

The Un-silent Silent Key

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All persons mentioned are fictitious... except, those that are not.
Any similarity to known persons is coincidental except, where it is not.

Please note that this play was initially written several weeks before Rick, KA1AQP, passed away.

Old George, WK1FSU lived in Holden, he had a very large ham shack with many radios, he was on every band. George was what we call a Morse Code, CW nut, and he would be making CW contacts most evenings, around 8:30pm.

About a month ago George passed away. Everyone in our club was saddened. He was a member of 2 clubs, he gave equipment to new Hams and he helped everyone with installing radios and antennas. He was a loss to Amateur Radio.

His family wanted to clear the equipment and antennas in order to sell the house, and asked our club if we could take all George's equipment, sell it, or keep it in the club for new Hams. Georges wife had passed away several years earlier so he lived alone. His family lived in Virginia.

After 4 weeks or so George's equipment had been allocated to different members and clubs, for use or for sale, and all of the antennas and cabling had been removed from the house in Holden.

People still talked about George and how he Elmer'ed many new, and, not so new Hams.

One day one of our members, Gary, got a phone call from an acquaintance in Ohio. The person said that he heard George, WK1FSU on CW, on 80M, 3.538Mhz, the previous evening. Gary told the Ham that WK1FSU had passed away. The Ohio Ham said he was sure it was George because he knew his CW sending fist (style). He said he would monitor the 80M band and call if he heard George again. Of course, as a

soon as Gary mentioned the call on the repeater, everyone tuned to the 80 Meter band. Every day someone else in the club copied George, WK1FSU having QSO's (Ham contacts) with stations all over. Several reports said that George talked about the 'current' weather in Massachusetts, his home in Holden and about his grandchildren in Virginia.

We were wondering if there was a Pirate Station out there, emulating George's CW calls. The general consensus was, somehow, it was the real George.

Now the mystery deepened. We decided to go to Holden and monitor any signals. 3 club members who had mobile HF went over to the house around 8:15 and parked a little way from the house. Our cars were fairly conspicuous with HF antennas on the roofs, so we hoped that no one would think we were stalkers.

Nothing was heard on 80M except some distant CW chatter. The minutes crawled by until around 8:31, a strong CW signal came up on the band. Everybody started their cars and moved to be in front of George's house. There was, such a scramble, we were lucky that there were no accidents. Anyway, very strong signals were emanating from Georges house. Using VHF each person reported signals that were overloading their HF sets. It was George, it was his fist, his speed and his way of conversing in Morse Code. We all got out of our cars and went to the front gate to see if there were any lights on in house. None, the house was dark. It was a dark night and the realization of what was happening sent a shiver up our spines (shiver). Before everyone got back in their cars, we discussed asking the club board to develop a plan of action to solve this mystery. We left the area as mystified as we were when we arrived.

By now we were receiving messages, emails and phone calls from all over North America, they had heard George, WK1FSU. Lots of comments were coming in; is it a pirate, is someone in the house, is he really dead, had he left a tape recorder running!

The mystery deepened when one of our club members, who knew George, lived about 2 miles away, was listening on 80 meters. He heard George. With his heart-in-his-mouth he replied to the CQ. WK1FSU this is W1JXR we copy your CW, signal 20 over 9. George replied W1JXR, nice to hear you on the band, how are you and your family, how is your Ragtime Band doing. W1JXR was flabbergasted, he backed away from his radio, knocking several items on the floor. It was George! it was George! it

was George. His wife wondering what all the noise was coming from the radio shack, intercepted him as he wandered into the hallway, saying, it was George, it was George. Ok dear, what! was 'George'. Gary told his wife the story. She said, you must have liked him, and are having a problem wrestling with his death. Gary said, no dear, it was George on the radio. Many other hams have also communicated with him in Morse Code. We went to his house, no one was there, but, signals were radiating from the house.

Ok Gary, she said, not quite understanding the situation, why don't you come in and sit by the fire, I'll make you a nice cup of Hot Coco. Gary, in deep shock, still shaking his head, went into the living room, and sat by the fire.

At the next club meeting the mystery of 'George' on CW, was the ONLY subject.

Somehow, in all the confusion a cohesive plan was put together:

1. Ask Real Estate Company to accompany us on a visit to the house
2. Call the Holden Police Dept to visit the house
3. Call ARRL RFI dept
4. Call the FCC

The following week I called the Real Estate company, noted on the sign outside Georges house. They said that someone would meet us at the house that afternoon. 3 of us went there. The Real Estate lady let us in. We checked the room where we had removed the ham bench and equipment, we checked down stairs where we had removed the coax and grounding cables. We checked all of the rooms. We checked outside in the yard where we had removed the long wire antennas and cabling. No sign of anyone living or working there, in fact everything was exactly as we had seen 6 weeks or so ago. The Real Estate lady asked what all of the fuss was about, is the house haunted! We said nooooo! we were just checking that we had removed all of the equipment as one component was missing!! We thanked her and beat a hasty retreat to our cars.

The same week we called the ARRL RFI dept. Ed Harrington. He had heard about the WK1FSU mystery signals, but he probably could not help as his bailiwick was radio frequency interference. He suggested we call the FCC.

