

THE LISTENING POST

Azalea Coast Amateur Radio Club

PO Box 4044
Wilmington, NC 28406

www.ac4rc.org

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June, 2012

EYECATCHER!!!

The next Club meeting will be Tuesday May19, 2012 at Cape Fear Community College North Campus. See the web site for directions. Also, it is time to pay Club dues for 2012. \$20.00 please, either mailed to the P.O. Box or brought to the meeting. Make sure your call sign is on your check. The Club roster and reflector list has been culled to reflect only paid up members. It is not too late to get off the disabled list and back on the active roster.

CLUB OFFICERS for 2012:

President Charlie Vaughn K4WUH; Vice-President Don Hall N4OFF; Treasurer Allan Pellnat KX2H; Secretary Norman Clemmons K4YSY

FROM THE PRESIDENT

New Hanover County Hams will again be sponsoring a Field Day event this year, June 23 & 24 at Ogden Park, Shelters 1, 2 & 3. The event, which is a test in part of emergency preparedness of the local Ham community is being organized and sponsored by the New Hanover County ARES, Azalea Coast Amateur Radio Club and Wilmington VHF Association.

The operations will consist of several stations: (1) Primarily using Morse Code, (2) Primarily SSB Voice, (3) Primarily VHF/UHF and (4) GOTA (Get On The Air) to give new or visiting people an on-the-air experience. There will also be a Public Information Booth and a learning experience program.

Set up begins Friday Afternoon, June 22 after 2 PM local time. We plan to get the major antenna and layout work done before Saturday morning to allow the set up crew which also forms part of the operations crew some rest before the exercise. We will set the rigs up Saturday morning and finish any

unfinished tasks.

Operations begin Saturday afternoon at 2 PM local time and continue until 2 PM Sunday.

We need operators to come forward and advise either Charlie Vaughn K4UWH (k4uwh@arrl.net) or David McGough KB4FXC (kb4fxc@inttek.net) of their intention to operate, modes and times to participate in set-up and take down activities. We desperately need to get some organization built into the operating schedules this year. It is only fair to all the participants and the only way to operate efficiently.-a main weakness in the past.

These are the main organizational details. There will be more details as we get closer to the event and people begin to register with Charlie or David.

REGULAR CLUB ACTIVITIES

Monday 9:00PM local net on the Club's .18 repeater.

Friday Noon Lunch Bunch, location changes weekly, announced on Club web site and via Club reflector. There are in fact three lunch Friday groups in the local amateur community. You can pay your money and take your chances.

Third Tuesday of every month, Club meeting at CFCC North. See web site for directions and parking pass.

Second Saturday of even months, Volunteer Examiner Test session at CFCC North, 10:00AM. See web site for directions and what to bring with you.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES and EVENTS (See current QST & CQ for details)

June

19 Club Meeting

23&24 ARRL Field Day; King of Spain SSB Contest

30 through July 6th US Original 13 Colonies Group Independence Week Special Event

July

1 RAC Canada Day Contest; 200th Anniversary of the End of the War of 1812

4 Independence Day

21 Cary (NC) 40th Annual Swapfest

22 Indianapolis In Motor Speedway ARC Brickyard 400

25-29 Experimental Aircraft Association AirVenture (Oshkosh, WI) Fox Cities ARC

Field Day, June 23 and 24 is the biggest Amateur Event nationwide. Last year, New Hanover County Hams put on a very good show and plan on doing the same again this year. Keep your calendars open for that next weekend. The Club meeting next Tuesday night will wrap up planning for the event. Help is still needed from the local Ham community for all aspects—Set up, Operation and Tear down Sunday afternoon. There's something for everyone so turn out for the meeting and offer to lend a hand.

PRIOR ACTIVITIES

Museum Ships weekend was a fun event for the thirteen Hams (including three of our friends from the Wayne County ARC) who participated. We made 684 contacts, mostly on 20M SSB. During the frequent “pileups”, we averaged just about one contact per minute. Thanks to Charlie—K4UWH--Jeff--KI4JDE--Allan--KX2H--Don--N4OFF--Jay--N3QH--Jake--KQ4TG--Norm--KI4YSY--Steve--AJ4JJ--Jack--WD4OIN--Pete--WA5T--Robert--WD4FIX--and William—KI4MGM. WE have received the Digital Certificate from The USS New Jersey (BB 62), the sponsor of the event. Data mining has not yet been completed.

