

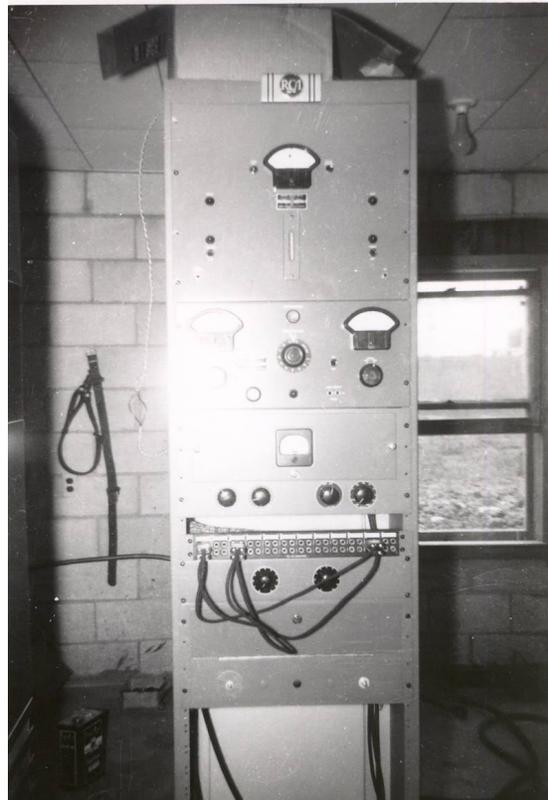
The Ticket

My family lived in Olathe, Kansas. My great-great-grandfather came there from New York after working on the Mississippi river steamboats and prospecting for gold in California in the 1850s. While today Olathe is a large city with a population nearing 160,000, in 1953 its population was only 5,500 and everyone knew everyone. We rarely locked our doors. Many of the town's inhabitants walked to work, and the town square, around the county courthouse, was the locus of any social activity. From the time of my earliest memory, it seemed I had the freedom to roam the town, unsupervised, usually leaving in the morning with a sandwich and a canteen of water in my WW II surplus knapsack. I say unsupervised, but if I were to join in any mischief, word would have soon reached my parents ears.

I think my first exposure to ham radio came about when, on one of my treks, I visited a friend's house. Perhaps I was 10 or 11 years old. His older brother, who was away in college, still had his amateur radio station in the bedroom that he and his younger brother shared. I was fascinated with the radio equipment and my friend cautioned me not to touch anything. He pointed out the QSL cards tacked on a bulletin board and proudly exclaimed the red and black QSL card with W1AW was an important and highly cherished card. Later that night I asked my dad, who was an electrician and radio repairman, if he knew any ham radio operators.

My father did, a young man back from the Navy who lived a few blocks away and whose father ran the restaurant next to where my dad worked. He was the radio engineer at the local radio station, KPRS. The former Kansas governor, Alf Landon who had made an unsuccessful run for president, owned the radio station at that time. Another ham my dad knew was the industrial arts teacher at the high school. Shortly after that discussion I received a copy of the Amateur's Radio Handbook for Christmas. I devoured it, cover to cover, especially the advertisements.

One day my dad suggested we take a trip to the local radio station where the radio engineer, Harry Krout, was working. Thus began a lifelong friendship that continued for sixty years. Harry's amateur call was W0YQG. A picture of the RCA radio transmitter at KPRS is to the right.



Harry was only 16 years older than I was, and he was married and already had a child. Nevertheless, I began to hang around at his house, listen to him make CW contacts, and ask numerous questions about amateur radio. Below is a picture of

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Harry operating his Harvey Wells Bandmaster. You can see his Novice QSL card tucked into his speaker above his RME receiver.

I was active in Boy Scouts and pursuing Merit Badges so I could advance in Scouts. One of those was the Radio Merit Badge. My father had helped me build a battery-powered, one-tube, regenerative receiver, but in order to get Merit Badge credit for that project, I needed to demonstrate its use to someone and explain how it worked. Here is where I met the industrial arts teacher, Mr. Marshall



Ensor – WOBSP. I timidly knocked on his office door one day after school, introduced myself, and asked him if I could demonstrate the radio. He grilled me about the radio unmercifully. Finally, he said I didn't understand how it worked and told me to come back when I could better explain its theory of operation. Failure! And I was only 13 years old. Doomed to become a Ne'er-Do-Well.

