



# Dots & Dashes

*What*

*Hath*

*God*

*Wrought*

The Official Publication of the Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.

Vol. 45, Issue No. 3 • Summer 2020

## RETRIEVING THE MARCONI TELEGRAPH FROM THE TITANIC

**O**n May 18, 2020, a federal judge in Virginia approved an underwater expedition to retrieve the Marconi telegraph from the ill-fated Titanic. Recall that the luxury ship Titanic, advertised as unsinkable, hit an ice berg on its maiden voyage and sank on April 15, 1912. The 108-year-old wreckage is located about 370 miles off the coast of Canada.

More than 1,500 people aboard the Titanic drowned in the icy waters of the Atlantic. Wireless operator, Jack Phillips, now remembered as an exceptionally brave man, continued to transmit distress calls as the situation became hopeless.

Jack sacrificed his life trying to alert other ships to come to their rescue.

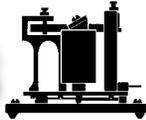
Because of a backlog of personal messages to be transmitted for wealthy patrons, warnings from other ships about ice bergs in the area were ignored. Obviously, this was a tragic mistake!

In spite of the current coronavirus health restrictions, the R.M.S. Titanic company plans to begin its expedition this summer. Because the ship wreck is deep under water, state-of-the-art underwater robots must be used to remove the Marconi transmitter from the ill-fated ship. Divers could not safely swim that deep.

*continued on page 15* ➡



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The official publication of

## The Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.

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**Local Chapter Members:** Members of local chapters should send all correspondence regarding address changes, membership renewals and similar information to their local Chapter Secretary/Treasurer. If you do not know your Chapter Secretary/Treasurer, please inquire with the International Secretary/Treasurer to obtain the necessary contact information.

**Your Articles and Stories:** MTC is always looking for original photographs, stories and articles about your experiences in telegraphy or radiotelegraphy. Please send articles and news stories to the Editor of *Dots & Dashes*.

**Telegraph Talks and Demonstrations:** If you or your local chapter should schedule any demonstrations, talks or other special events, please notify the International President so he can publish your event in our on-line calendar.

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The next issue of *Dots & Dashes* is scheduled for publication on September 30<sup>th</sup>, with submission deadline three weeks prior to that date.

➡ This ad runs routinely in the *World Radio News*:

## Morse Telegraph Club

Landline Morse is Alive and well!

*Dots & Dashes* newsletter  
The Ace Holman national telegraph office & hub  
Internet Telegraphy Railroad Telegraphy  
Morse Telegraph demonstration

Learn more about the history of the telegraph or simply enjoy using American Morse Code and authentic telegraph equipment.

[www.morsetelegraphclub.com](http://www.morsetelegraphclub.com)



## Sidewire

Comments from the  
Editor of *Dots & Dashes*

By Jim Wilson



The term “NORMAL” now has a new meaning: The worldwide coronavirus pandemic has changed everything. We will all look forward to a new normal in a year or two. The old saying that you don’t know what blessings you’ve got until they’re

gone, is so true.

Meanwhile, I wish each of you well. Please continue to maintain “social distance” and wear a face mask when in public spaces and wash your hands frequently.

Past International President, Lavina Shaw, recently sent me a note stating, “ I see where the deaths from COVOID-19 have really mounted in the United States, so I guess you really have to be careful. We haven’t had any cases here (125 residents). The management has been very strict about the 6 feet social distances, no visitors, or residents going out.” Recall that Lavina recently celebrated her 91st birthday and that she now lives at the Mayfair Retirement Residence in Port Coquitlam, BC.

All in person MTC meetings have been cancelled. But some chapters have begun meeting via the Internet using the Zoom program. The Seattle chapter has successfully used Zoom to keep in touch with its members. Of course, you can keep in touch with other MTC members by telegraph!

With time on your hands, I invite you to write your story “Biographer of a Telegrapher,” and send it to me to share with our members.

The Biography of a Telegrapher in this summer issue is of Hubert Jewell, my 95 1/2 year old friend, who recently became a Silent Key. Hubert’s story describes his beginning as a railroad telegrapher, progressing to supervisor of the Potomac Railroad Yards near Washington, DC, and finally becoming a member of the National transportation Safety Board investigating many railroad crashes. What a career; what a life!

*Jim Wilson*

## President’s Line

Jim Wades, President  
Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.



It should come as little surprise that our membership numbers have been slowly declining over the years. While many of us have worked hard to bring in new members to our association, these new individuals are only sufficient to slow, but not stop, the trend of decreasing membership.

Some of this loss is likely inevitable. Certain demographic and cultural trends work against organizations such as ours, the most obvious of which is the fact that the world isn’t producing new railroad or commercial telegraphers. However, there are other trends that work against us as well. Many historical associations are facing the same trend, whether it’s railroad preservation groups or US Civil War re-enactors, membership numbers are declining.

One of the major reasons for MTC membership is our Quarterly Journal, *Dots & Dashes*. However, the concept of paying for a magazine or newspaper subscription is a rather foreign concept to a younger generation conditioned to obtaining free information courtesy of the Internet. Daily newspapers and news magazines are struggling to survive, and while some specialty magazines are doing somewhat better, circulation numbers for many magazines are decreasing.

In the case of telegraph history, one can go on-line and learn much about telegraph instruments and collecting, which is a major phase of interest amongst MTC members who didn’t actually work in the telecommunications or railroad industry. Such free on-line resources act as a disincentive to join MTC and receive *Dots & Dashes*.

Most new MTC members come from the Amateur Radio community, where interest in “CW” is increasing. With the divisive debate about CW examinations now over a decade in the past, some are taking a fresh look at this old, but reliable art form and method of communications. Some of these individuals become curious about the historical antecedents

*continued on next page* ➡

of radiotelegraphy and begin investigating commercial and railroad telegraphy, resulting in an occasional MTC membership.

We've also had some positive experiences recruiting new members after presenting talks at railroad history associations. Engineering societies and similar groups. The talks are always well received, and it is common to have two or even three membership applications generated as a result of such efforts. Of course, this is not quite enough.

The MTC officers and directors will be discussing the best method to manage costs and move forward in coming years. Our primary cost is, of course, the publishing of *Dots & Dashes* and therefore, options might include increasing dues somewhat, encouraging increased use of on-line (email) delivery only, perhaps decreasing the number of issues of *Dots & Dashes* or combining *Dots & Dashes* with the regular publication of another historical association.

No firm options are on the table until we receive input from the members, who are encouraged to offer their opinion about these and other possibilities for limiting costs. Feel free to send

me an e-mail with your thoughts or opinions at: jameswades@gmail.com

In the meantime, please do your best to recruit new members. We need new blood and the best way to get it is through one-on-one member recruitment.

*Oh Canada!*

*Dots & Dashes* is very dependent on first-person content to keep it relevant. We are in need of more first-person experiences from Canadian telegraphers. If you don't submit your story, we can't publish it!

As a reminder, you do NOT need to be a skilled writer. Just tell the story of your experiences working as a telegrapher in Canada in an honest and informal manner. Imagine you're writing a letter to a friend. Our editor will do the rest. Our personal stories are our legacy and they add depth and nuance to the history of an art that was not just a technology, but the collective experiences and contributions of people like you and me.

***Thank you, 73,***

**30**

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# FUN NOTICE

***Come join the fun on MorseKOB wire 11.***

***The three weekly sessions meet on***

***Saturday around 2PM EST***

***Monday around 9PM EST***

***Wednesday around 9PM EST***

***Dust off your telegraph key and test your telegraph skills!***

# BIOGRAPHY OF A TELEGRAPHER

I, Hubert H. Jewell Jr., was born in Roanoke, Virginia on July 31, 1924. I came from a family of men who loved the railroad and spent their lives moving their families around in order to follow the “road”. I learned Morse code when I was about 12 years old from my paternal granddaddy, Ballard L. Jewell, who worked for the Virginian Railroad in Moneta, Virginia. I began work as a telegraph operator when I was 17 years old at CW tower in Pohick, Virginia working the 4pm – midnight shift on December 21, 1941. I’d ride the Caboose Express train from home in Ellett’s Crossing, Ashland, Virginia to CW Tower and rode (the Engineer slowed down and I jumped off!) the light engine, no cars, home when I got off at midnight.

