Clarion Review

Biography

Marconi: The Story of the Race to Control Long-Distance Wireless
Calvin D. Trowbridge Jr.
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Four Stars (out of Five)

These days, we tend to take cell phones for granted. Most people are used to being able to contact their friends and families with a simple press of a button, no matter the distance that has to be covered. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, wireless communication, even at short distances, was practically magical. Few people understood the mechanics behind it; those who grasped the concepts and were able to apply them to practical use found themselves in a desperate dash toward a long-distance, wireless transmission monopoly, which had the potential to be a very lucrative business.

Guglielmo Marconi led the pack of inventors from the beginning. In his makeshift attic laboratory at his father's villa in Pontecchio, Italy, and later in the facilities he had built to his own specifications, Marconi devoted long hours to the pursuit of knowledge. It wasn't the money that beckoned and urged him to work so hard. It was the delight he took in the repetitive trials, the incremental advances, and the constant edge of discovery that drove him.

Calvin D. Trowbridge, Jr., has produced a compelling biography of Marconi, following the inventor's life from his early experiments in the attic, along his rapid rise to notoriety, through his work during the Great War and its aftermath, all the way to his death in 1937. Trowbridge's approach is exhaustive. He includes relevant details about Marconi's intimate relationships with his parents, wives, children, and friends, alongside descriptions of Marconi's business acumen and passion for invention.

Though the narrative is dense with detail, Trowbridge's style remains engaging and a delight to read. Trowbridge is adept at letting Marconi's obvious natural attraction shine through the pages even at a century's distance.

The author also excels at reminding his readers of the global environment in which Marconi was working. He keeps the approaching Great War in the periphery of Marconi's great

success and points out the ways in which the values of certain decades—the Edwardian era and the aftermath of the war—affected Marconi's life and accomplishments. He even examines Marconi's involvement in Italian politics. Trowbridge includes certain historical events like the sinking of the Titanic to show the effect of wireless transmission on the world, and offers excerpts from contemporary newspapers to show the world's reactions, both good and bad, to Marconi's advances. Photographs and illustrations would have made this book an even stronger contender on the field of Marconi biographies.

Trowbridge tightly weaves together all the elements of Marconi's life to create a cohesive, fascinating look at the man who had a large hand in creating the world we live in today.

Andi Diehn