

Squelch Tales

Newsletter from the Merrymeeting Amateur Radio Assoc. for May 1999

WHAT WENT ON AT THE APRIL MEETING?

Chris, KB2SKP kicked off the meeting at about 7 PM. One of the first topics of business was the Tech Committee report by Bruce, W1ZE. For the benefit of our four-snowbird members who have returned from southern latitudes Bruce gave an update on the 147.27 KS1R/R repeater link project. Bruce also asked for assistance from for the following Saturday's 70-foot tower-lowering project on Granite Hill. Several members volunteered to spend their Saturday on the hill.

Field Day was the next topic of discussion. It was a unanimous decision that the MARA should participate in the event. There was a strong feeling that the event should take place, at the Meadowbrook Campground in Phippsburg but it that area was not available the corner field in Bowdoin where the club had their yard sale. It was felt by the majority of the members in attendance that event should be for the enjoyment of the members and their families. The members were aware that there was a feeling that the club should show the flag in a public place. It pointed out that the MARA would get publicity in the newspaper about the event, plus an amateur radio demonstrations, and the MARA's ability to provide volunteer communications may be made at the Woolich Days event.

The membership agreed that the MARA should again provide communications for the Merrymeeting Wheelers 13th annual Dam Michoud Century Bike ride to raise funds to fight cancer on Saturday August 28th. Chris and Bruce will coordinate with the Wheelers bike club.

Chris, KB2SKP, is working with Sagadahoc County officials to find out what support our organization can provide through ARES and our available repeaters. Robin N1NFK offered to help Chris in this project. Chris will make a report on what is being planned at the next MARA meeting.

After the break and 50-50 drawing, Bruce, W1ZE gave a short talk on HF mobiling and his experience with installation of a screwdriver antenna plus the pitfalls that can occur.

The meeting was closed at 8:20. Many thanks to all the attendees for making this meeting a success.

WHO IS W1ZE, REALLY?

By Bruce Randall, the present W1ZE

A year ago when I was anticipating a call sign change (again), so I wouldn't have to explain to everyone why a W6er was in Maine. I narrowed my picks to just two. My first pick was W1AU and my second was W1ZE. Both showed available on the FCC call sign database. I liked the CW swing of W1AU but I liked W1ZE also. I also remember some of the old timers in New England commenting that the original W1ZE, Irv Vermilya, was a colorful fellow involved in the early days of Ham Radio and a big gun on 75 Meters with his big self supporting tower on Cape Cod. In September of 98, when the Vanity dropped to \$13, I submitted my on-line application.

Two and a half weeks went by before my new license and call sign arrived from the FCC. I opened the envelope and inside was the call sign of W1ZE. I was not disappointed. A few days later I got on the Internet and the Yahoo's search engine and typed in W1ZE to see if I could find anything about the original ZE. The follow is what I found:

IRVING VERMILYA, W1ZE

America's #1 Amateur



If you were alive during the formative years of amateur radio, you knew Irv Vermilya. From the time he was 12 and he travelled to hear Marconi speak, ham radio was his first love, and he was a life-long ambassador for it.

Born in June of 1890, he grew up in Mt. Vernon, New York, where he built his first rather primitive set (as Irv recalls, it looked strange, but it worked) in December of 1901, after his trip to see Marconi. Other more advanced (and more professional-looking) sets followed, and his dedication to wireless increased. His spark transmissions were so frequently heard that he was offered jobs on ships that needed a wireless operator. He became a member of the newly formed Radio Club of America in 1911, using the calls VN. (Later, he would use 1HAA, but he was best known as W1-ZE). In late 1912, the government began to require that all wireless operators be licensed. Irv hurried to the Brooklyn Navy Yard to take the test, and was given Certificate of Skill #1. For the rest of his life, he would be known as America's Number 1 Amateur-- which he truly was.