After working telegraph at CW tower I went to



work at KN Tower in Milford, Virginia, 8am – 4pm, on December 23, 1941 for one trick to relieve a man. On December 24th they sent me to Doswell, Virginia on the 8am – 4pm shift for five days. Doswell was a busy job. C&O crossed RF&P at Doswell and C&O was still operated by train orders. There was a C&O/RF&P interchange at Doswell. While still a senior in high school I frequently worked Sundays on the 8am – 4pm shift at CW and 4pm – midnight at Doswell quite often. After graduating high school I was sent to RO Tower at Alexandria, Virginia, for the 11:30pm – 7:30am shift where I remained for most of the winter.

Next I was sent to AF Tower in Alexandria, VA, on the 12 midnight – 8am shift. I entered the Army on October 23, 1944. In the meantime before entering the Army I worked various telegraph jobs for one or two days and at different towers between Richmond and

Alexandria, Virginia. I was qualified on the RF&P to work all of these various towers.

After Hitler heard I was in Germany, he surrendered and I was honorably discharged on July 30, 1946. While in the Army I married my beautiful bride, Katherine Cussons, on February 6, 1946. We were blessed in marriage for a wonderful 23 years before her death in 1969. We had two beautiful children, a boy, Buz, and a girl, Cindy.

After returning to civilian life, I returned to the RF&P as a telegraph operator. My seniority entitled me to work the 8am – 4pm shift at Hamilton, Virginia. Shortly thereafter the Agency at Penola, Virginia became available. I bid on that job on November 4, 1946 and was awarded the job. My bride and I went to housekeeping on February 6, 1946 in a home furnished by the RF&P. I was awarded a job as Mail Messenger with the U.S. Post Office handling mail between trains and the post office. About April, 1949 I was displaced by a senior railroad agent and had to move to Richmond, Virginia where I bid on a job as relief Telegraph operator at WD telegraph office adjacent to the Station Masters Office. Subsequently the 12am – 8am telegraph operator’s position opened in MO in the main office and Broad Street Station in Richmond, Virginia. Around this time I enrolled in the VPI Extension Program in Richmond as an engineering student with whom I eventually received my degree in Engineering. I worked as operator at MO until I received a leave of absence to attend VPI in 1952...

~ *Hubert Jewell*

...Hubert would continue to love the Railroad and always considered it his passion even though he left his work with the RF&P to take a more lucrative job with the government for better pay, benefits and room to advance since becoming a family man. He retired from the National Transportation Safety Board in Washington, D.C., where he investigated railroad accidents all over the country until he retired in 1986. He continued to live and love all things railroad his entire life. When he had a stroke in 2000 and couldn’t speak for several days he tried to communicate with my brother and me by tapping code on our arms. He loved to attend Civil War reenactments with his brother Ballard and Jim Wilson, and regularly attended other telegraph demonstration events. Each night until only recently he’d tap out a message before

.....

saying his prayers and then he'd go to bed. Among his other passions in life, each spring he rooted and planted hundreds of azaleas all over Orange County. He won 1st place ribbons at the Orange County Fair for his bread and pound cake for years and had a standing order from family and friends each holiday and any other time we could get his delicious bread, cakes, chocolate cheesecake, and other delectable creations. Most of all, he was always there for us. Over the years, though he remained strong and out worked men half his age, he helped my husband Jerry and I fence, chase cows, and do anything he could on the farm, he eventually developed cancer. He was active physically and mentally until the last day or two of his life when we had to medicate him. He regularly told

me he had to finish his story for Jim Wilson and *Dots & Dashes*.

So on Good Friday, April 10, 2020, he did finish his story and took that last train ride on the Railroad to Heaven to be with his Lord and Savior. He was the best of the best and I can't tell you how much he will be missed by his family and friends. He always told us he was going to live to the year 2050. In our hearts he will live much beyond that. He loved life and as his nephew Dave Corter said, "he had plans and wasn't ready to go", but for almost 96 years he served God, his country, was devoted to his family, and lived a good life. We love him and will miss him dearly.

**Cindy Galyen,**  
**Hubert's daughter**

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## GONE ARE THE U.S (KB) AND THE CANADIAN (HN) HUBS

Well, the US hub was retired quite a few years ago. The MTC kept it running for a few years after Ace Holman passed away (he was the one who originally hosted it) and our president even linked it through a real Athearn repeater to one of the MorseKOB wires. However, just keeping four of the phone lines running cost about \$200 a month IIRC. As dialing into the hub entailed long distance charges and what with MorseKOB, few were using it and even fewer were willing to contribute to the cost of maintaining the phone lines and so it was retired. The Canadian hub remained operational up until early this year when it suddenly disappeared. I did make a little effort to try and find out what had happened but never got any response. The good thing about the Canadian hub was that its incoming phone lines were free long distance phone calls as they were maintained by some company in Toronto but apparently they have decided to no longer support it. Further, although I occasionally got a successful connection to it, more often than not when dialing in from the US a good connection was not to be had. I tried to find out what became of the equipment in order to preserve it (the US hub equipment has been preserved by president Jim Wades) but again did not get any response. It is possible the email addresses I had were old.

But yes, the hub dial in numbers for both hubs should be removed from future issues of D&D. Since MorseKOB is available at no additional cost to anyone with a PC type computer and an Internet connection

and works from around the world (Maurie from New Zealand was on our chat group on wire 11 last evening :-)) if folks want to continue communicating using American Morse code I would suggest using MorseKOB.

Although it is not necessary to have real instruments to use MorseKOB it is certainly a lot more fun if you do connect real instruments. Connecting a key alone is trivial, only an appropriate USB-to-Serial cable is necessary. We currently recommend the FTDI Chipi-X10 (<https://ftdi-us.shop/products/chipi-x10>). Connecting a sounder is somewhat more complex. With a few simple components and a facility with a soldering iron it is possible to construct a sounder driver interface. A more authentic type of interface but harder to build is a loop interface. A loop interface in fact shares some ideas with the terminal unit used with dial-up Morse but again is more complex to build yourself. However an almost turn key interface is available from one of our members, Chip Morgan: <https://mecerweb.com/interface-ordering.php>. This particularly helpful although somewhat more expensive if building electronic circuits is more than one wants to address. In any case the MorseKOB web site provides guidance on these approaches to interfacing to MorseKOB at this link: <https://sites.google.com/site/morsekob/morsekob25/interface>. Although I have built sounder driver interfaces I now use several of Chip's interfaces both at my residences and at the AWA museum. If anyone wants any suggestions and/or on-line help and advice, I'm available :-)

**73, Chris Hausler**

# CHAPTER NEWS

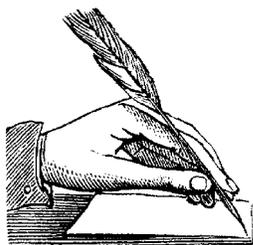
**B**ecause of the coronavirus pandemic, everyone has become isolated. All planned chapter events have been cancelled. But some chapters have begun meeting via the Internet using the Zoom program. Check with your chapter to see if this is a possibility for you.

