

# Metallic Radio Ephemera from Russia

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Many small metal *objects of virtue* from the Soviet era survive in Russia today, because the Russians made so many of them to maintain the morale of the people.

The Russians then and now take great pride in the early radio experimenter Alexander S. Popov. He used metal-filings coherers to detect lightning from approaching storms in the Baltic Sea, useful information for the Russian Navy. He came close to developing the first wireless telegraphy system.

See Eric Wenaas, *An Examination of Alexander Popov's Priority for the Invention of Radiotelegraphy*, 3 AWA Review 157 (2020), and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander\\_Stepanovich\\_Popov](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Stepanovich_Popov) .

Popov did acknowledge that Marconi had done it first. Marconi's daughter Degna Marconi writes about Marconi's visit on the Italian cruiser *Carlo Alberto* to Kronstadt, the Russian Baltic naval base, in July 1902.

An appearance of Alexander S. Popov at the vessel is reported:

"One day a Russian caller arrived at the foot of the *Carlo Alberto* gangway and said to an Italian sailor who helped him aboard: 'I want to pay my respect to Marconi, the father of wireless.'"

Degna Marconi, MY FATHER MARCONI, (McGraw-Hill, 1962) at page 132.

The radio museum in St. Petersburg, the A.S. Popov Central Museum of Communications, has an extensive original collection of Popov's experimental pre-“radio” apparatus. The Russians honored Popov with a commemorative one-ruble coin (nearby) between 1984 and 1988.



(Author's Collection)

After the 1917 Revolution, the Soviets put nationwide radio in place. At first, they broadcast mostly through speakers providing audio from the nearest government medium wave radio station. From 1927 on, the Soviets broadcast internationally via Radio Moscow on short wave. They beamed propaganda around the world. Anyone with a shortwave radio in the 1950s through the 1990s heard Radio Moscow (interminably), including Joe Asimov with his New York accent.

Specially favored listeners were honored with a high-class blue enamel pin with a radio tower, radio waves, “Radio Moscow” in Cyrillic, and CCCP (= USSR — see nearby photo).



(Author's Collection)

Television was on the horizon in the 1930s. Russia, like Germany, wanted a way to please and enthuse its Communist Party administering minions. TV looked like a great domestic and internal propaganda tool. In Russia, however, development had to await victory over the NAZIs. But TV came along in due course. Moscow sported one of the tallest TV towers in the world, built in 1967. For this line-of-sight VHF medium, size mattered; a calculation suggests a receive “viewing

range” radius of 60 miles and much greater for elevated receive antennas. The wiki says:

“Ostankino Tower is a television and radio tower in Moscow, Russia, owned by the Moscow branch of the ...Russian TV and Radio Broadcasting Network. Standing 540.1 metres (1,772 ft), ... It is currently the tallest free-standing structure in Europe and 11th tallest in the world.”

The Soviets were also very proud of this triumph of design and construction engineering. They put the tower on the little promotional pins of which that regime was so fond. See the photo at the end of this note.

Most of these sorts of pins are fairly pedestrian. One, however, offers an pleasing and unusual visual pun. This red pin shows a tower and the emanating radio/TV waves, but the waves are also part of the Cyrillic “СССР” around the tower as if radiating from the tower. Some Bureau of Propaganda apparatchik seems to have gotten away with a little design levity; one can only hope it didn’t land him in Siberia! (Likely not: note the Hammer and Sickle too):



(Author's Collection)



## Celebrating the Big Tower:



(Author's Collection)

These pins and the like are perhaps somewhat less ephemeral than the paper of which archives are full. Still, they won't last forever. Explication and preservation of this aspect of communications technology, and its popular emblems, are appropriate.

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