The three motor generator units for the Ship's original CW transmitters in Radio Two are still out for repair. Radio Silence continues.

The June 9 Volunteer Examiner Test Session passed one new Technician Class and one upgrade to Extra. Eight Ves and one additional Ham were present.

ODDS AND END NOTES

Allan KX2H has been in contact with a gentleman who has his late father's QSL card collection and hopes to “...find them a good home...” John Bink W2OWX (SK) amassed a considerable QSL card collection dating from the 1950s through the 1990s. Anyone interested in acquiring the collection may contact Mr. Bink at 910 794-8986 or jacruise@aol.com. If there is no local interest, the cards will be donated to the Antique Wireless Association Museum in upstate New York.

SPECIAL MESSAGE FROM THE CLUB TREASURER KX2H

“THERE HAS BEEN AN ACTIVE AMATEUR RADIO CLUB IN WILMINGTON SINCE 1914. PLEASE REMIT YOUR ANNUAL \$20.00 DUES TO ACARC, PO BOX 4044, WILMINGTON, NC 28406.”

FROM THE NORTH CAROLINA SECTION MANAGER

The ARRL North Carolina Section Manager's e-newsletter can be found on the ARRL web site. You can also sign up to have it arrive directly in your e-mail box. The SM's newsletter provides a good overview of ham activities in NC and a heads-up on national matters affecting Hams at large.

HOMETOWN HISTORY

1924 – Wilmington’s Hams vs AM Broadcasting

Regularly scheduled AM broadcasting spread rapidly across the U.S. in 1921 and 1922 . Before they had a hometown station of their own, many east coast newspapers regularly published program listings for KDKA, Pittsburgh, WEAN, New York and others.

Reported in the Wilmington Morning Star for February 20, 1924: “Local station is Ready for Operating”. A preliminary tune-up was heard the previous evening by Major Ewart W. Smith, the Secretary of the Wilmington Amateur Radio Association. WBBN was licensed by the A.B. Blake Electric Company and its station manager was Richard A. Dunlea. The first transmitter with no more than 10 watts input power, claimed to be homemade, and operated from the 5th floor of the Southern Building in the downtown business district.

WBBN was short lived. It was replaced as reported in a Wilmington Morning Star front page headline of July 11, 1924: “Station WRBT Formally Opens With Pleasing Program”. The operators of WRBT are a group of Wilmington businessmen calling themselves The Wilmington Radio Association. The article states that the station “...occupies space in the Calvary Baptist Church...” and is operated in conjunction with the Wilmington Radio Association on a Wavelength of 227 Meters.” (Approx 756 KHz). The station manager of WRBT is Richard A. Dunlea. No syndicated network programming here yet, just down home wholesome entertainment.

Although the Wilmington Radio Association is identified by name in mid-1924 as the operator of WRBT its existence didn’t receive any overt publicity until an October 29, 1925 Wilmington News article describing a formal organizational meeting. The stated purpose of this group was: “...to have more pleasure in radio listening, and with this end in view, ... to locate interferences, eliminate troubles and get up a spirit of cooperation among radio owners and users.” None of the named committee members appear to have ever been licensed amateurs. However the fact that the organizing meeting was held in the county courthouse with the permission of the county commissioners lends a sense of local governmental support for this group.

This meeting appears to have been an effort to put some official weight behind the question of interference to the fledgling broadcaster from various sources which undoubtedly included amateur operators. Although it is first identified by name in mid 1924 and announced an election of officers in 1925 the Wilmington Radio Association was not formally incorporated until four years after that. The Wilmington Morning Star for June 27, 1929 reported: “The Wilmington Radio Association was incorporated with a capitalization of \$50,000 of which \$5,000 worth of stock is already placed with the incorporators, J.C. Williams, S.F. Garrison, H.E. Stevens and Harriss Newman. The balance of stock is

to be sold to Wilmington citizens at a price of \$10.00 per share. Plans are to absorb the existing 50 watt WRBT station, move it and upgrade it to 500 watts.” The 1929 Secretary-Manager of the Wilmington Radio Association is Richard A. Dunlea.

