



The Alabama Historical Radio Society Newsletter

January 2008



A NOTE FROM THE PREZ

Our 2007 went out on a sad note with the untimely passing of Ron Westbrook. Ron was a long-time member of our society and served as President for 2 years. We will miss him very much.

Our Birmingham Public Library exhibit was well received by everyone. We gave out almost 400 of our new brochures.

The December 5 'brown bag' lunch session at the library was a HOOT. With Ron Westbrook as the sound effects man and Heather Haynes as a dolphin, there were lots of laughs. My hat's off to Dee for dreaming up all that nonsense.

Since Ron's funeral was January 4, we postponed our annual party until spring. Watch for the announcement!

Robert Frye will start a new class on February 2. If you or someone you know is interested in learning about radio/electronics, be sure to encourage them to take advantage of Robert's excellent class. I am sure it will fill up fast.

Let me know if you want more articles like the one in this newsletter by Dave Ingram. Dave is recognized as an outstanding author, and we are honored to have his article appear in our newsletter.

Let's all work together to make 2008 the best ever for every member of our society.

Dave

IN MEMORY OF RON WESTBROOK

It is with great sadness that we, the AHRS group, note the loss of Ron Westbrook. He was a great member of the AHRS, having served as president for two years. He left us much too soon, and we will remember his contributions to the club over the years. Our deep sympathy goes out to his family at this very difficult time.



DEE'S RADIO SHOWS

Hello everyone. It is difficult at best for words to flow at this time with the loss of our dear friend Ron. His untimely passing has taken a great slice from all our hearts. Our thoughts and prayers go out to Ron's family during this tragic time. But, we must go on.

This month's edition will be made up of some links to a couple of good web sites, starting with the following site about WENN and WATV, as told by the late Joe Dentici. Please read this, I know you'll enjoy it, I certainly did.

http://www.birminghamrewound.com/wenn_dentici.htm

Here's another good web site, a source of almost anything including Old Time Radio Shows:

<http://www.archive.org/index.php>

By for now, so long Ron, I hope to see you again somewhere down the log.

Dee Haynes

243-4630 or k4hfx@bellsouth.net

In answer to our request for articles from members, Dave Ingram, K4TWJ, has graciously provided the following article.



Note: This article is not to be reproduced without the consent of author Dave Ingram, K4TWJ.

HAM PRIDE: OUR LEGACIES AND TRADITIONS

By Dave Ingram, K4TWJ

Our amateur radio world is rich in proud traditions and noteworthy accomplishments, many dating back to the early days of wireless communications. This series of short articles thus passes on such related tales to newer amateurs with the encouragement/stipulation to also pass them along to next generation amateurs later in years.

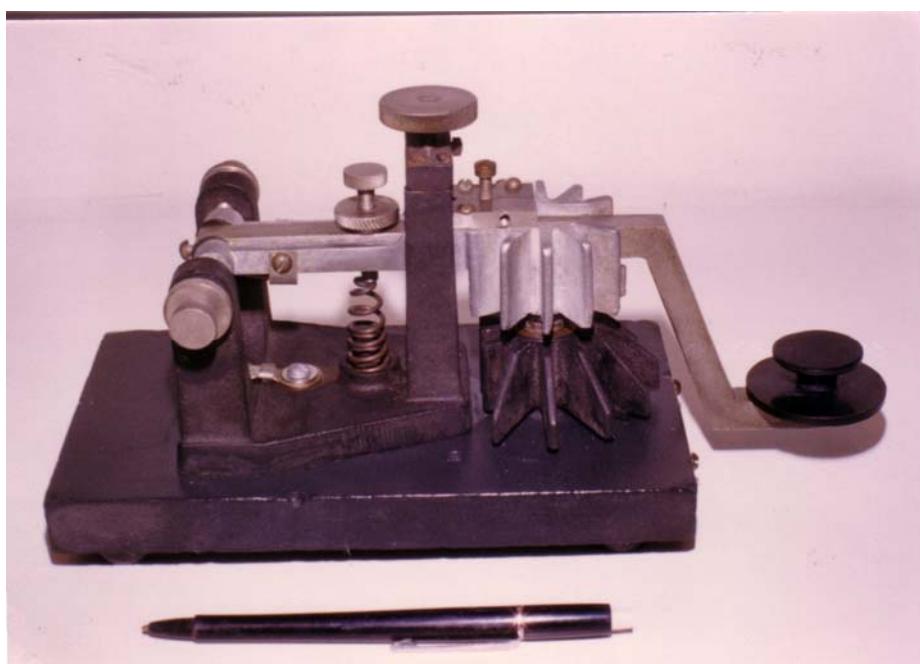
Amateur Radio came into existence approximately 100 years ago as a form of wireless telegraphy called “Spark Gap” or simply “Spark”. A typical transmitter of the time consisted of a large high voltage coil or transformer keyed in its primary circuit and a spark gap with large resonating coils and homemade capacitors to produce very strong (!) arcs or sparks in its secondary circuit. In some respects, it might be analogized to a long extension wire connected to a spark plug in an automobile engine so it radiates ignition noise and hash like crazy. The mating receiver consisted of a simple crystal set with open-air galena rock/mineral detector and an adjustable coil called a loose coupler. A long copper wire antenna polished with steel wool for good signal radiation was used with the setup. It was definitely crude, dangerous and frightful by today’s standards (especially a 1,000 to 5,000 watt rotary spark gap setup!) but it worked!

