. Underhill (circa 1909) from which I learned both the American Morse and Continental codes. The aforementioned high school boy was Edwin Howard Armstrong whom I knew from childhood days as early as 1907 when my parents lived in Yonkers. (Ref: "MAN OF HIGH FIDELITY, EDWIN HOWARD ARMSTRONG" by Lawrence Lessing.) I did not become a "ham" radio operator until after WW1, while studying Elec. Engineering at U. of Cincinnati.

My first wireless receiver was entirely home-made by Howard Armstrong which he presented to my father about 1912, and which my father helped me set up in 1914. It had a galena crystal detector and picked up NAA Time signals, weather and news on a QST schedule daily at 10:00 PM from Arlington, Va. (My father's grave in Arlington Cemetery is but a few rods from the site of NAA's towers). As I recall it, NAA was on 2500 meters at the time.

During his long fight in court with DeForest, Howard had occasion to make several trips to New Haven to Consult my father. This was during 1914 and 1915. During that time, under Howard's supervision and my father's assistance, I converted the wireless receiving equipment Howard had made while in high school to a one stage amplification using two De Forest Audions and an open core audio transformer designed by my father and manufactured by The Acme Wire Co., of New Haven where my father was then Chief Consulting Electrical Engineer. The three inductance coils were 5" in diameter and 30" long. I turned them out from a 6" x 6" maple beam 10 feet long and lugged it from the lumber yard to Hillhouse High School. I sat up many a night, - most of the night, copying Glace Bay (GB), Nauene Germany (POZ) Sayville, LI etc. and slept during classes the next day! I wanted that Wireless Operator's license more than a high school diploma, - at the time.

A slow recovery from mastoid ended my college career in 1921. I work for L.G. Pacent (Pacent Elec Co.) for several months and became acquainted to Prof. Hazeltine, and Dave Sarnoff. Then a few more months with the Independent Wireless Tel Co., on Water St. NYC (WCG) inspecting and servicing the wireless equipment on incoming vessels all over the NY harbor area. Then followed about three years working for Paul Godley at the Adams Morgan Co., Upper Montclair, N.J.

In 1929 I started a 30 year career with RCA Photophone, Inc., in NYC during the pioneer days of sound motion pictures. After 7 years as a Field Engineer headquartered in Bristol, Tenn., Altoona and Johnstown, Pa. I served as District Manager, RCA Service Co. inc in Pittsburgh for another 7 years. The final 16 years were spent in Camden, N.J. as a Product Manager.

Though many of my friends were "hams", I never owned a rig. I started out on 600 meters and up and to this day I occasionally enjoy scanning the band between 500 and 400 KHz on an old RCA Radiomarine ship receiver. For an antenna I couple into the telephone line, - a trick Howard Armstrong taught me in New Haven, back in 1914!

About 1945 I returned the Wireless Receiver Howard made when a boy to him at Columbia University. He was Professor of Electrical Engineering at the time and had been especially kind to my father who was failing in health. It is my understanding that this equipment is now on display in the Harkness Research Laboratories of Columbia University.

My career in electronics ended in 1957. My voice began failing and a growth appeared on the left side of my throat. A biopsy at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital was declared to be Carcinoma of the Larynx and I was informed by the surgeon that I would never be able to use my voice again. I had other ideas about being healed of cancer. Refusing further intervention by organized medicine was upsetting to many well-meaning people. Convinced that I could not be reasoned with it was declared that the cancer had spread to my brain. I was given three months to live, -and my wife was so informed. RCA gave me a disability retirement at age 58. As of this writing it has not been necessary since the day I was informed I had cancer (July 3, 1957) for me to be treated by a medical doctor in any way what-so-ever. I can no longer sing. (I was once a pretty good tenor) But my voice is strong and I am still lecturing to various groups on local history and beekeeping. It's a consistent fact that very few people are interested in getting understanding as to how and why I recovered. The general conclusion is that I never had cancer in the first place. And it's upsetting to many people when I try to convince them with documented evidence, or inform them about my membership in the Cancer Control Society and the International Association of Cancer Victims and Friends, -and the National Health Federation, - all with home offices in California!

I've mentioned what happened because, be-coming a beekeeper was a prime factor in a new way of life I chose when I was reasonably certain I did not have to die of cancer. I've disassociated from all activities and associations related to electronic career. One does not become wealthy on an income from beekeeping so my way of life is restricted for financial reasons. So I regret I cannot give financial support to the Society of Wireless Pioneers. I had to give up my membership in the AIEE IRE and the Veteran's Wireless Operators Asso. many years ago.

