

Not many women have involved themselves in Radio & Electronics however here is a story worth printing – Mary Texanna Loomis (3YA) 1880-1960 the first woman to be President & Director of a Radio Engineering College. One of the few prominent women of early radio history, born August 18, 1880 near Goliad, Texas. She was the second child born to Alvin Isaac and Caroline (Dryer) Loomis. Though born on homestead in Texas in 1880, by 1883 her parents had returned to Rochester NY and then on to Buffalo where Alvin became president of a large delivery and storage company.

Little is known of her early years, but appears she had a fairly middle-class upbringing. She seemed well schooled, with an early interest in music and language (she mastered French, German and Italian) Her early years were spent in Buffalo, NY and she later relocated to Virginia.



During the early years of World War I, Ms. Loomis became interested in the new field of wireless telegraphy. There was a family precedent; her cousin, Dr. Mahlon Loomis, had conducted early wireless experiments with moderate success. Dr. Loomis may have been the first person, in 1865, to send and receive wireless signals. Ms. Loomis mastered wireless telegraphy, becoming competent enough to be granted a license by the United States Department of Commerce.

There is a record of a marriage between Ms. Loomis and Turner Erwin in Buffalo NY she was age 18, dated October 1898. For what reason the marriage failed we will never know. After the armistice in 1918, Ms. Loomis, thoroughly fascinated with the field now called “radio” decided to turn her expertise into a career. Also, she wanted to do something that would honor her pioneering ancestor. Her idea was to do this by founding a radio school. Though radio was indeed, for many years, a profession dominated by men, Ms. Loomis around age 30 took no notice and in 1920 founded the Loomis Radio College in Washington, DC.

The Loomis Radio College quickly gained an excellent reputation. Ms. Loomis set high standards for the school and it attracted students not only from the United States but Europe and Asia as well. Loomis enjoyed teaching as much as she enjoyed radio itself. In an interview, she said, “Really, I am so infatuated with my work that I delight in spending from 12 to 15 hours a day at it. My whole heart and soul are in this radio school.” Your author first knew of Mary T (3YA) by a book, by Ms Loomis (Radio Theory and Operating) circa 1925, consisting of 848 pages. The book became the textbook for her students and is still a highly sought after today by those who are into early radio study and wireless history. Continued...

Some say incorrectly Mary was Doctor Loomis' daughter, she stated the Doctor was a cousin.

At the age of 50, Mary had founded a world class institution of radio learning, which provided fully trained graduates to the fledgling broadcast industry throughout the 1920's – As president and Lecturer of the Loomis Radio School, Mary also authored a definitive book on and aptly named “Radio Theory and Operating.” She is pictured at the school operating position circa 1921.

The Loomis College of Radio Engineering located in Washington, DC 401 Ninth Street NW operated wireless radio 3YA. By 1920 it was offering a six month course enabling the graduate to obtain a first grade commercial radio license and by January 1922 was offering a four year course with a degree in Radio Engineering bestowed on graduates. Ms Loomis also intended that her students understand more than just the inner and outer workings of radio. In addition to a radio laboratory (with equipment constructed almost entirely by Mary herself), the school maintained a complete shop capable of teaching carpentry, drafting and basic electricity. She reasoned that many of her graduates might find themselves at sea, or in other challenging situations and she wanted them adequately prepared. “No man,” Ms. Loomis said, at the time, “can graduate from my school until he learns how to make any part of the apparatus. I give him a blueprint of what I want him to do and tell him to go into the shop and keep hammering away until the job is completed.”

The Loomis Radio College appears to have been in existence at least through the middle 1930's. Research has not turned up any further information regarding the later history of the Loomis Radio College, or of Mary Loomis herself. However, her legacy lives on in the form of her textbook, recently reprinted in electronic form. Excerpted Everything2.Com & Loomis Families of America.

It is aptly known what the “Great Depression” did to businesses and institutions. My feeling is that it was a bad time for business at that time of our history. (Author)

In an interview given to H.O. Bishop of the Dearborn Independent in 1921, Mary was asked : “What sort of young men are taking up the radio profession?” “The Kind who have grit and want to get there! Virtually all of them are ambitious and enthusiastic over the possibility of visiting every nook and corner of the world.

My students are not only enrolled from various sections of the USA and Canada but from many foreign countries, such as Sweden, Ireland, England, Poland, Russia, Austria, Rumania and the Philippines. One of the brightest pupils I ever had was Prince Walimuhomed of Far-away Afghanistan. He was an extremely modest young man, keeping his real identity a secret until after graduating. He said he had no idea of earning his living by working at radio, but just wanted to know all about it. He does.

Mary said “You have no idea how much happiness I get out of the success of each individual graduate.” My boys keep in touch with me from all parts of the world. Scarcely a day goes by that I do not get some trinket or postcard from some remote section of the world. I have made the wonderful discovery that the only way for me to get happiness for myself is to make some one else happy. I find that I am making these young men happy by teaching them every phase of the radio business so that they can earn a comfortable living for themselves and their dependents and at the same time, see the great big beautiful world. Author, After contacting a distant relative, Lance Loomis.....advised me Mary expired in San Francisco June 7 - 1960 Continued page three

We desire to obtain more information about our subject and found a few things about her siblings; Brothers and sisters list; Henry John died in infancy, Martha Etta; Grace Dryer; John Fiske; Howard Clark 1892-1985 Niagara NY; Helen Ruth; Byron Alvin died in infancy.



The Loomis College in DC at the Strand Building. Below Ms Mary giving a technical class. Appeared to be attended well during the twenties. Credit Shorpy.com and National Archives.

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