



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE RADIO CONTROL SOCIETY (PARCS) Since the late 1940s



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Carmine Bianco ("Uncle Carmine") composed and submitted the following PARCS club history.

Ever since time immemorial, man has been fascinated with flight, and it doesn't matter the size of the plane or the age of the man. Here, at Brooklyn's Floyd Bennett Field, there is a group of men who call themselves, "The Pennsylvania Avenue Radio Control Society"

Where Did We Come From?

To trace our origin, we have to go back to the late 1940s, when Free Flight and U-Control ruled the skies of model aviation. Many model airplane enthusiasts flew out of places like "Dyker Park" (now known as Dyker Park Golf Course) in Brooklyn, Mitchell Field in Long Island, Staten Island (where now stands the Staten Island Mall, once a full-scale airfield, now abandoned) and many other locations of open and just plain unused lots of vacant land. So it was, with some of our fore bearers - Ray Gallo, Joe Iagrossi, Al Stromer, and Carmine Bianco, to name just a few who are still with us today.

At this point, let's remember that Radio Control model aviation, as we know it today, was in its infancy back then, and by today's standards crude and cumbersome. If you made a good take-off, it was a successful day. Landing was something else. If you made a good landing, you might be awarded the "Order of the Fur Lined Port-A-San." If you could do a simple loop and a roll in the same flight, you were a "cause célèbre." Everyone was a beginner.

Exact names and dates today are a little sketchy, but it is known that the club, as such, actually got started sometime during the summer of 1949. The collective memories of the oldest remaining members of the club start one summer afternoon in 1949 when Joe Iagrossi went looking for a part for his car at an auto scrap yard along Pennsylvania Avenue. He was a neophyte to model aviation and in the process of building a model airplane that would be guided by a new invention called "RC" (Radio Control). By happenstance, Joe got into a conversation with the scrap dealer who was also a personal friend. He mentioned his new hobby and that he was looking for a suitable place to fly it. His friend told him there was a small group of men right up the block along Pennsylvania

Avenue, doing just that.

Joe went, took a look, and was smitten. He learned that the group had been formed only during that summer. They numbered about seven men. All had been flying mostly Free Flight here, there and everywhere about the general region until one came upon the now shuttered Pennsylvania Avenue Land Fill (garbage dump). Thus, our name, "Pennsylvania Avenue Radio Control Society."

There were several hobby shops in the area at that time and the hobby shop has always, even as now, been a sounding board of sorts for the model airplane enthusiast. Thus, word of Pennsylvania Avenue began to get around. The membership steadily grew. There was nothing you could call a runway, only a lot of stinking and rotting garbage. It didn't matter much since most of the planes were actually redesigned Free Flight, never intended to R.O.G (rise off ground), and had to be hand launched anyway.

At some point, someone (unknown) suggested they become an organized club. Papers were filed, dues were set at \$12 (per year, not per month), and a meeting place was established at an old YMCA on Jamaica Avenue near the Interboro (now "Jackie Robinson") Parkway, and the PARCS, as we know it today, was born.

The first known president was a man named Bob Persavero. The first known treasurer was Hans Bahn. Hans safeguarded and secured the club's dues carefully in his shirt pocket. The club continued to grow, and so did the treasury until Hans had to graduate it to an old cigar box.

During the early days there were several club luminaries, some legendary and still remembered warmly by some of the older members, names like Hal Goldklank, Phil Cushman, Moe Antun, Al Sager, Sal Taibi (Society Of Antique Modelers), Joe Kovel, Romano Garabella (Romaine retracts), et/al.

There were many out of the ordinary incidents along the way. Some humorous, some near tragic, some simply unbelievable. There was the time Harold Goldklank was flying a converted Free Flight plane and lost the signal. A common occurrence in those days. Hal watched helplessly as his pride and joy slowly flew out of sight. Several days later, Hal got a phone call from a man in Danbury, Connecticut, telling him that his model airplane had landed on his roof and was undamaged. He had removed the wing, and Hal's name and phone number were inside the plane. He invited Hal to drive over and pick it up. Hal retrieved the plane and sure enough, it was completely intact.

Then there was the time when Ray Gallo lost control, another common occurrence of the day (not just to Ray, but to all of us). A man had driven his car into the dump and parked there to watch. Ray's plane hit the closed driver's window, shattering it right in the guy's face. Fortunately, there was no injury, only property damage. The guy gets out of the car on crutches and hobbles over to apologize to Ray for being in his way, gets back in his car and drives off, never to be seen again. And so it went in bygone days.

We flew out of that garbage dump for several years until about 1958 when someone in authority approached us and told us we'd have to vacate the field as it had been slated for a large building project to become known as "Starrett City." (On a clear day now, you can see Starrett City off to the north from our present flying site.)

