

The NEWSLETTER

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



HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

TOWERS HAVE TO START SOMEWHERE, YOU KNOW!

Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

What with the wedding and honeymoon, and Field Day planning, Grandma really has not really had sufficient time for this month's column. Not that writing this is terribly difficult, but I sit down at the computer to begin and then think of something I should be doing, or planning, or arranging, or - something. That leads to something else, and before

Men! And just how does he think all of these *things* will happen?

But when I really and seriously started to think about it, what exactly does all this fluff and folderol really mean? This wedding stuff we women subject ourselves (and our men) to - bunches of flowers and bouquets, corsages and boutonnieres, all those carefully planned and prepared meals with those do-dads at each place setting, special little gifts for this person or that one, matching colors, a special theme, the perfect dress?

I found the extra things came about because others thought that "this" should be included, or "that" was important, and I was somehow persuaded to add "them". In the end, most all of it means zip, zilch, zero. The



I know it, I've forgotten the first things on my mental list! I've even taken to carrying a little pocket note pad around with me so I can scribble stuff to remember.

Walter says *I shouldn't sweat it*, that it will all work out, that the people who need to be there for the marriage will be there. He says as long as we both show up at the appointed time, all will be well, and that things will take care of themselves.

important thing is to marry the one you love. Even (or especially) at our age!

So, I took my husband-to-be's advice and re-thought my priorities. Then I called Walter to tell him my decision. I could tell he was smiling, even though he would go along with whatever I wanted, just for me. After that, I phoned all of those affected and told them the fluff was off - because we were eloping.

There's only one place we *have* to be - that place on the hill just off the Beltway outside of Washington, DC. We'll park the RV in one of the bus parking spots, and after the ceremony we'll be on our way. We're still planning on a dinner of some sort when we return but it will be very informal compared to the usual expected style.

It took a dramatic shift in perception but it sure made my life a whole lot simpler and easier.



RADIO FREQUENCY TIME SIGNALS

by Steve - AG4SO

WWW/WWVH

Many of us have tuned in to [WWV](#) on 2.5, 5, 10, 15 & 20 MHz to check our clocks on the shack wall. Some of you probably also remember [CHU](#), the Canadian counterpart of WWV. I used to monitor their broadcast on 7.353 MHz; now I believe you can find them on 3.330, 7.850 and 14.670.

In addition to time checks, monitoring a WWV broadcast is a fast way of checking propagation; it was as many of us remember, a common practice in the days before the internet. Today, this is still a useful practice when operating from a remote site.

In my days of disaster response with [FEMA](#), I used HF to set up initial communications at remote locations using secure HF radio, locations such as the [USVI](#) (US Virgin Islands) For days, around the clock, we would operate HF, hunting for usable frequencies at both ends of the transmissions as conditions changed. In the mean time, the satellite gurus assembled, pointed, programmed and set into operation one or more portable earth stations. Today those earth stations are like the ones the news networks use; you simply park the vehicle fire up the equipment and push a button. The system automatically computes and points the dish to the bird, and sets the polarity of the feed horn. You call the space cops (mysterious folks who control the satellite up and down links remotely from the operators), they set your levels and you push in the patch cord that link the disaster phones, computers, fax machines, and video back to the distant end. In a half

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an hour you can be on the air with a full T1 (or more) communications path. (And the popcorn in the on-board microwave is ready as well) However, in today's EM-COM world most of us do not have this fancy equipment. When using HF, monitoring the WWV frequencies can still be a useful tool to keep in our tool box.

