

The NEWSLETTER

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Mercury Amateur Radio Association - MARA

North America - North East

No matter what the calendar says, It ain't really spring until you can get out and work on your antenna.



Photo from <http://www.antennamgt.com/blog>

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- JUNE 2015 - 27th AND 28th

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- COL. CHRIS HADFIELD - CANADIAN ASTRONAUT (RET.)

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DI-DA-DI-DA-DIT

- SOMETIMES YOU GOTTA PAY TO GET QUALITY

OTHER STUFF

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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

Past issues of The NEWSLETTER may be viewed at <http://ne.mara.net/newsletters.htm>

Grandma Mara's RAMBLINGS

The snow is gone, the grass is rising, the sputtering of lawn mowers is gradually becoming a common Saturday morning wake-up sound. This winter past was a long one, or so it seemed. Some of the old folks are saying it was at least as bad as any they can remember. Others of that generation (perhaps with longer memories) are claiming, that way back then, it got high enough that they couldn't get out of the first floor doors, that they had to climb out of second storey windows. What they did after that, no one ever says. Where would you go when the snow is that deep? Perhaps their memories fail them at that point.

Certainly it is nice to be able to go outdoors without boots, mad trapper hats, mittens, heavy coats, and arctic grade long johns.

The antennas survived the ravages of winter and won't require any serious repair work. Just the usual small preventative maintenance needed to prevent future drastic failure.

We had our Field Day planning meeting near the middle of April, in order to divvy out assignments and decide what equipment to use. Our group has dramatically increased in size over the last few years. First there was just Wendy and me, then Wendy's family and Walter were added. Now we have the seniors from the retirement home. We've gone from a single rig to two, and now to four. As it is, we will have to have operating time sign-up sheets to fit people in for the SSB station. Keeps up, we will need to book a bigger area of the park for our "group". As it was, there were so many who wanted to attend this year's meeting that we met over at the home. The "communications room" was too small to hold everyone so we used the cafeteria instead. Lots of chairs to sit on.

Speaking of chairs, we suggested that folks coming out to the FD site, might want to bring their own folding



Early on, we made the decision not to go with any power outputs greater than that of the typical one hundred watt rigs.

chairs. We will have enough for the operating positions but not for all of the possible on-lookers. The home is providing their excursion bus to shuttle the interested ham residents out to the activity. And, because so many of their seniors are participating or visiting, they are going to provide the Saturday evening supper, out at the operating site. Including dessert of chocolate cake from my recipe.

Early on, we made the decision not to go with any power output greater than that of the typical one hundred watt rigs. It makes it easier to keep the stray RF within reasonable and safe limits, and also keeps the generator requirements much lower. Instead of having a huge generator barking away behind our RVs, we have two smaller and much quieter ones along side those same vehicles. These units power the two HF positions; one on sideband, the other on CW, as well as our FM rig and our HF digital station. They also provide basic power for the two RVs after dark until lights out, when they are shut down.

They are kept securely chained and padlocked to their respective RV at all times. Most people are honest but no sense tempting anyone.

A bit of happy news to pass on. There was a recent wedding at the home.

A bit of happy news to pass on. There was a recent wedding at the home! Not the first one, I'm sure, but the first of two ham radio license holders. Fred, the resident who started it all, and Emily, one of the ladies who signed up for the first radio course, tied the marital knot in April. The groom wore a charcoal suit with thin blue stripes, that he proudly informed everyone he had bought just for the occasion. The bride was radiant in a simple ivory classic look, floor length dress. Wendy was the maid of honor and Walter was the best man (nobody much cared what they wore!). The couple walked out under a wedding arch of handheld radios, with some of the arch members supported by their walkers. The wedding cake was in the shape of two handheld microphones with cords intertwined. The newlyweds wanted to visit Niagara Falls for their honeymoon but said it was still too cold for them. They guessed they would stay put until the weather got warmer.

All in all, a very good month.

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Remember...

We're always looking for articles for the Newsletter.



TECH AND OTHER STUFF

by VE1VQ

Perhaps you have been listening around the bands and stumbled across stations transmitting CW, (or Continuous Wave, otherwise known as Morse Code) and you've kind of gotten interested. Maybe you knew and used the code in the past but now, years later, you are thinking about blowing the dust off your trusty J-38 and getting back into it. However, your code skills are so rusty you can barely recognize an A from a Z!

Where to start?

