Dots&Dashes

What Hath God Wrought

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HERO IN A RUINED CITY

Written for Dots & Dashes by Pat Kelly

On the warm sunny morning of December 6th, 1917, a light breeze wafted across the port of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. A few white clouds were visible in the sky.

It was the 4th year of World War One. Halifax, being the only year-round ice free eastern Canadian port, was a bustling shipping and commercial centre. Its population swollen from a peace-time fifty thousand, it now held more than double that number of residents, troops awaiting embarkation to the war zone, sailors of merchant and naval vessels, garrison soldiers and their families as well as hundreds of workers employed in many and various industries.

Merchant and naval ships crowded the harbour, as well as local craft: tugs, lighters, cranes and barges. The harbour is one of the finest in the world. From a spacious entry area, it leads via a short strait, called the Narrows, to a huge well protected expanse of water named Bedford Basin. In this Basin merchant vessels waited to join convoys for passage overseas. Since the threat of U-boat activity had become a growing problem, convoys were at last instituted to safeguard the ships loaded with vital supplies to sustain Britain's war effort.

Arriving in Canadian waters from New York loaded with three thousand tons of high explosives including T.N.T., benzine, gun cotton, and picric acid, was the French registered ship Mont-Blanc. Late on Dec 5th she had anchored off Halifax and waited until next morning for the harbour nets to open and allow passage up the harbour, through the Narrows to Bedford Basin. At about 7:30 A.M. On Dec. 6th, the Mont-Blanc, guided by a local pilot, made her way slowly up the harbour and into the Narrows.

Among the vessels anchored in Bedford Basin at this time was the steamer, Imo, registered in Norway, but chartered by the Belgian Relief Commission to carry supplies to Europe. She was in ballast and was to load cargo in New York. Detained for two days in Halifax for neutral inspection by the authorities, she departed Bedford Basin early on the morning of Dec 6th. also carrying a pilot. The ship proceeded down harbour where she was sighted by the Mont Blanc. To onlookers, the Imo appeared to be coming very close toward the Mont Blanc. A series of whistle blasts from both ships reverberated across the Narrows as the ships drew closer. Suffice it to say that owing to a misunderstanding on the part of both ships, the Mont-Blanc was rammed by the Imo in the Narrows at approximately 8:45 A.M. Although the damage to the Mont Blanc was not severe, it nevertheless ruptured some of the picric acid and other containers which spilled in the cargo hold and caught fire from the stream of sparks generated as the two ships collided. Flames erupted and spread rapidly and within a few minutes the ship was a roaring furnace. The crew tried to fight the fire, but overwhelmed by the intense heat and flames, abandoned the ship, making for the opposite side of the harbour toward the town of Dartmouth. Personnel from the nearby naval ships as well as the harbour vessel's crews rushed to try to extinguish, or as least contain the fire but it was too late. The Imo had drifted to the Dartmouth shore and grounded there. The Mont-Blanc, burning furiously, fetched up against Pier 6 in the main dock area, next to the North part of the Halifax area known as Richmond.

Meanwhile, early in the morning of that same day, a railroad telegraph operator and dispatcher named Vincent Colemen left his house on Russel St. Leaving behind his wife, Frances, and four children, he was to relieve the night operator at the small wooden station building in the Richmond railway yards. His task was to control the huge rail traffic associated with war-time Halifax. As he relayed orders to countless freight, passenger and other trains en route to the city, a naval rating rushed in to inform him of the collision and that the Mont Blanc was

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Dots & Dashes

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Note: If possible, please include a copy of an obituary and other available information about his/her career and relationship to telegraphy and/or the telegraph industry.

Donations of telegraph instruments, telegraph ephemera, historical materials or requests for assistance with museum exhibits, telegraph demonstrations, or other consultation should be directed to:

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Position open to anyone interested

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.

In This Issue

Articles

In Every Issue

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

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

Sidewire

Comments from the Editor of *Dots & Dashes*

By Jim Wilson

Ah Spring! At last, the weather will be not too cold and not too hot, but just right. So now is the time to get out there and demonstrate the electric telegraph to the public. If your MTC chapter has no immediate plans, seek out opportunities yourself, even if it's a one man show. Make a presentation to your local ham radio club. Offer to put on a demonstration to your local Boy Scouts pack. Offer your telegraph demo for a local history festival.

People are fascinated by hearing the clacking of a telegraph sounder and by seeing a real telegraph key. Remind them that the telegraph was demonstrated to Congress in May 1844 by Samuel Morse and Alfred Vail, and that the telegraph was soon used extensively during the American Civil war (1861-1865). Tell them that without the telegraph, the Union might have lost the Civil War!

Tell them that the electric telegraph was the first practical use of electricity and thus can be considered the first electronic mail message service (e-mail service). Remind them that when the telegraph was invented, Webster's dictionary defined electricity as "AN INTERESTING PHENOMONA OF NO PRACTICAL VALUE." Did Noah Webster get that wrong?

You have a unique skill and historic hobby as telegraph enthusiasts. Yes, YOU are living history. Historical accuracy and the preservation of this unique skill and special knowledge is the goal of MTC. You are a messenger for these tasks.

Thank you for continuing your membership in the Morse Telegraph Club, the world's leading advocate for explaining the electric telegraph. You deserve a gold star!

Jim Wilson

President's Line

Jim Wades, President
Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.

Morse Day

Most MTC members will likely receive this in time for "Morse Day." This is our annual celebration of the birthday of Samuel F. B. Morse. It is also the day on which our many Chapters gather for their required annual meeting.

Older MTC members will recall the nationwide Morse circuit provided by Western Union. This circuit linked all of our chapter gatherings and once a year, the telegraph sounders would come alive with the Morse of the many men and women worked for various railroads, commercial telegraph companies, stock brokerages, commodities exchanges, AT&T and so forth. Many of these men and women are no longer with us, but the tradition lives on.

Today, one can communicate telegraphically any time of day or night thanks to the "HN" hub at Toronto and the "MorseKOB" system developed by Les Kerr. Nonetheless, our chapter gatherings remain an important annual event. If you have not had the opportunity to stop by a Morse Day gathering, please do so. It's a great opportunity to talk "telegraphy" with other MTC members.

Orlando Hamcation

The Orlando "Hamcation" is one of the larger gatherings of radio amateurs in the North America. This year, the Florida "FX" Chapter conducted a telegraph demonstration at Hamcation for the first time. The result was 8 new FX Chapter members and a number of membership applications distributed to interested parties.

The feedback received during the Hamcation event was very positive. A number of visitors said it was by far the best display they had viewed. This proved to be an excellent opportunity to reach out to a new group of individuals, many of whom have never attended the larger "Dayton Hamvention," at which we have often conducted a Morse demonstration.

Dayton Hamvention

Regrettably, we have decided not to have a telegraph history exhibit at the Dayton

President's Line continued from page 3

Hamvention this year. The costs of attending have risen each year and with increasing financial pressures due to the devaluation of the Canadian Dollar, the money is just not in the budget to justify the event this spring. Each year, several MTC members have donated a sizeable amount of money out-of-pocket to make this event possible, but even with the vast majority of expenses covered by these generous volunteers, there are still some costs associated with the event. Therefore, we have decided to pass on Dayton for 2016.

Suffice to say, we will miss seeing some of you at Dayton this year.

Dues:

Chapters (and members at large) should be making final arrangements to pay their 2016 dues. We still have quite a few members who have not renewed for 2016. Please do so in order to ensure that MTC has the necessary funds to pay for such important functions as publishing "Dots and Dashes."

Our best wishes to all for a pleasant Spring and Summer season.

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loaded with a dangerous cargo and might explode at any minute. His office was only about seven hundred and fifty feet from the burning ship. Coleman was about to leave his post, but turned back to his telegraph key. He was concerned about the incoming train from Saint John, New Brunswick, with about 300 people on board, due in the North St. station, at 8:55. He hurriedly sent the following message: "Hold up the train. Ammunition ship afire in harbour making for Pier 6 and will explode. Guess this will be my last message. Good-bye boys."

That message would have been heard by all stations for many miles around the province. Station agents promptly rushed to change their signal semaphore blades to the STOP position, thus ensuring all Halifax-bound trains were halted as they approached their stations. In addition, this message alerted the entire railway system and beyond, to the danger.

At 9:05 A.M. The Mount Blanc exploded. A terrific shock wave was generated and was soon followed by a 40-foot high tsunami which swept over that portion of the city. The ship itself vaporized, nothing being left of her except a huge anchor stock that was hurled skyward and landed three miles away, as well as a gun that was found near the city of Dartmouth. Tons of molten steel and other debris that had been flung into the air, rained down on the harbour causing death and destruction. The plume of smoke rose to 20,000 feet, and the blast was heard and felt many miles away. The Richmond area, in the northern end of Halifax was swept clean. Houses and buildings of all kinds blown apart and fires everywhere. Derelict and damaged vessels of all types drifted in the harbour. The Imo crew lost several men killed and injured. Coleman's home was badly damaged, his wife and children injured, but thankfully all recovered. His body was found in the wreckage of his station. Later his wife was presented with her husband's telegraph key, watch and pen. They were later given to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, in addition to Coleman's wallet and his little girl's damaged dress which may be viewed today.

