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The Final Courtesy

from Michael J Manafo, K3UOC on October 18, 2014

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"Editor's Note: Due to the popularity of some of eHam's older articles, many of which you may not have read, the eHam.net team has decided to rerun some of the best articles that we have received since eHam's inception. These articles will be reprinted to add to the quality of eHam's content and in a show of appreciation to the authors of these articles." This article was originally published on: 10/01/2002

On March 27, 1925, Mr. T.P. Allen from Belfast, Northern Ireland was tuning around 75 Meters on his receiver looking for distant radio transmissions. At 2305 GMT, Mr. Allen had the good fortune to tune in on a conversation between Harris Fahnestock, Jr. (1BBO) operating from 1AF at the Harvard Wireless Club (or U-1AF, which was the callsign used by 1AF operators when making overseas contacts in those days) and an amateur radio operator in France. Mr. Allen recorded in his radio reception log that 1AF came through at a signal strength of R7 (moderately strong) but that the atmospheric noise was very bad during this reception. However, he also noted, there was little fading on the signal from the United States and there was also no interference from any other station at the time. In Cambridge, Massachusetts, Mr. Fahnestock recorded a contact in the club log book with station F-8HLP at 2305 GMT on that particular day. Mr. Allen must have been very excited to copy this U.S. station -- up until that moment his DX (distant stations heard) consisted of Porto Rico [sic] on voice, and Iraq and Finland on Morse Code. To celebrate this fine DX feat, Allen sent off a reception report to 1AF in the United States, fully expecting to have his reception report confirmed by the radio operator at the Harvard Wireless Club.

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To RADIO *V-1AF*.....

YOUR SIGNALS RECEIVED HERE ON *27-3-25* AT *2305* G.M.T.

STRENGTH *R7* QRN *bad* QRM *nil* QSS *nil* QSB *good*.

YOUR WAVELENGTH *80 metres?*.....

RECEIVER:— *0*..... H.F., DETECTOR & *0*..... L.F. VALVES.

AERIAL *40'x30' high 7*..... CIRCUIT *straight*.....

REMARKS:— *Working some French station & giving reports of reception in US. (mentioning U4SE and U4SI). See over →*

PSE QSL: THANKS. T. P. ALLEN, B.Sc.,
19 Ardgreenan Drive,
D X RECEPTION *Pote Rica (phone)* *JPA.* **KNOCK, STRANDTOWN BELFAST.**
Irish & Finland 73's, O.M.

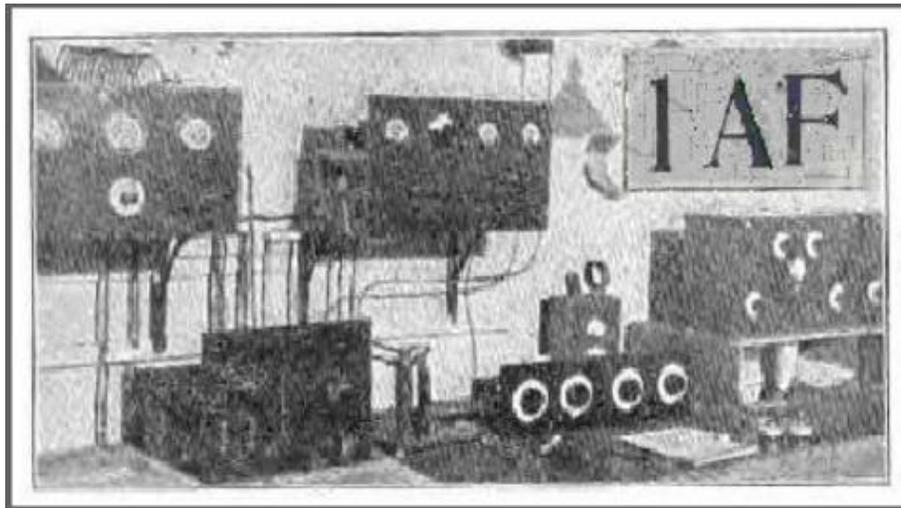
Transmission prohibited.

