



It Seems to Us

David Sumner, K1ZZ — dsumner@arri.org
ARRL Chief Executive Officer

Happy Birthday to Us!

“Applications for ARRL membership were first solicited and accepted on May 18, 1914. While we are celebrating the Centennial all year, the official 100th ‘birthday’ of the ARRL happens to fall on the Sunday of the Dayton Hamvention®. Come for cake!”

From the first, members have been the essence of the ARRL. Our founding officers, Maxim and Tuska, soon realized that the work of the ARRL was more than a couple of people in Hartford could handle and that a democratic framework for its governance was needed. On February 28, 1917 they met in New York City with four other leading amateurs. In the subsequent days the group hammered out a Constitution and elected an initial Board of Direction and officers. ARRL members were to elect the Board of Direction on an at-large basis every 2 years. The Board of Direction was to appoint six regional Division Managers who in turn would appoint District Superintendents, roughly equivalent to today's Section Managers. Headquarters was to be in New York City rather than Hartford.

But a much larger event soon intervened: the entry of the United States into the war. The May 1917 issue of *QST* that announced the new Constitution also carried the news that all amateur stations were to be closed and dismantled until further notice. The League's affairs were put into abeyance. Four more issues of *QST* were published, devoted mainly to recruiting amateurs to join the war effort, but with amateurs forbidden to carry on “radiotelegraphic experiments” of any kind the editor volunteered for military service and *QST* ceased for the duration.

The re-emergence of the ARRL right after the war is an oft-told tale that need not be repeated here. Soon after, in January 1922 every ARRL member was given the opportunity to vote for 17 of 22 candidates for the Board of Direction. Despite being elected on an at-large basis, the new Board members came from throughout the country and included a Canadian, reflecting the earlier request by Canadian amateurs that the ARRL include them in its Operating Department. This new Board set to work putting itself out of business by drafting a new Constitution and By-Laws. It provided for election to the Board of Directors on a regional basis, with any 10 members in a division able to nominate a candidate for Director of their division. A Canadian General Manager was to be elected separately in a similar manner. (Our relationship with Canada has an interesting history that we'll tell in a later issue this year.) The new Constitution was adopted on December 18, 1923.

The first elections under the new Constitution were held in April 1924 with ballots counted on May 1 and the new Board taking office on July 1. Thus, we now mark not only the Centennial of our national association but the 90th anniversary of our representative, democratic system of governance. Details have changed over time but its basic principles — geographic representation and a low threshold for nomination — have remained the same and have served the ARRL, its members, and all of Amateur Radio very well.

It is rare for the governing body of a non-profit organization to be as open to selection and participation by its members as is the ARRL Board of Directors. Non-profit boards generally are made up of people who have been recruited, either for their capacity for fundraising or for their likelihood to agree with whoever is doing the recruiting, be that a nominating committee or an individual. If members are offered a choice it tends to be from among a field of prescreened candidates. None of that applies to the ARRL Board. There are some basic qualifications to be met — 21 years of age and continuous membership and licensing for at least 4 years — but beyond that, just about any member who can get 10 signatures on a nominating petition is eligible to run for Director or Vice Director. In 2006 the Board made a significant change in the eligibility requirements, removing an absolute bar against service on the Board by anyone who might conceivably have a conflict of interest and replacing it with a more flexible policy that permits service except in the case of a “pervasive and continuing” conflict.

Geographic representation is another important element of the ARRL's time-tested governance model. While most of today's 15 divisions are geographically large, it is reasonable for an ARRL member who attends conventions and hamfests to expect to see his or her Director in person once in a while. E-mail makes every ARRL official accessible to every member, but it is always good to be able to have some “face time” with the person who represents you. And while radio waves don't stop at division boundaries any more than they do at national borders, members' interests, concerns, and priorities tend to be a bit different in different parts of the country.

In reviewing the list of ARRL membership benefits the other day it occurred to us that we don't often talk about the greatest benefit of all: the right to participate in choosing one of the organization's 15 volunteer policymakers, or even to *become* one of those policymakers by earning the support of the members in your division. For 9 decades, the open selection process has given the ARRL engaged, dedicated leadership with a single objective: serving the best interests of Amateur Radio. It has given us the successful organization that we have today, one that is in its eighth straight year of membership growth and has 100 candles on its birthday cake.

And that is well worth celebrating.