

K9YA Telegraph

Robert F. Heytow Memorial Radio Club

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President - Governors Relay

A Forgotten Tradition, 1922–1957

Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

Over a 35-year period, spanning the terms of six U.S. heads of state—President Warren G. Harding to President Dwight D. Eisenhower—hams and politicians participated in eight President – Governors Relays.

QST, February 1922, the event, now titled with a word transposition and a pair of apostrophes, became the Governors’-President’s Relay.

QST, March 1922

At a time when various commercial entities and government agencies coveted the frequencies and privileges allotted to the amateur radio service, it was necessary to state: “We must make a strong impression on our President, we must convince him that we are not small boys playing with wireless but real

men capable of fighting for our country if he calls us.”

Note references to “small boys playing with wireless” and “capable of fighting for our country...” As to the latter, that assuredly was proven by hams’ invaluable WWI military service. As to the former, it reflected the public’s view of the typical ham. In 1924, while attending the Third National Radio Confer-

ence, Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, a great friend of amateur radio, stated, “Nor have we overlooked in these previous conferences the voice or interest of the amateur, embracing as he does that most beloved party in the United States—the American boy.” (See: *K9YA Telegraph*, November 2005, “Zeh Bouck.”)

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QST, January 1922: President-Governors Relay F.H. Schnell, 1MO, aka, “The Traffic Manager,” suggested a “President-Governors Relay” to forward messages from the governors of the 48 states and Canada to President Warren G. Harding via the Washington Radio Club.

Tentatively the scheme is this: Some amateur, who will be charged with the duty by his Division Manager, will secure from the Governor of his state a message addressed to President Harding. Each message coming from each state will start at a specified time, heading for Washington.

We will see which messages reach Washington with the greatest speed as determined by from the time they are transmitted from the first station until they are received by a station in Washington. [Relay’s duration: “March 6th, 7th, and 8th.”]

With fresh memories of the WWI amateur ban and the ongoing postwar struggle for amateur radio’s survival, the publicity generated by this event would demonstrate the service’s invaluable facility to accurately, efficiently and rapidly relay messages over long distances. Messages were limited to “about ten words each addressed to President Harding and signed by the various governors....”

*“small boys
playing with
wireless”*

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Lawnmowers and Dipoles Don't Mix

Duke Wahl, JR., WA9WJB



Ah, spring. It's that magical time of year when "a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of yard work." What else is there? The honeymoon is over. OK, so I'm about three weeks late getting started. I drag out the lawn furniture, buy flowers, mulch and my first order of business was cutting the grass.

I bought my lawnmower at a garage sale. I had to put some elbow grease into it, but I eventually got it running fine. I sharpened the blade and it

cut great on the first pass. It was the second pass that didn't turn out very well. The lawn went to seed and its tall blades were laying down as if to duck and hide from my sharp mower blade. Also hidden in the lawn is my 80-meter dipole, which fell down in the front yard and is now hidden by the shaggy grass.

My dipole used to break frequently because it was ordinary copper wire. It flexes with the wind and eventually becomes brittle, stretches, and breaks. So I thought I would be smart and buy that copper-coated steel wire so it would never break. My noble ideas are usually thwarted by my oversight. I was still using copper wire to support the ends of the dipole and, of course, the end broke. OK, so unbeknownst to me, the new dipole is laying squarely in the path of the lawnmower.

You have to remember the old lawn mowers of yesteryear didn't have safety levers, which shut the machine off when you let go of the handle. No siree Bob, this model was gonna continue running until something physically stops it from doing so.

I was actually half daydreaming about an upcoming contest and thinking how wonderful it was to have a good dipole antenna when I was suddenly startled back to reality by what I thought was a large snake in the grass. I never saw so much movement in all directions

before. In a panic, I let go of the lawnmower handle and the lawnmower continued on about its merry way and gobbled up at least 120 feet of steel wire and a balun coil to boot. Soft copper wire may have cut or broken under this kind of stress, but NO, this was steel wire and not about to break. I really didn't know which way to run because this "snake" thing was all around me. As the hungry machine ingested more wire it went out of balance and began to shake violently like Elvis in concert. By this time, I realized it was my dipole as I saw the balun coil skittering across the lawn being drawn into its fate. I didn't like that balun anyway, it never seemed to work on 80-meters.

