

K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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A Century of Progress

Amateur Radio at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

John Philip Sousa, *A Century of Progress* march

A Century of Progress International Exposition was the name given to the 1933 World's Fair held along Chicago's lakefront June 1-November 1, 1933, and May

26-October 31, 1934. A Century of Progress commemorated the city's incorporation in 1833.

It's easy to overdose on superlatives when describing the Fair; it was an architectural, mechanical and electrical tour de force. A fifty cent general admission ticket bought access to something for everyone at A Century of Progress; from a replica of Chicago's pioneer settlement, Ft. Dearborn, to multi-color Art Deco edifices; from early steam locomotives to the first streamliners, the Union Pacific *M-10000* and Burlington *Zephyr*; futuristic robots (Westinghouse's mechanical man was photographed smoking a cigarette) and kitchens of the future; to life-size, inhabited representations of international towns and villages.

The light from the star Arcturus, 40 light years distant from earth, focused on a photoelectric cell at Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin actuated the Fair's lighting at nightfall. Four decades having passed since the city's first international fair, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition.

A Century of Progress bordered 37th Street on the south and Roosevelt Road on the north and occupied 427 acres in Burnham Park and on Northerly Island, one of five artificial islands in Lake Michigan proposed by Daniel Burnham in his plan for the

city. In 1946 Northerly Island became the site of a small urban airport, Meigs Field, it served general and commercial aviation until 2003 when it was unceremoniously decommissioned.

Amateur Radio Extravaganza

The Fair showcased not only Chicago to the world, but thanks to the tireless work of a group of local hams, amateur radio too was revealed to the world in the most favorable light. In addition to the specifically

World's Fair amateur radio activities, in 1933 the ARRL held its convention in conjunction with the larger event and in 1934, in like manner, a local radio club held a major "ham fest" at an estate north of Chicago.

After more than a year of preparation by the World's Fair Radio Amateur Council two stations were constructed at the Exposition. The stations, assigned the special call signs W9USA and W9USB by the Federal Radio Commission, were located in separate buildings. The main station exhibit occupied 2,000 sq. ft. on the second floor of the Travel and Transport Building. The second, smaller exhibit was located in the Hall of Science Court. The Travel and Transport

"...easy to overdose on superlatives..."

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Building was ideally sited at the far south end of the Fair, as far from the Electrical Building and its man-made noise as possible.

Visitor's Souvenir Radiogram Relay

Entering the Travel and Transport Building exhibit the visitor approached a replica old-time station where short messages were solicited for transmission to a contemporary station at the exhibit's far end. An operator at the "spark" transmitter, in reality a camouflaged vacuum tube oscillator, keyed the visitors' messages to the modern station where National FBX single-signal superheterodyne and Silver Ham Super receivers intercepted them. The operator on duty there typed out souvenir radiograms and handed them to their enthusiastic recipients. The two shacks were designed and built by George Dammann, W9JO.

World's Fair Radio Amateur Council Members

General Chairman, Fred J. Hinds; Exhibit Organizer, C.W. Glaser; Manager, W.F. Wiley, W9AZI; Communications Director (W9USA/W9USB), J. Edward Wilcox, W9DDE; Operations Manager, Laddie J. Smach, W9CYD; Traffic Manager, C.E. Miller, W9VS; Chief Operator, George Maki, K7HV; Head of Technical Committee, Fred Schnell, W9UZ; Technical Committee Assistants: Dave Abernathy, W9MYH; Ralph Briggs, W9EMD; George Dammann, W9JO; Louis Gamache; P.D. Lamb, W9GHT; Earle Russell, W9HBX; C.F. Schultz, W9CSB; and E.R. Word, W9BVY. Other committeemen: Publicity, Art Bates, W9FO and Herb Griem; Historical, R.C. Schweitzer, W9AAW; Convention, Wm. E. Schweitzer, W9AAW; Forrest P. Wallace, W9CRT; and Art Agazim, W9CN. Council Secretary, W.D. Ferrell, W9CGV; and Advisors, Marcus Hinson and H.D. Hayes.

April 1933

QST: World's Fair—Chicago, 1933

News of the World's Fair exhibits were relayed to amateurs from early March 1933 by specially appointed stations throughout the U.S. and Canada.

