

The NEWSLETTER

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

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



Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

At long last, the snow is gone and spring is finally here. The leaves are out, the grass has had a couple of mowings, and the smells and sounds of the season are very much in evidence.

Walter and I've spent some quality "date" time together over the last few weeks doing some preventative maintenance on both his and my antennas. On the sunny, wind-free days, it was really pleasant working side by side fixing the minor antenna problems that always seem to crop up over the winter months; which if you leave uncorrected, always develop into something worse at the most inopportune moment. We talked at length about our upcoming marriage, and the changes it would mean in our lives. Despite those changes, even because of them, we are both looking forward to the big day.

Walter's **dipole made with coax cable traps** was one we worked on. Every once in a while, through the snowy season, he noticed the SWR on forty meters would be, just slightly higher than normal. He keeps meticulous charts and notes on all of his antennas that he can refer to, if something seems out of "balance". It wasn't a steady increase over time, just an "every now and then" kind of thing.

So, we dropped the support lines down to the point where we could reach the antenna from the ground. No sense climbing up and down a step ladder if you don't have to! We quickly found the culprit in one of the traps. Somehow, probably last summer, a small bird of unknown species, apparently thought the plastic pipe the coax

was wound around would make a great spot to construct a nest.

No sense climbing up and down a step ladder if you don't have to!



It must have gotten across the coil wire end connections on the inside when Walter was in transmit mode, and "cooked its goose". The corpse and nest material, in concert with the moisture in the air, would make enough of a bridge across the coaxial coil, disturbing the impedance and the Q.

Walter removed the "foreign objects" and re-touched up the bird-worn soldered connections with some **Plasti-Dip**. While the dipole was down in the service position, he replaced one of the support line sections, as it was starting to fray from rubbing against a tree limb.

The rest of the antennas survived the winter quite well with only minor problems with simple fixes, such as touch-ups with the above mentioned Plasti-Dip, replacement of a few tie-wraps, or the tightening of locking hardware.

As you can probably tell, Walter is a firm believer in proper maintenance, and his antennas and station certainly reflect this attitude. Because he takes care of the little problems before they become huge catastrophes, his station is very seldom not fully ready when needed.



TECH (AND OTHER) STUFF

by VE1VQ

ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS ON A GENERATOR

Gas powered generators with a peak power rating in the 5000 to 6500 range are a good bet to supply power for the necessary devices in your home such as a refrigerator, freezer, furnace, water pump, microwave, etc. Brand name units are available for under \$1000, and other not-so-well-known ones for considerably less than that. Do some on-line Internet research to determine which is the right one for you. Check product reviews or do a GOOGLE search to see if the model you are interested in has problems - before you buy.

FIBERGLASS POLE ANTENNA

I had hoped to have had the time and the good weather to test the vertical antenna, but that has not been the case. This spring has been just a bit on the cold and damp side - not at all conducive to outside experimentation. I'm optimistic that by the June issue I'll have something more to report - and that the wx will take a turn for the better.

PICS AND PICAXES

Depending on where you look or who you ask, the acronym **PIC** stands for Peripheral Interface Controller, Programmable Interface Controller, or Programmable Intelligent Computer. Make it easy on yourself and simply call it a PIC, and nod wisely when others do the same.

They are all around us in electronics devices, and in an ever increasing number of ham projects. The PIC itself is manufactured by **MICROCHIP** in many flavors and sizes. The integrated circuit (IC) is an EEPROM or electrically erasable programmable read only memory. This means it can be erased and re-programmed many times without having to use a UV light source to do the wipe. Programming the device requires a programming circuit board, some software which is usually free or very inexpensive, a computer and some basic programming skills.

Along came a company called **REVOLUTION EDUCATION** which developed a way to make the basic PIC easier to use by making it programmable in-circuit. Their name, to distinguish it from the family of PIC products, is **PICAXE**. PICAXE micro controllers are pre-programmed with an interpreter similar to the BASIC Stamp but using internal EEPROM instead.

This also allows downloads to be done with a simple serial connection eliminating the need for a PIC programmer, making it easier for both the hobbyist and the professional, who have the need of being able to upgrade firmware without having to remove the IC from the circuit board. Their unit cost is more than a MicroChip PIC but this is offset by only requiring a programming cable instead of a programming board. Cables come in either Serial or USB versions. Software, free on the manufacturers web site, is of two varieties; one is the old style (**Programming Editor**) where you type the BASIC programming commands, while the second is a flow-charting program (called the **Logicator**) where no coding knowledge is necessary. This last one was crippled, as to what you could do with it, but now has apparently been “opened up” to its full potential, but with nag notices. To get rid of the nag notices you have to pay for an upgraded version - the same program but without the nagging!