*~Jim*

*PS: It's a new world out there.*

## MORSE TELEGRAPH CLUB CHAPTER LIST 2020

<u>Call Sign</u>	<u>Chapter Name</u>	<u>Secretary-Treasurer</u>		<u>Email</u>
AT	Ollie Blackburn	James	Favre	<a href="mailto:jmfavre@gmail.com">jmfavre@gmail.com</a>
CG	Calgary	Lavina	Shaw	<a href="mailto:lavinashaw@shaw.ca">lavinashaw@shaw.ca</a>
FN	C. D. Combs	Richard	Behrens	<a href="mailto:rbehrens@yahoo.com">rbehrens@yahoo.com</a>
FX	Florida	Clyde	Francis	<a href="mailto:rachel.f.francis38@gmail.com">rachel.f.francis38@gmail.com</a>
GO	Montreal-Ottawa	Luc	Bonneau	<a href="mailto:bonneauluc@videotron.ca">bonneauluc@videotron.ca</a>
K	Grace M. Pond	Don	Miller	<a href="mailto:dolomiller@bresnan.net">dolomiller@bresnan.net</a>
MO	Edmonton	Bill	Tchir	<a href="mailto:dwtchir@eastlink.ca">dwtchir@eastlink.ca</a>
MT	Montana	Burt & Sue	Stenslie	<a href="mailto:burtsue@live.com">burtsue@live.com</a>
MW	Milwaukee-Madison	Bob	Pluntz	<a href="mailto:pluntzr@gmail.com">pluntzr@gmail.com</a>
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PD	Emory Mulquin	Richard	Wornath	<a href="mailto:rgw36@outlook.com">rgw36@outlook.com</a>
RA	Maritime	Oscar	Belliveau	<a href="mailto:obelliveau3217@rogers.com">obelliveau3217@rogers.com</a>
SA	Sacramento	Lawrence E	Cardoza	<a href="mailto:destiny@snowcrest.net">destiny@snowcrest.net</a>
SQ	Hugh Braese (CA)	Cathy	Stanfill	<a href="mailto:ks6cw@mac.com">ks6cw@mac.com</a>
SX	Sea-Tac Evergreen	Betty	Watterson	<a href="mailto:kevin@seville.net">kevin@seville.net</a>
TD	Thomas A. Edison	Al	Skornicka	<a href="mailto:atynmtc@provide.net">atynmtc@provide.net</a>
WA	Washington-Baltimore	Jim	Wilson	<a href="mailto:telegraphjim@gmail.com">telegraphjim@gmail.com</a>
WG	Winnepeg	Bert	Johnson	<a href="mailto:joanb@mymts.net">joanb@mymts.net</a>



# Letters to the Editor

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## April 9th

Although I've been in touch about telegraphy with some members already, notably Less Kerr, I'm a new member. I sort of backed into an active interest in telegraphy from an initial interest exploring "Morse-over-IP." I'm licensed as an FCC amateur radio operator (N6PWD) but I don't know Morse code yet. I was curious about Less's MorseKOB program and the network protocol involved. I have been working on a small circuit dedicated to receiving and, hopefully in a future version, sending Morse over the internet as well.

**73,  
Patrick Dirks  
N6PWD**

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## April 10th

Thank you for sending the sad notice to me about Hubert Jewell. Herbert was an extraordinary person and we so enjoyed having him come to Fort Ward for many Civil War Camp Day programs. Even in the hottest weather of the last few years, he was a real trooper. He loved interacting with the public and sharing his knowledge. Herbert will be missed by all. Please pass my condolences on to Cindy and her family.

**Best Wishes, Susan,  
Director of Fort Ward Museum & Park,  
Alexandria, Virginia**

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## April 13th

Back in the mid 70's for over a year, I edited a monthly newsletter for a local hobby computer organization. The newsletter was just typewritten, size 8½ by 11, manufactured and printed using mimeograph stencils, so the "production value" was low. But it was a royal pain to get members to write things for my newsletter, somewhat like pulling teeth without novicane.

Fortunately for me, in the summer of 1978 I got shipped off to Atlanta, Georgia for a couple of years to design the original automatic dispatching system for their new heavy rail transit system. So, although I was never a real fan of such extended

travel, it happily relieved me of the duty as editor of this publication.

Interestingly, in addition to the book suggested to me by MTC member Dale Lichtblau, the second book that I am planning on reviewing for the summer edition is, *News over the Wires. The Telegraph and the Flow of Public Information in America 1844-1897,* by Menahem Blondheim. Unfortunately, the book costs \$30. However, by signing up for *acedemia.edu*, a somewhat questionable organization which now pesters me with emails, I was able to download a free pdf file of it. This is an interesting read. It addresses some of these same problems created by the "penny press," even before the telegraph came on the scene. This story parallels both in time and in events much of the information contained in that book about Western Union and the corporate order, the book that I reviewed in a previous issue of *Dots & Dashes*. It looks at that same story from another but related perspective. I tripped across this book quite accidentally while looking for something else. Hopefully, such happy accidents will continue to happen, both for me and for you.

**J. Chris Hausler,  
International Vice President,  
Morse Telegraph Club**

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## April 15th

Les Kerr, Gary Emmons, Ed Berntsen and I have tested and are in support of meeting over the Internet using Zoom. Attached is our spring meeting letter with more information. Please note that we will run a test check-in this coming Saturday April 18th at 11AM to get any bugs worked out of our connections.

**Thanks, and 73,  
Kevin Saville,  
Evergreen Chapter President**

*MTC members, during the coronavirus stay-at-home order, your chapter might consider the option of using the Internet Zoom program for your meetings.*

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### April 23rd

I think you will enjoy this story about my project and everyone involved. The story is titled, *Last of a Dying Breed – The Trackside Photographer*.

[<http://thetracksidephotographer.com/2020/04-23/last-of-a-dying-breed>]

**73,  
John Springer**

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### April 27th

My life is easy compared to everyone else's. I am staying at home aside from twice weekly trips to the Boyce depot in Clarke County where there are no reported infections [of coronavirus] so far. There's plenty of food in the freezer and this is my opportunity, I hope, to shed a few pounds. This has also been an excellent opportunity to catch up sorting and digitizing of primary source documents. I think a much-changed world awaits us.

**Dr. Frank Scheer,  
Director of the Railroad Postal Museum,  
Boyce, Virginia**

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### May 6th

Hello: I just came across these Google code trainers and thought I would share it with the group. They are using images to try and help people learn code. It is part of a bigger project for accessibility, which looks interesting.

Morse Typing Trainer: <https://morse.withgoogle.com/learn>.

Google Hello Morse Project: <https://experiments.withgoogle.com/collection/morse>

**Enjoy & 73,  
Kevin Cwalina**

---

### May 6th

I appreciate the opportunity to have my work published in *Dots & Dashes*. And now I have finished, "The Telegrapher's Trilogy" of stories, which I posted as a PDF on the Facebook CW Group, should you want to take a look. [<https://www.facebook.com/Download/preview/180950023061665>]

This contains all three stories in one file. Chronologically it goes *The Telegrapher of Canyon Diablo*, then *The Perkinsville Station*, and then *Nate Goes to War*.

**73,  
Bob Houf  
K7ZB**

*Readers: Bob's thrilling story, "Nate Goes to War," chapters 1 & 2 were published in the previous two issues of Dots & Dashes. I asked Bob how he became such an enthralling writer. He responded: "Not sure, maybe being an engineer, my mother got a degree in Journalism in 1940 and became an English teacher. My grandfather was a university professor who wrote a textbook. Just in the DNA, I guess. These stories come effortlessly and they actually tell themselves. I just put them on paper."*

---

### May 11th

I really like this video [<https://youtu.be/UPTzvcigqJO>] for many reasons. 1) This is from a young person who is very interested in the topic. 2) She is passionate about this; her enthusiasm is wonderful. 3) There is a nice 28KSR receiving decoded CW and a very nice 28ASR, which was receiving RITTY earlier in the day, probably to demonstrate RITTY. 4) This place is a real gem; I hope to see it someday.

While she is talking technical about how to copy the station, she shows various video segments from her visit in the background, so you can see more of the station. This is where the 28ASR is shown. She doesn't talk about it specifically, but likely when she made the original video footage, she was saying something about it because she is pointing out the text. She probably skipped that audio because she wants to talk about the ship to shore CW, the main topic of her video. Watch how excited she is as she walks around and sees the station. If you are a ham, this will warm your heart.

**73,  
Paul  
W2TTY**

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### June 5th

I am the editor of the *Alabama Radio Society* newsletter, the Superflex. I have an idea to run a contest with the members regarding the meaning of certain phases by Marconi's people in the logs of one of his first transmission experiments in Ballycastle, Northern Ireland.

First, let me give you some background. My niece lives in Ballycastle, Northern Ireland. She sent me the attached postcard about Marconi and his first wireless communication from Rathlin Island to Ballycastle. I have attached a copy of the postcard for your review.

I wish to run a contest with our members on the meaning of two phases used in the logs for

the radio experiment mentioned on the postcard. (I thought it would be a good idea to know the meaning of the phases before I published the contest.) I need to know the meaning of “received a few V’s” and “mostly red each way.”

**Dave Westbrook,**  
**Vice President of the Alabama Historical Radio Society**  
**Editor of the Superflex newsletter**

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### June 6th

I started going with my father to work when I was a kid because we had a car accident and my dad had just built their home and my mother went to the hospital. She could not take care of me for a while.

I would sit behind the machine at Woodlawn Tower during rush hour and keep quiet while my dad and his Levermen ran the place. After the rush, I could sit with them, go back to sleep and at midnight my dad would take me home.

