



# Dots & Dashes

*What*

*Hath*

*God*

*Wrought*

The Official Publication of the Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.

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## WATCH OUT, JOHNNY. IT BITES!

*By John M. Barrows, Former Editor, Dots & Dashes*

“Watch out, Johnny. It bites!”

With that warning came my introduction to the telegraph.

Starting at the age of about five I frequently accompanied my dad to work, who was then a toll testboardman in Helena, Montana for the telephone company. He also worked on the side for the Great Northern Railway as an extra telegrapher and ticket agent.

When a babysitter was needed, I often went to work with my Dad, both at the telephone office and at the depot. I was soon taking him lunch at the depot, from our house a few blocks away. I was a particularly curious kid and like many that age, the tickety-tick of the telegraph was mesmerizing.

Standing on a chair at the telegraph desk at the old Helena GN passenger depot I reached over to Dad's bug, an old Vibroplex that he had found stashed away behind a drawer in the depot at Clancy, a few miles from Helena.

It was then Dad shouted his warning.

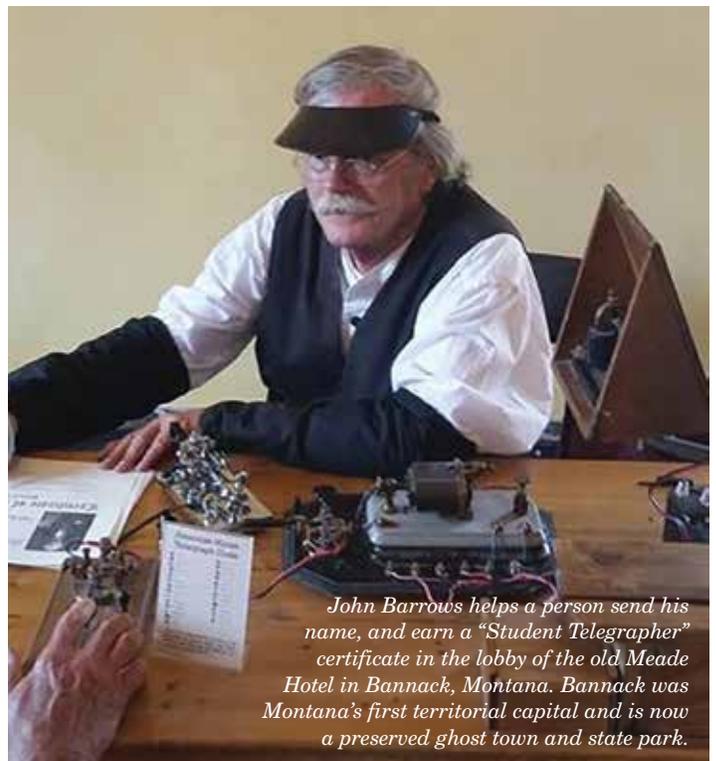
It was too late. Curious five-year old fingers opened the cut-out lever on the bug and began exploring that shiny, fascinating machine. And curious fingers went where they should not have been.

Owww! And then tears. That old bug did indeed have a powerful bite!

My Dad was a very competent telegrapher. His father had been an engineer on the Chicago and Northwestern Railway in South Dakota and my Dad's ambition had been to be an engineer like him. Reality struck soon. After his mother died in 1923, when he was 13, he was sent to live with his grandmother in Helena. It was then he had to wear

glasses, and with it went the dream of being on the right-hand side of an engine. His grandmother consoled him, noting that a worthy goal would be learning to telegraph and becoming a train dispatcher.

He taught himself to telegraph, and at the age of 15 went to work for the telephone company as a messenger between the testboard, and its multiple telegraph lines, and the vice-president's and business office, a few blocks away. His telegraph skills got him his first job at the testboard, and on the side he worked for Postal Telegraph and Western Union as a telegrapher, covering special events



*John Barrows helps a person send his name, and earn a "Student Telegrapher" certificate in the lobby of the old Meade Hotel in Bannack, Montana. Bannack was Montana's first territorial capital and is now a preserved ghost town and state park.*

# Dots & Dashes

The official publication of

## The Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.

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

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

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

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

## Morse Telegraph Club

### Landline Morse is Alive and well!

**Dots & Dashes newsletter**  
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# Sidewire

Comments from the Editor of *Dots & Dashes*

By Jim Wilson



Into every life a little rain must fall. That wise prophecy has proved true for me so far during this year. In February, I broke my left leg. In May, my sister Caroline's husband, Dave, died. He was a talented computer engineer. In July, our family dog, Alex, died. We sure miss our little twenty-pound furry friend. Then our septic system backed up, partially flooding our basement. The following week I had to get a root canal on tooth #30. So, I predict that the remaining months of this year shall likely be much better!

How are you doing? I'd like to hear from you. Keep those letters to the editor and original articles coming. Our readers like to read your unique stories.

Especially interesting in this issue are the Letters. The Morse Telegraph Club sure has some intelligent and interesting members.

Among the articles in this issue is a story about the goof-up by the USPS in printing a postage stamp about the 150th anniversary of the Transcontinental Railroad. Also is a short story about the fourth nation to land on our moon. Our moon is becoming a junk yard!

And the "Biography of a Telegrapher" for this issue is a well deserving lad, John Barrows, former editor of *Dots & Dashes*. John continues to educate and inspire the public. Read John's story on the front page.

*Jim Wilson*

# President's Line

Jim Wades, President  
Morse Telegraph Club, Inc.



## Telegraph History Presentations

Recently, your International President along with Don Mahoney of the Milwaukee-Madison Chapter and Stuart Nelson of the Twin Cities Chapter demonstrated telegraphy at the Soo Line Historical and Technical Society convention. Friday night and Saturday morning consisted of a telegraph demonstration during which we answered many questions about railroad telegraphy in general, and Soo Line and Milwaukee Road operations in particular. During the Saturday banquet, your International President presented a talk on telegraph history entitled "Canst Thou Send Lightnings."

The demonstration and banquet talk were very well received. MTC even obtained a new member or two. However, the most important result was the fact that a large group of individuals will know more about the history of telegraphy and telecommunications.

We have numerous younger members who were not employed in the telegraph industry but who nonetheless have an interest in telecommunications history. Your knowledge can do much to promote our historical and educational mission. Consider presenting a talk at a local railroad historical society meeting or at an Amateur Radio Club. ➡



President's Line continued...



One also needn't be an operator to demonstrate telegraphy. The "MorseKOB" program along with a terminal unit and a few nice telegraph instruments can do much to illustrate the technology of telegraphy.

We need to pass on our history so that it will be respected and preserved by future generations.

### *Santagrams*

Believe it or not, the Christmas Season is not far away. Your International President has already scheduled Santagram transmission activities at various holiday events. Ham radio CW operators can do this too using standard telegraph instruments and the Continental Code. While not 100-percent accurate historically, the average citizen cannot distinguish between the two codes anyway! The idea is to explain and demonstrate telegraphy.

Using MorseKOB, one can also create a virtual gateway to an experienced CW traffic operator, who can refile telegrams to the Radio Relay International (formerly NTS) traffic network for routing and delivery. It helps to know how to use a bug, but one could do so with a standard key as well.

*Let's spread the word about telegraphy! That's our mission.*



### *Interviews*

Over the years, we have tried to interest various organizations in the idea of interviewing members who worked in the telegraph industry. The result has been disinterest. Therefore, over the next year, your International President will be reaching out to members in search of interviews. The idea is to preserve as many recollections of the telegraph and railroad industry as possible. When possible, the interview will be in person and videotaped. Other interviews may be conducted via telephone or audio recording.

### *Photographs:*

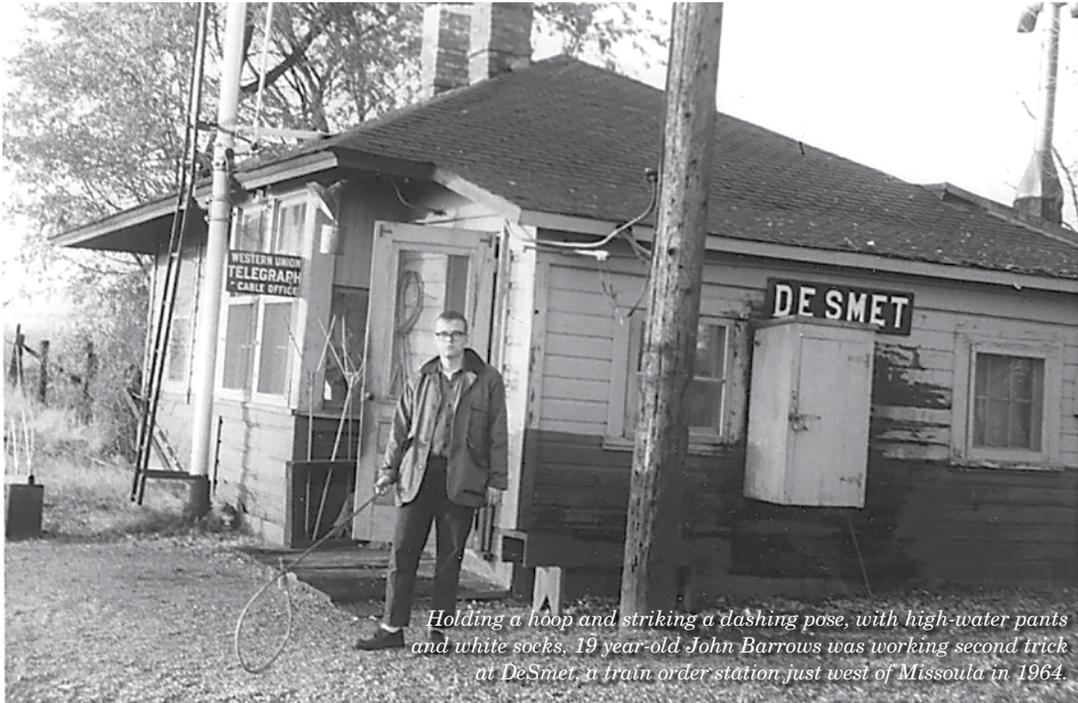
Do you have photographs of depots or telegraph offices where you worked? Do you have snapshots of your coworkers? Let's digitize those images and share them via "Dots and Dashes." Let's keep them in the MTC archive for future generations to enjoy. It's very sad to see scrapbooks disassembled and disposed of on eBay in search of profits at the expense of historical value. Such items belong in

an archive for use by future researchers and telegraph historians.

