



January 2016

Spartans Newsletter Winter 2015-2016

The late October gathering for lunch and reminiscing at the Linguini Restaurant was as usual a very pleasant affair. Collecting news items for sharing with attendees at the luncheon is an important function and also triggers this newsletter that is distributed more widely by posting on our website <http://clubspartans.weebly.com>, and in a compressed version by regular mail. Representing senior management at MDA, Dr. Marc Donato was able to join us for lunch and to brief us on the challenges of a rapidly changing global market and financial conditions. The drop in the value of the Canadian dollar may have a negative on us individually, but can be a boost to Canadian industry, but in the longer term is no substitute for the ingenuity, skill and effort of MDA and predecessor company employees that have given our sector a competitive edge. The thoughtful and lengthy letter from Dave Barnby later in this letter is a reminder of the value of putting down our recollections of past events and achievements. With some modest persuasion Mike Morris and Ian Grier have both done a fine job of recording some history of the early days of satellite communications, all posted on our web site but too lengthy for this newsletter. By the time this letter is distributed, John Barkwith's excellent account of the earth station activities supporting the 1972 Nixon visit to Shanghai will be posted on our web site.

Thanks to our committee members for their valuable contributions to the maintenance of our group.

Al Lawson	Photographer and list maintainer
George Larder	Wiley treasurer and jam maker
Gil Kerr	Luncheon organizer
Nicole Bourdeau	Chief recruiter
Margaret Gross	Webmaster
Ed SoroChan	Member at large
Gus Gross	Member at large

News Items

Al Lawson noticed the obituary for **Alan Powell** in the local newspaper and reminded us that he worked in RCA Equipment Engineering for a short time in the early 1960s. Later he joined the SPARTans, and attended one or two of our luncheons. Alan was a very active committee member of the local branch of the Institution of Engineering & Technology (IET). His obituary did not include any details of his professional career. We have requested this information from his son and will share this information when it is received.

The passing of **Bill Chisholm** on Sept 26, 2015 was noted. Although he was never a member of our group he was well known to many of us. His funeral was held Saturday, Oct. 31, 2015, at St. James Anglican Church, 642 Main Rd., Hudson



Page 2

Ken Perry advised us of the sudden passing of **Andy Sztyk** on Oct 20 at his home in Panama. Although he obtained prompt medical care it was believed that he was the victim of a massive heart attack. I joined several other Spartans for his memorial service and met members of his immediate family, but not Susan as she remained in Panama to wind up estate matters after which she plans to return to Montreal.

Ken Perry also reported the death of **Larry Clarke** on Oct 22. (Not my good news week says Ken). He was well known to us as the founder and chairman of the board of Spar and a builder of the Canadian aerospace industry.

<http://www.legacycom/obituaries/thestar/obituary.aspx?n=larry-denman-clarke&pid=176207267&fhid=5857>

Some years ago Spar commissioned Lydia Dotto to prepare a history of Spar called A Heritage of Excellence that chronicles the development of the Canadian space industry and his role in its growth. I have recently reread sections of this book that I believe does not give an adequate recognition of the contribution of other parties to the development of our industry. This should not be too surprising, as with the acquisition, merger and disappearance of companies, there is no longer a spokesman for them. I cannot claim to be a great admirer of Nortel, but think of their massive contribution to modern fibre optic and photonic communications technology, with no one now to speak to their achievements.

We noted with sadness the passing of **Leo Landovskis** former colleague and father of Peter and John. Leo was a modest and gentle man, adored by his children and grandchildren, liked and respected by his colleagues. As a founding member of the Montreal Latvian choir, he not only upheld the great choral traditions of the Baltic States, but is the only musician in my circle who has sung as soloist in Carnegie Hall. I joined his family and friends along with several Spartans for a celebration of his life.

Summer 2015 Newsletter Apology

Al Lawson wrote "I have read through the draft summer newsletter. Maybe we should call it the Indian Summer Newsletter", but Margaret took a more straight forward approach in the web posting, calling it more accurately the Summer/Fall newsletter. I will continue to maintain that it is the summer newsletter.

Regrets and other correspondence from members

From Al Lawson:

Hello **Dave (Barnby)**,

I guess I owe you a response to your phone call, in which you suggested that Spartans should get involved in helping in the running of the RCA Museum, Les Ondes Berliner. This matter was



discussed at a recent SPARtans committee meeting that reaffirmed that we should adhere strictly to the social role of the Spartans group. (Ed: I am sure that any individual support to the museum will be appreciated).

