ISSUE 97, March 2015

Thomas Lohe (President of Karlsruhe Institute of Technology) and Roberto de Marca (2014 IEEE President) unveil Milestone plaque for Hertz’s discovery and experimental proof of electromagnetic waves (IEEE’s 150th milestone)

Static from the Director ..................... 2
History Committee .......................... 3
   Chair’s Message
Center Activities .......................... 3
   New 45rpm Phonograph Exhibit
   Life Members Committee History Project
   UEF Project Update
   American Historical Association Conference
   History Center on Twitter and Tumblr
   Fall 2014 Course on History of Engineering
   Robotics History: Narratives and Networks
   Spring 2015 Biographical Course at Stevens
Milestone Report ......................... 7
Things to See and Do ....................... 7
   Vintage Computer Festival East
   The Computer Wore Heels App Review
   Antique Wireless Museum
In Memoriam ............................... 8
   Charles Townes
Donor Honor Roll ......................... 9
Bibliography ............................. 13
The newsletter reports on the activities of the IEEE History Center and on new resources and projects in electrical and computer history. It is published three times each year—once in hard copy (March) and twice electronically (July and November) by the IEEE History Center.

IEEE History Center
at Stevens Institute of Technology
Samuel C. Williams Library 3rd Floor
1 Castle Point on Hudson
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5991
Telephone +1 732 562 5450
Fax +1 732 562 6020
E-mail: ieee-history@ieee.org
URL: www.ieee.org/history_center

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Antonio Savini
Mischa Schwartz
Isao Shirakawa
Jorge Soares
John Vign

IEEE History Center Staff
Michael Geselowitz, Senior Director
m.geselowitz@ieee.org
Sheldon Hochheiser, Archivist and Institutional Historian
s.hochheiser@ieee.org
Alexander Magoun, Outreach Historian
a.b.magoun@ieee.org
John Vardalas, Senior Historian
j.vardalas@ieee.org
Nathan Brewer, Digital Content Administrator
n.w.brewer@ieee.org
Robert Colburn, Research Coordinator
r.colburn@ieee.org

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The newsletter of the IEEE History Center is published three times per annum; one issue (March) in paper, the other two (July and November) electronically. The circulation of the paper issue is 4,800; the circulation of the electronic issues is 22,500. The newsletter reaches engineers, retired engineers, researchers, archivists, and curators interested specifically in the history of electrical, electronics, and computing engineering, and the history of related technologies.

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By Michael Geselowitz, Ph.D.

Welcome to another action-packed issue of the IEEE History Center newsletter, the first issue in what is poised to be a very exciting year. As discussed by the IEEE History Committee Chair in his column (pg 3) and also described in the article on page 4, the new Engineering & Technology Wiki site has been launched. As mentioned last issue, a Phase 2 grant from the United Engineering Foundation will have us continuing to fine-tune the site and finding additional partners. Our main focus in 2015, however, will be on raising the visibility of this new exciting resource. I hope that you, our staunch supporters, will visit the site (www.ethw.org), use its content, and, most importantly, participate in our efforts to preserve and make known engineering history by writing topic articles or first-hand histories.

Our other major focus this year will be REACH (Raising Engineering Awareness/Appreciation through the Conduit of History) our pre-university educational program that was previewed last issue by our IEEE Development Office colleague, Natalie Krauser-McCarthy. To remind you, REACH will be our effort to give pre-university teachers the tools they need to teach and engage their students in the history and role of engineering and technology from the point of view of someone who worked in the technical area or was closely connected to someone who was. They may be narrated either in the first person or third person. “Relic Hunting” are accounts of finding or tracking down tangible pieces of electrical history in interesting or unsuspected places (in situ and still operating is of particular interest). Length: 500-1200 words. Submit to ieee-history@ieee.org. Articles and letters to the editor may be edited for style or length.

Subscriptions are free to all persons interested in technological history—whether engineers, scholars, researchers, hobbyists, or interested members of the public. It is published in hard copy in March, and in electronic form in July and November of each year.

To subscribe to the IEEE History Center’s free newsletter, please send your name, postal mailing address, e-mail address (optional if you wish to receive the electronic versions), and IEEE member number (if applicable) to ieee-history@ieee.org.

To make a tax-deductible contribution to support the mission of the IEEE History Center, please click on the "Donate Online" tab at www.ieee.org/donate or www.ieeefoundation.org.