None of us are getting younger. Let's preserve our memories now. MTC must have a legacy that lives beyond the current membership.

**73 to all!**





*Holding a hoop and striking a dashing pose, with high-water pants and white socks, 19 year-old John Barrows was working second trick at DeSmet, a train order station just west of Missoula in 1964.*

*continued from front page*

there were still steam engines, like 50 miles away to a sugar mill that still used an 1887 Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul switch engine.

In my freshman yearbook everyone addressed me in their comments as “choo-choo”.

I even organized a trip, with the help of my Dad and the railroad’s assistant superintendent, Mr. Setterholm, on a branch line mixed train from Beach,

North Dakota to Ollie,

Montana. Over 20 boys and girls overwhelmed the crew. They let the girls ride the engine going down, and the boys coming back. The engineer recounted that never had the whistle been blown so many times! And those not in the engine rode either in the combination passenger/caboose, or in a gondola car. Many a railroad rule was broken but great fun was had by all, including our minister, who was also a major railfan!

And after we moved to Missoula, Montana, in 1960, the fever stayed high. Thank goodness my high school counselor was a full-blown railfan himself. Whenever a steam engine came through, and there were several, Mr. Monahan always wrote me an excuse, and often went with me to the roundhouse to the engines.

And during my senior year, in 1963, I was on the student council and helped organize a private train to Helena for a major basketball game. It was a huge success. Over 600 of the more than 1,200 students at the school rode the train over and back. We even had a baggage car with slats in the door for dancing! From the depot we all walked together to the game. Missoula’s Spartans beat the Helena Bengals. We all walked back. As we sat on the siding waiting to leave, someone fired a shotgun blast into the side of the train. (Helena had some really enthusiastic fans, I guess).

We all got home safely, but that was the end of the special trains out of Missoula for basketball games!

like boxing matches and electron returns. His speed at both sending and receiving and handling the Phillips Code abbreviations, enabled him to read the leased lines that ran through the Helena testboard, including Associated Press and United Press. On Saturday afternoons he would copy the dispatches from Continental Press, a Sunday newspaper feature service, for the local newspaper.

Dad loved the telegraph, and the railroad. When we moved to Glendive, Montana, in 1951 (I was six), he packed his bug with him. Until 1959 the telephone company sent all its internal message work by Morse and used it in wire testing. Dad’s bug was always on his desk. And his son was still playing with it, but very carefully. It still bit!

One day, when I was about 12 or 13, he sent me out to clean up the garage. It was then, in the attic, I discovered several large boxes I hadn’t seen before. I open them up and discovered a trove of old Railroad Man’s Stories magazines. Hours later Dad came looking for me. I was upstairs in the attic, sprawled out, devouring the stories of railroad men and Eddy Sand, the telegrapher. I was hooked.

From then on, model airplanes and ships were put away, and a full-blown passion for the railroad bloomed.

I hung around the Northern Pacific’s roundhouse, and played in the cabs of the dead-end steam engines, including the huge 2-8-8-4 Yellowstones waiting their final trip to Brainerd, Minnesota and the cutting torch. I begged dad to take me to where

During high school, in Missoula, I was an enthusiastic member of DeMolay, a youth group sponsored by the Masons. Our advisor was the assistant Bridge and Building Superintendent for the NP and he had an outstanding job offer to any DeMolay who could pass the physical to work on the B&B.

I wasn't yet 18, then the legal age for such work, but that didn't matter. I went to work on the B&B in Missoula, working on the station platform, doing some culvert and water line work and patching up a stockyard corral. Then I was sent to work on the Wallace branch. My Dad lied to my mother, saying I was working on some culverts. Hah. The Wallace branch ran from St. Regis, Montana, to Haugen, on the Milwaukee Road by track rights, then over Lookout Pass. Four percent grades and high, imposing wooden trestles, 100 feet or more high. One of the trestles was nearly a third of a mile long.

The foreman, a big Swede, Arne Lindholm, told me to take two jacks out to the crew on the last

bend below the top of the trestle. The jacks, used to raise timbers, were incredibly heavy. I picked one up, and Mr. Lindholm, said, "No, no. Take one in each hand." At a soaking wet 130 pounds, the two jacks weighed almost as much as I did. I tried, but to no avail. I spent the rest of the summer rail-side, helping lower big bridge timbers with a "go-devil", a hand operated crane mounted on a four wheel track car. During that stay, which lasted nearly two months, we all lived in outfit cars, and at in a dining-car. My job was to handle the trash, bring in the coal for the cook stove and dump the ashes.

With the end of summer I resolved to do something else on the railroad.

It was on a fall day in Missoula that my railroad career changed.

My Dad and I were attending a University of Montana football game. We climbed the bleachers and we sat next to a tall, sharp-figured man. Dad introduced me to him, Harold Cain. Chief Dispatcher Harold Cain. Mr. Cain had worked with Dad at the telephone office in Helena while he was laid off from the railroad.

I said "Hello," and the next words out of my mouth were, "Mr. Cain, how fast do you have to telegraph to get a job?" He answered, "Oh, about 15 words a minute." I responded, "If I can do that, will you give me a job?" He said, "yes."

And thus started what my Dad frequently recalled

as the six worst months of his life. We set up two instruments, from basement to upstairs. And every evening for months my Dad would pound out the alphabet, then words, then finally sentences and messages. My first complete message I successfully copied from my Dad was, "I am starving. Please send me

six dozen donuts." Dad had a sense of humor.

During the December break from college, Mr. Cain sent me to break in on station work, without pay, with Gilbert Smith at Bonner, five miles East of Missoula. Mr. Smith patiently taught me the ins and outs of station work, how to check a yard and figure demurrage. It was mystifying, but interesting as I got acquainted with some of the myriad forms of the railroad.

During the spring break I again broke in, again without pay, with Mr. Bob Clark, the agent at Stevensville, about 25 miles south of Missoula. Mr. Clark showed me additional agency forms, but no telegraph as the wire had been taken out several years before.



*Holding forth at the old Drummond Depot at the Fort Missoula Historical Museum in Missoula, John Barrows works with dozens of people each July 4th. The office, fully restored, is dedicated to his father, John E. Barrows, a long-time volunteer at the museum. John and another MTC member, Kerry Facincani, donated the artifacts for the depot.*

Finally, in June 1964 I was sent to Garrison, a mainline junction, with one leg going through Butte, Montana. I was to be there a month, learning train orders, more station work and train orders and message work, all at minimum wage. The line through Butte was all train orders, and all by Morse, as was the message work for the Butte line. The main line, however, had been CTC'ed years before. Agent David Meiers and telegrapher Walt LeBrun took me under their wing for several days and showed me the ropes.

Heavy rains in the northern part of the state ended that stint. The Great Northern's main line washed out south of Glacier Park and all of the GN trains were rerouted to the Northern Pacific. I was sent to Rivulet, normally an agent only station on the freight line between Missoula and Paradise. Because of the tremendous increase in traffic, the station was upgraded to 24 hours for train order work. It was miles off the main highway, up an old logging road. The only folks in the community were the agent and the section crew.

On my first shift, midnight to 8 a.m., I settled in quickly. Then the westbound block clanged and a small semaphore signal in the office switched to red. I told the dispatcher, Bud Hansen, that a westbound was in the block. "No orders," he said.

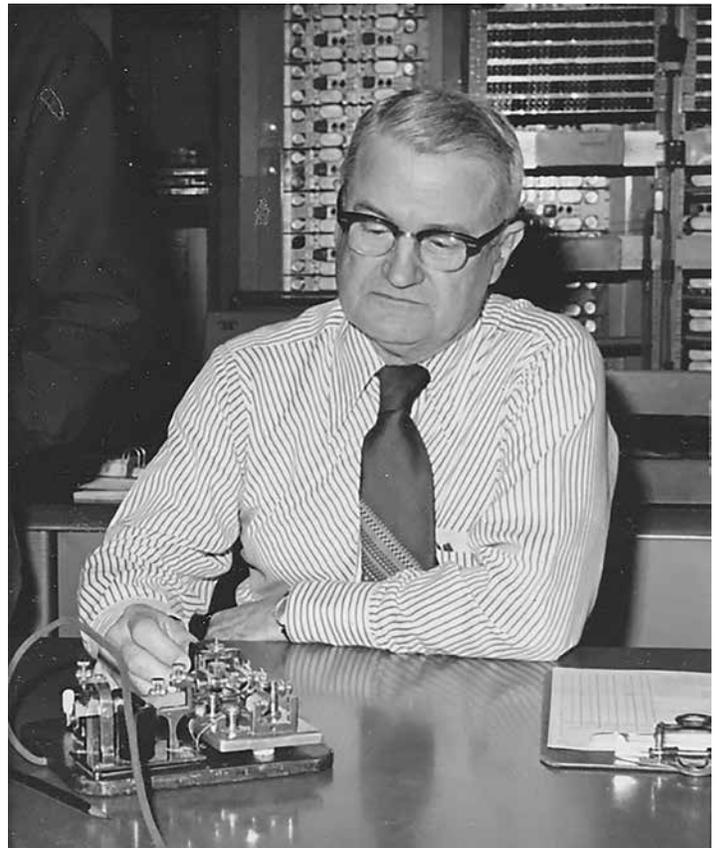
I went outside to watch the train, a Great Northern extra freight, pull into the siding. Then I went back into the depot, and reported the train. "OS the Extra GN \_\_\_\_ West, by at such and such o'clock.