June 1933

QST: Central Division World's Fair Convention
Display ad for "Central Division World's Fair Convention, Chicago, Ill., August 3rd, 4th and 5th"

July 1933

QST: World's Fair A.R.R.L. Convention

Amateurs are urged to attend the convention "held at the height of the season at A Century of Progress." Highlights of the Fair with its "90 miles of displays."

Announcement of amateur code speed championship elimination trials and finals and other planned programs. Convention fee including banquet and "trips through the Exposition" is \$4.50. Room rates at convention headquarters, the Medinah Athletic Club, range from \$3.00 for single rooms to \$2.00 per person for groups of four per room.

1933 Official Guide Book

List of Fair Exhibitors

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN: Paul H. Davis, Amateur Radio Amateur Radio Exhibit Association

An exhibit showing the actual making of simple receivers, transmitters, and other radio apparatus and their use staged by the World's Fair Amateur Council—Travel and Transport Building.

July 9, 1933, Chicago Daily Tribune

HERE'S SECRET OF LURE IN FAIR RADIO PALACE

Description of the exhibits located in the Fair's "crimson carpeted" Radio Palace. The Radio Palace is thronged by "eager, question-asking, attentive people of all ages." Why? "Eighteen million radio receiving sets are in use in the United States."

Displays include vacuum tubes being assembled on site; an oscilloscope, "an illuminated mechanism showing you what goes on in every tube and enabling you to *see* the voice waves"; and early radio gear. Featured was a barking, head-wagging,

*"His Master's
Voice"*



Entrance to Radio and Communications Building



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question-answering version of Nipper, Victor's mascot. He of "His Master's Voice."

July 31, 1933, Chicago Daily Tribune
CENTURY OF PROGRESS NOTES

Theodore R. McElroy of Boston, world's champion amateur radio operator, and Jean Hudson of Laurel, Md., [sic] 8 year old girl operator, the youngest licensed operator in the United States, visited the amateur radio exhibit in the Travel and Transport building yesterday. McElroy is in Chicago to defend his title in the code speed contest which will be a feature of the radio amateur's convention, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday.

According to QST, Jean Hudson resided in Laurel, Delaware with her father, E.L. Hudson, W3BAK, SCM for Maryland-Delaware-D.C. Later, Jean featured in Candler System magazine ads.

August 1933

QST: THE EDITOR'S MILL: World's Fair

Chicago area ARRL-affiliated radio clubs under the direction of Section Communications Manager Fred J. Hinds cooperated to help make the amateur radio exhibits at A Century of Progress a success. On display to the public were CW and phone operations and local 5-meter communications. Visitors could view historical and new amateur gear and attendants were available to answer their questions. A clubroom was provided for visiting hams where they could rest and "chew the sock" with the exhibit "gang."

August 4, 1933, Chicago
Daily Tribune

AMATEUR RADIO PALS OF YEARS
MEET FIRST TIME: Local Group
Sponsors World Meeting

The Tribune's reporter dubbed the hosting group, "the World-Wide Radio Amateurs." Attendees included Boyd Phelps, W9BP, of Minneapolis and Don Wallace, W6AM, of Long Beach, Calif. Phelps was described as "one of the first men to discover the value of the shorter wave lengths," and was "making television tests over six meter wave lengths." Also cited was Paul H. Davis, W9ADU, a radio enthusiast since 1903. Davis, a financier, was a member of both the Fair's Executive Committee and its Board of Trustees. Davis' firm, the Paul H. Davis Company, was one of the Fair's Guarantors of Gold Notes. A 1932 Tribune article describes Davis, W9GES (one of his several call signs), as the president of the Chicago Stock Exchange and "an ardent radio amateur." His son, also a ham, was the radio operator aboard MacMillan's arctic exploration vessel *Bowdoin* for its summer 1930 cruise.

*"...the value of
the shorter wave
lengths..."*

Fred Schnell of the famed "Atlantic Tests" and World's Fair Radio Amateur Council member was also in attendance.

August 6, 1933, Chicago Daily Tribune

New Yorker Wins Speed Title of Radio Amateurs

Joseph W. Chaplin took first place at the World's Championship Code Speed Contest and succeeded Ted McElroy as champion. According to the Tribune account Chaplin "transmitted [sic] 573 [sic] words a minute. Both amateurs and professionals entered the contest." In fact, Chaplin's record was achieved by copying a more realistic 57.3-wpm; he was an employee of Press Wireless.

