

## Why We Are Called Hams

Have you ever wondered why we amateur radio amateurs are called HAMS? Well it goes something like this the word ham was applied in 1908 and was the call letters of one of the first amateur wireless stations operated by some members of the Harvard Radio Club. They were Albert Hyman, Bob Almy and Peggie Murray. At first they called their station Hyman-Almy- Murray. Tapping out such a long name in code soon called for revision and they changed it to Hy-AL-Mu, using the first two letters of each name. Early 1909 some confusion resulted between signals from HYALMU and a Mexican ship names Myalmo, so they decided to use only the first letter of each name and identified their station as HAM. In the early pioneer and unregulated days of radio amateur operators picked their own frequencies and call letters. Then as now some amateurs had better signals than some commercial stations. The resulting interference finally came to the attention of congressional committees in Washington, DC and they gave much thought to proposed legislation designed to critically limit amateur activity.

In 1911, Albert Hyman chose the controversial Wireless Regulations Bill as the topic of his thesis at Harvard. His instructor insisted that a copy be sent to Senator David Walsh, a member of the committee. Hyman was put on the stand and described how the little amateur station HAM was built and he almost cried when he told the crowded committee room that if the bill went through, they would have to close up the station because they could not afford the license fees and other requirements which were set up in the bill. The debate started and the little station HAM became a symbol of all the little amateur stations in the country that were crying out to be saved from the menace and greed of the big commercial stations who did not want them around. Finally the Bill got to the floor of Congress and every speaker talked about the poor little station HAM.

That's how it all got started. You can find the whole story in the Congressional Record. Nationwide publicity identified the station HAM with amateurs. From that time to this and probably to the end of time, in radio, "Every amateur is a HAM...."

Thanks to John Meyer for this article