

More About the Old Kentucky Hams Club of the 1960's

by Mike Carroll, W4AEE

Although he lived in Madison, Tennessee, my grandfather, Harry Carroll, W4AEE became fast friends with several Ham Radio operators in KY during one of the Ohio River valley floods of the late 1930's when they all assisted the U.S. Corps of Engineers by passing health and welfare traffic on 75-meter phone.

Harry continued to have QSO's with those fellas until WWII shut everyone down for the duration. After the war, they resumed regular QSO's on various 75m. frequencies.

After meeting informally at various QTH's and other locations in south central Kentucky, the original group (then numbering only about 12) started an annual get together each June at Mammoth Cave.

The OM's, and some of their XYL's (my grandmother, included), would begin the weekend by meeting Saturday afternoon at the old, white, wood-frame Mammoth Cave Hotel. That evening, they would gather after supper and spend several hours sitting in the rocking chairs and rag chewing on the long, front porch. (I remember a tame raccoon that would come out from under the porch and gently take from hands whatever morsels of food he could get.)

On Sunday morning after a big, Kentucky ham breakfast, the guys would go over to the parking area behind the hotel (and some years to the parking area near the old cabins on the other side of the present cave visitors center) where a rather small tail-gating hamfest would commence. Usually other area Hams who had not stayed over the night before would come, too. Then late on Sunday afternoon, the group would disperse to journey back home.

By 1961, Harry and his friends had transitioned from AM to SSB and started QSO's early mornings on 3932 kHz. where they pitched their radio tents for 15+ years. They called themselves "*The Kentucky Corn Crackers Net.*" or just "*Corn Crackers.*" Whoever showed up first was official net control for that very informal gathering of OMs throughout Kentucky, S. Indiana and S. Ohio, W. Virginia, and N. Middle-Tennessee.

Later on, about the time I was first licensed in 1963, Harry and his 3932 buddies (by then they had become my friends, too) decided to form a rag-chewing radio club, calling themselves the "*Old Kentucky Hams.*"

In his professional life, Harry was a printing engraver, lithographer, and offset plate maker. So, the group naturally turned to him to design and print the club membership certificates, a copy of which currently appears on the The Old Kentucky Hams webpage, which I recently discovered. The finished certificates were sent to the club president who was, at the time, Johnny Gerard, W4TFK, in Frankfort. Johnny filled in the blanks and signed the certificates proudly distributing one to each member. I and my granddad were "charter members." I still have his and my certificates at my QTH in Franklin, TN.

Early OKH group members included:

W4ADO Friday Wolfe, Harlan, KY
W4AEE Harry Carroll, Madison, TN (originally 5BB, Shreveport, LA, 1924)
W4AZY Carl Newman, Peewee Valley, KY
W9BC Bev Howard, Evansville, IN
W4CMP Alec Carter, Bowling Green, KY
K4CSP Sadie Jo Miller, Hopkinsville, KY (daughter of W4NDY & W4NOW)
K4EI Neal McGown, (previously 9FZL, W9FZL & W4KBY), Bowling Green, KY
W4JHU Marvin Carver, Russelville, KY
W9KVE, Lefty Covert, Evansville, IN (former chief of police)
W4KWO Doc (Asa) Adkins, Lexington, KY (an MD, as I recall)
W4MWR Ernie Farmer, Lexington, KY
W4NDY Doc (E. A.) Strode, Winchester, KY (a dentist and husband of W4NOW)
W4NGZ Scotty (Col. Hansford D.) Scott, Auburn, KY (former mayor & owner of Scott's Auburn Mills)
W4NOW Blanche Strode, Winchester, KY (wife of W4NDY)
W4ODK Adolph Abraham, Lexington, KY
W4QJU Bud (Vincent) Wahking, Louisville, KY
W4TFK John Gerard (previously W9TFK), Frankfort, KY (former mayor)
WA4TTC Sherman Ferguson, Central City, KY
W4YYI Earl Jagoe, Owensboro, KY
W4YZF Hugh Garner, Louisville, KY
WA4VCL, Mike Carroll, Goodlettsville, TN (now W4AEE, Franklin, TN)

[As an aside, I will mention that John Gerard, W4TFK, one of the OKH group's founders, was the young man who crawled into Sand Cave to string a phone line down to (fatally) trapped, Floyd Collins. Floyd's family, the doctors, hopeful rescuers and a number of newspaper reporters talked with him via that phonenumber until the poor guy died from hypothermia and dehydration on Feb. 13, 1925. Floyd and his predicament were an international media event. Also noteworthy are two Hams who were responsible for getting the news reports quickly from the cave to the outside world. One set up a portable, CW station at the scene while the other located his rig at the Western Union telegraph office at Cave City. These men were Homer Ogden, 9BRK, and Basil Rauth, 9CHG, both of whom had come down from Jeffersonville, Indiana to help out. -W4AEE]