My dad had Tuesday and Wednesday off for many years. Because I grew to like trains, dad would take me on the weekend to spend the day with him on the job. When I was about 12, they gave me the pass and I started riding trains myself and taking pictures. When I was 18, I was hired as a fireman at Penn Central. I worked till I was 60 and retired from Amtrak.

I joined the Railroad Museum of New England and continued running trains and now have 50 years in engine service. In the winter of 2018, my friends and I made our way to old tower 44 in South Norwalk, the one that they now call SONO switch tower museum.

There, I met a great guy, John Graofalo, who was also a former operator. John made us feel at home. I could see they were very interested in Railroad history so I joined. Knowing that they used Morse code when the tower was built, myself and some friends got involved with having a display.

I spent several weeks searching the Internet and found the Morse Telegraph Club. Everyone at MTC has been very helpful with my project. And with

the assistance of my friend, Rick Selva, a lineman on Conrail at the start of his career, we have almost completed everything.

COVID-19 has us held up for the last piece of equipment. This is Chip Morgan’s box to be hooked up to the Internet. Rick has the modem. When it is safe, he will hook it up.

My wonderful wife and I converted a train sheet from tower 44 to Morse code. Chip gave us a wire where people can listen to 24 hours on December 8, 1968. When not involved with any of this, I fly fish for trout and sing at Karaoke Bars.

**John Springer**

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### June 8th

Since there seems to be an interest in Railroads in our group and I have had so much help with learning about the key and hooking up a box at the tower so when people come to visit us we can do demonstrations of telegraphy, would it be appropriate to mention this book? The book is so well written and is all about our tower. But as I am sure you know; all towers did the same function and were a very important part of railroad history.

**73,**  
**John Springer**

*Readers, see John’s Tower book offer in the Want Ads.*

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### June 9th

John Springer, an MTC grand chapter member, conducts Zoom meetings on-line. Anyone interested in railroad related photos and videos can join the Zoom meeting. Other members can post their pictures during the meeting. If you put a short item in D&D with John’s email address, [amtrkgir@comcast.net] our members can email John with their email address and John will send information pertaining to upcoming Zoom meetings.

**Richard Williams,**  
**International MTC Secretary-Treasurer**

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# HIS NAME WAS MOSE

*By George O. Hack (SK), March 28, 1971*

It happened somewhere along about 1910 or 1912. At the time, I was employed as a messenger by Western Union.

It was the custom in those years for persons, living within a reasonable distance of the telegraph office, to call for a messenger to pick up a telegram they wished to send.

My title was "Messenger No. 1," an honorary award for the responsibility of opening up the office, sprinkling the wooden floor from a sprinkling can, and sweeping the floor in preparation for the arrival of the manager, and other office employees.

In those days, the Associated Press wire reports were copied in the Western Union Office and delivered to the newspaper by messenger in "takes," or single sheets. In return for this service, the local newspaper delivered a complimentary paper to the telegraph office.

I was always an avid reader of newspapers. After finishing my janitorial task, it became my custom to tilt a chair back against the wall and read the morning news. There was always an abundance of local news, including daily happenings at the police station.

On a number of occasions, I read where a character, named "Mose" somebody or other, became involved with the law, usually winding up with spending a few days in jail.

I knew "Mose." He squatted on a piece of land on the banks of the Missouri River, and raised some produce, which he sold. He was a big, strapping fellow and looked like a pugilist. He owned an emaciated horse and spring wagon, both in near fragile condition.

With these thoughts in mind, I was somewhat surprised one morning to be summoned to Mose's modest cabin to pick up a telegram. Upon arriving, I knocked on the door, but at first received no response, but I was patient and persistent. I knocked and knocked and knocked; each time a little more vigorously. Finally, I heard a faint voice from within bidding me to "come in."

The door led directly to the bedroom where Mose lay in bed. He asked whether I had a telegraph

blank. As a rule, messengers always carried them, but on this occasion, I had to plead my negligence.

Mose leaned over to a small table beside his bed, picked up a sheet of note paper, and wrote out the following telegram:

"I is dying. Come and come at once."

One may imagine the feelings of a young lad in reading the telegram back to the sender, which was done as a matter of common practice in order to be certain that the handwriting was legible and all component parts of the message in order.

The telegram was addressed to a woman in St. Joseph, Missouri. I read the text back a second time to be sure that I had understood it. "Send that collect, boy," said Mose.

As I left the cabin, my thoughts were in considerable turmoil. Here was a man, writing out his own death telegram, and here was I, carrying it to the telegraph office.

I had never heard of anyone, anywhere, writing out his own death telegram. It bewildered me. At length the telegram was on its way, but the memories of the event lingered in utter amazement. About a week later, after again attending to my clean-up job at the office, I eagerly sought the morning news.

Eventually I came upon a story involving Mose, who had been arrested by the police for breaking into the office of the Home Riverside Coal Company's office on the edge of town.

Mose had entered the office, attempted to carry the small office safe out to his spring wagon, but in so doing, the safe slipped from his hands and crashed through the floor of the office, landing with a great big bang in basement below. Someone heard the noise and telephoned the police.

Here was Mose, only a week earlier on his death bed, now physically moving a heavy safe, with the intention of placing it upon his frail spring wagon. Somehow my thoughts began to tell me that Mose's death telegram was merely a ruse to bring his girlfriend back to him.

More than a half century has passed, but the incident always continues to amuse me.

**-30-**

# A MONDAY MORNING TRICK AT OW

*By John Springer*

**D**uring the Mid-1960, my father's assignment was changed around, and he would open OW tower, located almost in the shadow of the Tappan Zee Bridge on New York Central's Electric Division, on Monday mornings. OW was closed from Saturday afternoon until he got there.



I recall that we got up in the dark, because he had to be there at 7 a.m. My dad was not a morning person, and so we did not talk much on our drive to the tower, even though I

was always excited to be with him going to work. We had to park and walk a bit to the tower, and if I went with him during winter while I was on vacation from school, he would always grumble about how we had to drive into a lumber yard that had not been plowed and then push our way to the tower along a path that had not been cleared. When we got to the tower and climbed up the two flights of stairs, he would, after I pestered him, let me take out his NYC switch key to open the padlock.

OW had a coal furnace, and sometime Sunday night someone, I never knew who, came and fired up that furnace so the tower would be warm for us. In winter you always left the faucet in the tower sinks drip, otherwise the water lines that came from the passenger station in exposed pipes would freeze up. My father never let me put coal in the furnace in case something bad happened; he would put it in when we got there. The signal maintainers took care of it after that. Some young people reading this probably never have smelled coal burning, it's not like wood. They still had coal stoves in cabooses when I started on the railroad and in some shanties, but in time that was all

gone. You never give it a thought till it's gone. When I started at the Railroad museum of New England we have a caboose with a coal stove and it brought back memories of my young days in towers.

My position during the morning rush hour was to sit and watch trains go by, and my father would let me pull and push the levers sometimes, as he always said it was easier for him to do it than to call the moves. Since I did not get to this tower with him often, I never learned the machine as I did at JO and NW. After the morning rush he would call the moves and watch and make sure I pulled the correct levers. Since I learned how to read the boards in other towers you were able to do that at any tower and after a bit it would come to you.

