



Ivan Coggeshall (1935)

INTRODUCTION (Supplied by the Author, 30 July 1984)

When this compilation was made in the middle 1930s, no Introduction or Foreword was supplied. The history itself had unfolded as a sort of narrative to bind together the source material referred to in the footnotes.

Examination of the annotations now affords the best way of judging the reliability of the sources. It will be noted that many of the facts were adduced at US Government hearings held in Washington: specifically, S.535 and S.4301, on cable landings, 1921; HR.548, on radiotelegraph overseas facilities 1923; and S.6, in 1929-1930, looking to the formation of the Federal Communications Commission in 1933.

It was a feature common to these hearings that preparation for them by the various common carriers was meticulous, that testimony under oath was given by top officials, supported by accurate exhibits: contracts, leases, licenses, indentures, signed agreements - in brief, the best historical basic material available. The numbered hearings texts were available to the author in the form of type-set printed books.

In addition, as the footnotes bear witness, standard works on cables have been quoted or referred to, such as those by J D Reid (1886), Charles Bright (1903). Also consulted and used were English and American trade periodicals, like "The Operator", "Telegraph Journal", "Commercial and Financial Chronical", "Electrical Review", "Electrician", "Telephone and Telegraph Age", "Journal of the Telegraph" and the US Department of Commerce's "Foreign Communications News". The New York "Times" and "Herald-Tribune" and other newspapers furnished items. British sources included the "Blue Book", the "British 1902 Report", "Zodiac", and the General Post Office's "Telegraph and Telephone Journal". Also referred to are the Annual Reports of certain cable and radio companies in the United States and abroad.

Somewhat regrettably, much of the value of this history became moot with the abandonment of telegraph cables and shortwave international radio circuits in the later 1960s, in favour of their shared use of overseas facilities in the ocean telephone-grade cables and satellite radio links. However, the telegraphic organizational entities of the past did become the initial ones of the present (1980s) era; so, to that extent, their "ancient history" is still pertinent and, to some, interesting.

EDITOR'S PREFACE

In 1984 I presented a paper entitled *James Graves and the Valentia Telegraph Station* at the Institution of Electrical Engineers in London. This was concerned with the life and work of the first Superintendent of the Valentia island cable station, who was the great, great grandfather of my wife. This was later reprinted in *Electronics and Power* (July 1984, pp. 523-28). Several months later a parcel arrived through the post containing a congratulatory letter from Ivan Coggeshall together with a typewritten manuscript of his annotated history. This history traces the origins of Western Union, its place in world communications and its defense of its role within the trans-Atlantic cable monopoly by the leasing of cables from the British companies. It does not record the author's lack of popularity amongst Western Union cable employees; he was involved in the lay-offs following the introduction of telex and he had to oversee the stringencies during the Depression of the 1930s. A correspondence continued over several years, during which time it was agreed that I should edit the document with a view to publication. Ivan provided a set of amendments which have been put into effect and he also supplied thumbnail biographies as well as an autobiography.

It could be said that the abrupt ending of this manuscript in 1934 leaves much untold. During our correspondences and subsequently when we met at his house in Middleton, Rhode Island, I tried to encourage Ivan to finish the story with my help. There were many excuses to hide an underlying reluctance which, I believe, had its origins in his naval associations and particularly his wartime activities. When pressed on matters, he was prepared to talk only about Western Union's use of Vernam ciphers, which of course is well covered in the publicly available literature. There was therefore a certain perverse pleasure in providing Ivan with a copy of his wartime confidential reports on cross-talk between cables which had become declassified. The subsequent history can in fact be given in brief but Ivan might have been able to give a special insight. There was a discord between Western Union and the Anglo American Telegraph Co over the matter of National Defense Contribution and Profits Tax as imposed by the Finance Act of 1937. The matter was not resolved until a House of Lords hearing in 1948. The laying of the first trans-Atlantic telephone cables in 1956/7 meant that all telegraph cables instantly became obsolete (one single voice channel could carry approximately 200 telex lines and even with submerged repeaters and transistorised multiplexers no telegraph cable could not compete with this). The telephone cable and its termini were under UK-US government control and Western Union was not allowed access until it had complied with the divestment requirements. Thus Western Union International (WUI) was established in 1963, took over control of the cable network, dissolved the Anglo American Telegraph Co and closed the stations. Thereafter WUI leased voice channels and is still in business today as part of MCI.