The Radio Amateur Handbook saved my bacon. While I'm sure my second explanation of regenerative theory and feedback was less than stellar, Mr. Ensor approved my project. I also asked him if it was possible to join the high school radio club that he sponsored. He told me no, as at that time you had to be officially in high school. I was a freshman and didn't qualify; freshmen and sophomores were classified as being in junior high school. But he did encourage me to come into his office during lunch period and after school and use the Instructograph machine and learn Morse code.

A picture of Marshall and his sister, Loretta in front of his beautiful homemade KW transmitter is to the right. More on the connection between Harry and this transmitter will be discussed later on. As a side note, Loretta, W0UA, was a famous amateur radio operator, made the first YL trans-Pacific QSO on AM, and was active in the Kansas YL net until 1973.

Marshall believed in CW and even wrote his college thesis on how to efficiently teach Morse code. During WW II he was a Lieutenant Commander and commanded the Naval electronics radio shop in Seattle, WA. Both before and after WW II Marshall and Loretta provided over-the-air code lessons to thousands of aspiring amateur radio operators.



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One lunch break when I was practicing on the Instructograph, Mr. Ensor started up a surplus WW II code machine and told me to start copying the five character word groups. Every now and then he would speed up the machine. At speeds higher than I had ever copied before, he finally said, "Ok, that was 10 wpm, you copied it perfect for almost two minutes, I guess we can say you passed your Novice code exam." He knew the code requirement was 5 wpm, but Mr. Ensor was not going to let me off that easy. I don't recall him making me send any CW, but I'm sure he must have. Later than afternoon he helped me fill out an application for the written exam, which he mailed off to the FCC.

As I waited for the written exam, I studied everything I could get my hands on. Electronic and radio theory, regulations, operating procedures, you name it, if I could lay my hands on it, I read it. I must have asked Harry and Mr. Ensor hundreds of questions. Finally the day came. I remember guessing at 2 or 3 questions, but I was confident I had passed. Mr. Ensor looked it over, frowned, looked it over again, and said, "I'm not sure you have enough to pass, but we will send it in and see what happens."

'Devastation, failure, doom.' These were the thoughts that went through my head. Somewhere in my 13-year-old brain I imagined a government office where failures of my sort were archived. People would point at my failed Novice exam, shake their head, chuckle, and say, "If only he had studied a little bit more."

As time went along my feelings of the impending Novice failure notice faded. School ended and I was at Camp Nash along with Boy Scout Troop 86 for our week of summer camp. When I got home from camp I had some mail, and buried in among the latest catalogs and flyers from Allied Radio, Burstein-Applebee, WRL, EF Johnson, and several companies offering to print me QSL cards, was an envelope from the FCC. I opened the letter with shaking hands. There, in all its glory was a Novice license. It was near the end of June, and yet it had been issued on the 14th of May, so I quickly calculated I had less than 11 months to exercise the rights and privileges of a Novice.

With my license I began testing an ARC 5 transmitter I had converted to 40-meter crystal controlled operation. It would easily light up a 40-Watt light bulb, but when I loaded it into a dipole antenna it clobbered nearly every television in a two-block radius. In desperation a 6L6 transmitter was constructed. That and a borrowed TVI low-pass filter allowed me to get on the air with perhaps 10 Watts of output power. That transmitter along with a borrowed Hallicrafters S-38C receiver allowed me to make contacts that summer and fall.

As 1957 was staring me in the face I knew I needed to upgrade. But recall, this was the time period where hams were having a tempestuous love affair with 6

FCC Form 600 Rev. Nov. 1950		UNITED STATES OF AMERICA		EXPIRES	
STATION CALL SIGN		FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION		3 a. m., e. s. t.	
K N Ø G E R		WASHINGTON, D. C.		5-14-57	
Fixed transmitter location: (and remote control position when authorized)					
SAME AS BELOW					
Licensee and P. O. Address: GARY A. WHITE 329 SOUTH WATER ST. OLATHE, KANSAS					
(This license issued subject to conditions shown on reverse side)					
Operator Privileges		Issuing Officer		Date of Issuance	
Class NOVICE (C)		Mary Jean Morrod		5-14-56	
Class		Secretary			
Class					

NOT TRANSFERABLE

Countersigned: *Kenny W. Holt*

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meters. At the beginning of sunspot cycle 19, sporadic-E openings abounded nearly every evening and, with low power, armchair copy on 6 meter AM was easy. By this time a borrowed BC-348 and WRL 6 meter converter were taking time away from honing my CW skills. I wanted in on the 6-meter action – CW operations could wait – I wanted a microphone in my hand to join in the fun.

