

# CARING FOR YOUR QSL'S

## And Still Having Lunch Money Left

Jerry Berg

There are two reasons why I feel qualified to write on this topic. First, when it comes to my own collection, I have made the full range of mistakes, and suffered the consequences.

Second, as Chairman of ANARC's Committee to Preserve Radio Verifications, I have handled about 20,000 QSL's belonging to others, including some of the hobby greats. Having compared their mistakes with my own, I am content in knowing that they weren't any smarter than I was.

Although wind, rain and fire are definitely to be avoided, the biggest obstacle to keeping QSL's in good condition is usually their owners. Our QSL's are in much greater danger from what you and I are likely to do to them than from any force of nature. We are, in short, our own worst enemies.

You would be surprised how QSL's, even those from the 20's and 30's, hold up when they are not abused. A card that has enjoyed ordinary care won't look much different from the one you found in the mailbox yesterday. Preserving QSL's so that they will look good and bring you enjoyment for many years is really quite easy. All it takes is modest foresight and a little common sense.

The concept of "preserving" anything, including QSL's, will mean different things to different people. To the professional archivist, some of the ideas presented here may not seem the best advice. If your goal is museum quality preservation, be prepared to spend a lot of money on archival quality storage materials.

But most of us are more interested in enjoying our QSL's today than worrying about their afterlives. Thus I write not as an archivist, but as someone who wants to keep his QSL's in good shape and maybe have a little money left over for lunch. My apologies to those wishing a stricter approach.

### ● A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION

We will need to consider storage, display, preservation and accessibility.

1. **Storage.** Where you store your collection is most important. The basic rule is to avoid extremes of light and temperature. Constant exposure to bright sunlight will cause almost any printed material to discolor and fade, and dampness or dryness can do serious damage to paper products. So it is best to avoid locations where there are wide swings of temperature or dampness. A good rule of thumb is that conditions that are uncomfortable to people will also be harmful to paper.

How to store your QSL's is also important. If you don't care about display, you may want to just keep them in a box. Those who toss their veries in a box might seem a bit reckless, but leaving cards and letters in their natural state and stacking them up someplace safe is probably doing them more of a favor than you think. Some well preserved collections I have seen consist of letters just placed one behind another in a cardboard box. The aesthetics aren't much, but the cards and letters hold up well, provided they are kept in a dry, stable environment.

It is good to remove letters from envelopes before storing them, however. The CPRV has handled many QSL letters that have been stored in their original envelopes. They were in excellent shape, but if they had been unfolded early they would have avoided stress on the creases when they were eventually opened up.

2. **Display.** Album mounting is the easiest and most practical way to display QSL's. The album provides a measure of protection, and facilitates transportation.

Some DXers mount their QSL's on the wall. We have all seen pictures of shacks "papered" with QSL's. But how have those QSL's been attached? If they are mounted with pins, they are probably okay, but if they have a cellophane tape loop on the back there will surely be problems removing the tape later.

Wall display can be attractive, but it is not a good approach to long term care of one's QSL's. They will get dusty and dirty, and will eventually curl and discolor. If you want to mount your QSL's on the wall, mat or frame them, or cover them with plastic.

Finally, some collectors just put their QSL's in folders and file them away. QSL's can be displayed quite easily when filed in folders and arranged by state or country. Just pull out "Tristan" and gaze away.

3. Preservation. This is an area where things can get pretty esoteric (and pretty expensive). You may, for example, decide to use acid free storage and mounting materials, or special tapes, photo corners or other supplies. Or you may wish to mount your QSL's so as to minimize damage from handling, and use plastic covered album pages.

Let me briefly discuss a related issue, the composition of paper and the affects of chemical impurities on the survivability of QSL's.

Paper is made from cellulose, which is constructed of ribbon-like glucose molecules bonded together into long chains and then built up into sheets that are held together in layers. These cellulose units, called microfibrils, crystallize into bundles and then into fibers. Water and other chemicals are added to the fibers and the whole is then processed into sheets of paper.

It is the additives, along with impurities and unstable plant products, that are the culprits. They have a deleterious effect on the paper and lead to its eventual deterioration. Environmental and atmospheric acids and pollutants have a like effect.

These additives are referred to collectively as acids. The bonds which hold the cellulose chains, microfibrils, bundles and fibers together are attacked by these forces, and the deterioration process is on. The underlying chemical reactions are the main cause of the deterioration. If only one-half of one percent of the bonds holding the cellulose chains together are broken, the paper will be virtually useless.