There was a pregnant pause. A very long, pregnant pause. Then the dispatcher came back on the line and said, in a serious tone, "You do mean arrived, don't you son?" "Yeah, yeah. Arrived," I answered. Several years later I met Bud in person. Bud had been pulled off his agency job at Rivulet to add a West End dispatcher's job during the flood traffic. He informed me that when I OS'ed that westbound as "by" all he could see was the eastbound extra that was supposed to meet it at Rivulet and was getting ready to call the wrecker, although hopefully it would have been stopped by the automatic block.

Despite that inauspicious beginning, I had a great time working for the Northern Pacific. Altogether I worked some 22 stations on the Northern Pacific's Rocky Mountain Division, between Paradise and Livingston.

One of my earliest assignments was Missoula Yard. Each train that departed required a long train list to be sent on the teletype. Although I

had taken a summer typing class in high school (just me and about 20 girls!) I was still not a crack typist. About half way through my shift I was falling down badly., I called my Dad, who was Chief Toll Testboardman at Missoula for the telephone company. Dad came down and handled the teletype and I concentrated on train orders. The next morning I went to the telephone office and practiced sending on their teletype. The same the second night. The third night I was able to handle the job on my own. Although one of the operators put it in a complaint to the union, nothing developed and I worked the yard office



*The author's father, John E. Barrows, holds forth on a special wire between Missoula and Helena, Montana, on his retirement in 1965. The bug he is using is the same one his son, John M., found out "bites" when prying fingers go where they shouldn't.*

many times over the next few years.

All during college I worked whenever it was possible... often working midnight to 8 a.m., and racing to slip into a college class without being noticed.

In December, 1966, I took advantage of a pass to travel to St. Paul and look at Saint Paul Union Depot. I also visited the Western Union office there and the Northern Pacific's relay office. I also stopped by the office of the Transportation Communications Employees Union (which had

recently changed its name from the Order of Railroad Telegraphers. I met with Mr. Askew, the general chairman, since I was doing a paper for college on railroad unions for an economics class. I introduced myself, and Mr. Askew said, "I know you. You're the fellow with all the seniority dates!" That was because the railroad required me to quit whenever they didn't have work, then rehired me when they did.

In the summer of 1966 there were lots of extra-board telegraphers, and not so much work. A friend of mine, Doug Schnackenberg, was working at Stryker on the Kalispell Division of The Great Northern. We would travel back and forth and visit, and as Doug as the secretary of the National Association of Train Order Collectors as we traded a lot of orders with each other.

Doug suggested I call up the Chief Dispatcher and see about working the summer on the GN. I talked to Mr. Shoemaker, then assistant chief at Spokane, Washington, on a Thursday. I told him Doug had suggested I go to work for the GN for the summer. Mr. Shoemaker was very nice, but said there was no work available. "I've got every trainmaster's son working as operators," he explained. Then he paused.

"I don't suppose you can telegraph, can you?" "Yes," I said. "I don't suppose you ever sold a ticket?" "Yes," again. "Is your rule book card current?" "Yes."

"Can you be in Whitefish on Saturday morning for a physical and a rule book test?" "Yes," I said.

Saturday morning I was at the trainmaster's office in Whitefish. Mr. Park asked me one or two rules questions, then explained the importance of

identifying yourself on the train radio. He sent me to a local doctor's office. The doctor listened to my chest, held up a watch and asked if I could hear the tick. I told him I couldn't. He carefully wound the watch, and again held it up. It ticked. The final exam was a box of colored yarns. "Pick out the red one," he said.

I went to work the next day, a Sunday, as the telegrapher operator at Columbia Falls, on the edge of Glacier National Park. Mr. Lind, the agent, got me acquainted with the GN's station forms, and most of my work was handling train orders, Western Union and message work, as well as helping work the passenger train's express, baggage and mail.

The rest of the summer I spent working at Belton (West Glacier) in the beautiful log depot there as the day telegrapher and ticket seller, and later at Essex, right in the middle of Glacier Park. It was there at Belton that the agent forced me to learn to copy Morse on a typewriter and told me to ditch my pencil. The messages there were mostly long tour messages, taken in concert with the operator at East Glacier. It was a struggle, but by the end of my stay at Belton I could pretty much stay up with the other receiving operator.

After my stint on the GN, I returned to the NP and continued extra work until I graduated in June 1967. I had been interviewed by the railroad for a college-graduate executive training program, but turned down because, the interview said, they didn't want anyone with prior railroad experience. REA Express didn't have the same qualms, however, and I was hired for their executive program. I was sent to New York for training

and then later held management jobs in Minnesota and Montana, before quitting in 1969.

In 1970 I applied and received a job offer from the Soo Line Railroad to go to Enderlin, N. D., to become the sidewire operator for the dispatchers' office. At about the same time I had applied to become editor of the Wolf Point (Montana) Herald-News, a weekly newspaper on the Fort



*Like father, like son. John E. Barrows, the author's father, is working the message desk at the Helena Toll Testboard in 1929. He was 19 at the time. The desk has 11 sounders, and a wall of telegraph relays behind it.*

Peck Indian Reservation, and a day or so later I was offered the position, based on my work on my high school newspaper.

I took the newspaper job, and that started a 43-year career in community journalism, including being publisher of several small daily and weekly newspapers, and the head of the Montana Newspaper Association.

Although my official connection with telegraphy and the railroad ended, my love for both did not. Starting in 1991 I became interested in old west reenactments, and started a Morse demonstration at the annual Bannack Days celebration in the old ghost town of Bannack, Montana's first Territorial Capital. Enlisting the help of my fellow Morse Club members from the Missoula Chapter, I have headed up the demo without a miss, except one year when Bannack itself was hit with a flash flood, which closed the park for several months.

Although I am currently doing the demos by myself, due to the aging of our membership, I still enjoy working with young and old in getting them acquainted with American Morse Code.

In 1996 Bill Dunbar, longtime president of the Morse Telegraph Club and Dots and Dashes editor, announced his retirement from putting out the quarterly magazine.

For the next eight years, until relieved by our present editor and long-time friend, Jim Wilson, it was my privilege to edit Dots and Dashes. It was a great experience, although combined with publishing and editing the Dillon Tribune, in Dillon, Montana, it sometimes meant missing deadlines. I have to admire Jim Wilson for his ability to seemingly effortlessly assemble a top-notch publication every quarter.

With the editor's job came the opportunity to take part in a number of interesting telegraph demonstrations. Among the most interesting was a session at the Wallace, Idaho, depot, sending to L. R. Keith, a fantastic operator who could read my meandering sending without a hitch. Mr. Keith was for many years the wire chief for the Spokane Chapter (SK). He was responsible for the wonderful restoration of the Ritzville, Washington NP depot.

Another was my opportunity to get to know Brother Jim Wilson, the current editor of Dots and Dashes. At the urging of Jim and MTC member Walt Mathers I got my introduction to Civil War reenacting at the former German Ambassador's home and at the park at Loudon, Virginia. Messages were sent from the Embassy (which had

an excellent U.S. Civil War reenactment group) to Loudon and then by signal flag to another signalman, blending the U. S. Military Telegraph and the new U. S. Signal Corps to celebrate a pre-Gettysburg event.

And that led to a stint at the re-created Fort Caspar, in Casper, Wyoming. There, with another operator, who had been the Denver, Colorado, Western Union wire chief, we recreated the Pacific Telegraph Station on the North Platte, complete with an Indian attack.

My father died in 1998. He had been a long-time volunteer at the Historic Museum at Fort Missoula, in Missoula, Montana. Several thousand dollars had been received as memorials in his name. The money was used to restore the telegraph and ticket office at the old Drummond, Montana, Milwaukee Railroad depot. The depot had been moved to the museum grounds nearly 20 years before. Some restoration work had been done but the office area was still a shambles.

With the funds the museum did the needed restoration and refinishing work. From my personal collection of railroad and telegraph artifacts (which my Dad started collecting in the 1930s and I continued to expand) and the help of the late Kerry Facincani, long time Morse Club secretary and president, I was able to completely outfit the office portion of the station. On July 4th each year I man the station to work with dozens of children and adults try their hand at the telegraph key.

I was also deeply involved in the restoration of the Union Pacific depot in Dillon, Montana. The project took over 10 years but is a beautiful addition to the local museum.

Another place where I have helped was donating a large number of photos, equipment and records to the old Chicago and Northwestern depot in Redfield, S.D. MTC member Larry Munson and I "rapped brass" all day, demonstrating Morse and sending telegrams back and forth. Redfield was my Dad's hometown, and his father was a locomotive engineer for the CNW. It was a really fun way to pay homage to my grandfather and give Redfield a slice of its own history.

