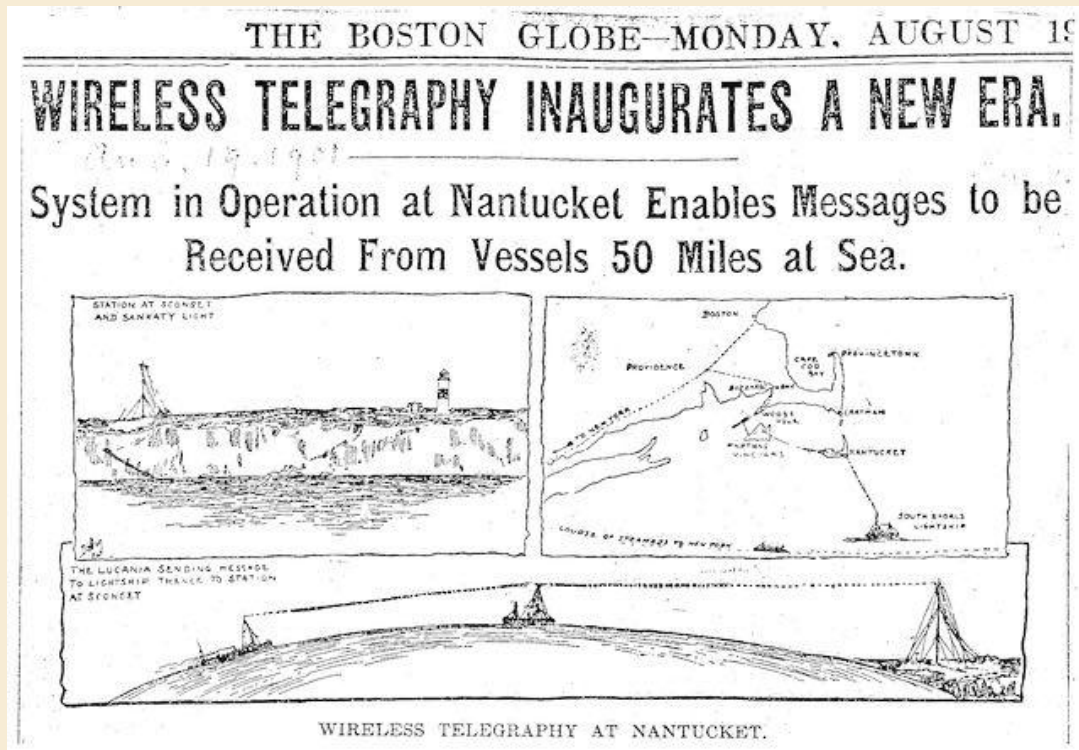




MARCONIGRAM

Connecting the Chatham Marconi Maritime Center Community

August 16 in Wireless History...



On August 16 1901, 120 years ago today, a wondrous and historic event in the annals of sea travel unfolded off the shores of southeastern New England.

