

Listening In Articles

March 2010

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Radio Golf

The following offers an explanation of how DXing and QSLing took root amongst radio enthusiasts in the early 1920s.

In some quarters it became a mark of distinction if you could pick up a station from a great distance away, and DX Clubs were formed throughout the province for those eager to participate in the sport of DXing or "Radio Golf" (DX being the telegrapher's shorthand for "distance"). Avid listeners spent entire evenings scouring the dial, stopping at any one station only long enough to get its call letters and calculate how far away it was, before moving on. The one who amassed the greatest number of miles on a particular night would be declared winner. As could be expected, hot disputes often arose when an alleged mileage was considered suspect enough to warrant a challenge. The only sure way to settle any disagreement was to write the station or stations in question, saying you heard a certain program at a certain time, and ask for a verification card which provided indisputable proof of your claim. All stations kept these cards handy in order to reply quickly to such requests.

From the book "On Air: Radio in Saskatchewan" by Wayne Schmalz, 1990, in a chapter describing radio in the 1920s.

What was the origin of this term "Radio Golf"?

Some have attributed it to Frank H. Jones, who owned an amateur radio station in Cuba and was also an avid DXer.

In his article entitled "Set-Backs and Come-Backs at 6KW: A Story of the Building and Operating of the Well-Known Amateur Broadcasting Station in Tuinucu, Cuba" and published in *Radio Broadcast*

magazine, September 1923, he states:

"I began playing the game of 'Radio Golf' a couple of years ago, and after I had made a score of more than 100,000 miles I quit keeping track. My real object in starting the game was to get people really to know how to use their detectors. My watchword was always: 'What I can't hear on detector alone can't be heard on audio amplification.'"

Credit: <http://www.vacuumtubeera.net/RadioBroadcast-Vol-03-1923-09.pdf>

DXer John Callarman, writing on the mailing list for the International Radio Club of America on March 08, 2007, says "The late Carleton Lord, in a treatise he did for the NRC book, noted that Radio Golf, an invention of Frank H. Jones, owner of a station in Cuba, was introduced in the Aug. 5, 1922 edition of *Radio Broadcasting News*."

So it appears Mr. Jones authored two articles, in 1922 and 1923, in which he takes credit for coining the term "Radio Golf". Whether he was the first to use it or not will never be known with certainty, but that doesn't really matter, because the phrase soon passed from common use. The action it described has continued to this day, however, in a modified form and to varying degrees, as DXers still "collect" countries, stations, frequencies and QSLs.