Speaking of propagation fun, I have, on more than one occasion while monitoring WWV at night, heard under the Ft. Collins, Colorado, transmitter signal WWVH located on the Island of Kauai in Hawaii. This station broadcasts on 2.5, 10 & 15 MHz. Their ID announcements are staggered so you can clearly hear both ID's under the right conditions, which typically is at night with a good propagation path. I once made a tape recording of this and sent it to WWVH along with the usual QSL info, and received a nice card confirming my reception. Information on WWV can be found at <http://www.nist.gov/pml/div688/grp40/wwv.cfm>

WWVB and those Atomic Clocks

Most of us have so called "[atomic clocks](#)" which are really adjusted by an AM broadcast from WWVB, way down on 60 KHZ (no nuclear fuel rod needed). It seems like the scientists at [NIST](#) have been busy looking for a way to improve the reception and accuracy of these devices and so much other equipment that use the technology. On March 5th, NIST announced [a new time broadcast protocol](#) is to be implemented. The next Atomic Clock we purchase may have been redesigned and will hopefully work a little better. In the meantime, there is no rush to go out and purchase a new clock as our existing clocks will still be usable. It also means there will be upgrades in the future for many other types of equipment which relies on WWVB for accuracy.

The master clocks for Cell phone and multiplexer networks, calibration laboratory reference standards, satellite and even GPS systems are a few that require a high accuracy of timing from the standards the US government maintains.

It is good to see this often unnoticed but essential technology is still being improved upon.



An example of an "atomic clock". A more accurate term would be a "radio controlled" clock. From LACROSSE TECHNOLOGY.



TECH AND OTHER STUFF

by VE1VQ

THE FIBERGLASS POLE ANTENNA SAGA

I have been trying to get some free time, along with a bit of decent weather, to do some testing and tuning of the fiberglass vertical. Any day without rain so the grass could dry off would even work for me - it doesn't have to even be sunny! So far, the month of May has not been accommodating. If the weather has been good, I've had to work. If I had the time free, the weather wasn't cooperative.

Sometime between now and the first snow the two events should coincide!

MORE GENERATOR

Recently, the husband of one of my home teaching families called me about his generator. Seems he had left gas in it for a while and now it wouldn't start! He said he had since drained the old fuel out and replaced it with fresh gas, but still no go. Then he added some fuel stabilizer directly in the tank, and then topped it off with more gas. (Never a good thing to do - always mix the stabilizer and the gas in a separate container and then pour it into the generator gas tank.)

So, the next Saturday morning, we gathered around the offending machine to discuss the situation like men tend to do. The generator was only a couple of years old and had never been outdoors in the weather, so was in excellent shape. We pulled off the air filter and I squirted a small amount of gas into the carburetor. By small, I mean something like a quarter teaspoon! He turned the key and the motor started - and died, once the gas in the cylinder ran out. Each time we injected fuel and tried to start it, it would run a little bit longer. With a few more injections, and judicious riding of the manual choke, we eventually got it going.

If you can't get at the air filter and carburetor intake, you can always remove the spark plug and inject the gas directly into the cylinder. I do whichever is easiest.

A little trick to start stubborn small gas engines. One this same young man's father had shown me years before.

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MORE PICAXE

Last month I wrote a bit about PICAXE hardware and software. Since then I placed another order with ABRA Electronics for more hardware, as I'm doing some development work on a small piece of specialized test equipment for the fire alarm industry. As with the prior order, they e-mailed me within hours of placing it on-line to tell me one item, a plastic case, was not available and did I want to cancel it or put it on back-order. My choice was to cancel it. The remainder of the order went out the same day.

After a couple of days, I went to Canada Post's tracking web page and found out it had been accepted for shipment the same day, and was in transit from Montreal. When it didn't show up a week later, I checked again and found that it was on route - in Edmonton, Alberta! For those of you who aren't totally familiar with Canadian geography, I'm in the east, down on the very southern tip of Nova Scotia, across the water from Maine. Alberta, on the other hand, is just to the north of Montana. For about a week the tracking site showed it stalled in the Canadian west.

I filed an on-line complaint with the post office, and was told by an automatic return e-mail that a file would be opened and they would look into it, that I should be assured that they took my complaint very seriously! About three days later I received another e-mail from them telling me that *my package had not been delivered*. Period. Not a word about where it was, or when I could expect it! So much for taking my problem seriously! I certainly was assured by their investigation. They did say that I could have the sender file a claim if I wanted.

