



BARA Facts

Newsletter of the Binghamton Amateur Radio Association

April, May, June 2009

Website: <http://w2ow.org> OR <http://www.wtsn.binghamton.edu/bara>

The President's Corner

April

Like most amateurs these days, the computer is an important component in my shack. Of course I have radio control software, frequency databases, access to callsign lookup, etc. at my fingertips (although I still keep a paper log in addition to my database!). But there's another important use for the PC is my shack – buying equipment!

I certainly prefer to buy stuff in person, especially from local folks, and those who attend local hamfests will attest to my presence at every one of them. But I often seek particular items that do not seem to be available at hamfests, and online auctions (especially, but not exclusively, eBay) provide a far wider range of equipment.

As an electronics hobbyist and experimenter, I'm always looking to obtain bench test equipment (especially since I've been spoiled with the best at work!). Slowly but surely I've been acquiring a nice setup on the cheap, and last week my function generator arrived. Why do I need a function generator? So that I can test out my oscilloscope, of course? And why do I need an oscilloscope? Gotta have the basic tools! (Plus, it was *free!*). It doesn't hurt that all this equipment just *looks* cool in the shop (those of you who share my geeky button/knob/indicator envy will understand).

I took a real chance on this one - it came with the caveat, "It powers up, but I don't know how to test it, so it's sold as-is." But it set me back only \$10 (plus \$20 shipping). I took it to work for a thorough test (got a great 'scope there that's far superior to mine, and much easier for me to use), and lo & behold, it turns out to be fully functional!

I will be utilizing the device soon, when I build

my ultrasonic detector kit from Midnight Science. This kit, which takes sound above the range of human hearing (like the ones bats make) and renders it audible to human ears, is built in three stages, with instructions on testing each stage built into the procedure (it was reviewed in this month's *Monitoring Times*, for those of you who receive that magazine). In addition to being a nifty device, it also teaches some fundamentals of electronics troubleshooting, which I'm looking forward to learning.

So that's what I've been up to in my shack lately. Drop a line to Ed (KB2SCF, eplesnar@stny.rr.com) and let him know what you've been up to, so that he can print it in our newsletter and let us all know about it! — 73 de allen lutins KC2KLC

May

Yesterday BARA held it's 50th hamfest, and initial indications are that it was another successful year, with 258 tickets purchased and all indoor tables sold out. There was a downside, though, in that we had far fewer people tailgating than in previous years. This is a pattern I've noticed occurring with most small hamfests, and I believe there are two primary reasons:

Just as the Internet (and cell phones) has usurped many of the functions previously available exclusively to amateur radio, so has it cut deeply into private sales functions (such as flea markets and hamfests). The advent of eBay (and other classifieds sites) has forever changed the face of the collectibles and antiques markets, as well as revolutionizing the sale of second-hand goods. Why bother dragging all that heavy equipment 30 miles away at 5:30 in the morning (perhaps in questionable weather) so that a handful of people can view it, when one can spend a few minutes at their desk offering it up for sale on the Internet to millions of potential buyers, who can purchase the item

as soon as their need arises, and have it delivered to their doorstep?

Also, the “DIY” (do-it-yourself) mentality, far more prevalent among electronics experimenters decades ago, has shrunk tremendously. This is in part because modern consumer items, with their miniaturized circuitry and ubiquitous surface-mount components, are far less prone to tinkering and repair. Also, it is no longer cost-effective to build such things from scratch, contrary to the case years back (for example, it used to cost a lot less to build a PC from individual components than to purchase a complete system, but the cost of computers from Dell, HP, Acer and other large manufacturers has dropped so precipitously that one cannot build a PC from scratch for less than the price of a warranted system).

But there is still a small coterie of DIY’ers out there (I subscribe to *Make* magazine, which caters to this crowd). A significant majority of those who are engaged in electronics projects are interested in microcomputer control of devices and robotics. (Traditional electronic kits are still widely available; check my web page at www.lutins.org/lists/electronics.html for a list of suppliers.) These people share with amateur radio enthusiasts the spirit of exploring the vast capabilities of electronic devices beyond the consumer realm. In looking to keep our hobby (and our club) alive, we should probably be striving to reach out to this group of folks.

