

QSL Cards – a Burden or a Privilege?

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Surprisingly, Wikipedia has a fairly extensive explanation about the history of the QSL card: “The concept of sending a post card to verify reception of a station (and later two-way contact between them) may have been independently invented several times. The earliest reference seems to be a card sent in 1916 from 8VX in [Buffalo, New York](#) to 3TQ in [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania](#) (in those days [ITU prefixes](#) were not used). The standardized card with call sign, frequency, date, etc. may have been developed in 1919 by C.D. Hoffman, 8UX, in [Akron, Ohio](#). In Europe, W.E.F. "Bill" Corsham, 2UV, first used a QSL when operating from [Harlesden, England](#) in 1922.” They cite their references, and of course, expand on the subject extensively.

First off, QSL cards are typically identified with HF operations. In most cases, VHF and UHF contacts very seldom foster the exchange of QSL cards ... perhaps that is a result of the more casual communications (and of course, you cannot do a log while driving down I-15 at warp 7!).

That said, in today’s world of email, websites (amen for QRZ.com!), Facebook and all of the other tools we have for personal communications, we still have the questions about “why ham radio?” and “Why QSL cards?”

The first one is easy: the amateur radio service has as many incentives and advocates as there are operators in the world, each with their own reasons. My personal answer is twofold: the science of radio propagation is fascinating to me and far from “cookbook defined”, and I get to “meet” some fantastic people who share a common field of interests – technical, in electronics ... personal, in communications, and the list can go on and on.

The second one is a little more difficult to answer. QSL cards are a time-honored tradition of the amateur radio service. So why do we see so many of the QSL comments on QRZ and other sites with notations such as “eQSL’s only”; “I do not do QSL cards”; “No QSL” ... and all of the variations to those?

For some, the answer is simply economics: a postcard used to be a penny (come to think of it, I am probably dating myself when I say I remember a penny postcard!) ... now a postcard costs twenty nine cents just to mail inside the US (unless USPS raised it again when I was not looking!). A single postcard now and then is probably not a bank breaker for anyone, even if on a fixed income, but if someone operates many hours a day (and some do – for some who do not have mobility, ham radio is their link to their outside world of common interests), the cost of the QSL cards, and postage, *and* even the logistics of getting them into the mail or to the Bureau is a huge obstacle. OK, I get that one. Makes sense to me.

For others who are contesters, it is not about the QSL cards, but about the points and contacts in the logbook. To fill out that many QSL cards might not be as enjoyable when you have made hundreds of contacts in a few hours ... Hmmm ... that one might make sense.

For others, time spent filling out QSL cards is hours they would rather spend operating. OK ... point made ... after all, it *is* the amateur radio service, not the QSL card service.

So, for some, the time-honored tradition of QSL cards sounds a bit like a burden, doesn't it?

There are a hundred reasons and some might just be excuses, but there is another side to that coin that I want to take a minute and explore with you.

Speaking only for myself, I have been a ham for something like 16 years, and a General license holder for a couple. I enjoy the challenge of propagation, and if you look at my QRZ.com biography, you will see that we are "antenna challenged" here. When I can make a contact in Australia or New Zealand – or Mississippi or New Hampshire, for that matter – the excitement is the same every time, and it is a privilege when someone takes some moments out of their lives to share with you ... your signal, or a comment about their family, or any of a host of personal information that gives them a personal identity. It was something of a surprise to me to realize that most of my very closest friends these past few years that I keep in touch with are hams ... and when those contacts take the time to send me a QSL card, it is another extension of themselves. It represents moments in our lives that we created a milestone in our lives, and some of those created an identity from which friendships have grown. Something to consider?

I cannot "paper the wall" with my cards (XYL would paper me if I tried), so I keep mine in a picture album – and soon I will need another one as my collection grows. Even as logs are not the requirement of old, nor are QSL cards a requirement, I often flip through my album of cards and the memories bring smiles – and sometimes causes me to write an email (if I cannot get them on the radio) to check on them and their family. Whenever my friends visit my shack, it is not unusual for them to find and flip through my album ... Yes, I have my very first QSL card from my very first contact when I got my General, and since She Who Must Be Obeyed doesn't want me to hang them on the wall, that album is very special to me, with a lot of great memories.

So there you have it: QSL cards are a personal extension of yourself in the history of the amateur radio service. It does not fit everyone ... they are a personal extension of yourself, and a tiny piece of history that you have shared with someone. I guess I can understand why some folks do not utilize the QSL cards, and do not criticize any of them for any of their reasons. Their reasons are their own, and I respect that. But for those of you who have the time and inclination, I hope that you can afford a few minutes from your life to send or exchange QSL cards when you can. It might be that operator's very first QSL card ... it might be their thousandth ... but every time someone opens the mailbox and sees that QSL card, I can promise you a bit of a smile and a warm memory comes to mind. It might be someone operating out of the area and receiving the memento of that exchange is not unlike a very personal souvenir ... it becomes special. It does not matter if you keep them on the wall or in an album or a shoebox ... you are preserving a bit of your personal history with someone else.

To each his own, but for me, QSL cards are a tradition as old as the amateur radio service - they are not a burden - they are a privilege to send and receive. I always try to send QSL card to all new contacts and will *always* respond when receive a QSL card.

73

Doug

These pictures are attached

My albums with QSL cards



one of my own QSL cards

Southern California



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Confirming QSO With	DATE DAY - MONTH - YEAR	UTC	MHz	RS	MODE 2 WAY

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My bio on QRZ.com is current.