For more information, contact Robert Colburn at r.colburn@ieee.org.

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Current and past issues of the newsletter can be accessed at: www.ieee.org/about/history_center/newsletters.html

The IEEE History Center is a non-profit organization which relies on your support to preserve, research, and promote the legacy of electrical engineering and computing. To support the Center’s projects—such as the Global History Network, Milestones, and Oral History Collection, please click the "Donate Online" tab at www.ieee.org/donate or www.ieeefoundation.org/
technology in their society. While not every student who learns about the history of engineering and technology will enter a technical field (though we hope some do!), everyone will gain a better understanding of the technology they use daily, and of how the engineering discipline helped create the world many take for granted. We are not the only ones who believe that the role of technology in history is important—the “Common Core” social studies standards that are being promoted in the United States call for students to engage in the subject—but for structural and historical reasons history teachers currently lack the tools to do so effectively and in an exciting way. The IEEE History Center is well positioned to fill that gap!

2015 will be the year that we organize our staff team to take on this important initiative, identify our external content partners, develop production and communication plans, and convene stakeholder meetings. We will also be working closely with Natalie and our other IEEE Development Office and IEEE Foundation partners to identify and engage potential major donors.

I would like to point out that despite these two major initiatives, ETHW and REACH, we have not let up in our other activities to preserve and make known the proud heritage of IEEE, its members, our professions and industries, and, most importantly, the related technologies. The ever accelerating Milestones program has reached a Milestone of its own (see pg. 7). Our successful move to the Stevens Institute of Technology was capped off by some exciting university teaching (pg. 5). Our social media presence is exploding (pg. 5). We completed an important institutional history project for the IEEE Life Members Committee (pg. 4).

We hope that all of these programs continue to draw your support for our important mission. This is the newsletter issue when annually we recognize you, our generous donors, with our Honor Role (pp 9-13). As you can see—despite uncertain economic times and despite an ever-increasing number of calls for your philanthropic dollars—you and your fellow fans of the IEEE History Center have come through again. I want to personally express my extreme gratitude and also my hope that you will continue to give generously, whether for REACH (our fundraising focus this year), for general operating support, or for any program or project that resonates with you personally. Thanks again.

### CENTER ACTIVITIES

### NEW 45-RPM PHONOGRAPH EXHIBIT AT THE HISTORY CENTER

Long before music streaming and MP3 files, and portable cassette decks pioneered by Sony’s Walkman, corporations sought ways to make the music you want available when you want it. In the late 1930s, RCA Victor had a problem. Sales of 78rpm records were rising, and so were sales of record changers on which people stacked their own playlists, just like AM radio’s first disc jockeys. But 78s, made largely of slate powder, weighed heavily on a record player’s spindle and motor; the variety of shaped edges made it difficult to separate one disc from
the stack. Benjamin Carson led a team to redesign the record and its changer in a patented system that RCA released only after Columbia records introduced its longplaying 33 1/3-rpm records in 1948. Both systems found their niches among record buyers, the cheap 7-inch diameter singles proving popular with teenagers and performers with only a song to release. RCA Victor made its large-spindle changers for nearly ten years, before multi-speed players with spindle adapters made them less necessary. The single record format is a rare novelty now that plays at the LP speed with an LP spindle, but the format’s durability over 50 years testifies to its cultural appeal.

The History Center’s first exhibit at its offices in Stevens Institute’s Samuel C. Williams documents this pop culture icon, thanks to the generosity of Phil Vourtsis, the world’s leading collector of 45rpm record changers and phonographs. Outreach historian Alex Magoun had worked with him before in assisting with Phil’s book, *The Fabulous Victrola 45* (Schiffer, 2002), and creating a smaller exhibit at the David Sarnoff Library. At the History Center Vourtsis loaned a larger sample of RCA Victor record players and related artifacts that Magoun complemented with more recent 45rpm records and other discs of similar or even smaller size. The result is three cabinets showcasing RCA’s initial products and succeeding changers, along with 45s in their original colors and sleeves. Should you be in the New York or Hoboken, NJ area and feel a nostalgic pull, please stop by!