Such was the terrible Halifax disaster that killed nearly two thousand people, injured over nine thousand and left many more hundreds homeless. More woes were to follow as the temperature quickly dropped to freezing and the next day brought a blizzard to add to the already nearly insurmountable troubles of that city. Many people suffered greatly from the weather and some died in the open spaces and parks where families sought refuge. In a very short time trains from many parts of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and other areas arrived containing much needed supplies and food. Also a train was sent from the city of Boston two days later that was loaded with all sorts of goods and personnel: doctors, nurses, medical supplies,carpenters, glaziers, tools, bedding, food and much more. Each year a grateful city of Halifax, sends a huge Christmas tree to Boston, which is erected on Boston Common to be decorated to celebrate the holiday season.

Coleman is remembered in two streets named in his honour in Halifax city.

The toll of the disaster would undoubtedly have been greater were it not for the self sacrifice of Railroad Dispatcher Vincent Coleman. May he be long remembered.

My thanks to the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, in Halifax, for their kind assistance and advice.

Letters to the Editor

February 4th

The article explaining volts, amps, watts, and ohms is appreciated [winter issue page 5]. I recently taught an automotive/electricity class about this subject by putting it into an old fashioned math story format. The results produced astonishment among the students because they could now “see” the relationships due to the visual aspects of the story.

A car has a 300 horse power engine coupled to an automatic transmission. Put the transmission in drive, lock up the brakes so the car cannot move, and adjust the throttle wide open.

The engine is now producing 200 horse powers.

The transmission cannot turn the output shaft, so the car cannot move. How many watts are produced?

Give an example of how many volts and amps are being produced.

What is the amount of resistance in ohms that could be measured?

At first it seems an impossible task. But a general knowledge of horse power and electricity is all that is necessary to answer the above questions.

Here are the answers:

Torque times RPM equals HP. In this example, rpm is zero, so torque is 300 as well as hp is 300. Volts time’s amps equal watts. Then 300 hp times 746 equals 223,800 watts.

As far as the answer goes, you just pick a voltage, such as 440 volts. Thus 440 volts divided into 223,800 watts equals 508 amps. Or if you pick 110 volts, then 110 divided into 223,800 watts equals 2,034 amps. Resistance is voltage divided by amps = 440/508=866 ohms.

So, that much power has to be dissipated in the transmission and the oil cooler because that’s where the power is being produced and absorbed. The energy is seen as heat and lots of heat is produced.

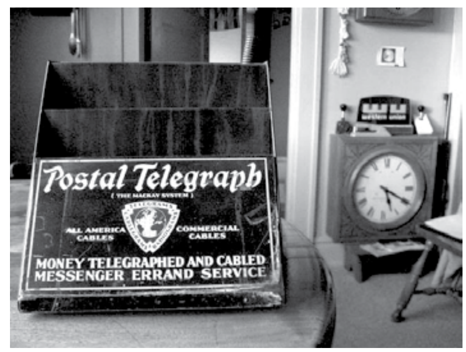
For whatever its worth, thanks for listening.

Boyd K. Ferrell

[Note: One of our members pointed out a typographical error in the original winter issue explanation on page 5 of this lesson. Watts equal amps times volts, W=IE.]

February 6th

Your discussion of the Postal Telegraph is most interesting [winter issue page 12]. One of the guys that I used to work with at Western Union, Everett Rainbow, had at one time worked for the Postal Telegraph. Everett has long closed his key, as have all of the people I knew from WU, but here is one item that I enjoyed.



Ronnie Kollmann
Newton, Iowa

February 11th

I just discovered and am now reading the “History of Telegraphy,” by Ken Beauchamp, published by the Institution of Electrical Engineers. I was able to get a copy through the inter-library loan. The book gives a more or less standard history of telegraph from the semaphore systems through electric landline telegraphy, ocean cable telegraphy, and wireless telegraphy. This book differs from the histories that most of us have read by its coverage of non-U.S. telegraph systems, especially telegraphy and the British Empire. There is a wealth of information concerning communication in two world wars that is missing from most histories of purely commercial telegraphy.

Jim Haynes
Fayetteville, Arkansas

February 11th

This humorous tale is written in memory of Donald Roy Hudson of the Winnipeg "WG" Chapter. Don was to me a character who rarely missed a chance to enlighten the folks that he worked with. When Don was a microwave technician with the Canadian Pacific Telecommunications, one of the sites he maintained was located deep in virgin growth forests near Eagle Lake in the Dryden Ontario area. If one had to venture there on a dark misty rainy might after midnight, it was quite eerie to say the least. The closer you got to the site on the narrow hilly road, the higher the trees and deeper the darkness got.

When Don was preparing to leave on his annual vacation, he considered most appropriately to ensure his sites were in top shape for another technician who would look after things while Don was away. However, it seems that Don's relief technician had a deep fetish about late nights in dark forests. I wonder how Don knew this. Thus, Don prepared this site to welcome the relief person.

In the power/engine room at this site, there was a cubicle with typical elevated door and a chemical toilet in a dark corner. A pair of boots was conspicuously placed adjacent in front of the toilet with a pair of coverall paint legs on top. Thus, a quick view from the engine room door would conclude that "someone is in there having a crap."

As "Murphy" would have it, on a deep and rainy night, and engine room alarm was received at the control center and the relief technician was quickly dispatched. As the technician arrived at the site gate, the place was in total darkness. Somehow, the usual outside light was out and the gate was locked. With only the headlights from his vehicle, the new technician opened the door to the radio room. This was quickly followed by another open door as the technician ran out the back door.

About a half hour later, the technician reported in from Dryden. He said that when he opened the internal engine room door in the building, he thought someone was at the site having "a dump," so he left in a big hurry! Later, everything was clarified to everyone's complete amusement and satisfaction. So, I wonder who unscrewed the outside lamp at the site.

Don, you were a great person to know and I always enjoyed your company. May you rest serenely in God's Peace.

Raymond T. Charron
Retired Canadian Pacific Railway
Former Microwave Supervisor,
CP Telecommunications

February 15th

I really enjoyed the column on errors in museum displays [winter issue page 3, by President Jim Wades]. I have seen a few doozies in my days including at the Edison Winter home in Fort Meyers a few years ago. Also, incorrect telegraph use in the movies is a whole topic unto itself. I remember seeing a low budget documentary about the Titanic, depicting somebody sending Morse with a sounder in the foreground.

Right here in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the public museum, there is a beautiful Knox and Shan weight driven embossing register, incorrectly described as "a repeater." I pointed this out to the museum staff. The person in charge, a sweet twenty something, was grateful but I could tell that correcting this discrepancy was not a high priority on her to-do list.

Dave Pennes, MD
WA3LKN

CHAPTER NEWS

Washington-Baltimore WA Chapter

On February 3rd, WA Chapter member Harry Dannals was surprised by a special luncheon at the Hyatt Doubletree hotel in Charlottesville, Virginia. Approximately twenty seven people attended this lunch in honor of Harry on the occasion of his celebrating seventy years as a licensed amateur radio operator. Incidentally, Harry, call sign W2HD, served 1972-1982 as President of the American Radio Relay League. Following that, Harry served for five years as president of the Quarter Century Wireless Association (QCWA). So, Harry is known worldwide. Harry will turn age 87 on April 15th 2016. He laments that the U.S. government ruined his birthday by making April 15th the dreaded deadline for filing U.S. income taxes!

On February 6th The WA chapter set up a lively display in Richmond, Virginia at the annual “Frostfest.” This active exhibit was visited by hundreds of amateur radio operators who attended this event. Manning the Morse Telegraph Club exhibit were WA President Hubert Jewell, Jr, and WA Secretary-Treasurer Jim Wilson, and the son of Hubert, “Buz” Galyen. This was our fifth year for participating at the Richmond Frostfest and it was again very successful. Dozens of sample copies of Dots & Dashes were snapped up by visitors to our colorful exhibit table. At least one new member was recruited to MTC.

"Buz" Jewell (left).
Hubert Jewell (right).

OUR HOME MADE TELEGRAPH SYSTEM

By MTC Member, Joe Flamini

Back in 1956, when I was nine years old, my three friends Nick, Gino, Frankie and I decided we were going to establish our own telegraph system. Nick's dad was my ham radio "Elmer", and helped me get my novice license. Nick had a license, and Gino was working on his. Frankie showed minimal interest in radio, but all of us had learned the Morse code, for a couple of reasons: it was cool, it was a cub scout merit badge, and most of our parents didn't know code. We all lived in South Philadelphia, in what was then known as "Little Italy". Everybody's name ended in a vowel. Our neighborhood of row houses was made famous years later by Sylvester Stallone in the film "Rocky", when he ran through it. Our dads encouraged our adventures, because learning anything even remotely scientific or technological was considered a route to a later job.

Since we were spread out over a city block and a half, we and our dads had to string a wire connecting all of our houses. This was no mean feat; the wire was of various gauges, and went over rooftops, down alleys, and even crossed Ninth Street. Legal issues weren't considered; we collectively figured it was easier to ask forgiveness than get permission (a philosophy I've embraced to this day).

Our system was a single-wire ground-return arrangement. Each of us had our own battery, key, and sounder/buzzer. When one operator pressed his key, his battery had to power all the other sounders. (Hey, it worked). Word of our little local network spread, and other guys wanted "in". Within six months, there were no fewer than nine of us on the system. (The batteries had to get a bit more substantial). We all built our own equipment, and no two setups were alike. The key was a strip of brass (salvaged from a discarded kitchen chair) with a radio knob screwed to it. The sounder was more of the brass strip with a steel washer attached. The coil was hand-wound over the course of a few evenings. The sounder strip was provided with an adjustable back contact so I could receive in sounder or buzzer mode, depending on which Fahnestock clip the ground was connected to. Since listening to CW on the air was a tone, I usually opted for buzzer mode, which also drew less current. We figured out early on that the Vail code was good for sounders, but international Morse was better suited for buzzers, and anyway that was what we used on the air.

