

Box 1, Site 5,
R.R. 5 Armdale,
N.S. B3L 4J5

February 8th, 1978

Dear Dr. Raddall:

I thought you would like a copy of this photograph, taken in 1922. I am a radio operator at VCS and have been some time collecting the history of this station. G.E. "Champ" Champion loaned me this, for reproducing, along with a number of others. I have had many of these old photographs reproduced, from various sources, and have a very good collection.

Through my research, many of those I have contacted, have told me to contact you. I have been reluctant to do this, for fear you might think I am trying to "free-load" off you. I certainly do not want this. I would like to try and have this history published. I have never written anything and felt it would be a good project, not only would I learn a lot but it would give me something to occupy my spare time. I have certainly managed both.

I would like to use this photograph and mention that you were an operator at VCS, because we all have enjoyed your works very much. I wanted to read your autobiography before contacting you, but with one thing and another have not managed this and will do so before long.

I am hoping that some of the operators can learn the very interesting history this station has accumulated. This is strictly on my own initiative and I want no help in any form, other than the detail necessary to make it possible. I doubt that the finished product will do much good. The government did away with the tickets sometime ago. I am one of three with a first class ticket and the majority have no ticket of any description. The majority have never seen a ship, have no idea nor care what they are communicating with. I have sailed on twelve ships, the most famous being the Bounty, a most enjoyable experience.

Apparantly Mr. Marconi took the lists of the old two and three letter call codes, as they were called, with him. At least I have liquidated all the sources I can think of, in trying to locate copies of same. Would you have known MacKay Bennett? Would he have been the W/O on HMCS Niobe and would her call have been "MB" and later "MMB"? Thanks to Alf Lawton, I have the logs from the day VCS (HX or MHX) went on the air until 1910, but I am unable to tell from this whether the station was HX or MHX. Therefore do not know when these first Canadian stations were issued the M prefix. These logs are the only logs I have found. I have also been unable to locate Point Amour's call code. I was told that Heath Point was MHP but the "Hampshire" (HMS?) was also assigned this call code according to these logs, even though there is an entry where one of the operators was transferred to "HP" and logged in that manner. This is no doubt accurate because Sable Island was MSB until Cape Sable went on a few weeks later, then Sable Island became MSD and Cape Sable MSB. Confusing, phew!

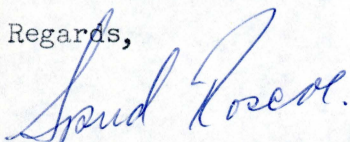
According to the entries in these logs I am given the impression that the old DGS Canada, who was the first to contact HX, was CT or MCT because her operator might have been C.T. West. CT and MB were the first, although MB is referred to as MacKay Bennett. This goes on throughout the logs and the HMCS Niobe is not mentioned, so I presume Mr. Bennett was the operator on her, unless there was a ship by that name. The more I try and clarify this point, the more confused I get.

I would appreciate any comment you would care to make on this undertaking. Would you know of a photograph of the operating position, when Marconi was involved with the station, between 1905 and 1926? This is the only important one missing in my collection. I have one of Barrington Passage VAL and Chebucto DF VAV. None of the possible sources I can think of, have been able to supply this.

Recently I have been concentrating on the signal station, what a can of worms that is, from the time it opened around 1800 until the wireless station opened in 1905, but enough. You have been through this sort of thing so much, that you must be at least tired of it.

Dr. Jannasch, N.S. Museum, has more or less insisted that I give them a hand with setting up a display on this subject at their new Museum on Privateers Wharf. I'm certainly no authority on this subject, but would like to know enough about it to be able to tell them they are wrong, and be able to prove it.

Regards,



S.G. "Spud" Roscoe

Feb.18,1978

Mr. S.G.Roscoe,
Box 1, Site 5,
R.R.5, Armdale,N.S.

Dear Mr. Roscoe:

My thanks for your letter and for the photograph of me, taken by "Champ" Champion outside the VCS shack in 1922.

Most of my papers, photograph albums, etc., are now in the Thomas H. Raddall Collection, Dalhousie University Library, where they are available for study in the Special Collections Room.

Among these papers the Dalhousie archivists can show you an article I wrote for the Dalhousie Review in 1947, entitled "Nova Scotia's First Telegraph System". It is a history of the visual-telegraph system built along Halifax harbour (eventually extended to Annapolis) by the Duke of Kent in 1797-1798, and in it I have described the old military signal station on the crest of Camperdown hill, where with modifications (chiefly a telephone line to the Citadel) it was still manned by army signallers in 1922.

One of my photograph albums contains a snapshot of this building, with "Champ" and one of the soldiers standing on the roof platform. Another snapshot shows the VCS shack in 1922, with a glimpse of the OIC's dwelling nearby, and the harbour mouth in the background. And there is one of the army signaplers and myself, bathing (mostly just clowning) at the little pond behind the hill.

I don't know the original call letters of the Camperdown station, or of Heath Point.