By now the lawnmower was having a bad case of indigestion with the dipole and balun, and was becoming very sick, but refused to die. It was hopping and jumping toward my XYL's favorite rose bushes. I realized what MY fate would be if the Elvis impersonator reached the rose bushes, so I chased after it. I grabbed the handle and gave it a yank to alter its course. Unfortunately it veered left into those large edging rocks around the flowerbed. The lawnmower has no appetite for rocks. It made a loud clank noise, gasped its final breath, coughed and died. Elvis is dead.

It just so happened my neighbor across the street witnessed the entire event.

He thinks I'm nuts anyway after the incident with the TV antenna last winter, so now his suspicions were being confirmed. After an ice storm, I was trying to repair the broken TV twin lead. I crawled up on the roof and almost made it to the TV antenna when I tripped over the broken TV lead, which was hidden under the snow pack. I ended up body surfing off the roof. I flew off and landed in the snow in front of the living room window where I made a perfect "snow angel" upon impact. The snow angel didn't last long because my brief encounter with gravity broke loose a large slab of snow pack, which promptly followed me off the roof, thus covering the snow angel and me. The XYL saw

*"The honeymoon
is over."*



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A Return to My Roots

Part I

Paul W. Ross, W3FIS

This article was prompted by two old college classmates, and a fellow local ham operator who joins our breakfast group every Friday morning here in “Slower Lower” Delaware. Their conversations focus on how digital modes are great, you can get a QSO going practically any time of day, and on any band. In fact, it starts to get a little boring after a while!

I got around to reconfiguring my shack for the umpteenth time about a couple of weeks ago. The cabling had degenerated into a “mare’s nest” of confusion. Now and then it is simpler to unhook everything, see what equipment you are really using, and straighten the mess out. The XYL and cleaning lady have finally refused to enter the spare bedroom that functions as a guest room, and the shack. My XYL points out the state of clutter is worse than my dorm room in college.

So, I decided to attempt to “return to my roots.”

I earned my Novice ticket in 1957 as KN2VZY, built a nice keyed oscillator with a 6SG7 pentode, and powered it with a transformer scrounged out of an old vacuum tube TV set. For a receiver, I had a Hallicrafters S-20R I picked up secondhand. A got a crystal for the 80-meter Novice band at 3,530 kHz, if I recall correctly, and completed things with a war surplus J-38 key (which I still use), and a wire out my bedroom window.

I do recall a fair number of QSOs, and a serious complaint from one of the local ham operators about the terrible key clicks I was generating. I really should have done something about that. If you like irony, one of the questions on my graduate oral examination in electrical engineering was to do a mathematical analysis of the key click problem!

Well, time passes, families get raised, careers go forward, and at retirement I found I had time to get back into ham radio. As I said, I still have the classic World War II military J-38 key from that era. Frankly, I have never been able to work up all that much enthusiasm about keyers, paddles, and bugs, though I will admit they do help sending more consistent code. My encounters of the worst kind with

a bug resulted in a rather disturbing set of dits before and after each character.

How do you get back in the CW business after loads of experience with SSB phone, digital modes, VHF/UHF FM repeaters, and the like?

On advice of various friends, I took their suggestions and came up with a few of my own:

- Get a good CW practice program for your computer. “Just Learn Morse Code” is good, and free, into the bargain. The G4FON Koch Method trainer is also a good bet. You can add letters to the programs, as needed, and get scores on your proficiency. When you are satisfied, add a few more letters and practice again. About five minutes of practice at a time is sufficient. You just need to keep at it on a regular basis.
- Listen to W1AW’s practice sessions. My bedside radio (I am a night talk radio freak) will tune up into the 160-meter band. The radio doesn’t have a BFO, but you can copy the code anyways.
- Listen a lot. Find somebody sending slow enough, then move up to someone sending faster. Don’t be discouraged if you can’t copy them 100%. You will soon learn to anticipate what is being sent. For example, if you hear an “L,” it is quite likely you will hear a second one, and digraphs like “TH” will be common.
- Check out any of the slow CW nets. They are good to listen to, and even better to participate in.
- Find out about organizations such as SKCC—Straight Key Century Club. They can be quite helpful. Also check out FISTS—the International Morse Preservation Society.



