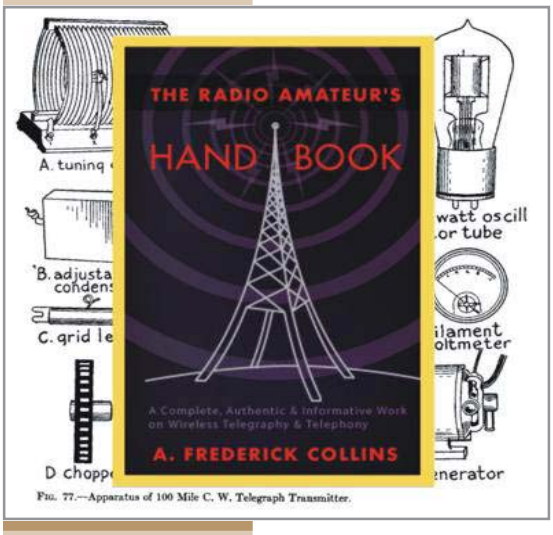
K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club — Volume 1, Issue 12, December 2004



Past is Prologue

Common Sense Blasts from the Past

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

In this season of holidays it is mankind's nature to celebrate the traditions of years past and to anticipate the year to come. As a subset of mankind we Hams are a fortunate group because in many ways we *live* our history every time we operate or socialize with other Hams. Despite the latest and greatest gear in our shacks, our illustrious past continues on a daily basis thanks to the enduring practices, vernacular and legacy modes we scrupulously preserve and enjoy.

"...Ham Radio is a dynamic organism..."

Yet, Ham Radio is a dynamic organism, in the past, as in our time, many changes have altered and shaken our foundation: operating bans during both world wars; the Novice class; incentive, slow- and no-code licensing; volunteer examiners; antenna prohibitions and restrictions; digital techniques; restructuring; BPL; and, most recently, the ARRL's proposed frequency allocation plan. For better or worse, these and other changes have shaped, and continue to shape, the service. To see just how much we have changed it is enlightening, and certainly entertaining, to review the historic record.

The voices of those who experienced firsthand the revolutionary ascendance of CW over spark and vacuum tube over galena crystal are mostly stilled, but we can read the documents of that era. Recently, while checking the Project Gutenberg Web site, I found *THE RADIO AMATEUR'S HAND BOOK*; 1922; A Complete, Authentic and Informative Work on Wireless Telegraphy and Telephony by A. Frederick Collins; and dedicated "TO WILLIAM MARCONI INVENTOR OF THE WIRELESS TELEGRAPH."

In the first years of the twentieth century, A. Frederick Collins was a celebrated engineer and a tireless promoter of wireless telephony. In 1913, an artful stock scheme netted Collins a three-year sentence for mail fraud. He was paroled after one year and then continued his career as a prolific author of novels, technical articles and books. Here is a selection of some of my favorite caveats from his handbook, some delightfully obscure and others as useful today as they were over 80 years ago.

Note: spelling and grammar as in the original.

Don't try to assemble a set if you don't know the difference between a binding post and a blue print. Buy a set ready to use.

Don't expect to get Arlington time signals and the big cableless stations if your receiver is made for short wave lengths.

Don't take your headphones apart. You are just as apt to spoil them as you would a watch.

Don't expect to get results with a Bell telephone receiver.

Don't forget that there are other operators using the ether besides yourself.

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Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL
Editor

Mike Dinelli, N9BOR
Layout

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT
Staff Cartoonist

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

www.k9ya.org
telegraph@k9ya.org

Full Circle with a Guy Named Ralph

Paul Hendershott, W9BBR

Dad's 1968 Chrysler Station Wagon

The year was 1975 and I had just turned 15. My dad had caught me three times so far that summer sitting low in the front seat of his 1968 Chrysler wagon after the sun went down. I was there practically laying on the floor trying to make my six foot, 165 pound, frame invisible from my parent's bedroom. Good luck! No, I wasn't sampling one of his beers, smoking a cigarette in secret, or even reading the *Playboy* magazine my friends and me found on a Boy Scout paper drive. No, I was there speaking into my dad's Midland CB radio with my best mock southern drawl saying things like, "Breaker one-nine , breaker one-nine, anyone got your ears on?" You see, the Pennsylvania Turnpike was just a thousand yards away, so I took on the responsibility of saving all the truckers in the state from local speed traps. God, I loved talking on that radio! But then came the rap, rap, rap on the driver's side window. Man, caught again!