However it is my hope that this brief biography will be of interest to other old brass pounders who knew the smell of ozone from the open rotary spark gap and the Fessenden semi-quenched spark gap prior to WWI. With sincere best wishes, and

  
Chas. R. Underhill, Jr.

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March 11, 1975

Mr. Eben K. Cady, President  
Society of Wireless Pioneers  
P.O.Box 530  
Santa Rosa, Calif. 95402

Dear Mr. Cady:

Your letter of March 5, 1975 is much appreciated. The Society of Wireless Pioneers hereby has permission to print my letter of February 18, 1975 in whole or in part under one condition, viz. that it include the following statement, quoted from that letter. "MY CAREER AS A BRASS POUNDER IS OF NO IMPORTANCE." I was employed less than three months by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Ltd., -during the summer vacation of 1917. My salary was \$40/month, which I picked up in the Woolworth Bldg., NYC. About 1914 it came to my attention that there was an amateur living in Montclair, N.J. listed as C.R. Underhill. Because I was born in Montclair in 1898 I wondered if he and I were related. His name again came to my attention when I was handed his salary check in the Woolworth Bldg., by mistake. (it was for a considerably larger amount!). I finally met this CR Underhill at his home in Montclair, N.J. on July, 3, 1923. He sailed the next day on the maiden voyage of the S.S. America (the former LEVITHAN) as a wireless operator. He was Chester Reid Underhill. His handle was "CHET" and his sign "CU". At the time he had an infant son (Bradford) and his wife was expecting another child. I married August 1, 1923, Frances Barrows, -a childhood sweetheart dating back to 1911 and we lived in Upper Montclair, N.J. while I was employed by The Adams-Morgan Co., manufacturers of the PARAGON home radio receivers. So the two Underhill families became intimately acquainted and I'm still in touch with his children and grandchildren. Oddly enough knowing Chet and his wife Elaine led to my employment with RCA in 1929. Chet was already in the field doing the type of work I had yet to be trained for.

I'm sure there are many among the 1500 or more members of the Society of Wireless Pioneers who knew "CU". He was operator at WLC then located in New London, and I spent a night with him at WNY on the roof of the Bush Terminal Building in the days when he relayed wireless traffic received via land-wire (Western Union). Chet was truly a "Professional" Radio Officer. Any similarity because of my name is purely co-incidental!

It's another co-incidence that at about the same time I first learned about the Society of Wireless Pioneers I also heard of the New England Wireless and Steam Museum, Frenchtown and Tillinghast Rds, East Greenwich, R.I. and have in mind visiting this museum. Right now I'm particularly interested in the fact that the SWP is aware that time is running out for many of us and that it is aggressive in concentrating records and historical data. I kept scrap books from boyhood days until about the time I was stricken with cancer in 1957. I'm going to make it a point of listing some of the pictures, books, records and other historical data so the SWP can check off items of interest.

Though the Deforest Audions and associated equipment "disappeared" during one of my several changes of address, I do have the open core interstage transformer mentioned in my last letter. I also have a Murdock 43 plate (if I recall correctly) variable condenser which was housed in a moulded container which was filled with castor oil to increase the capacity and was controlled by a bakelite rod extension to reduce the capacity effect of the operator's hand. I took 5" x 7" photographs of the principle components of Howard Armstrong's home-made wireless receiving equipment before giving it back to him. I think I can find (somewhere in the attic!) both the negatives and prints. And there's considerable correspondence from Howard Armstrong to both my father and me which the society might like to have. Come warm weather I'll make it a point to seek some long forgotten keepsakes. I'll promise you now that if I can locate the copy of "Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony" by Walter Massé and Chas. R. Underhill which Dad had given to his mother I'll mail it to your attention. Needless to say I'll be very happy to have become a member of the Society of Wireless Pioneers and am deeply grateful for your offer to waive the dues. I'll find some way to be of service in appreciation.

Sincerely,

*Reg.*  
Chas. R. Underhill, Jr.

p.s. My father, Charles R. Underhill, Sr., born at Chappaqua, N.Y., Nov. 2, 1874, died at his home in Lower Bank, N.J. October 3, 1950. Funeral services were in Egg Harbor (near Atlantic City) and interment in Arkington Cemetery. Howard Armstrong came down for the funeral. It was the last time I was to see him. His tragic untimely death at age 63 was on February 1, 1954. My last communication with him was early in 1952.