“Get a good CW practice program...”

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Bob Ballantine, W8SU



Reflecting on the history of ham radio and shortwave listening there are some things one rarely hears on the bands today.

Phraseology, such as, “The handle here is Baker Ocean Baker—Bob.”

The shocking loss of international shortwave broadcasting! Where are you VOA? Big Ben? Moscow Mailbag? Radio Brazzaville, et al. Oh, yes, the Russian Woodpecker jamming the spectrum.

The strains of someone with a laryngectomy using a voice box [electrolarynx] over the station microphone. Voice box hams have been few in number over the years, one of them, a VE4 or VE5, was daily heard on 20-Meters. The members of this fraternity were at times difficult to understand and usually the person talking with them was a close friend or relative who understood what they were saying. I found it a bit troublesome to understand. In today’s world programs to help smokers quit are popular. I was fortunate and quit smoking early on. I am sure an individual who used tobacco would say, “Never Smoke!”

Another of the voice box fellows frequented the 40-Meter band and, as I recall, was out here in the Midwest. Today, there’s a fellow in California who, in his QRZ bio, claims that handicap and participates in EMS and public service.

Years ago a very popular ham radio activity was the phone patch! Yes, free phone calls.

It got to the point where one group fought the practice, thus causing problems for those doing phone patches. I gladly used the patch service in the Coast Guard aboard ship, it was a great morale builder enabling the crew to call home. The art of phone patching is now ham radio history. Remember, no email, no texting then. The phone company didn’t make a ruling about amateur phone patches and their opera-

tors wholly cooperated when they knew a station was working overseas traffic with the military. Articles galore were available on how to hook up phone patches and many brands were for sale through radio jobbers. Some homespun their own. The FCC avoided the subject as far as I am aware.

Aeronautical Mobile. It was always a thrill to work aircraft. Usually they were commercial airliners, but sometimes military planes. Operators had to wait in line to work a plane, but it was always worth the wait, “I’m at 30-thousand feet in the Chicago corridor.” I worked a majority of the aircraft on 20-meters. I had a 15-meter QSO with a military tanker in the Pacific, west of Hawaii. Today, perhaps, the rarity of that activity stems from the very sensitive equipment on-board the aircraft, limiting passengers using computers and cell-phones and other RF generators of any kind including ham gear.

Retired railroad worker amateurs would transmit recordings of steam trains running up and down valleys sounding the sorrowful whistle tones of those days. Those transmissions were not considered music and hams got away with it.

Then there was a phenomenon called “heterodyne.” Oh my, in AM’s heyday, what a mess, a cacophony of hundreds of carriers all spaced so that one humongous mass of beat notes were heard all over the bands. It was especially fierce on 75- and 40-meters. I’m glad no one

today has to experience that mess. Headphones and a good signal slicer were a must on the station receiver. I bet you could list many more examples.

Finally, there are the life issues that torment we older people at night, permitting us some peace of mind getting on the air at 0300 or 0400 each morning with 20- and 40-meters the mainstays.

Myself enjoying CW on 7.040 MHz with the faithful W5KF, W8GGX/W8KEG, W8HDF and W9FVK. A talented, memorable group who are now silent keys. They were a gifted group, each with a fascinating life that helped ease the pain and discomfort in those early morning hours.

I dedicate this article to the memory of Ken Genheimer, W8GGX/W8KEG, 1929-2005. My guess is that you could list many more examples. ■

“The Russian Woodpecker.”



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The Lord's Acre Day was only weeks away. If he hoped to have a traffic-handler's booth operating on that day he would have to shake a leg. The following morning he contacted a member of the planning board and received permission.

