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Society of Wireless Pioneers - California Historical Radio Society

My radio experience started with the construction of an amateur station in 1906. Radio studies and experimental work was carried on until, in 1910, I had developed a station which was capable of communication with ships at sea. From this time on my station was used to handle ship's business for the Massie Wireless Telegraph Company who operated wireless aboard vessels along the Pacific Coast. In March, 1911, I was employed as Radio Operator aboard the passenger steamer Rose City, plying between Portland and Los Angeles. I continued in this position until the latter part of 1912, when I again operated my own station in Portland. This station, at the time, was one of the most powerful on the Pacific Coast. The station was used in the interest of shipping entering the Columbia River, and for experimental and developmental work in wireless. This service to ships, was continued until the station was closed on account of the World War. In 1912, a radio law was enacted requiring all stations to be licensed, and a license was procured from the Department of Commerce, which permitted the use of Commercial waves for this emergency ship communication.

My first commercial operators license was issued by the Department of Commerce on January 3, 1913 and renewed every two years until 1930 when the nature of my radio work (service and repair) made renewal impossible.

From January 1, 1913 to December 15, 1914, I was employed by the Portland, Oregon, YMCA as radio instructor in charge of their radio classes. On January 2, 1915, I organized a radio school at which I acted as instructor until 1916. I discontinued the school work to take charge of radio communications for the Northwestern Electric Company. This company maintained emergency radio communications for operation between Portland's Albina sub-station and the generating plant at Underwood, Washington. I continued in this position until April, 1917, when I enlisted in the U.S. NAVY with the rating of Chief Electrician Radio. This rating was later confirmed by examination. On April 17, 1917, I was ordered to duty at Lents, Oregon. This station was 30 KW arc equipped station used for government and general Alaskan Communications. I continued at this station until October 5, 1918 at which time I was transferred to Portland, Oregon as Assistant District Communication Superintendent. The duties of this position were to inspect all radio equipment on ships entering and leaving Portland, instruct naval operators in the use of naval codes and in the use and operation of the various types of radio equipment installed on these vessels, and inspect and make necessary adjustments on all vessels built for or used by the U.S. Shipping Board and the Navy in this district, which included Astoria, St. Helens, Columbia City and other places where shipping and shipbuilding operations were in progress. On vessels not requiring naval personnel, I made selection of all operators going aboard these vessels, and was responsible for their efficiency. Many commissioned officers, acting as commanders aboard these vessels, received their naval code books and instructions in their use from me during the time the office of Assistant District Communication Superintendent was maintained

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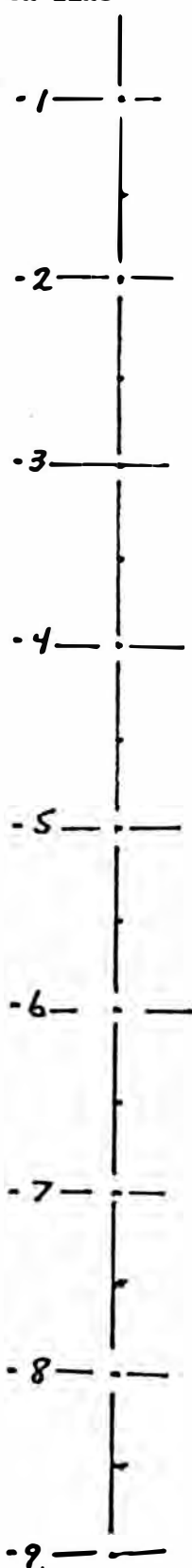
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in Portland, which was up to the time of my discharge from the Naval Service on March 11, 1920.

In the latter part of 1919, under special permit obtained by the U. S. Forest Service, at Portland, Oregon, I built and installed and operated a radiophone transmitter for experimental work being carried on by the Forest Service. Mr. C. M. Allen, Telephone Engineer, U.S.F.S., was in charge of these experiments. At this time, the Department of Commerce was not issuing licenses to any class of radio station for experimental purposes. This transmitter was used for broadcasting various Forest Service reports and material on a regular schedule. This station and experimental work was continued through August, 1920, when Mr. Allen and myself installed radiophone transmitters and receivers for the Forest Service on Mt. Hood. One of those stations was located in the lookout house on the very summit of Mt. Hood. The other was installed in a ranger station near Government Camp. These stations gave satisfactory operation in the service for which they were installed. The installation of the station on the summit of Mt. Hood, offered engineering difficulties seldom encountered, and its successful installation was considered an engineering accomplishment at that time.

Early in 1920, I organized a company known as the Northwestern Radio Mfg. Co. The company's business was the manufacture and sale of radio equipment, both transmitting and receiving. This company continued in business until the latter part of 1929. This business was discontinued on account of the radio patent situation at that time, which made it practically impossible to continue on a profitable basis. During the time the company was in existence, I acted in the capacity of radio engineer and production manager. During this period, a number of radio equipments were designed and built by me for broadcast use. One of the most popular of these installations was a complete broadcast layout, built for Mr. Willard P. Hawley, Jr. This station was installed first in Oregon City and later moved to Portland, Oregon. The station was later sold to Benson Ploytechnic Institute, and was the first used at that school. Broadcast programs from the Hawley transmitter were heard in practically every state in the Union. Other radiophone transmitting equipment was designed and built for stations in Walla, Washington, Astoria, Oregon and Calgary, Canada. In the latter part of 1920, I designed and built a transmitter which was installed at my factory and was operated as a broadcast set over a period of several years. This station was licensed as a limited commercial Class A station, it's call letters were KGN.

In the early part of 1921, I was placed in charge of radio for the Portland Division of Operation, U. S. Shipping Board. My duties in this position were to inspect each vessel on arrival and make necessary repairs and adjustments to maintain the radio equipment in efficient operation. The radio operating personnel on these vessels were assigned by me and were directly responsible to me in the performance of their duties. The fleet of vessels operated, numbered some fifty or more and were equipped

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with various types of apparatus. I was maintained in the Shipping Board Service until the Portland office was closed, due to the sale of vessels to private interests in 1928.

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April 17, 1985

Bill:

This autobiographical sketch of Charles L. Austin, was taken from a resume that Mr. Austin submitted to the Civil Service Board of the City of Portland, Oregon, in 1932, as required in an examination for Radio Operator-Supervising Service in the city's Police Department, Radio Communications Division.

I had the pleasure of working with Mr. Austin in the Bureau of Radio Communications from 1938 until 1950, sans three years of Naval duty.

The material re Mr. Austin was supplied to me by his daughter, Virginia Prebehalla, who resides at [REDACTED] Blue River, Oregon 97413.

73 - Walter Baumgartner - 297-P

P.S. You may keep all of this material for your files, including photographs, as they are copies.

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