I’d love to hear more ideas from folks about how we can maintain an interest in the activities of our club!
— 73 de allen lutins KC2KLC

June

As most of you know, I’m a sort of “renaissance man”, with one foot in each of many different interests (in Victorian times I probably would have been referred to as a “naturalist” – someone who studies the breadth of the world around them, without the narrow specialization that most of today’s scientists are pigeon-holed into. That’s not to be confused with a *natu*rist, which is someone who likes to go without clothing!). In addition to being a ham and having an electronics-oriented career, I also play music professionally, do historic research (I used to be an archaeologist), engage (with my wife) in stereo (3-D) photography, and enjoy the outdoors (particularly hiking and bicycling).

One great thing about the outdoors in this area is fossil-collecting; the region’s valleys are choked with the fossilized remains of creatures — especially brachiopods and crinoids — that inhabited a shallow sea that existed in this area long before dinosaurs roamed the earth. A handful of these fossils can usually be found by spending a few minutes examining rocks in any local stream bed (small sections from the stems of crinoids look like little circular disks; brachiopods look like seashells).

I recently attended a gem & mineral show in Johnson City, in part to procure some more intriguing specimens (I wound up purchasing a small meteorite, and also a couple of bits of dinosaur egg shell and a dinosaur “coprolite” (that is, a fossilized dinosaur turd. Yes, you read that correctly!)

The other reason I went to that show was to seek out mineral specimens to test out my ultraviolet light and my civil-defense era Geiger counter. “What the heck might I want with a Geiger counter?” you may ask. Well, aside from it’s cool “retro” look (my wife and I also collect antiques), it (and the ultraviolet light) is part of my continuing quest to expand the capabilities of my natural-born senses to include the ability to detect things that humans ordinarily cannot (you may recall a recent article I wrote about the ultrasound detector kit I purchased – same idea).

So why would I write about all of this in a ham-radio related publication? Because, in a number of ways, my interest in radio is related. For one thing, my interest in radio stems from a fascination with forces unseen, like radioactivity, ultraviolet light and ultrasound. Also, ham radio intrinsically involves the expansion of one’s horizons, whether it be by increasing one’s technical knowledge, or through talking to people around the globe. I believe that expanding one’s horizons is always worth pursuing. I also believe that it would be worthwhile for BARA to pursue expanding its horizons as well, if it is to remain a viable organization – more on this next time. — 73 de allen lutins KC2KLC

Omar, the Ham Hermit

Continuing the saga of Omar Doradious, W2UWU, the hermit ham whose entire contact with humanity comes through his amateur radio station....

Are the voices fading, my ears growing weak, the band shifting or could there be some unheard-of reason why I’m not hearing anything on the DX bands? I loosen the latch and prop open another window in the shack. Maybe it’ll be the DX window.

“Seek you dee eks, seek you dee eks. Aquí ist visky doo oo who eww.” (There must be something in the recommended regulations to cover that phonetic; when I call DX I’m looking for anybody).

“W2UWU, here be Vnupfal dual-zero ekki ekki.”

If there was ever a time for a good ol’ QRZed, it’s now: “QRZed from W2UWU.”

“Royer, royer, olmam. [pause for static] This is Vnupfal dua-zil numzo ekki ekki. Ohh-vrr.”

“This is W2UWU. Sorry, old man. All I got was ‘over’ and so that’s what it is. I’ll get your call when it comes on the QSL card. 73. This is W2UWU listening for any amateur radio station.”

Mumbles and mutters and even the surging band noise sounds unclear. I could use any one of a thousand uncalibrated test instruments to shoot at this trouble, but I have a hot hunch. My best repair tool may not be a soldering iron or set of snips, but my trusty vacuum cleaner. I detach the speaker and carry it into the kitchen, dig out the old Electrolux (what a great name! Why didn’t they make CW transmitters rather than putting out these old spark-gap models?), whooshh!! and in a minute I’ve drawn twenty-five years of dust out of the grille.

Back to the shack, plug the speaker back in and it seems to have helped. The band noise crackles clearly, but the signals are still indistinct. My meters seem to be reading properly, if a little low. Probably needles weighted down by more collected grime. Ahh, the hermit’s life is easy but gritty.

I look inside the transceiver, lift the lid of the linear, take the transmatch from its box. (No wonder I operate from the outside.) Dust of the ages has settled on the chassis, arachnids have spun their webs amongst the coils, and each variable capacitor has crud and goo between its plates dating back to the days when they were condensers.