Allen's SWL card arrived in Cambridge and became part of a growing collection of contact and reception reports (QSL cards) received by the Harvard Wireless Club. Several samples of these early QSL cards can be found at <http://w1af.harvard.edu/qsl-antique.html>. Time passed, and for whatever reason, Fahnestock's confirmation never arrived in Mr. Allen's post box in Belfast. Fahnestock apparently failed to confirm this 1925 SWL report or if he did confirm it, his card was never received and filed by Mr. Allen. In time, T.P. Allen most likely lost interest in collecting reception confirmation reports from amateur stations. Although the final courtesy of a QSO (or of a SWL Report) is a QSL, no ham or SWL expects to receive a return card for every single QSL sent. Some contacts and reception reports will simply never be confirmed. Soon after March 1925, Allen earned his radio license and began a long and noteworthy amateur career of his own, operating as G16YW from Belfast. Allen, no doubt, then put his efforts into collecting amateur radio contact confirmations instead of short wave reception reports.

In late 1924, some 15 years after the founding of the Harvard Wireless Club, a group of talented undergraduate radio operators at Harvard built one of the finest amateur radio installations in the country. However, the formative years leading up to this achievement could have just as easily marked failure rather than success for the club. Beginning in 1909, and continuing through the dark years of the Great War, the HWC had moved from Crufts High Tension Laboratory to the Jefferson Physics Laboratory to the Harvard Union and finally to the basement of Westmorly Court in the heart of Harvard Square. Club officers had searched with little success for an ideal location to operate

from. Either the university was one step behind the club preempting valuable real estate for other purposes, or the huge wire antenna arrays somehow managed to offend the sensibilities of this Harvard dean or that building custodian. Anyway, by some stroke of good fortune, the perfect club space was finally located in a wooden structure that sat high atop the east end of Soldiers Field Stadium. In November of 1924, Harvard operators moved into this 12 foot square windowless cubicle and erected two 55 foot gutter pipe masts to support their array of wire antennas. By January 1925, 1AF was on the air from high above Harvard Square. Radiating a 110 foot wire cage antenna at 120 foot above the ground (with a four wire counterpoise), 1AF put out a blockbuster radio signal on both CW and AM telephony. The new station was an immediate success.

The 1AF antenna (featured in the January 18, 1925 issue of the *New York Times*) was grounded directly to the steel frame of the football stadium. Its size was imposing and its performance was helped along by the fine equipment that the Harvard hams had assembled up in their cozy shack on the stadium roof. The radio apparatus (shown below) consisted of a 40 and 75 Meter transmitter, a 150 to 200 Meter transmitter, a 65 to 200 Meter low loss receiver, a 30 to 70 Meter low loss receiver and a Kennedy 180 to 20,000 Meter receiver with a two stage audio amplifier. The 40 and 75 Meter transmitter used two 50 watt tubes in a push-pull Hartley circuit operating on harmonics of the antenna. The 150 to 200 Meter set could be used with D.C., self rectified A.C. or phone, and could use from one to four UV-203-A tubes in various circuits. Plate supply for this transmitter was obtained from a transformer with "S" tube rectifiers and filters. With Club Secretary Fahnestock behind the microphone, this is the fine installation that transmitted the signal that T.P. Allen monitored across the Atlantic so many years ago. HWC operators reported in the summer of 1925 that an average of 140 messages (contacts or relays) per month were being maintained. As opposed to several years prior, when amateurs were limited to operating at 200 Meters and down, trans-Atlantic contacts on the higher frequency bands were now fairly commonplace.



And then disaster struck the Harvard Wireless Club. In early November 1927, less than three years after relocating from Westmorly Court to the roof of Soldier's Field Stadium, the 1AF shack caught fire. The wood-burning stove in the stadium shack overheated one cold winter evening; hot coals spilled out of the hearth and set the entire wooden structure aflame. Within an hour's time, the shack and all of its contents were a total loss. The Cambridge Fire Department was unable to reach the blaze due to the height of the structure above ground. Messrs. Fahnstock, Bohn, Thomas, Graves, and the other club operators could only watch as their magnificent station went up in flames. Morris "Al" Hughes, W1MU ('26) recalled that, *Many times I'd go down to the stadium at 2:00 AM and climb up to the radio shack and pound brass. We had a wood stove in the shack for the cold winter nights. Well I graduated in 1926 and the following winter I heard that some member got the stove going S-9+ and burned the shack down. And that was the end of the Wireless Club, I believe, for quite some time.* Mr. Hughes (SK 1992) had that absolutely correct -- club members discussed rebuilding 1AF after the great fire, but the project garnered little enthusiasm from the discouraged operators. Too much had been invested in the station and too much had now gone up in smoke. It took nearly 20 years for the Harvard Wireless Club to right itself from this disaster.