"No, I wasn't sampling one of his beers..."

Well, that was the end of my good samaritan radio days. The Midland was yanked out of the wagon and stored in the same place as my dad's gun — I think. To his credit, I never did find either of them again. But fortune smiled on me and so did my dad. He called me up to his bedroom the next morning I presumed it was to bop me on head for ignoring his many previous radio warnings. You see, he was a stickler for the rules. Not sure if they were his rules or the FCC's, but it didn't matter no using the radio and that was that!

Imagine my surprise when I was greeted by a big grin instead of a tongue lashing! He handed me this big heavy blue binder that looked like a very wide picture album, but instead of pictures, it held a set of 78-rpm records from the AMECO Morse code course. He told me that when he was a kid in the 1940s, he bought the records to help him get his Ham radio license. It turned out that he never did get his ticket, but had lots of friends at General Electric in Philadelphia who did. He said if I was going to talk on the radio, I was going to do it right! He hooked me up with a GE engineer named Ralph Williams, N3VT. Ralph taught a radio course at the local Civil Defense post in Norristown, Pennsylvania for guys interested in getting their Novice ticket. Ralph was an amazing guy! We called him fuzz chops with much affection because of his puffy white beard jutting out smartly from his chin. Ralph simply loved all things radio. But more than anything, Ralph loved to mentor. He was my mentor, and I suspect, a mentor to hundreds of other Novices in the Philadelphia area.

Ralph started me off by loaning me my first station. When I went by his home in Valley Forge to pick it up with my dad, I noticed hundreds of these strange planks of wood with tubes and coils attached to them. Poor Ralph was trying his hardest to spark some interest in me for those old tube radios from the 1920s called Atwater Kent breadboards. I nodded my head, yes, to everything he was saying about these unusual things, but my mind was already racing ahead in anticipation of my first DX-100 CW contact! No doubt a contact with some far away land that couldn't

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be more than an hour away if and only if Ralph would just stop talking about these crazy mahogany boards and let me run back to my house! Well, Ralph finally relented and I was on the air in no time flat, but with a wrinkle!

Now, my first contact was even more memorable than I could have imagined. There I was pounding out "CQ DX" like a madman, like I had practiced on my homebrewed buzzer for the past three months, when I got the most interesting reply. A voice came back, not the CW I had practiced for. "WN3BBR, WN3BBR, you are WAY out of your Novice band. Do you copy?" Dead silence. "Hello, WN3BBR, can you hear me?" Dead silence. Oh My God! I started to tremble. All I could think of was spending the next five years at nearby Graterford Prison for violating the highest laws in the land of the FCC! I sent a very wobbly, "I am SO Sorry" to the fellow. Then I proceeded to shut down my receiver. I shut down my transmitter. I even turned off the light in my room, hoping that if I did that, the whole thing might never have happened!

It took me three days to confess to my dad what I had done. Actually, I only did that because no less than three Official Observer pink slips arrived in my dad's mailbox begging the question. Well, it's not my fault, how often is it that the transmitter and receiver are both off in the same direction by the same amount? Often enough, I guess! But I did learn to calibrate before launching into the ether again. And, I somehow managed to stay out of Graterford prison as well.

"...you are WAY out of your Novice band..."

Well, 23 years went by and I had been dormant in the hobby for perhaps the last 18 of them. Then, one day, out of the blue, I got bitten by the Ham radio bug again. This time the bug bit deep! In 1999 I fully immersed myself in HF again and worked to upgrade to Extra. This time I sincerely wanted to get my code speed up to at least 20-wpm so I could start to really enjoy a more fluid CW conversation.

After another year back in the hobby, my neighbor came to me one day with a big, heavy, mahogany box. He said it was his grandfather's radio from the 1920s and could I possibly fix it? This beautiful box turned out to be an RCA Radiola 18. I started by searching the Internet for schematics, etc., and found a wealth of information on early radio receivers called TRF sets.