I placed an order on-line for a USB programming cable, and several of the PICAXE-8 project development



boards and the PICAXE-08M2 chips, with **ABRA**, an electronics supplier based in Montreal. Within about an hour, I received an e-mail from Bram telling me one of the items I'd ordered (the AXE003U PICAXE-08M2 Starter Pack with a USB cable) was out of stock and wouldn't be available for 2-3 weeks. Would I like to wait or was there something else that could be substituted? We e-mailed back and forth for a while until we settled on the AXE027 programming cable by itself. The few dollars difference in price between the AXE003U and the AXE027 dropped me below their \$50 minimum order. I suggested that I increase the order by another proto board, but Bram told me not to worry as it wasn't my fault they didn't have the original item in stock. Now this is the kind of company I can get to like doing business with! They have a US location in Champlain, NY and their phone number is 800-717-2272. For those of us on the north side of the world's longest undefended border, the number is 800-361-5237.

It's been a few years, but I have done some PIC programming in the past. We'll see how much I can remember from those days of yore!

PHIL GILDERSLEEVE W1CJD

Some of you will remember the cartoons that appeared for many years in QST Magazine. Drawn by Phil Gildersleeve, W1CJD, they featured Jeeves the butler trying his best to do the bidding of his boss (who was always unseen off to the side) or the activities of the (fictional) Podunk Hollow Radio Club. See page 6 for a copy of the June 1967 QST cover showing the PHRC



A PICAXE-08 Proto Board. The battery connector is not for a 9-volt battery as you might think, but for a case containing three AA cells. The IC voltage must be kept under 5.5vdc or a regulator is required. All PICAXE chips will run programs at voltages between 3 and 5.5V DC. The later generation parts (M2 and X2 parts) will also run down to 1.9V. The open space on the board is available for adding circuitry to actually do something. A Schottky diode in series to provide reverse voltage protection would seem to be a good idea, as it is very easy to touch the battery pack to the connector terminals - the wrong way around! The voltage drop of a Schottky diode is approximately 0.2 volts compared to the typical 0.7 volts for a silicon diode.

Field Day operation.

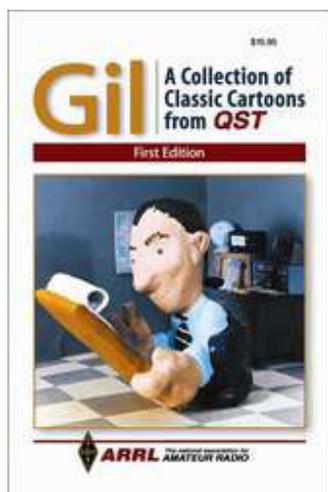
Beginning in 1927 and continuing for almost forty years, he created more than 1500 cartoons for the ARRL, with many appearing in the pages of QST. Gil passed



One of the many fine examples of W1CJD's pen. "Jeeves the butler" always valiantly trying to assist his employer with some facet of ham radio.

away on November 4, 1966.

In 1986 the ARRL gathered some of his cartoons together in the [Gil - A Collection of Classic Cartoons from QST](#).



Additional Links

<http://www.eham.net/articles/23264>

<http://hamtoons.net/node/22>

<http://oldqslcards.com/W1CJD.pdf>

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"If you feel like the weight of the world is resting upon your shoulders - try loosening your suspenders."

VE1VQ

DI-DAH-DI-DAH ^D_T

Words have the power to do many things. They can make us feel like we are the most important person in the world, the lowest of the low, or the dumbest of the dumb. Spoken by a Winston Churchill they can inspire us to heights of greatness; by an Adolf Hitler they can drag us to the depths of evil. They can soothe a little child's heartbreak or cut so deep such that the offended may never be healed.

Words can be so clear there is no possibility they can be misunderstood, or so ambiguous and confusing that wars are fought over their (real or perceived) misunderstanding.

A worldwide legal industry exists to "clarify" and "explain" the words of laws, printed on paper made from mega-forests of trees.

Religions of the world have argued, splintered and separated from each other over the words contained in the Bible, and their interpretation by various men and women.

With more and more people having access to the Internet, we now have the means to better communicate with precise and correct words to express our exact thoughts as never before. Or so you would think!

Perhaps I only subscribe to e-mail reflectors populated with people who don't use readily available word auto-correct on their messages, or only view web sites created by semiliterates (the MARA reflectors and websites being the exceptions, of course), but I find many examples of very poor choices of words and punctuation. I'm not in any way claiming to be an expert on either of those two things. In fact, I wish I'd paid more attention in my classes on those subjects, but even with my somewhat limited understanding, I can pick these things out. The

easier it should be to produce clearer and more literate messages and web sites, the sloppier we seem to have become in doing so.

Texting on our (smart?) phones, with abbreviations and acronyms, seems to have contributed to the haphazard way we now communicate, and even speak.