There are all kinds of acids that affect paper--impurities; the alum-rosin sizing that is used in the manufacturing process; acidic gases and pollutants from the atmosphere, like sulfuric acid and sulfur dioxide, both of which have a high attraction to lignin; and acids from adjacent acidic materials. Typically during the deterioration process, brown discoloration occurs and the paper becomes brittle.

Lignin is particularly harmful. It is the large molecule which binds the cellulose together in trees. The paper yield per tree is increased to 95% by using the lignin. It is only 35% if the lignin is not used. Lignin hastens the demise of paper by breaking down into many different acids and peroxides. (The brown color of shipping and packing containers comes from the lignin in the paper.)

Some high-quality (and high priced) archival papers are denoted as "lig free." Others contain alkaline buffers to neutralize acids. Some papers are commonly referred to as "acid free," although this nomenclature, without more, can be deceiving.

If all of this makes you want to place your QSL's in a hermetically sealed container and never look at them for fear of poisoning them forever, relax. These forces are largely beyond our control, and can be stemmed only with a level of effort that is beyond most of us. The point is that paper products, including the QSL's in your mailbox, are under attack by unseen gremlins all the time, and it behooves us not to make the process any worse by our own carelessness.

4. Access. How conveniently do you want to get to a particular QSL? If you don't care, you could just toss your veries into a bag and rummage whenever the urge strikes you. On the other hand, if you like everything in order you might have separate albums for QSL's from different parts of the world, groupings of QSL's from the same station, etc.

## ● MOUNTING TECHNIQUES

1. The album itself. How large an album page should you use? My suggestion is to use pages larger than 8-1/2 x 11". This will permit you to mount letters without having to fold them, and still leave a border area. It will often permit you to mount both a letter and accompanying card on the same page.

There are many, many different kinds of album pages. You should use pages with plastic covers, both to protect the QSL and help keep it in place. The plastic cover also provides a convenient place on which to mount a station sticker.

The primary hazards associated with plastics in archival work are from the chemical composition of the material itself (the plastic should be chemically inert), and from any additives or coatings that have been added in the manufacturing process. A plastic that is chemically safe by itself can be rendered unsafe by the introduction of a deleterious additive or coating. Many different plastic materials are used in the manufacture of mounting supplies--cellulose acetate, polyesters, polyethylene, polypropylene, polyvinyl chloride (PVC), etc.

Just as "acid free" is the password for safety in paper products, "Mylar" is the standard in archival plastics. Mylar is the brand name of DuPont's polyester film. It is strong, uniform, stable and inert. The latter quality is the reason for Mylar's acceptance in conservation work. Mylar contains no plasticizers that can migrate into adjacent materials, so there is no reaction with inks, adhesives, paper ingredients, etc. It will also withstand extremes of heat and cold.

There is one type of album that you definitely should NOT use, at least not without special precautions: albums with so-called "magnetic pages." These are the commonly available pages that have narrow ribs of adhesive to hold the card or photo in place. If you use such pages as they come out of the package, I suggest that you RUN, DON'T WALK, to your QSL albums and carefully remove all your QSL's, praying while you work. You may be lucky and still have time before these QSL eaters grab your veries for good.

Magnetic pages may be useful for photographs, which are on sturdy stock and have no information on the back. But they can be deadly to QSL's, particularly letters and particularly if the QSL has been mounted on the pages for a while. Those little ribs grip more firmly as time passes. Eventually you may reach the point where the QSL cannot be removed without damaging it, quite the opposite of the "easy in, easy out" approach you thought you were getting. Also, to the extent that storage deficiencies, like dampness, affect your QSL's, the damage is compounded by the use of magnetic pages. A letter that is a little weak from dampness may not survive the trauma of removal from a magnetic page.

One way around the dangers of magnetic pages is to use a piece of plain paper as a backing to the QSL. Cut the paper to the same size as the QSL, place the paper on the ribs, put the QSL on top of the paper and then lay the plastic face sheet over the QSL.

2. Affixing the QSL's. Avoid the use of cellophane tape (or "Scotch," "invisible" or "magic" tape, as it is variously known). The adhesive used with such tape is very corrosive, leaves a residue and eventually turns yellow and brittle. Most of us have probably used cellophane tape on our QSL's at some point, and have later learned the unfortunate results the hard way.

There are alternative tapes available, but tape of any kind should be avoided whenever possible. For mounting QSL's on album pages, use mounting corners. The ordinary type that are available at any stationery store are inexpensive and come in black, white and sometimes other colors. I use two for each card, four for a letter.

