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**QST Issue:** Sep 2002

**Title:** The First "YL" (Marion Adaire Garmhausen, 3BCK)

**Author:** John H. Dilks III, K2TQN

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# OLD RADIO

## The First "YL"

While certainly not the first female ham radio operator, M. Adaire Garmhausen, 3BCK, is the first "YL," and she was an excellent example. It all came about when she submitted an article to *QST*, "How to Build a Wireless Station," in early 1920. She received a letter back on the official ARRL *QST* letterhead from Edwin C. Adams. It was dated May 13, 1920 and read:

*Miss M. Adaire Garmhausen,  
516 W. 27th St.,  
Baltimore, Md.*

*My Dear YL:-*

*We have had to coin a new phrase for your benefit as you will readily see that OM will not fit and OL would certainly be most inapplicable. Thank you very much indeed for your most amusing history of the trials and tribulations of a lady ham. We will be very pleased to present this to the radio fraternity in an early issue of QST.*

*Again thanking you and assuring you of our best wishes, we remain*

*Sincerely yours,*

*THE AMERICAN RADIO RELAY LEAGUE  
By E. C. Adams (signed)*

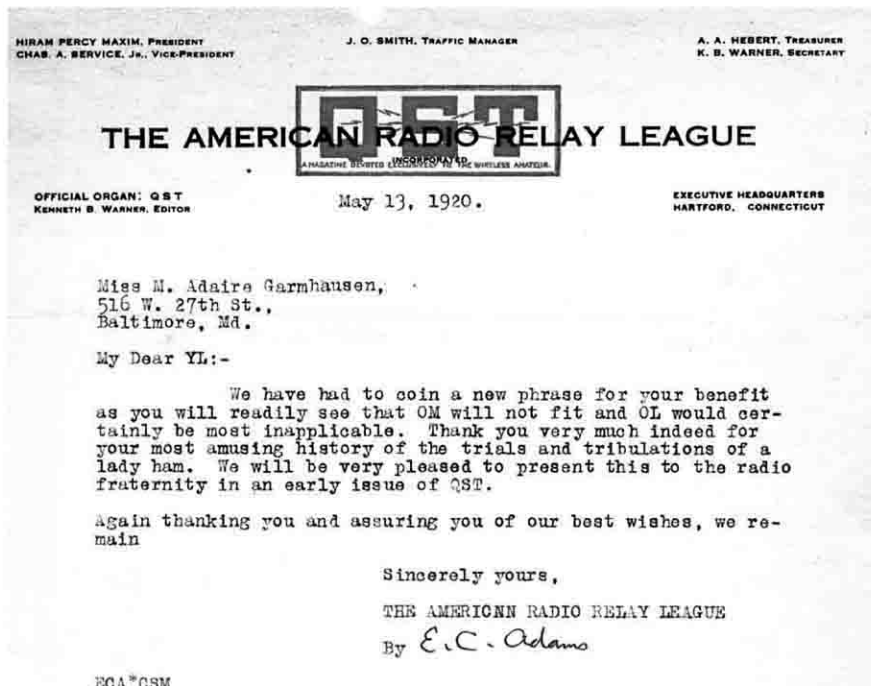
Her article was published in the July 1920 issue of *QST*. She became quite a celebrity, both in Baltimore and in Hartford. She was an excellent operator and many a local, single, young ham became smitten with her good looks and radio abilities. A second article, "Breaking Out," was published in May 1921 *QST*.

By 1922 she was already into more ham radio activities than most of us will ever do in a lifetime. *QST* editors, and many others, were trying to find out more about her and wondered, "What did she look like?"



**While not the first female ham radio operator, M. Adaire Garmhausen, 3BCK, is the first "YL."**

The answer came in the October 1922 *QST* column, "Who's Who in Amateur Wireless." The column featured her photo and started by saying, "Ahh! At last! The Ladies' Number of Hooshoo! You know, gang, we have been wondering all this time what these YL's look like and now after years of pestering we have got them to come across with enough dope to introduce themselves." (The column also profiled Miss Winifred Dow, 7CB, from Tacoma, Washington.)



### From "Who's Who in Amateur Radio," *QST*, Oct 1922

Miss Marion Adaire Garmhausen hardly needs any introduction as most of us have heard of her in one way or another. She admits she was born May 28, 1899, but swears she does not look a day over sixteen. Being a telegraph operator by trade, she went to wireless school just after the war and found a *QST* somebody had left lying about (careless!). Our budding Y. L. says she was struck by the spirit of the organization and wrote Mr. Duvall, whose name she found in the magazine, for further particulars. His reply harmonized exactly with the spirit of the magazine.

When she put in her first set the reigning forces offered her every discouragement known to mankind, so she retired to her shell. Her articles in July 1920 *QST* ("How to Build a Wireless Station") and May 1921 ("Breaking Out") tell in her own words of her experiences in getting started, so any attempt on our part to repeat the tales of woe would at best be infringing on her original masterpieces. 3BCK (for that is her call) remained in her shell until the organization of "The Radio Condenser," sometime Third District organ, when the remorseful crowd invited her to join them. And she was not merely decorative, either—she was of real help on the "Condenser," and she likewise was an active force in the planning and management of the hugely successful Third and Fourth District Convention in Washington last February.

However, they say she doesn't often venture out thusly. No ham has ever laid eyes on her station, despite sundry pleadings, and she swears "no ham ever shall until I get darn good and ready to let him." Ain't it like a woman! She admits her room "looks more like a blacksmith's shop than a young lady's 'boojwar,'" and in view of all of this discouragement we have given up hopes of having a photo of 3BCK in our "Amateur Radio Stations" department.

In spite of all her modesty we find that Miss Garmhausen holds two certificates in electrical engineering and is working for the last one necessary to get a diploma. We know she has been an ardent booster of the League and always will be, and it is her ambition some day to have to move to some place where her set will be able to fill a necessary place in A.R.R.L. relays.

I will continue the story about 3BCK in a later column. I'm still searching for more information about her life and her radio career. I know she lived in Baltimore her entire life and never married. She became a SK, I believe, in the late 1990s. She was good friends with Elizabeth Zandonini, 3CDQ, of

Washington DC, a well-known YL.

Anyone with any information, a QSL card, photo, obituary, etc. of 3BCK, please contact me at my address below or via e-mail. I'm also looking for issues of *The Radio Condenser*; an early 1920s Baltimore-based ham radio publication. —K2TQN

**QST**