Without delving into the tremendous activity of the Harvard Wireless Club at 52 Dunster Street during the 1950's, let's return to our story of the unanswered QSL request from Northern Ireland. Some 50 years pass by and along about 1977, a Harvard graduate student named A.E. "Buzz" Jehle (N5UR) joined the HWC. Buzz astutely observed that the history of the HWC was in danger of being lost if something

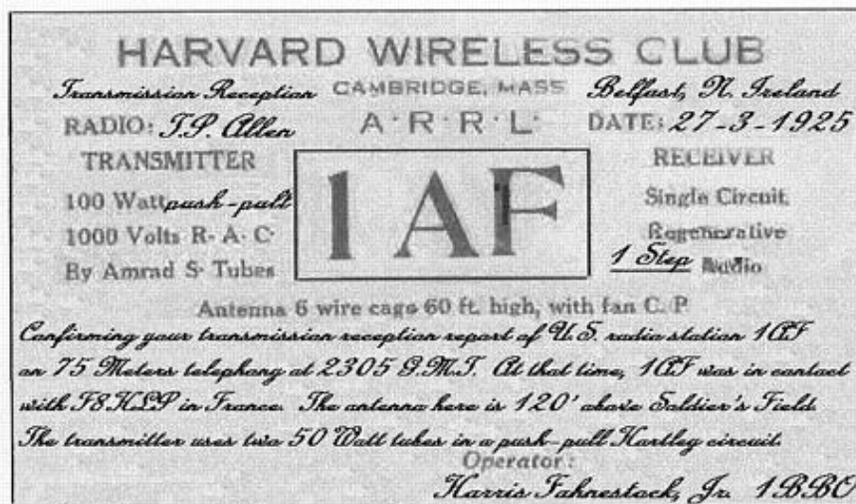
wasn't done to organize and preserve the written records of the club. Being a man of action, Mr. Jehle took it upon himself to catalogue and then deposit the Wireless Club radio log books and written club records in a special collection at the Harvard University Archives. In the midst of his labors, Buzz saved out a handful of documents and early QSL cards and passed these on directly to the club members in a bound folder. Among the documents in that folder was a SWL card from Mr. T.P. Allen in Belfast, Northern Ireland, dated March 27, 1925.

Skippping ahead some 22 additional years, in February 1999, yours truly (K3UOC) and HWC Web Maestro, Phil Temples (K9HI) began the extensive job of rebuilding the HWC web site. As the site grew, one of the new club web pages featured those antique QSL cards that Mr. Jehle had collected together for the club, including the SWL card from Belfast, Northern Ireland. This page has proven very popular among history-of-radio buffs. Since uploading the antique QSL page some three years ago, we have had many positive comments from hams around the world. Several hams thanked us for preserving some of the earliest examples of QSL cards; others simply found the cards fascinating to examine. No one, however, had ever written to us with any sort of personal connection to any of those pioneer radio experimenters. That is, until September 8th, 2002.

On that particular day Tony Quest, G4UZN, wrote to W1AF regarding the Belfast SWL card. I recognized Tony's callsign from the Hillview Gardens (9M6) DXpeditions of recent years. He and I had also worked on a number of occasions from 7Z5OO in Saudi Arabia. He wrote to the Harvard Wireless Club on September 8th with a very interesting QSL request. You see, over the years, Mr. Quest has inherited entire QSL collections from SK hams. One of Tony's collections is from the estate of Mr. T.P. Allen of Belfast, Northern Ireland. In his letter to the Harvard Wireless Club he states that, *I have [Allen's] collection of cards, some going back to the 1920's -- alas no card from 1AF. . . PSE QSL!!!*

As anyone who has dealt with Box 88 in the past understands, there is no statute of limitations on sending or requesting QSL cards. Requests for confirmations five or ten years after a contact has been made are not unusual. In 1981, I had a QSO from Venezuela with a ham in

Yugoslavia. I received his QSL request via the bureau in 2001 -- a full 20 years after the contact itself! No problem! I was pleased to confirm our "ancient" QSO. Therefore, in the spirit of ham radio camaraderie, why not confirm this 1925 SWL report now on behalf of the Harvard Wireless Club? I can think of no good reason not to honor Tony's QSL request. And so here it is; the first 1AF QSL issued in nearly 75 years.