**LIFE MEMBERS COMMITTEE HISTORY PROJECT UPDATE, MARCH 2015**

By Sheldon Hochheiser, Archivist and Institutional Historian

As I reported in the last two issues of the newsletter, at the request of—and with funding from—the IEEE Life Members Committee, the IEEE History Center engaged veteran public historian of technology and IEEE Member Andrew Butrica to research and write a history of the Life Members Committee. In January, as planned, Butrica completed a 162-page draft history and submitted it to the History Center and through the Center to the Life Members Committee for review. The draft documents the entire history of the IEEE Life Members Committee; its predecessor the Life Members Fund Committee; the history of life membership at IEEE predecessors AIEE and IRE; and the many programs that the Life Members Fund has supported over the years. These include many decades of support for historical activities, both at the IEEE History Center and elsewhere, as well as decades of support for students, education, and the interests of older IEEE members. Butrica’s work stands as a model of what can be done by a historian to document an important piece of IEEE history.

Butrica, as part of his research, became no doubt the first person to read all of the minutes of the committee, going back to AIEE days, and all of the issues of the Life Members Newsletters. He also conducted Oral Histories with staff member Dan Toland, who long supported the committee, and key volunteers Art Winston and Jacob Baal-Schem.

After reviews are completed, the LMC history will be posted on the the Engineering and Technology History Wiki for all to read and use. The three oral histories will be posted there as well.

**UEF PROJECT UPDATE**

As was reported in the last issue of this newsletter, the IEEE History Center championed the creation of a consortium of engineering associations with the goal of designing, launching, and running a new history of engineering website. With support for the United Engineering Foundation (UEF), this consortium launched the Engineering and Technology History Wiki Network (www.ethw.org) in January 2015. Currently the consortium has seven members: AIChE, AIME, ASCE, ASME, IEEE, SPE, and SWE. The UEF is funding a second year to expand and improve the site and seek additional partners, and all partners contribute an annual fee to run the website. The IEEE History Center manages the site on behalf of the consortium. Please go to the ETHW and explore it.

From the outset, the IEEE History Center has believed that ETHW would best serve the world by increasing the diversity of the participating engineering disciplines. The current consortium members all have the same belief. As mentioned, seeing the wisdom of embracing more engineering societies, the United Engineering Foundation has given us a second grant to help in this recruitment. This grant is also intended to help us promote the site within the memberships and the wider general public. To paraphrase a cliché, building it does not ensure that they will come. An active awareness campaign is needed.
BRINGING THE HISTORY OF ENGINEERING ALIVE

The History Center’s innovative course, given in the Fall of 2014, on the history of engineering was a success. As reported in the last issue of this Newsletter, this course, which looked at the role of engineering in human development from prehistoric times to the 18th century, integrated hands-on labs with classroom lectures strongly grounded in history and archaeology. Introducing labs is an exciting and effective way to make a traditional humanities course come alive, particularly for engineering and science undergraduates. Traditionally, history courses require students to write term papers. The capstone for this course was an ambitious project in which students, grouped in teams, explored the connection between the design and performance in ancient naval vessels.

The trireme was a formidable, high performance naval vessel in the ancient Mediterranean. In their superior role of the trireme, the Athenians defeated Xerxes’s much larger Persian fleet at the battle of Salamis, in 480 B.C. Many historians argue that it was this victory that saved Athens and allowed the concept of democracy to take root in the history of the West. The students were asked to examine the role of the cutwater (bow) in the performance of these ancient vessels. Other than serving as a way to mount a bronze ram, did this long protrusion of the bow play any role in the vessels performance? To frame the project, Dr. John Vardalas, Senior Historian at the IEEE History Center, consulted a team of 2 naval architects, an archaeologist, and a historian of ancient navies: Drs. Larrie Ferreiro, Raju Datla, Jeffrey Royal, and William Murray respectively. They suspected that the cutwater played a role. This group produced a rough sketch that captured the general shape of the cutwaters found in ancient iconography.

With the help of a graduate student, our undergraduates worked in two teams to convert this rough sketch into 3-D CAD drawings for the hull. The CAD files was then sent to a CNC machine to produce a 5 ft. scale version of the hull, with two different bow attachments: the ancient cutwater and the traditional bow we normally associate with ships. The two configurations were then tested in Stevens’s world-class tank testing facility, at the Davidson Laboratory. The tank uses an array of sensors to measure the model’s dynamic behavior. The model was run through the water at different speeds. The students then scaled up the data to produce drag coefficient numbers for the full sized vessel, which, based on archaeological evidence, was more than 120 ft. long. From the data, the students discovered that the cutwater conferred clear hydrodynamic advantages to the vessel.

