

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Each month one of our members is randomly selected and asked to share their ham radio biography with all of us. Questions or comments should go to Paul, KD2MX.

DISCLAIMER: Any views expressed in this section are those of the submitting member and may or may not be those of the NAQCC or its officers.

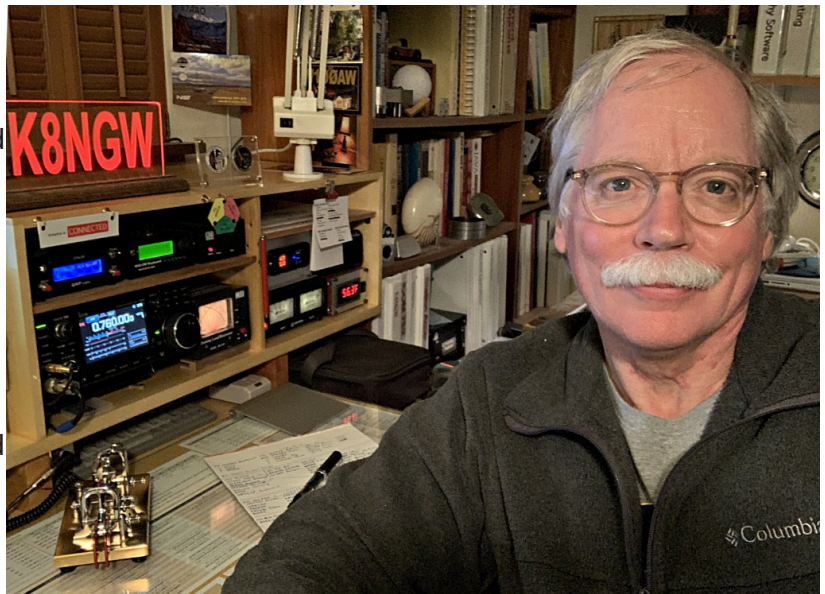
FREDERICK SCHEBOR, K8NGW, #8949

RF magic, pure RF magic. That's what planted the seed in me 60 years ago, drove me to ham radio 40 years ago and brought me back into the fold 10 years ago. Going back to the beginning...

In the mid 1960's, my grandparents replaced their tube-based table radio with a transistorized model. They asked me if I would like the old radio. Of course I jumped at the offer. The radio (I don't remember the manufacturer) covered the AM broadcast band and also had one shortwave band. While the shortwave band could pickup the powerhouse stations such as the BBC, Radio Moscow, and Voice of Canada, to me the most important capability was listening to AM broadcast skip late at night. While my parents assumed I was asleep, I would lay in bed (in Dearborn, Michigan) listening to news on WCBS from New York City, country music on WSM from Nashville, or a weather report on WGN from Chicago.

SLOW START WITH MORSE CODE

I share the next step on the ham radio path with many of you ... Boy Scouts. If my memory serves me correctly, the (1960's) Radio merit badge morse code requirement was to take part in a 5-minute conversation at 5-words per minute. Unfortunately the LP record we scouts listened to was not at Farnsworth character speed but much, much slower. As a result, I didn't learn the Morse



letter sound, but simply counted dots and dashes. (This would come back to haunt me later.)

Fast forward to the 1980's, my first (real) job, and my wife and I moving to Ann Arbor Michigan. The local club (Arrow) was offering a four-week Novice course with the Novice tests (theory & code) being administered at the 4th week. I had no problem passing the theory, and, as I did in the Boy Scouts, my dot and dash counting got me through the CW test. In 1982 the FCC granted me Novice callsign KA8NGW. I picked up a used Heathkit HR10B receiver, a Johnson Viking Adventurer transmitter, ran a 15M dipole down our apartment hallway ceiling and I was on the air!

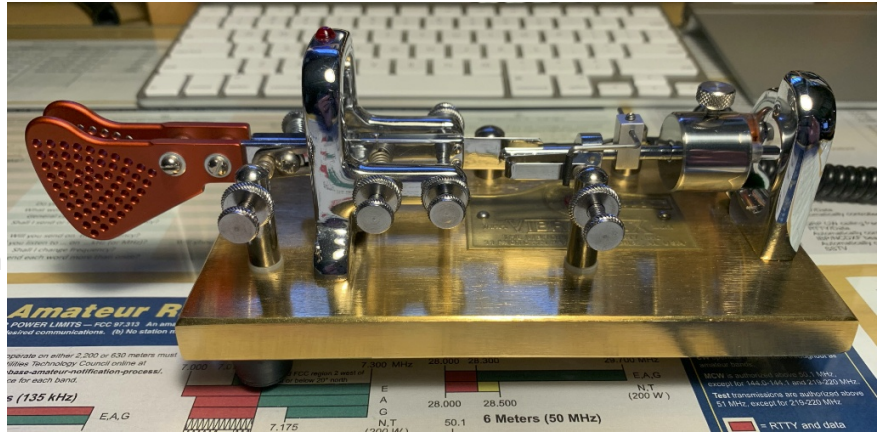
The next step is also shared with many of you. Life became more complicated. A new home, three wonderful kids, and increased job responsibilities started pushing amateur radio to

