

From *Radio's Conquest of Space: The Experimental Rise in Radio Communication*

by Donald McNicol

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At the time of Marconi's epochal demonstration, December, 1901, in sending signals across the Atlantic, there was the probability that for the first time the submarine telegraph cable companies might wonder what was going on. Actually, at that time there was a world-wide need for extensions of communication facilities, and the cable companies were going about their own business. In 1900, Germany laid down a submarine telegraph cable stretching from Emden to New York by way of Fayal. The Commercial Cable Company laid an additional transatlantic cable. A transpacific cable was laid jointly by Great Britain, Canada, and Australia, between Vancouver, British Columbia, and Australia, completed in October, 1901. Plans were complete for laying the Mackay interests' cable across the Pacific, and the United States War Department in that same month laid a cable up the Pacific coast to Juneau, Alaska.

Nevertheless, there were no more interested spectators of the wireless event of December 12, 1901, than the highly intelligent staff members at the transatlantic cable stations. It had been the custom for many years in submarine cable service for the staffs at the widely separated stations throughout the world to exchange Christmas greetings each year by means of cablegrams.

On Christmas Day, less than two weeks following the transmission of the letter S across the Atlantic in December, 1901, the staff at the North Sydney, Nova Scotia, cable station dispatched the following message to the office at the other end of the cable, at Liverpool, England:

*Best Christmas greetings from North Sydney,
Hope you are sound in heart and kidney,
Next year will find us quite unable,
To send exchanges o'er the cable:
Marconi will our finish see,
The cable co's have ceased to be;
No further need of automatics,
Retards, resistance, and statics.*

*I'll then across the ether sea,
Waft Christmas greetings unto thee.*

From the English station came the reply:

*Don't be alarmed, the cable co's,
Will not be dead as you suppose.
Marconi may have been deceived,
In what he firmly has believed.
But be it so, or, be it not,
The cable routes won't be forgot;
His speed will never equal ours;
Where we take minutes, he'll want hours.
Besides, his poor weak undulations,
Must be confined to their own stations;
This is for him to overcome,
Before we're sent to our long home.
Don't be alarmed my worthy friend,
Full many a year precedes our end.*

There was encouragement in this, and it warranted an acknowledgment. A final cablegram from the American to the English station read:

*Thanks, old man, for the soothing balm,
Which makes me resolute and calm.
I do not feel the least alarm,
The signal "s" can do no harm;
It might mean "sell" to anxious sellers;
It might mean "sold" to other fellers.
Whether 'tis "sold" or simply "sell,"
Marconi's "s" may go to—well!*