

QSL: How I Traveled the World and Never Left Home

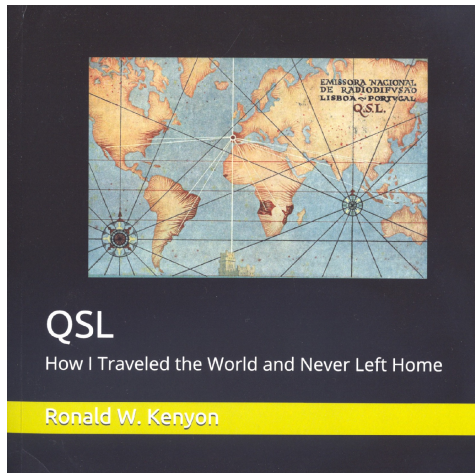
by Ronald W. Kenyon

Kindle Direct Publishing, 2020, 160 pages

Available at [Amazon](#)

See all Ronald Kenyon's books at his [Amazon author's page](#)

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Over the years since I started listening to shortwave in 1957 I have participated in countless discussions about how to introduce the hobby to the general public and get more people interested in shortwave. Of course, the shortwave enthusiast finds it hard to understand how anyone could *not* be interested in shortwave. But time after time we have learned that selling shortwave is not easy. Many surefire techniques have failed. What is it about people that makes them uninterested in chasing down a radio signal they can barely hear, in a language they don't understand?

My first reaction to Ron Kenyon's book, *QSL: How I Traveled the World and Never Left Home*, was that I wish I had had it during those many episodes of shortwave salesmanship. It would have been an excellent introduction to shortwave listening. To be sure, there have been many shortwave primers, but most have been in the nature of how-to's, without much attention to what many DXers consider the final step in a good shortwave encounter: the QSL. In this book, QSLs are the main point.

Kenyon doesn't do much evangelizing for shortwave. The purpose of the 21-page opening explainer appears to be to give the reader enough of a basic appreciation of shortwave listening to understand what the QSL illustrations that make up most of the rest of the book are all about. The QSLs aren't there to prove any particular point other than to illustrate Kenyon's personal experience of being a shortwave listener in Ashland, Kentucky during the years 1955 to 1961 (with a brief return in 1976). It is this personal story that sets the book apart from others

The text is a standard introduction to shortwave, with a tilt toward the historical. Many of the usual subjects are here: the purpose of QSLs; the Q-code; the difference between listening and ham radio; the bands; propagation; the various types of stations; interval signals; the SINPO code; the World Radio TV Handbook; etc. The history is largely personal. He explains the old Joe Morris WRØ "call letter" project (later WPE; Kenyon was WRØ4AE). The discussion of equipment focuses on the receivers he used—an old Crosley console for starters, followed by a Hallicrafters S-38D, then a Heathkit GC-1A Mohican, and, in the 70s, a Barlow-Wadley XCR-30. He discusses the

Newark News Radio Club, which was the most popular club of the day. And he talks about some of the big names in SWL history—Balbi, Legge, Cushen. Ron Kenyon’s story will resonate with many of today’s “senior” DXers—it certainly did with me. How many of us started listening in high school or junior high (Kenyon was 14 when he started), became inactive when we went off to college, and returned to it later after marriage and career were underway? A lot.

For me, going through the nearly 100 pages of color photos of shortwave broadcast QSLs was a treat, even though very few were new to me—I had most of them in my own collection, as I was SWLing at about the same time as Ron. But seeing them all together, with the short historical notes that were appended, helped make the case that, in QSLing, the whole can be at least a little greater than the sum of its parts. Perhaps that was Kenyon’s intent.

Nearly all the QSLs in the book are from shortwave broadcast stations. There were many regulars: Radio Australia; HCJB; Deutsche Welle; ELWA; Radio Nederland; the usual eastern Europeans, Moscow and China; the VOA “star” cards; etc.

There are also some especially interesting QSLs, such as one from Radio Algerie from 1959, without the cross outs that typically appeared on these cards at the time; a Brussels “World’s Fair” card bearing the OTC-Belgian Congo overprint; Radio Canada, when it was still using call letters; some Latins now long gone on shortwave (e.g. CMQ, Cuba; La Voz Dominicana; Radio Nacional del Peru; Ondas del Lago, Venezuela); a nice Japanese Short Wave Club card for a special anniversary program via Canada in 1956; the BBC Far Eastern Station; Radio Trinidad, from the days when that country was on shortwave; Radio Vietnam in Saigon, long before the fall; and many others. You can see some of them in a [video preview](#) that Kenyon has posted online.

