IN REVIEW:

The Early Shortwave Stations —
A Broadcasting History Through 1945

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The Early Shortwave Stations —
A Broadcasting History Through 1945
By Jerome S. Berg
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118 photos; appendix, notes, bibliography, index

I have to wonder if Dr. Emmett “Doc” Brown, Christopher Lloyd’s character in the movie Back to the Future, had DNA similar to that of Jerome (Jerry) Berg.

I’ve known Jerry for something like 40 years and he never told me he was an inventor. And yet he must be because, like Doc Brown, Photo A, Jerry has gone back in time as far as 1901 and took us back to the earliest days of shortwave, beginning when Marconi first transmitted the letter “S” from England to Newfoundland that December.

Jerry must have employed his own version of Doc Brown’s “flux capacitor” in order to throw us back to those days and later to the earliest amateur efforts at communicating via radio with equipment that today looks like jury-rigged arrangements that wouldn’t even cut it as an old-fashioned decent electronics repair shop today.

Following a look at the various early efforts to communicate by radio, Berg moves into the field of commercial wireless and then the beginnings of “real radio:” U.S. medium-wave broadcasters using AM, coupled with a shortwave service — sort of a precursor to today’s relay arrangements, without the satellites.

KDKA in Pittsburgh, Photo B, was soon followed by several of the other big stations, among them WBZ (Boston), Photo C; WJZ (Detroit), Photo D; WOC (Davenport); and

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Photo C. According to the WBZ Radio website <http://cbsloc.al/1sltUZ>, “WBZ Radio and WBZ-TV moved to the existing studios back in 1948. About a year earlier, the building’s cornerstone was placed. Along with it, a time capsule was buried. It’s said to contain a taped transcription of a WBZ program, some 1947 Boston newspapers, a copy of the popular book “Tom Swift and His Photo Telephone,” and predictions about the future of radio and TV by various editors of newspapers and magazines.” (Internet screen grab)

WWW (Schenectady), which had two shortwave relays — 2XAF using 9150 and others and 2XAD on 11370 and others.

In rapid succession, the following years saw the further development of shortwave, with signals coming from Australia, South Africa, Venezuela, Cuba, Ecuador, England, Holland, Germany, and several others. Shortwave was springing to life everywhere.

It’s a delight — married to a pang of envy — when one looks at the national advertisements sporting lines like “Hear Stations the World Over” and “DX From All The World” featured in widely read newspapers and magazines.

In those days everyone knew about radio and DXing — and you weren’t looked upon as some sort of oddball geek who spent all your hours hanging out in the basement with earphones clamped on your head. Today, guys like that are computer freaks, (some of them pulling in big bucks) and not subsisting on weekly allowances from their parents.

Many of the most well-known radio receiver manufacturers (GE, RCA, Crosley, Westinghouse, and others) were actively engaged not only in the manufacture of radios but also were providing programs to broadcast to those receivers. It was as if ICOM had its own station, in the hope you were listening to its programming on an ICOM R-3200!

Personally, I was rather taken aback to find mentions of and QSL reproductions from so many stations that I had heard, verified, and remember fondly. (NOTE: I’m not THAT old! — WPC9GLD.)

For example, the likes of PCJ (Holland), South Africa’s SABC, Cable and Wireless Ltd., La Voz del Tropico (Costa Rica), All India Radio, VLO (Australia), Radio Clube de Angola, and a number of others. In addition there were QSLs or photographs of government-owned stations that were familiar to me but, whose names or call letters had been changed before I got around to logging them.

Yes, the book is a bit pricey, but you are buying years of enjoyment and information. With 340 pages and lots of illustrations this is a fastidiously-researched book. It is one to be read, treasured, and referred to often, if only for the memories it generates.

“Flux capacitor” or not, this is one heck of a work. Let’s hope it’s not Jerry Berg’s last