

QSLs Give Life to Radio History

By Jerry Berg

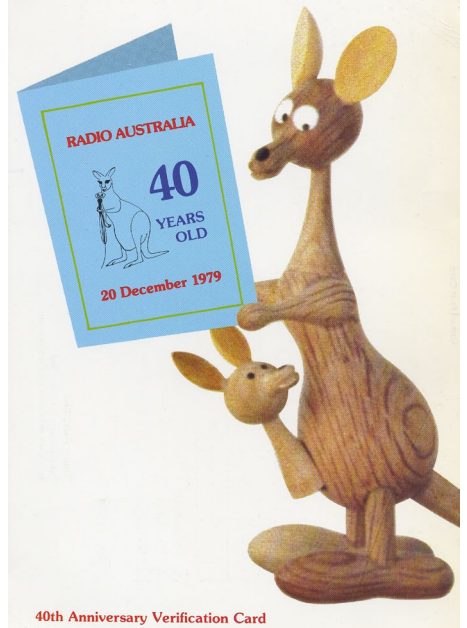
(QSLs are from the author's collection or the collection of the Committee to Preserve Radio Verifications unless otherwise stated.)

In October, *MT* looked at how QSLs can reflect political history ("Looking at QSLs and Seeing History"). This time we examine QSLs that remind us of events in *radio* history. Some of these events may be of large importance, others small, some of relevance to the general radio world, others only to DXers. But they all bring back memories of bygone days.

Some QSLs are of historic importance simply because of their age or the significance of the period when they operated. It is difficult not to feel

a special fascination for the QSLs from stations of the 1930s, such as Radio Tokyo, Deutscher Kurzwellessender ("Zeesen"), EIAR (Rome), the American "X" stations (W2XAF, W3XAL, W8XX, etc.), VK2ME of pre-Radio Australia days, etc. These pioneers of shortwave broadcasting operated at a time when both the technical capabilities of the medium and its propaganda value were being explored for the first time. In the mid-1930s, shortwave broadcasting was barely ten years old, and to the general radio-listening public, hearing signals over long distances was quite amazing.

Some QSLs are historic because they are from stations that operated in bands or modes now largely forgotten. In the 1930s there were the Apex broadcast stations that operated around 30 MHz. Despite their supposedly local character, they were often heard halfway around the world. There were also the "high fidelity" stations operating with wide bandwidths just above the standard broadcast band, and the early FM stations that transmitted around 40 MHz. Other historic broadcast band events would include the



40th Anniversary Verification Card

Radio Australia issued this good-looking card in 1979 to commemorate its 40th year on the air.



There had always been some leased-time shortwave broadcasting, especially among religious stations, but its expansion in the 1990s changed the fundamentals of the medium. Now you no longer needed your own transmitter. Most new "stations" simply leased time over a relatively small number of high-power transmitters. As this QSL shows, one of the locations from which the Voice of Hope, a California-based religious broadcaster, transmitted was Georgia, in the former Soviet Union.

广播收听证

亲爱的朋友:

兹证明您80年11月5日的收听报告, 频率4865千周, 符合本台节目。欢迎继续告诉我们收听情况。

甘肃人民广播电台
1982年4月9日

For decades it was impossible to QSL Chinese regional stations. Within the QSLing fraternity, the change in policy in the early 1980s, after which these stations started verifying, was very well received. This QSL is from the Gansu People's Broadcasting Station, Lanzhou.

BETHANY RELAY STATION VOICE OF AMERICA

September 23, 1944
November 14, 1994

The VOA station in Bethany, Ohio closed down in 1994. The feelings of the staff were amply conveyed by this black-bordered QSL, which read, on the back: "It is with great sadness that I confirm your reception of the final days of the Bethany Relay Station. Bethany has served the United States proudly for 50 years. 73 and thank you for being there for us."



Some QSLs are of historical interest just because of their age or the identity of the station. This QSL from Radio Tokyo is for reception six months prior to Pearl Harbor.



In the days before Fidel, the Cuban shortwave bands were home to numerous private broadcasters. This 1957 QSL is from Circuito Nacional Cubano, which operated on 11740 kHz. Its predecessor network, known as Radio Habana Cuba, was one of the country's major radio chains.



Relaisender
Sri Lanka



After a long gestation, the Deutsche Welle relay station at Trincomalee, Sri Lanka, began initial tests in 1984, but it did not reach full operation for five more years, and it suffered shut-downs even later. Its operation was plagued with terrorist attacks, local harassment and other problems.

One of the first, if not the first, European pirate stations heard on shortwave in the United States was the Free Radio Broadcasting Co. Although its address was in Holland, it was believed to be transmitting from the U.K.; and the power shown, 6 kW, was open to question. Europirates were heard in the U.S. starting in 1978.

super power (500 kW) broadcasting of WLW, Cincinnati, Ohio on 700 kHz, and the Mexican "border blasters."

Some QSLs serve as reminders of places where the shortwave broadcasting landscape, now barren, was once rich. In the pre-Castro days there were numerous private shortwave stations operating from Cuba. They met their demise when Fidel took power. In Tangier, until private stations were forced to close down at the end of 1959, the shortwave scene was a good reflection of the city's open character, with a multitude of stations and broadcasters, many of them related to one another in ways that were always confusing.

On the other side of the ledger, some QSLs are from places where private shortwave broadcasting was long forbidden but now permitted. In the former Soviet Union, private shortwave stations first appeared during the days of glasnost and perestroika. During most of the twentieth century, hearing, let alone QSLing, a religious station in Russia could hardly have been imagined. Suddenly

To SWL-42, Haskell, N.J.

