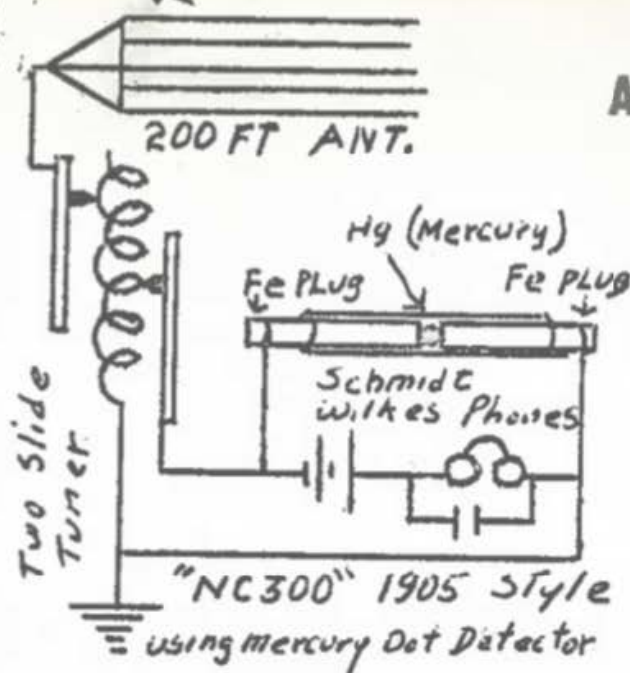


## AMATEUR WIRELESS

BEFORE 1912 IN THE

## PACIFIC NORTHWEST

By Edmund H. Marriner W6BLZ



Reading Seefred's article in W.C.H.A. about amateur radio before 1918 brings to mind one of the oldest "old timers" I know. Mr. Cliff Watson ex W7 ANO, ex "RM", ex "CZ", who used to live in Portland, Oregon, in the old days.

Where does amateur radio begin anyway? When the first license was issued, or before?

To go back to the very beginning when Cliff was a young lad, the story of Marconi sending the letter "S" across the Atlantic, December 12, 1901, was written up in *Colliers* magazine. Perhaps this was the beginning. This was enough to spark anyone with electricity in their veins and established wireless as a career, at least for Cliff. Along about this time publicity was given to a radio circuit which, in 1902, sent messages to Catalina Island from San Pedro and carried the Jeffries-Fitzsimmons fight long before the boat arrived with the news. At this time wireless was first used in police work. It seems two agents swiped some money and

wine from a hotel in Avalon just before the boat sailed. The manager had a message sent to the San Pedro police, who were waiting at the dock - to the amazement of the thieves. This circuit was the main source of communication to the mainland for 21 years. With all this publicity about wireless, it wasn't long before a Wireless Club was started in the public library in Portland. Here Cliff got enough information to build a coherer detector and pick up his spark rig across the room. The other amateurs at that time in Portland were Charley Austin who signed "SN" and soon had a 1 kw spark on the air. Also Billy Anderson, "CK" and Joe Hallack "FU". Joe and Cliff became life-long friends and Joe is now RI at Portland. The club was about the only source of information as there was no contact with the outside world except through magazines. The first chance the boys had to see real equipment was when Admiral Fullam brought a portion of the "Great White Fleet" into Portland for the Rose Festival in the summer of 1905. Here, aboard the "USS Charleston", Cliff saw a Slaby-Arco 2 kw spark made in Europe. With this information Cliff had a

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one inch Connetecut spark coil going in 1906 and contacted "PE" the United wireless station at Council Crest Hills back of Portland about five miles. Land Line morse code was used. Cliff had helped Tommy Thompson install the equipment at "PE" and had a chance to make his first contact signing "W". From then on in 1907 contacts were limited to an occasional ship which would come up the river and gladden expectant ears with a contact. In 1908 Cliff went up to the Dewey Mine, near Grangeville, Idaho, and constructed a receiver for the mine from the old Modern Electric magazine, using a mercury drop detector. A wire was strung 1,000 feet across the river and deadhead traffic for the mine was copied from "PE" in Portland.

When Cliff got back to Portland, Joe Hallack moved and left his H.V. transformer with Cliff so he could have some real power. Late in 1912 Cliff and Joe both went to Oregon Agriculture College; Now Oregon State, in Corvallis. Naturally they had to have the ham rig so they shipped it to the fraternity house; later installing the antenna on the roof of the administration building and stack of the heating plant. One of the more exciting things that happened when the station was installed was the night Cliff contacted the "SS Spokane" which was sinking in the Gulf of Alaska. He was able to

handle the distress traffic. A side light to this story has stuck in my mind - We have an old retired spark operator who now has an egg ranch at Vista, California, and calls at the house once a week. Naturally I am always asking him questions. One day, I said, "Did you ever send a distress call during all the years of operating?" He said, "Yes, I sent a distress call from the old "SS Spokane" when she was sinking in the Gulf of Alaska." I was amazed and walked over to the phone and soon had Hammill and Watson talking on the phone after their contact 45 years before.

The station Cliff and Joe had at the college was powerful enough to work "NPL", Pt. Loma, "PH" in San Francisco, and "PA" in Seattle, but the only amateur they heard was Charley Austin in Portland, some fifty miles away.

After college Cliff drifted into commercial operating on the Alaska boats and at the Montana Company's stations and did not get back into ham radio until the late twenties when he had "W7ANO". We could probably shake some commercial stories out of Cliff if there was enough interest. At any rate maybe some of the old timers may remember Cliff and I would be happy to convey any information on to him. He keeps a list of all the old 50 years operators around. If W.C.H.A. is interesred in the 50 year men we can sure send it in for publication. In the meantime why not prime old W6EA for some real early dope on what happened around Los Angeles. I can only remember when Wally, W6FEX, was in Radio Supply on Main Street in 1930. Can you imagine a guy working in a ham store that long?