

PROFILES

with

Jennifer Barr



Over the past 50 years "Wilo" Near has talked to people from every part of the world. It's not that he's been there, he's just talked to them—via short wave and ham radio.

Wilo (christened William, often called Bill but mostly Wilo) has been fascinated by radio since he was a boy and has been a licensed radio broadcaster since 1936. He's a life member with the American Radio Relay League, and has been an Advanced Amateur for 24 years.

The Acton Free Press of April 16, 1936 carried a story of a broadcasting station to be established at the "Y" by Acton Radio Club and operated by one William Near who had just received his license.

More recently, a couple of Sundays ago, Wilo arranged a call to Mary New, in Perth Australia, from her Acton parents, Eileen and Fred New. The call lasted an hour and ten minutes and was as "clear as a bell" according to Wilo.

The communication was arranged through a ham radio operator friend of Mary's. The call had to be carefully arranged for time taking into account cloud level and earth curvature in order to bounce the signal 11,278 miles around the earth. Other operators involved in the call were Steve Chamberlain, whose call numbers are VK6 1/R (for all you ham radio fans) and Mike Donahue, both of Australia.

Mass of Equipment

Wilo has lived in Acton since 1922 when as a young lad brought here by his parents from the States. Radio was in his infancy although Wilo hastens to inform the skeptic that short wave communications radios were much more advanced and sophisticated than listening radios.

He was given his first radio set in 1930, a set using two "peanut" tubes and rechargeable batteries. He started building his own gear, dismantling old sets for parts (a fact which now makes him upset because he has so few oldies left). He built a Heathkit in 1956 and now has a bedroom full of equipment for all types and amounts of output plus a 50 foot radio antenna anchored in a four cubic foot hole in his backyard. It's enough to boggle the mind.

He's delighted with his new beam aerial which increased his transmissions from 25 countries to 125. His second greatest radio thrill (the first was talking to Mary New in Australia) was contacting the chap who had installed the aerial then in New Zealand.

"We must have done something right," he commented.

It wasn't the first time Wilo had talked to New Zealand, he made his first "down under" contact in the 30s. In 1934 he received a letter from a Buenos Aires radio station congratulating him on receiving their transmission. When he first heard the Buenos Aires station, transmitting in English for the American listeners, Wilo says he thought he had Denver, Colorado, and was thrilled at that.

The only emergency Wilo has been involved in directly was one involving the Canary Islands. A lady residing there was desperately ill in Hospital and wasn't expected to recover. Officials wanted to contact her daughter and son-in-law in Toronto but had little information. A mayday call was bounced from British Columbia and picked up by Wilo in Acton. Between him and a Toronto operator, the son-in-law was found to be an anthropology professor at the University of Toronto. Wilo handed the information over to other operators and has yet to find out the end of the story.

During the Mississauga disaster and evacuation, Wilo monitored his set, but didn't clutter the air unless actually needed, as any good operator does.

Apart from the occasional emergency, Wilo uses his set for contacts and "rag chewing". He just loves to chat with people around the world and has a large shoebox full of QSL cards sent from former contacts.

The cards read like a travel list—Israel, Gambia, Cuba, Germany, Spain, Liberia, Guernsey, Switzerland. In August, Wilo's record book shows the following countries contacted: Uruguay, Denmark, England, New Guinea, Japan, Poland, Russia, Italy and Australia.

Museum pieces

Wilo also has a small museum of old radio tubes, although quite a few of his antiques have found their way into newer sets of local kids. He now regrets not keeping some of his historical sets intact. The earliest set he has is a 1923 Westinghouse that "squeals like mad but is tremendously sensitive." Among the old radio

tubes is a Rogers original, some Westinghouse peanut tubes, a large copper tubing coil from an early radio, the first RCA tube and many different sized tubes depicting the years from then to the day of transistorized radios.

When he's not mucking around with his radio, Wilo works with transformers and cabinets at Hammond in Guelph. His employer, Fred Hammond has an enviable museum of radio tubes, according to Wilo.

He's also in his 20th year as an elder with Knox Presbyterian Church and was Worshipful Master of the Acton Masonic Lodge in 1977.

Although the longest broadcaster in Acton, Wilo is not the only ham radio operator. There are eight in Acton and area and eight more in Rockwood and area. In all there are over 600,000 licensed radio operators in the world. Wilo has call books for all over the U.S. and the rest of the world casually listed under "foreign."

For any ham radio enthusiasts wishing to call Wilo has number VE1ACB.