ABRA offered to ship a duplicate order but I decided I wasn't in a panic and would wait to see what the postal people would do.

Perhaps it was because of Canada Post's *serious attention to my problem* that a week and a bit later the box showed up at my local post office. No explanation, no e-mail, no fanfare - just the package.

The delay wasn't a complete waste, as I downloaded the latest versions of [EXPRESS PCB](#) and [EXPRESS SCH](#), printed circuit board and schematic drawing programs respectively,

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and spent time designing the project printed circuit board. The two programs use a lot of common commands, so learning one gives you a leg up on the other one.

And I finally got my parts. Now I can commence my development project. Let the (geek) party begin!

KEYS AND KEYS

Even though I don't get on the air with CW much anymore, I still have several keys around the operating bench. I never was very speedy even at my best, managing at one time to copy the 20wpm code run from W1AW and getting the official certificate to prove it. Mostly I hung out in the old 80 meter Novice section (3.7 - 3.75 MHz at that time which shows you how long ago that was!) where I was often the first VE1 station they had ever worked.



E.F. Johnson Speed-X key mounted on a piece of mystery wood.

The very first key I owned (and still have) was an E.F. Johnson Speed-X straight key. That was back in the late 1960s. I don't remember how much I paid for it but it couldn't have been much, seeing as how I didn't have a lot to spend on hobbies in those days.

I played around with early transistor electronic keyer circuits for a while, finally building an [ACCU KEYER](#), from an article in the August 1973 QST. I traded it to John, VE1OU, for a trapped vertical antenna a few years later.

I had a [VIBROPLEX](#) bug for a period of time. I don't remember who or where I bought it from. As is normal with people trying to send code with a bug at a slow speed, the dits (dots) sound clipped relative to the dahs (dashes) even with the adjustable weight all the way to the end at the slowest setting. I resorted to the common practice of wrapping several turns of solder around the weight. I sold or traded that off sometime in the distant past.

After a ham friend of mine drowned when his car went through a guard rail and into the water, his wife



The AEA MM-2 MorseMatic key and Bencher BY-1 paddle.

gave me his AEA MM-2 MorseMatic keyer. I bought a Bencher paddle and used that combination for a while. I still have both tucked on a corner of the bench.

CW paddle purists look down their noses at the Bencher users like wine snobs view the great unwashed who drink the less expensive brands. Budgets being what they are, I have to make do with what I could and can afford. For my unwashed fist, it does fine.

The MM-2 is an iambic A-mode style keyer, a little long in the tooth by today's standards, but works fine for the little I use it. The A-mode was the original keyer style where dots and dashes alternate if both paddles are closed. If the dash side is closed first and then the dot side closed, the letter N will be sent. If the keys are held longer then a C will be generated. If the dot side is released right after the second dash is sent, the keyer will automatically produce the final dot to complete the C.

It has a beacon mode and a code training mode. It was interesting to note that one of the punctuation characters in the latter has an error. The side tone is more than adequate in volume and tone and is suitable for a small to medium class room setting.

Many years ago, I had to take a trip for business. This involved staying in a hotel for several nights. I had read about "[learning while you sleep](#)" so I took along the MM-2 to test the theory. I set the keyer up on the night table next to the bed. Some time in the wee hours of the morning I awoke with a terrible headache, the worse one I had ever experienced. That was the first and the last time I tried to learn code in that manner.

Keyers have come a long way since the days of tube, and early RTL and TTL ICs. K1EL has been making keyers and keyer ICs available for quite some time. I've bought some of his programed chips

and kits over the years and found both the products and the service to be excellent. Check out his website at www.hamcrafters.com to see his offerings.

A couple of years back, someone advertised a VIBROPLEX bug for sale on the QRP CANADA e-mail reflector. Off went a check and in due time the bug arrived in the mail. I've never had it on the air, although I did connect it up to a tone generator and an amplifier, just to check out my "fist". It's been a long time since my former days of "glory". I'd definitely need some solder for the keyer arm, and a lot of off-air practice before I dared to inflict my code on the ham radio public. Nostalgia is a



My VIBROPLEX Standard Model Original bug made in 1977 just before production moved to Maine.

wonderful thing.

