



It Seems to Us

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Taking Stock

“How are Amateur Radio and the ARRL doing? It seems timely to address that question in this, the last issue of *QST* before the start of the ARRL’s Centennial Year.”

As these words are being composed, the 10 meter band is alive with huge signals from distant corners of the globe. Outside, the New England foliage is in its finest autumn raiment. But the leaves are falling, the days are growing shorter, and the holiday season is drawing near. In just a few weeks we will begin the celebration of the Centennial of the ARRL. But before we cross the threshold into a new year and our second century, let’s pause to take stock of our avocation and its national association.

Amateur Radio is healthy. Here in the United States the total number of FCC-licensed radio amateurs stands at about 715,000 and continues to grow slowly as we welcome more than enough newcomers to offset expiring licenses and Silent Keys. By the end of 2013 we expect the number of new licensees to exceed 28,000 for the year, the largest “freshman class” since 2009.

More important than raw figures are the signs that activity is also on the upswing. The great propagation on the higher HF bands will not last forever, but that’s just a part of the picture. Developments in software defined radio (SDR) and digital voice technologies are creating whole new fields of experimentation and application. Inexpensive microcontroller platforms such as Arduino and simple computers such as Raspberry Pi offer endless opportunities for creative problem-solving. The continued relevance of Amateur Radio in public service and emergency communications is demonstrated all too frequently, as in Colorado during its widespread wildfires and severe flooding earlier this year.

As the pages of *QST* document every month, radio amateurs are seeking and meeting new challenges: launching high altitude balloons, backpacking their portable gear into the wild, conquering the upper microwave bands, or just squeezing another decibel or two out of an antenna. If you’ve become bored with Amateur Radio, you’re not paying attention; there’s always something new to try, always more to learn.

The ARRL is healthy, too. In 2013 we have seen our seventh straight year of membership growth. Members are the most important ingredient in our success, particularly when they become active volunteers. Thanks to our loyal advertisers and the members who purchase their products, the *QST* page count is envied by other association publishers — and we are proud that members can now access the Digital Edition of *QST* with even more content and at no additional cost. The *ARRL Handbook*, always a standard-setter and the flagship in our library of publications, has raised the bar even higher with the 2014 Centennial Edition. The Second Century Campaign, described on this page in the June 2013 issue, is off to an excellent start and is approaching the \$6 million mark toward the goal of increasing the ARRL Endowment by \$10 million.

There will be much to celebrate next year. It is rare for any association to reach its Centennial Year, much less with its founding

vision intact and such a bright future ahead. The ARRL is one of these. Yet, we cannot let our pride blind us to the challenges we face.

Largely because of our continuing role in emergency and disaster communications — our ability to bridge gaps in communications infrastructure and to communicate without having to rely on any infrastructure at all — Amateur Radio in the United States is in the public eye and mind. This has helped offset some of the effect of instant communication via mobile phones and the Internet increasingly being taken for granted, but that is not necessarily true in other countries; many of our sister societies in the International Amateur Radio Union are struggling to retain and attract members. Radio signals do not respect borders; for Amateur Radio to flourish here we must have strong partners throughout the world.

Nor are we immune to demographics. A very large proportion of ARRL members are so-called Baby Boomers, born in the years after World War II. That generation is moving into retirement and eventually will diminish and disappear, as have the preceding generations. We can be certain that Amateur Radio will continue to exist as long as there is a strong organization representing its interests, but there can be no doubt that it will change as newer, younger radio amateurs take the reins.

Those of us who are now active owe the enrichment that Amateur Radio has brought to our lives to those who came before us. Whether or not the previous generations of radio amateurs intended to do so, they developed traditions, social frameworks, and activities that made Amateur Radio what it was when each of us discovered it. For whatever reason, we became attracted to what they had built and made it a part of ourselves, in turn adding to their legacy with our own creations and achievements.

Hiram Percy Maxim and many others laid the foundation for what we now enjoy as Amateur Radio. We have built upon that foundation. We have succeeded in protecting and expanding the operating privileges that they bequeathed to us and have developed radio communications capabilities that even Mr. Maxim’s powerful intellect could not have led him to imagine.

As the ARRL enters its Centennial Year we can say with confidence that with a strong ARRL, the next generation will be able to do the same.