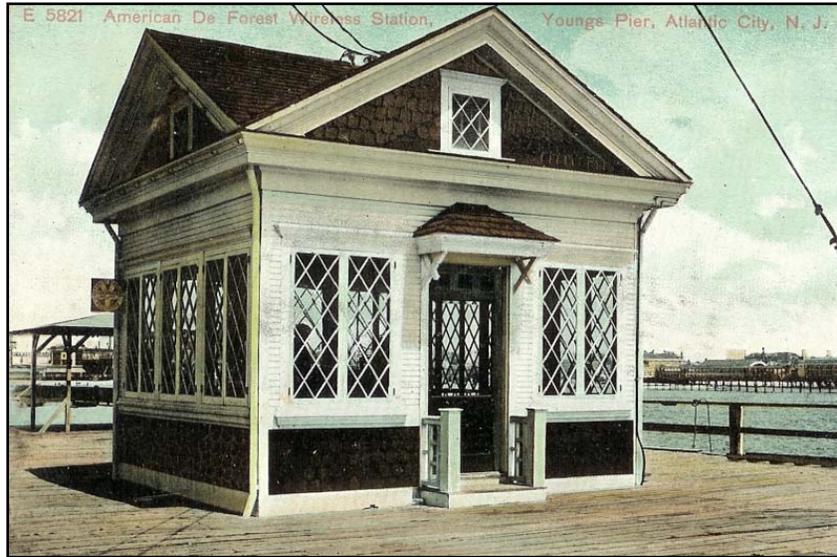


# Wireless Station AX Atlantic City

## Located on "Young's Pier" (Later called "Million Dollar Pier")

By Tom Appleby, W3AX



Thomas Appleby in 1909, the year he turned 23 years old began working as an operator for the United Wireless Telegraph Company, which at that time was the dominant radio communications company in the United States. After first working at a company station, "BS", located atop the Bellevue-Stratford building in Philadelphia, followed by a short stint on the S.S. Capt. A. F. Lucas, Appleby was given the choice assignment of operator at the company's shore station, "AX", located at Atlantic City, New Jersey.

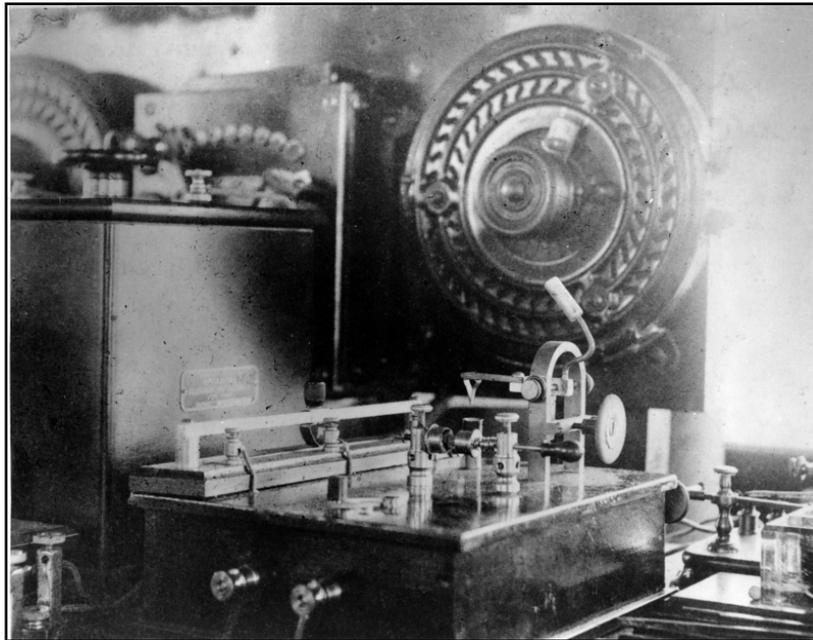


This is the original Ship-shore station "AX" on the Million Dollar Pier in 1909. The couple are friends of mine, I took the picture. You will see the name United Wireless Telegraph Co., on the station window. I was managing the station at that time as Bob Miller who was so well known by his slow deliberate fist, fine stuff to copy, had taken an extended vacation, meant never