August 7, 1933, Chicago
Daily Tribune

CENTURY OF
PROGRESS NOTES

Jean Hudson, 9 year old licensed amateur radio operator of Laurel, Del., yesterday was presented with a silver loving cup by H.D. Hayes, superintendent of radio in the Ninth district, as a result of winning a receiving contest sponsored by the world-wide amateur radio convention. The amateur operators have an exhibit in the Travel and Transport building at the Fair. (Jean Hudson had just celebrated her ninth birthday as this article was written.)

September 1933

QST: World's Fair Exhibit

The Travel and Transport Building was located at the 35th Street entrance to the Fair. Visitors entering the building

immediately confronted the London, Midland and Scottish Railway's famed locomotive *Royal Scot* and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad's air-conditioned flagship train the *Capitol Limited*. A President class 4-6-2 Pacific locomotive hauled the *Capitol Limited* on her Chicago to New York City route. Up the escalator to the second floor, past the Denmark and Irish Free State exhibits, turn right past a balcony overlooking the Texaco TravelAir Model R racer No. 13, and finally on to the amateur radio exhibit.

October 1933

QST: World's Fair Amateur Radio Convention

World's Fair Amateur Radio Convention held August 3-5, 1933 on the 7th floor of the Medinah



Travel and Transport
Building



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Athletic Club, 505 N Michigan Ave (built in 1929 and closed in 1934; now the Hotel Intercontinental).

The convention station operated 24-hours a day handling traffic to and from the venue's 714 registered guests. Attendees were afforded a free trip to A Century of Progress and the opportunity to partake in a buffet dinner and entertainment at the Hollywood, a concession at the Fair.



Formal Dining Room at
Medinah Athletic Club

More than 300 conventioners participated in the amateur code speed championships. Taking top honors with a world's record 57.3-wpm was Joseph Chaplin of Long Neck, Long Island, New York. "Little Jean Elizabeth Hudson, W3BAK, just a day or two past her ninth birthday, copied her way into the

20 w.p.m. classification with the assurance of an old timer..." She later did a "creditable job up to 30 w.p.m." She was "interviewed by the press like the charming little lady she is."

At the convention banquet, ARRL President H.P. Maxim, W1AW, presented Boyd Phelps, W2BP-W9BP, with a gold medal in recognition of his work in "developing short waves." Speakers included Don Wallace, W6AM-W6ZZA, receiving antennas; R.H. Freeman, aircraft communications equipment; John Reinartz, W1QP, small power tubes in short wave work, super-sensitive bridge voltmeter and super-regeneration; F. Dawson Bliley, quartz crystal oscillators; H.P. Wareing, frequency stability; Fred Schnell, W9UZ, his new monitor; and Robert S. Kruse, transmitter problems and cures.

President Maxim later spoke of "the possibility of intergalactic communications by amateurs, primarily with Mars, and the future of amateur radio." H.P. Maxim had a longtime interest in this subject leading to the establishment of the Elser-Mathes Cup to be awarded for the "First Amateur Radio Two-Way Communication Earth & Mars."

Maxim's book, *Life's Place in the Cosmos* was published in 1933.



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October 5, 1933, Chicago Daily Tribune MARCONI DEPARTS FOR NIAGARA AFTER FINAL FAIR VISIT

During his final visit to the Fair, Marchese Guglielmo Marconi in company of David Sarnoff, president of RCA, visited the "amateur radio exhibit... and amused himself for an hour talking to amateurs in different parts of the world."

December 1933

QST: The World's Fair Radio Amateur Exhibit

By the numbers from Wallace F. Wiley's, W9AZI, article:

"4,000 amateurs signed the registration book—nearly 10% of those licensed in the U.S."

Traffic handled by W9USA to mid-October 1933 equaled 10,500 messages including those from runaway boys to their families and other personal exigencies.

Two and one half months after the Fair's opening some 360,000 people visited the exhibit, about 2% of the total number visiting the Fair.

The exhibit well served amateur radio and the public through its educational and traffic handling efforts. People of all ages indicated a genuine interest in earning their license and many teachers stated what they learned at the exhibit would assist them in discussing the science of radio with their students. Hundreds of QSLs papering the exhibit's lounge walls proved it was both a very popular QTH to visit and QSO for that W9USA card.

