

# Reflections on the Centennial of the London Amateur Radio Club

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London Amateur Radio Club President



LARC club station VE3LON. Tom, VE3HOR (left) and Mike, VE3ZMC, operating.

## Suddenly, we could no longer meet.

Suddenly, we were restricted to our homes, our radio shacks and our backyards...

The camaraderie, networking, expert advice, and entertainment we had enjoyed as members of the London Amateur Radio Club in Ontario was severely limited and we were constrained to using radio, landlines, and over-the-fence gossip to provide a semblance of normalcy to our need for communications.

***All of which made it more distressing since this year is our club's centennial year!***

Except for the war years, the London Amateur Radio Club (LARC) has been in continuous operation in since 1920 and so we wanted to celebrate the occasion. The pandemic eliminated most of our choices and we have decided to present "Centennial Corners" as part of our virtual club meetings over the forthcoming year, each focusing on the reminiscences of a knowledgeable club member and illustrated with archival photographs.



This brief look back (and forward) will anticipate the reminiscences of three of our distinguished Past-Presidents, each of whom served during unique times in the life of the club.

They are snapshots and are necessarily incomplete, but perhaps they may convey the flavour of how things were back then.

First among these recollections must be those of Mitch Powell, VE3OT.

Mitch served as club President in 1977 and brought to it enormous experience as a radio operator having been employed in the Arctic from 1954 to 1956. He had the call VE8WN at the time and worked with the Department of Transport (or DOT as it was then known) sending Wx reports by CW from Resolute Bay, only occasionally having to resort to QLF technique with his left foot.

The club met at the Lorne Avenue Public School then and enjoyed support from many interesting characters in our history. Mitch became a Director of the Canadian division of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL) and served as the Canadian representative on the ARRL Executive Committee from 1979 to 1981.

The Canadian Radio Relay League (CRRL) then became a separate entity and he was elected its first President.

Mitch was on the faculty of Fanshawe College here in London where he taught electronics, but he was perhaps better known within the Amateur community for his annual evening course which trained a significant number of Amateurs over the 20 or so years he offered the course.

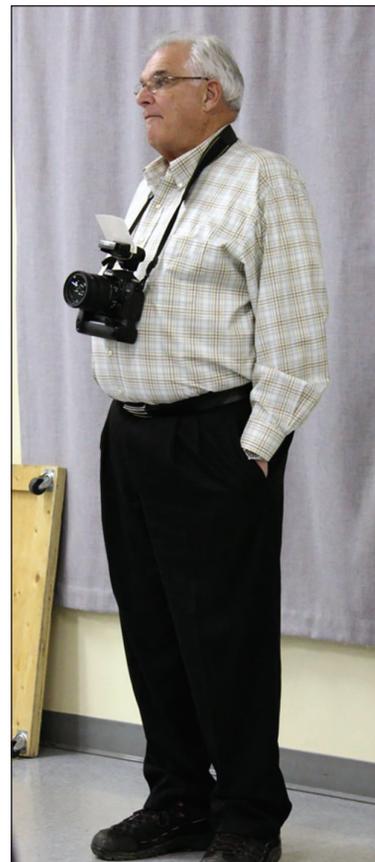
With about 20 students in each class, we estimate he trained over 400 Amateurs, many of whom are active in the club today.



Mitch Powell, VE3OT, working CW at Field Day in 2019.

The tradition within LARC of offering a course to potential new Amateurs continues today. Each fall, the club offers a team-taught Basic Amateur Radio course which must now be in virtual presentation mode. Mitch continues to teach in our course.

The second recollections will be those of David Lambert, VE3KGG.



David served on the club Executive in 1982 to 1983 as Treasurer, and then as President from 2012 to 2014. It was on his watch that the club found a home.

A series of lucky coincidences led to the club being invited to set up a demonstration radio station at the Secrets of Radar Museum (SORM), then located on the grounds of Parkwood Hospital.

The occasion was the 2014 "Doors Open" annual event and LARC being there proved to be very popular with visitors to the museum. This led to the club being offered a permanent place to establish a club station in 2015 and we operated

David Lambert, VE3KGG, at LARC's potluck Christmas dinner December 2013.

there as VE3LS, a call inherited from the London Seniors group whose station was within the hospital itself, but whose facilities had to be dismantled due to space requirements.