Finally I bit the bullet and asked Mr. Ensor one day if he would administer the Technician exam. His response was something like this, “No, I don’t believe the Technician class license is good for amateur radio. I can’t stop you from going that way, but I won’t administer the exam. Remember the Novice license is there for you to learn the skills of CW and how to operate in a professional manner.”

Not to be deterred, I asked my other mentor, Harry, W0YQG, to administer the Technician class license. As 1957 rang in I was on 6 meters AM with a WRL Globe Scout, a handful of crystals, and a 5-element beam. Fun, fun, fun – until one evening when Harry asked me why I didn’t tell him Mr. Ensor wouldn’t give me the Technician exam.

Harry told this story to me several times over the years. One day Mr. Ensor stopped Harry on the street and gave him holy heck for letting me get a Technician license instead of a General. Harry recounted Mr. Ensor said something like this, “The Technician license is an abomination to amateur radio. Gary was ready to take his General license and now he is going down a path that will lead to nowhere. I’m really disappointed in both of you.”

Harry respected Mr. Ensor since he had been one of his students. I could tell that now I was in the doghouse with both of my mentors. I needed to redeem myself and somehow upgrade to General.

In those days you needed to personally appear at the FCC district office and take the exam, only given on weekdays. Since the school year was in session there was no way my parents would let me cut classes for a day. Finally I decided the risk of getting caught cutting school was worth it. I knew I could pass the theory and receiving of CW, but sending was another matter. Early in my Novice CW operations I had acquired a WW II surplus J-36 bug. My sending with a straight key was atrocious.

Nevertheless, I caught the bus to downtown Kansas City and sat in with three men who were taking the exam for general. Two of them didn’t pass the receiving portion and left the room. After passing the receiving portion, with shaking hands I sent the worst CW I had ever sent. After a minute or two the examiner practically ripped the paper with the copy I was sending from my hands and gruffly said, “Okay – that’s enough!”

That left the remaining man and me. He finished the written portion of the exam rather fast, but I noticed the examiner shaking his head negatively and the man left the room with a disappointed look on his face. You would get a temporary license if you already had a call and were upgrading. The examiner checked my

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written test and said, "Congratulations, you only missed one question." As he was writing out my temporary license he also asked me how I got out of school for the day. I remember lamely mumbling something as I took my temporary license and started the six-block walk back to the bus station.

The next morning before school I stopped by Mr. Ensor's office and showed him my temporary license. He congratulated me, but I could tell he was focused in on yesterday's date on the license and he knew I had missed attendance in his class the day before. But he didn't say anything about my missing class or ask me any incriminating questions.

Later in the day an office aide came to one of my classes and gave me a note saying I was to report to the principal after school that day. Okay, it was time to pay the piper. Two or three days of detention or likely a day of expulsion was the going rate for cutting school. I was more worried about my parents finding out, as I knew they would.

As the day progressed my nerves began to get the better of me. I was thinking about the consequences my parents might levy. Grounding, no radio operating, extra chores, not going on the next weekend Scout camping trip. I was in a cold sweat as the school day was slowly grinding to an end. In my last class another aide came and gave me a note signed by the principal. It read something like this, "Mr. Ensor explained everything, and you don't need to see me."

I've thought of this story many times over the years and told it to several people. I had redeemed myself in Mr. Ensor's eyes and he went to bat for me. I never told my parents and they never said anything, but it's likely they somehow found out. Harry thought what I did was hilarious.

Here is a newspaper clipping of me operating one of the transmitters in our radio room at the Olathe high school. I was a 16 year-old senior at the time. As I recall I was talking to Bob Henry (W0AKA) in Butler, MO on 75 meters AM when this photograph was taken. Bob and I had already met in person as the previous summer I had driven to his store and bought a used Hallicrafters S-76 from him.



A "HAM" RADIO transmitter and receiver is part of the equipment used by students taking radio and television training. Gary White, a senior, of 329 South Water street, Olathe, checks out the radio. In the foreground the hand of another student is visible as he practices on a code sending key.