Do you want to mount the QSL's so that one or both sides are visible? If you are using album pages with paper inserts, as I do, you will be able to see only one side of the card. Many hobbyists like to display both sides, however, using the plastic page cover without any paper insert. The problem is how to affix the card to the plastic cover. Paper corners are not suitable because the back part of the corner, when viewed from the back of the page, is unattractive. Some DXers have used staples, but that is not fully satisfactory either.

One solution is to use see-through plastic corners. Another is the use of Gudy-O stickers, which are transfer tabs of adhesive. Or you could make a small hinge or loop out of a removable (not cellophane) tape. These products are described below under "Supplies."

### ● SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

1. DON'T use magnetic pages unless you use "backing" paper to protect the QSL from the adhesive ribs.

2. DON'T use cellophane tape. It looks good at first, but over the long haul it won't stand up and it will damage the QSL.

3. DON'T deface the QSL. This may seem pretty basic, but you'd be surprised at the fate that has befallen some QSL's. Don't fold them, punch holes in them, staple them, stick things on them or write on them.

But a P.S. here. I must acknowledge one example of "defacing" that was actually rather nice. In a collection donated to CPRV, the DXer used a mechanical numbering device to place on each QSL a small number which corresponded to an entry in a book containing the details of the logging--date, time, frequency, etc. I have to admit that it worked well and it didn't really detract from the appearance of the QSL's. So much for hard and fast rules.

4. DON'T remove the stamps, and DO save interesting envelopes.

5. DON'T use metal paper clips. They rust. Use the plastic kind.

## ●SPECIALIZED SUPPLIES AND TECHNIQUES

1. Where to look. There is an entire industry out there providing supplies to professional and amateur archivists. You will find some of these items in your local stationery store, but the extent of the products available from specialty houses surprised me.

There are companies that supply all kinds of storage and preservation items to stamp collectors, postcard collectors and other hobbyists, as well as libraries and museums. They often advertise in stamp, postcard and other "collector" magazines. I am going to mention three who produce informative catalogs which are available for the asking. Looking through the catalogs will tell you more than you ever wanted to know about archival supplies.

Light Impressions, 439 Monroe Avenue, Rochester, NY 14607-3717, 1-800-828-6216 (in NY, 1-800-828-9629). Ask for their illustrated "Archival Supplies Catalog." They also produce an interesting brochure, "Mounting Techniques," covering procedures and materials for organizing photos and documents in albums. The brochure is free for the asking. Light Impressions will also provide free copies of their catalogs and brochures for workshops and conferences.

University Products, Inc., P.O. Box 101, Holyoke, MA 01041, 1-800-628-1912 (in MA, 413-532-3372). Ask for their illustrated "Library and Media Center Supplies and Equipment Catalog," which contains a large section on archival and preservation materials.

Conservation Resources International, Inc., 8000-H Forbes Place, Springfield, VA 22151, 703-321-7730 [in Canada, Archival Conservation Resources (CANADA) Ltd., P.O. Box 2506, Ottawa Station D, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 5W6]. CRI also has offices in England and Australia. This catalog is less extensive than the others, but it contains a detailed article about what paper is, how it is made, how and why it deteriorates and what you can do about it. Some of the above discussion of these topics is based on the CRI article.

2. Supplies. The following is a brief description of some of the more interesting supplies for the amateur archivist. Some of these items can be found in local stores. All are available from one or more of the suppliers listed above, and all tend to be priced on the high side.

Containers. Even if you just toss your QSL's in a box you can still go first class. All kinds of archival-quality storage boxes are available, constructed of acid free and lignin free materials. Envelopes, portfolio boxes, file folders, etc. that are made of such materials are also available, as are plastic envelopes, sleeves and bags.

Albums. A number of manufacturers offer albums with acid free coverings--overkill, in my opinion, but available to those who are so inclined. Some also come with slipcases, which is a nice touch.

If you prefer an album that will hold 50 or 75 pages rather than 25 or 30, keep in mind the desirability of D-ring construction. The main advantage of D-rings is that they let you flip pages easily, without bending them, and they allow the already-turned pages to lie neat and flat. D-rings make the handling of large albums much easier.