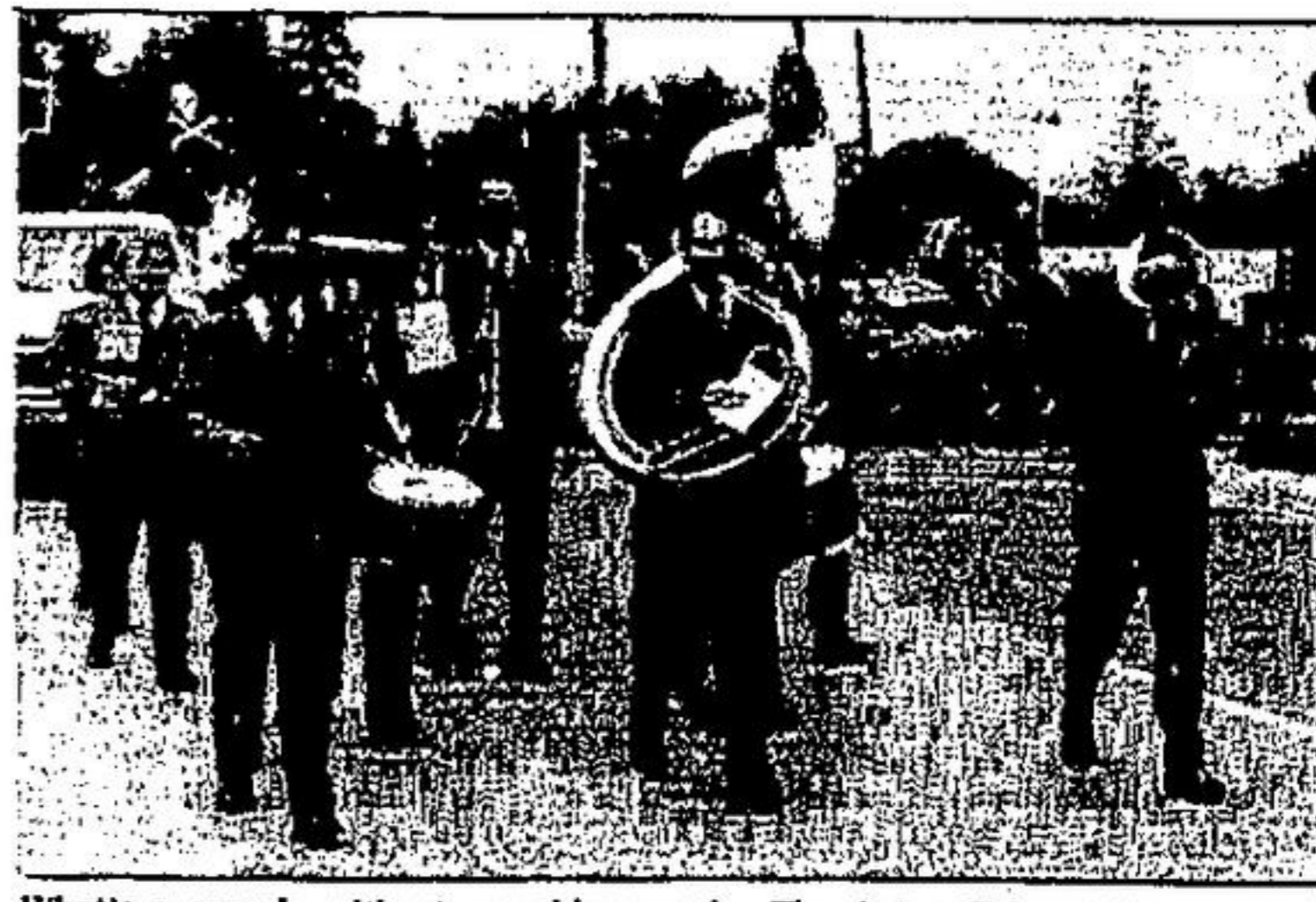
While we're talking, a call comes in on the radio in the universal Morse code. Wilo starts to read as if the communication is in straight English.

"It's a west coast station," he comments, "We're 20 minutes to Hood River" it says—"and the transmission fades leaving me wanting to renew contact with that vague voice out there three thousand miles away."

It would be very easy to get hooked on ham radio.



The Robert Little MAD Camp worm captured first prize for best float in the parade.



What's a parade without marching music. The Acton Citizens' Band led the playground finale parade Thursday night.

Suggest garbage bins for sewage plant

Acton Councillor Terry Grubbe wants the region to put garbage bins at the sewage treatment plant so residents can drop off bagged refuse.

Council passed her motion Monday calling for the region public works committee to consider putting a bin at the sewage plant or another appropriate location.

She noted she has

heard concerns about where to dump garbage from residents. She thought residents could dump garbage at the region run sewage plant during the hours it is open.

Mayor Peter Pomeroy suggested if the town paid to put the bin at the sewage plant the region would likely be more receptive to the idea. It is "vital" that the

town get a bin for Acton and area Councillor Russ Miller said, pointing to

the garbage strewn on rural roads. Robert Engineer

Austin reported the town has spent over \$900 on picking up garbage on

rural and urban streets this year to the end of July.

Highway 25 info centre

The Ministry of Transportation and Communications will hold an information centre at Speyside School next Tuesday afternoon and evening to outline plans for reconstruction of Highway 25 from Highway 401 to Acton.

The information sessions will be from 2 to 4 p.m. and from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Improvements for the road include widening to 24 feet, constructing a truck climbing lane on the part that is on the Niagara Escarpment, improving the design of some intersections, widening of Highway 25 to four lanes between Highway 401 and regional road 9 and reconstruction of the Highway 25 and Highway 401 interchange.

The improvements are needed because traffic volume is increasing, many large trucks use the road, there is a higher than normal number of accidents on Highway 25, the pavement 20 feet wide, is too narrow and some intersections are poor.

Halton Hills supports the province's reconstruction plans.

Monday council passed a resolution indicating

agreement with the plans for the highway. Engineer Robert Austin said the province hasn't decided when the reconstruction will take place.

Councillor Marilyn Serjeantson wondered if the reconstruction of Highway 25 would solve some of the town's continual problems with gravel truck routes. Austin said the province might be able to answer her question.

\$500 for committee

The special Halton Hills council committee reviewing market value assessment will have \$500 to spend exploring the new form of property assignment.

HALTON HILLS BLUE FIN SWIM CLUB ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

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wieners 1.39

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