The author tops off the book with 30 pages of amateur QSLs, SWL cards, and station greeting cards, and a story about a letter from a member of an Antarctic expedition who had heard a Kenyon letter read on the air over Radio Sarandi in Uruguay. Most of us have a story or two about unusual or unexpected hobby encounters like this.

One of the things I like about this book is that it avoids all the hype about listening to news direct from foreign places, hearing events as they happen, etc. I have never found that a very convincing rationale for shortwave listening, probably because in the real world things seldom worked out as advertised. I’ll admit that I’ve never been much of a program listener. I identify more with the broadcast band DXer of 1924 who called programs “merely the tedium between call letters.”

Most of the author’s shortwave experience dates back more than 60 years, and a non-radio person reading this book might wonder whether shortwave listening is still available for someone who wanted to give it a try. Kenyon does not deal with this, and may well not be very familiar with the shortwave bands as they are today. The answer, of course, is that shortwave broadcast listening is still alive, but it is breathing hard. The equipment is hugely better, but noise has become a game changer, and the number of stations and countries still on the air is a fraction of what it was. Of all the shortwave broadcast QSLs in the Kenyon book, only a small number would be obtainable today, and the number of radio countries still doing direct shortwave broadcasting is less than half what it once was.

It's pretty clear that Ronald Kenyon was serious about shortwave, and managed to squeeze a lot out of a modest setup. I dipped into some old issues of the NNRC bulletin and found that he was listed as a new member in January 1957. He was an active contributor of logs and QSL information to Hank Bennett's shortwave section until 1961, and it looks like he was especially interested in Latin American stations. These were considered among the most difficult targets to hear and identify, so he was serious about his listening. He heard 85 countries, no small feat at a time when hearing 100 was considered quite a feat. And he also did some broadcast band DXing. He collected 162 QSLs in all, of which 107 are in the book.

Here are some of his logs from old NNRC bulletins (he was "281" in the list of contributors, then "4AE"). Remember that times in Hank Bennett's column were reported in EST.

4780 YVLA, La Voz de Carabobo, Valencia, Venez. at 2200, much music. Ads for local stores. ID from time to time. (4AE)

6125 HRQ, R. Suyapa, San Pedro Sula, Honduras; 2025 with pop records (RV) Always a regular, strong, and dependable. (281)

9210 Leopoldville in French 1630 with records; also 0100-0130 with news and music. ID: Radiodiffusion de la Republique du Congo". (LAGM, 4AE)

15083 R. Clube de Mozambique, Lourenco Marques hrd 1430 fade-in with various musical pgms and relays from Emissora Nacional, Portugal. Continues to 1500 when have news; s/off 1515 with anthem. No English (281); Again 0015-0100 close with good light and pop music and all-Portuguese. A 4-note gong before each ID. (61)

6105 XEQM, Merida, Yucatan; Pepe Villimil & his guitar at 2300 Sun; beautiful music! Watch for special pgms on July 20, its 2nd Anniversary of XEQM and 17th Anniversary of XEQM, (281)

5981 ZFY, Georgetown, B.G. s/on Sun. 0445 with pgm preview, religious services, news. Not hrd evenings. (281)

6070 CFRX, Toronto; this makes a good 'marker' when tuning the 6 mc band. Is about the only one hrd from 1200-1300. (281)

17795 CR6RZ, Luanda, Angola at 1730 in Portuguese with fair signal. (281)

5970 HI4T, Trujillo, D.R. at 2230-2300 close with anti-Castro broadcasts in Spanish and Creole. (281)

Ron Kenyon attended the University of Michigan and went on to graduate school at Stanford. He has been the recipient of various awards and scholarships, and his traveling has not been limited to shortwave. From his [Amazon page](#): "Since 2012, I have published [twenty-four] books. Most are collections of essays about France, where I lived for twenty years. I have also published non-fiction books about Florida, Saudi Arabia and the island kingdom of Bahrain as well as six albums of color photography. In addition to my collected poetry, I co-edited and published the complete works of the late American poet Ralph L. Kinsey."

At \$31.50 the book may seem a little expensive, but I think it was worth it, and I wish there were more personalized stories like this. In any event, rest assured that no one is getting rich in the shortwave publishing world today.

December 31, 2020 - Links verified as of that date.