The NEWSLETTER

MAY 2011 VOLUME 11, No. 5

Mercury Amateur Radio Association - MARA - North America - North East

...time to get out and put up that new wire!

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OTHER STUFF

Links that will take you to web locations referenced in this newsletter are shown in blue.

E-mail your comments, ideas, or submissions to marane@mara.net or to ve1vq@eastlink.ca

Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

May is my most favorite month of the year. The cold weather of winter and early spring is gone and the heat of summer hasn't arrived to plague us, but it's still warm enough to be out working on your antenna or your yard without a jacket or sweater. And hopefully, the flies (and ticks - if you have them in your area) haven't hatched to afflict and torment us.

The best type of day for antenna work is cool bordering on warm with a slight breeze (just in case those pesky flies are around) but not hot. With weather like that it's actually fun to work outside. You also don't have to worry about whether or not your soldering iron or gun is going to produce enough watts of heat to warm the copper and melt the solder.

Grandma is writing this in mid April and the weather is still too cool for my liking (although there are no flies!). You remember Wendy, my young protégé? She's anxious to get some wire up in the air at her home. She's had all of the materials since December, but the winter hasn't been kind to us antenna building hams here in the northeast.

So, she and I have an antenna building day scheduled for the first good Saturday in May. She has done all of the research on wire lengths and coaxial traps. She found an article on line at http://www.scribd.com/doc/24990781/Trap-Dipole, and she's done all the calculations herself. Walter (Grandma's friend who acted as a volunteer examiner for Wendy's testing session late last year) verified her figures and helped her build and test the traps for her inverted V, and to cut the stranded copper wire to the right lengths (leaving a bit extra for insurance).

Wendy's father has taken an interest in her new hobby and has used his wood working skills to make a window insert for her bedroom (originally, her radio gear was going in a corner of his home office but that area turned out to be too small) out of scrap piece of plywood and a UG-363U feed-through connector that I contributed from my junk box. He angled the edges and added foam strips, top and bottom and on the ends, to perfectly fit the window when closed. He secured the window against entry using long screws through the lower frame into the top frame.

Now, with everything ready, all we need is a good Saturday, and no flies to plague us!

CULTURED CORNER

by ANØNMS

THE NICE DAYS OF MAY

The nice days of May
may well be the best
to put up a wire
that answers the quest.

To hear everyone
out there and receive
all at S9 that
none else can perceive.

Sending a signal
way out and beyond
to out-do the rest,
the same to respond.

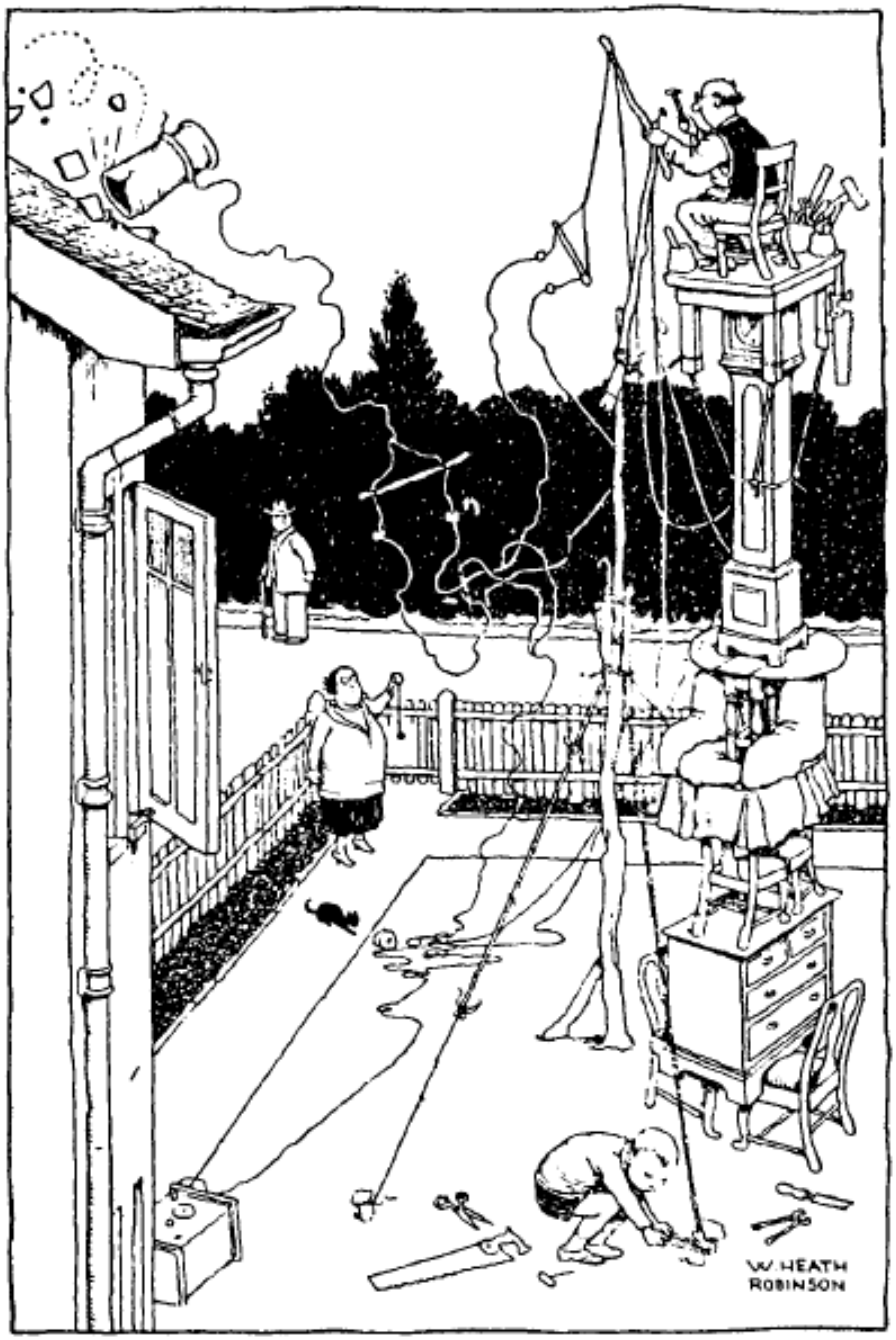
The nice days of May
won't be here for long.
Enjoy all you can
while singing May's song.

