

The Whole World His 'Neighbor'

Southbridge Radio Ham Talks With Distant Lands

By GEORGE G. KELLEY JR. Telegram Staff Reporter

SOUTHBRIDGE — "W1NEP", his "XYL", and their two "harmonics" live at 122 Litchfield Ave.

Actually, the head of the household is Donald B. Whitney, but he's also a ham radio operator and as such has his particular code designation, W1NEP.

And in ham lingo XYL is wife and harmonics are children. Thus his wife Janet is his "XYL" and Susan, age 13, and Dick, 10, are the harmonics.

"Some of the ham lingo is unusual, but there's nothing unique about me, or my being a ham," Whitney said. "There are 20 or 30% of us in the Southbridge area, and more than 200,000 around the world."

Ham Five Years

"I've always been fascinated by radio," said the 36-year-old American Optical Co. employe, "but I've had my ham license only five years now."

However, in those five years he's talked — via his equipment — to hams in all 50 states and all five continents — to people in Northern Rhodesia, Russian and other Iron Curtain countries, Egypt, Lithuania, Laos, Angola, French Equatorial Africa, and Bechuanaland, to name just a few.

Also, the Chilean Islands, Barbados, Saudi Arabia, Wake, Fiji, and even an American woman schoolteacher on Pago Pago.

He explained how hams exchange QSL's — picture postcards with spaces for special information to be filled in on the back. They're for the purpose of confirming a particular ham-to-ham contact.

Whitney said he "works", that is contacts, five or six hams a day and sends out one or two QSL's per week.

Russian Speak Best English

"The QSL cards from Russians, as you'd expect, are part propaganda," he said.

"For example the picture side will show people at an unbeliev-

ably clean and spacious bathing beach or park. Lately their cards show the moon with a Russian satellite orbiting around it.

"About the Russian hams," he continued: "They speak about the best English I've heard.

"There's no language problem, as a ham, for an American. About 80 percent of all hams are in this country, and most of the rest are English-speaking too."

What do you get out of being a ham, he was asked.

Any time of day or night I can go into the "ham shack"—our den off the living room—and talk to people anywhere in the country or all over the world.

"If for example I can't sleep at night, no matter how late it is I can get up, come downstairs to the ham shack and count on finding someone to talk to.

"Everyone on ham radio is on a first-name basis," he continued, "and you don't know when you first make contact whether you're working a corporation president, or a farmer, or a schoolboy. That's part of the fascination, along with learning about all kinds of people and other states and countries."

Can Be Expensive

Is it an expensive hobby to take up?

Said Whitney: "You can get on the air for under \$100, or spend as much as \$30,000. The average ham, I'd guess, has two or three hundred dollars invested.

"For talking in the different frequency bands the same sending and receiving units suffice, but the antenna systems must be changed.

"I have several different antennas in the back yard. In fact, just three days ago I put up a 75-meter band, for working New England and New York State.

"My son Dick helped out. Actually we used a fishing pole and cast the antenna up to catch it between two trees. How long it'll stay put, I don't know."

Reference to Carla

At about 8:30 in the evening Don sat down at his apparatus

to try and make some contacts with other hams.

He switched on several dials and turned others, making lights glow throughout the equipment and producing a series of sharp clicks from a little box, signifying that he was hooking up by remote control to the proper antenna system outside behind his home.

At first there was a medley of Southern accents, including an enthusiastic woman ham who was sprinkling her conversation with phrases such as "land o' Goshen" and "lawzie me".

"The women really rule the airwaves after about 8 in the morning," said Don, "talking about starting their washing, sending the kids off to school, get-



SOUTHBRIDGE MAN AT THE MIKE Donald B. Whitney talks to near and far from "ham shack" in his home

ting out the dust mop, and so forth."

Then we listened to a man in

Texas describing how hams there had worked on the Civil Defense net during Hurricane Carla —relaying messages, making family contacts and in general helping out with the emergency operations.

Both the armed forces and the government consider hams a valuable reserve pool of trained communications people, available in time of local or national emergency, whether long or short in duration.

No Heat Wave in Denver

Don was calling "CQ—CQ", over and over, asking for contact with anyone hearing his signal.

A voice answered, as clearly as if from next door, identifying himself as Bob in Denver, Colo.

"Is the sun still out in Denver?" Don asked.

"No, its a little cloudy and kind of cool out, about 40 or 45 degrees," was the answer.

A little later, just before signing off Don asked what Bob did in Denver.

Back came the response: "I'm a high school student."

Next Don talked with a man named Pete, living near Albany, N.Y., and mentioned that he worked for American Optical Co. here.

Pete told us he drives by an AO branch, in Latham, N.Y., daily on his way to and from work.

Mrs. Whitney took the microphone: "Hello Pete, this is Janet. I'm not a licensed ham but I am an enthusiastic XYL who thoroughly enjoys spending some of her evenings here in the ham shack talking to people near and far."

"I know", said Pete, "my XYL was once the same way. But we have a new grandson now whom we're very busy spoiling, and these days, when I get on the air, she just plays with the baby."

Besides their interest in distant people and places via radio, the Whitneys are also a music-loving family.

In a usual evening, when not at the mike in the ham shack, Don will probably be found playing their new electric organ recently installed in their front room, beside the piano.

Although Don doesn't expect him to become a ham soon, son Dick is already a talented photographer, shooting all kinds of pictures and developing and printing them himself in a basement photo lab.