

THE LISTENING POST

Azalea Coast Amateur Radio Club

PO Box 4044
Wilmington, NC 28406

www.ac4rc.org

147.180 (+.600 88.5)
442.500 (+5 88.5)

May, 2012

EYECATCHER!!!

The next Club meeting will be Tuesday May17, 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

Charlie K4UWH is away on assignment. His comments and observations will return next issue.

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

May

17 Club Meeting

18-20 Dayton Hamvention!!!

19 Armed Forces Day; King of Spain CW Contest

26&27 CQ WW WPX CW Contest

June

2&3 Museum Ships Weekend; Alabama QSO Party

2-6 National Electronics Museum D Day Commemoration; Battle of Midway Commemoration

9 VE Test Session

19 Club Meeting

Do not forget that Dayton is next weekend. If you are interested in attending, just let your desires be known at the meeting next week. I am sure that you will find some space somewhere in a group that will be attending.

Also, Museum Ships Weekend is fast approaching on June 2 & 3. This is always a fun event for the Club members. We have done very well in this event for the past several years and have introduced many new hams to the fun of HF amateur communications and the joy of being on the receiving end of a pileup from folks anxious to contact a WWII Battleship. This year, since we may although we hope not be without CW capability from Radio Two, we are looking at trying digital modes. Stay tuned.

Finally, 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 weekend.

PRIOR ACTIVITIES

The Generators for the three CW Transmitters in Radio Two were shipped out to a repair facility last month, and there is no reasonable expectation of their imminent return. However, KX2H has procured from the Antique Wireless Association in upstate New York a Plate Transformer with associated peripherals which will eventually be modified to act as backup to these motor generator units. For the present, however, as regards CW radio transmissions from Radio Two, BB 55 remains under enforced radio silence.

The Club's .18 repeater continues to perform well within its own limitations. The 442.500 repeater remains down. Recent modifications to the Tunit have failed to solve the horrendous interference problem at the site. Efforts to identify and resolve the interference problem will continue. Once again a tip of the earphones to David KB4FXC for his most generous expenditure of time and effort on our behalf.

We had a modest effort on board BB 55 during the Annual Armed Forces Day Crossband Military/Amateur Radio Communications Test, moved from the 19th to the 12th of May to avoid conflict with the Dayton Hamvention. As we all know, band conditions have been less than ideal of late. We managed only one SSB contact with NBL, the Sub Base in Groton, CT. Several other stations were heard, but “down in the mud”. Later in the evening (2144Z) from home, a good signal report was given and received from Ft. Huachuca AZ. For the uninitiated, the military equivalent of “59” is “Loud and Clear”.

ODDS AND END NOTES

Brad WD4FTR credits an online Extra Class study Guide for his recent success in upgrading. Brad advises that he had held an Advanced Class ticket since 1977 and was not comfortable with his prospects for success with other programs. He heartedly recommends HamTestOnline.

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.

Who was Seth Parker, really? Why was the Radio Inspector NOT allowed to inspect the radio equipment on his ship while docked in Wilmington harbor? In the world of intrigue of the 1930s, what was the real purpose of his round the world voyages. Read on!

One Thing Leads to Another

While skimming through old QST magazines I came across the following under the Roanoke Division

news for April 1934: “W4BRK was *not* allowed to inspect radio equipment on the schooner Seth Parker while docked in Wilmington harbor. R.I. states that he has not had a single report of off frequency from North Carolina this year.” Note the italicized *not*.

This intrigued me first because W4BRK, the Radio Inspector (RI), was a local ham, by name Sam Sweeney, and also Secretary of the Cape Fear Amateur Radio Association in that year. Secondly I had been looking for links between the early local hams and various commercial radio enterprises.

I figured Seth Parker must have been a real person who the ship had been named for so I did a simple Google search for that name. It turns out that Seth Parker was indeed someone's name but not a real person. The Seth Parker for whom the schooner had been named was a fictional elderly New England parson on a weekly NBC radio show. His radio voice and creator was 32 year old Phillips H. Lord who went on to create the golden age of radio classics “Gangbusters” and “Mr. District Attorney”; the antecedents of today's “America's Most Wanted”, “Cops” and “Law and Order” TV series.

It seems that Mr. Lord, having made a tidy fortune writing radio scripts, had purchased the four masted lumber schooner *Georgette* and had it converted into a private yacht. The conversion included new diesel engines, the latest in food refrigeration and comfortably air conditioned cabins provided by his radio sponsor Frigidaire and a one kilowatt AM shortwave broadcast transmitter licensed with the callsign KNRA as an NBC affiliate.

His plan was to sail *Seth Parker* around the world with various celebrity guests coming and going throughout the voyage. He would continue his weekly radio broadcasts by shortwave from exotic places and NBC would pick them up for rebroadcast over their network. Each broadcast began with the words “Frigidaire Presents the Cruise of the Seth Parker”.

John Woram has a website article titled “Chronology of the Seth Parker Voyage”.

(<http://www.galapagos.to/TEXTS/PARKER.HTM>) It begins in December 1933 in Bridgeport, CT and proceeds down the east coast of the USA as far as Washington, DC in late January. Then there is a gap until an undated visit to Charleston, SC and on to Jacksonville, FL on March 6th 1934.

My next stop was the newspaper archives in the local history room of the New Hanover County public library. In the thirties ships arriving and departing Wilmington were regularly listed on the business pages of the newspaper. From the April QST mention and Mr. Woram's chronology I knew that *Seth Parker* was likely in Wilmington between late January and early March of 1934. I found nothing in January's papers. Then on February 12th there it was listed as an arrival from Norfolk, VA. February 16th showed *Seth Parker* departing for Charleston, SC.

Next came the page by page scan of the newspapers for that five day span in February to see if there was any mention of the radio celebrity's visit. Here is the first of two items that I found:



Wilmington Morning Star, February 12, 1934 The “electric manufacturing firm” was of course Frigidaire. The Salk vaccine still being some 20 years in the future we can surmise that the “cripples” referred to might have been polio patients.

A second news article on the day of departure described the broadcast and *Seth Parker* leaving her berth at the custom house dock and being towed to the mouth of the Cape Fear River by a tug.

So based on a chance discovery in a 1934 QST of a familiar (to me) callsign, W4BRK, which from earlier research I knew belonged to Sam Sweeney one of Wilmington’s early hams, I learned the following: Sam Sweeney, W4BRK was also the Wilmington Radio Inspector in 1934; the identity of Seth Parker, his creator Phillips H. Lord and his yacht; an otherwise obscure piece of NBC network history and a small piece of local broadcasting history.

I was able to provide John Woram with copies of the newspaper articles giving him documented evidence of two previously unknown ports of call for the *Seth Parker*, Wilmington, NC and Savannah, GA. He has since added this information to his website chronology. From his website I also learned that Frigidaire had published a promotional booklet titled “Aboard the Seth Parker” and was able to find a copy of it for sale on the internet. Also, in a small antique consignment shop in upstate NY I found a framed print of “Schooner Seth Parker” issued by Frigidaire to accompany the booklet. Go to John Woram’s website if you want to know how the rest of the voyage went. I still haven’t resolved why W4BRK was *not* allowed to inspect the KNRA equipment.

Allan KX2H

All for now, more later. 73 Bill AG4PA