Irv Vermilya's involvement with radio continued; at the age of 16, he did in fact go to sea as a wireless operator; a few years later, he was given the important job of running the Marconi Wireless Station (station WCC) on Cape Cod, Mass. (Friends of his recall that many years later, he still loved to tell about how noisy the station was-- with its 35 kW rotary spark gap...) During World War I, he served in the Navy, and then returned to Massachusetts to run the RCA wireless station at Marion. His engineering and wireless skills brought him into contact with such legendary figures as David Sarnoff, Lee DeForest, and Edwin Howard Armstrong, and his technical skills earned him the praise of the radio editor of the Boston Post who referred to him as an "expert sending operator." The editor noted that Irv Vermilya was "one of New England's best known amateurs, and one of the few... who were able to reach a European station during the recently held amateur tests." (Boston Post, 14 May 1922, p. 13)

By 1921, professional radio stations were springing up, and Irv was interested in this new technology too. Using his newly acquired license for a land station, 1ZE, he began doing radio broadcasts to entertain his neighbours in and around New Bedford and upper Cape Cod. His work came to the immediate attention of the Slocum and Kilburn Company, which was planning to open a station at their mill (the mill was similar to what we would call a "general store", since it also sold electrical equipment, tools, and building supplies; the station would be located in the radio department). They hired Irv to build it and run it, and the station went on the air officially in mid

1922 as WDAU. (It still exists, although today, it is known as WNBH-- the initials stand for New Bedford Hotel, where its his wife's surprise) in early 1924, where he operated it under the call letters WBBG ("The Voice From Cape Cod") until mid-1925. His was one of many small stations that suffered when ASCAP required all stations, no matter what their size, to pay large fees to play ASCAP music; such fees almost drove Irv's little station off the air, but it made him even more determined to find some financial backers so that he could keep the station operating. He was finally able, with a business partner, to move his radio station back to New Bedford, requesting the aforementioned WNBH call letters. It was common in radio's early days for stations to have studios at hotels, since this provided a studio audience as well as a house dance band, and it certainly gave WNBH a good community image to have the hotel as its location. Irv continued to play a major role in WNBH's operation, serving as its General Manager, as well as helping to hire the talent and getting the station publicity. His ability as an engineer was well known, and he frequently kept the station up and running during winter storms or other weather-related problems. In May of 1934, he sold WNBH to the owners of the New Bedford Standard-Times newspaper, but he continued to work there, first as station manager and later as the chief engineer until he retired in 1955.

While Irv Vermilya's career in professional radio earned him considerable praise, he never stopped being involved with ham radio. In 1921, he was named the New England Manager of the ARRL. He was the mentor to Eunice Randall (no relation to Bruce Randall), the district's first woman amateur, and at a time when women were not expected to know anything about radio, Irv was totally supportive of Eunice and encouraged other men to give her a chance-- Irv and Eunice were friends for many years, attending each other's weddings, participating in various conventions together, and of course, keeping in touch via their ham sets. Irv wrote columns on ham radio for QST and for various newspapers, and won virtually every award a ham could win-- it was impossible to read any magazine about ham radio without seeing another country or continent that W1-ZE had received or been received by. (In the early 1920s, amateur 'tests' were often held to see how far a transmission could go, and Irv was one of the few whose messages were received as far away as Europe...) And as you might expect, he also put a mobile transmitter in his car, and in the early 1930s, he set up the first police radio station for the New Bedford Police department. In fact, whenever he could put his radio skills to a positive use, Irv was right there to volunteer, whether it was relaying messages during a hurricane or attracting some publicity for ham radio by engaging in a "foot-sending" contest with Eunice Randall (Eunice usually won...). Years later, he was one of the founding members of the Old Old Timers Club, and served on its board. He was also the first American citizen ever given a permit to operate his mobile station in Canada.

I would like to tell you that such a distinguished career and such a highly respected man lived to a ripe old age, but not every story has a Hollywood ending. Depressed by the death of his wife, in failing health, and perhaps feeling the industry he loved so much no longer had a place for him, in late January 1964, Irv Vermilya committed suicide. His death came as a shock to the many people who had admired him; even the New Bedford Standard-Times editorialized about what a fine human being he was, and how much he had contributed to broadcasting.

Irv Vermilya elevated the status of ham radio, and was an able spokesperson and emissary, whose outgoing personality made friends wherever he went. If it were not for him, New Bedford and large parts of Cape Cod would not have had radio for a very long time, and thousands of people who met him via ham radio would not have known what fun this hobby could be. Perhaps he never invented something major the way Marconi did, perhaps his name is not as famous as Sarnoff's, but it is radio's early pioneers who paved the way for the fledgeling industry to grow and succeed. Irv Vermilya was definitely American's #1 amateur, and he deserves our thanks for

his dedication and his many years of service.

