Why “Radio Amateur News” is Here

Radio Amateur News, vol. 1 no. 1

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**R**ADIO AMATEUR NEWS with this issue makes its debut to the radio fraternity. At this occasion it may not be amiss to state the pertinent reasons for its existence and why as a matter of fact it just *had* to come.

This magazine is the logical outcome of many attempts to publish a purely Radio periodical, independent thruout and devoted to American Radio Amateurism.[[1]](#footnote-21)

In 1908 I started the first magazine in America in which were publisht many radio articles—MODERN ELECTRICS. Radio Amateurism being in its infancy then, could not support a purely radio magazine,—so MODERN ELECTRICS devoted only about one-quarter of its contents to radio. In 1913 I came out with the ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER. This magazine has been more prominent than any other on account of its very important radio section. Even during the war—with radio amateurism dead and nearly every radio magazine discontinued—the ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER, at a great financial loss, continued publishing radio articles uninterruptedly, month after month, to keep alive the radio spark in the hearts of our amateurs.

But now that the war is won,—now that the amateurs have won *their* war by defeating a proposed new law which would have destroyed American Radio Amateurism—we will witness the most wonderful expansion of the radio arts ever dreamt of. The amateur is here to stay and so is radio in general. I predict an astounding growth of the art during the next ten years. Every other house will have its radiophone, to converse with friends and relatives, for business and for pleasure. Marvelous inventions will be made in Radio during the next decade—unbelieveable now.

Because I am a staunch believer in the glorious future of Radio in America, I have launched RADIO AMATEUR NEWS. Its first issue will mark the time when amateur radio in America has come into its own again, when it has been re-born greater than ever—a Phenix rising more beautiful than before from his ashes.

I felt that the time was ripe for a purely radio magazine—a 100% radio magazine,—by and for the amateur. I felt that a magazine for the entire radio fraternity, be he scientist, advanced, or junior amateur, was badly needed, and that is why you are now reading this the first issue of the newcomer.

And here is the platform upon which RADIO AMATEUR NEWS stands. I pledge myself to a strict adherence to every plank:

lst. Only Radio—100% of it—*nothing else.*

2nd. An Organ for and by the amateur. The amateur’s likes and wants will always come first in this magazine.

3rd. Absolute Independence. RADIO AMATEUR NEWS has only one Boss—its readers. This magazine is not, nor will it ever be affiliated with any stifling, commercial radio interests whatsoever.[[2]](#footnote-22)

4th. Truth—first, last and always. When you see it in RADIO AMATEUR NEWS you may be sure that it is so. Not being affiliated with commercial radio interests, this magazine will have no reason to suppress important articles discoveries, etc.

5th. RADIO AMATEUR NEWS is and will be the sworn enemy of all adverse and unfair radio legislation. Our Washington representative will inform us immediately of any new radio legislative measures. No unfair bill will become a law before all amateurs have had their say.

6th. The uplift of American Radio Amateurism out of the “kid” class, into the serious status to which the art is entitled. Amateur Radio is not a plaything or a sport—it is a useful mind ennobling art—it vanquishes distances, it saves lives and it will be as necessary as the telephone ten years hence.

7th. Instructive first and last. Up-to-date scientific articles for your instruction will always have first place in RADIO AMATEUR NEWS. We shall publish purely scientific articles every month, articles that on account of their length are often crowded out of other publications.

8th. First in print with the News. You will find all important Radio News in this magazine from one to three months ahead of all other publications—always.

Now, my friends, it’s up to you how great and how big RADIO AMATEUR NEWS shall be. Its future is in your hands. We’re off……

Three cheers for American Radio Amateurism—

*Long live the Radio Amateur.*

1. *Radio News* debuted in 1919 as the standard bearer for a community of amateur experimenters during a period that was about to see a rapid shift in the industry away from independent tinkerers having private conversations, toward powerful corporations that produced consumer-friendly broadcast listening sets. But the magazine wasn’t altogether above buying into the broadcast craze of the 1920s. Tim Wu writes that *Radio News* eventually served as one of the first broadcast programming guides in the country’s history, publishing lists of each radio station in operation, along with their frequencies and “what one might expect to hear on them—a forerunner of the once hugely profitable *TV Guide.*” These lists of broadcast programming reveal that much of the chatter on the air as early as 1922 came from corporate sources: “many early stations were run by radio manufacturers such as Westinghouse, the pioneer of the ready-to-plug-in model [a claim Gernsback would certainly dispute], and RCA, both of which had an obvious interest in promoting the medium. Still many stations were run by amateurs, ’radio clubs, universities, churches, hotels, poultry farms, newspapers, the U.S. Army and Navy”

   Tim Wu, *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires*, (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2010), p. 39.

   *Radio News* became an increasingly confliced magazine into the 1920s, as it extoled the virtues of the amateur experimenter while being bankrolled by advertising revenue from RCA. An RCA advertisement appears in *Radio News* as early as January 1922. James Harbord, Lieutennant General in the Army during the Civil War and later President of RCA, wrote an editorial in a 1923 issue of the magazine explaining his company’s policy on buying and controlling radio patents.

   James Harbord, “General Harbord Explains the Patent Situation,” *Radio News*, 5, no. 3, (September 1923): 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
2. By 1928 the number of radio parts retailers and manufacturers had declined significantly with the rise of more consumer-friendly, complete radio sets. But when *Radio News* began to name specific radio parts and manufacturers in its articles, purportedly to make these endangered resources easier to find, readers cried foul. Many wrote in saying that the magazine’s articles seemed far too “inspired” by its advertisers. Gernsback responded:

   Against its better judgement, RADIO NEWS, during 1927, endeavored to better trade conditions by publishing manufacturers’ names and giving manufacturers’ specifications in its text pages; because it seemed that it would thus be made easier for the reader to buy suitable material than if no names were given and he had to guess them. In doing so, RADIO NEWS honestly believed that not only would it serve its readers, as it had always done, but the radio trade as well.

   It is, however, admitted now that this policy was wrong and, beginning with this issue, we revert to our former custom of not mentioning any manufacturers’ names or trademarks of parts and circuits of any kind in the text pages of RADIO NEWS. In that respect, we go back to our former practice of the years previous to 1927.

   . . . At no time, however, did RADIO NEWS reap any material benefit from specifying manufacturers’ names and materials. If any proof is wanted, the constant advertising shrinkage of RADIO NEWS during 1927 is glowing testimony of this fact. At no time did the trade (particularly the parts manufacturers) really support RADIO NEWS, in spite of its publishing their names and specifications quite freely.

   Hugo Gernsback, “Radio Movie,” *Science and Invention*, 16, no. 7, (November 1928): 622–623. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)