Gino's dad bought him an actual hardware-store buzzer, and his key was a strip cut from a coffee can with a coat button cemented to it. Frankie found an old doorbell button. He disassembled it and glued a popsicle stick to the top contact, and used that as a key.

Whoever got home from school first sent out a CQ. If no reply, a dialogue ensued when the second guy got home. Everyone had a unique "fist". After two or three characters, you knew who was sending. We told jokes and collaborated on our homework. From third grade to high school we had our own local area network.

The whole experience propelled a number of us into engineering careers—myself as a telephone engineer, Gino as a military radar tech (and later a power company engineer), Nick as a two-way radio designer for Motorola. I'd like to think there're a few kids like us still out there, hacking an old radio and dreaming of the cool things they'll design someday. And I'd like to think that there are still parents out there who'll encourage and drive their kids in that direction. The technologies have grown, and today's kids must adapt, but a well-directed scientific curiosity will always be the key to tomorrow's innovations.

LOST AT SEA
SS TREVESSA

By Pat Kelly

The SS Trevessa was one of a large fleet of well known and well found cargo ships. She belonged to the Hain Line of St. Ives, Cornwall. Beginning in the early 1800's, the Hain family had been sailors and ship owners, owning mostly small sailing and trade vessels and doing quite well. About 1876, Edward Hain IV as a young man convinced his father that steamships were the coming thing and so an order was placed in 1878 with the Readhead Shipbuilding Works in South Shields, Durham, for a small steam vessel. The ship was duly delivered and was christened Trewidden. Business prospered and by 1907, 34 vessels were under Hain family ownership, spanning the seven seas. Ship names all began with the Cornish TRE.

The SS Trevessa, formerly the German vessel Inkenturm, was built in 1909 in Flensburg Germany. She was interned in the Dutch East Indies during the 1st World War, then taken over by the British Shipping Controller. Following a drydocking in Singapore, she was sent to Leith, Scotland and became part of the war reparations agreement. In 1919-20 she was acquired by the Hain Line and renamed Trevessa. The vessel was of 5,000 tons, 400 feet long with a speed of 10 - 11 knots. After a thorough refit she was declared fit for sea in all respects and began her service in the Hain Line, plying the seas carrying various cargoes She was still fitted with her original half-kilowatt German Telefunken German wireless 2/transmitter and associated wireless equipment. Her Radio Officer was Donald J. Lamont, a native of Braemar, Scotland. The ship was under the command of Captain Cecil Foster of Barry, Wales. So it was that on January 2nd 1923, she departed Liverpool in ballast for Canadian ports. Heavy weather, at times of hurricane force, was encountered on that wintery passage across the North Atlantic, but the ship weathered it comfortably enough and duly arrived in Sydney, Nova Scotia. After loading cargo there, then proceeding to Liverpool, Nova Scotia and St, John, New Brunswick,, Trevessa set course for Australia and New Zealand via the Panama Canal, stopping briefly at New York. She discharged her cargo at several New Zealand ports: Wellington, Lyttleton, Timaru and Dunedin. Next ports of call were Melbourne, Sydney, and Newcastle, Australia where she topped up on bunkers. Finally, at Port Pirie, South Australia, she commenced loading her new cargo for the homeward trip. This consisted of a load of zinc concentrates from the Broken Hill mines .Some goods such as grain and and various metal concentrates are not considered the safest cargoes to transport by ship. They can shift during bad weather thereby causing a serious stability problem. Grain, if it becomes wet can swell and open a vessel's seams. Zinc concentrates are heavy and tightly packed, becoming a sort of ooze, like half-set cement. Strict supervision is the order of the day when stowing such material, and a vigilant port officer was satisfied that all was well. The Trevessa left Port

Pirie, called at Fremantle, West Australia, for more bunkers and on May 25th began her journey across the Indian Ocean to Durban, South Africa, thence homeward via the Cape of Good Hope.

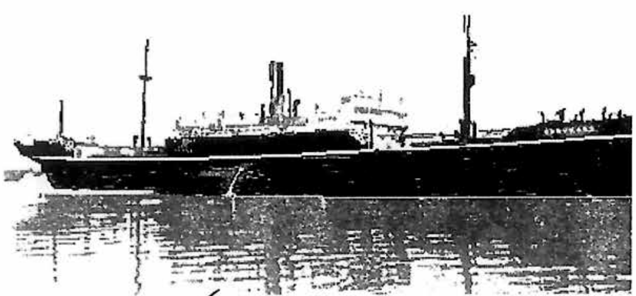
On June 3rd Trevessa encountered very bad weather. A severe gale from the west-southwest increased to a full and violent storm. Captain Foster prudently hove-to.

About midnight water was found to be leaking into No. 1 hold. Pumps were activated, but no water was ejected. It soon became apparent that ☛

the cargo of concentrates were preventing the water from entering the bilges where the pumps could reach it. The water continued to rise in the holds. The ship was down by the head, had a heavy list and was wallowing dangerously. Despite turning about to run with the winds and the seas, Captain Foster and his officers realized the ship was in a sinking condition and must be abandoned. At 1 A.M., Monday June 4trh, he ordered wireless operator Lamont to send the SOS. Lamont immediately sent: "SOS de GCVJ Trevessa., Lat. 28.45 South, Long. 85.42 East. sinking rapidly, crew taking to boats." Reception was very difficult for Lamont owing to the terrific noise of the storm and the seas washing over the vessel. A faint response from the liner Runic soon faded away, but two of Trevessa's sister ships, Tregenna,350 miles to the east and Trevcan 270 miles to the south replied and both headed for the Trevessa's position. The two starboard lifeboats were quickly loaded with provisions and the crew of forty four embarked. Captain Foster took charge of one boat with twenty men and First Officer Stewart Smith with twenty four men, the other. The winds and seas were still fairly strong but the boat's crews were able to cope quite well. At 3 A.M. the Trevessa sank. They were a long way from any land, as the Australian coast was about 1600 miles to the east, and the island of Mauritius about 1700 miles to the west. Taking into account the prevailing winds, the possibility of obtaining drinking water from rain showers, and a more moderate temperature along the route, and a better chance of encountering the Southeast trade winds, course was set for the island of Mauritius. All the next day the two boats stayed nearby in hopes of sighting a passing vessel or perhaps one of the sister ships that had answered the SOS, but towards evening they began

Capt. Foster's Lifeboat
on view at Wembley

Sunk on the 3rd June 1923 Indian Ocea



S.S. Trevessa/GCVJ

their long journey. They reckoned on a passage of perhaps three weeks to reach their destination and with luck would likely have enough rations to see them through. Of necessity, food and water were strictly rationed, each man receiving one biscuit, four teaspoons of condensed milk and three teaspoons of water. Meanwhile the two Hain ships were searching for their sister ship. They reached the scene of the sinking on June 6th and found one empty lifeboat and some other debris. By this time the survivors were about 150 miles to the west. Not much hope was held out for the missing men, but the search was continued, with the Trevcan sailing eastwards and the Tregenna making to the west on the off chance either might encounter the lifeboats. On June 9th, the Tregenna turned northeast and on June 13th set course for Mauritius. On leaving the ship, Captain Foster had no time to collect his chronometer but he had charts and a sextant to obtain a rough position from sun and stars. He hoped to keep sailing on about the same latitude of Rodriguez Island which lies some 330 miles east of Mauritius. If either Mauritius or Rodriguez was missed, Madagascar, more than 1100 miles away off the east coast of Africa would be the next landfall. Not a happy prospect. Mauritius, Rodriguez and Reunion are the three main islands that make up the Mascarene Islands in the Indian Ocean, and are close to the same latitude, although quite a distance apart.

Both boats were of equal size but the Captain's boat had a larger sail. This resulted in much difficulty in keeping close to one another. After about nine days at sea, it was decided that they would separate and sail independently, and in a few hours were out of sight of each other. Before long they met with the southeast trade winds which ☛

helped to carry them towards their destination, although wind and seas were still quite strong. With no rain falling for some days, and the water ration so skimpy, the men suffered from thirst and some of them, against the Captains and Chief Officer's orders, drank sea water. Several of them died as a result. During the passage, passing rain showers helped to slake the men's thirst somewhat. On some days heavy rain squalls gave the men a much needed drink.

Several simple and ingenious ways were devised by the crew of catching rain water and directing it into containers for future use. Days of flat calm where the heat became intense, the men were lethargic and had to use all their facilities to remain awake and alert. Then came periods of rising winds and high seas. Both the Captain and First Officer believed in keeping the men occupied and each had to take his turn rowing, cleaning the boat, tending the sail, and performing small but necessary tasks. A supply of cigarettes, tobacco and matches cheered the smokers on board, but after a while with mouths dried by lack of moisture, this lost its appeal. Added to this, cramped conditions in the boats made sleeping or resting difficult.

The stone memorial dedicated to the survivors of the **Trevessa** shipwreck in 1923, stands on the edge of the beach near St Martin's cemetery. The cargo ship sunk in the Australian waters and a life boat carrying 17 survivors miraculously drifted to Mauritius, into the Bel Ombre lagoon. After surviving for 25 days with rations of water and biscuits, the sailors who had witnessed the passing of many of their crew, were welcomed by the Sugar Estate's Administrator M. Robert, and restored to health by the people of Bel Ombre.

