



It Seems to Us

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Present at the Creation

“ARRL Founding President Hiram Percy Maxim was in his 40s when he became fascinated with radio through his 11-year-old son. Neither of them could have known that it would lead to the formation of the organization we still have today.”

March 1914. The American Radio Relay League is but a gleam in the eyes of two enthusiastic Hartford radio amateurs: Hiram Percy Maxim, a noted inventor and industrialist, and his 17-year-old friend Clarence Tuska. Over the next couple of months they would persuade the Radio Club of Hartford, which they had helped to found in January of that year, to support them in getting the Relay League off the ground.

How Maxim and Tuska first met is one of the great American stories. If in 1911 a young high-school boy hadn't found the nerve to confront a prominent man at his own front door, it might never have happened — and the formation of the ARRL itself might never have occurred. Here is the story, excerpted from May 1979 *QST*, in the words of someone who witnessed it: Hiram Hamilton Maxim, HPM's son.

“In 1911, when I was a boy of 11, I had a schoolmate friend, John Garret, who had made a wireless set with which he could telegraph back and forth with another friend and schoolmate, Harmon Barber. John Garret lived on the corner of Farmington Avenue and Prospect Avenue in Hartford. I was living with my family at 550 Prospect Ave. The distance they bridged was three blocks. John had made the sending and receiving set himself from equipment then available.

“I told my father about John's wireless and further told him that he could telegraph back and forth with Harmon Barber. My father, being a little skeptical, suggested that he give John a short message to send to Harmon who would then telephone back the answer. This was done, the correct answer came back at once, and Hiram Percy Maxim was hooked on 'radio' from then on for the rest of his life.

“I was just as interested. Together we immediately started to get some kind of an outfit to put out a signal and to receive. He first bought a receiving set from a firm in New York, but it was so unsatisfactory that something had to be done. My father saw in Harris Parker's toy store at the corner of Ann and Asylum Streets in Hartford a receiving set for sale that looked much more sophisticated than what we had. He bought it and brought it home one evening. We went right at it with great excitement, but couldn't seem to make it work, to our intense disappointment. So, the next day he sadly took it back to Harris Parker's.

“The next evening, the doorbell rang. My father answered the door and found a rather unusual-looking young man with black hair and brilliant, striking, greenish eyes. He said his name was Clarence Tuska, that he had made the set my father had just returned and he had come to find out why my father couldn't make it work. At that moment began a lifelong association between the two in the radio world that led to the founding of the American Radio Relay League, the C. D. Tuska Radio Company, and a close association with all of us in many ways.”

Clarence Tuska had put the receiver in the toy store for sale on consignment. On going to the store to collect his money, he'd found the set on a rear counter and was told, “The man who took the set returned it and said it was no good.” His recollection of the encounter that followed is captured in “A Memorable Meeting,” January 1964 *QST*:

“I came directly to the point, and give or take a word or two, I can almost remember saying in one breath: ‘Mr Maxim, I am the boy who made the wireless set you got at Harris Parker's and you returned it saying it was no good and I want to know why!’

“This was obviously no trivial matter to be handled at the open door. Either we were to be shut out or invited in. I was never sure what prompted him to ask us in other than he was naturally kindly and always gentlemanly. He quickly disposed of the ‘no good’ comment by explaining: ‘I did not tell Mr Parker that it was no good or did not work. I told him it would not serve my purpose and that I wanted something better — something more professional.’ Before we said good night, [we] had Mr Maxim's order for a loose coupler, a variable condenser, a crystal detector and a pair of Brandes Navy phones.”

Hiram Percy Maxim was President of ARRL from its formal creation 100 years ago until his death 22 years later. Tuska, the League's first Secretary and first Editor of *QST*, served in the Signal Corps during World War I and ultimately followed a path into radio manufacturing and patent law. His amateur license lapsed, but he maintained an interest in the League's growth and progress until his death in 1985.

From loose couplers to packet radio; from spark to space. All that progress spanned but a single lifetime. Hiram Hamilton Maxim, the instigator of his father's interest in radio and witness to all that followed, saw his father, HPM, revered after his death in 1936 by generations of radio amateurs until his own death in 1992.

How different, how empty, our Amateur Radio world would be had it not been for two extraordinary personalities: the schoolboy and the inventor.

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