One move that I always wanted to do was to cross the trains at Philips Manor from Track 4 to Track 2. That move was very different, because it was far away and the levers for the move were on the OW machine. I believe at one time there was a tower at Philips Manor, but when we went there the switches and signals were controlled from OW. ➡



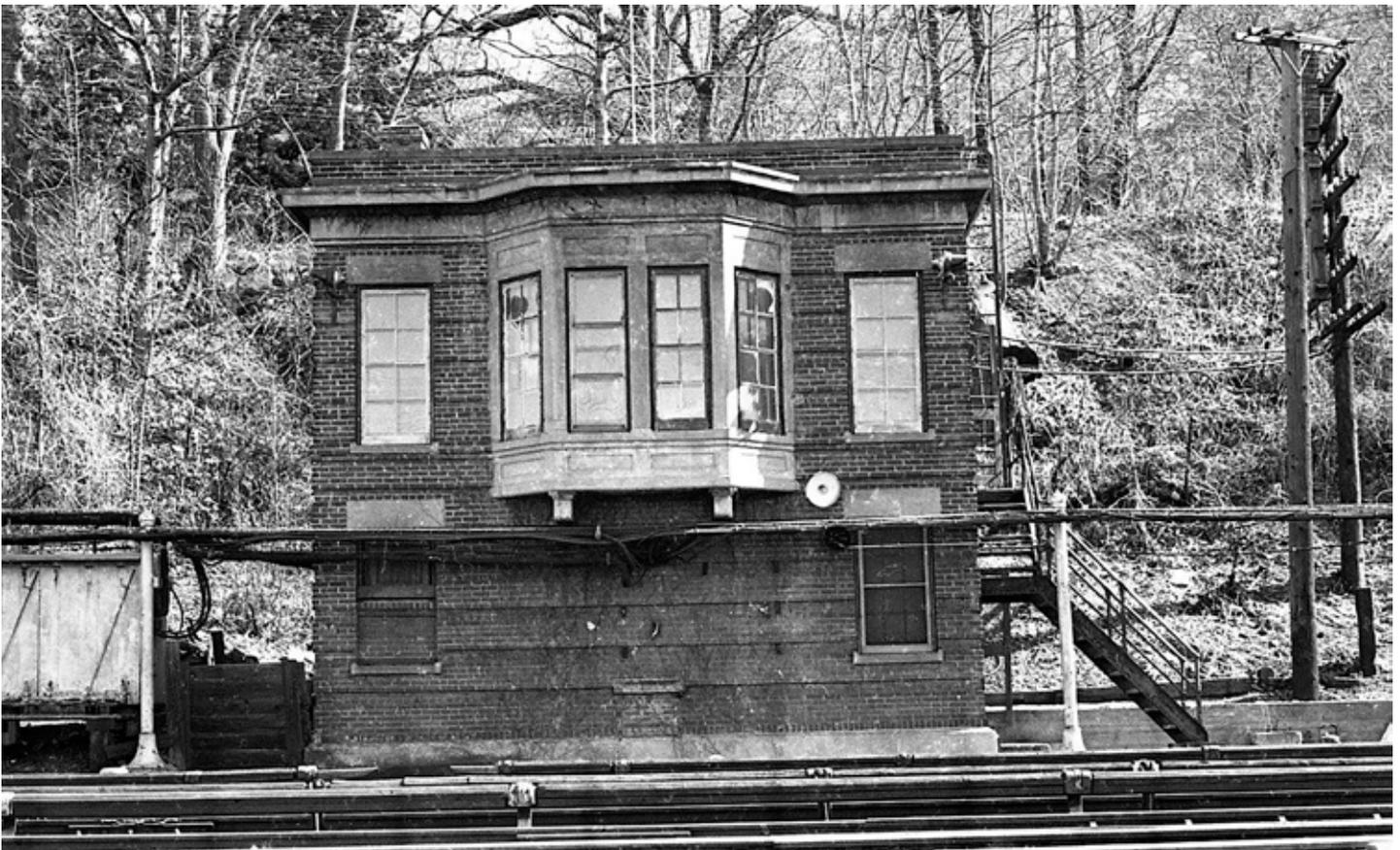
In those days, as you know, we had named trains with observation cars on the rear, and my father always told me when the 20th Century Limited was coming. If you plugged the Century for any reason, it had to be good! So No. 26 would go by, and I would watch for the observation car with the blue and white sign on the rear. There was one other train with an observation car that went by on his shift also.

I'd see the jobs coming east from Poughkeepsie towed by electrics as well as the crack trains. Freights ran mostly at night, but as a rule one would go by going east while we were there. I believe it was NY-2 or NY-4. I would count the cars, and in those days the conductor or rear brakeman would come out of the hack and you'd give him a wave and he would return it. There were different hand signals you would give if something was wrong. I remember my dad said was if you pinched your nose and pointed down to the ground it meant the train had a hot box.

After the morning rush hour my dad would get a call, and it would be one of the Harmon traveling switchers that he would put into the Chevrolet Plant. As a rule, one of them would come out of the plant and bring cars down to the siding at the tower for the westbound freight to pick up at night.



Sometimes the conductor on the job would drop off at the tower and come up. On one of those days he asked my dad if it was ok to take me for a ride on the engine while they made the move. Of course he said ok, and out the door I went. That was my first freight train ride, and I never forgot it. When I hired out in 1970 there were five traveling switchers coming out of Croton East. Four of them, as I remember, came to Tarrytown to keep the Chevrolet Plant switched out, and he would place cars east of OW for pickup at night, or bring cars



back to Croton Yard.

Some people I never see written about are the signal maintainers. Without them and all they did, nothing would work right at any interlocking. Today those men are called the C&S Department in many places, but the job they do is the same – putting oil and graphite on switches, checking switch heaters, signals, and in those days, cleaning the lever machine. Today, with computers and a mouse, there is no machine in a tower to keep clean and oiled.

But the job they do is just as important because when a dispatcher says he can't get a switch, or the circuit drops out and he can't clear a signal, those are the people who fix the problem. Joe Hard and Fred Gunther were the maintainers at OW. Since the GM plant was such



a big customer, I suspect that is why the railroad had two of them on duty. They were very happy-go-lucky guys, and I expect this was because they were very close to retirement when I met them.

In the photo of my father at his desk you can see a black box in front of him. They had an approach bell for all four tracks so the operator knew a train was coming and could clear up for them. On the left side of the desk was the horn where you could hear the dispatcher and other towers talking. In front of that is the mouth piece he spoke into to give the OS for all trains and to answer any questions the dispatcher might have for him. On his right were two phones – one a regular land line and the other a direct phone to the GM plant so the crews working there could speak to him directly and vice versa.

There was also a block phone for the call boxes along the tracks. In those days a crew member who had a problem would open that big box carefully. The reason for the care was that bees made nests in them. When he knew the box was ok he would crank the handle on the phone. They had a list in the box of how many cranks for what tower or station you were trying to reach. In those days the only trains with radios were the long-haul freights.

Every tower had a clipboard or something like it to post the bulletins on pertaining to special instructions that were not in the timetable. Things like track work and temporary slowdowns were



covered on these bulletins. The big clock you see in front of my father had several large batteries in it, and each day at 11 a.m. the dispatcher would give a time check. Some of them would say "11 o'clock" about three times then say "now," and the operator would push a button to set the clock so it was exact. The second shift people did the same thing at 7 p.m. When all was quiet you did hear the clock tick.

My father carried a personal AM radio with him to have a little back ground music. Without that, those eight hours went by very slowly when you were not busy. But for me it all went by too quickly, and there is nothing I would not do to bring those wonderful days with my father back. I hope you enjoyed reading this, as I am not a writer but a story teller, and because my dad often took me with him, I had a great childhood. Now I enjoy sharing stories of what it was like.

This story first appeared in the *New York Central Historical Society Magazine*



*Retrieving the Marconi Telegraph from the Titanic continued on page 15*

If successful, the recovered Marconi telegraph station, a first of its kind, could be restored to operable condition. This could become a major museum artifact for tourists worldwide.

But, hold your horses, this recovery project is strongly opposed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. NOAA argues that the Titanic should be respected as a grave site rather than mined for its valuable artifacts. NOAA views this as grave robbery.

Who can claim the Titanic? Should the 1,160 remains of its victims be put on display? Who controls the oceans; companies, courts or governments? Since the discovery of the wreckage on the bottom of the sea in 2010, these have become relevant questions.

The government's position is that the Titanic should be protected where it lays.

Since 1987, thousands of artifacts have already been recovered from the ship. The RMS company

argues that without intervention, the Titanic will continue its rapidly deterioration.

For centuries, maritime law has held that whoever retrieves a wreck gets salvage rights. This rule is intended to clear the sea bottom of debris.

Current law requires that the RMS company cannot separate its collection of Titanic artifacts and that it needs permission from the court to take anything off the ship.

[The youngest passenger, Millvina Dean, age two months during the voyage, was the last survivor. She died at age 97.]

The judge in this case commented that "The Marconi device has significant historical, educational, scientific, and cultural value." This hot debate goes on.