As we know, language is never a static thing. And perhaps this is the way the English language is headed. It will be our grandchildren and their children who decide this stuff after we're dead and gone.

I have the feeling I'm fighting a lonely and futile battle here.

Until next month,
VE1VQ

*The spelling of "GRAMMER" in the CONTENTS section was intentional - in case you were wondering about my *grammar*!

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?

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.

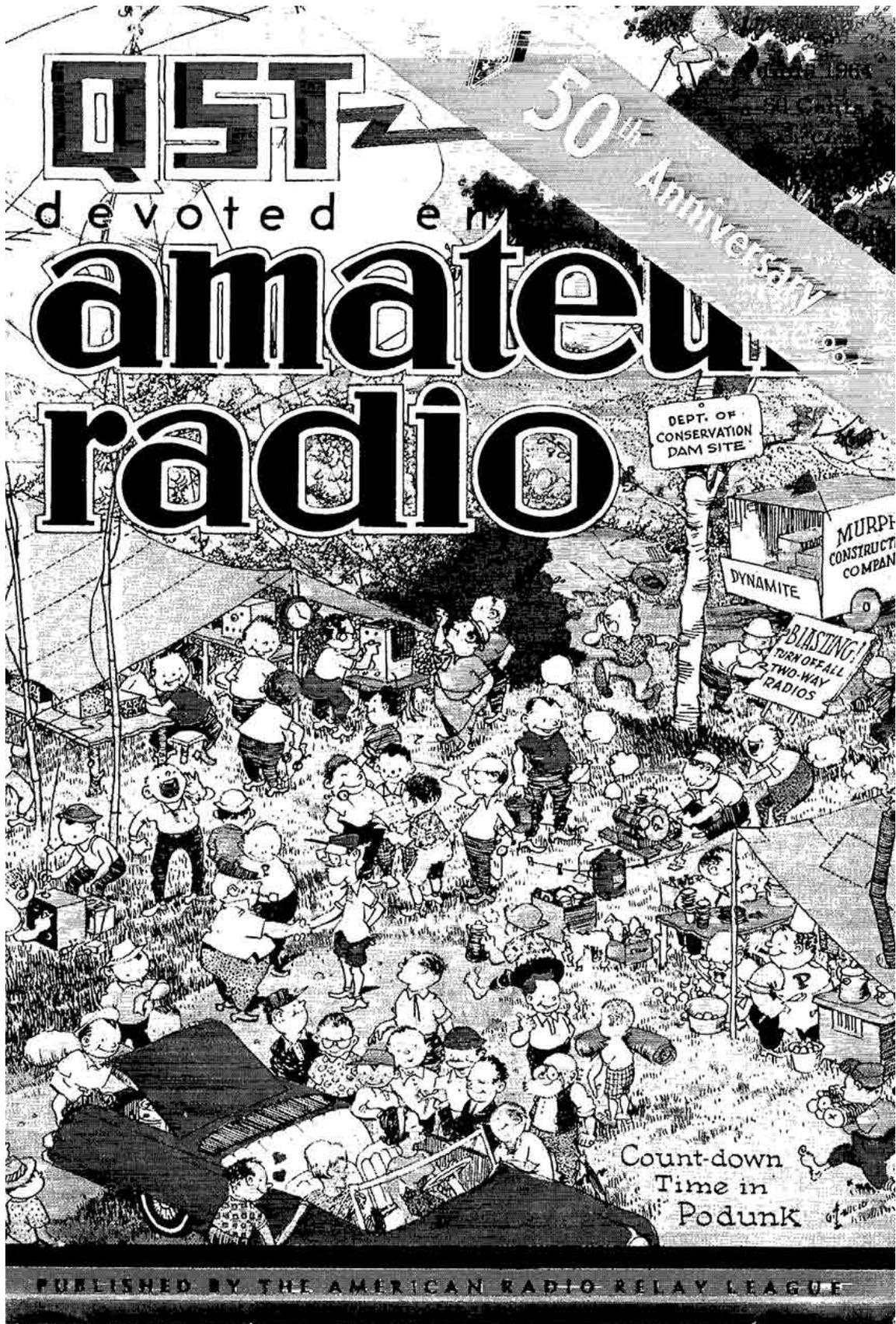
Did you get a piece of ham equipment for a birthday? Write up a little piece describing how it worked (or didn't work!) for you.

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.

2013 MARA NORTH EAST ANNUAL MEETING

Anyone have any thoughts as to the date and location of the Annual MARA North East meeting yet?



The June 1964 QST Magazine cover by W1CJD. Note the guys with the dynamite truck and the BLASTING sign on the middle right, and the girls in the convertible down at the bottom. It's almost like a *Where's Waldo* page!