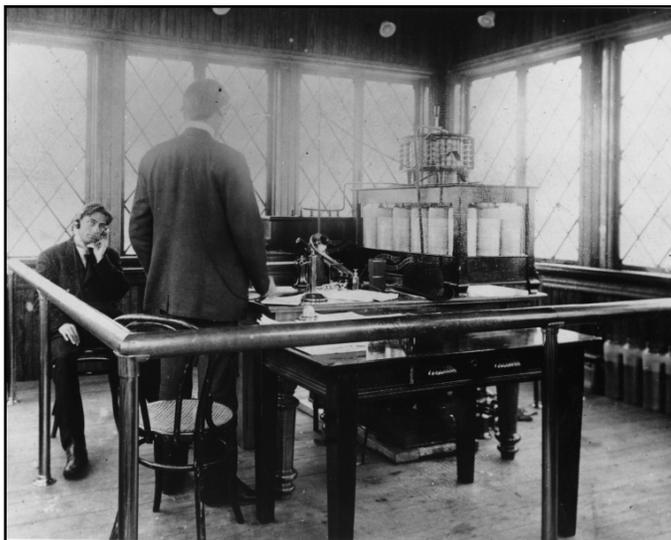
to return, got a job in a telegraph office in Chicago, but in 6 months he came back to

“AX” and I reverted to 2nd operator with Bob “RM” again manager. The gentleman with the lady is Dudley Seguin, not an operator, I don’t know who the lady was, my memory fails. You can just see the ocean end of the pier to the extreme left where the nets were hauled.

The Detector Box that I made and used at "AX" in 1909, It stands in front of the generator field rheostat, and consisted of an electrolytic detector with a piece of Wollaston wire (silver coated platinum) about .001" dia. held in a clip on the end of a lever supported by an inverted U shaped bracket with



weighted hand lever to hold the Wollaston wire out of contact with the acid in the platinum cup when we were transmitting, otherwise the platinum point of the Wollaston wire would have been burnt off each time we transmitted. An Electro Importing Co., potentiometer with slide adjustment on a carbon rod at the extreme left of the detector box regulated the battery current to the detector and a dry battery (standard size ) was inside the box. Toward the front there is also a Pericon detector (Zincite and Chalcopyrite) in case the electrolytic failed, and a two point switch near the front switched on either detector as desired . Note the W.U. line relay partly visible on the extreme right back of the ink-well.



We used to clear the ships and put their messages on a direct W.U. wire to N.Y. or Phila when we couldn’t get traffic thru to “WA” the Waldorf Astoria, "DF" Manhattan Beach or “NY” 42 Broadway, N. Y. We cleared all the Limy ships after they passed Bermuda every Sunday afternoon. Oh, yes, my detector set up was Verboten, on account of patent infringement, but we used to cover it with a cloth against prying eyes.

**Above - Close up of the operating table United Wireless Station "AX" in Atlantic City, 1909. Visitors were allowed to enter station, brass rails kept them away from the equipment.**

This is old "AX" as it looked during W.W. I after the Navy took it over as a District station of the 4th Naval District. This view is toward the beach, you can see the hotels. The sailor in the foreground is John F. Anderson, Yoeman, U3NR, my assistant who traveled with me during the organization of the shore direction finding system of stations on the Atlantic Coast and some years later he became the assistant to the Comptroller of the Currency in the Treasury Department



and Anderson was in charge of all the closed banks during the "bank holiday" which Pres. Roosevelt declared and brought down the great depression of 1929 when the stock market collapsed. Anderson is now retired by the Treasury Department and lives (1961) in Arlington, Va.

### **Thomas Appleby, W3AX Memoirs, Station AX, Atlantic City, NJ**



Arriving back at Bayonne from my last trip on the [ship] Lucas I requested a short leave of absence to go home and see my folks in Philadelphia. While there a telegram arrived ordering me to the United Wireless Station "AX" located out near the ocean end of the Million Dollar Pier Atlantic City, N. J.

What a delightful surprise to be assigned to a land station and especially such a prominent one located in a resort later to known as "The Worlds Playground."

