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OLD RADIO

Vacation Time and Radio Museums

Many collectors make it a point to visit radio museums when they travel. One of the best is located midway between Boston and New London, Connecticut, in historic Rhode Island. It is the New England Wireless and Steam Museum, situated in East Greenwich, only 10 minutes south of I-95 at exit 8.

Founded by a group led by Bob and Nancy Merriam, it was officially opened in 1964 by then Governor John H. Chafee. It started with a single building on their farm, a converted cow barn, and now consists of five buildings filled to capacity. Bob Merriam, W1NTE, has been a continuous member of the League since 1939 and a Life Member for many years.

What's There

The wireless building shows the span of electric communication from telegraph to TV. It features ham radio receivers and transmitters from the earliest days through to the 1960s. Also on display are keys, sounders, crystal sets, tubes, microphones, ocean cable instruments, spark transmitters, detectors, an 1881 Dolbear receiver, an 1899 Marconi coherer and a jigger, and a Marconi spark set exactly like the one used to call for help on the *Titanic* in 1912.

The foremost exhibit is the Massie Wireless System station, "PJ." Built in 1907, it is the oldest surviving working wireless station in the world! It was moved there in 1981 by museum volunteers to avoid demolition. The original location was on the beach in Point Judith, Rhode Island. Most remarkably, all of the equipment on display in the station is original to the station, except for the changeover switch that was assembled by collector and author Alan Douglas from original parts. The pump handle key, the Massie Resonaphone tuner and the operator call box are sitting on the original table. The condenser cabinet with its helix and straight spark gap are also on display. On the left wall and above the helix there is a hot wire ammeter and anchor gap.

Downstairs at the Massie building you will find a vintage working ham radio station maintained by the Fidelity Amateur Radio Club. Also in the station is the original 160-meter transmitter made famous and built by Stew Perry, W1BB.

In another downstairs room you will find the movie set from the 1999 PBS special, "Rescue at Sea." It is a replica of the steamship *Republic's* wireless cabin, complete with original wireless equipment of the same type used by the *Republic*. It became



Museum Director Bob Merriam, W1NTE, in the Fidelity Amateur Radio Club station, K1NQG, on the first floor of the Massie building.



Some of the early ham radio receivers on display in the wireless building.

famous when the *Republic* had to call for help after the collision in 1909 with the steamship *Florida* in dense fog.

Visiting the Museum

The New England Wireless and Steam Museum is run entirely by volunteers. Therefore, their efforts are mainly directed to hosting scheduled groups such as school classes, engineering societies, radio clubs or association meetings, etc. They do not have the staff to handle walk-in visitors except by prior arrangement. Thursday is "Volunteer Day," and there are usually people there between 9 AM and 4:30 PM. They ask you to please call 401-884-0545, fax 401-884-0683 or e-mail news@ids.net for an appointment.

July 29—Radio Meet at the Museum

The annual radio meet is the "Yankee Radio Tune-Up" on July 29, 2000. The gate opens at 8 AM (no early entry) and the meet runs until 3 PM. Admission is \$10 with free parking. There will be an Antique Radio Flea Market with Tailgaters selling a variety of radios and parts. The Fidelity Amateur Radio Club station, K1NQG, will be on the air in the Massie station building. A silent auction will be held during the morning to raise money for the museum, and it will feature some rare items. Coffee, donuts and soda are available. Bring your own lunch. Also, on July 22 the Yankee Chapter of QCWA will meet at the Museum.

Joining or Helping

Generous financial help from individuals supports the museum. So do admissions and proceeds from museum functions. The museum solicits no government grants, although the IRS recognizes it as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit institution. This museum deserves our support.



The 160-meter station of Stew Perry, W1BB.

For more Information

Please write: Robert W. Merriam W1NTE, Director, The New England Wireless and Steam Museum, 1300 Frenchtown Rd, East Greenwich, RI 02818-1424; tel 401-885-0545. You can also visit the museum's Web site at: <http://users.ids.net/~news/index.html>.

SEE YOU THERE

I'm planning to attend the Jersey Shore Hamfest in Bayville, New Jersey, with my mobile museum on August 13. See <http://members.aol.com/jsarsfest/.html> on the Web. Look for my call letters on my hat and say hello. —K2TQN

QST