He fabricated a booth on a utility trailer and fitted it with a swing-down door that served as a counter, providing a flat area where people could write their radiograms. Inside, there was enough room for two operators. Artie, an old school classmate, he hoped, would join him.

He found Artie working at a gas station.

"You haven't let your amateur ticket lapse, have you?" Charlie asked.

"No, I haven't. Do you have something in mind?"

"Yes, two things. You sort of grew up in Dad's shop and you know the mechanic's trade pretty well. I could use a good man to help me."

"Wrenching? You think there's enough business for both of us?"

"I know there is. You'd be on commission, of course."

"I know. That's the bad part. I'd never know what I was going to make."

"True. But even a bad week would pay more than you're making here. Think about it and let me know."

The morning of the Lord's Acre Day he was prepared. Hitching his booth/trailer behind the Dodge, he drove to the Butler Square and set up in his appointed location. He even had a sign over his window stating: FREE RADIO MESSAGES SENT ANYWHERE IN THE UNITED STATES. INQUIRE WITHIN.

With the cost of long-distance telephone charges, such an offer appealed to some folks. By eleven o'clock he had more than two dozen messages waiting for the noon, forty-meter net to start. At twelve sharp the NCS began with the net preamble and then issued QNI.

Charlie had installed his station at the back of the booth so people could watch the radio in operation. Canting his current meter slightly provided a reflective view of faces. He was halfway through his stack of messages when the meter caught the reflection of the prettiest redhead he had ever seen. Charlie, a bashful young man, was always reserved. But this girl changed that.

As though an external force had taken over his being, he stopped pounding brass in the middle of a message and spun around on his stool.

"ROSE!" he shouted, and then wondered if it was actually he who had said that.

"How did you know my name?" Rose asked, her mouth gaping, her blue eyes goggling at this man she'd never before seen.

"What else could it be?" he answered in swift retaliation.

Only then did he notice her father on one side and her mother on the other. Mom was a small lady, also a redhead, and a smile that might cause *The Thinker* to alter his pose. Dad, however, was a different story. His huge handlebar mustache hid most of his mouth, but not enough to conceal his displeasure, nor his bushy eyebrows his glaring eyes.

"Young man, aren't you supposed to be doing something?" her father barked in a gravelly voice equally as menacing as his expression.

"Yes. Of course," Charlie babbled and again surprised himself with, "but may I take the three of you to lunch after I'm finished here?"



*"The prettiest
redhead he had
ever seen."*



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The Call Out

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We at McKinney Amateur Radio Club in McKinney, Texas lost one of our own last week. Though he was 92 years young, he was an active club member up to the day he passed. In recognition of this fine fellow, the club held a “Call Out” on his behalf.

Sunday night the two-meter Information Net began at 2000 hours in the usual manner, asking for check-ins. About three or four minutes past the hour the club vice

president broke in, announcing he had a piece of priority traffic to pass. Of course, everyone immediately went to listening mode.

The vice president issued the deceased member’s call sign, waiting and then issued it again. After waiting

a second time he called upon another member to call for him in Morse. He did, first at about ten words per minute, then again at near five. After a brief pause he added the suffix “SK.” The net was opened to receive comments from those who knew this fine fellow.

In all, there were a dozen comments, each a tribute to this friend we’d lost. However, one stood out from the others and I’ll paraphrase it to the best of my ability.

“He was my best friend. I first met him in Chicago in 1948. He used the GI Bill to earn a degree in electrical engineering and later retired from Collins Radio. In recent years he and I had lunch together at least twice each week. Our last meeting occurred on the day he passed. Twenty minutes after our parting I received a call that he was gone.

“I will miss him.”

The Call Out consumed our allotted net time and it was closed after the last comment. ■

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what happened; opened the front door and said, “Are you done now, showoff?” And, of course, the neighbor across the street was shoveling snow and saw everything from start to finish. One good thing, if you convince your neighbors you’re nuts, they will leave you alone.