*Chas.*



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March 12, 1975

Memo for: SOCIETY OF WIRELESS PIONEERS

The February 1948 issue of FORTUNE has a 14 page article titled "ARMSTRONG OF RADIO", with five photographs and a full page reproduction of a painting ~~by~~ (portrait) of Howard by Stephen Greene. A half page photograph on p. 91 is of Howard in 1947 standing in the ruins of the attic room of his parents' home on Warburton Ave., in the Greystone section (very exclusive, at the time) of Yonkers. (other photographs appear in the book "MAN OF HIGH FIDELITY" \*Edward Howard Armstrong, a Biography by Lawrence Lessing (Lippincott-1956). I remember that attic room very well, and dining with the Armstrong family on at least one occasion. In an old scrap book is a Christmas card received from his sister Ethel, with whom I corresponded while in college. I vaguely remember putting on headphones and hearing wireless signals from ships and shore stations in the NYC area. With a wonderful view of the Palisades from the attic river (where WQXR's FM tower, built by Armstrong) still stands) I looked down the river and, with childish imagination, saw the ships I was hearing by wireless! That was during 1907 and 1908, as I recall. But it wasn't wireless that prompted me find my way from my parents home at Pine Crest (exactly adjacent to the city line between Yonkers and Hastings on North Broadway, Yonkers) to 1032 Warburton Ave. Howard had outgrown a wealth of mechanical toys. Finding me fascinated by them he ~~gave me~~ gave me one of these toys from time to time. So he became an idol and I must have been a pest at times. I presume that because of his admiration for Dad he tolerated me. I remember going with him to the country club along North Broadway where he played tennis. During these games I amused myself by roaming the golf links and accumulating dozens of golf balls!

Just before we moved to Muskegon, Mich. in 1909 Howard gave me a complete and very elaborate set of trains and track, -which filled a good size steamer trunk. It was in Muskegon where I played with it for many, many hours, setting it up outdoors in the summer months. I was the envy of many kids in the neighborhood!.

About 1914, when I had outgrown "toys", it was suggested that I pass the train and track set on to two cousins, -both younger than I. They were, in fact, too young to appreciate it. When I sought to reclaim a few of the items some years later it had been reduced to worthless junk.

  
Charles R. Underhill, Jr.

# SOCIETY OF WIRELESS PIONEERS

*DEDICATED--to the men "who went down to sea in ships"  
as Wireless Telegraphers and all those who have earned their  
living "pounding brass" as wireless or radio ops since the  
days of Marconi.*



*Join the Buckslip Club—Communicate*

FROM William A. Breniman  
TO Eb Cady

March 15 1975

Dear Eb...

Abswering your letter of March 5th inviting him to join with waivure of fees which the Jack Binns fund will absorb I am glad to say it was received and he accepted . I will number if 1900-P when it comes up in turn, perhaps a few days or a week.

He will be a fountainhead of historical information which will repay us manyfold (in my opinion) for our actions.

You might drop him a personal line thanking him for the material he has supplied us with application form, I am attaching some of the material sent but much more is too heavy to send on unless you want it.

Tell him that Breniman was deeply interested in copies of the " Edwin H. Armstrong" material (photograph of the hand made coupler Mr. Armstrong made circa 1908 and mention of write up in Feb. 1948 issue of Fortune Magazine. We wonder if copies still available and if so we might wish to reprint w/ permission of Fortune if we can obtain. Also thanks for many other items of interest enclosed. Regular membership data being forwarded through channels. We have mailed copy of latest release today, hope it arrives okay etc. Return

attached at your early convenience TU.....Bill

P. O. Box 530  
Santa Rosa, Cal. 95402 USA

# NEWS - RECORDS - INFO

Society of Wireless Pioneers

Subject: New Member Listing. Date:

1900-P

March 22 1975

UNDERHILL, CHARLES R. (Jr.) (Reg/Frances)  
[REDACTED], CT. 06331

FS: 1917 - SS Rio Grande / KEG

While "Reg" (or Rex as some call him) tells us his career as a brass pounder is of no importance we think his background and experience should rank and list him as one of the true "Spark-Gap" Pioneers. His experience in knowing and working with those of radio-telegraph in the early days is outstanding. His father (Charles R.) co-authored a book "Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony" with Walter Masse (1909). Father was Capt. in Aviation Section of the US Army Signal Corps. Reg knew Edwin Howard Armstrong from high school days and his first wireless receiver was hand made by Armstrong and presented to his father circa 1912. He also knew and/or worked with Paul Godley, Prof. Hazeltine, Dave Samoff, George Cole WCG and later WNY and many others. (We will publish more about his experiences in coming issues of SPARKS).

