Lewis Mason Clement

(1892-1979)

An appreciation of a great radio engineer and administrator.

Compiled by Vic Ross, C.Eng., FIEE(Ret)
with additional material added by
Bruce Clement Lamont

Proceedings of the Radio Club of America
Vol. 53, No. 2, October 1979

Lewis Mason Clement, the last surviving member of a trio of innovative creative native-born American geniuses who have left an indelible mark of honor upon American and even world history through their precious contributions to the radio art, died at his home in Pompano Beach, Florida, on August 22, 1979. He was 87.

He had consulted with two other God's gentlemen who also had gone to heaven: Dr. Golden Rule and Rev. Do Unto Others. Lewis Clement was a disciple of Dr. Edwin Howard Armstrong of the east and Columbia University and The Radio Club was one; the other was Herndon Pratt, a chairman at the University of California at Berkeley, a man from whom he gave his excellent instruction without any tuition fees whatever.

Lewis M. Clement 1910

Clement was born in Oakland, California, on June 25, 1892 and like Pratt, had his heart set upon electrical engineering by the time he was a young boy. Clement was a descendant of a family that had been prominent in the Pacific Coast area since the early days of the Hudson's Bay Company, Capt. Eugene Finnerty, a former Lieut Governor and China Clipper ship captain, pioneer, and later Port Commissioner of San Francisco. Not only did young Lewis obtain a love for navigation then, but he also had inherited upon him that a sea captain in the earlier days was a very lonely man indeed, because he was out of sight of land, because he was out of communication with home for a long period of time, and what little he might know of where he was at any time could only be learned by star recognition. The sextant was a captain's best friend. And it was not a sextant he sold, it was an urge to wanting to be heard in every direction from home.

His Canadian-born parental grandfather, Lewis Morisby Clement, was also a transportation pioneer of the West. A civil engineer who graduated from Yale, he was the first man to survey a practicable transcontinental railroad through the Rockies. In 1882 he was the engineer assigned to Collingwood, Ontario, to supervise the construction of that line he had today by Theodore H. Judah, the Chief Engineer of the nascent Central Pacific Railroad of California which was soon to start building the western portion of the first transcontinental railroad. Clement was also responsible for the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway's transcontinental system and CPRR grade over the Sierra Nevada and Nevada and Utah. He seen rose to become the CPRR's Chief Assistant Engineer and later Superintendent of Track until leaving the CPRR in 1891 to become Chief Engineer of the Pacific Improvement Company in San Francisco where he helped design the city's cable car system. The senior Clement also helped San Leland Stanford, his longtime employer with both the CPRR and PIC, to set up the Engineering Department at Stanford University. His son Russell, the younger Lewis Clement's father, was also a civil engineer and served in MIT ROTC who went on to the Regular Army and retired as a major general.

LM Clement was the wireless operator on the Pacific Coast Steamship Company's steamer Senator, Sonoma, Santa Rosa, Ecuador, June 25, 1914.

With this family engineering background, it is hardly strange, then, that he was tactily encouraged to become interested in the art of wireless. He was a student at Oakland Polytechnic High School when, on Sunday, April 14, 1912, he was Oakland in 1905, was Co-Founder and Secretary of the Bay Counties Wireless Telegraph Association in 1907, and in 1908 he made the first ever broadcast of a sporting event, the University of California vs Stanford football game. He soon learned how to use the key of his crude spark gap outfit without putting out the lights in the Clement two-family house along with the lights of several neighbors as well as had been the case earlier. His classmates such as Herndon Pratt and others were also learning the art of wireless telegraphy. Clement became a member of the Pacific Coast Wireless Telegraph Association, leader at the front of a very rapidly growing and expanding organization that has led today to virtually instantaneous round-the-world communication as well as communication with real men on the Moon and radio space probes that have gone far to reach the very limits of the universe. He was so good company, such admired the work of his colleagues, concentrating upon what he felt he could do best and admiring what each of the other men did that was superb and

Daily Pal Off
Oakland, California, Sunday, April 14, 1912
SPOKANE STRIKES ROCKS
Two Women Die of Fright in Midnight Wreck
PASSENGERS SAVED BY PASSING VESSEL
Wireless Telegraph Flashes Word to Vessels Near by
Tells of Terrible Scene of Wreck
Wireless Telegraph Saves Lives
Wireless Telegraph Saves Lives
Wireless Telegraph Saves Lives