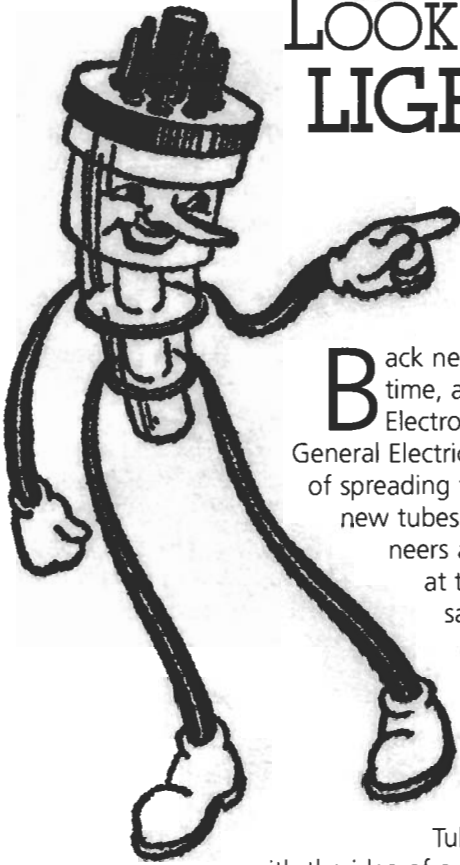


# LOOK WHAT LIGHTHOUSE LARRY HAS THIS MONTH!

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**B**ack near the beginning of time, around 1946, the Electronic Tube Division of General Electric faced the challenge of spreading the word about its new tubes & techniques to engineers and technicians. Since, at that time, it could be safely assumed that all real electrical engineers and service technicians were also amateur radio operators, the technical staff of the

Tube Division came up with the idea of a publication aimed at

hams as the vehicle to convey their new developments. The result was G-E Ham News which first appeared in 1946 and continued right through until 1963 when, I suspect, the growing popularity of that new-fangled device, the transistor, took its toll on vacuum tube innovation.

G-E Ham News appeared bi-monthly and was usually 8-pages in length, although an occasional 12-page issue sprouted when a particularly ambitious project required the extra space. Since I have an interest in radio history, over the years I had gradually acquired a handful issues and, before I knew it, I had nearly the complete set. Thinking that other history-minded hams might appreciate having access to these little snapshots of ham history, early this year I embarked on a project to scan every single issue for posting on the Internet. It took several months and as I completed the project I realized that I had not only done a lot of scanning, I had also taken a walk through our history. Scanning forced me to look at literally every single page General Electric published in the 17-year run.

The first editor of Ham News was a fellow whose real name was George Henry Floyd, Jr., WA4DGA (ex-W2RYT). Floyd was an engineer and executive at General Electric. He was born in 1917 and just recently passed away in 2008 at the age of 91. The name George Floyd may not mean much to most hams nowadays, but to old-timers he was much better known as "Hashafisti Scratchi," columnist of CQ magazine. Hashafisti Scratchi's satirical columns were, what we would characterize today, very politically incorrect. Floyd's identity as Hashafisti was not revealed until his death!

In any event, Floyd must have had a penchant for alter

egos, because the "editor" of G-E Ham News was "Lighthouse Larry," lighthouse being a synonym for a glowing vacuum tube. Editorial responsibilities changed hands over the years, but the Lighthouse Larry cartoon figure remained at his post.

The various issues of G-E Ham News are fascinating not only to observe the evolution of the technical content, but also as a peek at post-war ham radio culture. For instance, early issues carried details of operating awards still familiar to us, like Worked All States (WAS), and DX Century Club (DXCC), along with ones that have disappeared, like Worked the British Empire (WBE), and British Empire Radio Transmission Award (BERTA). Even the issues which served as country checklists proved interesting. For instance, you can find places such as Little America (KC4), Goa (CR8, Portuguese India), Belgian Congo (OQ), French Cameroons (FE8), and British Somaliland (VQ6), from the fading days of European colonialism.

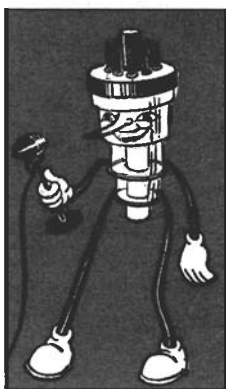
The technical insights are, of course, intriguing too. The projects rotated amongst amplifiers, transmitters, amplifiers, receivers, amplifiers, oscillators, more amplifiers, and station accessories, followed by even more amplifiers. I guess the amplifier theme shouldn't be a surprise considering that Ham News was, after all, published by the Tube Division! One gets the impression that a low power rig was only 200 watts and real hams ran half a kilowatt or nothing at all. In truth, it was interesting to look over these amplifier circuits. The component count for the 1948 "Economy Half-Kilowatt" consisted of only 30 parts. That lean & mean rig would give you 500 watts on two bands" with only two tubes! Who could resist?

I'm exaggerating a bit on the amplifier obsession since the real agenda of Ham News was introducing new technology, not just promoting high-power tubes. Thus, Ham News was the place to turn for cutting-edge practical design information on that new phone mode, Single Side-Band (SSB), as well as UHF operation on 432 megacycles (now called MHz), Variable Frequency Oscillators (VFOs, as they began to replace crystals), emergency communications for Civil Defense (compact portable rigs, often for 6-meter operation). Television Interference (TVI) suppression (as TV ownership exploded in the 1950s), and even the increasingly popular mobile operation.

In 1952, General Electric announced the annual Edison Award to recognize the "many vital and humane public services performed by radio amateurs" and Ham News carried the results. The first winner was Don Mullican, W5PHP,

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for service following devastating tornadoes in Arkansas. "Traffic to and from the nation was funnelled through his ARC-5 [a WW II surplus rig] on 75 meters" continuously for five days. Other winners were recognized for traffic handling, including messages for arctic & Antarctic personnel (remember Operation Deepfreeze?). The photographs accompanying the award announcements are classic.



The final aspect of this scanning project proved to be poignant. Occasionally my copies of the various issues had margin doodles and even a coffee cup stain where the volume was used as a coaster. It's fun to imagine the original owner perusing the latest news from GE and perhaps daydreaming of a construction project (an amplifier, of course), and setting his (it would almost certainly have been a male) coffee cup down for a moment to pick up his mic. These incidentals erased the intervening years. It was as if that long forgotten ham had just handed me the latest news, saying, "Look what Lighthouse Larry has this month!"



Assorted covers from the **G-E HAM NEWS**.