That was all it took. Before long I was collecting all sorts of antique radio sets and restoring them when I could. The same passion I had for Amateur Radio carried on into this great appreciation for early antique sets. Then I came upon those neat old mahogany plank radios that Ralph Williams had shown me almost 30 years ago. With that, I embarked on a mission to track down Ralph to let him know how much fun I was having with my newfound interest in early radio. It took a while, but I found him up in Orient, New York.

Ralph Williams, N3VT SK

It took Ralph a minute to figure out who the heck I was, but when it came back to him I recounted some of my fondest memories. We talked a bit about our favorite boat anchors and my newly found interest in the first commercial broadcast radio sets. I wanted to know where and how I could e-mail him, but Ralph never embraced the Internet and thus had no e-mail. I told him I would stay in touch by mail. About two more years went by and I was having the most fun a guy ought to have playing with Ham and antique radios when I saw a book on-line about Atwater Kent radios. It turned out to be a published collection of articles Ralph had written 25-years earlier for a monthly magazine, called *Radio Age*. I was so excited to read it, that when I was done I sat down and wrote Ralph a letter thanking him again for having such a profound impact on me with his mentoring of Ham Radio and antique radio. A few weeks later I received a letter from his lovely wife telling me Ralph had passed on. Unfortunately, Ralph never got to see the book he helped write on Atwater Kent radio. It was published by a terrific guy named Donald O. Patterson.

So for me, the odyssey I embarked on three decades ago has come full circle. It started with a lot of

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www.k9ya.org
telegraph@k9ya.org

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QRP Kayaking

Harcourt "Bud" Quick, W8BHK

Bud, W8BHK, QRP/Kayak/Mobile

You wake up in the morning and the sun is just breaking over the horizon for the start of a beautiful summer day, should you mow the grass or go out and play? My wonderful grandmother always said, "All that work will always be there after you're dead and gone." Dilemma solved. It's Ham radio and kayaking time!

A couple summers ago I tried working QRP from my kayak and it opened up a whole new experience for me in Ham radio. What a blast! After I made my first contact with Bill, N9CX, in Gahanna, Ohio, there was no turning back, I was hooked for life. The comments from fellow operators were: "Neato" "This is my first kayak QSO" "What kind of antenna are you using?" "Don't flip over!" "Wow!" and, of course, "Please QSL."

"What a blast!"

A couple of my more memorable contacts were with Dale, WD9GWH, who was on vacation near Fort Colonge in Quebec, Canada with his FT-817 operating from a small hunting cabin. Who could ever forget a QSO with Hal, W8OHM? Hal has been a Ham for sixty-seven years with the same callsign and has me logged as his 66,497 QSO. I have worked Hal twice from the kayak and once from my home QTH. I wonder how many more contacts he has logged since then?

Most of my kayak/MM/QRP operating has been done from Gooseneck Lake located at the eastern end of Mason county near the small village of Walhalla, Michigan. The lake is fairly remote and only has about six cottages along its shoreline, since the state of Michigan owns most of the surrounding land. The lake comprises an upper and lower section with a gooseneck channel connection, hence the name. It's a great place to experiment with antennas and operate QRP, since it's so private and remote.

To date, my log book shows 76 QSOs with 14 states and two Canadian provinces while running 5 watts from my Ten-Tec 1340 and Hamstick antenna. All my operating has been done during the day on 40-meters when the band is short.

The equipment used is very basic and not very expensive in case you accidentally drop it over the side for fish bait. I did lose a keyer just that way last year before I had fastened it securely to my equipment rack.

If you look at the photos you can see the equipment rack is made from two pieces of broom dowel tapered on the ends to friction fit into the kayak cockpit. The radio has two broom clamps fastened to the bottom, which snap on to the dowel rod. There are also two pieces of Plexiglas, one is used to mount a soap dish box for my headphones and accessories, and the other is for my PK-3 keyer, which is built into a shallow electrical box. A homebrew keyer paddle was made from the relay contacts of an old central office telephone stepper switch.

