

# Shortwave Center

April 1983

Editor: John C. Herkimer, 3233 East Avenue, Caledonia, NY 14423

## The Mystique of the QSL by Al Sizer

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"When it occurs that your report to them was as much a thrill to them as hearing their programming was for you, well....that's dynamite!" says Ralph W. Perry of Euless, Texas.

"My QSL collection has moved with me three times already and would certainly go with me again if I should move from my present home," declares William S. Sparks, the San Francisco lawyer.

"To me, QSLs are an essential part of the hobby because they provide something tangible for my DXing efforts," writes Jerry Berg, another DXing attorney from Lexington, Massachusetts.

"I am proud of QSLs and I use my collection to illustrate my point of view that neither tape recordings nor any other substitute can replace them," explains Prof. Richard E. Wood of Saudi Arabia, who uses QSLs in teaching.

Gerry Dexter, the Lake Geneva, Wisconsin DXer who has the incredible total of more than 1200 stations verified, compares QSLs to family photo albums. "How often do you get it out and look at it? Not very frequently, I suspect. But there's no way you'd trade them and you're glad they exist. I think it's the same way with QSLs."

"If we were to leave Hillsdale, Missouri, there's no question but what I'd take my QSLs along," informs Marlin A. Field who specializes in religious verifications which a college is interested in for a permanent collection.

"I'll keep QSLs with me during moves," declares John Campbell, Okehampton, Devon, U.K. "For disposal via a will, I'll try to find a good museum with interests in collections devoted to radio."

"QSLs to me are not 'unwept, unhonored and unsung'--they, to me, are important reminders of stations heard in the past," adds Bill Matthews of Columbus, Ohio.

John J. Moritz, Jr., the Youngstown, Ohio shortwave columnist and former editor sums it up: "As far as QSLs go, they remain dear to my heart at all times. The main point is that QSLs, perhaps more than anything else in this hobby, are and remain a personal achievement."

The above opinions came to me as the result of a questionnaire I sent to a group of DXers whom I knew by reputation to have outstanding collections of QSLs. What I was seeking specifically was their answers to the question, "After the challenge and thrill of obtaining that verification is over, what part does your QSL collection play in your DX life from then on?" I wanted to know whether they ever looked at them as time passed and what they thought would happen to their verifications eventually.

My respondents answered all these questions, but they went beyond them for other information and comments about verifications that caused me to enlarge the title of this article to, "The Mystique of the QSL".

For me, and I hope for other DXers, it explains a lot about QSLs and tells me, for instance, why it is that during a year when I sought no verifications, my interest in the hobby generally waned. It seemed to me that reproducing the views of these expert QSLers in some length would be valuable. And please note! Not one of these verie seekers talks about them "proving" his reception. Other facets of QSLing interest them more.

Let's run down their views in detail....

RALPH PERRY: "In my opinion, to DX but not to QSL is to marry but not have children. It is the second greatest satisfaction in the hobby (the first being experienced in those fleeting moments when one knows he is hearing something unique, has found something absolutely new, is the first on a new station). To make tangible an intangible experience seems to me the most human of responses to our hobby.

I enjoy crafting the very best report possible, one which I hope will be a true source of enjoyment to those on the reading end at the station I've just heard. They've given me real joy via their transmission and it only seems appropriate that one should attempt to return some of the same their way.

My enjoyment of QSLing has increased immeasurably since I got off the country-chasing treadmill, when I finished logging what was possible. Now my reports go solely to new DX stations, usually LAs. I have about 750 stations QSL'd on SWBC, 215 HIC on the NASWA list. Of these, 45 are Indos, 1 a Brazilian and about 500 are LAs. Of these, 54 are Peruvian, 43 are HCs and Bolivia and Colombia have 35 each.

My approach to QSLing has been greatly influenced by personal visits to stations in Latin America and Indonesia. At some of these poorer operations I was distressed to see the quick slam-bang xeroxed form-letter "send me a QSL" type of reports. At most DX stations, which by definition are low-powered locals, foreign reports are not particularly wanted or sought. So these types of arrogant reports really hit the heights of offensiveness.

I try to make my report something the station personnel will want to answer. I was most amused, and at the same time dismayed, by Ian McFarland's mini-series over Radio Canada's DX show, dealing with reporting standards. He said 10 minutes is the absolute minimum for a report! Ten minutes!?!? If one is keeping such a close watch on the clock and is that anxious to 'get off the frequency', please don't bother the station with your worthless report. A report should last for as long as one can hear a station and take down details of interest."

BILL SPARKS: "My QSL collection starts back in 1934 and goes to 1939 when I dropped out of serious DXing for college and over four years in the Army. Then it picks up again in 1962 up to the present. Currently I have 756 SWBC, as defined by NASWA, stations verified. While I don't consider that I specialize in any particular area, my favorite QSLs and the area I work the hardest on, is Indonesia where I now have 64 verifications.