*What is your opinion?*

*Information for this story comes from The Washington Post and from Wikipedia. ~ Editor Jim*



# Welcome Aboard!

## NEW MEMBERS OF MTC

*Ken Ashmead of Calgary, Alberta*

*Marilyn Maguire of Calgary, Alberta*

*B.A. Black of New Berlin, WI*

*Richard Cullet of Burbank, IL*

*Rich Dwight of Palmer AK*

*Patrick Maloy of Middletown, NY*

*Chris Nichols of Charlottesville, VA*

*Ed Silky of Dublin, CA*

*Patrick Dirks (not sure of his location)*

*Ray Whimple (not sure of his location)*

*Let's welcome these nine new MtC members!*

## DID YOU KNOW?

*Do You Know if the earth is in danger of being struck by a large asteroid or meteor?*

Everyday, tons of meteors, mostly about the size of a grain of sand, are burned up by our protective atmosphere. This meteor dust helps seed rain clouds.

Sixty-five million years ago, earth was struck near Cancun by a large asteroid -- which caused the death of dinosaurs. Yes, the earth is in constant danger of being struck by another large asteroid.

**The most recent asteroid to threaten us was on June 6, 2020.** This 1,870 foot diameter rock passed by earth at about 13 times the distance to our big moon. Our moon is in orbit about 240,000 miles from the center of earth.

**Stay tuned.**

# “30” SILENT KEYS

*News of our brothers and sisters who have closed the key*



## Washington-Baltimore “WA” Chapter

**HUBERT H. JEWELL, JR.** served as President of the Washington-Baltimore “WA” Chapter for more than a decade. The soul of Hubert Jewell, age 95 ½ left this earth on April 10, 2020.

“Hubie” was a dear friend. We participated in more than a dozen telegraph demonstrations over the years. His brother Ballard, called Junior, joined us often at demos, as did his daughter Cindy. All four of us dressed in authentic Civil War era telegraph attire. Recall that Cindy served the Chapter as International Secretary-Treasurer for more than five years, until her health caused her to give it up in 2015.

Hubert’s *Biography of a Telegrapher* can be read on page 5. Hubert’s biography was the last chore that “Hubie” did for me, using his old fashion manual typewriter. And Hubert’s published book, *Working on the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad*, is still available from the RF&P Railroad Society. See the Want Ads for details. This may be your last chance to purchase his book from the historical society.

Let’s see if I can recall from memory the telegraph demonstrations that we did. There was...

- The Brandy Station Civil War site in Central VA
- The Gettysburg Civil War site in PA
- The National Security Agency Museum in MD
- Fort Ward Civil War Park in Alexandria, VA
- The Boy Scout Jamboree in PA
- The Ellicott City Railroad Museum in MD
- The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum in MD
- Historic Beverly Days in West Virginia
- The Delaware Fire Fighters Museum
- A Maryland Historic Park (our MTC tent blew away!)
- The Morristown, New Jersey Historical site  
(where the telegraph was invented)
- The National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, MD
- The National Air & Space Museum in Washington, D.C.
- The Historic ship Constitution in Baltimore Harbor, MD
- Saint Elizabeth’s hospital site in Washington, D.C.
- The German Embassy in Washington, D.C.

And probably more that I have forgotten

At some of these sites we participated in as annual demonstrations

Boy did we have stories to tell from each of these events; what memories!

I shall miss my wise, thoughtful, intelligent dear friend, Hubert Jewell.

**Jim Wilson**  
**Secretary Treasurer,**  
**WA Chapter**

## Maple Leaf “ON” Chapter

**ROBERT NELSON GUNTER**, age 89, passed away on October 31, 2019. He was born on July 1, 1930 in Trento, Ontario. After learning telegraphy in Wellington, Bob joined the Canadian National railroad in July 1951. He served as an Assistant and a Telegrapher in the Belleville Division. Bob retired in 1986. His last position was as a Carload Supervisor in Belleville Car Central. Bob and his late wife, Jean, raised two daughters. The lave behind six grandchildren and several great grandchildren.

Bob joined the Maple Leaf Chapter on October 1, 1991 and he served as a long-time faithful member. He will be missed.

**Thanks to Donald Laycock, Secretary-Treasurer of the Maple Leaf Chapter, for this interesting information.**

**SAMUEL GAW**, age 93, passed away recently at Kemptville, Ontario. Sam took a career path that began as operator, to senior management, and finally as a member of the Transportation Board. He worked for both the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railroads.

Sam was also a gifted athlete. He played pro hockey at the age of 17 for the New York Rovers, the top farm team of the Rangers. Sam played hockey all over Canada and overseas. And he could have been a pro golfer; he was that good. Near the end of WWII, Sam joined the Army Signal Corps.

**Thanks to Les Weir, a lifelong friend of Sam’s, for this interesting information.**

**PETER BOLAN**, age 86, of Miramichi, New Brunswick, passed away on March 7, 2020. He was born on february 23, 1934.

*Thanks to Lavina Shaw for this brief information. Lavina says that Peter worked for the railway and that he stayed overnight with Earl & Lavina a few years ago when he helped out with a telegraph demo at the Satit Thomas railroad show.*

#### **C.D. Combs Memorial “FN” Chapter**

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**HENRIETTA “PEG” KAY**, age 94, passed away on March 28, 2020 at Saint Joseph’s Villa in David City, Nebraska. She was born on December 30, 1925 on a farm near David City to Henry and Anna (Meysenburg) Lukassedn.

For most of her life, she went by “Peg.” She attended grade school at St. Mary’s and Holy Trinity in David City. In 1943, she graduated from high school in Brainard, Nebraska. Following graduation, she attended railroad telegraph school in Omaha.

In January 1944, Peg began work as a railroad agent-Operator for the Union Pacific Railroad at North Platte, later in Wyoming at the Union Station in Omaha. She also worked for the Santa Fe Railroad in Kansas City and Emporia, Kansas until 1953.

On October 13, 1954, Peg married Cliff Kay in Hinton, Oklahoma. She then trained as a court reporter, working in several courtrooms in Oklahoma for many years.

Peg was a member of the “FN” Chapter of the Morse Telegraph Club from 1998 until the current year.

*Thanks to Richard Behrens, Secretary-Treasurer of the “FN” Chapter for this information.*

#### **Edmonton “MO” Chapter**

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**STEVE MATWYCHUK**, age 88, passed away on April 26, 2020 at Calgary hospital. Steve trained at Spedden, Alberta under Jake Ruhl for a job as Operator Agent. On November 3, 1952, Steve began his career with the Canadian National Railroad working as spare board operator on the Edmonton Area.

After gaining experience, Steve bid a permanent position as Operator at East Edmonton, operation the manual block system. Since he worked with his dad at carpentering, he built his own home in South Edmonton.

Prior to CTC replacing MBS, he bid on operators position at Kelowna-Kamloops Junction swing. Here he again put his carpentry skills to work

to build his own home at Ruthland, a suburb of Kelowna. Soon thereafter, he secured a permanent position as Operator at Kelowna. Retiring in 1981 and wanting to continue making himself useful, he took a job as janitor at a school nearby until 1991.

*Thanks to Bill Tchir, Secretary-Treasurer of the Edmonton Chapter for this information.*

#### **Saskatoon, “KN” Chapter**

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**LEONARD LOUIS SOLOMON**, age 83, of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan passed away on May 27, 2020 from complications due to Parkinson’s Disease. The eldest child of Louis Solomon, a farmer and Canadian National Railways section man, and his wife Rose Varga, Leonard was born on August 21, 1938 on a farm near Parkerview, SK. After living in Parkview and Yorkton, the family moved to Dinsmore, where Leonard graduated high school in 1953 at age 16.

Len began work as an itinerant agent-telegrapher for the Canadian National Railroad in June 1955, working throughout Saskatchewan and Alberta before obtaining a permanent position in Biggar, SK in 1957. He enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan in the fall of 1958, graduating with a Bachelor of Education degree in June 1962. He continued working as a telegrapher during the summers.

On June 29, 1962, Len married the love of his life, Mary Lou Wright. The couple had a daughter, Karen (Kay) in 1964 and a son, Keith, in 1968. Len and Mary Lou would have celebrated their 58th anniversary on June 29th.

Len taught at White Bear, SK from 1962-1965, then in Saskatoon from 1965-86. After a heart attack in 1982 with triple bypass surgery in 1986, ill health forced Len to discontinue teaching.

Over the years, many former students praised Len’s ability to “bring the story to life” in his reading of literature to the class. It was in this practice that he developed a love for the dramatic arts. He appeared in several plays, a handful of commercials, and even did some modelling with a local agency. His last role came four years ago when he played an elderly First World War veteran in the movie, “The Invincible Sergeant Bill.”

