



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JEREMIAH (JERRY) COURTNEY 1910-1994



Written by JM (06/1980), JW (1995); Formatted by JS (06/2008), updated by JS (11/2010)

The following article was published in the June 1980 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Profile of a Life Member, Jeremiah Courtney, L-5

By Jim McNeill
AMA Historian

One of Washington, DC's most respected attorneys, writer of legal articles for bar journals, *Communications* magazine, and other weighty publications, is the honorable Jeremiah Courtney. He is a practicing lawyer and head of a very successful law firm. He is also a member of the Academy of Model Aeronautics, and he has been involved in its every twist and turn in its legal road for the past two decades. And a lucky thing for AMA, too, this brilliant legal mind has helped guide our AMA boat through some very stormy, choppy FCC and Internal Revenue waters, and we have always come out in one piece and we are still on course.

All of us remember a couple of years ago when the Federal Communications Commission considered taking our 27 MHz radio bands away from us. Our legal posture, our moves on the legal chessboard, were guided by Mr. Courtney. AMA won that battle and retained all its frequencies, due in no small part to the legal genius who looked after us. Mr. Courtney also headed the legal team that obtained our original 72 MHz RC channels over stiff opposition, by a 4 to 3 FCC vote.

Only a couple of months ago the U.S. Internal Revenue ruled that AMA **was** indeed what it claimed to be, a **non-profit** organization, following a yearlong investigation and an initially adverse ruling. We had our legal team fighting with us side by side in Washington, DC in this struggle for survival, and again – Jeremiah helped pull us out of the fire.

Last year his law firm explained the legal procedure for AMA to follow in its continuing excellent relationship with NAA, in their reciprocal agreement to have a voting Council member on each other's legislative body. This legal explanation is but the latest in a continuous and unending service the Courtney Law Firm provides the Academy.

So, what does all this heavy legal stuff have to do with AMA Life Members? Jeremiah Courtney **is** a Life Member of AMA, and he got to be one like everyone else who is so enshrined – he donated one thousand dollars to the Academy. He did so back when AMA had very, very little money and could barely get by financially. He holds the low number of L-5, only the fifth member in history to become a Life Member.

AMA's General Counsel since 1964, Jeremiah is not a model airplane builder. His hobbies are tennis and the study of law, and he's pretty good at both. Columbia Law School graduate of

1935, he lives in Washington, DC, has one son, Jerrold. A few years ago when AMA was getting its act together to go forward with Life Memberships, it was Jeremiah Courtney himself who suggested to a Council assemblage to agree to accept Life Memberships in pieces of \$250 each to make it easier for members to acquire this status and to spread the tax deduction over a period of years.

Respected in our nation's capital as a premier attorney, Jeremiah is **revered** on the rolls of the Academy of Model Aeronautics, as a legal savior, as a father of our Life Member system, as a gentleman, and as a true friend.

The following article, written by John Worth, was published in the March 1995 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

Radio Controllers lost a longtime friend last November with the death of Jerry Courtney at age of 84. For more than 20 years, he was legal counsel for the Academy of Model Aeronautics, specializing in protecting and promoting AMA's radio control interests before the Federal Communications Commission. More than anyone else, Jerry was responsible for the acquiring and expansion of RC frequencies for modelers everywhere. (He was also an AMA Life Member – number L-5) His service on behalf of AMA began in 1963 and continued until the early 1990s.

Recognized nationally in the legal fraternity as one of the most effective lawyers in the radio communications field, Courtney was initially hired by AMA on an as-needed basis. Later, as AMA's Radio Control activities grew (largely as a result of his efforts), he was retained on a continuous basis and also became AMA's general counsel for all legal matters.

In the transition from occasional to regular services, Jerry made a major financial donation to AMA and became one of AMA's first Life members. He also established his relationship with AMA on what amounted to a token payment arrangement; providing whatever legal services were required for only \$1,000 per month. For a lawyer of his stature and national reputation, this total of \$12,000 per year was practically a gift to AMA.

What Jerry did for AMA in the way of obtaining FCC support for modelers was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. Other organizations, mainly in the communications field, paid huge amounts for similar services. Jerry often said his work for AMA was largely because he admired AMA's frugal non-profit efforts on behalf of its members, with minimum organizational overhead expense.

AMA's spectacular growth during the 1970s and 1980s may properly be attributed to his efforts with the FCC to obtain new Radio Control frequencies. In fact, most of the growth of the model industry in general during this period was similarly a direct result of his services. While other aspects of model aviation declined, Radio Control activities literally exploded and became the dominant category of AMA membership – almost all membership growth in AMA over the past 25 years has been by Radio Control modelers. Also, whereas in AMA the growth was in model

aircraft activity, for the industry in general the growth involved not only model aircraft, but also model cars and boats.

Thus, through the combination of Jerry Courtney and the Academy of Model Aeronautics, for all modelers whether AMA members or not, the model industry as a whole has benefitted tremendously. Not often can the growth of an industry and a national organization of consumers (working with the industry) be so directly related to the efforts of one person. In Jerry Courtney's case, however, the history is clear- his talents and personality dominated the progress of Radio Control, in terms of being extremely successful in influencing the actions of the FCC.

His success had a solid base. During World War II, he was an FCC staff attorney. He put this background to good use when he established his own private practice in 1946, specializing in non-broadcast communications. Seventeen years later, having become well known and successful in working with other organizations, he added AMA to his list of clients.

In 1986, Jerry merged his practice with the Washington law firm of Blooston, Mordkofsky, Jackson, and Dickens, but he continued to serve as AMA's legal counsel and representative to the FCC, with additional help from the staff of the merged firm until his retirement.

Details of AMA's Radio Control frequency acquisition history are contained in a series of three articles in the May, June, and July 1989 issues of *Model Aviation*. Written by Radio Control pioneer and Hall of Famer Walt Good (AMA president #11), the articles include many mentions of Jerry Courtney and his contributions to Radio Control growth.

In one part of the July article, it is noted that AMA had 30,000 members in 1971. Now, less than 25 years later, during which time the number of Radio Control frequencies has grown greatly, so too has the AMA membership – now more than five times what it was back then!

As evidence of the correlation between the number of Radio Control frequencies available and the membership of AMA, it should be noted that when Jerry Courtney began service for AMA in 1963, there were only five frequencies designated for Radio Control, all in the 27 MHz "Citizens Band," with their use severely limited by interference from communications users of the same band. In 1966, after three years of concentrated effort between Courtney and AMA's Frequency Committee, the FCC granted five more Radio Control frequencies – in the 72 MHz band, away from all the CB-type interference.

In 1971, due to continued efforts before the FCC, RC-ers had a total of seven frequencies in the 72 MHz band, in addition to those in the 27 MHz band. But rapid growth of Radio Control activity demanded still more frequencies, and after a prolonged legal effort with the FCC, the current spectrum of Radio Control frequencies was established in November of 1982: 50 channels were designated for model aircraft use in the 72 MHz band, and 30 more were designated in the 75 MHz band, for "surface" (car and boat) operations. Meanwhile, the 27 MHz frequencies are still available, as are various frequencies in the 50-54 MHz "ham" band.

With this expansion of frequencies, Radio Control activity flourishes and AMA's membership along with it. To this man who figured so prominently in this history, recognition and

remembrance is fully deserved. The name of Jeremiah Courtney (“Jerry” to all modelers who knew him) will not be forgotten by those who worked with him, and he deserves to be remembered by all those now benefitting from his previous service.

This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.

AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