One of the most interesting jobs I had concerning telegraph was with Rocky Mountain Rail Tours. In the summer of 2004 I was a narrator and historian on the company's tours between Billings and/or Livingston, Montana to Sand Point, Idaho. One of the last trips ran from Sand Point to Billings and return behind the Southern Pacific Daylight

engine 4449.

Accompanying me on the train was Jim Fredrickson, a well-known retired Northern Pacific dispatcher, photographer and historian. We strung wire between two club cars on the train, and then “dispatched trains,” using the train’s actual progress, issuing train orders and messages. Using original Northern Pacific train order forms, clearances and message blanks, that meant making multiple copies of everything, enough to make about 50 packages, which were sold to interested passengers, along with a small booklet explaining the whole procedure. That meant staying up late at the stops along the way to hand copy the orders and messages, using lots of carbon paper, over and over! A trip to remember!

And finally, my current project is the restoration of the East Helena depot of the Northern Pacific. The small, 18x24 structure was abandoned in the early 1980s and sat forlorn by Montana Rail Link tracks for over 30 years. In 2012 the county historic preservation officer had an article printed

in the Helena paper that she was attempting to preserve the structure. I contacted her, and helped, with local people, form the East Helena Historical Society with the goal of moving the structure to a secure site and restoring it.

In 2014 MRL gave the depot to the City of East Helena, and fundraising began. It took five more years, but with the help of a retired local contractor the depot was moved to its final home behind City Hall. Restoration is well underway and should be ready to open as a museum and visitors’ center next spring. I have donated most of the railway and telegraph oriented artifacts, along with several others, and it should make an excellent city museum for a community with a rich, smelter-based history.

And as I finish typing this, I am reminded once again of my Dad’s words about the telegraph and its undeniable attraction.

“Watch out, Johnny. It bites!”

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# THE HISTORIC WOUFF HONG

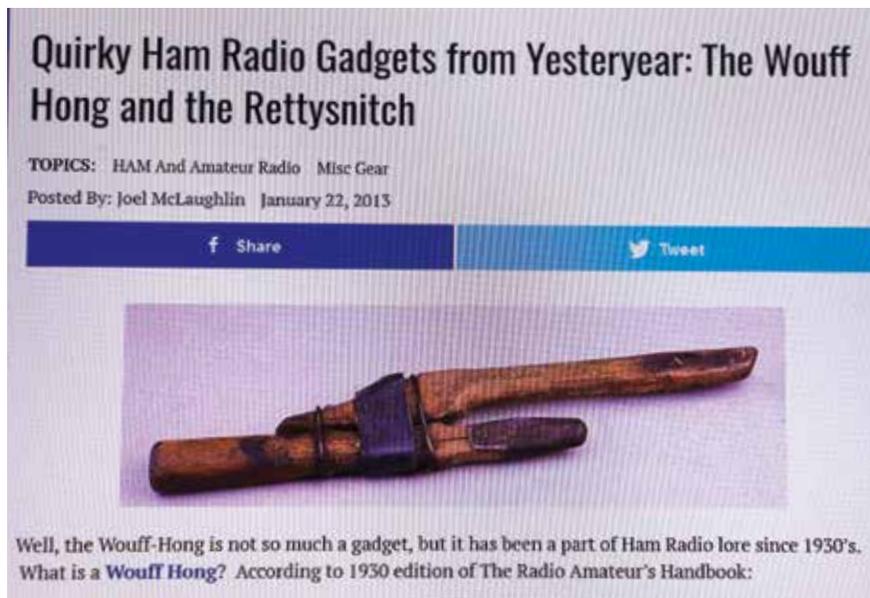
An old friend of mine who lived in New Mexico recently passed away. Ray’s widow wants to give me one of Ray’s prize possessions, a Wouff Hong. So, you ask, what the heck is a Wouff Hong?

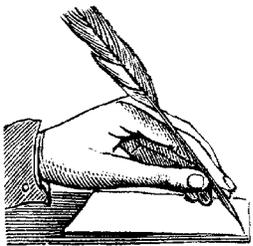
According to the 1930 edition of the Radio Amateur’s Handbook, a Wouff Hong was created by T.O.M (The Old Man) who wrote stories in the American Radio Relay league’s magazine, QST, titled “Rotten Radio.” Using humor and satire, The Old Man’s stories described bad operating practices using the telegraph key.

It wasn’t until after his death that QST revealed that T.O.M. was Hiram Percy Maxim, otherwise known as W1AW. Hiram served the ARRL as president for 22 years, after which the ARRL built a new memorial radio station in Newington, Connecticut which has been known from that day forward as W1AW.

Today, amateur radio station W1AW continues to broadcast

code practice sessions for the improvement of International Morse code CW operators.





# Letters to the Editor

## August 27th

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My interest in Morse code stems from my general interest in landline telecommunications. This includes landline telephony, Telex, and landline Morse. In addition to that, I have a minor interest in spark gap transmitters, because of the Titanic, but mainly landline and hence American Morse.

My main telecommunications interest is in vintage telephones and I'm a vintage telephone collector. But that has expanded to teletype equipment and telegraph equipment as well. I'm a telephone guy first and foremost but I'm interested in any kind of communications that uses analog copper wire to convey information. Even though from a timeline perspective, the telephone displaced the telegraph, I see them as coexisting in many ways. I'd like to keep it that way in my home for the future.

I find it ironic that the next closest alternative to sending a telegram today is sending a letter by USPS. Strictly speaking, this is assuming one has no electronic equipment at home, only a telephone. Telegrams were easy, accessible, reliable, and quick – unlike of the electronic communication that has displaced them.

I do hope to learn the code, eventually. It may not happen immediately, this year, or even in four years. But I think it would be cool to have a telegraph key and be able to communicate that way at some point as well. I enjoy learning more about landline telegraphy and telecommunications and am constantly in all my telecom hobbies.

Currently, I'm a computer Engineering student in the School of Engineering and Applied Science here at the University of Pennsylvania. I'm excited, even though I've been repeatedly told it's one of the most difficult pathways at Penn, a road definitely "less traveled."

There are only 15 of us right now and the number is declining. But I know it will also be highly rewarding, so my plan is to stick with that. One reason is because I am interested in both hardware and software, particularly because of my hobbyist interest in telecommunications, a lot of which involves low level hardware and circuit

knowledge. I think it would be beneficial for me to improve my knowledge in that area, as I know it will help me in the future.

Let me know if you need anything further from me and I'll be happy to oblige. I hope MTC can continue to expand and bring other younger folks into the hobby. I know telephone has the phreaking scene which continues to draw in many young people. I don't know of an analog with telegraphy, but the technology in and of itself is a deserving draw, in my opinion.

**Naveen Albert,  
Freshman at the  
University of Pennsylvania.**

## September 7th

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I know its been awhile since the "Hamcation" in Orlando, but I still wanted to thank you for sending me the sample copies of Dots & Dashes for use by our Florida Chapter. We were able to distribute quite a few to interested attendees at the Hamcation.

I also was able to give out a few to visitors on Morse Day at our annual event in April.

My father, John, and Greg Raven, both FX Chapter members, attended the local ham radio Field Day event in June, setting up a Morse Telegraph Club display. They passed out a few more copies of Dots & Dashes to interested ham operators.

So, thank you again for sending the copies of *Dots & Dashes* for our club use.

**73,  
Robert Feeney,  
President,  
MTC Florida Chapter.**

## September 13th

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First thing this morning, I joined MTC. I watched the YouTube videos from the Antique Wireless Museum and was especially interested in the segment with the MorseKOB.

I've been looking around eBay for a KOB or a sounder, but I'm not quite ready to buy pieces of

the system that I'll need. Regarding the sounders, I'm reading about the history and development of sounders, looking for one that makes the best sound.

I retired in 2014 and have had all the time to revisit my childhood interests, like amateur radio and family history. While researching my family history, I discovered that my grandfather's neighbor was the manager of the Western Union telegraph office in Waterloo, Iowa in the 1930's. This would suggest why my uncle became a naval radiotelegraph operator on the USS Houston in the mid-1930's and later in the Army stateside in 1942. He was earning commissions from Western Union for passing soldier's telegrams home during his off-duty hours.

On two occasions, I've been to Frostfest in Richmond, VA and chatted with MTC members and picked up copies of D&D. My question to the MTC members was whether one could be simultaneously proficient at both American and Continental Morse. Apparently so.

I'm also finding a lot of material on the Internet from Canadians who worked as kids in the Canadian Pacific or Canadian National telegraph offices.

I went to the university in Cholula, Mexico in the 1970's. At that time, the local telegraph office was on the main street. I'd walk by and hear the clicking, wondering to myself how the operators could work with all the street noise. Apparently, they could.

I am disappointed not to find on YouTube a good tutorial on American Morse. The presenters are usually trying to show the big picture of the operation. They are sending at high speed and the sound is more of the narrator speaking, rather than the sounder clicking. Back in the 1960's, we had an Instructograph at my high school amateur radio club with International Morse lesson tapes. I thought I saw a few on sale on eBay, perhaps with American Morse tapes. There are plenty of resources available for learning Continental Morse.

I realize that American Morse is an anachronism in this century. But I think of it in the manner of Civil War reenactors who take their hobby seriously. It pays off when Spielberg can use their talents in making the feature film, "Lincoln."

My second interest, early radiotelegraphy, led me to the Antique Wireless Museum. I am trying to understand what the signal sounded like to the listener before the development of CW and super heterodyne receivers and beat-frequency

oscillators. All the recreations of spark are always from the transmitted side with the buzzing and snapping.

I've read biographies of Marconi and I am skeptical that he received transatlantic signals while in Newfoundland, given the wavelength and time of day. Like Edison, it was all hit-and-miss experimenting in the absence of good science.