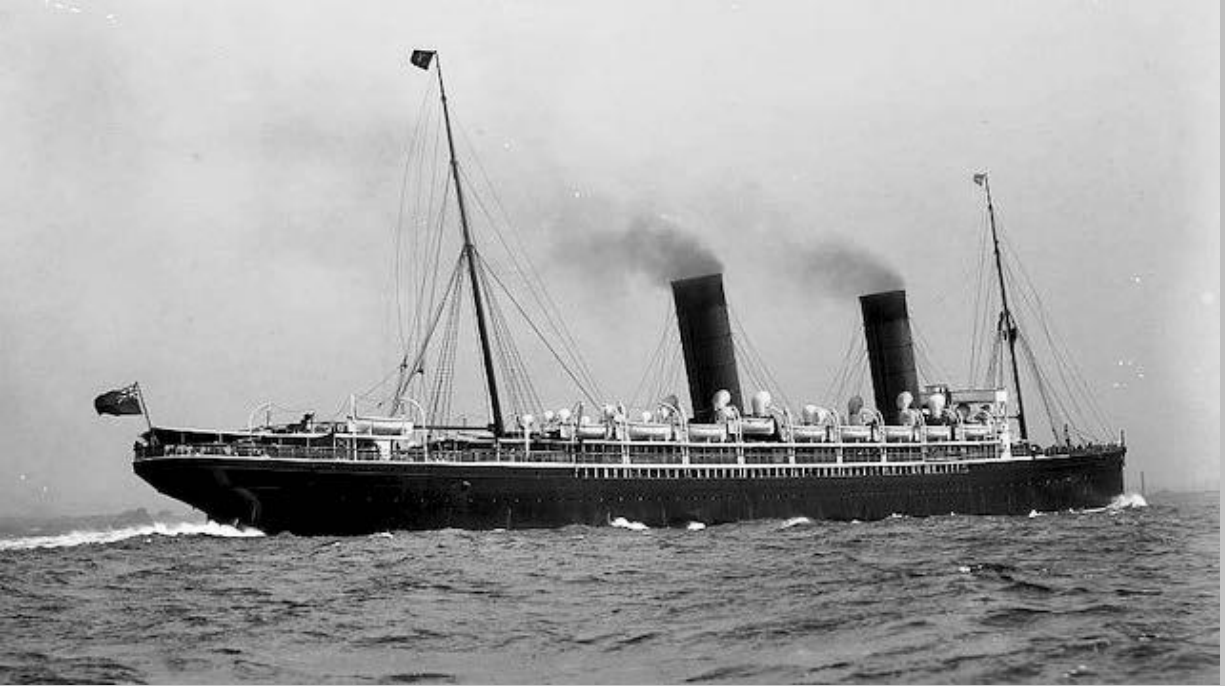
Nantucket Island was the first place in the United States where the fledgling system of wireless telegraphy was put to a successful commercial test.

Passengers aboard the luxurious Cunard steamer RMS *Lucania*, bound for New York from Liverpool, were able to send telegrams wirelessly to shore while still 50 miles at sea, a feat that was beyond imagination only a few years earlier.

The event was highly anticipated, and there was an air of excitement when the first signal from the approaching ship was heard at around 6:00 p.m.

Lucania was equipped with Marconi wireless apparatus, as was the Nantucket lightship and a shore station built on Bunker Hill in coastal 'Sconset. Signals from the ship went wirelessly to the lightship and thence to 'Sconset, thence by wire to Martha's Vineyard, Woods Hole, and onward.

In assessing this milestone, one commentator observed that a trip to Europe would now mean being isolated for only a fraction more than four days.



By October, Cunard had equipped 4 steamers with wireless, which became a prominent feature as the company enticed ocean travelers to book passage on its great vessels.

It would be many years, however, before mid-ocean ship-to-shore messages would be reliable, because early wireless had only a limited range. To cover long distances meant relaying from ship to ship to ship... to shore (and vice versa). It depended on what other ships were within range, at what times, and going what direction.

In 1904, with 32 ships equipped and making the Atlantic crossing, Western Union would accept telegrams to be sent to ships *at the sender's risk*. If a message didn't make it to the recipient, there was no charge for the (failed) wireless leg. But Western Union had done its (successful) job getting the message to the shore station, so the fee for that was kept.

By the time WCC went into service in 1921, Marconi's spark had given way to RCA's vacuum tube and reliable long distance messaging was at hand. Launched a hundred years ago, WCC was maintaining reliable radiotelegraph communication with the principal ocean liners up to 2500 to 3000 miles distant.

This summer the Marconi/RCA Wireless Museum is celebrating the centennial of WCC and telling its story with our new exhibit, "Chatham Maritime Radio - 1921."

STAY CONNECTED!



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Founded in 2002, Chatham Marconi Maritime Center is a 501(c)(3) organization that celebrates the rich history of 20th Century maritime radio and explores the innovative advances in science and technology that continue to transform our lives.