The antenna is a 40-meter Hamstick with two twelve-foot radials that trail behind the kayak. One of the radials I let sink and the other I float on the surface, because this stabilized the SWR readings as the kayak went through differing water depths. A piece of Plexiglas was cut for the shape of the rear cockpit and a quick antenna disconnect was installed to accept the Hamstick antenna. This assembly slides into the rear cockpit (coaming) and is held in place by two

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pinch clamps. The whole setup can be installed in ten minutes or less and then it's time to have some fun on the water.

Almost every outing brings the thrill of seeing ducks, geese and loons. Even an eagle with his majestic white head and tail was spotted soaring high above in the summer blue sky on one trip. Using polarized sunglasses you can watch small bluegill and bass dart about the weeds seeking cover from the big dark shadow cast by your kayak.

There are about three or four types of kayaks made for specific purposes; the type I use is called a recreational kayak. They are made by several manufacturers: Old Town, Wilderness Systems, Necky, Dagger and Walden, to name a few. I purchased the Pungo kayak made by Wilderness Systems because it had great reviews and fits my needs perfectly. The Pungo is designed for rivers, small lakes and marshes — the type of kayaking I like to do here in Michigan. Another reason for choosing this particular kayak is its very large cockpit, which makes it easier for an old guy like me to get into and it has room for all my radio gear and a 7 ampere-hour battery pack.

Operating QRP is a personal choice and may not be for everyone, but it's a whole lot easier to power the radio equipment with smaller and lighter batteries. On the other hand, I'm sure a little more power would have made the difference in completing a contact, especially under marginal conditions.

You may think this is a young man's game, but I can assure you that's not the case, as I'm no spring chicken. If you can transport a fifty-pound kayak to your favorite outdoor watering hole, then, you too, can enjoy Ham radio amongst nature's world in all its wonders.

Soap Box, Ten Tec 1340 QRP rig and PK3 Keyer

My friend, Jane, KC8TSG, often comes along with her Sky kayak made by Necky and enjoys taking pictures on our outings; she took many of the photos for this article. She'll just have to learn the code now, so she, too, can operate QRP/MM, but come to think of it, she does use her two-meter rig in the kayak. ■

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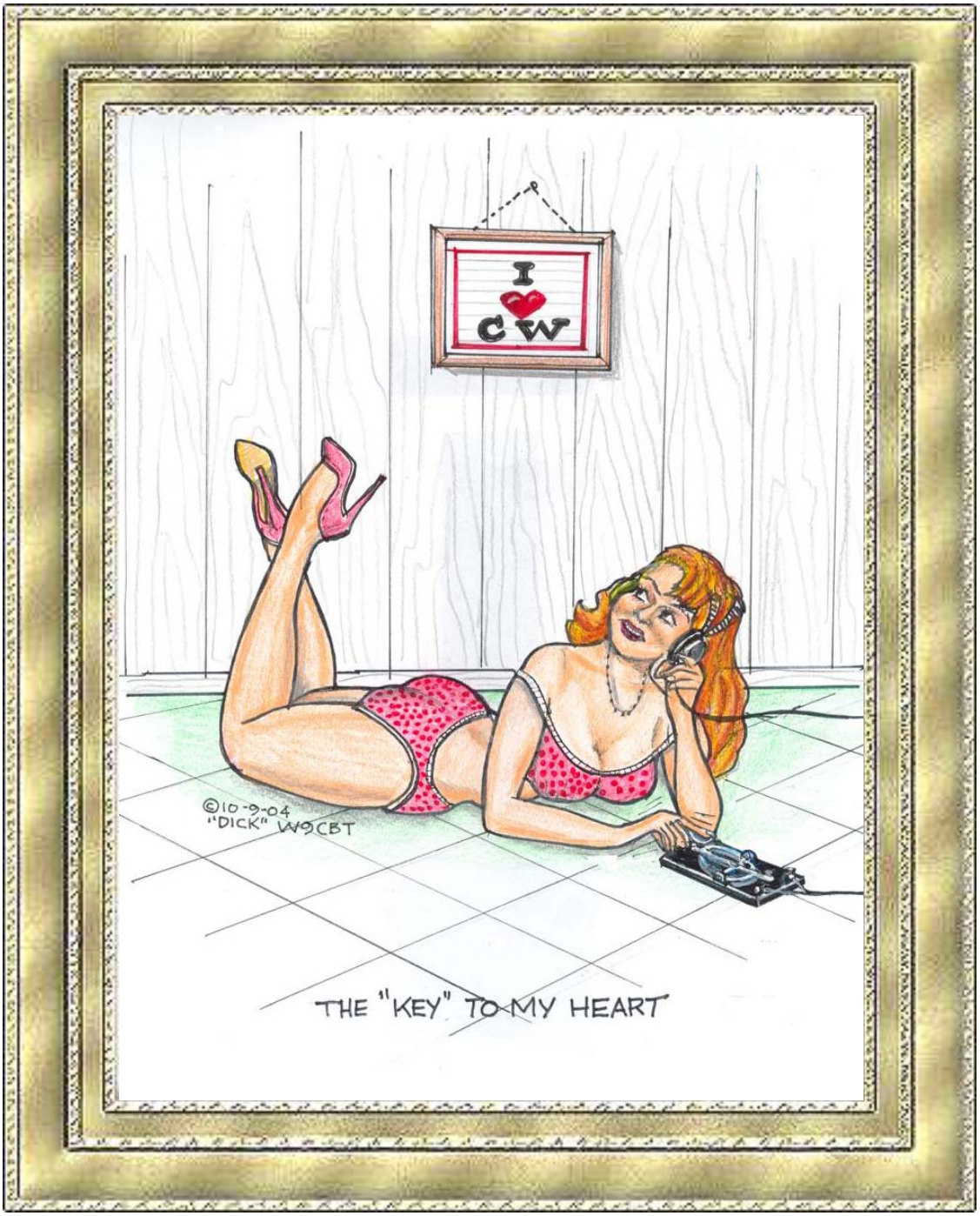
Your “Centerfold” Op