It was a pleasure to meet up with you again at our last SPARtans luncheon. You now hold the record of the member who travelled the farthest to attend a luncheon. On behalf of Club SPARtans, we would love to see you again at a future luncheon. To which Dave replied at length: Regarding the museum, I can see that SPARtans could not get involved in such an activity, but it struck me that perhaps someone should just keep in touch with what the museum was doing.

I think I told you that I visited the old Lenoir 'factory' (on your tip-off) on the Monday following the SPARtans lunch and met Gaetan Pilon who runs 'Studio Victor, and has done so since the 1980s with his brother and one or two other colleagues as a recording studio – you probably know all this. Anyway, the studio used to be the Antenna group's laboratory / range and was run by Peter Foldes. The area had been a recording studio for RCA Victor in the distant past (sorry to be vague about this but I have forgotten what I was told).

Gaetan and I spent an hour or so chatting and he mentioned that he was thinking of retiring and I gained the impression he was looking to sell the facility and the future might be in doubt. I don't know whether you have visited, but it's quite fascinating with the old studio paneling restored and with a good collection of historic artifacts – I had my picture taken looking at a 'Nipper' looking into a vintage gramophone. I noticed that the St Henri area is a bit run down with houses boarded up – sometimes an indicator that demolition and re-building could be in train. No doubt if that happened it could become a high rise-area or similar, like much of downtown now. I suggested to Gaetan that the Lenoir 'factory' could become victim of this, and he didn't challenge my comment. If that happened what would become of the museum project.

When I first called at the St Antoine entrance the Museum was closed, but whilst talking to Gaetan, by happy chance, the young lady (Meggie) in charge of the project turned up to show some friends around the museum. I asked whether I could take the opportunity to have a quick look and was given entry. It was a quick look as the party didn't stay long, but, although I wasn't very impressed with the museum, I had the time to see that there was a lot, and I mean a lot, of vintage equipment (mostly test equipment I think) in a very large room to the back of the museum. I didn't have time to investigate and the room was not lit – I imagine someone has an inventory.

Anyway I later joined the museum (\$50) just in case something happens. I did mention to you that Meggie told me there is a grant of \$7 million (I think it was), which seemed to me a good sum to get something going.

My only thought Al, is that there ought to be some old hands from the time liaising with Meggie just to ensure the museum does justice to the history.

You told me there was a book on the history, and there was (I bought a copy), there was hardly anything on the Lenoir factory and was all about the Nipper image and a bit of US background history. Perhaps there was another book, but when I came to Montreal I had wondered whether there was any interest in putting together a 'Montreal' version. It's pretty late in the day if it has not already been done with memories fading and less and less of us being around, although there is no doubt lots of 'paperwork' around. You suggest that I should elaborate on my suggestion to Lorne but the above is all I can contribute, for what it may be worth, at present, unless there is interest as well.



Richard Lubelsky I just realized that my reply to Al, some time back, never left my SENT folder, and that I lost all my SPARTans directory files, the members directory, web site access password, and anything else that can be useful. If you can arrange to have all this stuff sent to me I would be in your debt.

Stefan Zadrozny: Yes Al, I plan to attend the luncheon and it better be good, because it will be my birthday ... 80 something

Les Meszaros: I'm still working part time, although sometimes it feels like it's full time. At least that's how my wife sees it. I have done considerable traveling so far this year, supporting two clients. I don't really need to work, but it's hard to turn down people (my ex colleagues usually) when they ask me to do something for them. It seems that with the explosion of IP based communication, there are not enough young engineers interested in the satellite portion of the communication link. Also, companies can't justify keeping someone who knows about such things because there is not enough work for him/her. So we old fogies have to keep on carrying the torch.

Peter Landovskis: I would really like to attend but it is unlikely I will be able to make it. I am driving to St Louis this week with one of my daughters for a dog jumping event her dog qualified for, and the week after the Spartans luncheon, I am driving to Halifax for the wedding of one of my other daughters. A drive from Toronto to Montreal on the week in between may be pushing my luck so I will have to send my regrets for this luncheon. If there is some way I can make last minute arrangements to get to Montreal, will it be possible to send you an e-mail (no later than the Tuesday) to see if you can fit me in.