Next day I called the FCC office in Boston. They were very cordial and immediately directed me to the 'strange signal' department. The fellow I talked to said he had heard about the mystery signals, from a ham who works with the FCC. He said he could send a van out to Holden to check and quantify the signals. We said that it only happens around 8:30 pm most evenings. He said many strange signals occur at night, so, no problem. It will take 4 days to set up the orders and about another week before the van can get out there. He said he would call me as soon as it was clear when, and if, the visit was to take place. We reminded him to do it as soon as possible before it stopped, and we, spend the rest of our lives wondering!!

Reports continued to come in via radio, email and phone, George was still transmitting! A few days later the FCC called and said that a van had been scheduled for the following Wednesday evening. They would go to Holden and begin to listen as they approached the center of town. Then they would follow the signal to a location. At that time, they would open their orders and see the actual house address. This was a 'double blind' test to make sure they were following the right signals. Reports indicated that the signal came on the air at 20:31:20. They arrived at the house location at 20:59:11 They noted that the strongest signal was coming from the side of the house and assumed it was where the antenna was. Although it was dark the FCC made a preliminary visual check, and saw no antennas, horizontal or vertical. They also monitored the CW signal and determined it was WK1FSU identifying the transmission. The carrier power received was equivalent to 50 watts at the antenna.

Having received the FCC report, we decided to maybe call the Holden Police department, but because of the possible disbelief factor, we went to the Police Station in person.

We explained the problem and why we would like them to enter the house and determine that there was no one or nothing present that would suggest clandestine operation of a Ham radio station.

Before the Police could leave the building a reporter for the Worcester Telegram overheard the conversation. Next day there was an article about "Holden Police investigate a 'haunted house' emanating radio signals".

Before we received the final report from the Holden Police, I got a call from the Real Estate office asking about the newspaper article on the Haunted House in Holden, and

how this could affect the selling of the house. I told them that it must have been someone at the Holden Police station that gave them the information. I said that there is a mystery, Radio signals coming from the house. We are close to solving it and need them to cooperate with the FCC, Police and our club, until the mystery is solved. They agreed.

The Holden Police dept called. They said that they did not find anything that would show that someone was living there. I complained about the reporter who was there at the Police station. The Policeman said they have no control over reporters and must let them do their job.

Our investigation slowed up as the summer came in, and Hamming slowed up, that is, until Field Day. At the Field Day site, we asked the CW operators to listen out for WK1FSU on 80 Meters. Around 8:33 on Saturday, the first day of Field Day, there was yell from the CW tent, I have George, I have George, George is on 80 Meters. We all ran to the tent to find the operator in conversation with George, in Morse Code. We who are not versed in high speed, or any speed Morse code, waited intently for the translation. One of the guys in the tent said to the operator; bag him, bag him, that's 3 points. As had happened many times, this contact with George started conversations all over the Field Day Site, and for many hours into the evening. Sitting by the campfire around 11 pm that night one wag, started a CW QSO using his voice; dah dit dah dit dah dah didah, another person made Twilight Zone sounds, and the rest got freaked out. The mystery was still with us and still scaring the be-jeebers out of us.

From the time we received the first report, of WK1FSU being on the air, after his burial, everybody who gets the ARRL QST magazine would turn to page 103 or so to look at the Silent Key list. For the last 2 months I received reports from several Ham's; "looked in QST SK page today, no George", "no George in QST". I check QST on my phone, SK page (Obits for Silent Hams), no George.

I am looking at the page one day, saying to myself, it has been 3 months, if Georges family had notified the ARRL, George should appear in the QST soon. The family must supply a Death Certificate, it then takes several more months to appear in the QST. This month's QST, no George.

Everything is humming along; Field Day is but a memory. Along about August 10, I get a phone call from NY ham who had constantly kept us up to date on George's QSO's. He said that there was no CW QSO's by/or with George the previous evening.

For some mysterious reason I suddenly ran out to the mail box and found this month's QST. I opened it to page 103, and, there was George, WK1FSU, listed as a Silent Key.

I called several club members to confirm what I had seen, and, asked them to listen to 80 meters tonight to see if George was on.

The next day I got 3 reports, no George, checked from 8:15 to 9:45, all frequencies, no George.

A thought struck me. I immediately called the Real Estate Office and asked them to meet us at the House that afternoon. A couple of club members said they would be there, without asking why.

We all arrived around the same time. The Real Estate lady let us in. We went into the kitchen, and there, on the table was a copy of this month's QST. It was open to page 103, WK1FSU, George of Holden was listed, and, was circled in red pen with the word QRT (I am ending my transmission) in Morse code: dah dah di dah, di dah dit, dah. I rolled up the QST and put in my coat pocket.

We told the Real Estate Lady that there would be no more ghostly signals from the house, the owner had finally gone to rest.

It was then that I realized!

George, would not stop transmitting, until, he saw his own Call sign in the Silent Key page of QST!!

(Show QST open to SK page 103)

Now with the mystery solved, we went on with our, unfulfilled, uneventful lives.

QRT
QED

73 de AB2IX

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