the background. Coupled to that was my inability to get my code speed up to 13 words per minute in order to pass the General test. Try as I might, my method of counting dots and dashes limited me to 9-10 words per minute. I wrote a CW practice program for my Commodore Vic-20 that would allow me to work on specific letter sets. Unfortunately, try as I might, I could not overcome counting. Over time, I was on the air less and less until finally I packed my station up, took it to a local ham fest and sold it all.

STARTING OVER: THE PATH TO EXTRA

My return to amateur radio was orchestrated by ... the Boy Scouts. I've been an adult scout leader for nearly 30 years. In 2012, the ARRL partnered with the BSA and created a Morse Code Interpreter badge. The badge was available to both scouts and adult leaders. There are several requirements, but they center on sending and receiving morse at 5 wpm. I thought that it would be simple but with a bit of practice. This time however, armed with knowledge of Farnsworth and Koch, and the myriad number of CW practice apps, I went back to square one and re-learned the code properly.

While doing that, I realized that "You know, with a bit of study you could get a Technician license." And while studying for the Tech, I realized that "You know, with a bit more study you could get a General license." I passed the Technician exam in November 2012 and passed the General the following month. To celebrate my accomplishment, through the Vanity program I petitioned the FCC for my original Novice callsign, KA8NGW but with a letter removed, and thus I became K8NGW. I picked up a used Icom 735 and was back on the air the summer of 2013. Since that time, I've upgraded to Extra, graduated from CW Ops Level 2, and learned the joy of sending morse with a bug.



Modified left handed Vibroplex Original Gold Bug

NAQCC

I joined the NAQCC but didn't begin participating until January 2019. Since that time, I've been fortunate to take part in every monthly sprint. With the lack of bug operators in the W8 division, N8XMS and I usually trade off 1st and 2nd places every month. This month (June) I was able to participate in my first mW Sprint. One of these years I'll start participating in the monthly challenges.

THE SHACK AND PROJECTS

My current station is built around an ICOM-7300 through an MFJ 267 wattmeter/dummy load and out to an LDG RT-100 remote tuner mounted at the base of a DX Engineering 43' vertical with 32 buried 48' - 65' radials. For the low bands, I manually switch in a base-loading coil tapped for 160 and 80 meters. For CW operations I use a Begali Simplex Mono key setup for a "lefty". For NAQCC events, I use a modified left handed Vibroplex Original Gold Bug (a very rare model). For SKCC events I pull out my trusty Army Signal Corps J-38 straight key. For other CW contests or CW DX pileups, I opt for a K1EL K42 CW Keyboard.

Just this month I added a uBITX V6 to the shack. Its a great little QRP rig controlled with a color touch screen driven by an Arduino controller. It does though, require several modifications before its ready for a NAQCC Sprint:

1. AGC - There is none! If you turn the AF gain up to hear a low level CW signal and your neighbor tunes up his 1.5KW amp in the pass band, your eardrums will end up in the next county!
2. CW Filtering - There is none! The CW passband is the same as the SSB passband, ~3 kHz. There's A LOT of CW sprint signals in those 3 kHz!
3. Variable power output - There is none! As built, 20M is 3.72 watts, 40M is 3.31 watts, 80M is 6.45 watts and that is the trouble spot since it's above the 5 watt QRP limit.

Fortunately with a little leg work (Internet searches) and some solder smoke, these issues can be remedied. There is a very active group at: <https://groups.io/g/bitx20>. And lastly, as a bonus, I get to learn Arduino programming since I want the features to be selectable via the touch screen. Hopefully I'll use the uBITX in the September sprint.

ON THE AIR

You'll usually find me on the air Monday nights, or late night Friday and Saturday. All bands and modes are my favorite. In addition to Worked All States on several bands and modes, this past April I was able to complete the ARRL Triple Play Award (all 50 states on SSB, CW, and digital). I'll go after DX, but I'm not a committed DX chaser. My confirmed country count stands at 89. So far the highlight of my amateur radio career was to represent the great state of Michigan during the 2014 ARRL Centennial. It was a real hoot being able to send "CQ CQ CQ DE W1AW/8" from my shack. My copy of the W1AW station license is a cherished memento.

The RF magic that I felt 60 years ago while listening to distant stations, is it still there today? Well, as I make the last few edits to this article, its 12:08 AM and the uBITX is tuned to 5085 kHz ... WTWW, Lebanon Tennessee. Yeah, the RF magic is still there!



The latest project: A uBITX V6 and a J-38 key