Trevessa survivors Memorial
Mauritius.

Captain Foster as a ship's 1st Officer had been torpedoed in the first world war (incredibly, twice in one day), and had spent ten days in a lifeboat before reaching the Spanish coast. This experience in navigation, distribution of rations, boat handling, ect,. was to stand him in good stead when he was in Trevessa's lifeboat.

After a week at sea, all the men of the Trevessa were suffering from shortage of water, but on June 14th a huge rain squall overtook them and enough water was collected for all hands to get their fill. First Officer Smith's boat was at this time about one hundred miles to the south of the Captain's track. Day followed day and the crew suffered at times from intense thirst. Cramped conditions in the boats took their toll, sapping the men's energy. The Captain and 1st Officer were very pleased with the behaviour of the crew, who, although at times suffering greatly, never failed to fulfil their duties.

However all things come to an end and land was sighted by the Captain's boat after twenty three days at sea and a few hours his boat rounded the north end of Rodriguez Island. They were hailed by a fisherman who guided them through the reefs to the jetty at Port Mathurin where eighteen men were escorted ashore and well cared for by the local population. Captain Foster then contacted Britain by cable and gave an account of his voyage. So many of the local population gave unsparingly of their time and effort to help the new arrivals, who after their long and difficult voyage, presented a very scruffy and salt caked appearance.

First Officer Smith in his boat, experienced much the same problems as the Captain and his men. Variable weather, shortage of rations and the general discomfort of a long voyage in a cramped and overloaded boat.

On June 23rd after careful calculation,,they believed they were in the area of Rodriguez Island, but as no land appeared, course was changed to Mauritius. Soon, as the voyage extended, some of the men became very weak and incapable of carrying out their duties. Later several died of exhaustion and fatigue.One of the casualties was Mr. Mordecai, 2nd Engineer, who, caught unexpectedly by a heavy sea, making the boat lurch, throwing him overboard. In spite of putting the boat about, he could not be reached. This cast a pall of gloom over the whole of the boat's crew, as he was a tower of strength in the lifeboat.

On the afternoon of June 25th, land was sighted and proved, thankfully to be the island of Mauritius. The sixteen remaining men were taken to facilities ashore where one man died. The landing was at the village of Bel Ombre near the southwest corner of the island. Soon all survivors were reunited at Mauritius and after their recovery their conduct received the highest praise from the formal Court of Inquiery.

On arrival in England Captain Foster and 1st Officer Smith were received by the King and Queen.

Capt Foster did not survive long.

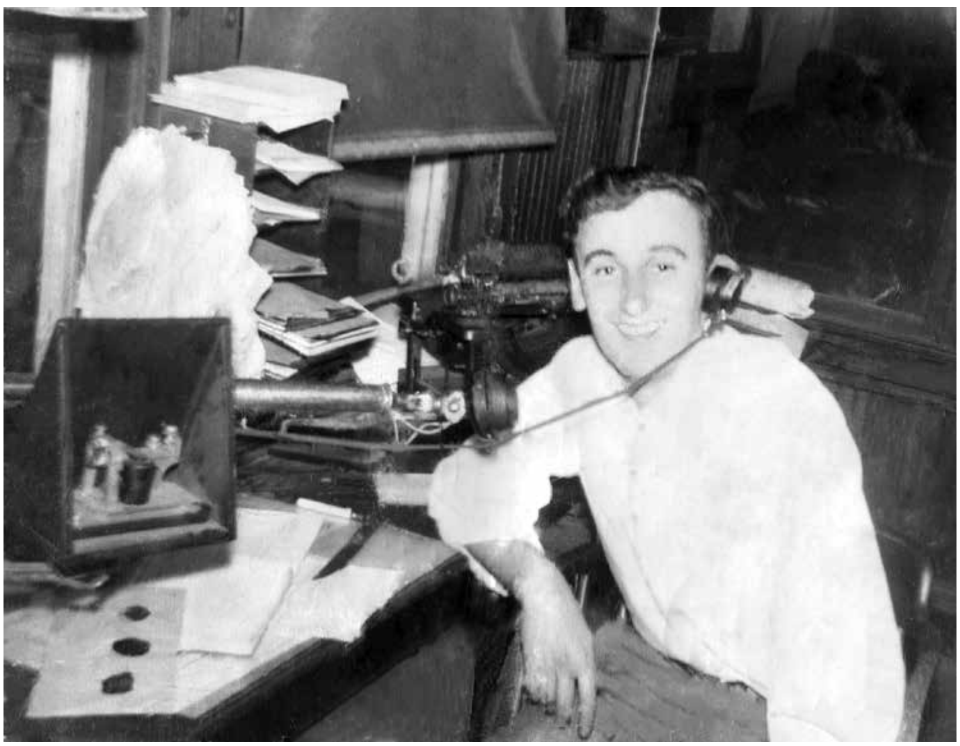
MY MEMORIES!

By Bernard Rochefort

After reading the very interesting stories of Wally Footz, Dots and Dashes issue Winter 2015-2016, about the stories of two women in a difficult situation.

I had a similar experience, but first let me introduce myself.

I was born on May 20, 1930. After learning telegraphy at the Sudbury School of Telegraphy, I started to work as a railway telegrapher on April 12, 1946 at the young age of not quite sixteen years old, on the Canadian Pacific Railroad, in the Schreiber Division, even though I was under the required age of eighteen years old. There was a big shortage of telegraphers, as many previous telegraphers were still in the Armed Forces. The railroad did not hesitate to hire me. When applying, the clerk must have realized that I was not eighteen because before I got the line asking my date of birth, he said that I had to be eighteen years old. So I did what he expected me to do and wrote May 20, 1927. But this lie gave me some trouble later. A year after I started I missed delivering a none restricted order to a passenger train, causing delay to this train. There was an investigation and I had to admit that I had falsified my age and was taken off the job. It thought me a lesson about train orders that I never forgot. By then, most telegraphers had returned from the Armed Forces and that did not help my cause. The superintendent investigating, told me to come back when I was eighteen but rather than wait I went to CN at Capreol.



Much like the CPR, He referred me to his clerk. I falsified the age on application form again but not near as much as I had just turn seventeen years old by then. The chief dispatcher gave the application form a glance and told his clerk to issue me a pass to the Hornepayne Division. I worked sixteen years for the CN Raiway.

I must say that I do not believe anyone ever started as a railroad telegrapher in a more dramatic way than I did. On April 10, 1946, at fifteen years old, I went to the chief dispatcher's office in Sudbury and told him that Mr. Way, instructor at the telegraph school said that I was proficient enough in telegraphy to work as a railway telegrapher. I thought that he would send me to a station somewhere to train further to be an operator, but not so. When I told him of my training, he told me that there was a big shortage of telegraphers especially in the Schreiber division. A lot of the telegraphers of the past were still in the armed forces. He sent me to one of the office clerks who handed me an employee form to fill out. He must have sensed that I was not eighteen because before I got to the line asking my date of birth, he said that I was supposed to be eighteen years old. So I wrote May 20, 1927, doing only what I thought he expected of me. He gave me a train pass and told me to be on local train No. 1 the next morning for Schreiber. I recall asking him where Schreiber was and he told me exactly this: "Just up the line a bit." ☛

We arrived in Schreiber around eight o'clock and I went to the dispatcher's office, as I was told to do in Sudbury. I explained to one of the dispatchers what I was there for; without any discussion, he told me that it was too bad that I did not get off at Mobert where we had gone by a couple or so hours before. He said that the operator, who was working there alone, required relief. He went on to say that there was a freight train leaving Schreiber immediately for the East and the conductor of that train was in the operator's office downstairs. He told me to go down, he would give the conductor a message to carry me to Mobert and drop me off there.

We arrived in Mobert about two hours after midnight. The operator who had been working there knew that I was coming. He had his bag ready and he got on the same caboose that I had just come off.

I went in a very dimly lit office, with just a coal oil lamp burning. I expected to see someone there, but there was nobody. I stood there kind of dumbfounded and wondered what I had got myself into.

Things had happened so fast. I could hear voices on the telephone and the chattering of the telegraph relay. I put the earphone on my ear and listened to a conversation that I thought was the train dispatcher and a station somewhere. Suddenly, I heard a voice saying, "Hello Mobert". I answered that it was Mobert but my voice was not transmitting. Then suddenly, there was a loud ring on a telephone box on the wall. After a minute or so, it rang again with the voice saying "Hello Mobert". I tried answering again, but still no sound went through. I started searching for a way to answer the telephone. Then I saw something like a pedal on the floor under the desk or table. I pressed on it and mumbled something, and the telephone finally transmitted. I said in a very timid voice, "This is Mobert."

The dispatcher asked who I was and I told him that I had just got off the freight train and there was nobody inside the station. He wanted to know where the operator on duty was. I told him that I believed he was the person who got on the same caboose I just recently departed. I went on to explain my journey, from Sudbury to Schreiber and finally the dispatcher sending me to this new post. I also told him that I was fresh out of telegraphy school and had never worked as an operator.

"You mean to say that you do not know anything of what your duties are?"

I told him that was correct.

There were a few unprintable words followed with "I don't believe this."

He asked me if I knew how to operate the train order board. I said no and again a few unprintable words followed with "I just do not believe this." He said that they would have to get someone there immediately, but that wasn't so easy. He must have talked to someone in his office because a little later, I heard him give a message to the operator in White River for a westbound freight train telling him to stop at Mobert and for the conductor to come in and explain a couple things to me. Then he said, "Did you hear this Mobert?" With that same timid voice I said, "Yes." "Just sit tight until he gets there," he instructed, adding that there would be another eastbound freight train going by and to let him know the time, which I did.