I keep the QSLs in albums similar to photo albums and try to keep everything segregated by countries as closely as possible. I have separate albums for Europe, Africa and the Pacific. Because of the large number QSLed from the Americas and Asia, I have more than one album for these.

I have the Indonesians in a separate album plus a very large album for the balance of Asia and the Middle East. I have another very large album for Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, a separate album for the balance of South America and two albums for North America (one for Cuba, Canada, Mexico and the U.S. and the other for Central America and the Caribbean.)

I don't spend a lot of time going through the albums. I frequently review an album when I am putting a new QSL into it. The main time the albums are in use is when I have a visiting DXer who is interested or even a casual visitor who is not a DXer but interested in seeing them after seeing all the pennants on the wall.

My QSL collection has moved with me three times already and would certainly go with me again if I should move from my present home. However, I have never given any particular thought to what I would want to have happen to them in the event of death. I can't see why anyone would really want or have any use for another's QSLs other than an immediate member of the family."

(To be continued next month)

# Shortwave Center

May 1983

Editor: John C. Herkimer, 3233 East Avenue, Caledonia, NY 14423

For those who wondered, that was the real Charlie L. last month. Since his much-heralded exodus to Tibet some years ago, 'ol CL has remained silent...until now! Thanks to Charlie's intermediary (who shall remain nameless), CL will be with us again, here in SWC, on a semi-regular basis, to enlighten (and humble) us. Need I say more? Great to have you back!

## The Mystique of the QSL by Al Sizer



Nous vous remercions de votre rapport d'écoute du 10 Novembre 72. Nous avons le plaisir de vous confirmer l'exactitude de vos résultats.

Last month nine DXers, whose reputation for outstanding QSL collections is well known in the hobby, began to outline their views on why they seek verifications, how they handle them, how they use them and what future they may have. We continue with their opinions in detail....

**JERRY BERG:** "I have never counted the exact number of QSLs in my collection but it is in the neighborhood of 750. To me they are an essential part of the hobby because they provide something tangible for my DXing efforts. Whether they are "full data" or something much less, they constitute a permanent record of my hobby activities.

Unlike a sterile entry in a logbook, a QSL represents a 'live' contact between station and listener, a brief exchange between two cultures and a recognition that listener and station each appreciated the other enough to take part in the contact. That is basically how I view my QSL collection as a vehicle for looking back on the countless hours of seeking out new stations and for remembering briefly the excitement of hearing this or that new one.

From time to time I will leaf through an old QSL album and recall with satisfaction a particular logging or a particular period during my hobby involvement.

QSLs are a useful reminder that DXing is not static, that the stations and even the countries available to be heard are changing all the time. No one can look back on QSLs from Angola, Goa, Katanga or Panama without both satisfaction at having been around to hear them and a little regret at not having gotten into the hobby even earlier.

A relatively small gap between stations reported and QSLed also evidences one's own commitment to sending concrete and verifiable reports, a happy reminder that you must be doing something right.

When I entered the hobby 25 years ago I treated QSLs as something to be displayed, put on the wall, "shown off" etc. but now I view them the way most people think of 'collections', as mementoes to be preserved. While I never shrink from the opportunity to show them off to others, such opportunities are relatively few, and in any event I do not believe in trying to impress others with things which could be, at best, of only marginal interest to them. The meaning of a QSL is not transferable to someone else. You have to have gotten it yourself to appreciate its significance.

These days I am concentrating on QSLing Latin American stations, a specialized area I neglected for a long time due to the lack of time and the lure of numerous other, more easily verifiable stations.

After verifying most available countries, however, you take any target of opportunity that comes along. Whether it's a relatively easy to hear station like WRNO or a new high-powered relay site, or a low-powered Peruvian or seldom heard Indonesian, or even a pirate, you just keep listening, writing and hoping, simply because that's what makes the hobby fun for you."

DR. RICHARD E. WOOD: On my QSLs I have to admit they are reclining in a cellar in St. Louis; I didn't bring them here because of the weight limit I faced. I had a heap of books piled up, ready to bring, and they included a few of my relatively lightweight QSL albums; but in the end I purchased an R7 to bring here since I understood (correctly) that communications receivers are not sold in the Kingdom. I also wanted to take my R-1000 and my favorite multilingual (but not Arabic) typewriter. So, many of the books including the QSL albums had to stay behind.

I keep all my QSLs in card and letter albums and generally throw them into boxes and drive to the different DX conventions each summer. I know many DXers who attend the conventions but leave all or most of their QSLs behind. If they are flying, that is understandable, but if driving, there seems little excuse. In fact, I often write DX convention organizers ahead of time and suggest that they urge conventioners to bring their QSL albums. I hope to pick up my car and the albums in St. Louis this June and drive to the ANARC, IRCA, NRC and perhaps other meetings.

