

REPORT OF THE HISTORICAL COMMITTEE  
January, 2013

In January 2000 the ARRL Board created a Historical Committee “to develop a plan for storage of historical artifacts and archival material related to Amateur Radio, and to explore means for future public access and display of such material.”

In the ensuing years, part-time staff and volunteers, including staff members have generously volunteered countless hours of their time to this effort. In the absence of any statement as to the Board’s vision or expectations regarding use of the collections, these individuals have used their experience and best judgment to manage, catalog and accept subsequent additions to the collections. An article by Michael Marinaro, WN1M, describing the work of those dedicated long time volunteers is attached this report. The article will appear in the February 2013 *QST*.

This past July, recognizing the need to strengthen the efforts to protect, preserve and provide access to the items in our Collections, the Board adopted a policy, recommended by the Historical Committee, as to the acquisition, access, care and use of the Historical Collections. The premise of the newly adopted Policy is that if we are to know, appreciate and use the treasures in the collections, we need to understand what is in the collections, and how to access, care for and permit use of those items. The committee and the board recognized the Policy and the accompanying Terms of Reference were not an end, but were the next necessary step in this process.

ARRL actually has several historical collection activities. In the past when a knowledgeable volunteer or part-time staffer expressed an interest in a particular activity or area, they were encouraged to work in that area. The result has been significant progress in some areas, but the efforts have understandably followed the areas of particular interests of the volunteers. We have not provided a coordinated vision as to the purpose for having a historical collection or how the collection fits in as an ARRL activity. For example, the cataloging tools used to list and catalog documents and images are different from the tools to list equipment and artifacts. The cataloging tools being used at present are useful to the volunteers working in those areas but more challenging to anyone not regularly using the tool. Additionally, the records reside on the in house server and are only accessible on the premises.

In July we reminded the Board of the mountain of documents, equipment and artifacts that need to be cataloged and organized if they are to be anything more than things in a file cabinet or box. The simple fact is that current volunteers simply don’t have the necessary time or resources to do the job without help and direction from the Board.

The recently adopted Historical Collections Policy and Terms of Reference are good tools but they cannot operate in a vacuum. The Policy and TOR tell us how to proceed. Now the Historical Committee

and dedicated volunteers need to know the objective. What is the Board's vision and expectation for use of the ARRL Historical Collection?

At some point the Board will have to decide why we have a historical collection and how those items should be used. While documents and images are presently at minimal risk of deterioration, a fire in the building or other event that activates the sprinkler system could change that status in an instant; Equipment is a different matter. Much of the equipment and artifacts are in boxes stored in a big pile in the warehouse. These items were moved to the warehouse when the lobby was remodeled. The lists of contents are sketchy, so in a real sense we aren't even sure what is in those boxes

In 1998 the ARRL Lobby Project Report stated in part:

“We believe the proper archiving of equipment that has historical significance to the Amateur Radio Service is a function in which the national association should be a participant. “

In 1999 to the ARRL Board, Director Jim Maxwell, W6CF, recognized the need to evaluate the costs and benefits involved in storing, cataloging, and displaying such historic material. Today we face the same questions present in 1999.

In 2013, more than thirteen years after W6CF's proposal, in the face of ARRL Centennial we still haven't decided and articulated a vision for our historical collection. In fact we still don't have a good idea of what is in the collection. Every time I look at photos of that stack of deteriorating boxes in the warehouse I think of a phrase from “Big Yellow Taxi” an old song by Joni Mitchell; “...[Y]ou don't know what you've got till it's gone.” Unless we develop a vision, plan for action and provide a mechanism for implementing the plan with volunteers or staff, our past will be our future.

The committee would respectfully suggest the following goals for the ARRL Historical Collection are consistent with the collection Guidelines and Policies adopted by the Board this past July:

1. The ARRL Historical Collection documents and records shall be open and accessible to members and the public.
2. There shall be a prominent display of significant ARRL Historical Collection equipment and artifacts. The contents of the display which shall be changed on regular basis.
3. The Historical Collection documents should be accessible online and images of collection equipment and artifacts would be viewable in a virtual museum.

As always we have options. Three options are set out. Though we haven't attached a specific budget a general cost framework is presented with each option.

Option 1. Status Quo. This would amount to continuing to assert the value of a historical collection with little support for the activity. (No Additional Cost)

Option 2. Commit to a small historical collection at ARRL HQ with changing artifacts from the collection and develop an On-line Museum. This would involve acquisition of a quality scanner(s), digital camera and accessories for item imaging, small to medium collection cataloging software program, funding for staff training, funding for soliciting and minimal support for volunteers, funding for staff training of volunteers, funding for prospective storage of significant artifacts, documents and images. Refining the mechanism for disposition of non-significant artifacts. (one option might be including surplus or non-significant historical items in the ARRL Auction) (The commitment cost could vary based on the timetable for implementation. The minimum initial year cost would be \$20,000)

Option 3. A scaled down and serially implemented version of Option 2, acquisition of a quality scanner(s), digital camera and accessories for item imaging, small to medium collection cataloging software program and, funding for staff training. This would be followed by seeking volunteers, and training of staff to supervise volunteers. Refining the mechanism for disposition of non-significant artifacts could be included early on if supervised volunteer could be found to assist in inventorying boxes to determine surplus or non-significant historical items in the ARRL Auction. (The cost would vary based on the timetable for implementation. The minimum initial year cost would be \$7,500)

The Historical Committee respectfully seeks the guidance, vision and funding approval of the ARRL to proceed to implement the Guidelines and Terms of Reference approved in July 2012

Respectfully submitted,

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