The couple of years spent at this station were most enjoyable as we

alternated the day and night watches which gave both operators plenty of time for daytime as well as evening recreation and our location was almost as good as being aboard ship because during storms the pier rocked and the huge waves splashed up over the sides and through the open floor boards, with the twang of the salt spray most invigorating. Many were the good friends I made while there, among them Captain Jeffries who later operated the Jefferies baths on the boardwalk; Captain Young who built the Million Dollar Pier and had his home between the wireless station and the boardwalk end of the pier; Charley Seymour who was engineer at one of the big hotels; and others, all amateur wireless operators.

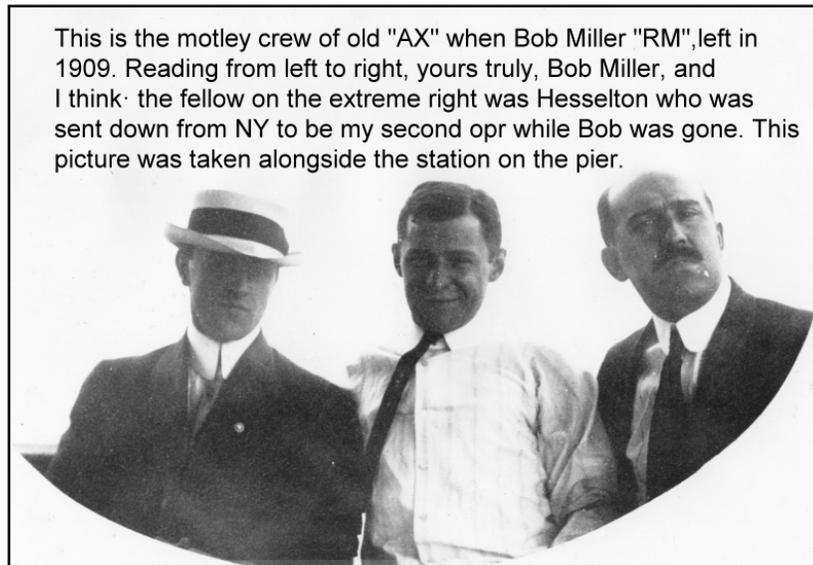
Not all emergencies resulted in disaster. In this extract below, Appleby remembers a time when a passing ship which had caught fire asked that help standby, but it was never needed. (The radio operators normally were not permitted to send out a formal distress call until the ship's captain authorized it, partly because ships from other lines that came in response to a request for help could claim a monetary salvage award). In this case Appleby stayed on duty from midnight until after sunrise, monitoring the situation and "babysitting" the burning vessel, until it made its way to safety.

## Baby Sitting with a Ship

Out near the ocean end of the Million Dollar Pier in Atlantic City, New Jersey, shortly after

midnight in 1909, I was preparing to close the wireless station for the night after clearing all passing ships of their traffic, when suddenly there came a call in my headphones, the dots and dashes spelling out "AX - AX, are you there". AX was our wireless call. So I

immediately replied "Go ahead." In a rather excited and jerky manner came back the reply "We are on fire, please remain on our wave length, we are about 40 miles abreast of you."



This is the motley crew of old "AX" when Bob Miller "RM", left in 1909. Reading from left to right, yours truly, Bob Miller, and I think the fellow on the extreme right was Hesselton who was sent down from NY to be my second opr while Bob was gone. This picture was taken alongside the station on the pier.

With such a report of distress at sea I immediately did the customary thing of sending out the general CQ and OS meaning for all ships within range to answer and give their exact positions in that general locality, in the event they might be needed for rescue operations, and then I ordered silence of all other transmissions until the emergency was over.

Every few minutes the thoroughly frightened operator on the burning ship would call and ask "are you still there? We may need assistance at any moment." During the course of his following transmissions he gave snatches of information such as "the smoke in this room is so dense I can hardly see a thing." A few minutes later he said "I'm black as coal, have been down in the hold helping fight the fire", followed by "We now have a list of forty-five degrees, don't leave us as we may need help any minute, am awaiting the Captains orders."

And so it continued throughout the remainder of the night while his signals gradually grew weaker and weaker as the ship proceeded southward. Fortunately the fire was kept under control as by daylight the signals from the ship had become very weak due to increased distance, and I later learned that they had put into a port in Florida where the city fire department was called and extinguished the blaze.

I never learned that fellows name and still haven't any idea who he was, but I do have the dubious distinction of baby-sitting with a ship at sea.