*"...Two-Way
Communication
Earth & Mars."*

W9USA—1000 Watts—7040 Kc

Fred Schnell describes the transmitter at W9USA designed and built by Dave Abernathy, W9MYH. Its design objectives were met by providing maximum legal power output, heavy-duty construction to meet its expected severe duty cycle and with an eye to making its internals visible. "The antenna system is of the Zepp type. The feeders being 92 feet long and the radiator 66 feet—not counting the stretching."

1934 Official Guide Book

Amateur Radio

The World's Fair Radio Amateur Council has its exhibit space and operating station on this floor. A

radio-controlled boat is operated on the lagoon by remote control, operators on shore starting, stopping and maneuvering the boat.

Three short-wave transmitters are in operation. Any licensed radio transmitting amateur visiting the Fair may operate the transmitter if he has his license with him. It is unlawful for a person to operate an amateur radio station unless he has a license on his person.

In the exhibit is a full-size, old-time "spark station" which will show how amateurs sent and received signals in the early days.

List of Fair Exhibitors

Amateur Radio Exhibit Association, Known as World's Fair Radio Amateur Council

Amateur broadcasting, short wave transmitters, replica of old-time "spark station," demonstration showing "remote control" by radio impulses—Travel and Transport Building.

Electrical Building: Reference under subheading "RADIOS AND PHONOGRAPHS." "Amateur radio equipment, which we can operate, is exhibited." This is the only mention of an amateur transmitter in this building. The Electrical Building was strenuously avoided due to QRM.

May 1934

QST: W9USA—WORLD'S FAIR

Now in its second year, A Century of Progress will again host the World's Fair Radio Amateur Council's two exhibits. New activities were planned for 1934 including, "A complete amateur station will be in operation, using the call W9USA." The station was planned for the "Lounge Room of the Radio Exhibit." Guest operators with license in hand are again invited to operate.

August 1934

QST: Amateur Radio at World's Fair

A progress report on the exhibits' second year at the Fair. Featured is a photograph of George Dammann, W9JO, seated at the key of the "spark" shack he designed and built.

August 1934

QST: WORLD'S FAIR RADIO AMATEUR EXHIBIT

More details of the "Souvenir Radiograms" offered at the Travel and Transport Building amateur radio

exhibit. The radiogram's "reverse side... contains a brief story of amateur radio."

At the "special transmitting exhibit" located in the Hall of Science Court, amateur radio operators who presented their license could operate the 750-watt, 7,030 kc transmitter signing W9USA. These hams received a "card certifying they operated W9USA."

October 12, 1934, Chicago Daily Tribune HAM CONVENTION DRAWS THROG OF RADIO AMATEURS

The Lakeside Radio Club convention was expected to draw more than 1,500 U.S. and DX hams to Thorne Donnelley's, W9PZ, estate located near Lake Bluff, Illinois. Donnelley, heir to the R.H. Donnelley Corporation (publisher of telephone directories) was the club's president.

The hams will be celebrating "the opening of W9PZ with the latest type of a phone transmitter" from 8:30 am till the wee hours. Discussions and demonstrations of a technical nature were offered. NBC was there to air a broadcast covering the W9PZ convention during news commentator Don McGibney's usual 10 pm program.

Notable hams attending: "Dr. James Hard, X1G, Mexico City; Buck Taylor, W4LU, Signal Mountain, Tenn.; J.D.

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Enter the K9YA Telegraph
Photo Contest!

Click [HERE](#) for Details



Electrical Building



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Slaughter and his famous whistle, W4MU, Cleveland, Tenn.; and the Purdue University 'Gang,' W9YB."

October 14, 1934, Chicago Daily Tribune

RADIO AMATEURS
ATTEND HAMFEST ON
NORTH SHORE

Come from All Over U.S.
with XYLs and Static.

It was an all day "ham fest" for more than 1,000 guests at the Lakeshore Radio Club. The Tribune's reporter explained, "'Hams' are self-styled licensed amateur radio operators, some 46,000 of whom operate throughout the United States..." He added some amateur radio lingo, "YLs [amateur radio for 'young lady']," "...XYLs [the same for wife]" and "...static [children]."

