

A History of the Indianapolis Radio Club

Ca. 1964

On October 28, 1914, nearly a half century ago the small group of “Wireless Nuts” in the Indianapolis area banded together for the purpose of increasing “our knowledge of the art of wireless and to further the course of Amateur Radio”.

It is small wonder that the charter members of the Indianapolis Radio Club met in their respective homes since the general public viewed askance those who hid away in attics and cellars and pretended to talk over the “aether”. With time, however, came public tolerance, if not acceptance, and the records show called meetings during 1916 to 1918 at the old Madison Avenue library, the Old Chamber of Commerce Bldg., Manual Boy’s Club, and occasionally at some Church. From 1918 to 1920, the Old Chamber of Commerce Bldg. on South Meridian St. served as a meeting place.

From 1920 until 1926, the Club occupied quarters in the old Shortridge High School, the Y.M.C.A., the old Chamber of Commerce Bldg., and then back to the Y.M.C.A.

It was during this period that Indianapolis Radio Club built and operated WBBI, one of the pioneer broadcast stations. It is probable best not to record the demise of this station, but the curious can ask any of the Old Timers in the club for details.

The Club moved on April 5, 1926 to the Old Naval Reserve Armory on East North St., and it was at this location the club obtained it’s first ham ticket, W9JP. The rig was on the air until early 1928, when the Club moved to the Merchant’s Power and Light Co. at Meridian & Washington, the “Daylight Corner”. It was not until November of the same year, when a move to the Century building was made, that operation of W9JP was again possible.

During the next four years, the Club flourished at this location, and an increasing membership made possible the sponsoring of ham fests and many outings to State Parks around Indiana.

From 1932 to 1935, the Club met in the Peoples Bank Bldg., and then for the next three years, the Wimmer Bldg., the Liberty Bldg., and St. Paul’s Episcopal Church served as headquarters.

In the fall of 1938, the Club moved to quarters in the Insley Mfg. Co. at St. Clair and Olney Streets. It was here that the Club enjoyed some of the most active years in its history. With W9JP on the air on 20, 40, 80, and 160 meters on both phone and CW and with ample space and kitchen facilities, it was uncommon to have a day pass without some sort of activity at the Club room.

On September 28 and 29, 1940, the Club sponsored the Central Division Convention.

With the advent of World War II, and the loss of these quarters, coupled with the curtailment of amateur activities, the Club's fortune took a nose-dive.

Meetings during the early war years were held at Cropsey Auditorium and during April, June, and July of 1943, it was found necessary to stain the proud record of the Club, and actually pay for a meeting place in the Warren Hotel.

After this indignity, however, meetings were held regularly at Fire Headquarters at New York and Alabama. With a high percentage of its members in the Armed Services and the rest engaged in war work, a turn out of four or five for a meeting was not unusual. A W.E.R.S. rig was maintained and used during these lean years.

After the war, the struggle to regain pre-war status began, and on January 5, 1947, the Club moved to rooms above the drug store at 25th and Station Streets, and then to the N.E. Community Center on February 5, 1947.

It was during the period spent at the N.E. Community Center that W9JP was put back on the air for a short time.

A move to the Servicemen's Center at 100 N. Capitol was made on May 4, 1951, where a more elaborate W9JP was installed.

From this QTH, the club moved to the Marine Armory at White River Parkway and 29th Street in October, 1952, and then to the present meeting place in the Indianapolis Park Board Bldg at 29th and Harding.

In the preceding history of the Club's wanderings we make no mention of the hardworking and loyal members who found meeting places for the Club, arranged for or gave interesting programs, found time to participate in Emergency nets at State Fairs, conduct code classes, display Amateur Radio to the public at Hobby Shows, sponsor Ham Fests, picnics, and Division Conventions.

To make a complete list of names of those who contributed of their time, efforts, and talents would be an impossible job.

It is those pioneer “wireless nuts” and those who followed in their foot steps through the intervening years that made possible a Golden Anniversary of the Indianapolis Radio Club.

Today, fifty years later, it is fitting and proper that we honor those pioneer hams whose efforts helped make Amateur Radio the fascinating and widely recognized hobby that it is.