A couple of hours later, the westbound freight train rolled by and the caboose stopped close to the station. The conductor came in, smiling a bit, went to the telephone and talked to the train dispatcher. Then the conductor explained to me the position of the train order board: the green board, yellow board, red board, East and West. He explained to me about the signal lanterns by the door and that I had to inspect every train that went by and if I saw anything wrong, to give the caboose the stop signal by turning the lantern sideways back and forth and the conductor would stop the train. I had heard the term "hot box" but had never seen one.

The conductor said that the train dispatcher would not give me any train orders for the time being and they would get someone here as soon as possible. The conductor got back in his caboose and the train left.

It was getting daylight by then. A couple of trains went by and about eight o'clock the chief dispatcher wanted to talk to me. He was very pleasant, more so than the train dispatcher. He said that he had been briefed, but I should give him the sequence of events again. Afterwards, he said that there had certainly been a lack of communication. Also, that there was a nice chap on his way to work with me and to just hang in there until he arrived.

At about noon, a young man arrived, and, yes, he was a nice guy. He was not much older than I was but he had been brought up in a station where his father was the agent operator. He explained to me pretty well everything I had to know to work there. When the dispatcher told you to copy an order for, say, a westbound train, the operator had ☛

to tell him that he had displayed the west board before he proceeded to give you this order. At one point, a train order had to be copied. He had me do it and repeat it to the train dispatcher. Every train order received had to be repeated back to the train dispatcher.

He showed me how to put the order or orders along with the clearance form in a hoop. On this particular day, it was a non-restricted order, and the train picked it up on the fly. It had to be hooped up to the engine crew and then the caboose, with a hoop that they caught. If they missed it, they would have to stop and back up, and believe me, nobody was happy then. I recall how nervous I was. Back on the telephone, I reported the train went by at such a time and the dispatcher acknowledged.

On April 12, 1946, I made a time sheet for that day, the first day of a 17-year railway career - a little bumpy at times, but interesting.

In those days, on the main lines, there were block stations at about every 30 miles or so. We often referred to them as bush stations, a name I thought was much more appropriate.

On the Canadian National, where I worked most of my railway career, there was no automatic block light protection. If a train got in trouble, the tail end brakeman would immediately have to go out and flag against any following trains unless this train had rear end protection by train order. These stations were there in part to keep the prescribed distance between trains to give the preceding train enough time to go out and flag if it did get in trouble.

Most of the railroads in Canada were single track and these block stations were necessary to give orders to trains, where to meet opposing trains, to wait for opposing trains and much more. There were often several trains on the subdivision at any one time. All went well if everything went according to plans, but all it took is for one train to get in trouble for any reason, it would have a domino effect and the train dispatcher would have to change the meeting points of all opposing trains. Then maybe another train got in trouble, and the train dispatcher had to start over again. Even the best dispatchers would get irritated; the nervous ones were sometime hard to work for. When these problems happened, every block station on the subdivision would get involved. Restricted orders were given to trains whose meetings were pulled back and none restricted orders were given to trains whose meetings were advanced.

They were small stations with a bunk room or bunk house at the back to accommodate three operators, an outhouse at the back and there was also a well, to get water from with a rope

The telephone system was often in trouble with static noise, and the train dispatchers and the operators would revert to telegraph. I also worked for a while on the branch line from Longlac to Thunder Bay. There was no telephone on that line and all communications between the dispatcher and the operators were by telegraph. In a way it was kind of neat, as one knew what was going on all the time, without having a telephone in its ear. But I must say that working especially the night shift, without hearing a human voice all night felt kind of strange.

In early spring of 1950, The Grand Trunk Western a subsidiary of CN were losing their men that were in army reserve to go in active duty in preparation for the Korean War. The Grand Trunk gave me letter to give to the US immigrations that my job was necessary, and I quickly had a visa to work in the US. I reported to the Chief Dispatcher at Battle Creek Mich, the head office of The Grand Trunk.

The Grand Trunk Railway was a very busy railroad in those days. It was double track from Port Huron to Chicago. There were a couple passenger trains, travelling from Toronto to Chicago each way, and a lot of freight trains, most of them came from Eastern US. These trains came across into Canada at Buffalo NY or Erie Pa, then to Sarnia and back in the US across the tunnel Sarnia to Port Huron, then West to Chicago on The Grand Trunk Railway. The shippers of Eastern US like this route, because it got their goods to Chicago and West much faster than going around Lake Erie. This route was very popular until the container services and piggy back of these containers started to be the norm of many shipments. The tunnel from Sarnia to Port Huron was not high enough to accommodate these double decker container cars. The CN wanted to make this tunnel higher but there was much pressure put on the politicians by certain lobby groups to stop that project as they wanted trains to go around the South side of Lake Erie. This gave employment to US people and was good for business.

While in the US, I worked for a short time at Port Huron. Then two months on a work gang near Flint Mich. These gangs were known as Gandy Dancers, I do not know where this term originated. There were about two hundred men. ☛

Other than the foreman, equipment operators, welders etc., they mostly came from skid row Chicago. They were not railway employees as such, but were contracted by a private company. I believe this company got some reimbursement from the government to give these men some work. These men often worked one day and quit, the company paid those men cash.

When I worked there, my duties were to work with the train dispatcher, giving the foreman authority to go on the main line to work.

Another duty was to give orders to trains to use the opposite track to go around the work gang and back on its track at the other end. I also handled the cross over switches. At noon, if there were no trains I went and eat in the dining car with the workers. Let me tell you, I heard some pretty sad tales. Later when I worked at South Bend Indiana, I went to Chicago and walked on skid row just to see what it was like. I never forgot such a sad place.

When the gang was finished there, I moved on, I worked at different places, Battle Creek for one. Another place I worked that was peculiar was the tower at the West End of South Bend Indiana yard which is situated at the East end of the Kankakee swamp. In this swamp, there are poisonous rattle snakes and they often came out at night to lie against the warm rail. A trainman had been bitten in the past and died. So the railroad had set up a tower about twelve feet above the ground, with a man to operate the switches with a system of arms and long rods to each switch. The yardmaster talked with the train dispatcher, and he would transmit to the operator, to let a certain train out, or what track for a train to go in. When going to work there we had to walk about a hundred yards from the parking lot to the tower. We were told to carry a good flashlight and have an eye for these snakes. Working the night shift, I did see a couple snakes. They were not very long, maybe twenty four inches with big body of about three inches.

In March 1951, I returned of Canada, just when the forty week came in effect. Working in the US had not done my career much good other that the experience of living there. Unfortunately it did hurt my career as I lost my seniority. Although the Grand Trunk was subsidiary of CN, the union did not allow a member to carry his or her seniority from one railroad to the other. So I had to start a square one. Had I stayed on the CN, I would have had enough seniority to start to work as a relief train dispatcher, something I would have like to do.

I started to work, what was known as the Allandale Division, headquarters at Barrie Ontario. I worked for a while at the telegraph desk beside the Chief Dispatchers office, copying or sending messages and reports for the Chief Dispatcher and Superintendent. I later worked a job that was kind of different. It was at the Army Camp Borden railway station, during the Korean War. There were two telegrapher positions there. One was to copy and send messages for the army. Some of these messages were coded messages. They were in groups of four letters and a little hard to copy as there was no meaning to these messages. I recall, when copying these code messages, I was kind of nervous, as I thought the safety of the whole country depended on these messages.

The other duty was the movement of troops. The army gave its requisition to the railway agent and he passed it on to the operator. Sometime it was for one army personnel, sometime a few going to different army bases for courses. Sometime, it would be a whole train load. We had to work with the Toronto office to arrange sleeping accommodations for these personnel on whatever train, they travelled.

In August 1952, I heard from a friend working in Montreal, that the Montreal Terminal was a good place to work. I contacted the chief dispatcher there and not very long after I reported to him. And yes, it was a good place to work on the spare board. There were multiple jobs there. Some were train order stations, some telegraph offices, some passenger ticket stations. The chief seemed to have confidence in me and did not hesitate to send me to any of them. I often worked a night shift at one place and somewhere else for the afternoon shift, or vice versa. Although we were on a forty hour week, I mostly worked two or three extra shifts a week, and therefore making pretty good money.

Things were pretty good in Montreal and I thought, I had finely found my niche, no more moving, but I was in love with a girl near my home town in Northern Ontario, I had met a year before. She would have like to come to Montreal but felt that she had to stay close to her widowed mother. So I returned to the Allandale division, and we got married in August 1954

I had worked as a vagabond for eight years, moving from one place to another, always on the spare board. It was time to have steady job and not too far from my wife s mother. The first one to come along was a swing job relieving the operator at Bracebridge, Huntsville, the agent at Scotia ☛

and the agent at Sundridge. We made our home in Huntsville. I kind of liked that job as they were all day jobs except for an afternoon shift at Huntsville and I was off on Sunday.

In 1955, there was worldwide girl guides' jamboree at Sprucedale some fifteen miles North from Huntsville. There were some five thousand girls from almost every country in the world, all in their native garbs at the camp. The railroad took me off my regular job and sent me there for five days. A tent was set up at the edge of the camp, with a small desk, a chair, a telegraph key, sounder and a typewriter. I did not have very much to do but copy and send a few telegrams mostly for the camp officials. Many of these girl guides had never heard a telegraph sounder before and came to my tent, and were interested in how telegraph work.