You can look in the ads in QST or CQ Magazine (does anyone actually look at the advertisements in the ham mags anymore?) or go on-line and purchase tapes or CDs that will help you learn (or re-learn) the code, or you can use your computer and log on to sites which will let you do the same thing. Some of these sites let you practice on-line, while others require that you download software you run on your computer. With most of these, you can create MP3 or WAV files to copy to a CD

ters, numbers, or punctuation, or words, or sentences. You can select which characters you want to practice on, and it will send you those in random sequence. You can set your preferences so when you log in again it "remembers" you, and where you were.

Check out G4FON's downloadable program at <http://www.g4fon.net/CW%20Trainer.htm>. This is another one where you can change a lot of things, including introducing noise and QRM at different levels. You can change the pitch of sent characters or the number of them before the program pauses. It even lets you add QSB (fading). You can record sent code



Just Learn Morse Code

Welcome

Just Learn Morse Code is designed to make it easy to learn Morse code, as well as in the code.

The basic methods used to achieve this are Koch's method and Farnsworth timing.

Features

- Accurate Morse code timing
- Thorough evaluation of code copied
- Customizable character set
- International characters
- Prosigns
- Selectable speed, pitch and volume
- Optional Farnsworth timing
- Creating Morse code audio files
- Generate Morse code from text files
- Practice selected characters
- Practice common words, abbreviations and Q codes
- Optional dual pitch for initial learning
- and more

as a WAV file. The web page says it works on Windows 9x, NT and XP, but I had no trouble with it on my laptop

with Windows 7 Pro.

Another program, somewhat similar to the G4FON Trainer, is called Just Learn Morse Code and can be found at <http://www.justlearnmorse-code.com/>. This one easily lets

Plain Text Training

A random sentence, taken from a choice of different databases, will be sent. Please select your desired speed and press Start.

Character Speed (wpm):

Effective Speed (wpm):

Simplify characters

Language / Collection:

15 @
10 @

en - American proverbs (169) ▼

www.g4fon.net

so you can listen to them in your vehicle on your way to work or shopping or to Church on Sunday (if your family members don't object).

The [LCWO.net](http://www.lcwo.net) site was recommended to me by Bob, N3TS. LCWO stands for *Learn CW Online*. It lets you set

the speed at which you want to practice, the spacing between elements, and the audio frequency. You can choose between let-

ters, numbers, or punctuation, or words, or sentences. You can select which characters you want to practice on, and it will send you those in random sequence. You can set your preferences so when you log in again it "remembers" you, and where you were.

Another one I haven't tried but was recently mentioned on the QRP-L reflector is called CW PLAYER and can be downloaded at <http://www.f1orl.org/cwping.htm>.

Then there is the old standby, the American Radio Relay League, and their code practice sessions. You can listen to them on

your rig on various frequencies (see the transmission schedule at <http://www.arrl.org/code-transmissions>) or you can view and listen to them at <http://www.arrl.org/code-practice-files>. There isn't anything you can change with this site, other than listen. The files are in MP3 format so you can download and save them to a CD.

If any of these don't fill your particular needs, then search on-line for "Morse Code Learning Software" and you should find other programs out there which might.

VARIATION OF FREQUENCY WITH THE TWIN-T OSCILLATOR

In the March 2015 issue of the Newsletter, I described a Twin-T audio oscillator circuit as the basis of a Code Practice Oscillator. I neglected to state the frequency range of the circuit in Figure 2. While not a great deal of variation is available, the potentiometer allows adjustment from 420 Hz to 480 Hz. Adding a 3.9K resistor in parallel with R2 (1K) raises the frequency output range from 510 Hz to 722 Hz.

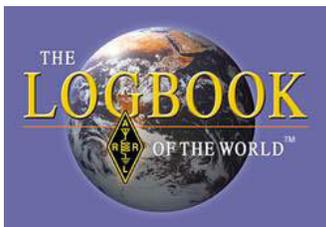
QSL CARDS and LoTW

In the late 1960s, when I was first licensed, it cost all of 4 cents to mail a QSL card in the Canadian postal system. Back then, there were comments at the monthly ham club meetings about how expensive it was getting to send a card out. Nowadays, in Canada, it will suck \$1.00 out of your wallet to buy a single stamp or \$0.85 if you buy them in rolls or booklets. If I have to send one south to confirm a contact in the United States it will set me back \$1.20.