Instead of writing a conventional report, the course challenged the students to give a presentation in a specific historical context. They were to go back in time to Ancient Greece and pretend to be naval architects giving a presentation to the Athenian Trieropoioi on the eve of the Peloponnesian War. The Trieropoioi, a board of ten men, was charged by the Athenian assembly to let contracts for trireme construction. Each team had to convince this board that if Athens were to prevail over its Spartan foe, more money had to be invested to support the team’s R&D. The students got into their role-playing and did a wonderful job. The board was played by Stevens faculty and staff, which included the Provost.

IEEE HISTORY CENTER AT THE AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

From Friday 2 January to Monday 5 January, the American Historical Association (AHA)—the main society for practicing historians in North America—held its annual conference in New York City. The theme of the meeting was “History and other Disciplines” and the AHA encouraged nontraditional session formats in order to foment discussion on this important issue of interdisciplinarity. Dr. Andrew Russell, a Stevens Institute of Technology colleague, therefore organized a roundtable session held on the Sunday entitled “The History of Engineering and the Engineering of History,” which was chaired by IEEE History Committee member Dr. Paul Israel. History center Senior Director Dr. Michael Geselowitz contributed opening remarks entitled “Professional Courtesy: Historians Encounter Engineers” and participated in the subsequent discussion. The session was well attended by a range of historians interested in issues surrounding engineering and technology (and even one practicing engineer!), and the discussion was lively. While at the conference, Dr. Geselowitz also attended several sessions on public history and participated in the AHA’s annual business meeting.

IEEE HISTORY CENTER ON TWITTER AND TUMBLR

The IEEE History Center is bringing history to more people via social networking tools such as Twitter and Tumblr. Follow the activities of the IEEE History Center and others involved in the history of engineering on its Twitter feed at https://twitter.com/ieeehistory.

The IEEE History Center maintains a blog on Tumblr in which interesting images related to the history of technology are posted. Featured in Tumblr’s history and science categories, the blog has approximately 123,000 followers as of January 2015 and more than 130,000 total social interactions. To date, six of the posted images were featured on Tumblr’s radar, a feature that allows the Tumblr staff to broadcast selected images to all logged-in users. These posts receive significantly more social interactions, the highest reaching 10,400. To follow the blog or to view the images, go to http://engineeringhistory.tumblr.com/.

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ROBOTICS HISTORY: NARRATIVES AND NETWORKS. A MAJOR COLLECTION OF ORAL HISTORIES COMES TO THE IEEE HISTORY CENTER

In 1961, George Devol and Joe Engelberger put the world’s first industrial robot on the factory floor of General Motors, and in the half-century that followed, robots have found their way into surgery rooms, scientific laboratories, battlefields, search and rescue situations, Mars, and even our homes as vacuum cleaners, toys, and security guards. To commemorate this anniversary, the IEEE Robotics and Automation Society decided in 2010 to undertake a major project to document, and preserve, and disseminate this history. The society formed a partnership with the School of Information and Computing at Indiana University, and in particular, with Assistant Professor Selma Šabanović, a social scientist who is an expert on the influence of social and cultural factors on the design of robots in the U.S. and Japan, as well as on how theories of social cognition can be developed and evaluated through human-robot interaction. Professor Šabanović put together a team to undertake the extensive initial stage of this project, collecting the recollections of major participants in robotics through oral history. The team collected more than ninety of these between 2010 and 2013. In 2014, Šabanović approached the IEEE History Center to see if the Center would be interested in hosting and preserving the transcripts of these oral histories on the IEEE Global History Network. The History Center of course, was happy to do so, and she started to send the transcripts to the History Center as they were ready. To date, she has sent 22 transcripts, all of which have been posted. Among the interviews available are those with IEEE Life Fellows Peter Kokotovic, Ray Jarvis, and George Bekey.

With the transition from the Global History Network to the new Engineering and Technology History Wiki, these oral histories can be found there. You can find the list of available oral histories, with brief descriptions, and links to the full transcripts at: http://ethw.org/Oral-History:Robotics_History:_Narratives_and_Networks

FROM WATT TO JOBS: LIVES OF THE ENGINEERS AND THE RISE OF THE GREAT POWERS

It’s not hard to imagine that for engineering majors fulfilling a requirement in history—even when it’s about one’s profession—a course on the history of modern engineering threatens to glaze over the eyes and ears. After all, what can one learn from the development of now-outmoded techniques and technologies? History Center outreach historian Alex Magoun thought he would try to overcome that potential obstacle in two ways. One is to take a biographical approach, and focus on the lives of individual engineers and their relation to the era and countries in which they lived or worked. The second approach is to put those individuals in the context of their countries’ rise to the status of great powers. “I want to make it personal,” Magoun says. “Engineers enjoy and struggle with the fortunes of life, and they have to adapt to or resist the political, economic, and technological trends of their time and space, just as the rest of us do.”