GOT SOMETHING YOU CARE TO SHARE?

Have something you want to share? A construction project, pictures of your station... home or mobile; a station installation at the chapel, or Field Day, a trip in the woods or some remote location with your portable rig, or maybe an antenna in your back yard. Whatever it is, share it with us. Send it to VE1VQ@eastlink.ca

HOW TO RAISE AN ANTENNA

It's spring, and time to get that antenna wire up in the air



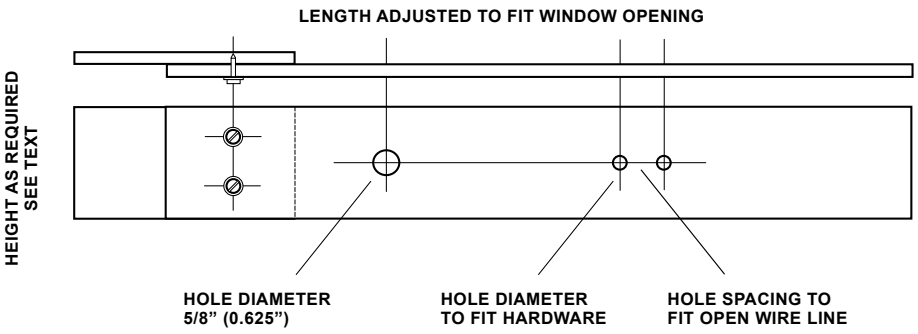
William Heath Robinson (31 May 1872 – 13 September 1944) was an English cartoonist and illustrator, best known for drawings of eccentric machines. Here he shows us what any self-respecting ham would do to set up an antenna for his station. Notice the lengths to which this amateur goes to work in safety! In Britain, mention of a Heath Robinson device is the equivalent to Rube Goldberg.

TECH STUFF

By VE1VQ

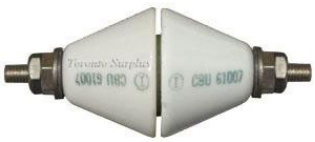
In her column this month, Grandma Mara mentions a window insert to get that valuable radio energy from the rig inside to the antenna in the great out-of-doors. MFJ have their model MFJ-4602 for $69.95 should you want to go commercial, and there are probably others as well. If you have a modicum of skill with tools and some scrounging talents, you can save some money and 'roll' your own.

If you count woodworking among your blessings, check out your scrap pile for a 1/2 inch piece of lumber or plywood long enough to reach across the inside of your open window with some extra to spare. It should be 3 to 4 inches wide if your window frame is made from wood or vinyl, or double that if from metal and you are feeding balanced or open wire line.



Cut two pieces of the board allowing for overlap and weather stripping. If you are using coaxial cable, drill a 5/8" hole to pass the coaxial feed-thru (Amphenol # UG-363U). If you have balanced or open wire transmission line, drill two holes to pass the threaded rod or long bolts. Make the spacing equal to the wire spacing of the line.

If all you are running is a rig with the typical 100 watt output you should have no trouble with feed thru hardware on wood. If you are using an amplifier, perhaps you should consider ceramic or plastic feed-thru insulators.



An example of a ceramic feed-thru insulator. You can find them at surplus suppliers or (for better prices) at flea markets.

