

A History of Amateur Radio in Clark County

By Bill Norton, W8FYO

The history of amateur radio organizations in Clark County can be traced back more than 50 years. After World War II there already had existed the Southwestern Ohio Amateur Radio Society and a western Ohio chapter of the Society of Amateur Radio Operators. However, the roots of CLARA date back to July 31, 1947 at 8:15 PM when 24 radio amateurs met in the small ballroom of the Shawnee Hotel in Springfield. They came from Springfield, South Charleston, Urbana, New Carlisle, Medway, and Yellow Springs. In that room that cost \$1.50 to rent, the Springfield Amateur Radio Club took form.

This clipping from the Springfield Sun the following day describes the meeting as enthusiastic. In the article, the new club secretary, Frank Knull, said that the monthly meetings would feature talks by Wright Field engineers and traveling sales engineers of leading manufacturers. He said that SARC was formed to further the research and development of radio communications as well as exchange mutual ideas on maintenance of radio equipment and actually instruct associate members in the theory and practice of radio communication.

A month later officers were nominated and elected and the members heard their first program, a sound movie called "Electron Theory and The Diode Tube." That must have particularly excited them because the next month's program was to be a debate on the relative merits of transmitting tubes. P. T. Taylor and Dick Littler argued in favor of screen grid tubes while Bud Griswold and Don Ream, W8OG, attempted to prove that triodes were better. There is no record of who won.

The overall interests of hams in the 1940's were in many ways the same as they are today...getting the best performance from their equipment, making contacts with distant stations, chewing the rag with other hams about the hobby, and of course, discussing amateur radio politics. Meeting minutes as well as the club newsletter Q5'er, later Q-5, indicated a major worry at the time was a change in frequency allocations, and what SARC, the League, and other radio clubs could do about it.

But the technical aspects of amateur radio continued to change then, as now, resulting in all the necessary conflict and diversity that must be a part of it.

In the October 1953 issue of the Q-5 the editor lamented: "It used to be that when a group of Hams came together for a meeting or social gathering, the discussion was ALWAYS about antennas, keying methods, modulators, Class B and C amplifiers, Heising, grid cathode, plate modulation, DX States worked, WAC, WAZ, DXCC, the fist of old Joe." "After sitting in a meeting of Hams the other night, nary a word of such things." "Instead, horizontal amplifiers, yokes, the high price of receiving tubes, rasters, linearity, and ad infinitum...Woe is me...Oh for the days of the "19" receiving tube...A little prayer might be in order...Oh Dear God, make them hams again just for tonight."

That newsletter, by the way, consisted of five typed pages and cost 2 cents to mail.

For thirty years, activities of SARC included participating in field days, conducting training classes, public service, and emergency preparedness. Meetings were held for years at the YMCA and the old Columbia Gas Company on the western edge of the city. The club call, W8OG, was acquired by SARC after the death of Don Ream, a club founder and local Western Union telegraph operator. For many years the club operated the Clark County Emergency Net weekly on 80 meters at 3907 kHz. In fact, there was even a novice emergency net operating on cw.

Until the 1970's, SARC was the only ham organization in the county. But the growth of 2-meter repeaters created a new branch of enthusiastic hobbyists. SARC started a 2-meter net in September 1971 that used a new repeater built by Glen McConkey and others. This repeater operated on an input frequency of 146.46 and an output of 146.88. By spring, the repeater was moved to the Jones Road site near South Vienna.

On April 5, 1972, the Western Ohio Repeater Association held its first official meeting and the first order of business was to change the frequencies. A month later, the current 13/73 pair was authorized and crystals were passed out for the new frequencies. The dominant issues for the club were frequency coordination and the technical aspects of building and maintaining the repeater. Regular meetings were held at the Springfield Air National Guard base and a small newsletter called "2 Meters +" was started. WORA incorporated in 1976.

Then in the mid and late 70's, the membership and public service activities of SARC and WORA began to converge. During the blizzard of 1978, emergency preparedness by both clubs paid off during three straight days of emergency communications for public service and rescue operations. The following year WORA formally joined SARC for field day and a mall exhibit. By fall a committee was appointed to examine the possibility of a merger. The Q-5 and 2-Meters + newsletters combined in October. Finally, on February 19, 1980, the Clark County Amateur Radio Association was created, acquiring the assets of both WORA and SARC. The SARC club call of W8OG was retained.

That eventful time was nearly 20 years ago. Since then, CLARA has continued the tradition of service in this area. As one of two amateur radio organizations in Clark County today, CLARA has not only benefited local amateurs, but also the entire community itself.