Now that you have fired me up with your prompt email, I'll spend some time today on the Morse KOB site and download the current D&D issue.

***Eric Hagerstrom  
Bloomfield, New York***

**September 14th**

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[This response to Eric Hagerstrom by MTC International Vice President J. Chris Hausler includes information that is valuable to us all.]

Good to hear from you, Eric, and glad you chose to join the Morse Telegraph Club!

As to the sounders, which one makes the "best" sound is a matter of taste. Personally, I like local sounders better than main line sounders. I tend to favor Western Electric 3C sounders as, although a local, they have a main line impedance of 140 ohms. I have a standard configuration that I use when connecting instruments to Morse KOB, but it requires instruments in the range of 100 to 150 Ohms, which is typical of Morse main line instruments. Most locals you find are 4, 20, and 400 Ohms. What's more, the 3C was really a "test instrument," usually found in large relay offices, so when you find one (and they show up reasonably frequently on eBay), they tend to be in fair to excellent condition as they mostly "lived" in a protected environment.

All that said, it is not necessary to have instruments to use MorseKOB. It will make the clicking sound of the sounder using your PC's sound system and using the "Tools'Preferences" menu on Morse KOB you can select a few different sounder sounds, so you can try them out without buying a sounder. That said, each sounder even within a specific type, tends to have its own individual sound. You can also send using the keyboard, but if you are happy with the generated sounds, connecting a real key to the MorseKOB is trivial. Click on "Interface techniques" (<http://kob.sdf.org/morsekob/interface.htm>). on the main MorseKOB page and it will show you the options.

Connecting a sounder is a little more difficult because the USB port on your PC will not provide

enough power to do so. This it is necessary to have some form of amplifier to drive a sounder. Two choices are the simple sounder driver circuit, which you would have to build. A more flexible option and more authentic is the Loop interface, also described. There is enough instruction available from the "Interface techniques" page to do this, but one of our members manufactures a neat loop interface kit, also described and that is what I frequently use and what I have installed at the AWA museum. There is a 3C clicking away next to me right now on my dining room table bring driven by one of these manufactured loop interfaces as I write this.

When you get to that point, I can provide any additional information, options and suggestions as to interfacing real instruments to Morse KOB. Feel free to ask.

As to learning American Morse, MorseKOB itself provides an ideal way to do it. This will take any text you want to practice on and send it at whatever speed you want. You can add Farnsworth delays to it as well. A tutorial is available from the MorseKOB main page (<http://kob.sdf.org/moreskob/morsekob25/tutorial.htm>). And, several our members provide feeds at various speeds on MorseKOB for code practice. If you look at the "current activity" link on the main page (<http://mtc-kob.dyndns.org/>). It shows all the "wires" currently connected to our active telegraph server computer. As I think I mentioned below, the wire numbers 1 to 99 are mostly for actual people to communicate or for testing purposes and the wire numbers 100 to 199 are mostly broadcasts at various speeds (again with the exception of the weather wire: 106) and most show what speed they are using in their listing at this link. Note tat about the lowest speed listed is 15 WPM. You really don't want to start any lower at this and I would suggest starting at 20 WPM. You do not want to learn by listening for the dots and dashes (spaces and long dashes) but rather try to hear each character as a unique sound. At 20 WPM makes it difficult to do anything else. Again, if you have any questions about any of this, please feel free to ask and either I will answer, or I will direct your question to someone who can better answer it. And, yes, we have several members competent with both codes. One suggestion is to keep International Morse as tones and American Morse as the sound of the clicking telegraph sounder.

Yes, we also have many Canadian members. Our immediate past MTC president, Lavina Shaw, is a

Canadian and was a telegraph operator who grew up living in a railroad station. She learned the code as a child from her father. A video was made about her late last year. You can view this video at <http://m.youtube.com/watch?v=mJi7d7vHVVVA>. Lavina is still very active in our telegraph community.

You mentioned Spielberg's film, "Lincoln." The Morse Telegraph Club provided the telegraph equipment and set-up for that film. International MTC President Jim Wades and D&D Editor Jim Wilson were significantly involved as they sought accuracy in telegraph scenes. Mr. Spielberg wanted an accurate portrayal of the telegraph.

**J. Chris Hausler**  
***MTC International Vice President & Volunteer at the Antique Radio Museum***

### **September 15th**

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I think the next Morse code message at the top of the Dots & Dashes journal should be something along the lines of needing more Morse code stories. You could invite people to call you by phone if they were shy about writing. There should be some funny vignettes that the members have when using Morse code either for work, for personal, or for public education uses.

While I know nothing about this, I have been Googling around. How about the secret Morse code of Lewis and Clark or the Culpepper code used by George Washington and the Cupeper Spy ring? I got these ideas from: <https://heav.org/blog/2018/04/23/samuel-morse-secret-codes/>.

**Best,**  
**Patrice Porter,**  
***friend of the Morse Telegraph Club***

### **September 15th**

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I'm currently going around in circles. I guess that makes me a big wheel. The depot at East Helena (MT) is in progress of restoration by our East Helena Historical Group, but not without a basketful of contention and blustering by one of the members. He wants to just add new siding to the depot instead of restoring it.

I am also in the middle od completing the signage and historical displays for a new Helena museum. And on Wednesday morning (September 17th) I leave for a week in Bannack, the ghost town that used to be the Territorial Capital. I am part of the reenacting group that does a full immersion of the 1860's. I just completed construction of an

era-appropriate telegraph office and am getting ready for my annual reenactment of the town's first doctor. Stuff is piled all over the house!

**John Barrows,**  
*former Editor of Dots & Dashes*

### September 21st

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I have been interested in railroading my whole life; worked my way through college on the Green Bay & Western. Earned enough each summer that I didn't have to borrow a dime. Of course, tuition was reasonable in the mid 1960's.

I've been a member of the Soo Line Historical & Technical Society for 30+ years. I talked to a couple of telegraphers that came to the convention and they told me about the Morse Telegraph Club. This year's banquet speaker was Jim Wades, your International President. I had an opportunity to test my skills on some equipment he brought along. I'm amazed at how fast he can send and receive.

I have an extensive telegraph display at our visitor center in Ladysmith, Wisconsin where I live. The center was built as a reproduction of a Soo Line depot. We preserved the Soo Line's first passenger diesel (an FP-7 from 1949) and its displayed with three pieces of rail equipment, a

rail express-RPO car, a combine and a 1st class coach. All were built by Barney & Smith in Dayton, Ohio in 1911 and 1914.

I filled one display case with telegraph equipment, literature, and some historic telegrams that I bought on eBay. They include telegrams sent by Ulysses Grant, Benjamin Harrison, Teddy Roosevelt, and Dwight Eisenhower. I also have a telegram sent in 1868, a day or two after the completion of the trans-continental telegraph line. As I remember, it was sent from Missouri to California.

I also set up the operator's desk at the center to include relays, main line sounders, local sounders, switchboards and other equipment.

Yes, I downloaded the KOB program, which will help me learn telegraphy. I must familiarize myself with it. What I need it to hear telegraphy being sent. For 38 years, I was a weekly newspaper editor in Ladysmith and always covered items related to railroading. I wrote an article on the last day the telegraph was used in the Ladysmith depot. I believe that was in 1979. The local agent and clerks all were telegraphers at the time.

**John Terrill,**  
*New MTC member*

## DID YOU KNOW?

*Do you know that the location of the earth's magnetic poles changes daily and that life on earth could not exist without our magnetic field?*

**B**ecause the earth is a dynamo, not a permanent magnet, the magnetic poles shift daily, a fact that has been causing a nuisance to navigators for centuries. A simple compass needle does not point north.

In the past, the north pole has become the south pole. But you have no need to worry; the last time this happened was 780,000 years ago. The present north pole is located off the coast of northern Canada.

The current rate of shift, 34 miles per year, is relatively fast. And the intensity of the magnetic field has decreased by about 10% during the past 150 years. These effects on modern electronic devices is yet unknown.

Some planets have no magnetic fields. Other planets have intense magnetic fields, much stronger than what we have on earth. With no magnetic field to protect us from the constant shower of solar particles, life could not exist on earth.



# Welcome Aboard!

## NEW MEMBERS OF MTC

Ricky Bush, Buffalo, West Virginia  
Eric Hagerstrom, Arlington, Virginia  
Michael Cisek, Saint Charles, MN  
Professor Barry Keating, South Bend, IN  
Sarah Knight, New York, NY  
John Harris, Alpharetta, GA  
Bob Montgomery, Eagles Mere, PA  
Samuel Martin, Lansing, NY  
Paul Henson, Topeka, KS

Joey Ferguson, Pawleys Island, SC  
Mike Wisniewski, Westmont, IL  
Roger Cowan, Santaquin, UT  
All Aboard Westcliff, Westcliff, CO (MUSEUM)  
Mike Richardson, Barboursville, VA  
Steve Shiflett, Omaha, NE (FN Chapter)  
Marv Haskell, Valrico, FL (FX Chapter)  
John Terrill, Laydsmith, WI  
Ken Ashmead, Calgary, Alberta

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# THE MEDINA RAILROAD MUSEUM

*By J. Chris Hausler*

Your International Vice President was asked by the director of the railroad museum in Medina, NY to provide a telegraph set-up for a series of skits by costumed reenactors that took place on Saturday afternoon, September 7th. The Medina Railroad Museum is located in a former railroad freight house and features a quite extensive collection of railroad and related artifacts as well as a large HO scale model railroad layout. Their web site is at: <https://www.medinarailroad.com/>. The track passing the freight house is the former Falls Branch of the New York Central and is currently operated by Genesee Valley Transportation. There is occasional excursion service on this line sponsored by the museum.