For a short time, the club scattered to the winds until someone suggested the parking lot at Jacob Riis Park, a public beach area in the Rockaways. The problem there was that the lot was owned by the NYC Triboro Bridge and Tunnel Authority, who gave us permission to fly only during their off-season. That meant Labor Day to Memorial Day, when the lot and beach were closed to the general public. We flew there during these off months only. Then, once Memorial Day rolled around, it was again off to the winds, until about 1961...

During the summer of 1961, Al Paseri, who was an avid skeet and trap shooter as well and an aeromodeler, learned that his skeet shooting range on Fountain Avenue was shutting down because of a new city ordinance banning the discharge of firearms within city limits. Fountain Avenue was now up for grabs. We grabbed it. But it was short lived as it soon went the way of Pennsylvania Avenue and, by 1962, the builders moved in.

In the summer of 1962, a member (unknown) discovered that another old city garbage dump at the end of Schenk Avenue in the New Lots section of Brooklyn was abandoned and vacant. Now we had summer and winter quarters. We were getting into the big time. We flew at Schenk Avenue from Memorial Day to Labor Day, then back to Riis Park. Someone suggested we change our name to shorten it because it would be cheaper to screen or embroider on tee shirts and jackets. A vote was taken and the general consensus was that "Pennsylvania" sounded more influential than Schenk and since we are a "Society," we must maintain our dignity..."oish!"

It was at Schenk Avenue, that a member was merrily flying one day when he suddenly yelled out "I AINT GOT IT" (another common occurrence back then.) It looked like Phil Cushman lost the signal from his super heterodyne full house pulse tone radio. Phil was staring at the sky to the west, frantically trying to pump in commands to regain control while his plane was spiraling into the ground behind him to the east. Phil had painted his plane white, with gleaming Aerogloss (dope) and had become disoriented when a flock of (white) seagulls (remember this was an old garbage dump) flew by, and old Phillsy was desperately trying to fly a seagull. The crash was spectacular.

Another seagull incident took place when Hal Goldklank, ever the clown, decided to chase and harass a flock of seagulls. Now one must understand that seagulls do not like being harassed in their own home territory. As Hal laughingly flew into the flock, one or more of them defecated all over his nice red, white, and black airplane. Quick, pass the Windex bottle...

During our brief stay there, Al D'Amico was a radio host for then WPIX FM Radio, the

New York Daily News' own radio network and a member of PARCS. Al had a bit of influence here and there. There were doors that were always open to him. One day Al got hold of the ear of a ranking U.S. Naval officer in the Navy's Construction Battalion (CBs) and prevailed upon them to lend us some of their equipment and manpower. Lo and behold, one day a group of sailors and officers showed up with surveying equipment and road graders and graded for us a nice clean runway. But, alas, it was short lived as Schenk soon went the same way as Pennsylvania and Fountain Avenues. And so it was then back to Riis Park on Labor Day and back to the four winds on Memorial Day. We had to operate this way for several more years.

By the summer of 1965, Al D'Amico was now a member of the executive board. He once again used some influence and pulled a rabbit out of a hat. He got the U.S. Navy to give us permission to fly a few times out off a runway at Floyd Bennett Field, then known as NYNAS (New York Naval Air Station). However, by then the Vietnam War was escalating and we had to curtail all activities there for national security reasons, but we had a foot in the door. A door that would later swing open again for us.

By 1973, President Richard Nixon brought the Vietnam War to a close. Subsequently we again managed "temporary" permission to use the runways at Floyd Bennett Field but we had to get almost daily clearance from the Navy and show identification to the marines guarding the main gate, from which we still enter to this day.

In 1975, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara decided the Navy no longer needed an air station in New York. The Navy packed up and left. The Marines at the gate were replaced by civilian security and the base was largely left to the U.S. Coast Guard. The NYPD Aviation Bureau moved in, but only as invited guests with no authority on the field since it remained federal property and does so still. Eventually, responsibility for the field fell to the U.S. Department of the Interior and was made a National Park. It's now known as part of the Jamaica Bay Branch of the National Park System at Gateway.

It was a whole new ball game. We managed to be given a somewhat closer to permanent position at Floyd Bennett Field, but we had a way to go before being more tightly cemented in. From 1975 on, we went through a series of administrative changes at the field. Some administrations were friendly and receptive; some were not. Through politics, charisma and sometimes even a little chicanery... not much, just a little...we have managed to weather all the storms...so far.

We now have a membership roster of over 350. We have been flying out of Floyd Bennett Field more than 30 years. The club has been in existence for more than 60 years. We are probably one of the oldest, if not THE oldest radio control society in existence today.

Light winds and fair skies,
Uncle Carmine, AMA 106
Past President, Pennsylvania Avenue Radio Control Society (PARCS)



"The early days."

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