A category of albums that is not always found in the "album" section of stationery catalogs is the so-called display binder. They look like regular albums but they have "multo-rings," a row of 30 or so metal rings running the length of the spine (as opposed to the two or three rings usually found on regular albums). These binders will hold only 25 or 30 usually plastic covered pages, but the pages are commonly available in larger than usual sizes, like 11 x 14", 14 x 17" (the size I prefer) or even 18 x 24". The large page size makes them especially handy for displaying letters or putting together a display of station ephemera that cannot fit on an 8-1/2 x 11" page. Display binders come in both soft and hard cover designs.

Plastic covered pages. The variety of plastic covered pages is almost limitless. Be careful, though, because the plastic sheet protector and the paper insert that goes inside it do not invariably come as a single unit--sometimes you buy them separately. As noted earlier, if you use the paper inserts you will be able to see only one side of the QSL.

A quick check at your local stationer's will familiarize you with what is available, but the archival catalogs have some interesting specialty products, including such things as sheet protectors with plastic insert tabs attached, nice for indexing the contents of the page.

Also available are plastic pages with "pockets" for cards or photos of approximately postcard size. These often permit you to see both sides of the item inserted. You are out of luck if your QSL is a little oversize, however.

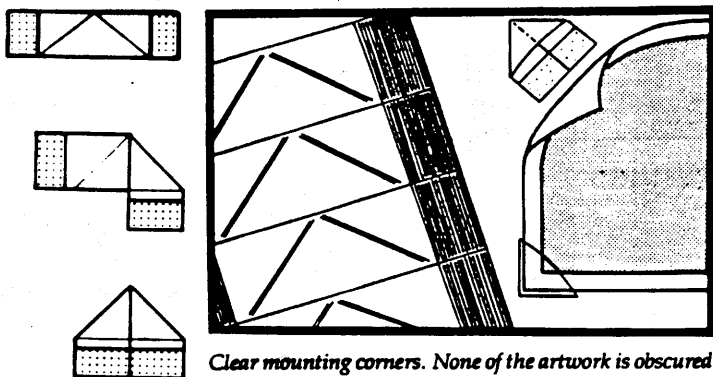
**Corners.** The usual paper variety are available at any stationery store. You moisten the back, press it in place and you're all set.

There are also two other types commonly available on the archival scene. One is a regular paper photo corner that contains no adhesive. I am not sure why one would use these except that they are made from special acid free paper and they are very professional in appearance. They must, however, be attached to the page with a piece of tape or an adhesive, too much of a chore for most of us.

The other special type of corner is the clear plastic variety shown in Figure 1. They are made of clear polyester. When you take them from the box the "corner" is actually a scored plastic strip which you fold into a corner. On the back of each "foot" of the corner is a self-sticking 3M adhesive that has been approved by the Library of Congress as a non-yellowing permanent adhesive for conservation use. Remove the paper covering from the adhesive and press the corner into place. The adhesive does not come into contact with the material mounted.

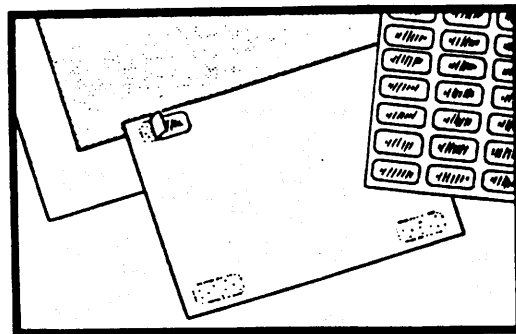
These see-through corners are a little awkward to work with at first, but they are probably your best bet if you want to mount your QSL's so as to see both sides. Affix the corners directly to the sheet protector, without using a paper insert. Two corners per card is plenty.

Mounting corners should not be used with brittle or fragile papers because they may place too much stress on one section of the paper and tear it. For ordinary cards and letters, however, they work fine.



Clear mounting corners. None of the artwork is obscured.

Figure 1



Gudy-O-Stickers. Transfer tabs leave a neat square of adhesive on the album page.

Figure 2

**Tapes.** If you can't get along without tape, what are the alternatives? One is removable tape, commonly available as "Scotch Removable Magic Tape" (No. 811). It is available in 1/2", 3/4" and 1" widths. I do not know what the long term properties of this tape are, but it is certainly preferable to cellophane.

Another interesting approach is to use removable correction cover-up tape. This white tape is intended to be applied to typed work in order to cover up mistakes, block out lines, etc. It is now available with the light weight 3M "Post-It" adhesive which permits you to lift the tape and reposition it without doing damage. It is sold as "3M Post-It Removable Correction and Cover-Up Tape." It comes in 1/6" (one typewriter line), 1/3" (two lines) and 1" (six lines) sizes, and is packaged in a 700" cutter dispenser. It is intended to mask, not hold things together, but at least one DXer uses it successfully. What the long term holding power of this material is remains to be seen, but at worst you will just have to replace it.