Although I was not going to be taking an active roll in the skits I was asked to also costume to the extent that I could. The only costume materials I have are a bowler hat and sleeve guards and so I wore those. I also of course wore one of my MTC logo shirts. The first photo shows the group of reenactors including yours



truly, kneeling center, in the office of the freight house. However, the man sitting at a desk on the right is a mannequin. The skits took place in this office.

The telegraph set-up I provided consisted of two copies of MorseKOB running on my laptop, one connected to a Western Union portable press set connected to wire 113 and the other to a separate key and local sounder in an Acme pedestal resonator. I had a bug wedged into the key in this second configuration. I also had copies of "Dots & Dashes" with membership applications stapled in the back available for visitors to take with them. The second photo shows the initial set-up although during the skits my laptop was covered by a black cloth and the copies of "D&D" were moved elsewhere. During the skits one of the reenactors was sitting at the desk playing the telegraph operator.

It was a fun afternoon. As the museum has some telegraph instruments I was also asked to propose a permanent telegraph set-up for the museum likely to be connected to MorseKOB. That is still under discussion.

# AN INTERACTIVE TELEGRAPH DISPLAY

By Lavina Shaw

In the latest issue of *Dots & Dashes* there was a letter from the president of the Apple Valley Model Railroad Club in Hendersonville, N.C. thanking the Morse Telegraph Club for our assistance in setting up an interactive Morse telegraph display near their model railroad layout in the former 1902 Southern/Norfolk Southern depot, now city owned. Some readers may be interested in learning more about the unusual interactive telegraph display.

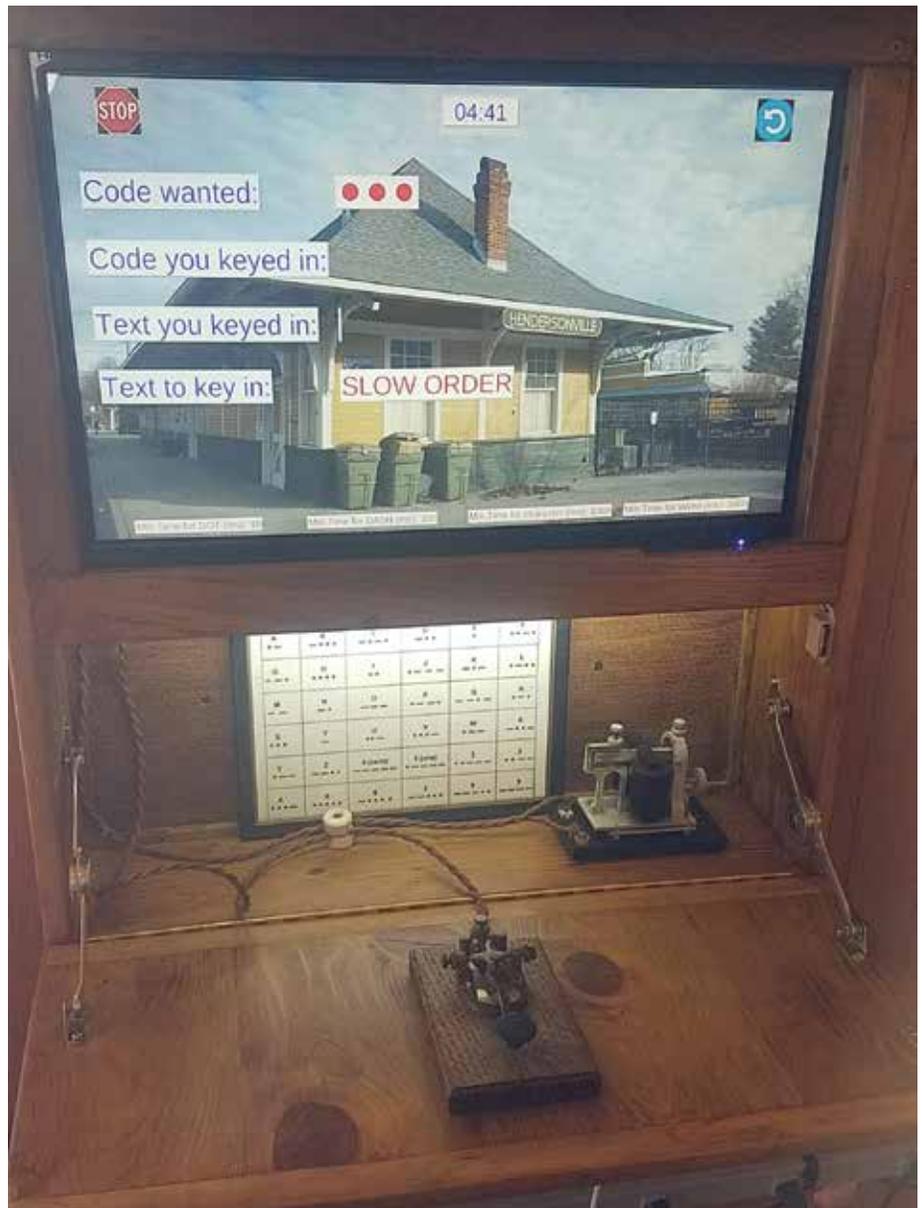
The photos below are of the touch screen monitor used for the interactive display and the telegraph key and sounder donated by MTC.

The creator of the display explains how it works:

“While I continue to update the software, it is completely operational. Users can get info on the history of Morse Code and telegraph use on railroads, hear Morse code for all letters and numbers (artificially generated to speaker) in both tone and “click-clack”. The main thing is that each visitor has up to five minutes to practice Morse Code at a (user changeable) set of three (rather slow) speeds where they are prompted with a continuous series of phrases to complete and graphically shown the phrase wanted, the number of successfully completed phrases, the current letter/number wanted as well as the code for that letter/number and the code as they key it in. If they don’t correctly enter the code, they try indefinitely until they correctly enter it. Then there is a “Test” choice (just went operational last week) that provides them with a single much longer phrase and times them. If they wish to have it recorded for the record, they are prompted (as in video games) for up to three initials and are then shown the 10 best times for the last 30 days as well as the last week.

The user is given an initial screen with (all buttons are on-screen using a touchscreen monitor) a graphical stop and a reset button and a graphical countdown timer. STOP pauses the whole application. RESET takes one back to the initial screen but does not stop the timer. When the timer (set at 5 minutes) hits 30 seconds, the color changes and does the same at 15 seconds. When it hits 0, the application is reset and user has to give up the seat.”

Hendersonville is 22 miles south of Asheville, if any members would like to check out the display.



# “30” SILENT KEYS

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



## **Montreal Ottawa GO Chapter**

**GILLES GAGNON**, age 81, passed away on June 12, 2019 in Ottawa, Canada where he was living for many years. Gilles was born in Mattice, Ontario, Canada. He worked for several years as a telegraph operator in Cochrane, Ontario. During the early days of his career, Mr. Gagnon served as Director General of the Hearst Hospital. Later, he became a City Councilor for Hearst and then Mayor of Hearst from 1981 to 1994. During his mandate, his focus was mainly on the transformation of the social economy of Hearst and the development of the forest industry, a chief employer of Northern Ontario. He was also a strong supporter of Hearst University which attempted to contain the exodus of young people to larger cities. Gilles was also quite involved and was a regular operator on the “Slow Morse” for many years. Our condolences to his family and friends.

***Thanks to Luc Bonneau for this interesting information.***

## **Winnipeg WG Chapter**

**THOMAS HUMENIUK**, age 92, died on June 5, 2019 in Nanaimo, British Columbia. Tom was born on February 28, 1927. He learned to telegraph in Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan in 1945. He worked for the Canadian National Railway for over 40 years as an Operator/Dispatcher in several locations including: The Pas, Dauphin, Victoria Beach, and Winnipeg and finished his career in Prince George, BC. He retired in June 1987 as Chief Dispatcher in Prince George, BC. Tom was married to his sweetheart Norah for 70 years. They raised four children.

***Thanks to Lorraine Thomas, Tom’s daughter, for this information about her father. Thanks also to Bert Johnson for additional information.***

## **Milwaukee Madison MW Chapter**

**FRANK J. ROLAND**, age 90, passed away peacefully at this home on July 6, 2019. “Rollie” was born on February 25, 1929 in Cross Plains, Wisconsin.

He attended Saint Francis Xavier grade school, Edgewood High school, and UW at Madison.

Rollie had a ten-year career with the Milwaukee Road, beginning as a telegraph operator at train stations across southern Wisconsin. He was quickly promoted, becoming the youngest train dispatcher on the Milwaukee Road and became the Chief Dispatcher in Madison for all passenger and freight train traffic in south central Wisconsin. He loved the railroad and enjoyed sharing stories of the last great era of trains and was given a lifelong membership in the Morse Telegraph Club.

As a young man, an illness landed Rollie in the St. Mary’s Hospital in Madison. There he met the love of his life, Helene Baggot of Portage, a registered nurse. They were married on October 15, 1955.

Rollie left the railroad to help his father in the family business in Cross Plains, Frank’s Market, a grocery store known for its specialty meats and sausages, based upon family recipes. He built the business over the next twenty years, drawing customers from across Wisconsin and Illinois.

Rollie was an active community leader in Cross Plains, serving on the Village Board, leading efforts to modernize local governance and village services. He was a strong supporter of the new library and swimming pool for the growing community. He coached Little League baseball and worked with other businessmen to support the Little League so that more kids could play.

