

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BUTTE AMATEUR RADIO CLUB

Amateur Radio is a scientific hobby followed by persons interested in the fascinating fields of radio and electronics. It's first followers were private citizens of an experimental turn of mind whose imaginations went wild when Marconi first proved the possibility of communications by wireless. In quest of knowledge and with endless new field, growing in numbers with each passing year.

By 1912, there were numerous government and commercial stations in operation and hundreds of amateur radio stations on the air. It was at this time that the government established the laws, licenses and the frequency allocations of the various radio services. In May 1912 the first radio club in Butte to be known was the Wireless Association of Montana. Roy Tysel, president; Elliott Gille, vice-president and Harold Satter, secretary - treasurer at 309 South Ohio Street. By 1919, the vacuum tube began replacing the out-moded spark-gap transmitters and the horizon expanded. Amateurs pioneered a great deal of the experimental research of the 1920's.

During this period another of Butte's first organizations of radio appeared known as the Butte Radio Club. Among it's earlier members were:: Carl J. Trauermen; Marion R. Cooper; Forest Gray (later KL7FQ); Charles Goddard and the late Judge W.E. Carrol and others. The club station W7BPF was in the First National Bank Building, Room #7 on the second floor.

We find that the nature of its activities can be divided into two parts, Post-War and Pre-War. The club was kept alive during the war years by such diversified and entertaining activities such as picnics, meetings in member's homes, the 2½ meter demonstrations and bar techniques in member's basements. These served only to hold the threads together more or less until post-war resumption provided an opportunity for the club to burst forth in a glory of VHF developments, DX conflicts and the flowering of new members. But....let's not get ahead of our story.

Just about 1930, the Butte Radio Operators Association was organized by a group of licensed amateurs and fellows who wanted to learn to be a "Ham" among those were: "Hank" Sturtevant, W7AMA; Bill Sullivan, W7BNL (W7FC); Jack Collins, W7DTL; Ralph Cook, W7DVA; Thomas Cox W7CQL; Leslie Crouter, W7CT; Edward Craney, W7AEG; Leonard Davies, W7JX; James Foster, W7BDP; Dan Gerogeovich, W7DUZ; John Gilbert, W7BI; Jack Hanley, W7CDW; George Hanson, W7BKB; John Hill, W7NT; Fred Kistler, W7EQC; Elmer Patterson, W7BST; Steve Wimsett, W7BUG; Mel Sewalson, W7BDZ; Jeff Woodhouse, W7FL; Carl Marcusson, W7AOH; Frank Laslovich, W7BTL; Mike Laslovich, W7AYR and Robert Corbett; Albert Evans; Charles Goddard; Leslie Blewett; Arthur Chevigny; Edward Leishman; Albert Matsen; Ken Payner; Danny Hayes; Harold Spangenberger; Bryon Zundell; Julius Shiner; Fred Jameson; Leys Christie; James Wimsett and many others.

The Rocky Mountain Hamfest sponsored by the Butte Radio Operators Association held June 1st & 2nd, 1935 was the first to be known with its headquarters in the New Finlen Hotel. A trip down in the Leonard Mine was one of the high-lites and a baseball game between the Phones and the CW's teams. The chairman for the Hamfest was Mel Sewalson, W7BDZ.

With the gradual return from the depression, operating activities increased and new members appeared. The present Butte Amateur Radio Club was formed on March 27th, 1936. The Charter Members were: Jim Foster, W7BDP 404 South Idaho; Jack Hanley, W7CDW 534 West Mercury; Les Crouter, W7CT 652 South Jackson; Dan Georgeovich, W7DUZ 735 Maryland; Fred Kistler, W7EQC Ramsay, Montana; Albert Evans, W7FHF 331 West Gold; Bob Corbett, W7FLB 1050 West Galena; Chas. Bleichner, W7FRS 520 South Washington; Elmer Roach, W7FXF 208 West Park; Arthur Chevigny, W7FXU 725 West Park; Harold Johnstone, W7GDB 528 South Dakota; Louis Scofield, W7CHR 821 South Dakota; John Cochrane; Taino Kaukanen; Kenneth Paynter and Larry Stimatz. The first officers were: Albert Evans, W7FHF president; Fred Kistler, W7EQC vice-president; Charles Bleichner, W7FRS secretary and Les Crouter, W7CT treasurer. At this time there were 33 licensed amateurs in Butte.