The Radio Act of 1912 introduced U.S. Commerce Department licensing of amateur wireless stations. Then as now, passage of an act by congress did not necessarily mean that funds were appropriated to enforce the new regulations. As for the “Interference” issue; amateurs were supposedly restricted by the 1912 act to operation on “200 Meters and Down”⁶, i.e. the shorter wavelengths at higher frequencies than those used by the broadcasters. These wavelengths were then considered commercially useless. C.B. DeSoto in his 1936 book on early amateur operations states that at the dawn of AM broadcasting, nearly a decade after the 1912 imposition of amateur licensing: “The 200 meter restriction, the power restriction, even the licensing requirement, existed to a considerable extent in name only”. DeSoto goes on to say that: “...a considerable outlay was necessary for broadcast listening in those days⁷...when people experienced interference they sought redress. Politicians – local, state and national – found pressure being brought to bear...by the prominent folk of their communities”. I infer that this was at least one motive for the 1924 formation of the Wilmington Radio Association.

On the subject of interference to broadcasting, a June 1923 QST article titled “Concerning Amateur Interference with Broadcast Reception” summarized a study by the U.S. Bureau of Standards of several thousand reception reports within a 400 mile radius of each of two early broadcasters, KDKA of Pittsburgh, PA and WLB in Minneapolis, MN. The conclusion was that fewer than a quarter of all reception reports experienced no interference of any kind. The most prominent source of reported interference was from other broadcast stations. Confirmed amateur interference amounted to just under 6% of cases and commercial wireless telegraph stations accounted for 2%.

From this I infer that in 1924/25 when WBBN and its successor WRBT went on the air, first with 10 and later a 50 watt signal, there was a high probability of interference from both licensed and unlicensed amateurs operating spark transmitters with questionable frequency control emitting broad and spurious signals. This would have been compounded by the presence in Wilmington as in just about every other city of its size of the most common mode of public transit at that time, streetcars operated from electrically noisy overhead lines or third rails.

By the end of 1924 there were reported to be six million radios in use in the U.S.A. and more than two thirds of those were home made. The pride of my personal radio collection is a crystal set built by my grandfather in about 1921 and which my mother recalls listening to with the headphones sitting in a large glass bowl on the dining room table. At the end of 1925 the production of factory made sets topped home made sets for the first time.

However the average home listener hearing what he believes to be morse code signals couldn't differentiate between amateur or commercial signals and typically blamed “hams” for almost any interference. To address the interference problem the amateurs in many larger cities by mutual agreement observed “Silent Hours” desisting from operations between 7:00PM and 10:00PM local

time. Naval station NWN atop the Maffitt Marine Wireless building was of course also in operation at this time and many ships sailing in and out of the port were wireless

equipped. It's doubtful that NWN or the shipboard stations would have observed any silent hours in deference to home entertainment broadcasting.

The first order of business for the newly incorporated Wilmington Radio Association was the acquisition of the WRBT Calvary Baptist Church Station. The studio and transmitter were immediately moved to the top of the Wilmington Hotel building.

In October 1931 WRBT was again moved, this time to the Cape Fear Hotel where it became WRAM. Later that year the transmitter was moved to a site on the Princess Street Road, then just outside the city limits. The studios remained in the Wilmington Hotel Building. Richard A. Dunlea was directly involved over the ten year operation of all three of these earliest stations. In 1934 WRAM went off the air and was moved lock stock and barrel to Durham, NC where it became WDNC which is still on the air today. In that year there were seventeen licensed amateurs in Wilmington.

Wilmington had no hometown AM broadcaster for a short span of time between the demise of WRAM and the start-up of WMFD in April of 1935 by none other than Richard A. Dunlea now as station licensee as well as general manager. Once again atop the Wilmington Hotel, this station began with a 100 watt transmitter and evolved over time into "The Powerhouse of Southeastern North Carolina". Power was boosted to 250 watts in 1940 and to 1 KW in 1947 operating on 630 KHz. On April 23, 1975 in the Hanover Sun: R.A. Dunlea Jr. the son of the broadcast pioneer is quoted as follows – "WMFD went on the air April 21st 1935 operating between 8AM and 10AM, Noon to 1:30PM and 6PM to 10PM or earlier if they ran out of programming material."

Allan KX2H

Finally, QST in Digital Format has made its debut. Check it out at www.arrl.org/qst.