In 1977, Rollie founded and ran his own successful real estate business, Frank Realty, serving residential, commercial, and agricultural clients throughout Dane County.

Rollie enjoyed his woodwork shop, where he crafted beautiful pieces for family and friends. He built and flew radio-controlled airplanes. He was also an excellent cook and particularly loved Big Band era music. He was well rounded.

***Thanks to Robert Pluntz of La Crosse, WI, Secretary-Treasurer of the MW Chapter, for this interesting information.***

## Chapter at Large GC

ROBERT WOLFE of Hammond, IL became a Silent Key last December.

***Thanks to Joseph Wolfe, Robert's son, for the brief notice.***

## Calgary CG Chapter



ANDY (ANDY) PUCZKO, of Calgary, Alberta passed away September 30th at age 88. Andy looked after the Slowspeed sessions for the Canadian Hub and also headed the Calgary MTC Chapter. He started his working career as a telegrapher for the Canadian Pacific Railway, and worked for eight years in Southern

Alberta and Leduc. He then worked for an oil company for the next 10 years in Edmonton and Calgary, and spent the rest of his working career as a chartered accountant when he retired in 1988, Andy was a talented artist, collected stamps, flew and repaired model airplanes and played the violin and mandolin. He was very active, serving as an executive on boards of organizations, and was a Grand Knight of the Knights of Columbus. Andy is survived by his wife, five children, eight grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

***Thanks to Lavina Shaw for this information***

***Note: Andy gave me a lovely painting of a train station and elevator, which reminded me of my old home in Sifton, Manitoba***

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# RAILWAY DAYS AT CALGARY'S HERITAGE PARK

*By Lavina Shaw*

On September 28th and 29th, three telegraphers came from quite a distance to man the three heritage railway stations at



*Bill Wilson and Lavina Shaw at Midnapore Station*

“Railway Days” at Calgary’s Heritage Park. Cliff Metherell came from Lashburn, Saskatchewan, a distance of about 350 miles; Bill Wilson, from Wetaskiwin, Alberta, about 150 miles, and myself (Lavina Shaw) flew from Vancouver for about 1100 miles. Bill is also the Operations Manager of the Alberta Central Railway Museum Society.



*Ken Ashmead and two members of the Morse Club at Heritage Park*

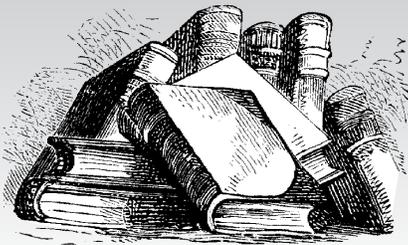
Unfortunately, Calgary was hit by a snowstorm, which was very unusual and early for this time of the year. However, many telegrams were sent and received from station to station (Midnapore, Sheppard and Laggan). During the two days. People would send a telegram, get on the steam train which transversed the park, and collect it at another station. The stations were all the original stations, brought to the park from outside Calgary. Laggan was the original station at Lake Louise.

The Heritage Park is Canada’s largest historical “working” park. The Buildings, décor and costumes represent the 1910 era. You can ride the steam train, a trolley or take a short cruise on a paddle-wheeler on a man-made lake.

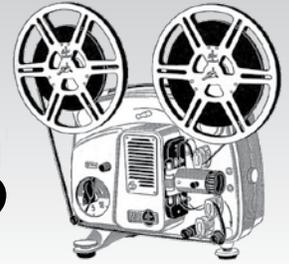


*Bill Wilson and Cliff Metherell at Laggan Station*

Ken Ashmead, a volunteer who looks after the railway stations has organized a Morse club and has several people who want to learn the Code. In between sending and receiving telegrams, I taught a bit of the code to three enthusiastic volunteers. It was fun!



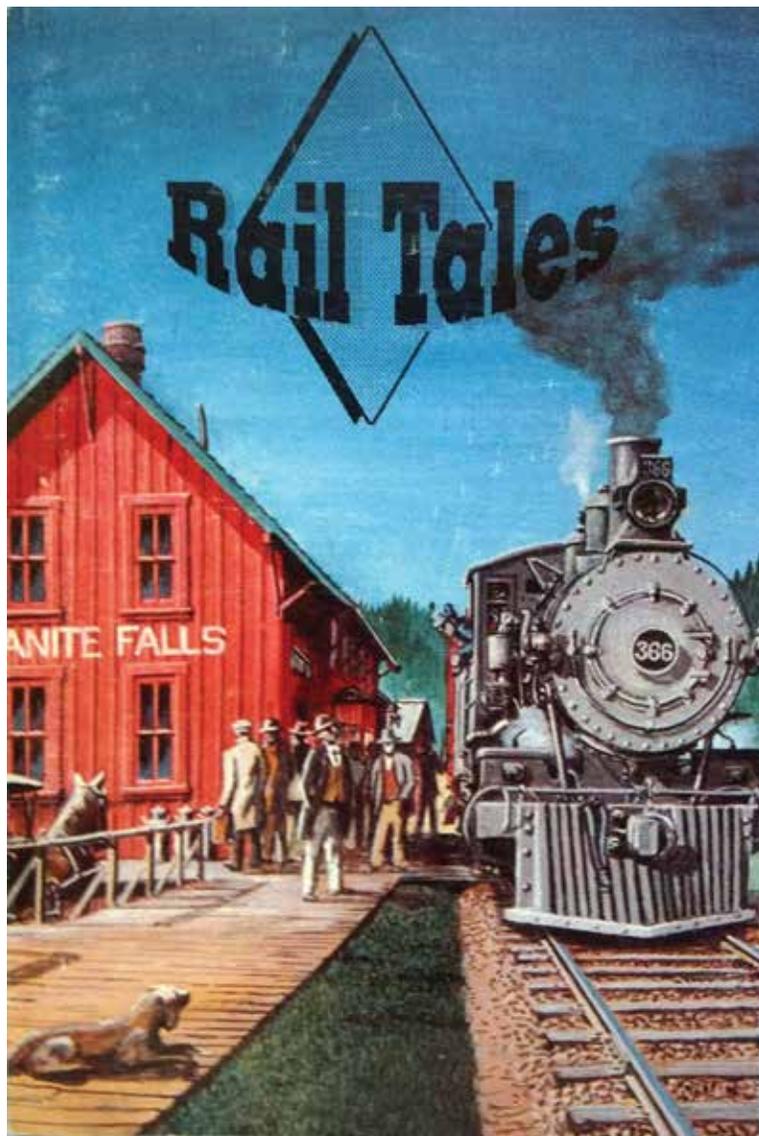
# J. Chris Hausler's BOOK & MOVIE REVIEWS



I was quite saddened as I expect we all were when I learned last spring of the passing of telegrapher and long time member of the Morse Telegraph Club, Ruth Trueblood Eckes. Back in 2002 shortly after I had first learned about and joined the MTC, I saw an advertisement in *Dots & Dashes* for a series of books by her titled, *Rail Tales*. Wanting to learn more about this new interest of mine, telegraphy, I phoned her on a couple of occasions and after a nice chat both times including her suggesting that I write about some of my own experiences in the railroad industry (something I did eventually do, but a decade later), I ordered several of the books. At the time, the first book in the series, titled *Rail Tales*, was already out of print and the last book, titled *Sparks, Smoke & Cinders* was not yet available. But I acquired all the other books in the series then available.

Each book contains an anthology of stories by individuals about their experiences in the railroad industry which Ruth had collected, not only those of telegraph operators but of other crafts as well. Many of the authors were members of the MTC. The stories spanned a number of decades of time

and gave a good flavor of what it was like to work in the railroad industry at those various times at various places around the country and, again, at various crafts. I quite enjoyed reading all of them.



I too was still working for a living in the railroad industry at that time and very busy with it and other things and so never got around to ordering the last book when it became available or even the first which I recall came back into print for a while. When I started my book and movie review column in *Dots & Dashes* about a decade ago, I neglected to review this series as the ads were still running and I believed the members of the MTC would already be quite aware of them.

With the announcement of her passing last spring I figured I'd better do something about this soon and so found both the first and last books available from various used book sources and acquired copies. Once again I was in for

some good reading! As it has been some time now since the books were advertised in *Dots & Dashes* maybe some of our newer members are not aware of this wonderful series and so it was time to do this review.

All of the books are still available from the usual sources of used books for a wide range of prices, Amazon tends to be the most expensive, but if you search around most are available for \$20 or less. The entire series is referred to by the title of the first book, again, *Rail Tales*. Here is a list of all of them with their ISBN 13's and first publication dates: *Rail Tales*, ISBN 978-0945433378, 1995; *Blow The Whistle Softly*, ISBN 978-0945433392, 1996; *Whistles in the Night*, ISBN 978-0966184150, 1997; *Call of the Rails*, ISBN 978-0966184112, 1999; *Down the Track*, ISBN 978-0966184105, 2001; *Sparks, Smoke & Cinders*, ISBN 978-0966184129, 2003. If you choose to acquire any or all of this series I think you too will be in for some good reading, enjoy!

As I've said in this column before, finding Hollywood films with any telegraphic content is at best difficult. When telegraphy does appear it is usually only in a very brief scene or two and is frequently poorly represented. One wonders at times why it was included at all as the same limited plot effect could probably have been achieved, and with less effort, by just having one of the actors say something about sending a telegram. If the actual use of the telegraph was considered important enough to include, one wonders why a better attempt wasn't made to do it correctly. With all this in mind the film I'm reviewing this time is *Pale Rider*, both directed by and starring Clint Eastwood. It was released in 1985 and was the highest grossing "Western" of the 1980's.