Observant and regular correspondent **Charlie Morton** was alerted to author Piers Hemmingsen's soon-to-be published book, *The Beatles in Canada: The Origins of Beatlemania*. www.thebeatlesincanada.com. It apparently includes an entire chapter on the Smiths Falls' RCA Victor plant and its role in introducing North America to the British boy band. The non air conditioned plant was known for being sweltering hot in the summer and cold in the winter. Plant management encouraged staff to use salt pills in the summer to keep from passing out. A 14 year old Trudy Medcalf started the first and largest North American Beatles Fan Club with 100,000 members at its peak. She was introduced to the band in 1963 when she spent \$1.50 on a ticket to a concert in England. Afterwards, she called the European fan club and asked for permission to start her own club back in Canada. She remembers being flown to New York City for the band's Ed Sullivan Show debut. She and a friend were in the mailroom (at Smiths Falls) while each band member took turns stopping in to say hello to the girls. Medcalf was especially pleased with John Lennon who once identifying the teenage girl as the fan club president, got down on his knees and bowed to her.

This reminder of the Smiths Falls record plant was a surprise to George Larder but not to me as I knew that the old steam driven presses from the basement hell-hole at Lenoir Street had been relocated there. I was aware that a record stamping operation ran in the basement of the Lenoir Street plant when I arrived at RCA Victor in June, 1954. As a junior employee I never had the nerve to ask for a tour of the facility but I recall conversations with long time employees such as



Alec Edisbury who spoke of the terrible conditions in the steam operated press area. I speculate that bakelite style 78 RPM discs were still being produced there, but their days were numbered as the 33 RPM Long Playing (LP) vinyl disc introduced by CBS Records in 1946 was taking over. I was also aware that a new plant had been set up in Smiths Falls to make 33 RPM vinyl records and I also speculate that it was designed to produce the new 45 RPM vinyl disc that had been introduced by RCA to take advantage of the big market for hit singles that was formerly served by 78 RPM discs.

If George did not remember the record operation he may also have not remember the vacuum tube manufacturing operation at Lenoir Street that used very large gas fired carousels that were dismantled and sent to a new plant in Cowansville. Again, this technology was in steep decline with tubes being replaced by transistors. At some time I may recount a modest scandal in connection with the move of the tube manufacturing equipment to Cowansville.

To the best of my recollection, the first transistor equipment designed at RCA in Montreal was a service channel signaling unit designed around 1960 by Don Green and Sam Huey for the MM 600 long haul microwave systems, and the second was a more complex baseband switcher/combiner unit for the MM600 designed by me. Both Don and Sam later went on to very successful careers in US industry.

Regular contributor **Greg Baylis** sends the following short memoir of an episode in the early deployment of long haul microwave systems in Canada, showing how a few almost casual words can have a big impact on future business.

Microwave System memories

By Greg Baylis

In 1961 a group of customer and supplier personnel were on a field trip to review the progress on a major microwave system between Grand Prairie AB and Alaska (GPA) based on the RCA Montreal designed MM 600 equipment. The system that was planned and executed by RCA Montreal began at Grand Prairie AB, where it connected with an existing microwave system, and ran along the Alaska Highway to the Yukon Alaska border where it joined with an Alaskan system. The field trip group included the Canadian National Telecommunications (CNT) general manager and two supervising engineers who would be responsible for system operation on completion. Marketing manager Bill Roloff and I represented RCA.

At this time CNT was responsible for Trans Canada communications from Winnipeg to Vancouver, and Canadian Pacific Telecommunications (CPT) from Halifax to Winnipeg. A transatlantic cable being developed would terminate north of Halifax and CPT had already installed capacity to bring the cable traffic to Montreal.

Our group checked in for the night in Watson Lake just north of the BC-Yukon border. After a fine supper we all relaxed in a lounge with walls adorned by mounted heads of bear, moose and deer. During the conversation on the status of the GPA system, Bill asked if CNT had considered providing a microwave system across Canada that would connect in BC to a planned transpacific cable terminating in New Zealand and Australia. CNT replied that they had evaluated the



prospect but found issues of financing, frequency licensing and other items too onerous. Bill was very discouraged by this response.

After the group dispersed that evening, Bill and I went for a walk along the moonlit Alaska Highway at a crisp and clear minus 20F. The transcontinental system came up in our conversation, and based on successful partial tests on the GPA system, I said to Bill, technically we could do it. Bills reply was, if so I will continue to promote the proposal. Some months later Bill had secured the financing and was assured that frequencies would be available. He then convinced CNT and CPT to bid on the transcontinental system. Their successful bid resulted in an award to RCA for the design, path testing and provision of all equipment for a system of 136 stations stretching from Montreal to Vancouver.

The result was one of the worlds longest and best operating microwave systems based on good engineering and equipment, and an excellent marketing effort initiated by a few words spoken on a cold night on the Alaska Highway.