If you must use tape and you want to go first class, use one of the very thin mending tapes available from the archival suppliers (Neschen "Filmoplast P" or Lineco Archival Quality "Document Repair Tape"). These tapes consist of very thin, strong, acid free tissue coated with an acid free adhesive. These are slow tacking tapes, which means that the tape can be lifted and repositioned easily during initial application. It increases its holding power after 15-20 hours.

Finally, take note of something called Neschen Gudy-O transfer tabs. While they are not an archival device, they are handy, and even yours truly, who is dead set against attaching any kind of adhesive to QSL's, has used these little guys when no one was looking. A package of Gudy-O transfers consists of five sheets of orange paper tabs--340 in all. Each tab is 15/16 x 3/8". You lift the paper tab, place the adhesive side at the point on the paper where you want the adhesive applied, press down, lift the tab and--voila!--the adhesive has

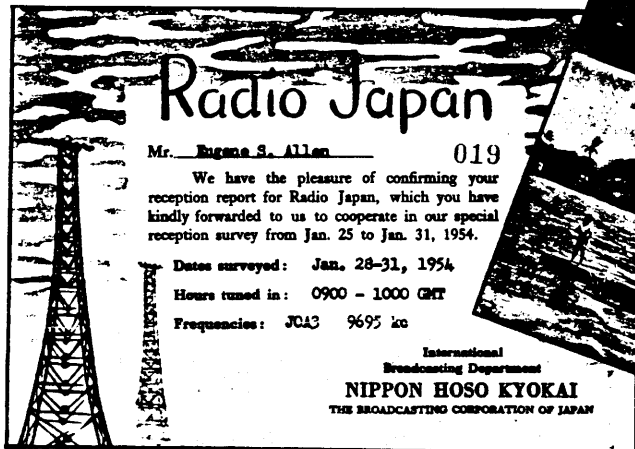
been transferred from the tab to the paper. (See Figure 2.) Very handy, and, of course, you can cut the tab to a smaller size in order to minimize the amount of adhesive used. These are good for very light jobs where you would like to use a piece of double stick Scotch tape but your conscience gets the better of you.

A final product of some interest: Document cleaning pads, recommended for cleaning dirty, dusty or moldy paper items. This isn't something that most of us will need, but it's worth knowing about. It is a pad containing a soft, grit-free powder which absorbs and cleans surface dirt. You twist the pad lightly over the item to be cleaned, producing a thin layer of white cleaning powder. Then you rub gently with the pad, causing the dust and dirt to be absorbed by the cleaning powder. Brush the residue away and you are left with a clean, renewed surface.

All of these archival products are nice, but most of them are in the non-essential category. Remember: common sense, steady temperature, and no dampness. With those basic points in mind, your QSL's will have a long life and you will get maximum enjoyment from them.

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The Committee to Preserve Radio Verifications exists to save QSL's from loss or destruction after their owners have left the hobby or passed away. Here, from among the QSL's that have been donated to the committee, are a few that have survived through the years. For more information about CPRV, send a business size SASE to Jerry Berg, Committee Chairman, 38 Eastern Avenue, Lexington, MA 02173.



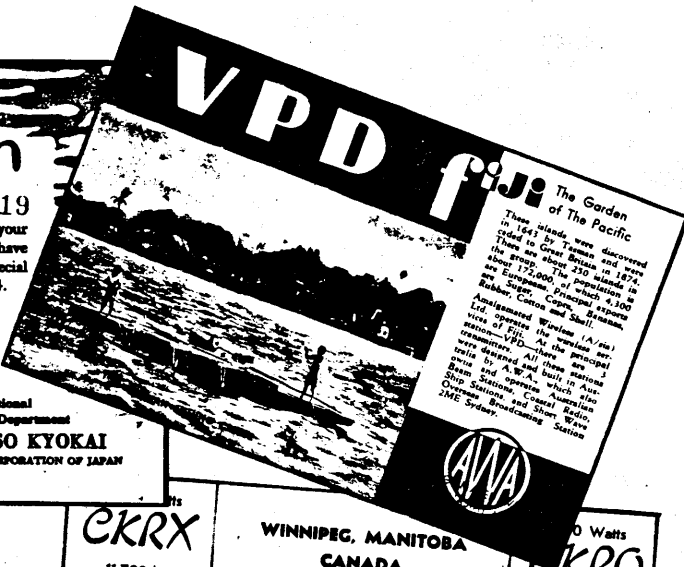
**Radio Japan**

Mr. Eugene S. Allen 019

We have the pleasure of confirming your reception report for Radio Japan, which you have kindly forwarded to us to cooperate in our special reception survey from Jan. 25 to Jan. 31, 1954.