M: Many F&AM lodges and affiliates. Historian or belongs to several Historical Societies.

PARTICIPATION: Assures us he will help in any manner he can, especially with historical memorabilia and historical data.

QSP: AARP/NRTA Bulletin Feb. 1975

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June 21, 1975

To: William A. Breniman

From: Reg Underhill 1900-P

Dear Bill:

Enclosed are photographs of the five basic units comprising the wireless receiving equipment made by Major Edwin Howard Armstrong while a boy in high school, and which he gave my father in 1912. I made these pictures about thirty years ago in anticipating of returning the five units to Howard who was then Professor of E.E. at Columbia. I planned to write a story on each picture. But, Bill, I'm sorry but I'm swamped in my own little world and have delayed too long as it is. The essential details are in my letters of March 12th and photocopies included.

I'm enjoying reading "SPARKS" Supplement #1 Spring 1975 edition, NEWS LETTER SUPPLEMENT. I agree with FRED R. REED, SR. 1359-V 100% (Correction: Elmer Osterhoudt 203-P) that "Sparks is tops-full of meat" Ref. p. 16.

Ray Anderson's (988-P) suggestion has my vote. If labels printed, please send me a big few.

The item CALCULATOR FUN (page 16) is "turning on" so many friends that I've typed copies of it to pass around. The origin of SHELL OIL computation and credit is worth a story.

Re: my listing on p.48 I overlooked including the 14 months I served in the regular Navy during WW 1. Though my Commercial First Grade Radio Operator's license was still valid when I enlisted on July 1, 1918,- after graduation from Staunton Military Academy, Staunton, Va., I was rated as a striker. After training at Newport I was assigned to the USS Pennsylvania, flagship of the Atlantic Fleet, with Admiral Mayo on board. That experience was of no importance as far as status is concerned.

I'm enclosing a picture of my father and me taken at Langley Field, Va. Jan. 1, 1919. I had spent Christmas at sea as the Atlantic Fleet returned from Brest, France after witnessing President Woodrow Wilson's landing on French soil. In July the fleet sailed up ~~the Potomac River to the~~ the Chesapeake Bay to Annapolis to attend graduation exercises. Two ~~shipmates~~ shipmates and I went to Washington on liberty. The enclosed copy of a U.S. Naval Despatch tells (in part!) what happened during our trip to Washington.

Bill, I'm planning to make photocopies of letters from Howard Armstrong, George Cole, Louis G. Pacent and others which I will send to you as time permits. I hesitate to part with the originals. They are in a large scrap book which seems to be falling to pieces! Most are dated in 1916.

More later,

73

Chas. R. Underhill, Jr.

June 26, 1975

To: William A. Beniman  
From Reg Underhill 1900-P

Dear Bill:

The enclosed pictures of me got misplaced. Was under the impression I had sent them to you some time ago.

Delighted to know you were a "Paragon" Products Distributor back around 1924. I was inspector at the time, - in ~~fact~~ fact, most of the time the Adams-Morgan Co. manufactured radio broadcast receivers. My signature ("CRU, JR") was written on the wood base of the cabinets of hundreds of units. I took the enclosed picture of the Model T Ford truck of the Newark, N.J. Distributor, - E.M. Wilson & Son about 1924. I have considerable literature published by The Adams-Morgan Co., and Paul F. Godley, including Paul's booklet "GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH RADIO RECEIVERS", - published in 1923 (the year I married), and which he autographed for me on March 5th, 1923. I have in mind passing all this stuff in my scrap book to the SOWP.

I have a book published in 1877 titled "LIGHTNING FLASHES AND ELECTRIC DASHES", - A VOLUME OF CHOICE TELEGRAPHIC LITERATURE, HUMOR, FUN, WIT AND WISDOM. ("profusely illustrated") 189 pages. If interested I'll send it out to you viz parcel post.

Just ran across the enclosed item "Where Did Newspaper's '30' Originate?"

The enclosed correspondence from E. Stuart Davis, The National Telegraph Office 1149 Weber St., Union, N.J. 07083 (radio W2ZH) may be of interest. I made one visit to Union and have been out of touch for the past seven or eight years. Perhaps you have heard of this outfit. A number of my shipmates in the radio gang on the USS Pennsylvania were former WU operators with CPO ratings etc.

I'll try to keep old stuff coming to you as I find time to wade through accumulated piles of confusion!

73

*Reg.*  
Chas. R. Underhill, Jr.