Such a course has its challenges, to be sure. Magoun has learned a great deal about civil and mechanical engineering in the 18th and 19th centuries, and is still assimilating what biographies he can assemble about engineers in European and Asian countries in the 19th and 20th centuries. “My high school French helps a bit, but not with German, Japanese, or Russian, alas. The sooner online translation software improves, the better.”

THANK YOU TO OUR HISTORY CENTER DONORS!

Your support helps preserve the heritage of IEEE’s technologies.
IEEE’s Milestone program dedicated its 150th milestone on 5 December 2014. Commemorating Heinrich Hertz’s discovery and proof of electromagnetic waves in 1888, the plaque was unveiled in front of the building where Hertz made his discovery at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Karlsruhe, Germany by 2014 President Roberto de Marco and Karlsruhe Institute of Technology President Detlef Lohse. The Milestone Program has grown in recent years, and is one of the most publicly-visible ways that IEEE recognizes and celebrates achievements within its fields of interest. 2014 was a very active year, with fifteen milestone dedication ceremonies held in Japan, Germany, Canada, and the United States. Because some of the milestones had multiple plaques, almost half a ton of bronze bearing IEEE’s name was installed in various parts of the globe. Nonetheless, many achievements remain to be recognized, and IEEE encourages its members to propose these achievements. Details of the Milestone Program can be found at: http://www.ieeeghn.org/wiki/index.php/Special:Milestones and there is even a list of suggested achievements (which is not intended to be a comprehensive list, merely examples) which can be proposed http://www.ieeeghn.org/wiki/index.php?title=Milestones:List_of_Achievements_Suitable_for_Milestones

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

VINTAGE COMPUTER FESTIVAL

Vintage Computer Festival East will celebrate its tenth anniversary on April 17-19 at the InfoAge Science Center, in Wall, New Jersey. "VCF East" offers sixteen technical classes, two hands-on demonstration halls of systems from the 1960s-1980s, and historic lectures. This year's keynote speakers are computer designer Wes Clark and VisiCalc co-creator Bob Frankston. There will be a special ceremony honoring the 50th anniversary of the DEC PDP-8 minicomputer. Visitors to the family-friendly event will also find museum tours, consignment, vendors, food, prizes, and more. Please visit www.vintage.org/2015/east/ for details or find us on Facebook and Twitter @vcfeast. Contact: evank@midatlanticretro.org.

THE COMPUTER WORE HEELS APP

Guest review by Gabriela Geselowitz, Tablet Magazine

In 2011, readers of this newsletter were informed about a documentary film, "Top Secret Rosies," which had been partially funded by the IEEE Foundation. The IEEE History Center had played an advisory role in the production, and served as one of the premier sites. Now the director of the film, LeAnn Erickson (also a professor of film at Temple University in Philadelphia) has turned the film into an App for the iPad.

Like the film, "The Computer Wore Heels" tells the inspirational story of the group of young women in their teens and twenties who used their math skills and early computing technology on behalf of the allies during World War II. It’s a story well recorded but under-reported, and this app explains the work of these women in a way accessible to young adults.

LeAnn Erickson’s App reads like a novel (and is even designed to resemble a book, complete with turning pages), with multimedia extras, from newsreel clips, to old photographs, to now-digitized handwritten notes. It tells the story from the perspective of the young women from a diverse group of backgrounds who were united by their love of math and desire to help the war effort. The story is one of the history of computing to be sure, but it’s also several composite biographies.

The app explores the hardships of the young women, including the several Jewish participants in the program fearing the Holocaust overseas, and the discrimination faced by an African American woman on the team. Of course, it outlines how difficult it was to have a career in mathematics as a woman at the time, how they didn’t receive the recognition they deserved for their work, and yet what a rare opportunity all the girls had.

This story draws the clear connection between math skills and computing, as the women go from solving problems on their own to working on ENIAC.