A little whisk with the broom could sweep it all off, but I remember a better way to cleanse the apparatus. Using my knowledge of electronic circuit design (I knew it would come in handy some day) I prepare to dust my equipment.

Gently, so as not to become hyperventilated or get anything on the log sheets, I start blowing dust, from the power supply to the oscillators, from one stage to the next, then back toward the drivers and the finals. When the dust has been collected up in a ball I sigh it over toward the linear, watching the Eimacs glow as they burn up chunks of insect matter that come in

contact with their elements. What else are heaters for?

Huffing and puffing, taking care not to inhale too deeply, I finally move the electronic waste matter into the matching network and with one good blow – more like a sudden sneeze, actually – whatever it is in that brownish-gray ball is sucked up into the transmission line and out to wherever such garbage goes.

A little silicon butter on the ball bearings in the VFO and the rig is back in working order. At least, I hope it’s in working order – in horror, I think that some of those dust particles from my solid state gear may have been integrated circuits.

But the band noise comes in sharper than ever. I hear what sounds like Finns working Basques. Knocking some potato chip crumbs off the microphone, I try another call.

“CQ DX. This is W2UWU standing by for a call.” If it works it shouldn’t take long to draw a response.

“W2UWU, this is SMØPUY. Great signal, old man. My name is Lars and I’m in Nynashamn; that’s about 40 kilometers south of Stockholm.” A quick check in my atlas tells me I am indeed receiving words as sent.

“Terrific, Lars. This us W2UWU, the name here is Omar and you’re 40 over 9. What are you running there?”

“Oh, the same old stuff, Omar. All the signals have just begun to come up. It’s very odd. I think it might be because of that mysterious brownish-gray cloud of something that just appeared over the North Atlantic.” — © 2009 William B. Jaker

A Word From the Editor

With this issue we bring you up to date with several accumulated BARA Facts. The last issue went to press just before the Hamfest and the press of business and personal matters has delayed work on subsequent issues. I hope that we are now up to date — *Eddie the Editor*

BARA FIELD DAYS AND OPEN HOUSE

JUNE 27-28, 2009

One and all are invited, encouraged, and exhorted to participate in the Field Day Event from the BARA Shack on Milks Road, Town of Binghamton.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SATURDAY, JUNE 27, 2009

10:00 AM — Setup equipment. Bring your portable rigs and antennas or use the Club's equipment.

12:00 Noon - 2:00 PM — Barbecue! Hot Dogs, hamburgers, salad, soda, etc.

2:00 PM --- Field Day operations begin!

6:00 PM - 8:00 PM — Barbecue! (More of the same!)

SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2009

9:00 AM - 11:00 AM — Coffee and Donuts.

2:00 PM — Field Day operations end

Much work has been done at the shack in preparation for the 2009 Field Day event. Our activities last year were a great success and everyone had a great time. This year promises to be even better with a barbecue provided by the Atlantic-Inland Electrical Inspection Agency. Hot Dogs, hamburgers, and soda will be provided. If you are planning to come for the barbecue, a small dish to pass would be appreciated.

If you plan to attend, please give John Rudy, WB2FQZ, a call at 669-4380 and leave a message so that he can plan for food and refreshments.

HOPING TO SEE EVERYONE AT THE 2009 FIELD DAY EVENT!

John Rudy, WB2FQZ

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P.O. Box 853
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First Class

Club Officers and Committees			
President	allen lutins	kc2klc	729-4817
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	John Rudy	WB2FQZ	669-4308
W2OW Trustee	Mel Snitchler	WE2K	723-9612
Newsletter	Ed Plesnar	KB2SCF	754-3810

Next General Meeting

7:30 PM, Wednesday, June 17th
Town of Binghamton Town Hall, 279 Park Avenue, South of the
Ross Park Entrance

Board Meeting

7:00 PM, Wednesday July 1st
Conference Room, WSKG Studios, 501 Gates Road, Vestal

Exam Session

7:00 PM Monday, June 29th
Vestal Public Library, Route 434 Vestal

BARA Dues

\$18/year Single member; \$27/year Family

Local Repeater Nets

146.73 MHz STAR Net (NTS Feeder) Every
Evening at 6:30 PM Local Time
146.82 MHz BRAT Net (Informal BARA) Sunday Evening at
8:00 PM Local Time



**BARA, The Binghamton Amateur Radio
Association is an ARRL Affiliated Club**

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