

James E. Smith 3YN *1889 - 1973 * James E. Smith was so taken with the new technology of radio in the early part of the century, he founded what would become one of the world's most successful correspondence school to train people for careers in the wireless field.

James Smith earned a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester Mass. Smith became a teacher at McKinley Technical school in Washington DC and opened a radio class in 1914 at the United States Savings Bank. The building had been built in 1907. The first class had only 4 students but WWI was looming.



Thus National Radio Inst., was founded and prepared students for occupations as radio technicians, operators and repairmen in private industry, the military and commercial radio.



The N.R.I. was a huge success, more than a million students took its courses in its first 60 years. In 1968 the company was purchased by McGraw-Hill and renamed NRI Schools. In 1969 WPI recognized Smith's lifetime accomplishments by presenting him with an honorary doctor of engineering degree. He remained with McGraw-Hill as NRI Chairman until his death in 1973. Citing changes in the marketplace, McGraw-Hill phased out NRI Schools in 1999.

Smith always felt gratitude to WPI for providing the basis for his success. Through a foundation he established in the mid 1950s to continue his philanthropic interests after his death, three scholarships were established at the University. In the last two decades alone, the James E. Smith Scholarship, the J. Morrison Smith Scholarship and the Michael Galbraith Scholarship provided nearly \$400,000 to 38 WPI undergraduates.

With a recent gift of \$50,000 to The Campaign for WPI, the Macamor Foundation (named for Smith's home in McLean, Va) has brought together James Smith's interests in radio, education and his alma mater. The gift will fund construction of facilities for the student operated radio station WWPI in the new campus center. Those facilities on the upper level of the center, will honor Smith '09, his son J. Morrison Smith '37 and his grandson Michael Galbraith '58. The Macamor Foundation spokesman said "they view the gift as a fine way to acknowledge their father and his life's work and the university that contributed so much to his success."

Partially scripted from wpi.edu/newsletter.com
The radio call -3YN- issued to James E. Smith National Radio Institute Wash DC October 1915.

Your author has the NRI Transmitter kit in his collection. They are becoming rare and gaining a cult following. Ham gear was once offered to the students as kits to obtain their ham tickets along with some basic to mid range test gear with their correspondence courses. W8SU 2007



Image courtesy of Kristopher Gunter