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT



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Memorial Radio Club

www.k9ya.org
telegraph@k9ya.org

The "Mi-Key"

The Ultimate "CW" Keyer

Dick Sylvan, W9CBT

For years, I have listened to arguments between CW and phone enthusiasts about the advantages and disadvantages of the two modes.

I decided I would make my contribution to Amateur Radio by solving this ongoing problem. I have studied the merits of both modes and have come up with a unique solution that should satisfy everyone. My computer is equipped with a voice technology program. In other words, it converts spoken words into typed text. I combined this technology with a computerized CW keyer program — spoken words become text, are fed into the keyer and out comes beautiful Morse code.

You don't even have to know the code and you can become an expert Morse code operator almost immediately. I modified the CW keyer program as it only went up to 45-wpm and it is now able to output 300-wpm for fast talkers. I added a code reader function to the design so it would display what the other station was saying when the speeds go supersonic. Perfecting the method revealed some advantages and disadvantages to the system. I am working hard on minimizing the disadvantages.

"...all you need is the ability to talk."

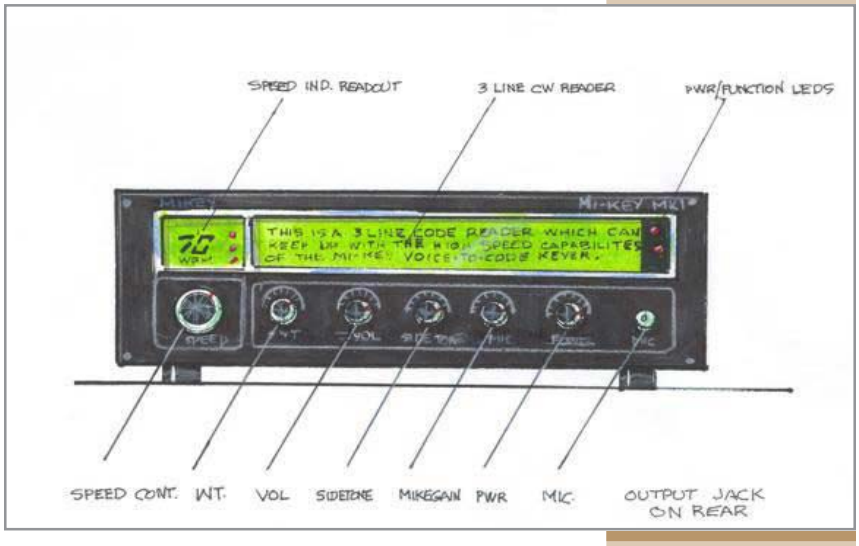
Advantages of the MI-Key Keyer

No need to know Morse code. You immediately become a really great CW operator even though you may be newly licensed.