Date surveyed: Jan. 28-31, 1954  
 Hours tuned in: 0900 - 1000 GMT  
 Frequencies: JCA3 9695 kc

International Broadcasting Department  
**NIPPON HOSO KYOKAI**  
 THE BROADCASTING CORPORATION OF JAPAN

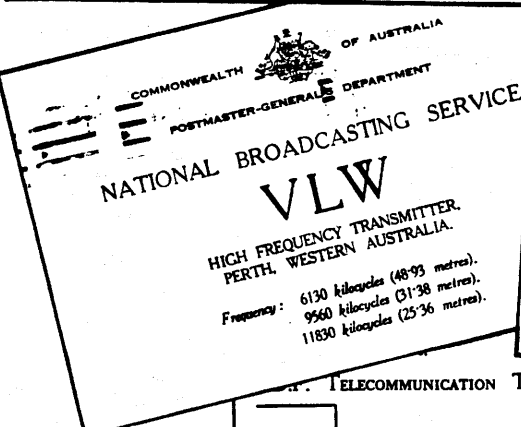


**VPD Fiji** The Garden of The Pacific

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Amalgamated Wireless (A/W) Ltd. operates the wireless service of VPD. At the present time VPD has two stations which were designed and built in Australia by A.W.A., which also maintains and operates the Australian Ship Stations, Coastal Radio Stations and Short Wave Broadcasting Station 2ME Sydney.

AWA logo



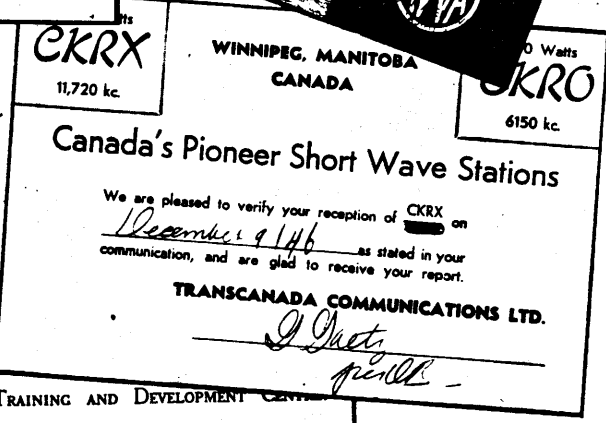
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA  
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**NATIONAL BROADCASTING SERVICE**

**VLW**

HIGH FREQUENCY TRANSMITTER,  
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 9560 kilocycles (31.38 metres),  
 11830 kilocycles (25.36 metres).



**CKRX** 11,720 kc  
**WINNIPEG, MANITOBA CANADA**

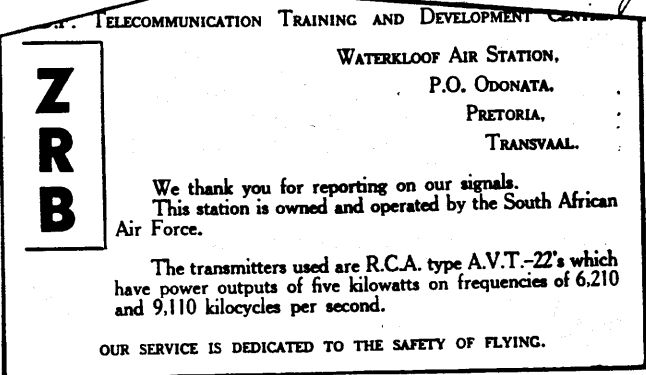
**CKRO** 6150 kc

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We are pleased to verify your reception of CKRX on December 9 1946 as stated in your communication, and are glad to receive your report.

**TRANSCANADA COMMUNICATIONS LTD.**

*J. G. G. Smith*



**ZRB**

TELECOMMUNICATION TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

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 PRETORIA,  
 TRANSVAAL.**

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 This station is owned and operated by the South African Air Force.

The transmitters used are R.C.A. type A.V.T.-22's which have power outputs of five kilowatts on frequencies of 6,210 and 9,110 kilocycles per second.

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