How about you? What do you have for keys, paddles, bugs or keyers that you could share with us?



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to uncharted lands, or opened a new doorway to the human spirit.”

Helen Keller

DI-DAH-DI-DAH

Historically, June has been (until very recently) the most popular month for marriages for centuries! Brides married in June “were likely to give birth to a first child in spring (also thought to bring good luck) and recover in time for the fall harvest. During medieval times a person’s annual bath usually fell in May or June, meaning that June brides still smelled relatively fresh.”¹

Perhaps not quite the same reasons apply today! Now, it’s more likely June would be chosen because the weather is nice without being overly hot, not because the bride just recently took a bath!

Certainly makes you glad bath soap and under-arm deodorant were invented.

According to another site, “the wedding ring was rather connected to the exchange of valuables at the moment of the wedding rather than a symbol of eternal love and devotion. It is a relic of the times when marriage was a contract between families, not individual lovers. Both families were then eager to ensure the economic safety of the young couple. Sometimes it went as far as being a conditional exchange as this old (and today outdated) German formula shows: ‘I give you this ring as a sign

Historically, June has been (until very recently) the most popular month for marriages for centuries!

of the marriage which has been promised between us, provided your father gives with you a marriage portion of 1000 Reichsthalers’.

“The double-ring ceremony, or use of wedding rings for both partners, is a relatively recent innovation in the United States. The American jewellery industry started a marketing campaign aimed at encouraging this practice in the late 19th century. In the 1920s, ad campaigns tried introducing a male engagement ring, but it failed due to the necessity that its advertising campaigns make secret appeals to women. Marketing lessons of the 1920s, changing economic times, and the impact of World War II led to a more successful marketing campaign for male and female wedding bands, and by the late 1940s, double-ring ceremonies made up for 80% of all weddings, as opposed to 15% before the Great Depression.”²

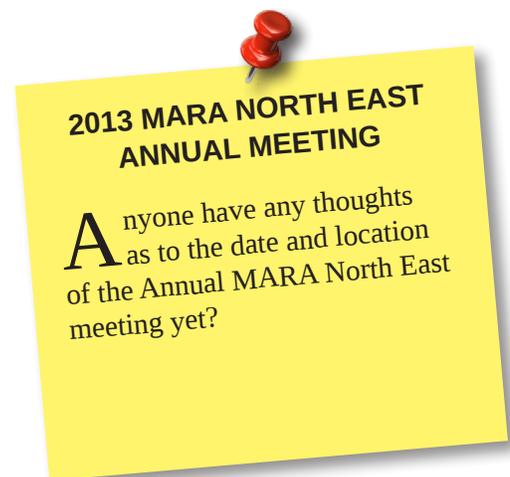


All this stuff I’ve mentioned that you thought of as romantic in nature is not so when you actually look into the history of it. Next thing they’ll be saying that love is *solely chemical* in nature and has absolutely nothing to do with the heart!

Until next month,
VE1VQ

¹ <http://suite101.com/article/the-most-popular-month-for-weddings-a114510>

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedding_ring



How About It?

How about sending a picture of you and your station? If so inclined, send me a bit of a write-up about your ham radio career. And if you have one, send a copy of your QSL card.

Did you get a piece of ham equipment for a birthday? Write up a little piece describing how it worked (or didn't work!) for you.

You're thinking, "no one wants to hear about me!" That's not true because *everyone* has an interesting story to tell.

Send it to VE1VQ@eastlink.ca in whatever format you want - even scribbled in pencil on a piece of paper.

FIELD DAY 2013

Is anyone thinking about operating from a chapel for Field Day this year?

Remember, it's June 22nd and 23rd this year!

LDS FIELD DAY 2013

Does anyone know if LDS Field Day is taking place this year?