

REGINALD AUBREY FESSENDEN  
Physicist and Engineer, Deceased

Reginald Aubrey Fessenden, claimed by some to be "the greatest wireless inventor of the age - greater than Marconi," was the son of New England parentage, Rev. E. J. and Clementine (Trenholme) Fessenden, born at Milton, Quebec, Canada, on October 6, 1866. He died July 22, 1932 at his estate in Fiatts Village, Bermuda.

Educated at Bishops College in Quebec, he became principal of Whitney Institute, Bermuda, in 1885. From 1886 to 1887 he worked with Thomas A. Edison as Inspector Engineer, Edison Machine Works, and was Head Chemist at the Edison Laboratories, East Orange, New Jersey, 1887-1890. He then became Electrician for Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and in 1891 at Purdue University, in Indiana, he became Professor of electrical engineering. After two years he returned to Pittsburgh, and served in the same capacity at Western University of Pennsylvania (University of Pittsburgh).

Noted for his early radio experiments, his wireless work began in 1898. His first wireless experiments were carried on off the Atlantic Coast at South Carolina and Virginia. The Wright brothers were experimenting nearby with airplanes at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, and the three inventors became close friends. At Brants Rock, Massachusetts, one of the earliest wireless stations was erected. Two other stations were built, one in Scotland and one in Florida. His experiments resulted in a radio receiver which was reputed to be two thousand times more sensitive than Marconi's.

Also, he was special agent for the U.S. Weather Bureau from 1890 to 1902, and from 1902 to 1910, he was General Manager, National Electrical Signaling Company. Professor Fessenden declared that the first aerial telephone was used in 1900, and that the first transmission by this means was carried out in 1905.

He became Consulting Engineer, Submarine Signal Company, in 1910. His contributions in this field were the fathometer, an electrical device for obtaining quick and accurate soundings for vessels; direction finders; other electrical and radio devices and compasses. In October, 1929 the Scientific American Gold Medal was awarded him for promoting safety at sea.

A destroyer escort (DE-142) was named USS FESSENDEN in his honor and commissioned in 1943. It will shortly be recommissioned.

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