To get back to an elderly lady who led me to write this story, after reading the interesting article of Wally Footz. Shortly after I was married, I was working at Scotia on a Saturday, when train 41 from Toronto to North Bay Ontario., arrived about four pm, and an elderly lady got off the train. She asked me to telephone her son at Seguin Falls, a small isolated community, some thirty five miles from Scotia to come and get her. When I tried to call him, the telephone did not work. The station was due to close shortly after train 41 for the week end. I could not really leave her there, so I telephoned my wife and told her the situation, and told her that I would be a little late getting home. What I did not realize, was that the road to Seguin Falls was a country gravel road, with a lot of wash boards, pot holes and sharp curves. It took well over and hour to get to her son's place. We chatted a bit on the way, she told me that she was from Southern Ontario. She said that she stayed alone after her husband passed away but now found it hard to live alone, and had decided to visit with her son and daughter in law while deciding her future. I told her that I had just been married. When I arrived at her son's place, I thought that she or her son would offer to pay me, but she only said, thank you very much, I will pray for you.

When I arrived home after eight o'clock, my wife was so worried. She asked me how much she had paid me, and I answered, well nothing yet, but she said that she would pray for us. Maybe she did, because Rolande my wife and I had fifty nine good years together, until she passed away in July 2013.

Going back to the railroad. About the time we got married, I realized that the days of the railroad telegrapher, would soon come to an end. I had gained a ton of experience, working every kind of telegrapher jobs, but it would not do me much good. It is hard to believe, that in less than ten years, the passenger trains were replaced by buses and airplanes, a lot of the freight went to trucks, telegrams to fax machine etc. Worst yet the movement of trains by train orders would soon be done by remote control. No need for telegraphers any longer. I thought about applying for a train dispatcher position that would continue to exist. But I would have to start as a relief dispatcher, be away from home, and later would have to move. So I decided to retrain as an electrician by correspondence course. I left the railroad in 1963 and I started an electrical contracting business. I later added plumbing and heating. I had a very successful business for thirty five years and I passed it on to my son and daughter in law. I have no regrets leaving the railroad as we were so much better off financially.

I am now in the twilight of my years and it is only natural and normal to reminisce about one's life. I think about my departed wife, my family, the business I was in but I must tell you, that I often find myself thinking about the railroad especially the steam era days.

Maybe I should not say this, but looking back, I am glad that I falsified my age when I first started to work, as it gave me the memories of working three years during the steam era.

Then diesel engines began replacing the steam locomotives and somehow to me the railroad was never the same after that. When I think about handing up a hoop, only three feet away from a fast moving locomotive in the dark, often with steam blowing in my face, hoping a crew member would catch the hoop and then the same with the caboose. I may say that it is more than a memory; it is a feeling that is hard to describe or forget.

I recall pusher locomotives on duty twenty four seven, to help freight trains over a certain steep grade. I also recall, on a couple occasions, a locomotive ran out of water and had to dump their fire. It became a dead locomotive and had to wait for another locomotive to come and get this train.

I recall the section men going to work on a pump car pulling a trolley behind then, a man patrolling the track on a scooter, the steam locomotive with the engineer called a Hogger. There are many interpretations as to why they were called hoggers, but the one I believe came from the firemen on hand firing engines, who gave to engineers for using excessive steam, making them shovel more ☛

coal to keep up the steam. These so call hand bombers were later replaced by larger locomotives with stokers. King of the rails, you will only see today, standing silent at museums across our land, much like monuments, witnesses and guardians of our history.

I am more inclined to remember, working in the bush stations, than working under the bright lights. I recall working in these stations, it was so quiet, often only the pendulum of the clock broke the silent, hearing the kettle steaming on the coal stove, sometime the telegraph relay, a message going through, or a couple telegraphers communicating together. I recall the blowing wind, the howling of the wolves, sometime far, sometime close. Hearing one long whistle of a locomotive in the distance, then another long whistle when close, to let the operator know their train was approaching. It reminded me of The Hank Williams lyrics, "I heard that lonesome whistle blow".

I recall, working in this North Country, when it was so cold. It is said that some places like Hornepayne can at times be the coldest spots in Canada. One knew it was cold, when on a clear night, there was an atmospheric haze or fog hanging lazily above the earth and the mercury in the thermometer almost disappeared. Even the wolves were quiet. It almost froze my face, my hands and yes other parts when I had to go and hoop up an order to a train, or simply inspect a train going by.

I recall, on an extremely almost dangerous cold night, a freight train pulled in the siding to get out of the way of a passenger train. The locomotive looked like a steaming glacier. The engineer or hogger and the front end brakeman came in the station, a smell of stale alcohol, long whisker and eyes that look like two pee holes in the snow. The engineer a Scotsman sat in the only chair and the brakeman laid on the floor and was soon snoring. I asked the engineer if he wanted a cup of coffee and he replied, do you have anything stronger laddie? I assured him I did not. He told me that they had been on the road for some twenty hours with so many problems and had only travel a hundred miles. In those days, train crews worked as long as they could stand up. Let me tell you, they were plenty tough those men. On this night the engineer told me that they had some spirit but sadly did not have anymore.

There was much solidarity or fraternity amongst telegraphers, we all knew each other, if not by appearance, but we knew their voices, their character and their telegraph ability. We could often identify a telegrapher just by the way he or she transmitted the Morse code.

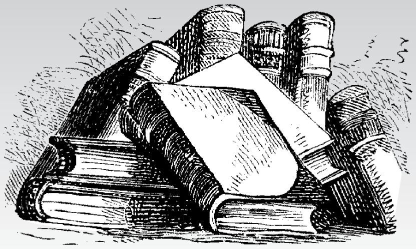
A few years ago, I joined the Morse Telegraph Club, Maple Leaf Ontario Chapter, at North Bay Ontario, (Mr. Pierre Hamel Vice President of the local chapter.) just to keep up with what is going on the railroad. I always enjoy reading the Dots and Dashes Publications, the stories in it, the silent keys. I remember many of these members, almost all the ones on the CN from Toronto to Northern Ontario.

I may add that this article is taken in part from an auto biography book of my personal life, written and printed in 2014, titled Bernard Rochefort, Nipissing Junction and Beyond.

Welcome Aboard!

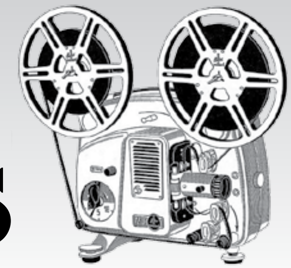
New Members of MTC

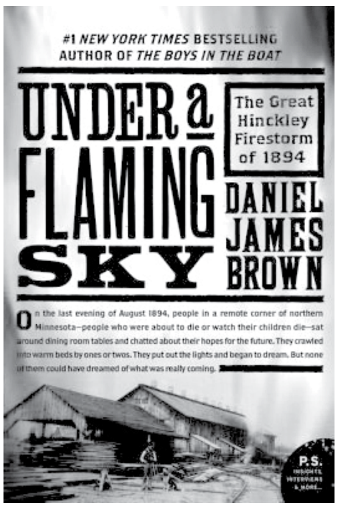
John Zimmerman K4ZI Tavares, Florida	James F. Bishop W4CYF Pensacola, Florida	Vincint Kondracki KI4VSR Saint Cloud, Florida
Gary Liljegren W4GAL Melbourne Florida	Victor R. Johnson, Jr. K4GXY Panama City, Florida	Kevin J. Kalil KF4ZQK Jacksonville, Florida
Russell Turpin WA4KCN Benton, Arkansas	Maria Estolt Brandon, Florida	John M. Glassberg NE0E Boynton Beach, Florida



J. Chris Hausler's

BOOK & MOVIE REVIEWS





This column is dedicated to long time MTC member Eugene Wood of Madill, OK. Last fall, Mr. Wood sent me a letter recommending a book for me to review. The title of this book is *Under a Flaming Sky, The Great Hinckley Firestorm of 1894* by Daniel James Brown. It was published in 2006. Hinckley is a small town in Minnesota about halfway between Minneapolis and Duluth. At the time of the fire it was located at the junction of two railroads, the St. Paul & Duluth which ran between those two cities and the Eastern Minnesota, a Great Northern branch running between St. Cloud and Superior, Minnesota. A large lumber mill was located just north of Hinckley and was the principle reason for the town's existence as such mills were for many other small towns in that area of the country at that time.

The business of these small towns was to harvest the extensive virgin white pine forests then present in that area. Foresting practices at the time could be summarized as going after the fast buck, cutting the desirable trees and leaving behind wastelands covered with unwanted branches and other combustible material. The foresters would then move on to the next site with no attempt at remediation or other forest management. As a result, small wild fires were not all that uncommon and the smell and even the appearance of a little smoke in the air did not raise any real concern among the populace. Unfortunately for the folks of Hinckley, and that part of Minnesota in general, the summer of 1894 had been especially dry and that day, September 1st, a large weather front passed causing high winds out of the southwest. These conditions caused two smaller fires to merge southwest of Hinckley and become a raging firestorm which destroyed a number of towns that day but seemed to especially target Hinckley.

After providing the above background information the book tells the story of the events of that day, and the several following, including many individual stories both of those who survived and those who didn't. Among those who didn't was the telegraph operator at Hinckley for the St. Paul & Duluth, Tommy Dunn, whose charred corpse was found after the fire had passed. In fact a number of telegraph operators are mentioned as well as several railroad engineers and crews who endangered their trains, waiting to the last minute to haul as many as possible away from Hinckley to at least a modicum of safety although many were still badly burned. Hinckley today has several roads named after these heroes, including one for Mr. Dunn.