During operation, the key literally flamed with high circulating current and static electricity. Hairs on an operator’s head and arms stood out from static electricity and the smell of ozone filled the air. Arcs of static electricity flying off the transmitter occasionally scared visitors witless and sent them running in fright. Outside, the antenna glowed with a purple haze and flames of static electricity flying from its ends occasionally started bush fires. That popular QCWA logo of an old-time spark op with bolts of static electricity emanating from his pipe is more factual than folly, friends. Original spark ops were indeed a gutsy lot! Yes, and compared to those open air and fire breathing dragons of yesteryear, today’s mild mannered rigs in fully enclosed cabinets are quite docile.

Bands, frequencies and modes like CW, AM and SSB were relatively unknown during that tender young age. Operators just tweaked their transmitters resonating

circuits to produce a healthy spark with a unique sound. They copied incoming signals by concentrating on the raspiness, buzz, hiss, tone or fist of a selected station while ignoring other stations—regardless of strength. There were no IF or Passband filters and no DSP. The only selectivity was between an operator's ears.

A shining example of a genuine spark-era key is the famous 50 amp-rated "Rock Crusher" key made by the Marconi Wireless Telegraph Company and shown in our accompanying photo.



The key's huge silver-tipped contacts could get fiery hot during operation, so massive heat sinks attached to both upper and lower contacts helped keep the key cool enough to handle. The key's skirted knob also serves an important function. It protects an operator's fingers from harmful burns or shocks. A slip of the hand definitely could not be tolerated here! Genuine spark keys are more than prized collectibles, incidentally; they are true artifacts of amateur radio's proud history and legacies you can hold in your hand. May those keys, their operators and their memories live forever!

Author Dave Ingram, K4TWJ, is one of today's most active, enthusiastic and well-known radio amateurs, with over 800 articles and 26 books on amateur radio to his credit. He presently writes three columns in CQ Magazine (of the U.S.), designs QRP kits and operates 30 and 20 meters CW daily. You can see more of his work at <http://k4twj.blogspot.com>.

QCWA

The Quarter Century Wireless Association was founded in 1947, when 25-year amateurs hailed the era of spark communications. It survived the trials of time and today it is widely recognized as one of the most outstanding and influential organizations in amateur radio. Membership is open to radio amateurs worldwide licensed 25 years or more. Details at www.qcwa.org or via QCWA, P. O. Box 3247, Framington, MA 01705, U.S.A.

MEETING TIMES

We meet nearly every Saturday of the month at 09:00 at the Alabama Power Building on Parkway East (aka Centerpoint Parkway) in Huffman. The organization's space is accessed from the rear of the building, so park around the back (by means of Huffman Road, which runs parallel to the Parkway). Entry is via the door on the right.

Come to the Monday Night Meetings, TOO, on the 4th Monday of the month at 7 PM!

FREE ELECTRONICS CLASSES

The first Saturday of the month, there are electronics classes free to members. Topics include test equipment, Resistors and Capacitance testing, Inductors and coil winding, to name only a few subjects!

We hope to see you there!



DUES ARE DUE AGAIN IN JANUARY

Membership dues are \$25 a year, payable beginning this month. If you have questions about the dues, you can contact Julian at 205-879-3619.

Dues can be mailed to AHRS @ P.O. Box 130307, Birmingham AL 35213.

WHO TO CONTACT

President – David Cisco

205.822.6759

ciscod@bellsouth.net

Member and Instructor – Robert Frye

205.631.6680

RLF100243@aol.com

Web site – Robert Matthews

RMatthews@ms.soph.uab.edu

Web Address:

<http://alabamahistoricalradiosociety.org/>

Newsletter – Patsy Desaulniers

patwrite@juno.com