Len was a huge Saskatchewan Roughriders fan (Canadian Football League). He enjoyed going to a game each August with his children. He often reminisced about players from bygone eras, and he felt keenly the team’s highs and many lows. 

In 1966, Len sneaked out of his own brother's wedding to catch updates of the Grey Cup game on the car radio!

Len was an avid curler, skipping a rink for many years in the local mixed and men's 50-plus leagues.

His retirement years rekindled an interest in telegraphy and the railroad. He volunteered as a telegraph operator at the Western Development Museum. He also served as Treasurer for the KN Chapter of the Morse Telegraph Club. His volunteer work brought him many new friendships, especially amongst the "old timers" like himself who had once served as the backbone of the railway communications network.

Len also loved to travel. He enjoyed camping trips to the mountains with his children, and vacations to Montana (summers) and Arizona (winters) with Mary Lou. Other travel adventures included a trip to the Queen Charlotte Islands with Kay in the 1980's. A road trip to Texas and Louisiana with Keith in 2009 saw them seeking refuge overnight in barn during a Kansas thunderstorm, and paying homage at the gravesite of Buddy Holly, one of Len's musical heroes.

Excursions to Newfoundland and the Maritimes in 2016 and 2017 gave him an appreciation for the culture and hospitality of Canada's Atlantic region. Highlights from the Newfoundland trip were a visit to the telegraph office/museum at Heart's Content, the western terminus of the first successful underwater Transatlantic telegraph cable laid in 1866; and to Signal Hill, where Marconi received the first overseas wireless telegram in 1901.

***Thanks to Keith Solomon, Len's son, for this wealth of information.***

### **Winnipeg "WG" Chapter**

**KARL THOMAS**, age 90, passed away on March 28, 2020. He was born on April 22, 1930. Karl had a varied and interesting career. The son of a Canadian National Railroad Section Foreman, he began as a water boy on an extra gang in 1944 at 14 years old during his summer vacation. He progressed as an extra gang laborer, section man rock gang timekeeper, and compressor operator.

Karl learned his Morse from Agent Archie McKinnon at Elma, Manitoba. He hired on as an Operator at Elm a on September 16, 1948, working relief positions on the Manitoba district. He was then loaned to the Alberta Division in 1949. Returning to Manitoba District in 1951. Having worked over 20 locations on both districts, he

closed out the agency at Redditt in 1975.

Karl ended his career on the Canadian National as Transportation Operator in the Chief Dispatcher's Office in Winnipeg, handling agent, operator and dispatching staff for the Manitoba District.

Retiring on September 30, 1985 at age 55 with over 39 years of service, Karl and his wife Marion of almost 40 years, enjoyed 35 years of retirement, volunteering for the Legion, community clubs and senior groups. They had fabulous vegetables and flower gardens. Karl also loved curling, hunting and fishing, enjoying times spent at their fishing camp at Brinks with family and friends.

Karl was a pillar of strength and support for his wife Marion, children Glen and Shannon, and his grandchildren and great grandchildren, always there to help in any way.

***Thanks to Bert Johnson of Winnipeg, Manitoba for this interesting description of Karl's career and family life.***

**KEITH R. MARLEY**, age 87, of Minnedosa, MB died on April 15, 2020. Keith last worked for the Canadian Pacific Railroad as a Train Order Operator in 1966, resigning to work for the Dryden Paper Mill. Retiring in 1979 from the paper mill, Keith kept up his railway connections, maintaining his Morse Telegraph Club membership.

Keith's wife says, "Railroading was in Keith's blood." She says Keith never lost his enthusiasm with anything to do with railroading. Keith established a railway display in the Franklin Memorial Hall with many rail related pictures and artifacts. He was also very involved with the Souris Railway Museum ([sourierailwaymuseum.ca](http://sourierailwaymuseum.ca)) where he gave many Morse demos to busloads of school kids who were bussed in from surrounding areas.

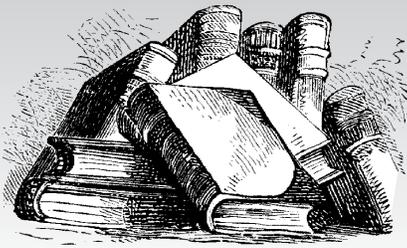
***Thanks to Bert Johnson for this valuable information.***

### **Grace M. Pond "K" Chapter**

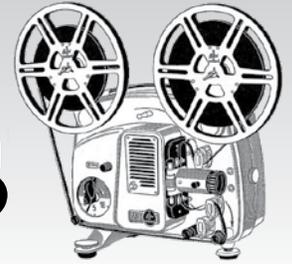
**MYRTLE R. FORNEY** of Cheyenne, Wyoming passed away this past April. She served as Vice President of this chapter for many years.

**MARSHALL G. EMM** of Aurora, Colorado, passed away this past April.

***Thanks to Don Miller for this brief information about Myrtle and Marshall.***



# J. Chris Hausler's BOOK & MOVIE REVIEWS

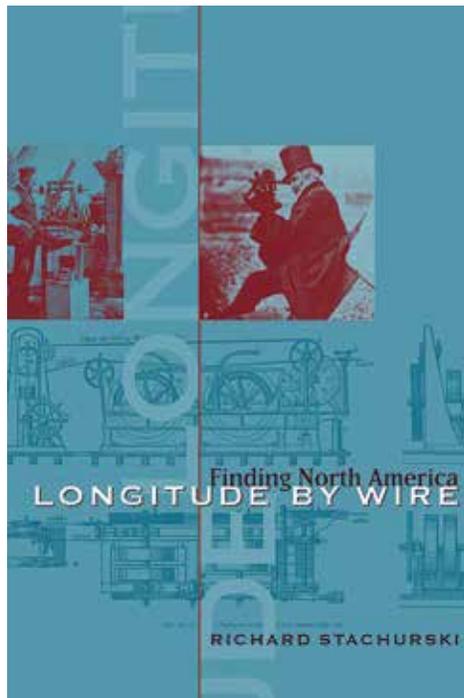


Where on earth are you; do you know? You probably do know that any location on earth can be specified by two values, “latitude” measured in degrees, 0 to 90, north or south of the equator and longitude measured in degrees east or west, 0 to 180, from what is called the “prime meridian”, a north-south line running through Greenwich, England. So, what’s your location? Today if someone asked you that question you might pull out your GPS equipped smart phone and tell them. Most GPS-enabled smart phones can be accurate down to about 16 feet. With specialized equipment, real-time accuracy down to a few centimeters is possible with GPS .

But how was one’s position found “back in the day”. This first became critical for ships at sea. Many shipwrecks resulted because their navigators did not accurately know their position. Given an understanding of the positions of the celestial bodies on the celestial sphere, latitude can be measured quite accurately even on a tossing ship. This can be done by careful observations made with a marine grade sextant of the altitudes above the horizon of stars, the sun, moon and the planets. Longitude was another problem as celestial observations east and west are based on the earth’s rotation which can only easily be known by knowing accurate time. The “longitude problem” at least for ships at sea was “solved” in the 1700’s by the development of accurate clocks known as chronometers. Today a skilled navigator using a professional grade sextant on a good day and with an accurate marine grade chronometer can determine his position within a circle of about two miles. I developed an interest in celestial navigation back in the mid 1970’s and taught myself how to do it. Even with my limited

experience and an inexpensive plastic marine sextant I was usually able to find my position within about six miles.

Such accuracy, however, was not good enough by far for land based geographers and cartographers. New MTC member Dr. Dale Lichtblau who shares an interest with me in celestial navigation sent me a book titled, *Longitude by Wire, Finding North America* by Richard Stachurski. It was published in 2009, ISBN 978-1570038013. Knowing one’s position at sea was not the only thing needed by navigators to avoid being shipwrecked, it was also necessary to accurately know what and where the “hard stuff” around the edges of the seas was located. The United States very early in its existence became dependent on maritime activities both for defense and for its commercial interests. Thus with many shipwrecks occurring, early in the nineteenth century the US government founded the United States Coast Survey. The book describes their initial efforts to document the eastern coastal environment using traditional surveying techniques .