Editorial comments

During Mike Morris diligent research on his Pakistan story, he stumbled upon a reference to former RCA employee **Cedric Baxter** whom I readily recalled from our days together on the ISIS program who may have maintained contact with John Burrows. I thanked Mike for his effort on the Pakistan story and reminded him of earlier correspondence where I spoke of former highly regarded colleagues Emeric Podraczky and Kishore Chitre, both of whom went on to work at Intelsat. I tried to visit them whenever I was passing through Washington. In one of many e-mail exchanges, Mike replied that he knew Kishore C well at RCA but only met him once after that in the 1980s at a conference in Washington. He seemed to be at a stage in his career when he wasn't allowed out of the office alone it seemed, in case someone wanted to say something he shouldn't hear or vice versa? We had a brief chat before he was whisked away somewhere. Mike had a similar situation with John Roth in the 1990s at an investor's conference, when SR Telecom and Nortel were both flying high, albeit at different altitudes. "John was sitting in the hotel lobby with his entourage and as I approached him two of his aides, looking aghast, tried to intervene but he waived them aside and we had quite a long talk about the old RCA Antenna Group from which so many people "emerged" including John. I think from the look on his face he found the chat more pleasant than his usual daily burdens".

I shared similar stories with Mike as I had crossed paths with John Roth during our careers and he was always friendly and enjoyed talking over earlier times. The last time I spoke to him was in Vancouver in 1986 when I recall he was CEO of the Nortel research organization. He had taken over from Dave Vice whom I knew well both from Queen's, where he was one year behind me in EE, and as a good friend of Roly Reader, a classmate of Milt. We used to play poker regularly at Roly's place and I can assure you Dave was a much better poker player than me.

In 1986 I had conveniently arranged to give a paper at a communications conference coinciding with the Vancouver Expo 86. A lot of nonsense had been circulated about the supposed competition between satellite and terrestrial alternatives. I hoped to point out the natural complementarity of the two and not the conflict, whereby the satellite had an advantage in introducing and aggregating wide area services until the traffic density warrants the capital cost of fibre or microwave networks. I did not realize it at the time, but John was in the audience



and he came up to me later saying he completely agreed with my thesis, and shared some critical insights into fibre and photonics that Nortel labs were deeply involved with at that time.

Mike has also contacted Frederic Hore who has not only written recollections of his involvement in early earth station contracts but is also a professional photographer. We look forward to his inputs. I encourage everyone to share anecdotes and bits of our shared heritage. This can include pictures or copies of original text. Do not be too concerned with style and grammatical accuracy as the content is the important thing and our volunteers will do the three Ps, polishing, preparation, and publishing. I will also try to do my bit by resurrecting material from my paper files and photographic records for possible posting in an existing historical slot in our web site. I am sure some of this will include material created by long time members Henry and Elsa Hore and Eila Talon and others.

Margaret has also reminded us that we should also record and share the happier events in our lives such as notable birthdays and anniversaries.

Raffle

Another successful raffle was held thanks to our sales ladies Nicole Bourdeau and Wanda Daniel and our generous donors. They reported another excellent response and judging by the proceeds I would have to agree. The money collected goes a long way towards maintaining our modest membership fee.

The prizes offered and the winners were as follows:

- \$50.00 food voucher donated by Ristorante Linguini, won by Stefan Zadrozny.
- Mantle clock donated by Claude Richard¹, won by Peter Oliver.
- An original oil painting by Charlie Albright, won by Gil Kerr
- Set of 2 home made jam jars donated by Marcia Slaven and won by Wal Duk.

Note 1: The mantle clock is an exact replica of clocks previously donated by Curt Ingerville and now crafted by Claude Richard.

Honorary Members

Mary Buchanan	Bill Corless	Letty Cox (Bob)	Marc Donato
Jean Gondos	Elsa Hore	Pam Leahy	Carmen McNally
Hazel Osborne	Barbara Pastuszko	Hazel Redhead	Nancy Renz (nee Ingerville)
Claude Richard	Eila Tallon	Mary Zacharatos	



Sending Regrets

Bruce Aikenhead	Dave Barnby	Collette Besner	Ed Budnick
Terry Cagney	Dean Collis	Pat Hammond	Gilles Lachapelle
Peter Landovskis	Richard Lubelsky	Lloyd Martin	Bill McMath
Dan Mercik	Les Meszaros	Roger Rak	Jane Robinson
George Rout	John Runeckles	George Skinner	Susan Szytk
Dave Whitton			

Note: Please continue to send status updates and memorabilia, as member contributions and sharing of our common background is the core of these newsletters.

Your Reporter,
Lorne Keyes