

CARA CELEBRATES 95TH BIRTHDAY



The Cambridge Amateur Radio Association will celebrate its 95th birthday on December 4, 2008. During the month of November, the organization had a display in the Crossroads Library and provided communications for and entered a float in the Christmas Parade, and on December 4, they will launch a new web site www.w8vp.org. The following is a brief history of CARA.

Cambridge Amateur Radio Association – W8VP

The Cambridge Amateur Radio Association (CARA) came into existence on December 4, 1913, when a group of wireless radio operators formed the “Wireless Association of Cambridge.” The founders were Roy Waller, J. Homer McMunn, Edward “Tom” Sarchet, George Rubicam, George Robey, Don Hinton, Paul Simcox, E.D. Shipley, Ray Sears, and Miss Nellie Waller, (Roy’s sister). Nellie Waller was the first licensed female radio operator in the area, the second female operator in the state of Ohio, and only the fourth in the entire United States.

In the days of the birth of “Wireless Communications,” these folks were the real pioneers. They were a young group of experimenters in a new technology, with no “experts” or “old timers” to consult for assistance in their endeavors. Transmission and reception of signals in those early days was primitive and limited. “Out of town” communications occurred only under very rare night-time conditions, by transmitting a group of “continuous wave” tones, using a code developed by Samuel F.B. Morse, which has since become known as the “Morse Code”.

Starting in 1912, wireless operators were licensed by the government and were allocated special segments of the radio frequency spectrum for their operations and experimentations.

In 1914, Roy Waller was the first wireless station on the air in Cambridge. He founded the first commercial broadcast station, WEBE, which later was changed to WALR when it moved to Zanesville, which eventually became WHIZ. Roy's son, Clarence "Clancy" Waller, is a member of the Cambridge Amateur Radio Association today.

J. Clayton "Nick" Nicholson, a native of Cambridge, obtained his first license in 1919, at age 13, and became a very active and avid "CW" operator. He became an expert, and it is said that he handled hundreds, even close to a thousand messages each month. Nicholson was a sub-dealer in ham radio equipment and a prime mover in the old Cambridge Radio Club. In 1928 his call was changed to "W8VP." It is said that the phonetics for his call were "W8 Vest Pocket"... but he was never known to use phone.

In March of 1935 Nicholson was elected President of The Cambridge Amateur Radio Association and prime founder of the "hamfests" of 1935 and June 1937 in the National Hotel in Cambridge. (These hamfests were similar to the Dayton Hamvention in that they combined a hamfest with a national convention which including many gifted technical speakers and major equipment sponsors.) Nicholson was a Chief Radioman (RMC) in the U.S. Navy Reserve and was teaching radio in a Navy Communications School in Indianapolis, Indiana, when he was taken ill and later passed away, while receiving treatment in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1943.

In 1949 The Cambridge Amateur Radio Association obtained permission from Nicholson's family to adopt his call, W8VP, as their own, in his honor. The ensuing petition to the FCC was granted. W8VP is now heard as the identifier, both voice and CW, on the club's repeater system.

In the 1950s and 60s, two former presidents, Al Blancett and Clarence Waller were the main driving forces with the organization, and Joe Wagner WA8AHV helped form a radio club at Cambridge High School. During this period, alignment with the Civil Defense of the county was forged, and many technical achievements through amateur radio were developed which are in use today.

Then, in the 1970s came the development of the high frequency repeater systems. Former president, Ron Rogers, developed and placed into operation the first computer controlled repeater system in the state. An updated version of this system is still in operation today.

Later in the 1980s and 90s, space communications began here when CARA made a radio contact with the 1st space shuttle "ham" in space. (Amateur radio is the official hobby of NASA.) Technology then began to include ham satellites and moon bounce communications. CARA set many national VHF communication competition records; some still stand today.

With the turn of the 21st century, amateur TV and digital communications appeared. CARA members continue to be at the leading edge of technology, following the example set by our founders. Hams communicate across town and around the globe using various technologies such as CW, voice, video, and computers.

Through the years our “hams” have experienced the evolution of “wireless communications” – the birth of “solid-state” electronics; the arrival and departure of the vacuum tube and the advent of enhanced digital communications. Gone are the days of the “spark gap”... and the days of reveling over a radio contact with your colleague just across town. Even transmitting and receiving video via SSTV (slow scan TV) with amateurs around the world is a common practice.

Today, all sorts of awards are offered to operators for such activities as Working All States, Working All Zones (of the world), working a hundred (or more) countries, Islands On The Air (IOTA’s), lighthouses, etc., for those who like to collect QSL cards (official confirmation receipts), often referred to as “wallpaper,” from everywhere and everyone, to commemorate their radio contacts. Of course, just having a casual conversation with other operators, across town, in another State or in a Country on the opposite side of the globe is quite often a memorable experience! The old adage: “It’s a Small World” becomes readily apparent.

There is also a serious side to the members of The Cambridge Amateur Radio Association. They take public service activities to heart and participate in community activities and provide communications wherever needed, such as fires, floods, parades or special events and celebrations in the area. Several members are involved with ARES (Amateur Radio Emergency Services) and the Civil Defense Agency, which is now the EMA (Emergency Management Agency). ARES members are National Incident Management System, Citizens Emergency Response Team, and SKYWARN weather spotter certified. Some also have radiological and hazardous material trained as well. CARA members practice their communications skills each Tuesday starting at 8 PM during a weather reporting net and again at 8:15 PM for a message passing and information net on 146.850 MHz. Where there is a need for communications, CARA is ready to serve!

Each year the folks with W8VP erect stations & antennas at a remote location and attempt to communicate with as many stations as they possibly can, using emergency power etc., to hone their skills in preparation for an emergency, and this is coordinated with the other hams across the United States. Also known as Field Day, this is one of the few times that they can “have fun” while serving a useful purpose!

The Cambridge Amateur Radio Association (W8VP) currently, consists of approximately 50 members led by President George “Sonny” Alfman. Sonny has been an active driving force since 1962 and has been the club’s president more than twenty years, leading mentor (teaching fifty radio classes), and technical adviser. In 1999, with CARA’s assistance, Alfman formed an organization called the Multi-County Coalition of Eastern Ohio (MCC). The MCC consists of about 110 hams from nine counties who meet three to four times a year to coordinate radio communications for disasters and large public events.

Past presidents of the club include Roy Waller, Paul Simcox, Clayton Nick” Nicholson, Al Blancett, Clancy Waller, Ron Rogers, Rankin Cohagan, Jim Hoag, Dick Barrett, Charles Galloway, Steve Brown, Dean Jenkins, Cam McCartney, Bert Nagy, Frank Hyder, Fred Barton, Evelyn Barton, Bruce Homer, and G. Sonny Alfman.

The club currently meets on the last Monday of the month--March through September, the last Saturday of the month--October through February except December. There is no formal meeting in December, but there is a Holiday Awards Banquet. Visitors are always welcome, and occasionally classes are held for those aspiring to pursue the hobby.

For more information on CARA's history read Radio Boys Leave A Legacy by R.R. Ballantine or visit the club's new web site www.w8vp.org on December 4.