The day's festivities included a demonstration of Thorne Donnelley's shack, "said to be one of the most elaborately equipped amateur transmitters [sic] in the country"; technical discussions were given over a public address system; tennis matches at the Shoreacres Country Club between distinguished players "Charles Garland, William J. Croker, Preston Boyden and Thane Halstead"; and "an exhibition of golf shots by Chick Evans and Jack Westland." Not to mention the "continuous flow of entertainment and refreshment" provided "from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m."

In the immediate pre-war era there would be World's Fair amateur radio exhibits to come, notably at San Francisco's 1939-1940 Golden Gate International Exposition (W6USA) and the 1939-1940 New York World's Fair (W2USA). For those Fairs the heights reached by the amateur radio exhibits at Chicago's A Century of Progress set the bar very high indeed. ■

*"continuous flow
of entertainment
and refreshment"*

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Images Courtesy of:

Chicago Postcard Museum,
www.ChicagoPostcardMuseum.org

University of Illinois at Chicago



A Panoramic View of Chicago's World's Fair



Shoreacres Country Club
Lake Bluff, IL



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Charlie Cotterman, KA8OQF

A warm summer evening back in the early 1980s, the Dayton Amateur Radio Association club station, W8BI, the Novice console, a Drake TR-7 setup, transceiver/antenna tuner/speaker: top of the line back in them there days. A 40-foot tower out back of the station, with a Mosley TA-33 on top, and the guy wires insulated and loaded for 40/80, a prime station for anyone, let alone *just* for Novices. Everyone else used the other consoles, with Drake 4B and 4C lines and L4B amps. But us poor Novices were restricted to the TR-7, et.al. Boo-hoo, poor us; hee, hee, hee.

Back when I started down there, the station was a Drake 2NT/2C/Heath HG10 VFO. Not bad, about as bulletproof a tube rig as they made, and a very good training rig for the “hollow-state” days. But the transmitter was limited by the FCC rule at the time of manufacture. Seventy-five watts was it, the basic idea was that if you were going to screw up as a Novice, you were going to do it at low power. This was a time of transition, however, cathode and plate and grid were giving way to emitter and collector and base. The club got the chance to upgrade, and for simplicity's sake, they put the new stuff at the Novice console. Part 97 took the 75W limit off, and the Novice bands exploded with 100W signals, including mine.

I fondly remember that warm summer evening, pointing the beam westerly or thereabouts, and putting out a confident 10 wpm-or-so CQ. Wasn't expecting anything unusual, although I was hoping to bag Alaska. The dots 'n dashes from my key ended, I settled the headphones and my backside firmly on my ears and in the chair, listening. *And there he was...*

A bit weak and watery, but still plainly audible, my fingers twitched, scribbling call letters down on the scratch paper. Not sure I got that right, repeat OM, OK? He came back again, and I scribbled some more, but still didn't get all of it. A 2X3 call for sure, got most of it, but that very first letter eluded me.

So, again and again, I asked for just the first letter of the call. And he came back, kinda weak, and kinda watery, but still, plainly audible, just not understandable. My brain just refused to translate those musical little tones into language. I was starting to think that this op on the other end was losing patience and respect for me. This was something new for me, one letter out of a call escaping me.

Then BANG it struck; what I was expecting and what I was hearing were two different things. I *expected* a K, a standard garden variety US 2X3 call sign, ya know. But what I was *hearing* was a J. Not KA-something-or-other: JA...*Japan*...DX.

I gaped, I gasped, and I grabbed the key and went back to my first DX. After the contact, I slumped in the chair and let the adrenaline wear off. I worked someone on (more or less) the other side of the world—I was a REAL HAM now!

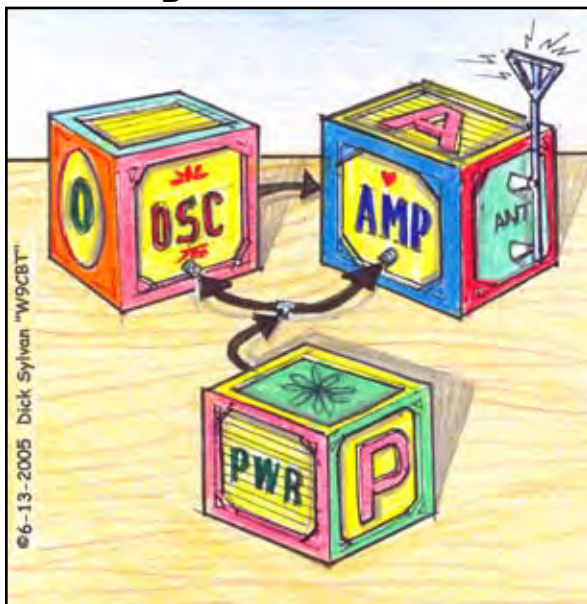
Since then, I've worked my share of DX, some rare, some not. There's been a thrill or two snagging that unusual one (LZ855SRKM, anyone?), but there has never been again (and I suspect there never will be) that kidney punch of a thrill of that first DX. ■



