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OLD RADIO

1922 Armstrong Transatlantic Letter Found

You never know what you're going to find or where you will find it.

I purchased the remnants of a ham's estate a couple of years ago. He had become a SK about 20 years earlier and most of his station and collection was sold shortly thereafter. His home was now being sold and the few remaining ham items and more than a few boxes were offered for sale from the cellar. I purchased all that was left from the family a few days before the sale, and just before the dumpster.

Cleaning out a cellar is hard and dirty work. After 20 or 30 trips up the stairs with heavy boxes, you tend to want to get done and get out of there. This day was no different.

The larger items were loaded into my van and we were bringing up the cartons of parts he had on shelves. We were almost done when I noticed one more shelf with small boxes, including a nice looking cigar box. I had room in the last carton, so in they went. I looked into each box first, and if it wasn't radio related, it went back on the shelf. Some had wood screws and nails and other heavy odds and ends. The cigar box went in last because there were two old tubes in it along with some paper junk. I figured I would sort it later, throw away the junk and just keep the tubes.

It took a few months to get around to sorting that last carton. When I finally opened the cigar box I was sitting on my couch and watching TV with my wife. After the tubes were removed, I started going through the paper. There were several interesting letters, a few 1920s QSL cards, some pins and a couple very old hamfest tickets. About half of the box contained papers that once belonged to Homer E. Nichols, W1BM, Life member of ARRL, Director of Nichols Manufacturing Company and Section Communications Manager of Connecticut, 1926-1928.

FROM THE STORY OF THE FIRST TRANS-ATLANTICS



Pupin comes to visit the station—Professor Michael I. Pupin of Columbia University came to Greenwich with Mr William Deegan of the Postal Telegraph Co “to see what you boys are doing,” as he put it. Front row, left to right—Armstrong, Burghard, Dr Pupin, Cronkhite, Grinan. Standing rear, left to right—Tex McBain of the Greenwich Fire Department, George Brillhart, John Hobe, Carl Trube, William Deegan, R. H. McMann, V. A. Hendrickson, Jack McWilliams. Far rear—John Cullen, Fire Department. Photo used with permission from the Radio Club of America.

I started to read the letters. One was in response to a letter that W1BM must have written to Edwin Armstrong about the December 1921 Transatlantic Tests. It was hand-written on January 5, 1922 and signed by Armstrong. It read:

My Dear Nichols,

I hope you will pardon my delay in answering your letter—I have been absolutely buried and I did not remember, after reading it the first time, that you asked about coming over to see the station. I am particularly sorry because we had a visitors day the Sunday following the tests when Prof. Pupin, Sarnoff, Goldsmith and a bunch of radio boys came up to look us over. Right now the station is down—the transmitter is at Columbia and will probably be on exhibition in N.Y. for a while but if you ever hear 1BCG on the air again at any time give us a call and make your own arrangements for coming over. We will be glad to see you any time up to 5:30 A. M.—or was it 5 A. M.

In respect to 1AAY it appears that there was an error in the coding of this call and that it should have read 1AAW. This station, however, did not transmit, so I don't yet know the answer.

Best of 73's and hope next time I see you will be after 6 A.M. at least.

Sincerely,

(signed) E. H. Armstrong

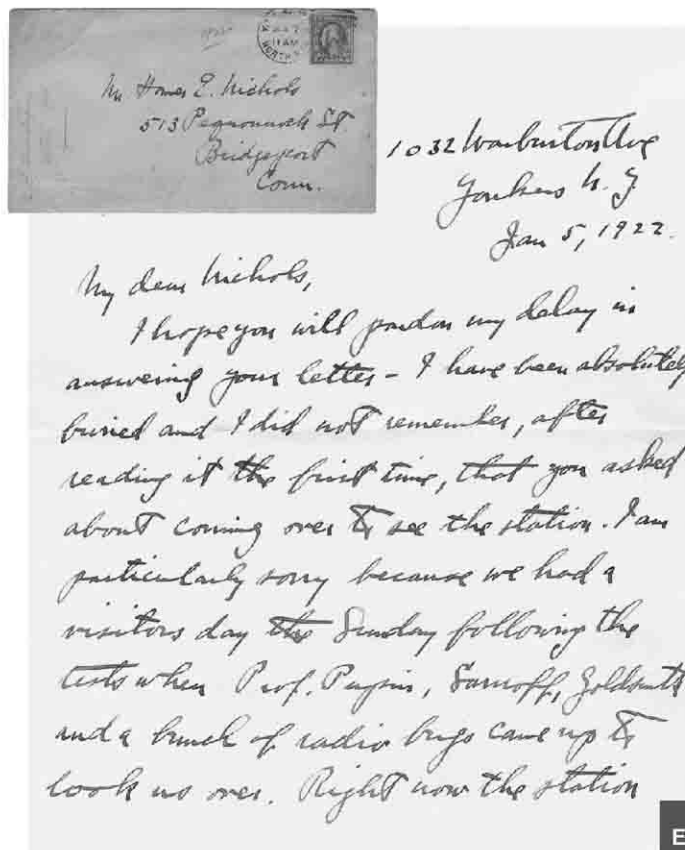
I read and reread the letter. What luck to have saved this from the dump—what a historic letter! I was so excited I called a few friends right away. Everyone thought it was great.