Of course, T.P. Allen, G16YW, is a Silent Key. And Harris Fahnestock, Jr., 1BBO, has also gone on to that big DX pileup in the sky. Yet, with G4UZN (as the curator of the G16YW QSL collection) standing in for Allen and K3UOC (as the Trustee of W1AF) standing in for Fahnestock, I have issued a bona fide confirmation of a verified reception report -- 77 years, 5 months, and 15 days after one young Irish radio enthusiast monitored a young American radio operator chatting with a station in France, back in the halcyon days of amateur radio. The above confirmation card is the product of a good deal of graphic wizardry. In order to create this QSL, the one and only remaining 1AF QSL was scanned at 150 dpi and saved in 8 Bit Gray Scale. Handwritten text from the original contact was carefully airbrushed out. Several words printed on the original card were obscured or blurred and could not be salvaged. The upper and lower right corners of the card that are torn and missing were added. Then starting with a blank 1AF QSL, the confirmation text was added in 18-24 pt. True Type BD Cursif bold italic font, which has a wonderful turn-of-the-century handwritten feel to it.

A world record, I am certain -- 77 years, 5 months, and 15 days to confirm a QSL card! The next time you lament an

overdue QSL, imagine waiting the equivalent of three and a half generations before receiving that card! Apologies for penning Fahnstock's signature on the confirmation above. I believe that the OM would have approved. His one small piece of unfinished business has now been settled. So, here's to you, Mr. Allen -- you have finally received your long overdue reception confirmation! And here's to you Mr. Quest -- for your kind attention to the legacy of our remarkable radio pioneers. And to you as well, Mr. Fahnstock -- for your legendary operations from atop Harvard Stadium. What a magnificent time you and the other Harvard radio operators must have had! And so, in the true spirit of ham radio, the circle is once again unbroken.

The Final Courtesy of a QSO is a QSL

Member Comments:

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The Final Courtesy [Reply](#)
 by [ONAIR](#) on October 18, 2014 [Mail this to a friend!](#)
 Wouldn't it have been marvelous if TP Allen would have still been around to get that conformation?

The Final Courtesy [Reply](#)
 by [DL8OV](#) on October 18, 2014 [Mail this to a friend!](#)
 That is a nice story. My YL has no interest in ham radio but I have noticed her glance at the QSL cards on the wall once in a while. As for myself, every contact with DL8OV gets a card because it is one of the things that I like about our hobby.

Peter DL8OV

RE: The Final Courtesy [Reply](#)
 by [K9MHZ](#) on October 18, 2014 [Mail this to a friend!](#)
 Very interesting reading.

RE: The Final Courtesy [Reply](#)
 by [KJ4DGE](#) on October 18, 2014 [Mail this to a friend!](#)
 Great story! I am always impressed with this hobby. When I first started as a ham, I never thought about QSL's that much until I began receiving them. I then created my own and started sending them as well. If nothing more as you say a courtesy from one Ham to another. I especially like the ones from Special event stations as these are usually very unique.

KJ4DGE

The Final Courtesy [Reply](#)
 by [K8QV](#) on October 18, 2014 [Mail this to a friend!](#)
 These days hams prefer the Internet for QSLs (and often even for their "radio" contacts).

Some real QSL cards on the wall generate more interest with visitors than anything else in the shack. They say things like, "This one says Mongolia - did

you really talk to somebody there?" or "Where the heck is Pitcairn"?

Ah, progress. No wonder people aren't interested in becoming a ham anymore.

The Final Courtesy

by [WA4HBK](#) on October 18, 2014

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My personal record this year is receiving a QSL request for a QSO in August 1978. I was more than happy to add another country for this ham's DXCC. I use a program on my PC to print cards as I need them for my various calls through the years.

RE: The Final Courtesy

by [W9OY](#) on October 18, 2014

[Reply](#)[Mail this to a friend!](#)

Man, that story wore me out! I bet this guy is a 75M op

73 W9OY

The Final Courtesy: The Card

by [AI2IA](#) on October 18, 2014

[Reply](#)[Mail this to a friend!](#)

Anyone requesting my QSL card for a contact will get one from me, SASE or no SASE. If they prefer, I can send an eQSL card. Usually these are good for needed locations, or special situations, but also they are good to confirm friendly QSOs and sometimes for contest contacts of special value to the requester. Special event QSL cards are always very nice to receive.

Some look upon them as an unwanted burden, and that is their option.

A photo album of QSL cards is especially nice to show folks new at the subject of ham radio and very much enjoyed by children.

All things considered, every ham ought to keep some from others and give some when the situation arises. They are part of ham radio just like microphones and keys.

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