The "Mackay-Bennett" was a cables ship based at Halifax from 1884 to about 1924, when she was retired from sea service. Her American owners (The Commercial Cable Company) had her built in Glasgow and named after the company's founders, John W. Mackay and James Gordon Bennett. The owners kept her under British registry, and her officers and crew were mostly Canadians and a few English. I served as a wireless operator in this ship in 1920-21.

Her first wireless outfit was a primitive little set using a ten-inch induction coil in the transmitter and a "coherer" in the receiver. I located this outfit in the ship's fore-peak, where it had been stowed away and discarded for many years, and took the "coherer" for a souvenir. It is now in the Raddall Collection at Dalhousie. Marconi in person installed this set in the ship in 1899, when "Mackay-Bennett" was sent down to New York to observe and report the famous yacht race between Sir Thomas Lipton's first "Shamrock" and the defending "Columbia".

There are photographs in the Raddall Collection of the ship herself, and snapshots taken on deck at sea, including one of me leaning against the stern railing, and another of me in the doorway of the radio cabin.

My autobiography entitled "In My Time" gives descriptions (on pages 114-116) of VCS and my life there in 1922. On pages 67-69 you will find a brief account of the mutiny and subsequent fire at VCT in 1919, but I omitted the ribald reply of the mutineers when the OIC at VCS, Pete McGillivray, came to the key and tried to reason with them.

Another book of mine, "Halifax, Warden of The North" has much information about the various signal stations at Halifax, from 1749 to modern times. See the index under "Telegraphs".

You may copy and use any of these photographs and materials in your projected book, providing that due acknowledgement is given to me and to Dalhousie University Library. The acknowledgements should appear in a preface, and in footnotes wherever references or quotations are made.

Sincerely,

P.S.

On learning that I was quitting the Marconi service, operators at Sable Island and Cape Race sent messages of farewell to me at VCS. One was from Jim Myrick, the famous "JM", who always called me "Red" from a misunderstanding, due to "static", of "Rad". When I was at Sable Island he was my opposite number at Cape Race, and we had a lot of traffic back and forth. He was considered the fastest and best brasspounder on the coast, and like a good many others I did my best to imitate his hand and speed. These farewell messages are in a scrapbook in the Raddall Collection.

Box 1, Site 5,
R.R. 5 Armdale,
N.S. B3L 4J5

February 25, 1978

Thomas H. Raddall,
44 Park Street,
Liverpool, N.S.

Dear Dr. Raddall:

Thank you very much for yours of February 18th, 1978. I am sure I got more history out of your two page letter than I would in six months research. The "Mackay-Bennett" is most interesting, especially in the fact that the many I have contacted in trying to find out who she was, did not name her. No doubt they all would remember her, or would have at least known of her.

As stated, I do not know what I am doing, but I am throughly enjoying myself. I want to include as many photographs as possible, mostly to camouflage the poor writing. Parks Canada have advised that they would get back to me on the history of the early signal station, some time ago. I have been trying to piece it together with what the British Navy was using at the time. It was a most pleasant surprise to learn that you had written this history.

Your "Halifax, Warden of The North" along with "In My Time" are ones I have requested for sometime from the local mobile Librarian that serves us at Sambro. I just went in and purchased "Halifax, Warden of The North" but could not find "In My Time". Will get a copy soonest.

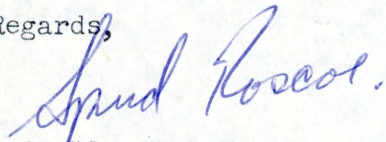
Thank you most kindly for permission to use your photographs and materials, and acknowledgements will certainly be given, for anything I use. Since contacting you, I have been in contact with Cyp Ferland in Montreal. He started in 1917, with Marconi, and retired a Supervisor with Canadian Overseas Telecommunication Corporation, in 1962. C.O.T.C. is now known as TELEGLOBE and handles all the overseas traffic we collect from ships. He has sent me photo copies of several interesting anecdotes he has written on the history of these stations. I was also pleased to be able to forward him some photographs he has been unable to locate, and am hoping to locate some more for him.

Yes, these operators that seem to be born with good fists make me rather frustrated, is the only way to describe it. Mine is probably the poorest on the air and the harder I try the worse I seem to get. I am very nervous and was born that way. Our family Doctor claims it is a good indication that I am more conscientious than average. Maybe so, but it certainly does nothing to improve my transmitting. We have several at VCS who are very good to the point of being above perfection, but even they claim they are not happy and would like to do better. So no doubt it is a never ending circle.

Before I bore you completely, there is one other thing I would like to mention. The old "Canadian Raider" was scrapped last year after 57 years of faithful service. She ended her days as "Antonio de Satrustegui" and flew the Spanish Flag with the call sign EAND. It is good to know we can build them, but a pity we could not do a better job of sailing them.

All the best and once again thank you.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Spud Roscoe". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

S.G. "Spud" Roscoe