After graduating from high school in 1960 I enlisted in the Air Force. Every time I came home on leave I'd make a trip to Mr. Ensor's farm and visit with him and Loretta. We never spoke of his complicity in getting me out of the consequences of cutting school. Mr. Ensor retired in 1965 and after a short illness in 1970, became a Silent Key (SK). I continued to visit Loretta until she became a SK in 1991; she had stopped operating in 1973 and was plagued by crippling arthritis in the later years of her life.

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Loretta deeded the Ensor family dairy farm and farmhouse to the county as a museum and today it is a wonderful testament to the gritty, hardworking, and dedicated people who were the backbone of our greatest generation. Here is a web link to the museum: <http://www.ensorparkandmuseum.org/>

The last time I saw Mr. Ensor was after I came home from Vietnam in 1970 and was at Texas A&M working on my meteorology degree. I continued to be in touch with Harry although he was working in Pennsylvania for many of those years I was coming back to Olathe on leave. For part of this time Harry had let his amateur radio license lapse. When Harry returned to Kansas we regained personal face-to-face contact. He was a pallbearer at my father's funeral in 1978 shortly after I had earned a Master's degree in Electrical Engineering.

Harry became active in restoring many of the radios and equipment at the Ensor museum. He took on the herculean task of making the Ensor KW transmitter operational again. When he was in his 70s Harry regained his amateur license, his old call, and upgraded to Extra.

Harry also restored the 1930s 160-meter AM and CW transmitter that Mr. Ensor built that was used in the high school radio room. On it's maiden restoration test we made an AM 160 meter contact on it from the Ensor museum to my home in Texas. What a thrill. That transmitter, shown at the right, is still operated today for special events at the Ensor museum.



After retirement Harry continued to be active. He kept up with technology and was the family's 'go-to' guy for computer questions. We stayed in contact; not by ham radio, although we made a few contacts, but by e-mail, telephone, and notes in the Christmas cards we exchanged each year.

In September 2014 I was inducted into Olathe High School's Wall of Honor. I'm exceptionally proud of this honor as I share a place along with Mr. Ensor who was inducted posthumously in 2008.

<http://schools.olatheschools.com/buildings/wallofhonor/2014/09/29/gary-a-white/>

I had invited Harry to the banquet and award ceremony, but he regretfully declined, as his heart was failing. But thanks to the efforts of his niece, we were able to meet for lunch. Harry became a SK in December of 2014 after a long struggle with heart disease and a short stay in the hospital. I attended his memorial services along with many of the amateur radio operators in the Olathe and Kansas City area. It was especially memorable to see and hear firsthand how many lives he had touched and influenced by amateur radio.

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If you've read this far you hopefully get the idea that an amateur radio license is not just a ticket to operate. Rather it is a ticket to a never-ending trip of friendship and camaraderie that spans a lifetime and perhaps many generations. The privileges that come with the ticket transcend boundaries of nationality, race, age, and gender and are truly mysterious and magical. Even today, every contact I make restores the thrill of that first shaky CW contact I made when I was 13 years old. My amateur radio experience has been a defining element in how my life and career has progressed. I'm sure Mr. Ensor, Harry, and many of you have similar feelings.

Today Harry's son Joe, WOPWJ, is an active amateur radio operator and received the Kansas Amateur Radio Operator of the Year award in 2013. Here you can see a picture of Joe behind Harry as they are working on the KW transmitter at the Ensor museum. Joe and I stay in touch.

I remain active on the amateur bands; operating mostly CW on the SKCC frequencies. Arthritis has limited my sending abilities with a straight key so I usually use paddles or a keyboard. I am helping my son, Al, K5ANM, restore an Apache transmitter and a Hammarlund HQ-140 receiver.



About the author: Gary White, W5GW, retired from the Air Force in 1982. He held the following jobs in the USAF: Link Trainer Instructor, Weather Radar Technician, Weather Officer, Communications Officer, Program Manager, and Spacecraft Mission Director.

After retiring from the Air Force Gary worked as a program and project manager, electrical engineer, research scientist, and system engineer and technical advisor (SETA) to numerous government projects. Today he is retired from industry and works part-time as a flight instructor. When he is not flying, pursuing astronomy, or



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operating amateur radio he writes short stories and novels. He recently published his first book.

Gary holds an Extra class license, DXCC, numerous WAS awards, including the ARRL 9-Band and Triple-Play WAS awards. He is SKCC member 3742T.