Some unusual practices were uncovered through investigating the past history of the club. For instant....one was known to have only one radio tube that would fit both his receiver and transmitter. He would use a handkerchief to prevent finger burns, the old UV-201A would be pulled out the receiver and plugged into the transmitter to complete the QSO and so forth. There were a lot of rugged characters in those days, now the average Ham feels he is lost unless he hasn't a complete set of tubes for every type of rig he has. By this time the club members were communicating with radio stations all over the world and experimenting with frequencies as high as those used by the present day television stations and beyond that too. They were building and designing their own transmitters and receivers as there was very little of such a thing on the market. Emergency tests were beginning at this time sponsored by the American Radio Relay League and club members were participating in all these events.

Around this time new and old calls came into existence such as Orval Hill, W7CJN; Gilbert Bassett, W7CME; John Pierce, W7COT; Dick Beasley, W7CRE; Tom Cunningham, W7CUK; Kenneth Horsefall, W7EIH; Bill Whipple, W7EMF; Bill Skeen, W7EPM; Albert Beck, W7EQM; Ernie Strong, W7EQP; Lloyd Tysdall, W7FSP and Dale Slabbekorn, W7HRP, most of these amateurs are still active. These were the days before the war surplus so a lot of weird experiments were tried to better the other fellow in getting on the air. The "Loop" modulation was very popular and even to this day some look with distain on such methods as NBFM, Amplitude Modulation, etc.

The club activity remained high until the break of World War II, on December 7th, 1941 when all amateur activity was curtailed, and the frequency bands were taken over by various military services. Our club remained in tack, however during the war years the club would meet with a rag-chew meeting on a Friday nite and two weeks hence a business meeting. This brought the XYL's into the organization, of course they had to do the clean-up mess after the meetings and help

plan the refreshments for the next meeting. At the home of Albert Beck, W7EQM in Ramsay, he had a BAR in his basement with a mirror and neon lights around it at the back of the bar, and those who visited his place for the first time would have his or her name with call letters on top of the bar.

During these years several picnics were held at Al Beck's property in the Galena Gluch near Basin, Montana (now known as the Merry Widow Uranium Mine) or up in the Mormon Gluch near Bernice. At one picnic there were approximately 50 people and one fellow would take the beer cap off with his teeth, of course he was missing a few teeth. A public address amplifier was made by Orval Hill, W7CJN and Leslie Blewett, by using a generator we had enjoyable music at our outings. The club purchased a 300 watt generator altho it had never been checked for its voltage until this picnic. The voltage was checked by a VOM and found it was 240 volts and Les Blewett had to make a quick trip to Butte to purchase a couple new filters condensers that blew out when we tried to play music off the turn tables, its a wonder that we didn't burn up the motor.

Through a little misunderstanding with the American Radio Relay League, Francis E. Handy, WLB DI - ARRL's Communication Manager came to Butte to straighten things out. On behalf the B.A.R.C. arranged a dinner at the Rocky Mountain Cafe in Meaderville on March 22nd, 1946. We told Teddy Traparish to give Handy, WLB DI the largest T-Bone Steak he has in his refrigerator, Handy said he never had anything like it in his life, he ate all the fat and half the bone.