Information Supplied by Donna Halper, [Contributing Editor,] Boston Radio Archives, Boston, Ma.

Now all of you know why I am very pleased to have the call sign of W1ZE

ROCHESTER, THE FLEA MARKET

Over the past several years the May Hosstraders Hamfest and Flea Market has had lousy weather which was instrumental in changing its nickname from Deer-chester to Rain-chester.

This year everyone was glued to the weather channel and listening to other weather prognosticators to see if it was worth going. Most reports were iffy a day or two before.

The MARA had a few brave soles that attended. Loren Dudley (W1LHD) as usual went down Friday afternoon with Pete Russell (K1MJP) and Bruce Randall (W1ZE) following early Saturday morning. Upon arrival they found the fairgrounds dry, no mud, but there was a heavy overcast and some fog mist. The fog and mist dissipated quickly leaving only gray but dry skies. Attendance was down a little from previous years (folks afraid of bad wx. We expect), but Pete, Loren and Bruce reported having a good time and not leaving without spending a few bucks. Some are worried that Loren's addiction to Hallicrafters has reemerged because he came home with another vintage receiver. Steady Loren, you can kick it.

Hope to see a better turnout for Rainchester in October.

WORD FROM HQ

The ARRL celebrates its 85th anniversary May 18, 1999.

To mark the event, Maxim Memorial Station W1AW will operate as special event station W1AW/85 during the week of May 17-23. Some W1AW/85 operation will include PSK31. The American Radio Relay League was founded in 1914 by Hiram Percy Maxim, later 1AW, and Clarence Tuska, later 1AY. It was Maxim's desire to send an inquiry about a hard-to-get receiving tube--A DeForest Audion--from Hartford, Connecticut, to Springfield, Massachusetts, that served as the catalyst for the League's birth in 1914. After conditions prevented him from working Springfield directly, he arranged with a station between the two cities to relay his message.

Initially working with Tuska through the Radio Club of Hartford--which had voted to take over development of a national "relay" organization--Maxim's vision for the League became reality in May of that year. Initial dues were free. By late summer, more than 200 "relay stations" had been appointed across the US, although the first edition of QST--16 pages in all--did not appear until December 1915.

"Our celebration of the League's 85th anniversary would please our founders in two ways," said ARRL Executive Vice President David Sumner, K1ZZ. "First, we are celebrating with on-the-air activity--the organization, promotion, and protection of which was why they went to the trouble of creating the League in the first place. Second, just as they did in the exciting early years, we are looking forward by emphasizing new methods of radio communication.' ARRL President Rod Stafford, W6ROD, encouraged participation from all segments of the Amateur Radio community. "We hope everyone, member and nonmember alike, will join in celebrating the League's first 85 years and the beginning of the next 85," he said.

Volunteer staff members will handle on-the-air duties at W1AW/85, which will take place before and after regular daily W1AW transmissions. Plans call for W1AW/85 to operate 160-10 meters plus 6 and 2 meters and 70 cm, 25 kHz inside subbands on CW, plus SSB, RTTY, PSK31, SSTV, satellite, Novice bands, etc. Additionally, W1AW/85 will transmit bulletins using PSK31 as a secondary digital mode (time permitting) for the last digital bulletin of each day that week.

IN BRIEF FROM HQ:

* This weekend on the radio: Armed Forces Day (see above) and the EU Spring Sprint are May 15. Just ahead: The Major Six Club Contest and the Texas QSO Party are the weekend of May 21-23. See May QST, page 89, for details.

* Vanity update: The FCC in Gettysburg reports it has processed vanity call sign applications received through April 16. On May 5, the FCC issued 186 grants. Another 173 applications landed in the work-in-process (WIPs) stack.--FCC

* Spectrum Protection bill collects cosponsors: ARRL Legislative and Public Affairs Manager Steve Mansfield, N1MZA, reports that as of May 7, there were 49 cosponsors on HR 783, The Amateur Radio Spectrum Protection Act. Recent cosponsors include Rep Tom Davis of Virginia, the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee chairman.