The app concludes with a message to young women encouraging them to follow in the footsteps of these women seventy years ago – and it’s a message sorely needed. Hopefully this app will gain popularity and can inspire someone else to not give up on her love of math or computing.

Available for the iPad at the Apple App Store for $2.99.
The IEEE History Center lost a friend and longtime supporter recently. Charles Townes, IEEE Fellow, Nobel Laureate, and inventor of the laser, died at the age of ninety-nine on 27 January 2015. Townes’s many contributions to technology made him a towering figure; imagine a world without CD and DVD players, laser surgical devices, industrial lasers, or fiber-optic communications. While much has, and will, be written about his technical achievements, the IEEE History Center staff would particularly like to remember his service to IEEE’s historical activities. We also recall with personal fondness what a delightful and engaging person he was to work with. Charles Townes served on the Trustees of the History Center from 1999 through 2001, and continued to lend his wisdom and advice as a trustee emeritus for many years after that. He was also a stalwart supporter of the IEEE History Center Fund.

An oral history—including an audio clip— with Charles Townes conducted by IEEE History Center Senior Historian Frederik Nebeker can be found on the Engineering & Technology History Wiki (ETHW) at http://ethw.org/Oral-History:Charles_H._Townes_%281992%29 and we are pleased that we can help preserve Charles Townes’ words and voice. An obituary in The Institute can be found at: http://theinstitute.ieee.org/ieee-roundup/opinions/ieee-roundup/remembering-laser-theory-pioneer-charles-townes-
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<th>Gold Advocate</th>
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<td>Merrill B. Allen</td>
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THE BIRTH OF ELECTRIC TRACTION: THE EXTRAORDINARY LIFE OF INVENTOR FRANK J. SPRAGUE
by Frank Rowsome Jr., published by the IEEE History Center

Frank Julian Sprague has often been called the inventor of public transportation. In addition to his developments in electric traction, Sprague made enormous contributions in the areas of control and safety, without which mass transit would not be possible. Sprague developed automatic signal and brake control for railroads, and an auxiliary train control to take charge if the driver made a mistake. He was active in the planning and construction of New York City’s subway system, and in the electrification of Grand Central Terminal.

Sprague believed that “Transportation is the key of civilization… for without it our existing social structure would collapse.” Among Sprague’s other achievements are the introduction of electric elevators and of electric power units suitable for machine tools, printing presses, dentist’s drills, and labor-saving conveniences in the home.

Rowsome’s engaging and colorful biography not only gives a detailed view of Sprague as a person, but also Sprague’s approach to design and problem-solving. Numerous personal, and sometimes quite humorous, anecdotes bring Sprague, his assistants, and the early history of electric railroads to life.

Frank Rowsome Jr. is probably now most famous for The Verse by the Side of the Road (1966), but he was also managing editor of Popular Science Monthly and later became NASA’s chief of technical publications.

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BLUM, ANDREW, *Tubes: A Journey to the Center of the Internet*, Ecco Books: 2012

By Sheldon Hochheiser
While not—except incidentally—a book of history, many readers of this newsletter will likely find this book an interesting and engaging read. While the internet is most often thought about in abstract conceptual terms, Blum undertook the task of exploring and describing the internet in physical terms—as actual pipes of fiber optic strands carrying messages across cities and around the world on pulses of light, as physical buildings where the messages are handed off from one carrier’s fiber to another’s on their way to their destination, and as data centers were the information is stored. He constructed his book as a physical journey, a geek’s travelogue, to locations around the world where the physical internet is located, from hubs in places including New York, Vienna Virginia, Amsterdam, and London, to cables running under city streets to places where submarine cables emerge from the ocean, He explains how all these things come together to provide the physical infrastructure upon which modern communications is grounded.


By Alexander B. Magoun
Academic researchers are encouraged to reflect on their careers and lives through the letters that Hans Christian Ørsted wrote while traveling in Europe between 1800 and 1846. He shares your interests and concerns: grants and patronage, the nature of parties, theory and practice, the quality of culture, new equipment, intellectual disputes and stimulation, attending to a spouse and raising children, and the politicization of science. His adaptation to new forms of transportation—i.e., the steam locomotive—is analogous to converting from postal communications to internet and wireless. In fine translation as in the original Danish, Ørsted writes well and warmly about the industrializing world around him, bringing to life the man usually known for one set of brilliant experiments, if not as a unit of measurement.

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