As a teacher of language and cultures, I use the QSLs in my class, where appropriate, and show them to my students informally. When I travel in different countries I may take along the veries from there, as a personal introduction; you can show them at the gate of the Third World stations which are often guarded by soldiers, police or private guards.

I am proud of QSLs and I use my collection to illustrate the point of view that neither tape recording nor any other substitute can replace them; in some medium wave circles, in particular, some people boast of their 'taped veries' and actually compile statistics of such tapes. They are tapes, all right, but they are not veries; a verification is issued by the station to the DXer, not by the DXer to himself. A look through albums should convince people of this distinction.

I have subsequently met a number of the signers of my most exotic QSL cards and letters; for example, while I was doing field research for my Ph. D. dissertation on Bonaire, N.A., I found that the signer of my QSL letter from Radio Espinharas de Patos (the name means 'Dick' by the way; it is a coastal town in southern Brazil) was now working on the Portuguese-language staff of TWR there. He instantly remembered my name and location--he didn't just recognize it when I told him, he spontaneously told me that I was Richard E. Wood and that at the time of the report I was living in Newcastle upon Tyne (where I started DXing). He then drove me all over the island on the back of his motor scooter so that I was able to complete my fieldwork promptly.

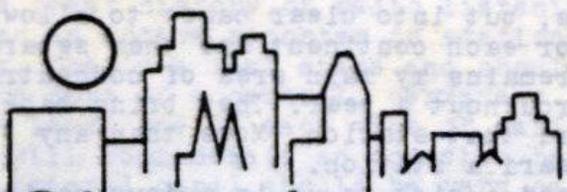
Could any of that have happened if I had just made a tape recording of the station, by myself and for myself, when I heard it?"

GERRY DEXTER: "How often do you get out the family photograph album and look through it? Not very frequently, I suspect. But there's no way you'd trade them and you're glad they exist. I think it's the same with QSLs. The albums are there but, no, you don't pore over them very often. It's fun when a fellow DXer visits and you get your annual or semi-annual view that way.

Dispose of them? I have a good idea of what I, personally, will set up but since it isn't set yet I won't comment on it further.

I recently passed the mark of 1200 individual SWBC stations QSLed. They are in about 16 binders of 2-inch depth, divided by areas and countries."

(To be concluded next month)



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June 1983

Editor: John C. Herkimer, 3233 East Avenue, Caledonia, NY 14423

This month....we'll finish Al Sizer's excellent article on verifications, with comments by some of the hobby's best, and Steve Reinstein checks in with another of his in-depth profiles of the Latin American clandestine scene. Stay with us, OK?

## The Mystique of the QSL by Al Sizer

ASOCIACION CLUB RADIO CULTURAL AMAUTA  
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In this series of three articles, we have been relating the views of nine outstanding collectors of QSLs--on why they seek verifications and how they handle them. In this concluding article we finish the rundown:

MARLIN A. FIELD: "I don't know how many QSLs I have. I count by station. I have QSLs from 353 stations in 212 countries. I have a number of QSLs also from the same station; for example, I try to get each one issued by HCJB.

Also, I really have two collections--(1) QSLs from all countries, and (2) QSLs from religious broadcasters which are duplicated in No. 1 for the most part.

My specialties: (A) Pennants--from 291 stations in 95 countries. (B) Latin America, and (C) Religious broadcasters.

What part do QSLs play in my DX life? I have them organized in such a way that it's easy to find what I'm looking for. They're in 21 looseleaf notebooks by continent. If I want to see an African QSL, I look in my black notebook (sorry, South Africa!) where countries are arranged alphabetically.

I refer to the QSLs occasionally as well as show them to others once in awhile. Undoubtedly, I'll be showing some of them to our new minister as he spent a summer with HCJB and is interested in radio as a missionary outreach.

Unfortunately, I don't have all my verifications in books yet. In the books I also have postal cards, photos and stamps I have received from station personnel. The pennants are in separate books.

If we were to leave Hillside, there's no question but what I'd take my QSLs along. The Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College, Illinois, has expressed interest in my religious collection; therefore, when I no longer have a need for it, it will go there. Center personnel even suggested that I might donate it before death so that I might see how it was used there.

I've made no arrangement for my general collection. There's more work that needs to be done on both. I don't know whether I'll get it done before I retire or not--as I don't know when I'll retire.

I also have QSLs from 925 AM stations in 29 countries."

JOHN MORIPE: "As far as QSLs go, they remain dear to my heart at all times. The challenge and excitement of finally nailing down a long sought-after Peruvian does not diminish after putting it in your book. Indeed, it only serves as encouragement to get the next one.

Of course, this applies in varying degrees to the individual involved. It goes without saying that Gerry Dexter is the foremost at the motivation/QSL game. He continually hammers away on a regular basis. For me, it is not that degree of intensity, but still I have my method to keep plugging away.