The plot of the film revolves around a conflict between a wealthy miner and a group of small scale placer miners panning for gold in a stream

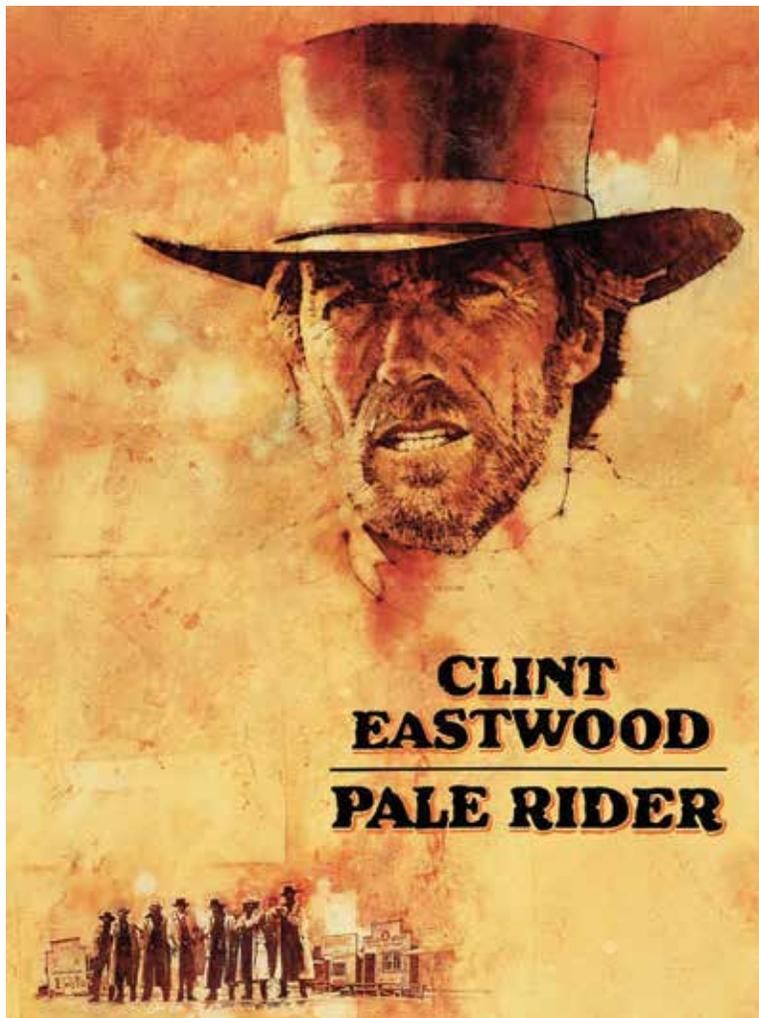
bed in California. The wealthy miner, Coy LaHood played by Richard Dysart and his son, Josh played by Christopher Penn are using large scale hydraulic mining to extract gold. Having apparently exhausted all the gold in the adjacent stream beds, the wealthy miner and his son, from here on referred to as the "bad guys" want to

force the small scale miners, from here on referred to as the "good guys" off of their claims so they can also hydraulic mine out that stream bed. The bad guys have a group of thugs working for them who try to intimidate the good guys such that they abandon their claims. The film opens with the thugs riding through the good guys camp and more or less destroying it.

One of the good guys, "Hull Barret" played by Michael Moriarty, then comes into town to get some replacement supplies and is set upon by the thugs and beaten. A lone man, a stranger (Eastwood), rides in on a pale horse and seeing this comes

to Barret's aid. When the dust settles, all of the thugs are lying on the ground unconscious and/or bleeding. Barret, wanting to thank the stranger invites him back to their mining camp for dinner. When the stranger walks into the dinner scene he is wearing a preacher's collar and from then on Eastwood's character is referred to as "Preacher".

The time frame represented by the film is never explicitly indicated. It is said that the head "bad guy", LaHood, had been an early settler in the area starting in the mid 1850's, but large scale hydraulic mining created environmental disasters and was banned in California in January 1884. There is brief mention in the film of the possibility



of this ban occurring in the next few years and so I estimate the time frame represented by the film to be around 1880.

Living in the good guys camp there is a mother and daughter, the mother, "Sarah Wheeler" played by Carrie Snodgrass, and the daughter, "Megan" played by Sidney Penny, who are being taken care of by Barret who hopes to marry Sarah some day once his claim pays. The daughter develops a crush on the Preacher who saves her from being raped by Josh, but of course it doesn't end well when the Preacher suggests she wait for someone younger.

Although I enjoyed the film, I could have wished that Eastwood's character had been better explained. At some point in the film he takes off his preacher's collar and puts on his six guns. The evidence suggests that something in his past caused the character to take off the guns and put on the collar but this backstory is never really explained. At the end of the film the Preacher just rides off into the hills.

OK, I can hear you asking, so where's the telegraph in all this? The head bad guy, LaHood, seeing that his local group of thugs is no match for the Preacher, sends a telegram to hire what amounts to a higher grade of thugs referred to as a marshal and his deputies. The first scene shows the telegram being sent from the little town's small wooden (rather attractive) train station complete with a telegraph office sign on it. Adding to this scene there is short steam train just making a stop at the station as the telegram is being sent. The next scene then shows the telegram being received in a larger city presented as Yuba City, CA. The recipients, again, are a group of so called lawmen headed by an apparently self proclaimed marshal, "Stockburn", played by John Russell. However, the "law" they defend is dependent on the wishes of whoever is paying them. It turns out that the Preacher and the marshal have a history and although there is a hint dropped early in the film, this is before the Stockburn character is even introduced and I didn't pick up on it until the end of the film. Again, the Preacher's backstory is never really explained.

In both telegraph offices there is what appears

to be a steel lever key and an Acme resonator with a sounder in it. Unfortunately the images are both dark and not very clear. The size of the sounder coils hints that it is a main line sounder, and in one shot I almost thought I saw the angled armature of a 15B. The Acme resonator box is more or less just sitting on about a 2 inch high base of some sort, not a pedestal or swing arm. My guess of about 1880 for the time frame of the film is certainly close to the 1881 date of the invention of the steel lever key and so its presence could be explained, but Acme resonators didn't appear until about a couple of decades later and 15B's even later than that.

We see the face of the operator in the little wooden station and the credits list one actor, Jay K. Fishburn, as the telegrapher. I assume this was him as we never plainly see the face of the receiving operator played by a different actor, likely an extra. Both however have a terrible sending technique, slamming the key with their finger held an inch or more above the key's knob between strikes. Further, with this technique they are only sending dots, nary a dash is heard. But very little code is heard anyway and I could make no sense of it. I could have wished that the receiving operator actor had at least been taught to correctly send "OK" to acknowledge receipt of the message instead of just a short group of random dots.

As with most traditional Westerns, in the end the good guys win and the bad guys lose. What did you expect? However, if you want to see how it all plays out and who does what to whom, you'll have to acquire a copy for yourself. I won't spoil any more of the suspense by further revealing the plot. If you need a hint, the film's title is a reference to the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, the rider of the pale horse being "death". I found DVD's of the film readily available from several branches of my local library so I suspect that it may also be available from yours. It can also be watched on-line and of course you can purchase DVD's of it from Amazon, many with two or more Eastwood films on the same DVD and for well less than ten dollars. However you view it, enjoy!

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**AVAILABLE:** A collection of telegraph, Western Union, and Postal Telegraph items. These include paper, instruments, self-winding clocks, and other items related to telegraphy. I would prefer to sell these items as a group, not individually. Contact Gene by email at k4mog@bellsouth.net

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## Ham Radio Web Sites

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

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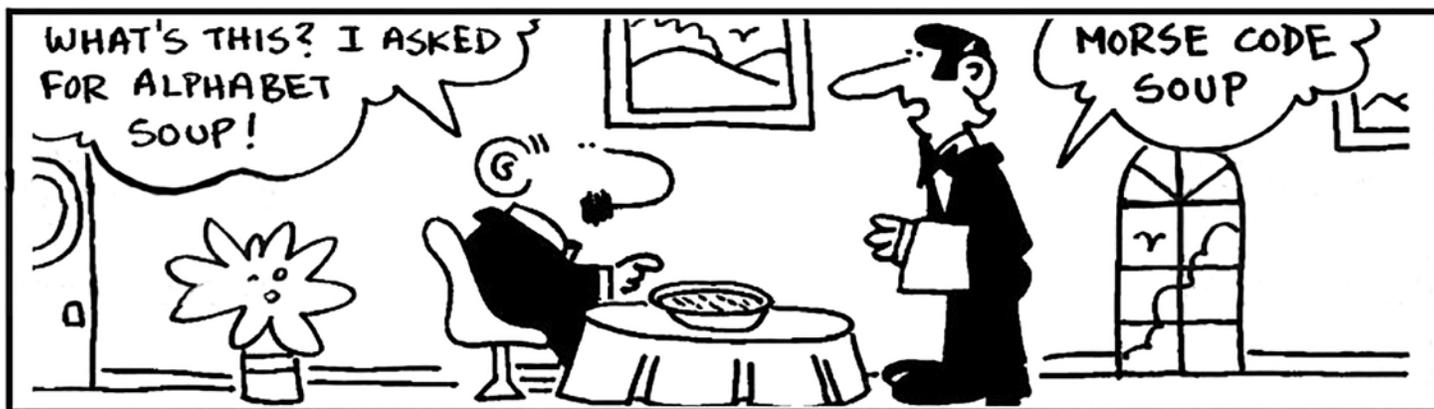
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