Again, one’s latitude on land was not hard to find using celestial observations. What’s more it could be measured much more accurately than possible on shipboard by using large heavy specialized instrumentation mounted on a stable base which was not practical for use at sea. However, the issue of longitude remained. An error of four seconds of time equals an error of one nautical mile at the equator whether on land or sea. Before the invention of the telegraph, the only way to get accurate time was to carry chronometers from place to place but maintaining their accuracy when carried over rough land was even harder than when at sea. Further, even with corrections,

most marine chronometers can be read with at best an accuracy to the nearest second .

The telegraph went a long way toward solving this problem as now the time of an accurate clock at one location could be simultaneously communicated to other locations. We're all familiar with the noon clock set used by the railroads but again this was at best accurate to the nearest second. This was plenty good enough to keep trains from running into each other but not to achieve the accuracy in position desired by the geographers. The book describes how originally time was marked by someone tapping on a telegraph key but each individual did this slightly differently which led to studies made of individual error. The book goes on to describe how automatic signaling and recording devices were developed such that time errors well less than a tenth of a second could be achieved. Using such technology it was possible to measure the difference in longitude between two locations connected by a telegraph wire to a fairly high level of accuracy. If it was a direct wire, repeaters added some random errors to the time, the accuracy was even better. This was done by measuring the time of the meridian passage of the same celestial body at the two locations and then knowing the time difference between the two observations. This of course only provided accurate east-west distance between the two locations, but knowledge of absolute location was still dependent on the vagaries of the understanding of absolute time.

Now we get to the books title, *Finding North America...* Of course, we never really lost North America but to find it more accurately it was necessary to know its distance from what was called the prime meridian. The concept of a prime meridian, that north-south line from which ones distance east or west was to be measured was an old one and originally every country had their own, the US had a number of them. With Britannia "ruling the waves" however, eventually everyone standardized on the meridian through Greenwich, England and so knowing ones distance relative to that became important. Calculating this distance requires knowing the absolute time at Greenwich, Greenwich Mean Time or GMT .

Astronomers have long calculated and tabulated what is called the Greenwich Hour Angle, GHA, of many observable celestial bodies and published them for an entire year in what is called a Nautical Almanac. Although you can buy printed versions of this annual document, it is also available from a number of sources as a free download for you

armchair celestial navigators. By knowing the GMT at the time you measure the meridian passage of any tabulated celestial body at your location, the Nautical Almanac will give you its GHA at that time and thus your longitude. The Nautical Almanac is normally used in a more complex manner than this along with measured celestial altitudes to find both ones longitude and latitude. This is done in classical celestial navigation by solving a spherical triangle on the surface of the earth based on accurate times, measured sextant altitudes and data from the Nautical Almanac, but if you know your GHA you know your longitude.

We all know the story of the Atlantic cable and the book goes into a fair amount of detail about its development. Soon after it became operational it was put to use to even more accurately know how far west the US was from Europe. And so North America, by accurately knowing its GHA, finally "knew" where it was in the world. As undersea cables extended around the world, the accurate location of other places began to be better known as well.

All things come to an end. Although the telegraph greatly facilitated the geographers in their efforts to improve accuracy it was still necessary to run special wires from the telegraph lines to appropriate celestial observation posts. Further, there was that repeater problem I mentioned earlier. The development of radio early in the 20th Century came to the rescue. It was no longer necessary to run special wires as the radio equipment could be located right at the observation posts which further reduced the cost of making these observations.

As electronic development proceeded accuracy was improved even further. Radio based hyperbolic semi-automatic and automatic navigation systems were developed during World War II which also required very accurate clocks. One of the most modern of these for use on land, air and sea was LORAN-C which was still heavily in use into the 1990's. In the 1990's, however, satellite based systems were developed, GPS being the best known. It too requires knowing the time, more accurately than any of those 19th Century geographers could possibly imagine. But this knowledge of accurate time simultaneously at two locations all began with the use of the telegraph. Before Dale sent me this book I had been unaware of this effort, so thanks Dale! And for the rest of you, enjoy!

# HOUSE TRACK Want Ad Section

For Morse Telegraph Club Members

**AVAILABLE:** Book *Tales of the American Telegraph*. Issue #3 includes a photo layout. John B. Ryan, 11017 E. Sprague Avenue, Spokane, WA 99206.

**WANTED:** Re-enactors for Locust Grove, the Samuel Morse Historic Site in Poughkeepsie, NY. Please contact Andrew Stock, Curator of Education and Public Programs at a.stock@morsehistoricsite.org or (845) 454-4500 x13 if you are a Signal Corps re-enactor who may be interested in participation in history of telegraphy, including the annual Civil War weekend.

**AVAILABLE:** Period attire for telegraph operators of any era. Authentic reproduction hand crafted clothing will be made to your exact fit by a certified seamstress at reasonable prices. Several MTC members already have attire provided by this talented and well educated lady. Contact Valerie Mathers at (410) 768-3162.

**AVAILABLE:** Pen & ink railroad drawings on stretched canvas, frame print, art print and greeting cards. See these on the website of *Dots & Dashes* member Peter Hamel at Peter Hamel Fine Art American.com. Telephone (705) 472-8860.

**AVAILABLE:** Book. Hubert Jewell, President of the Washington-Baltimore Chapter, offers us his biography titled, *Working on the Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad*. This book is chocked full of facts and descriptions of railroading and of Morse code communications. Hubert's book is available from the RF&P Historical Society, Inc. PO Box 9097, Fredericksburg, VA 22403-9097 or from the web site www.frandp.org. The price is only \$25.15 postage paid.

**WANTED:** Any information about the Texas and Red River Telegraph Company formed in 1853/4. This author is completing a book on the company. Contact MTC Member D.M. Roth via email at roth.durrell@gmail.com.

**AVAILABLE:** WD-1 commo wire, steel insulated wire in coils, about a mile long. Good for telegraph demos. FREE! Contact Walt Mathers by phone at 410 768-3162 or by email at Whirlygigger@msn.com.

**AVAILABLE:** The equipment is part of a very large collection gathered over 60 years. It was from a family member who has passed but was a very long time and well known MTC member. I have included three pictures of the hardware. I would like to sell it as a collection. There are several rare west coast as well as many early rare pieces. \$12,500. Dave Ball (408) 805-0065



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*Please do not send address changes for Dots & Dashes, dues renewals, etc., to the Editor. All mailing lists and membership rosters are prepared through the office of the International Secretary.*

## Ham Radio Web Sites

For those of you who are amateur radio operators, here are four current web sites that I find useful:

[www.arnewline.org](http://www.arnewline.org)  
[www.usrepeaters.com](http://www.usrepeaters.com)  
[www.qth.com](http://www.qth.com)  
[www.qrz.com](http://www.qrz.com)

## NOTICES & INVITATIONS

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on the web at [www.morsekob.org](http://www.morsekob.org)

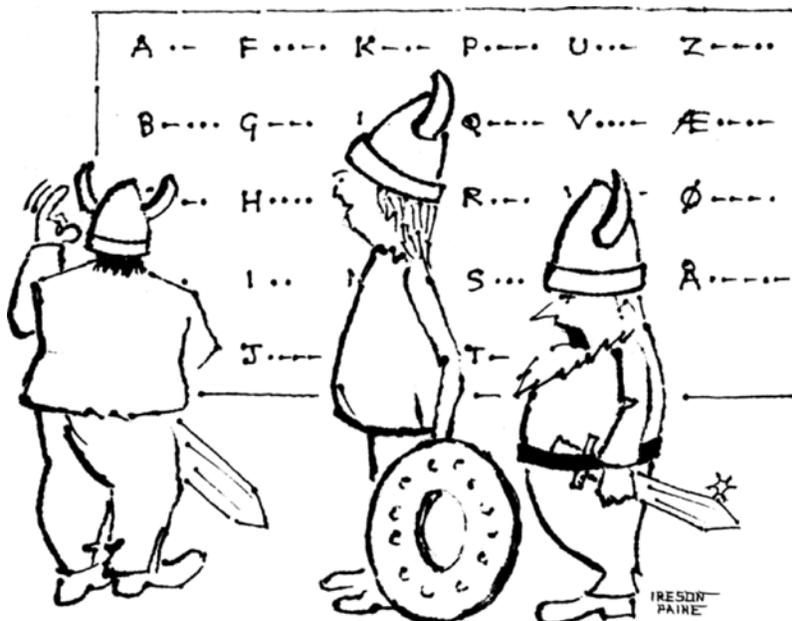
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