Another telegraph operator mentioned was Olive Brown. Operating at Rush City on the St. Paul & Duluth south of the fires she stayed at her post for more than 36 hours straight helping to control the relief efforts as well as deal with telegrams from the distraught relatives of the residents of Hinckley and the other small towns affected. There is even a photo of her in the book.

Today, the Eastern Minnesota through Hinckley is a branch of the BNSF Railway. The St. Paul & Duluth from Hinckley south for some distance is operated by a short line railroad. North of Hinckley all the way to Duluth the former St. Paul & Duluth is now the Willard Munger State Trail, said to be the longest paved trail in the US. A year after the fire, the St. Paul & Duluth rebuilt their large depot in Hinckley which today houses the Hinckley Fire Museum (hinckleyfiremuseum.com).

I found this book thoroughly engaging and think you will too. In addition to the stories of this horrific event, the author also discusses the state of weather forecasting, burn treatments as well as forest management at that time as compared to modern times. It also looks at human nature ☛

and even contemporaneous labor relations to help analyze why folks behaved as they did. It points out that many more folks could have been saved had they realized the danger they faced and had acted accordingly. The author's grandfather and great grandmother were two who escaped the fire but certainly not unscathed. I found copies of this book available from several local libraries, from which I borrowed a copy, as well as from Amazon. It's ISBN-13 is 978-1-59228-863-2.

Gene Wood also used to write an occasional column for *Dots & Dashes* titled, *Morse in the Movies*. His column from the first issue in 1993 mentions a "western" film of which I had never heard before, *Whispering Smith* released in 1948. Smith, played by Alan Ladd, is a railroad special agent for the fictional Nebraska & Pacific. He is called to come to division headquarters in Medicine Bend to chase down a gang of bandits, the Barton Brothers, who have been raising havoc with the railroad. There he meets up with a childhood friend, Murray Sinclair, played by Robert Preston, who is the wrecking boss for the railroad. Sinclair and Smith also share a love interest, Marian, played by Brenda Marshall. However apparently Smith didn't whisper loudly enough and she married Sinclair some years before. It is made obvious however that now reunited she wished Smith would have popped the question and Sinclair slowly becomes aware of her continued infatuation.

Smith also becomes aware that his old friend Sinclair has become involved with a bunch of questionable characters headed up by one Barney Rebstock, played by Donald Crisp. Further a new "college educated" superintendent has arrived on the scene, George McCloud, played by John Eldredge. McCloud discovers that when Sinclair cleans up a wreck he gets off with the contents of wrecked cars, even if those contents are still in sound condition, and demands it be stopped. Sinclair, who has been making good money, apparently much more than his railroad salary, selling these goods as well as giving them to his workers takes offense and McCloud fires him. Smith tries to intercede in his friends behalf but to no avail. Sinclair is thus driven further into the arms of his questionable friends and he goes from cleaning up wrecks to causing them and then getting off with the contents.

Relatively early on in the movie, Smith takes care of the Barton Brothers but is called back to address this new problem of all the suspicious wrecks. This leads to an eventual showdown between old friends Smith and Sinclair with Marian in the middle. Of course this leads to the expected outcome. Want to know more? Buy the DVD, it is available from Amazon, some used copies for just pennies.

Where's the telegraph? Early in the film on a rainy night the three Barton brothers show up at a lonely way station, Coyote Creek and ask the agent/telegrapher (uncredited, but played by Irving Bacon who also played telegraph operator Casey in the film *Kansas Pacific* that I reviewed in the summer 2015 issue of *Dots & Dashes*) when the next train will arrive. Once again Bacon is dressed in sleeve guards and a visor. When he asks them "which direction?" and they say "either", he becomes suspicious and looks up at a conveniently placed "wanted poster" showing the three Bartons. He turns to warn the approaching train but is shot dead. All during this scene we hear and see a local telegraph sounder in an acme pedestal resonator clicking away with what sounds like good Morse. In a brief scene, which made this telegraph instrument collector wince, one of the Bartons takes the butt of his pistol and breaks the sounder and resonator hood into pieces with a couple of blows. Now, of course, this is intended to signal to the audience that telegraph communications from Coyote Creek have been disabled but we know better. In fact, there is a brief indistinct view of a relay or relay KOB adjacent to the pedestal resonator and the Bartons don't touch this. Oh well. In this office we also see what appear to be several gravity cells on a shelf.

The only other telegraph scenes are a little later when Sinclair has taken to wrecking trains. There are several short scenes in rapid sequence where we see a telegraph message being written about the wrecks superimposed over the image of an Acme pedestal resonator clicking away, again with good sounding although indistinct Morse. In addition, both the little station at Coyote Creek and the larger one at Medicine Bend have the classic blue enamel Western Union signs mounted on them and the Coyote Creek station is equipped with a target type train order signal.

In researching this film I found that it was based on a book of the same name published in 1906 and written by Frank H. Spearman. Spearman, a bank president in real life, was noted for his fictional westerns many of which were railroad related. The well known *Held for Orders* is another of his books. *Whispering Smith*, the book, can be downloaded for free from Google Books at: books.google.com/books?id=_rNEAAAAIAAJ or reprints can be purchased from Amazon. The book tells essentially the same overall story as the film but with many additional subplots, characters and differences in detail. Also some of the names have been changed. For example, *Whispering Smith* is "Luke" in the film but "Gordon" in the book and Marian is spelled "Marion" in the book. It is a good read and there is also some mention of the telegraph very early in the book. Interestingly, apparently Spearman based his fictional *Whispering Smith* on several real Union Pacific RR policeman including one named, James L. "Whispering" Smith.

I also learned that the book had earlier been made into several different silent films but have been unable, so far, to find any available copies. In addition, there was a TV series in the early 1960's with the title *Whispering Smith* In this series however, Smith, played by W. W. II hero and Medal of Honor winner Audie Murphy is a Denver, CO police detective, having nothing to do with the railroad or the telegraph. It appears all this series really took from the book is the title.

"30" SILENT KEYS

News of our brothers and sisters who have closed the key

Maple Leaf ON Chapter

Paul Leger, age 83, of Temiskaming, Quebec, died on January 19, 2016. Paul was born on February 17, 1937. He learned his valuable telegraph skills at Bearn, QE. Paul began his career as a Canadian Pacific Railroad telegraph operator in 1951. Then he worked at various stations in north Ontario and Quebec. His first station agent position was in Nimegos, ON in 1956. By 1974, Paul had become a relief dispatcher in Sudbury, Ontario. After 39 years of service with the CPR, Paul retired in 1991 in North Bay. Then he became active in the Maple Leaf Chapter, northern division.

Thanks to Don Laycock for this information about Paul. Don adds," He will be missed by all."

Members at Large CG Chapter

Edward J. Ryan of Peoria, Arizona died in 2013 but this is our first notice about his loss. His amateur radio call sign was N7VEX.

Thanks to Mary Smith in Arizona for this brief notice. Mary says that Ed was, "her best friend's husband." She had only sketchy details but stated that Edward never had any children and that, "He was a big [telegraph] enthusiast." Mary's best friend has since passed away.

CD Combs Memorial FN Chapter

Larry Harvey, age 82, passed away on July 7, 2015 in Perry, Iowa. He was born on July 26, 1932 in Manila, Iowa to Fred and Marie Harvey. Larry graduated from Bayard High School in 1950. He then attended Business College for telegraph in Chillicothe, Missouri and later attended Drake University in Des Moines. He started work as an agent for the Milwaukee Railroad on November 7, 1950 in Linden, IA. After serving in the U.S. Army during the Korean War, Larry returned to Perry, IA and in 1955 he became a train dispatcher. Larry and Shirley Gripp married on September 9, 1956 at the Bayard Methodist Church. They had two daughters.

During his railroad career, Larry worked in Perry, Bensenville, IL, and Ottumwa. He retired from the railroad in 1983 when the dispatcher's office moved to Illinois. After retirement, he worked at the Rowley memorial Masonic Home in Perry until 1992. He was active in the Methodist church, Otiey Masonic Lodge in Perry, Eastern star, Ames York Rite, and the Za Ga Zig Shriners in des Moines. He was also a member of the Texas Nail Collectors Association, National Association of Railroad Passengers and the Perry American legion. Larry also enjoyed hunting, dishing, attending sports events, traveling and collecting railroad memorabilia and coins. The railroad was always of interest to him.

Thanks to Richard Behrens, Secretary-Treasurer of the C.D. Combs Chapter, for this interesting and detailed information about Larry.

Margorie Rowen, age 88, of Denison, Iowa passed away on December 12, 2015. She was born in February 1927 on a farm northwest of Clarks, Nebraska. ☛

Marjorie graduated from Central City High School. Following graduation, she attended the electronic Radio and Television Institute in Omaha, Nebraska. Upon completion of her schooling in November 1944, she spent three months student training in Newell, Iowa with P.L. Rowen, her future father-in-law. She worked the "swing" job between Cherokee and LeMars, Iowa. Margorie sold tickets, called train crews, copied consists of what loads were coming in on the meat trains from Sioux City and Sioux Falls. She would ride the train back and forth between LeMars and Cherokee to work the first, second, and third shifts in these towns. She worked this job for three years, ending in February 1948.