* SAREX mission delayed again: The next Space Amateur Radio Experiment shuttle flight has again been delayed. The flight will carry the Chandra X-ray Observatory. NASA has decided to postpone mating the observatory with its inertial upper stage (IUS) pending additional progress in the US Air Force investigation into problems with the April 9 launch of a Department of Defense satellite. The launch had been set for July 9. The specific impact on the launch date is not yet known. NASA says it will not launch Chandra on shuttle mission STS-93 "until the situation is fully understood." The IUS is a two-stage solid rocket that will help propel the Chandra observatory from a low-Earth orbit to its operating altitude nearly one-third of the way to the moon. The STS-93 mission is the only SAREX opportunity scheduled for 1999.--NASA

* Reminder--ARRL Outgoing QSL Service fees have changed: League members are reminded that the ARRL Outgoing QSL Service fee schedule was revised effective January 1, 1999. The current fees are \$6 per pound (or portion of a pound), \$1 for 10 cards, \$2 for 11-20 cards, and \$3 for 21-30 cards. Packages accompanied by the incorrect fee will be processed, but senders will be billed for the additional fee. Priority will be given to packages with the correct fee enclosed. Other packages will be handled as time permits. For more information, contact Martin Cook, N1FOC, 860-594-0274; buro@arrl.org.

* UoSAT-12 gets OSCAR designation: Amateur Radio's newest satellite, UoSAT-12, has received an OSCAR designation from AMSAT. UoSAT-12 now also may be referred to as OSCAR-36 or UO-36. The satellite soon will complete its first full month in orbit. The assignment of consecutive OSCAR numbers to new Amateur Radio spacecraft is a tradition that dates from the launch of the very first ham satellite, OSCAR-1. The satellite remains in very good health. Planning is under way to open UoSAT-12's transponders for general amateur use.--AMSAT News Service

Tower Comes Down On Granite Hill

As reported in the meeting activity column, a group of MARA members (Paul, Linda, Mike, Loren, Mark & Bruce) joined Nels Bigelow, from the broadcasting group, on Granite Hill, Saturday May first to start taking down the old 70-foot tower. The tower will be reinstalled and lengthened at the new location across the road from WABK's tower also on Granite hill later this year. We were hoping for an additional tower climber to help Nels, and make the evolution go quickly, but no such luck. Bill, K1MNW, loaned us his gin-pole and Pete K1MJP provided the climbing belt. Mark brought along his plasma cutter (what a slick rig) that came in handy.

The project started at 9 AM, but by 3:30 PM only 20-feet of the tower had been removed. Nels who is in good shape for being close to 70 was pretty tuckered out after spending over four hours up the tower all by himself and needed to quit. It was a unanimous decision to continue the project on Monday (3rd) at noon.

Monday a smaller group from the MARA (Paul, Linda, Loren & Bruce) joined Nels and two other members of the broadcasting group at the site and things went much quicker this time. The remaining 50-feet of tower came down in about four hours.

As chairman of the Technical Committee I want to thank all of you that devoted your valuable time on the hill and those of you that loaned us the needed hardware. Your efforts are greatly appreciated by Nels Bigelow for the broadcasting group and yours truly.

73, Bruce

OOP's, We Bo-Bo'ed!

Last month we told you about the change in the emergency autodial on the 147.21 MHz repeater. Yes they have changed but the numbers we gave you are wrong. Here are the correct emergency autodial numbers:

- **0 = State Police (south) Gray -----1-800-482-0730
- **1 = State Police (north) Augusta-----1-800-452-4664
- **2 = Brunswick Emergency (911)-----725-5521
- **3 = Topsham Emergency (911)-----729-5588
- **4 = Bath Emergency (911)-----443-5566
- **5 = Freeport Emergency (911)-----865-4212
- **6 = Lisbon Emergency (911)-----353-2300
- **7 = Sagadahoc Sheriff -----443-9711
- **8 = Cumberland Sheriff -----1-800-501-1111
- **9 = Androscoggin Sheriff -----882-9711

If you want a card with the above numbers printed on it to put in your car or wallet, contact Chris KB2SKP or Bruce, W1ZE.

***TAKE THE TIME TO CHECK-IN
TO THE HARECOM NET EVERY
MONDAY EVENING AT 7:30 ON
THE KS1R/R, 147.21 REPEATER***



HC63, Box-81, Bath, ME 04530

MARA MEETING

May 27 @ 7 PM,
Salvation Army Bldg
25 Congress St. Bath