

A Brief History of ARES

As we celebrate one hundred years of the ARRL, we've reached a seminal moment in time when we are sparked to reflect on the past while looking to the future with a sense of inquiry and wonder. That has certainly been the theme of the ARRL's centennial celebration this year. *QST* has featured fascinating look-backs at pivotal points in the League's and Amateur Radio's history this year, with more to come. Continuing this theme, let's take a brief look at the role of Amateur Radio in public service, disaster, and emergency communications over the past hundred years.

In the early days, Amateur Radio and hams were considered irritations and nuisances to the "real" communicators - the commercial sector and the military. We were almost outlawed, and ultimately relegated to the "useless" frequencies of "200 meters and down." That was until it was demonstrated that we could actually be of use as a service. In 1913, college students/hams in Michigan and Ohio passed disaster messages when other means of communications were down in the aftermath of severe storms and flooding in that part of the country. A Department of Commerce bulletin followed, proposing a dedicated communications network of radio amateurs to serve during disasters. Five special licenses were reportedly issued. A magazine article noted that amateurs - who were once considered nuisances - were now considered to be essential auxiliary assets of the national public welfare.

The ARRL was formed in 1914, and disaster response communications as provided by radio amateurs became organized and useful. In 1920, Amateur Radio was used to help recover a stolen car, of all things! Soon, the use of Amateur Radio for natural disasters that we traditionally think of now emerged with hams active in deadly flooding in New Mexico and an ice storm in Minnesota.

More organization followed, with an "MoU" emerging with the American railroad system for Amateur Radio support when the railroad's wire lines were down: There was an ARRL Railroad Emergency Service Committee. There was even a Q-signal designated: *QRR*, a kind of land SOS.

More reports of disaster response communications provided by amateurs appeared in *QST*, much as they do here in this newsletter today. A major New England flood had amateurs supplying the only efficient means of communications from the devastated areas to the outside world, prompting the chairman of the Federal Radio Commission to say the future of radio depends on the amateurs.

Hams worked with the Burgess Battery Company for emergency radio power. Many of us old-timers including myself have used those batteries when we were kids for our crystal radio kits; they looked like tall, thick candle columns!

More organization followed, and traffic handling was recommended as the best way to gain discipline and proficiency to prepare for the efficiency and effectiveness needed in response communications situations.

ARRL Field Day was started to prepare amateurs for portable operation, as was necessary in disaster situations when commercial power and means of communications were down.

In 1935, the ARRL Emergency Corps was formed with the goal of having an Amateur Radio Emergency Station in every community -- a goal that remains just as urgent today as it did then! To wit, just look at today's emphasis on the neighborhood and community as "first responder" and on self-reliance in the post-disaster survival chain.

More "served agencies" emerged as potential partners, including the Red Cross. In 1936, major flooding across a 14-state region served as the ARRL Emergency Corps' first major testing, serving well, and solidifying Amateur Radio's status as a critical disaster response communications asset and public service. Communications operating protocols and the appointment of Emergency Coordinators

followed.

Technical advances supported this evolution. Spark gap transmitters gave way to the vacuum tube, making portable operations more viable. Articles on portable transmitters and receivers appeared in *QST*. Exploration and experimentation in the VHF region also spurred more development of portable equipment. The development of the variable frequency oscillator or VFO, something that modern generations of hams take for granted, was at the time a liberating breakthrough offering more versatility and flexibility, and more efficiency of course in meeting the demands of a disaster response communications situation.

World War II meant a shut-down of Amateur Radio, but many hams joined the War Emergency Radio Service, which did provide some communications during the war period for natural disasters. After the war, the ARRL reconstituted its disaster response communications programs and networks, and the first Simulated Emergency Test was run in 1946.

The Cold War followed, and the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service (RACES) was formed by the government for civil defense (CD) purposes, the forerunner of the modern emergency management model that we know so well today.

Throughout the sixties and later up to today, the role, procedures, protocols, equipment and techniques of Amateur Radio in public service, disaster and emergency communications continue to evolve, ebb and flow. This evolution is fueled by advances in Amateur Radio technology and its application, lessons learned from each and every incident that involves amateur communications support. - *KICE*, based on an excellent article by Gil McElroy, VE3PKD, that appeared in September 2007 *QST* -- QRR: The Beginnings of Amateur Radio Emergency Communications