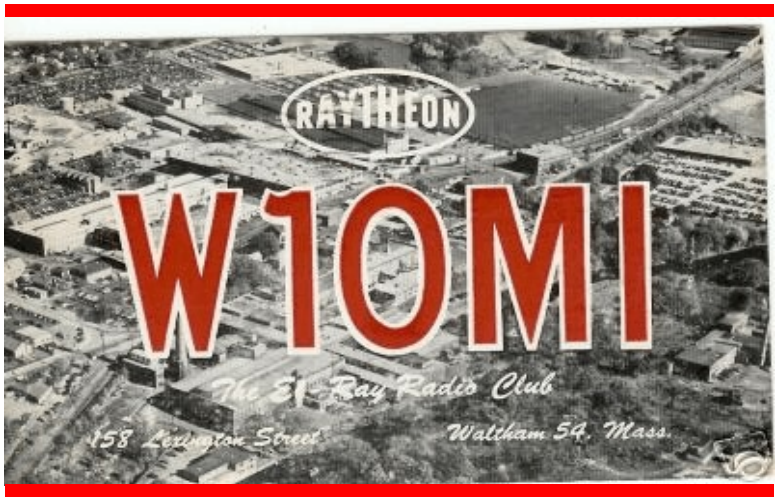
Percy L. Spencer W1GBE *1894-1970* Born in Howland, Maine, was twice orphaned at a young age. His father expired when Percy was 18 months old. His mother turned Percy's care over to an aunt and uncle. The uncle was like a father to him, but when Percy was only age 7, his second father died. Percy had a gift of constant curiosity which helped him turn an underprivileged childhood into an especially privileged one. Although he didn't graduate from grammar school, he became Senior Vice President and a member of the Board of Directors at Raytheon, receiving well over 150 patents during his career.



When at the age of 12, Spencer worked in a spool mill in the cold, gray Maine dawn and worked till after sundown. Four years later his curiosity led him into something new. The local paper mill was to be electrified. Although he had no formal knowledge of electricity (in 1910 few people knew much about it). Percy signed on as one of three men to install the system. Learning entirely by trial and error, he emerged a competent electrician.

In 1912 after the Titanic tragedy, the heroism of wireless operators sparked our boy's imagination. He joined the Navy to learn wireless telegraphy and entered Navy radio school. Yet eventually Spencer became one of the most respected experts in the complex field of electronics.

Discharged from the Navy, Percy went to work for the Wireless Specialty Apparatus Co., of Boston. Spencer's insatiable curiosity is still remembered by his co-workers. In those days the whole shop would often keep going until midnight to finish an order. Spencer learned so well he became a wireless-equipment production boss in WWI and was sent out on trouble shooting missions by the Navy when he was barely old enough to vote. Next, during the late 20s and 30s he earned a position with the growing Raytheon company. His experiments bought him into contact with many of the best physicists at MIT. In 1929 our subject was experimenting on photoelectric vacuum tubes and making major steps in the development of the modern TV camera tube. In 1941 Spencer discovered a more efficient way to manufacture magnetrons from 17 per day to 2,600 mags per day. Spencer's accomplishments were honored by the U.S. Navy when awarded the Distinguished Service Medal and honored by a building named after him at Raytheon.

In 1945 Spencer created a device to cook food using microwave radiation. Raytheon latched on to this and after acquiring Amana Refrigeration in 1965, was able to sell microwave ovens on a large scale. The first microwave oven was called the Radarange. Today some 200 million are used throughout the world. The original microwave oven stood at 5 feet 5 tall and weighed 750 lbs, costing approximately 5 thousand dollars. Our sample QSL card, Club Station W1OMI is now W1GBE, a memorial to Percy Spencer.

Earlier at Raytheon, due to Spencer's skill, won a contract for Raytheon to produce working models of combat radar equipment for MIT's Radiation Labs – Next to the Manhattan Project, Spencer had the highest WW2 military priority. He invented Microwave diathermy equipment with the cooperation of Mayo Clinic. –Spencer became a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences; member of the Institute of Radio Engineers; holder of an honorary Doctor of Science degree from the U of Mass. Truly our subject amply demonstrated that nothing is beyond the grasp of a person who is inquisitive and wants to serve our fellow man. Partially scripted smecc.org invent.org/hall members.aol.com/spencerlab W8SU 2008