We thank You for the report on our 28 Mc signals. At the time You heard us we were using an input power of 600 W to a pair of HF 300 tubes and a bidirectional four element fixed beam antenna („lazy H") which was directional E-W.

OIX-7

The transmitter is an experimental one, built for testing simple directional antennas and observing the max. usable frequency.

Remarks *Thanks for the report Am.*
R8 - 28.3° KC 712 AM EST 2/23/47



- OIX-1 6120 kc/s 15 kW
- OIX-2 9500 kc/s 10 kW
- OIX-4 15190 kc/s 10 kW
- OIX-5 17800 kc/s 1 kW

The Finnish Broadcasting Company
Helsinki, Finland.
K. J. Jams Operator
042/104

Special broadcasts may be meaningful events for those who hear them, even if their place in the broader history of radio is small. This QSL is from special low power tests on 28 MHz that were conducted by the Finnish Broadcasting Co. in 1947.

PANAMERICAN RADIO - TANGIER (Morocco) AFRICA



With greetings from us and thanking you for your report of 4, 5 & 6th July, 1952, which we verify as correct.

7300 kc/s
39, Boulevard Pasteur
B. P. O. Box 49

Tangier 20th August, 1952.

Few places have a more colorful shortwave history than Tangier, which was administered as an international city from 1945 to 1956. During that time, and until private shortwave broadcasting was closed down by the Moroccan government at the end of 1959, Tangier was host to a variety of broadcasters. Panamerican Radio was one of several Tangier anchor stations.

WANTED
by
EVERYONE

6000 WATTS
of
Freedom

THE FREE RADIO BROADCASTING COMPANY

↓

QSL

THE FREE RADIO BROADCASTING COMPANY

FREQ. 6214.5 KHZ

S.I.N.P.O.

NAME JERRY BERG

DATE 29-1-78

TIME 0931-1000 GMT

PO BOX 41 DEDEMSVAART
HOLLAND

THE VOICE OF FREEDOM
FOR YOU



The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19)

For over 50 years the notion of private shortwave broadcasting from the Soviet Union was unthinkable. Things changed in 1991, and Radio Center was one of many private broadcasters which, while not allowed their own transmitters, were permitted time on the state shortwave network.



Even some domestic U.S. pirate stations have made their mark in radio history. In 1978 the signal of WFAT, transmitting from Brooklyn on a frequency just above the standard broadcast band, was often heard up and down the east coast with live listener call-ins. WFAT was the subject of a major write-up in *The New York Times* shortly after the FCC closed it down in 1979.

it was possible.

And some QSLs are from stations with historical radio significance that may not be readily apparent. HCJB, in addition to being for decades one of the first stations heard by many novice SWLs, was the first private religious broadcaster on shortwave. And KDKA, commonly recognized as the "first" American standard broadcast station, was, by way of its shortwave outlet 8XK, also the first shortwave broadcaster.

While American pirate broadcasting, at least on shortwave, has been mainly the home of radio rascals, pirate broadcasting in Europe was a serious part of broadcast history. The Europirates, which started out on AM and FM around 1959, played a fundamental role in breaking the state monopolies on broadcasting. Eventually some went on shortwave, where they became good targets for U.S. DXers.

A QSL may not necessarily be of major historical significance but may still chronicle a memorable radio event. Hams and ham band DXers are used to QSLs from special event stations. There are also numerous "special event" QSLs from broadcast stations – for test broadcasts and for programs transmitted on special occasions, such as the opening of a new radio facility, a program dedicated to a club or to a particular historical figure, and so forth. The Radio St. Helena Day broadcasts are probably the best known of the shortwave broadcasting special events of recent years.

Many stations of long standing have marked their anniversaries with a special QSL (Deutsche Welle's 30th, Radio Canada International's 40th,



In 1934, the FCC set aside a few channels above the standard broadcast band for stations wishing to experiment with wideband "high fidelity" transmissions. W6XAI in Bakersfield, California was one of four stations so licensed. The experiment ended in 1941.

Radio New Zealand's 50th, Radio France International's 60th). Alas, not every station reaches its next anniversary; shortwave closedowns are becoming all too common. Verifications from stations now silent take on new importance, as do the special QSLs that some stations have issued on their last day of broadcasting. The last day QSL from Radio Berlin International is probably the best known of these. Earlier this year, when Radio Prague left shortwave, it issued a QSL bearing a special "last day" endorsement.

Once upon a time, shortwave stations transmitted almost exclusively from their own transmitters. Then came dedicated relay stations – transmitters located in other countries but dedicated to broadcasting the programs of their owners. The VOA and BBC relay stations are examples. This was followed by exchanging time among relay station owners, and then leased-time broadcasting, where a "station" has no transmitter of its own but rather produces programs and rents transmitter time from one of the large stations selling air time. Practically all of the new shortwave broadcasters are of this type; new listening targets in terms of broadcast organizations, but not new

transmitter sites. Most of the leased-time stations QSL in the same way as stations that operate their own transmitters.

Finally, for the dedicated QSLer, history is made when QSLs begin flowing from places previously known for *not* QSLing. The best example is China, from whose regional stations a QSL was almost impossible to obtain until the policy changed in the 1980s. There are many examples of stations that have gone for long or short periods without QSLing, and then began replying. These include Radio Botswana, Radio Bhutan, even the venerable BBC. They may not have been major historical events in the grand sweep of broadcasting history, but they were welcomed by QSL-collecting DXers.

About the Author

Jerry Berg has been active in shortwave circles for over 50 years. He has written three books on shortwave history and many articles about shortwave listening. He is the chair of the Committee to Preserve Radio Verifications, a member of the NASWA Executive Council, and co-producer of www.ontheshortwaves.com. He can be reached at jsberg@rcn.com.