No need to know how to type. Keyboard keyers require you to type. With the Mi-Key, all you need is the ability to talk.

Variable speed settings from 5- to 300-wpm. You can blow away the high speed keyboard CW operators we hear on the low end of the CW bands.

All the technology is readily available. I even downloaded my keyer program off the Internet. I only had to modify the programming for the very high speed settings.



Disadvantages of the Mi-Key Keyer

Coughing or sneezing while talking will cause the Mi-Key to freeze up. I then have to reboot the unit.

Also noticed, the keyer does not work correctly if one speaks with a foreign accent. The program doesn't seem to like female voices either —particularly loud, harsh, high-pitched ones.

If you talk faster than the speed setting, the keyer freezes up. It emits some jumbled words. If I didn't know better, I would say it was swearing.

I am in the process of building the unit shown in this article, getting the bugs out and putting all the technology into a handy desktop unit — just plug the mic into the interface and the output into the key jack of your rig. I hope to bring it to market later this year.

I welcome input from interested parties.

I know you will agree the Mi-Key Ultimate keyer is a revolutionary idea whose time has come. ■

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

www.k9ya.org
telegraph@k9ya.org

COMMON SENSE - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

TRANSMITTING DON'TS

Don't attempt to send until you get your license.

Don't fail to live up to every rule and regulation.

Don't use an input of more than 1/2 a kilowatt if you live within 5 nautical miles of a naval station.

Don't send on more than a 200-meter wave if you have a restricted or general amateur license.

Don't use spark gap electrodes that are too small or they will get hot.

Don't use too long or too short a spark gap. The right length can be found by trying it out.

Don't buy a motor-generator set if you have commercial alternating current in your home.

Don't overload an oscillation vacuum tube as it will greatly shorten its life. Use two in parallel.

Don't operate a transmitting set without a hot-wire ammeter in the aerial.

Don't fail to solder each connection.

Don't think that all of the energy of an oscillation tube cannot be used for wave lengths of 200 meters and under. It can be if the transmitting set and aerial are properly designed.

Don't set the transformer of a transmitting set nearer than 3 feet to the condenser and tuning coil.

Don't use a rotary gap in which the wheel runs out of true.

EXTRA DON'TS

Don't think you have an up-to-date transmitting station unless you are using C.W.

Don't — no never— connect one side of the spark gap to the aerial wire and the other side of the spark gap to the ground. The Government won't have it — that's all.

Don't try to tune your transmitter to send out waves of given length by guesswork. Use a wavemeter.

Don't think you are the only one who doesn't know all about wireless. Wireless is a very complex art and there are many things that those experienced have still to learn.

Find *THE RADIO AMATEUR'S HAND BOOK* and other books on-line at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/6934> ■

RALPH - CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

excitement, anticipation, fun and learning with a guy named Ralph. Because of Ralph, I explored further into the world of antique radios than I might have. It seems that almost a third of all the antique radio guys I meet these days are Hams. More and more Hamfests combine their shows with antique radio associations creating a wonderful crossover to each other's hobbies. I guess the love of radio is just that, the love of all things radio.

In the end, I think Ralph was extremely happy I had come to appreciate those early wood plank radios, and I was happy to let him know how much I appreciated his enthusiasm in the beginning, and what turned out to be the end of his wonderfully influential life. ■

K9YA 2004 Field Day Update

Kudos to the 2004 K9YA Field Day team. K9YA ranked 14th out of 165 1A entries. Our team finished 5th in Illinois and 6th in the Central Division. 2,249 logs were submitted this year with 2,085 in 2003.

Photos of K9YA Field Day are available on the club Web site at **<http://www.k9ya.org>** ■

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

www.k9ya.org
telegraph@k9ya.org