Anyway, my poor lawnmower! My dipole and balun were now tightly wound up in the blade; it was a mess. I turned the lawnmower over and tried to unravel the wire away from the blade, but it was a hopeless tangled mass of tough steel wire. The blade was severely bent and had a huge divot on one side. So in disgust, I decided to unbolt the blade and throw the whole mess in the garbage. I went for my wrenches but when I returned, I found a small bonfire on the lawn with my lawnmower in the middle of it. When I turned the lawnmower over to get the wire out, gasoline started running out of the tank and the hot muffler did the rest. I’m having better luck with vertical antennas. ■

CONTINUED - A RETURN TO MY ROOTS PAGE 3

- Get a decent set of close-fitting, padded earphones. It will keep out extraneous noise. In addition, it leads to greater domestic tranquility, those shouts from the XYL of “close the ... door” will cease. This is a good thing.
- If the bandpass in your receiver isn’t sufficiently narrow, consider investing in one of those switched capacitor audio filters that can be adjusted for bandwidth and frequency. They are available both assembled and in kit form. In particular, they are very good for “cleaning up” the signal in some single-band QRP transceivers that depend on a crystal filter for their selectivity, which can be marginal. This is especially important when the band is crowded and there are interfering signals.
- Learn the common “Q” signals and “pro-signs” such as “BK” for “back to you” [BREAK], they are used to speed up and shorten messages.

Get your nerve up. Get on the air. Call CQ. If they are sending too fast, ask for a QRS. If they won’t slow down, find somebody who will. ■



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QST, May 1922: Governors-President Relay

President Harding received forty messages. Of the missing eight messages, five states did not originate a message and three states started messages that did not reach their goal.

Although the relay's first run was not associated with any specific event, Harding having been elected in 1920, later relays were scheduled to coincide with and celebrate the presidential inauguration.

QST, January 1925: Governors'-President Relay

Calvin Coolidge, March 4, 1925

Now titled the Governors'-President Relay, the event migrated to the 75-80 meter shortwave band recently opened to amateurs. Compared to the 1922 event, it must be judged not a great success with President Coolidge receiving 22 of only 24 messages originated.

QST, February 1929: Governors-President Relay

Herbert C. Hoover, March 4, 1929.

President Hoover received 41 messages from the various states. Greetings were also received from Alaska; the Virgin Islands; the Philippines; Nova Scotia; "the Pah Ute Tribe" [Paiute] in Yerington, Nevada; and the Bronx Board of Trade.

QST, February 1933: Governors'-to-President Relay

Franklin D. Roosevelt, March 4, 1933.

Following the passage of the 20th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, this was the last time the presidential inauguration took place on March 4. From 1933 on, January 20 marked the beginning and end of the president's and vice president's tenure.

QST, July 1933: Governors'-President Relay

This 1933 event scored messages from 35 state governors and three territories thanks to hams' cooperation across the nation and in the final lap to the Washington Radio Club. President Roosevelt tendered a message following the event.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 21, 1933

My dear Mr. Corderman:

I wish to thank you and your fellow members of the Washington Radio Club, as well as all members of The

American Radio Relay League who participated, for your services in transmitting to me the "Governors-to-President Relay Messages" originating at the capitols in connection with the inaugural proceedings. I derived a great deal of pleasure from my perusal of these messages.

You are to be complimented on having and maintaining at such high state of efficiency an organization composed solely of amateurs in the radio field.

Very Sincerely Yours,

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Roy C. Corderman [W3ZD],
Esq.,
4401 Leland Street,
Chevy Chase, Maryland

QST, January 1937: Governors-to-President Relay

"Help us to show President Roosevelt that amateur radio communication is responsibly conducted, that our communication facilities are both prompt and accurate and that we operators know our stuff 100%."



Roosevelt on March 4, 1933, to his left is the outgoing President Herbert Hoover

QST, March 1937: Governors to President Relay

Franklin D. Roosevelt, January 20, 1937.