We operated at the Parkwood facility for three years after which the property was going to be sold and the building torn down. Subsequently, the availability of space within the 427 Wing, a Canadian Airforce Association property beside the airport (YXU) in London, was brought to our attention by Frank Birch, VE3FBZ and was another happy coincidence. This permitted the club to move in 2017 to the facility and, after substantial renovation by a few dedicated members, resulted in the splendid club station we enjoy today. It uses the call sign VE3LON.

Those same members also extensively renovated an adjacent area in the building so that the Secrets of Radar Museum could re-establish itself after leaving Parkwood. Some of the original equipment at the station was from the London Seniors group and was donated with help from John Ohnmacht, VE3JO – a former Radio Inspector with the Department of Communications (DOC) in London – and John Pedersen, VE3MGR, who made the station a memorial tribute to John, VE3JO, when he became a Silent Key.

David was a member of the London Fire Department (LFD) from 1986 to 2001. He also served with the fire department in Strathroy from 2019-2020, and finally retired this year. He worked as an investigator for the LFD and is a dedicated promoter of fire safety. He was responsible for LARC contributing to the annual Fire Prevention Week special event and operating as one of the two wildcard stations, VA3FIRE/VE3FIRE, in alternate years. This year will be our fifth year of contributing to the event (see page ??).

David is also recognized within LARC as an excellent DX operator and is the “go to” guy within the club for advice on operating DX. He has written extensively about HF operating for new Amateurs as well as making suggestions on equipping a station for DX operation.

David has been heard to opine that, when trying to put rare DX in the log, 100 watts should be considered QRP! He currently admits to having confirmed contacts with 332 of the 340 entities (countries) recognized by the ARRL which puts him in an elite group of Amateur operators worldwide. He is always listening for any of the remaining entities on his list which include North Korea (P5), Vietnam (3W) and the Lakshadweep Islands (VU7). If you hear any of them, please let him know.

The third set of recollections are those of Dave McCarter, VE3EI (also VE3GSO), who was President in 1979 and then again from 2016 to 2018. Dave is a respected senior Amateur who has had considerable impact on the club’s operations and who still serves LARC today as its Treasurer.

It was on his first watch as President that activity in the club focused on repeater establishment. One of the club’s repeaters, VA3LON, was put in operation at that time and is recognized as one of the more dependable VHF repeaters under the club’s umbrella. It supports general activities as well as a weekly net which has helped enormously to maintain contact among club members during these extraordinary times. This long-running net is on Mondays at 8 pm on VA3LON, 147.060+, PL: 114.8 Hz, controlled by Brian, VA3ATB.

Dave’s second term as President saw the move to the 427 Wing location, the subsequent renovations, and the establishment of several activities at the club station which were being enjoyed by many LARC members until the global pandemic arrived.

Until his retirement, Dave had been on the faculty of Fanshawe College as an instructor in electronics and he brought to the club substantial knowledge and enthusiasm for the discipline, particularly as it applies to Amateur Radio.



Dave McCarter, VE3EI, operating with solar power at Field Day 2013.

He established a weekly kit-building and electronic experimentation evening which was attended by those interested in learning how to endure the joys of self-immolation with hot solder (hi) and then the ecstasy of completing a project which actually worked.

Dave provides advice to club members on all those questions dealing with electronics in Amateur Radio and is a treasured resource for the club.

There are many others whose activities have contributed substantially to the club’s operations over the years and one will be mentioned here. John Pedersen, VE3MGR, is a Past-President (1986) whose mechanical design and engineering expertise, provided over several years, has solved numerous problems allowing LARC operations to thrive, and members to enjoy both the club station and their own stations with his help.

An example of his genius is the recently constructed lean-over tower and hex beam antenna installed at the club station and depicted on our QSL card shown at left.

It is hoped that these reflections and anticipated reminiscences to be featured in our forthcoming monthly “Centennial Corners” paint a picture of an active Amateur Radio club, proud of its heritage, and looking forward to its next 100 years with eager enthusiasm.

You can follow the London ARC and the reports of our “Centennial Corners” on our website at <http://www.larc.ca>.

QSL card for club station VE3LON showing the Yagi, Hex beam, vertical and dipole antennas at the 427 Wing.