Charlie, KA8OQF

Ham Lingo

DICK SYLVAN, W9CBT



BLOCK-DIAGRAM (HF XMTR)



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K9YA Telegraph

Letters

I am delighted to see that you have released a complete collect of Rod Newkirk's articles.

I, too, was an Illinois State Police radio operator. I worked at the Springfield headquarters station, District 9, while Rod worked as an operator at District 3, Chicago. Rod was an absolute delight to work. His CW "fist" was smooth as silk, and he was extremely easy to copy, even at the customary 50-55 wpm that we operated at. This was before the days of computers. One operator would sit and send messages, one after another, while the other operator copied them on a "mill," a typewriter with all caps, or input it into a Model 28 teletype machine. Rod was super professional. He knew that when he was sending to me, I was typing into a teletype machine, and he sent at exactly the correct speed to allow me the few extra carriage returns and line feeds required by the cumbersome machines. Thus, we could accurately exchange the maximum amount of information in the shortest possible time. The same for when I was sending to Rod. I could send strings of messages to Rod, and he never broke me for time-wasting and annoying repeats. I could empty my pile of messages to Chicago in short order, by which time Rod had another stack of messages ready to send to me. It was a very busy time, but when you were working Rod on the other end, you knew your 8 hour shift was going to go very smoothly.

I never knew Rod to be anything other than 100% professional. I knew he was the DX editor for

QST, and I did occasionally read his columns. But, at the time, after working 8 hours per day on the CW circuits, I really didn't feel like going home and operating more hours on ham radio. So, most of my interaction with him was on the State Police circuits.

Today, State Police radio operators are history, and the CW circuits, once busy 24 hours per day, are now silent. So, ham radio has once again begun to interest me. But 95% of my interest is in CW, where I am completely comfortable and relaxed.

One day a few years back, I was on 30 meters CW (I chose that band specifically because it's CW-only), and I worked a Canadian call, VA3ZBB. And he knew who I was! Turned out it was Rod, now retired and living in Canada! What a tremendous pleasure it was to work him again. I must confess that with old age, neither of us still has the super-smooth, professional polish that we had when we were working commercially, but that's the tribute you pay to arthritis and stiff fingers. Still, Rod had the smooth, professional sound that I enjoyed when I was working professionally. And we caught up on old times.

Imagine my pleasure when I discovered Rod wrote for the *K9YA Telegraph*. All his stories have been very enjoyable for me to read. I hope he is able to continue with his contributions for many years to come.

73 es best DX to Rod!

73, Gary, K9AUB

That Defining Moment

Lynn M. (Sam) Elbe, KY8R

The defining moment I knew I had to be a ham was when I watched my father copy a Morse code message on the TV when I was in the 7th grade. I guess that was in 1955. I studied and studied and could finally copy 5-wpm, took the Novice test, passed it, and my license finally arrived: KN8AUG. I was so proud of myself and the first contact I made—well, that is another story.

So, here it is 55 years later, and I still get on CW and do it the same way I did 55 years ago. Only now I am a little faster and a whole lot older, I still enjoy the gift my father gave me in ham radio, a hobby that will last a lifetime.

Your Defining Moment?

You remember—the moment you knew you had to become a ham. Tell us about it—your Elmer—your first rig—first contact, etc.

Contact us: telegraph@k9ya.org

Raymond Daves, *RADIOMAN*, Media Tributes

Media tributes to WWII U.S. Navy radio operator Raymond Daves (*K9YA Telegraph*, June 2011) are available at *RADIOMAN* author Carol Hipperson's Web site: www.carolhippersion.com.

A Bicycle Mobile Adventure (part V), by Scott B. Laughlin, N7NET, will resume in the September 2011 issue.