Fifth running of the relay. Messages received from 39 states, the Territories of Alaska, Hawaii and the Virgin Islands, and from President Quezon of the Commonwealth of the Philippines. Most messages were passed on

80-meters, 10 messages on 40-meters and none on 20-meters.

Hiatus

Not for another 12 years, until 1949, through WWII and beyond, would the relay be run.

QST, April 1949: Governors-to-President Relay

President Harry S. Truman, January 20, 1949.

Another name change for the first postwar relay, its sixth. The Washington Radio Club resumed its prewar role. Messages received from 41 states, four territories and "...mayors and civic organizations." Event took off January 19 on "3550, 3875, 7100

*"amateur radio...
is responsibly
conducted"*



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"And when will that be, young man?" her father growled.

"About ten minutes."

He shot a glance at his wife and she at him, but neither considered Rose's opinion. Having not taken her eyes off Charlie, she made no objection.

"We'll be back," her father promised.

When he turned back to resume his message sending he was only mildly surprised to find the NCS was holding the net in limbo. Knowing that Charlie was operating at a public gathering, he realized unforeseen things sometimes occur.

Charlie had finished with the messages and was waiting for Rose and her family when Artie emerged from the crowd.

"I've decided to take you up on that job offer," Artie said, leaning on the counter.

"How'd you know I was here?"

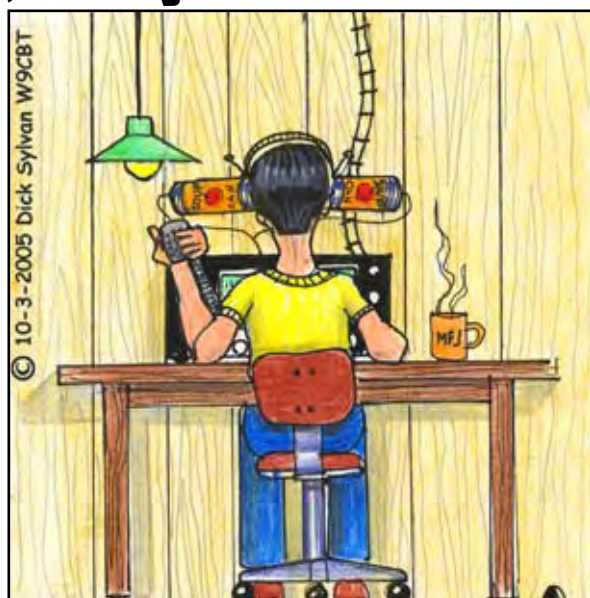
"May down at the café told me."

"I wonder how she knew?" Charlie asked.

"Need you ask? Maybe you hadn't noticed that May is aware of everything that goes on in Butler. A barber should be so informed." ■

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Ham Lingo DICK SYLVAN, W9CBT



THESE "CANS" SOUND TINNY!

and 14,150 kc" with out of District of Columbia stations calling "CQ Wash.... GPR" and D.C. stations, "CQ GPR."

QST, April 1953: Governors-to-President Relay
President Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 20, 1953.

An extraordinary performance for this, the seventh relay, 47 states, four territories and "several military commands."

QST, April 1957: Governors-to-President Relay
President Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 20, 1957.

The relay's final run. In a poor showing, only 25 states and the Canal Zone passed messages. "Herbert Hoover, jr. W6ZH, undersecretary of state, arranged for official receipt of the messages and their transmittal to the President of the United States on the occasion of his inauguration."

Epilogue

From that first relay in 1922 to its cessation in 1957 there occurred a quantum leap in communications. Over the relay's 35-year run, radio signals blanketed the globe, television leapfrogged continents and the era of satellite communications was just over the horizon. Thanks to new technologies, news reporting was becoming near instantaneous with audio and visual coverage of breaking events. Amateur radio, too, would break new ground in decades to come, but by 1957 it was no longer the idiosyncratic "whiz kid" of the 1920s and 1930s for its grass roots ability to quickly and accurately disseminate information. So, amateur radio's Governors-to-President Relay became a victim of its own success in helping birth these impersonal commercial giants. ■

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