At a meeting held at Al Beck's, W7EQM in Ramsay it was decided to give Jack Picard, W7JFR (disabled wheelchair victim) a Hammarlund HQ-129X receiver. Speed Horton of the Seattle Radio Company happened to be at this meeting and it was through them we purchased the receiver. To raise the money for the payment, donations were made by the people of Butte and the Seattle Radio Co. gave us a Astatic D-104 microphone to be raffled at a Hamfest to help affray the expenses, a low cost of 50¢ per chance. The receiver was given to Jack W7JFR at a meeting held at Fred Kistler, W7EQC's home 715 West Granite on June 14th, 1946. The Hamfest was held at the Mormon Gluch near Bernice on August 14th, 1946. A 3C24 transmitting tube was given to Henry Decker, W7BNU of Whitefish for coming from the farthest town and registered for the Hamfest. Women's Nylon stockings were extremely hard to purchase during the war, but Les Blewett said he would have a pair of Nylons to be raffled at 25¢ per chance and all the money from this raffle would be turned over to the club's treasury. There was close to 200 chances for the Nylons, the winning number was won by Phyllis Spring and when she opened the box, was she suprised for there was only a couple Nylon Tooth Brushes. Phyllis chased Les Blewett nearly back to Butte, well we made nearly \$50 off it for the treasury. There were over 175 raffle tickets sold for the mike and not only Jack W7JFR getting his receiver he also won the mike.

The longest meeting of the club was held at Bill Whipple W7EMF's 1953 Warren Avenue on April 19th, 1946 until 2:15 AM trying to cut a 78 rpm record of Tico-tico. Another record about this time was made by Jack Picard, W7JFR and Les Blewett who drove to the top of Harding Way and made a 2 meter contact with Orval Hill, W7CJN who was at Big Butte, a air-line distance of 14 miles, Anaconda here we come.

Dan Georgeovich, W7DUZ and Les Blewett was appointed as a committee to make arrangements for a joint installation party to be held at the Rainbow Inn in Crackerville, January 19th, 1946. This was the starting of the Anaconda Amateur Radio Club, funds were raised for the Anaconda club by asking questions pertaining to radio terms for the men and household questions for the women, all incorrect questions cost the person 25¢. The Butte officers were: Jack Picard, W7JFR president; Orval Hill, W7CJN vice-president; Les Blewett secretary and treasurer. The Anaconda gang: Ernie Strong, W7EQP president; Clifford Herberg vice-president; Marguerite Jones secretary-treasurer. During this time the Anaconda Amateur Radio Club followed the tradition of the Butte Amateur Radio Club by going to the members homes for their meetings, until we get back on the air once more.

At the end of World War II and as soon as the frequencies were returned to the amateurs, a mad scramble was made to get on the air. Bill Whipple, W7EMF had definitely established himself as a source of almost unlimited supplies of surplus radio parts, so his basement was the mecca of all rising aspirants of the art. With all the surplus items available, Whipple kept his stock remarkably well in spite of the drain imposed by the gang trying to get something to be on the air with. New calls sprang up like wild mushrooms: Jack Picard, W7JFR; Tom Rutherford, W7KKB; George Harmon, W7LER; Alva Deschense, W7LNS; Bill Blewett, W7LNU; Bob Dougherty, W7MNI; Al Elge, W7NMF; Evan Thibodeau, W7NML; Les Blewett, W7OIO; Harold Curry, W7OIP and Bob Pullen, W7PGG.

The Butte gang have participated in every Field-day since this event was started by the ARRL. The Butte gang have usually made good account of themselves as shown in the past issues of QST. VHF has been developed a long way over the years, one Ham in Butte Orval Hill, W7CJN has the distinction of being the first six meter station in Montana. Very soon after he was helped by Tom Rutherford, W7KKB and Les Blewett, W7OIO. Much activity had been developed on 2½ meters with *WERS during the war and six stations experimenting on 420 mc band, Orval W7CJN has done some expermenting with 1296 mcs.

All in all, the members of the Butte Amateur Radio Club has had a lot of fun over the years and expect to have a lot more in the future. No seems to be discouraged at the moment and the activity on all the amateur frequencies are at the all time high. The above history of the Butte Amateur Radio Club hit only on some of the high spots and of course not all who were associated with the club's behalf are appreciated, however it is felt that the traditions as laid down by the founders have been maintained through the years.....

* War Emergency Radio Service

.....Compiled by Leslie S. Blewett, W7OIO