Next, I dug out my book on the Transatlantic Tests and read it again. Yes—the things mentioned in the letter Armstrong later put into writing for the Radio Club of America's *Proceedings*. You might want to get a copy of this book for yourself; it is available from the Museum of Radio and Technology.¹ This book has the whole story from several different publications and from many notable radio hams who were there. It includes an introduction from Armstrong, the history of 1BCG including many great photos of the station and radio equipment, recollections of a Member of the Engineering Staff of 1BCG, the electronic details and schematics of 1BCG and the Superheterodyne receiver Godley used, Paul Godley's story from the other side, a complete reprint of the February 1922 *QST* article, clippings from newspapers and magazines, and much more.

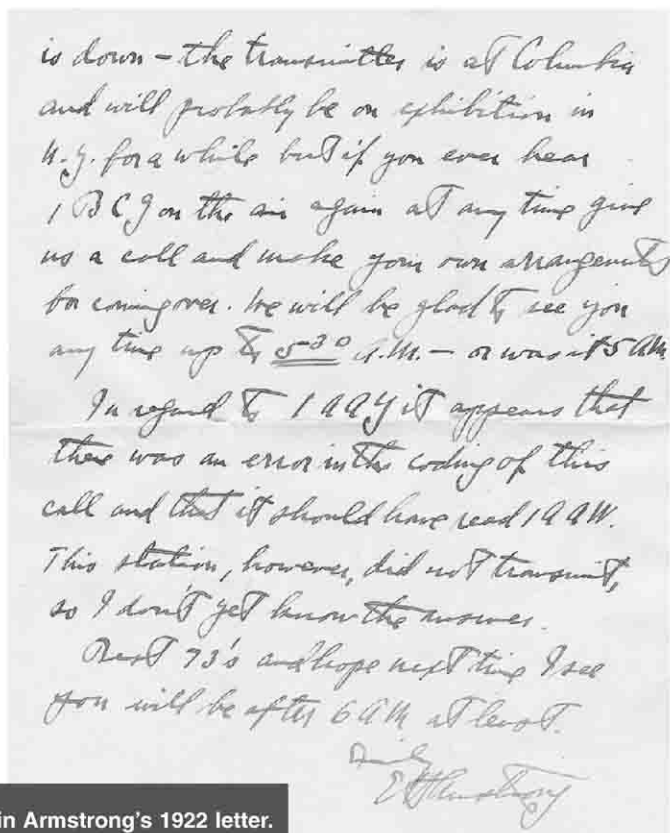
Homer Nichols, W1BM

I have learned a little more about Homer Nichols, W1BM, since then but not a whole lot. Thanks to Bob Merriam, W1NTE, of the New England Wireless and Steam Museum, I

¹1640 Florence Ave, Huntington, WV 25701. I paid \$10 for mine at a radio meet, but I suggest that you check with them first for actual cost, shipping, etc. This is a good quality 8 1/2 x 11, 78 page reprint whose title is *The Story of the First Trans-Atlantic Short Wave Message, Proceedings of the Radio Club of America, Inc, 1BCG Commemorative Issue, October 1950.*



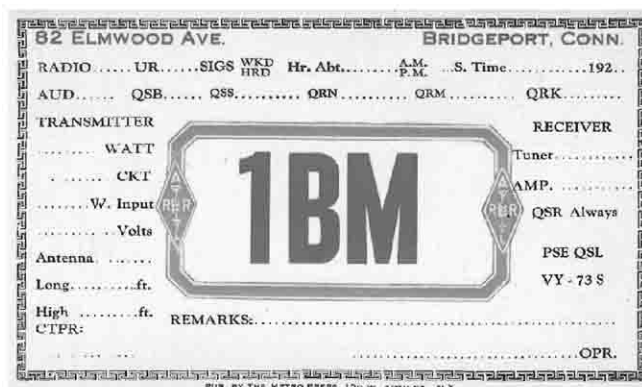
Edwin Armstrong's 1922 letter.



The cigar box that contained the Armstrong letter, among other interesting items.

received a copy of a QSL card Homer had sent to Stew Perry, W1BB, in 1950. In part he said on the card, "BM was assigned to a ham in Bridgeport back in 1912 but he went to college and after 1st World War I fell hair [sic] to it. Hiram P. Maxim was the 21st ham in New England District to get a license and mine was 23rd." Clearly, Homer Nichols was a very early ham and his call changed to 1BM after the War.

In 1950 he was running a Collins 30J at 400 W and using a



Homer Nichols' 1922 QSL card.

National HRO-5 receiver. He worked Stew on 3535 kHz. He still had the same station in 1959, as indicated on another card.

Homer was also a mentor. I received an e-mail message from Seth Horen, K1LOM, that said:

Homer Nichols was my Elmer. When I got interested in ham radio at age 12 (1957) he was the one who helped me get my novice license and even gave me the test! He also came to my house and put up my first antenna, climbing ladders and trees at about age 65! He also was responsible for my father getting his license a couple of years later.

If anyone knew Homer Nichols, W1BM, has a photo of him or can add to this story, please e-mail me. I'll share the information with K1LOM.

I'm not sure why the SK had the cigar box with Homer's papers; perhaps he had purchased them from W1BM's estate years earlier.

There are still a couple of other items in the cigar box to tell you about, but I'll save them for another day.

Look for my hat at the hamfests and say hello.—K2TQN QST