In August 1947, Margorie married Loys (Skeeter) Rowen. They celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary shortly before Loys death in August 2012. They made their home in Cherokee, Iowa from 1950 until 1974, where Loys worked as a ticket clerk, telegrapher, and called trainmen for work. In 1974, Loys was elected General Secretary Treasurer of the Brotherhood of Railway and Airline Clerks (BRAC). This new position took them to Bourbonnais, Illinois. Loys retired in 1986 and they moved to Denison in 1989. After his retirement, Loys served several years as the president of the Morse Telegraph Club FN Chapter. Marge was also an active member of the chapter and remained active by sharing Dots and Dashes with family and friends. They both enjoyed demonstrating their telegraph sending and receiving skills with demonstrations at Cub Scout events, elementary school classrooms and local festivals. Family and friends enjoyed "hearing" these skills at their 60th Anniversary celebration, when Loys sent Marge, "I love you" in Morse code.

Marge contracted polio in 1952. She was hospitalized in Sioux City, Iowa for seven months and then treated at Warm Springs, Georgia, where President Roosevelt had his Little White House for six months. From her wheelchair, Marge was able to keep house, raise their three children, attend adult education classes, be active in Girl Scout programs, create many Christmas ornaments for her family, knit and crochet blankets for grandchildren, sew most of her clothing and have a smile for everyone. Marge lived according to their motto: "There is no such phrase as I can't." Her fierce determination, intelligence, curiosity about life and her love and devotion to her family and friends has been an inspiration to her many friends, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Thanks to Richard Behrens, Secretary-Treasurer of the CD Combs Chapter for this interesting life story.

Twin City MS Chapter

Phillip Orville Halvorsen, age 88, died on December 2, 2015 at the Christian Community Home in Osceola, MN. He was born on June 1, 1927 in Greenwald, Minnesota. He attended school in Swatara, MN and graduated from high school in Hill City, MN. Phil enlisted in the U.S. Navy when he was a senior in high school. After his discharge from the Navy, he graduated from Telegraph School in Minneapolis, MN and then worked as a Depot Agent for the Soo Line Railroad. Phil retired after 42 years service with the Soo Line Railroad in September 1987. On June 18, 1950, Phil married Gladys Nelson. They moved around with the railroad, settling in Milltown, MN for their 25 years. Their sons were Jerald and Jeffrey and their daughters were Julie and Joy. Phil was an active member of Milltown Lutheran church, a member of the fire department, and treasurer of the Senior Citizen Club for 15 years.

Thanks to Jeff Halvorsen, Phillip's son, for this information about his father. Jeff adds, "Dad loved his time with the Soo Line and talked about it often."

Vancouver DI Chapter

Earl Baynton, age 87, of Surrey, British Columbia passed away on January 19, 2015. He worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway for 36 years.

Thanks to Lavina Shaw, Secretary-Treasurer of the Vancouver Chapter for this brief notice.

Winnipeg WG Chapter

Daniel George Kollesavich, age 79, passed away suddenly on March 19, 2016. Dan was born on May 5, 1936 in Sturgis, SK. At age 11, Dan was a helper to the Canadian National station agent. This is where he became a proficient telegrapher using Morse code. This skill led Dan into a career with the Canadian Pacific Railroad as an operator, station agent, and train dispatcher. He worked the territory from Thunder Bay, ON to Alberta.

In retirement, Dan did Morse telegraph demonstrations at railway museums and for various other organizations. He conversed with fellow telegraphers on the wire each night and served as Secretary-Treasurer of the Winnipeg Chapter of the Morse Telegraph Club.

Dan was also passionate about hockey and baseball. In 2010, Dan and his four sons were inducted into the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame. He umpired baseball in Winnipeg for over 20 years. Donations in Dan's name are appreciated, sent to the Lake of the Woods Railroaders Museum, PO Box 832, Kenora, ON P9N 1L9.

Thanks to Lavina Shaw for this interesting information about Dan.

OFF TO A BAD START

By Russ Nicholls

Having just finished my training on Morse code at WX Tower in Welland, the New York Central Chief Operator in St. Thomas Ontario called and told me to report for duty to relieve the "midnight to eight operator" in Tilbury. My transportation to Tilbury would be the caboose of a Pere Marquette westbound freight. That in itself was a memorable experience.

On arrival, the crew slowed the train to allow me to get off. I walked into the station and was greeted by the day operator and the "four to twelve man" enjoying a few beers around the old pot bellied stove. I can vividly recall, even though it was sixty seven years ago, the day man saying: Russ, there's one thing you must always remember when you work on the railway: "You see a lot and say a little." One didn't have to be a genius to see through this statement. This same gentleman was called into the head office a short time later and was assigned to the lofty position of trainmaster. I believe there is a saying that, "it's not what you know but who you know."

Being with the two lads for the balance of their shifts gave me a clear understanding of what I was expected to know and do on the midnight shift. "Just keep the trains moving." No problem, I thought. Finally the old Seth Thomas clock on the wall indicated midnight, so I was on my own. Yes, I was nervous. That old station with its oiled floors creaked and cracked; otherwise it was so quiet you could hear a mouse sneeze.

About 2:00 a.m. the dispatcher's phone rang. I nearly jumped out of my skin. He said, "I have an eastbound freight out of Windsor ahead of #364. I'd like you to run him in there at Tilbury." I knew what to do. I reached up and pushed the calling on button (Distance Signal), which would display yellow to the approaching train. Ah, I thought this was really railroading. I kept going outside to look up the track to see if I could see its headlights.

Finally she came into view, initially just a spark, and then as it came closer it got brighter and brighter. Then, as I expected it to slow down to take the siding; she roared past me full tilt with absolutely no intention of stopping. I did everything that I was told, but . . . what should I do now?

High on my list of priorities was to grab my lunch bucket and head for the door. I was supposed to report to the dispatcher when he was in the clear at Tilbury, but that sucker got away on me. Finally, I got enough nerve to report him.

The dispatcher took my report and began to laugh. What he is laughing about, I wondered. After his laughter subsided, he said, "Don't worry, he got your signal OK." It sounded to him like the lads you relieved didn't tell you that there are five water track pans on the Canada Division and Tilbury is one of them. Steam locomotives have to have water and the railway has installed track pans every so many miles apart. So the engineer when running on the mail line simply drops his scoop and in about five minutes or less has filled his tender with sufficient water to take him on to the next set of pans. After his tender is filled, he will stop at the other end of the passing tack and back into the siding. You make no mistake, he assured me. I thought, "Wow, what a relief!"

So much for my first day on the job.

DO YOU KNOW?

Our home planet Earth is part of the small planetary system circling our life giving middle-aged sun. Do you know how many other planetary systems are now known to exist?

Using advanced modern telescopes, the number of other planetary system known to exist is 10 to the 22nd, which translates to about 8,000 billion billion. This figure was just published by David Eicher, editor of Astronomy magazine. Yes, this number is difficult to comprehend.

When the Holy Bible stated that God created the heavens and the earth, most of humanity viewed the heavens as irrelevant specks of light in our night sky. Now we know better. Planets circle most of these specks of light and it is predicted that many of these planets are inhabited. The future will bring us exciting new discoveries.

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: 2016 Railroad Calendar. The Inland Empire Railway Historical Society offers a stylish 2016 wall calendar of historic railroad events. To order a calendar, write to the IERHS at P.O. Box 471, Reardan, Washington 99029. Their annual membership is $25.00 which includes a calendar. The IERHS is a 501-c nonprofit corporation, so all donations are tax deductable

AVAILABLE: I can duplicate small wooden resonator boxes for both 4 ohm and 30 ohm main line sounders. You will varnish or paint these to suit your desires. The cost is $25 each. Milton Hegwood, 206 Kleven Avenue, Culbertson, NE 69024, telephone (308) 278-2152

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 chalked 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.

AVAILABLE: Crests, "Order of Railroad Telegraphers" with emblem in the center, $12 each. Email Mary Roy at terttu@shaw.ca or mail Mary at 3874 Winlake Crescent, Burnaby, BC V5A 2G5, telephone (604) 420-1292.

AVAILABLE: Vintage Rule Books of North American Railroads, at least 30 volumes, as far back in time as 1890. To purchase this valuable set of historic documents, call, e-mail, or write to James Gaw at 54 Colonial Drive in Kemptville, Ontario, Canada K0G 1J0, j.gaw@bell.net, or (613) 258-0243

AVAILABLE: Old telegraph and railroad books. For a list of these items, send a SASE to Eugene Wood, 104 Sunset, Madill, OK 73446. (Eugene doees not have an email address).

AVAILABLE: "Morse code machine" and old billing forms from the estate of Jack Griffin. Phone Kay Griffin at (321) 231-0447 or write to Kay at 12239 Montevista Road, Clermont, Florida 34711.

AVAILABLE: RR car passes & trip passes, also old Union (ORT) cards, (some over 100 years old), Postal & Western Union paper items and some WU copied on RR telegram blanks. Send a SASE for a list to Gene wood, 104 Sunset, Madill, Oklahoma 7346-2051

Keep in Touch...

Your participation in *Dots & Dashes* is important. We need your stories, club news, announcements and reminisces to keep it lively and interesting for everyone.

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For membership changes, address updates, dues and other information dealing with membership or with chapter operation, contact your local Chapter Secretary or:

International Secretary-Treasurer

Position currently open to anyone interested

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.arnewsline.org
www.usrepeaters.com
www.qth.com
www.qrz.com

Notices & Invitations

Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.
Dial-Up Information

U.S. (KB) HUB
1-269-697-4506/4508/4513
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CANADIAN (HN) HUB
1-888-822-3728 (toll free)

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