

# HISTORY OF THE OLD KENTUCKY HAMS

via Warren Harris, W4PKX

Thales, a Greek philosopher, started talking and writing about little particles of matter called the "elektron", during the period of 600 B.C.

Many years later, a French physicist, Charles A. Coulomb, used all the information he could find on the electron, experimented with them, and established an electrical charge which these little electrons exhibited.

Andre Marie Ampere, Conte Alessandro Volta, and Dr. George Simon Ohm also made contributions to the electronic phenomenon. Through the efforts of all these inspired men, and others, the foundation for electronics was laid.

Communications up to this time had been by word of mouth, foot, horseback, and sailing ship; very slow and cumbersome methods. Marchese Guglielmo Marconi saw the possibility of communicating over wires by the use of telegraphy. Although telegraphy was a tremendous improvement in communications, the wires were difficult and sometimes impossible to string in some areas.

Later, the idea of transmitting information without wires was born. Since radio wave emanated in the air everywhere, anyone possessing the necessary knowledge could build a radio receiver and transmitter, and get into the act. However, another problem arose. Some people just couldn't send telegraphy, not even with their left foot.

Thomas Edison gave us the light bulb, then the electron tube was developed to improve the "state of the art" of electronics. However, many of the people, especially the kids, preferred to get started with simple equipment, and one of the simplest receivers was called the crystal detector. It consisted of a coil of wire, a couple of condensers, usually made of tin foil, a crystal (galena), a cat's whisker for the galena, and a set of headphones. It was during this time that kids started getting more spankings for coming home after school covered with coal dust after looking through coal piles hunting for pieces of galena. Cats took on a different appearance as they were losing their whiskers to the receiver sets and strands of wires started disappearing from fences. People who smoked cigarettes were encouraged to smoke more so the tin foil from the empty packs could be used to construct the needed condensers.

A few of these kids were Scotty Hansford, Neal McGown and Johnny Gerard. These youngsters, along with many other people, began building receivers, later learning how to build transmitters. They began talking with others over the radio across the country and many firm friendships began to be established. Friendships that would become stronger as the years passed along.

Gradually, the state of the art improved and it became possible to add circuits to the rigs and voice communications became possible and that was even more enjoyable. Now even the "left footers" could be "talked" to. Word got around and more and more people became "HAMS". As the number of "HAMS" got larger, the World became smaller.

The clouds of War began to loom throughout the World in both the East and the West during the 1930's. On December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Japanese. It was on this morning, as the hams began to tune up for their morning rag-chews than an unusual signal zero-beat their signals. It was the FCC, telling them to get off of the air and cease operations. Electronics was a relatively new field and the United States was in great need of many things for the war effort. Some of the hams donated their rigs to the government to be used for the duration of the hostilities.

Although the United States was, indeed, in great need of many things, there was one elite group of people, the hams, that went into military service needing very little training... they could start to work immediately! An offensive was gradually mounted and Victory in Europe came May 8, 1945 and VJ Day occurred August 15th of the same year.

With World War II over, these Veteran Hams were anxious to get home and get their ham rigs back on the air and to find out how each other had faired during the war. New friendships were also established. Then it was decided that it would be nice to have a meeting at Mammoth Cave National Park at the old Hotel for a real good eye-ball QSO. Those attending the first meeting were Scotty Hansford, Neal McGown and Johnny Gerard. Thus the Mammoth Cave Area Amateur Radio Reunion Organization was unofficially started on the first Sunday in June, 1946. Such a good time was had that it was further decided that the same thing would be done on the same Sunday of each year. With the passing of the years more hams joined the original group and it grew and grew.....

Many hams brought the entire family and picnic lunches. The picnic lunches were often spread together on the picnic tables so that others who didn't bring lunches could be invited to join in; this thoughtfulness bound the entire group even closer together. A truck full of Cokes was always brought up from Bowling Green. For a registration of \$ 1.00 the gathered hams were entitled to free cool Cokes for the heat of the rag-chewing, swapping and selling of parts and gear.

When things began to slow down in the afternoon, Johnny Gerard usually became the host for a drawing and many donated prizes were given to holders of lucky tickets. The prizes were donated by various radio shops and electronics dealers.

Later, in addition to the first Sunday in June meeting, some of the Hams started coming back the last weekend of January for a winter meeting and a banquet. This also became an established meeting that is looked upon with eagerness. A year was too long to wait to see old friends.

Somewhere along the mine, it was further decided that there should be an organization for those who had a Ham license for twenty years or longer. Therefore, **The Old Kentucky Hams** was born and Harry Carroll, W4AEE, designed an impressive certificate as proof of membership. At the present time there is no requirement for membership in The Old Kentucky Hams other than a valid ham license and \$ 1.00. The impressive certificates are now valued in the memory of those who helped develop Ham Radio to the State-of-the-Art that it is today, so that the generations of today and the generations yet to come may enjoy the fruits of their labors.

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*This from Warren might make a nice reading at  
the next meeting.*

*Jfa*

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As an aside. I will mention that John Gerard, W4TFK, one of the OKH group's founders, was the young man who crawled into Sand Cave to string a phone line down to (fatally) trapped, Floyd Collins. Floyd's family, the doctors, hopeful rescuers and a number of newspaper reporters talked with him via that phoneline until the poor guy died from hypothermia and dehydration on Feb. 13, 1925.

Floyd and his predicament were an international media event. Also noteworthy are two Hams who were responsible for getting the news reports quickly from the cave to the outside world. One set up a portable, CW station at the scene while the other located his rig at the Western Union telegraph office at Cave City. These men were Homer Ogden, 9BRK, and Basil Rauth, 9CHG, both of whom had come down from Jeffersonville, Indiana to help out.