

**PRESS STATEMENT – IMAGINE BERMUDA 2009 ON THE 100TH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST RADIO BROADCAST
BY REGINALD FESSENDEN**

(Imagine Bermuda 2009 wishes to express thanks to all attending this ceremony including the Minister of Community Affairs; the family of Reginald Fessenden led by William Zuill Sr.; the representative of the U.S. Consulate; the principal of Whitney Institute; past recipients of the Fessenden-Trott Scholarship; reps of the Telecommunications Commission; the Broadcasting Community and the Ham Radio Operators.)

The mandate of Imagine Bermuda 2009 is to promote a greater sense of community by looking to aspects of our history, with the view to building a better future. We are pleased to facilitate this gesture in observance of the 100th Anniversary of Fruits of Reginald's Labour. The fact that this occurs in the Christmas Season is fortuitous.

The Christmas Story offers some parallels. Reginald and his family faced strong resistance from the status quo in the Science Establishment of the time; not unlike Mary and Joseph having to *escape the Romans* and flee to Bethlehem. The members of ships off the coast, who heard that first broadcast, would have surely considered that they had experienced a *miracle* in hearing the sounds of a violin playing and a voice singing *Oh Holy Night* on equipment that normally produced morse code.

Those of us gathered, do so in the spirit of appreciation for the legacy past on to us by Reginald Fessenden and the many on whose shoulders we stand. We stand here out of a sense of our stewardship for the bounty that has been handed to our generation. We do this while accepting our responsibility in doing our best to protect the future of this island and what we can for a better world.

Fessenden faced those tremendous challenges because he had a dream of what might be. He modeled perseverance and his life offers an example to us today for overcoming adversity while staying true to an inner calling. Of course the life of Fessenden is one we only shared with our neighbours in North America. Uncovering this story reminds us the need to mine our whole history to access those rich seams of our shared past that offer us guidance and strength on the way forward.

Presentation by the Minister of Community & Cultural Affairs on the 100th Anniversary of Radio Broadcasting at Grave of Reginald Fessenden

It is fitting as we all reflect on the Christmas Story that we are able to take time to look at this very Human one, which in key ways shares a chapter in the long story that we call Bermuda. Reginald Fessenden, while being born in Canada and spending most of his working years in the U.S., spent some key time residing here in Bermuda.

Like so many who share in our story, Reginald first came here to work. He was employed as the principal of Whitney Institute at the tender age of 17. If this wasn't a clue to his keen mind, his next step was. He left Bermuda after two years to work with Thomas Edison in New York – not without leaving a piece of his heart in the island for the care of Helen Trott. In a short time Reginald rose to become Edison's Chief Chemist; but he soon moved on to work with the U.S. Weather Service.

Fessenden had been mandated to develop a wireless means of communication for the scattered weather stations; but the project ran short of funding before completion. However, Reginald was able to build on his research to achieve his 'dream' of voice broadcasting. He first did this on Christmas Eve 1906 from Brant Rock Massachusetts.

In spite of this tremendous success, Reginald made the point in recounting his story that *most of(his) life(he) had to live in poverty. . .fighting court battles and being ridiculed.* No doubt he was able to survive those years by the faithful support of his wife – Helen Trott from Smith's Parish. Financial challenges meant that his son Reginald Jr. had to drop out of Yale.

Like the classic story that it is, there was a happy ending. Court Battles were won and payments made. Reginald and Helen settled back in Bermuda for their retirement years at Winstowe in Flatt's – the former residence of the Union Representative in Bermuda.

Upon his death he was buried here at St.Marks. The New York Herald Tribune did a special editorial which opened:-

It sometimes happens, even in science, that one man can be right against the world. Professor Fessenden was that Man.

Reginald lived out his story, leaving a legacy that includes the spirit identified by the Tribune. He also left numerous inventions in addition to the Radio. In response to the unfortunate death of his only son, Reginald left a fund – the Fessenden-Trott Scholarship which is available to students in Bermuda, the U.S. and Canada.

As Minister of Culture and Community Affairs I have been pleased to highlight this story of Reginald Fessenden on behalf of entire Bermuda Family. Let me express deep appreciation for his legacy for not only Bermuda, but also for the rest of the Human family around the world who are brought together a little closer, by the radio.