But take heart all of you oldsters, there is hope. There is something called **Logbook of the World**, or LoTW. And it doesn't cost you anything to join. "There is no fee for obtaining a Callsign Certificate, submitting QSOs, or using one's LoTW Account to view submitted QSOs, confirmed QSOs, or award progress. A fee is only charged when submitting confirmed QSOs for Award Credit."

It takes a computer and a bit of time, but according to what I've read, it isn't all that difficult to set things up. I haven't done anything with it yet. Will I? Maybe, but first I have to get back on the air and make some contacts.

Will it take over the excitement of receiving a real card in the mail or from the bureau? Who knows? According to the figures I've seen, there are already thousands of people using it. Someone out there must be getting excited about something!



HENDRICKS QRP KITS

Some months back, I mentioned a couple of products from **QRP KITS**. One was the BLT+, a Z-type low power antenna tuner,^{1,2} the other a nifty QRP LED SWR indicator³ sold as a stand-alone unit or included as part of the BLT+.

I recently read that Doug Hendricks, KI6DS, the owner of QRP KITS has sold the business to James Bennett and Kathy Long, owners of **Pacific Antenna**. The web site shows May 1st as the proposed date they will be back in business. This is all good news for QRPers as the company has been noted for high quality kits at very reasonable prices.



QRP KIT Battery Status Indicator kit.

Once they are up and running again, I think I'm going to order a **Taylor Battery Status Indicator Kit** for a rechargeable battery pack for my TenTec 506 that I'm building inside a plastic ammo can. It uses a tri-color LED and provides two voltage set-points to indicate battery charged (green)/battery becoming discharged but still good (orange)/battery needs charging (red). To check the battery condition, simply press the switch and observe the color of the LED. No current is consumed when the switch button is not depressed and the LED is not turned on. The web site provides an assembly manual with a schematic, so I suppose I could gather the parts and build my own. But then I'd have to make my own printed circuit board. For the small amount they charge for the kit, I'll probably take the lazy way.

¹ http://ne.mara.net/pdf/newsletters/2014_news_jun.pdf

² http://ne.mara.net/pdf/newsletters/2014_news_jul.pdf

³ http://ne.mara.net/pdf/newsletters/2014_news_sep.pdf

AR



Plastic ammo can

ARRL FIELD DAY

Field Day is always the fourth full weekend of June, beginning at 1800 UTC Saturday and running through 2059 UTC Sunday. Field Day 2015 is June 27-28.

No local club to join up with, or they are way too serious and you just want to operate for the fun of it?

Well then, set up by yourself, or find someone of like mind to operate with you!

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Be always on the lookout for experiences you can learn from.”

Col. Chris Hadfield

Canadian Air Force (Ret.)
Canadian Astronaut (Ret.)

“close” it without feeling the least bit guilty.

But, every now and then, on the free web sites, I find one that sits near the top, and makes me want to read another by the same author. They are the ones I hope someday get “discovered”; the ones I hope make it to the commercial side of the tracks; the ones I hope someday make a living at writing, and doing what they obviously love doing.

Free is good, but in the case of the quality of the material on these web sites, you most often get what you pay for.

Until next month,

VEINQ

DI-DAH-DI-DAH ^D†

My library card died last month. Well, actually the card didn't croak, but my membership expired, which I suppose is the same thing.

Seeing as it used to live in Lethbridge, in southern Alberta, and I reside (most of the time) in southwestern Nova Scotia, I couldn't easily renew it. Seems like they want a warm body to be there to prove you are who you claim to be! So, I'm unable to “borrow” any books on my tablet until the next time I can present myself to the nice library person at the membership desk.

What to do?

There are a considerable number of sites available on-line offering free books to people like me, who like to read. What is interesting is why they are free. You generally won't find any well-known authors on there. There's a reason for that - once you get well-know as a writer, you can make money selling your books! The writers who publish or upload their writings to these sites are trying to break into the game. Some of them are pretty good. Some of them are downright awful! I find the majority are more in the middle of the pack. Some seem to have forgotten to turn their spell checkers on. Some need to learn about punctuation. Some need to find something else to occupy their spare time.

I don't mind the spelling and punctuation errors so much, if the plot is grabbing and the characters believable. I do mind if there are glaring mistakes or definite impossibilities.

To be honest, I find the same deal sometimes happening on the paid side of things; those books I wonder why, after a few pages, I even started reading. If I had paid for it, I would feel obligated to finish reading through to the end. But because I borrowed it from the library, or downloaded it from a free web site, I can