My QSLs are organized in notebooks, put into clear pages to allow viewing of both sides. I have a book for each continent and then separate books for each Latin country, as that remains my main area of concentration.

I look at my QSLs periodically throughout a year. They bring back fond memories of how and when I finally heard that station. More than any particular, they remind me of when I heard a station.

I sometimes look at them when I need a pick-me-up in a down period of the hobby. Sometimes I look at them to get me started on follow-ups once again. But they still remain a friendly reminder of my involvement in different stages of this hobby. It is interesting to look at my QSLs and think of the early days when I scratched out some details in English to a station, and then, after so many years, think of the many reports and things I sent out to a Latin, only to finally receive a verification letter after two or three more years.

I suppose the main point here is that QSLs, perhaps more than anything else in this hobby, are and remain a personal achievement. A personal reminder. An incentive to do more. Plus, a QSL collection serves as an enticement to continue during periods of inactivity in the hobby.

A number of people have seen my collection, but I do not make it a point to bring it to conventions or openly talk about it. Again, it remains personal to me.

What would I do with it? Well, I hope that my son gets involved in DXing someday and I might be able to pass it along to him as a reminder of earlier stations and times, a kind of historical perspective of the radio scene.

But more than anything, I'm glad that I have it to look back upon.

It serves as a record of my DX involvement. Logs and taped IDs are nice, but nothing takes the place of that card, or letter and hand painted pennant from Radio Andina. QSLs are the icing on the cake, and they taste very, very sweet to this DXer."

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JOHN CAMPBELL: "Yes, QSLs come out for recollection or discussion, usually with friends interested in DX or aspects of radio and communications. This doesn't happen very often at present (due to my workload), but maybe things will be more relaxed in another 20 years or so.

To help recollections of reception etc. and the particular pleasure they give, I store QSLs in albums sold in Europe to hold first-day covers in frequency order; it helps me remember the sources of QRM which have made the DX receptions difficult.

For disposal of QSLs via a will, I'll try to find a good museum with interests in collections devoted to radio. Best such examples I've seen so far are in New Zealand, but that's rather far away at present.

Total number of QSLs must be about 1600, about 70% shortwave and the rest mostly medium wave. I don't try to specialize but I seem to have quite a few QSLs from European SW pirates. Other areas where the collection is well developed are Indonesia and political clandestines. Sore point: I've reported 6 U.S. pirates from outside North America but only three have replied. Corresponding rate for European 'unofficial' stations is at least 95%."

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BILL MATTHEWS: "The QSL collection...well, there is absolutely nothing like adding a card or letter from a new country to it. Regrettably, such additions are few and very far apart. In the interim periods, I try to add to the collection by submitting reports to stations offering multiple designs for reporters (a la HCJB, Radio Berlin International, Radio Cairo, etc. While this is not a good substitute for a new country, it helps me to sustain my interest in DXing.

QSLs to me are not 'unwept, unhonored and unsung'--they, to me, are important reminders of stations heard in the past--of the 2 AM 'rise and shine', of the 3:30 AM fall asleep time by the receiver! I can remember studying in mid-winter (while in high school and college) to the Brazilians, of the high heat of a Pennsylvania summer while listening to Radio Iran, or in early evening to an interference-free Voice of Turkey.

I carefully preserve at least one QSL per country, sometimes more depending on the rarity. Others are maintained to look at for the various designs that are obtainable. As for showing to others, that's an exception rather than the rule, for I think it is only too true that the confirmations mean more to you than to others (especially non-DXers!).

If I had to move, they would certainly accompany me. As far as throwing out, they would be among the last things to go. Death? Well, that's another matter. I've always wondered why the stamp collectors have been able to band together, create vast reference collections and even establish national libraries devoted to philatelic material, yet we DXers and SWLs cannot establish a permanent home for QSLs when a person leaves the hobby or dies.

The great history of radio listening is in those cards and letters and yet, when an active reporter to stations is no longer involved, there go the QSLs. That's a real shame and should not be.

Some sort of a central, permanent repository should be established where at least one of each type of card and commemorative card (when a station will commemorate an occasion by the addition of some phrase to an already printed card) should be very carefully preserved and catalogued.

When one cannot hear a new country, how does one get any kind of thrill? Well, try new stations--Latin America is filled with them. Try for as many domestic stations as you can hear--the Chinese and Australian regionals. Try to earn as many different QSL designs as stations offer (make sure the station wants reports!). Adventist World Radio offers a special certificate for QSLing the various sites and frequencies they utilize. It's 24 spaces total and it took about 2½ years to complete, so it's not as easy as it might seem. The challenge of propagation on that one is almost unbelievable.

I have no exact count of QSLs earned over the years (19 years of reporting!). My area of special interest is, as it has been, the Far East."

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