Once you have the panel cut and all of the holes you need drilled, paint the edges and surfaces with a couple of coats of good quality exterior paint to seal the wood against moisture absorption. Give it several days to completely dry before mounting the hardware and adding the weather seal. Then simply open the window and slide the pieces into place. Use a clamp to keep the two pieces together while you screw them together. Then lower the window to keep the bugs out.

For security's sake, it is always advisable to add a couple of screws (one on either side) through the raised lower window into the upper window frame. Measure, mark, and drill holes to pass the screw through the lower frame and drill smaller holes (not all the way through to the outside) in the upper frame. Stay away from the edge of the glass!

If you have vinyl or metal frames, or if you rent, then you may not want to use the security screws as above. In that case, cut a tight fitting piece of wood to place vertically between the lower window frame and the upper window casing. Make the fit tight enough so you have to use a screwdriver or pry bar to remove it.

Don't have the wood in your scrap bin? Stop by your favorite home supply store and pick up a piece of plexiglas, lexan, or similar window material. The last time I had the front window in a vehicle replaced, I noticed that the repair shop had pieces of plastic they were cutting for a customer. If you have a plastics supplier in your area, talk nice to them and perhaps they will find a 3/16" thickness (minimum) scrap in their bin that they will sell cheap, or even give to you. They might even cut it to size for you. If not, a hacksaw or jigsaw with a fine toothed blade will do the job. Might not be quite as neat but it will still work. Put masking tape or paper with rubber cement on the plastic and make your marking on that (and also to prevent scratching). If you use a powered jigsaw, clamp a straight edge along the

A step drill made for cutting smooth holes in many materials.

markings allowing for the blade offset. Take care when drilling or cutting plastic and use a low speed setting to avoid over heating the material. Rather than try to drill a 5/8" hole, start smaller and enlarge by using a rat-tail file/rasp or with a step drill. For the smaller holes, start small and gradually increase the bit size until the desired diameter is reached.

Once the outside coaxial connector is screwed into place **and tests OK**, coat it with Star Brite liquid electrical tape to keep the moisture from getting into the connectors and the coax.

For open/balanced wire line, smear a liberal coating of grease on the outside terminals and wire connections. It doesn't hurt to periodically loosen and re-tighten both inside and out, to maintain a good electrical connection.

MNE

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

I would like to be remembered as a man who had a wonderful time living life, a man who had good friends, fine family — and I don't think I could ask for anything more than that, actually.

FRANK SINATRA

ARRL FIELD DAY - 2011

June 25-26

ALWAYS HELD THE FOURTH FULL WEEKEND IN JUNE!

DI-DAH-DI-DAH DIT

Back in February of this year, I had the opportunity to attend a meeting of the Southern Alberta Mara Chapter. I'd previously made contact via e-mail with Robert McMillan, VE6XMB, a member of the group, who lives in Raymond, Alberta. When I called him from my daughter's place in the same town, to see if we might be able to get together, he mentioned that they were holding their regular monthly meeting that afternoon and asked if I would like to attend. Since the meeting was taking place about a block away from my daughter's house, it really wasn't any hardship to make it.

Their meeting was quite informal with several people assigned or "volunteered" to speak on various topics...

I was one of the first to show up and was asked if I would "mind" talking about MARA as the main speaker for the meeting! Fortunately for everyone, the request was made in jest, and I could enjoy just being a visitor.

Their meeting was quite informal with several people assigned or "volunteered" (I never did find out which) to speak on various topics and lasting from ten to twenty minutes. The first spoke about antennas and safety; the next talked about WW2 resistance to the Japanese in northern Australia and Timor and about "Winnie the war winner". A member of the Church's ERC (Emergency Response Communications) group spoke about the Church's official emergency communications and how MARA members could assist in time of disaster, and about practicing before the emergencies happened by using repeaters and simplex to communicate by two meter VHF FM (Very High Frequency/Frequency Modulation) locally, and by HF (High Frequency) in order to reach Salt Lake or one of the other storehouses. He informed those present that the frequencies to be used were posted on the Southern Alberta MARA web site. Another explained the use of a RAC (Radio Amateurs of Canada) Radiogram form to pass traffic. [Here's a dual ARRL/RAC Radiogram form - Ed] Next, a demonstration of HF digital communication was provided (all locally on

a laptop). And lastly, a short presentation on hand made serious winter outer wear was given.

From the casual chatter around the room, I suspect that many of those present were fairly new hams with their basic licenses ("Canadian basic" gives all privileges above 30MHz), and the presentations were geared for that level. Nevertheless, it was a highly interesting meeting! And as is typical, there were refreshments afterward.

It was a highly interesting meeting!

Should you ever find yourself in southern Alberta on the third Saturday of the month, contact VE6XMB and find out where the meeting is. I can tell you that it will be worth it!

Until next month,
VE1VQ