I have tried in so far as is possible to be faithful to the style of Ivan Coggeshall's original manuscript. The table of contents contains the headings and subheadings which he used. An almost complete index has also been added. It attempts to index personae, events and locations. There are just a few notable omissions. As London, Paris and New York appear repeatedly throughout the text, it was felt that their inclusion in the index would be superfluous.

I must record my gratitude to Ivan Coggeshall himself, for his help and for his encouragement of my researches in the history of cable telegraphy. There is also the encouragement and help from station staff (Marshall Killen, Bob Mackey, Jack Tranfield, James Dennis, Sam Breslin, Derek Pawson etc) many of whom are now 'silent keys'. Finally there is my wife and the help from her family (which can claim four generations of cable station staff). Without access to their unique collection of material, I would never have been in a position to start this work.

Donard de Cogan
University of East Anglia, March 1992

SOME NOTES ON THE CITED SOURCES

Ivan Coggeshall, himself, provides some details about his sources, but as we are further away in both time and technology, these might seem remote and mysterious to us. It is therefore worthwhile reciting some of the details. From the UK there is the classic book by Charles Bright, the son of the trans-Atlantic cable pioneer (*Submarine Telegraphs*, Crosby, Lockwood & Son). On the US side there is J.D. Reid's *Wiring of a Continent*. There are many periodicals and newspapers and trade journals which the author mentions in the text. For the latter sections of his history he might have cited Keith Clarke's *International Communications the American Attitude*, AMS Press, New York 1931 but perhaps was not aware of its existence. The text includes many references to several Congressional Hearings. Those in the Senate are preceded by S (such as S6 which led to the Couzens Bill and S4301 which preceded the Kellogg Bill). The House of Representatives hearings are preceded by HR (eg HR.548 of 1923 were concerned with radiotelegraph overseas facilities).

NOTES ON FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

The text contains many abbreviations that would have been common parlance amongst telegraph staff. These had been developed by the Pool companies but were refined by Western Union generally refer to termini but one must make clear distinctions between termini for traffic and cable termini. These are listed below.

Cable termini		Traffic termini	
BR	Bay Roberts (Nfld)	RM	Ranem (Nfld)
CN	Canso (Nova Scotia)	SP	St Pierre (et Miquelon)
EM	Emden (Germany)	Z	North Sydney (Nova Scotia)
HC	Heart's Content (Nfld)		
HG	Harbour Grace (Nfld)	AC	London (Shorter's Court, Exchange)
HM	Hammel (New York)	BO	Boston (cotton wire)
HO	Horta (Azores)	CD	New York (main)
HR	le Havre (France)	FX	New York (cotton exchange branch office)
ID	Ballinskelligs (Ireland)	LD	London (main)
PL	Placentia (Nfld)	LI	Liverpool (main)
PZ	Penzance (UK)	LX	Liverpool (cotton exchange branch office)

In the case of cables, the designation should give both termini. Some examples with date of laying are given below.

1CN - Z	Canso - North Sydney 1891
2HM- CN	Hammel - Canso 1889
HO - EM	Horta - Emden 1926

Whenever there was no ambiguity only one was given .

1VA	Valentia - Heart's Content 1883	1PZ	Penzance - Canso 1881*
2VA	Valentia - Heart's Content 1874	2PZ	Penzance - Canso 1881
3VA	Valentia - Heart's Content 1883	3PZ	Penzance - Horta 1910
4VA	Valentia - Heart's Content 1894	4PZ	Penzance - Horta 1926

* This cable was diverted from CN to BR in 1910. In 1927 the European end was diverted so that it became BR - HR (see pp 34, 35)