

A LOOK BACK

An interview with John Bravis, WØEKS

by Dave Wester, KØIEA



Born in Northeast Minneapolis in 1926, John became interested in ham radio at the age of 12, after he saw an Andy Hardy movie. During the movie, there was a ham radio scene where they called a Canadian station using a bread board rig with a big knife switch to change from receive to transmit.

John's sister knew a local ham, Emerson "Em," WØQMC who lived only 4 blocks away. John would often ask Em, "How far can you talk?" Em told him on 160 meters he could get as far away as St. Paul. John was amazed. At age 13, John heard that Lew Bonn Electronics, down on 12th and La-Salle, was holding code classes. He learned the code and passed the FCC exam in June, 1941. But, because John's father was not a U.S. citizen, the FCC only issued an operator's license. So, John had an operator's license, but no callsign. He could not legally operate, until this matter was resolved. In the meantime, WWII started, and all U.S. hams ceased transmitting.

In 1944, John graduated from high school, and enlisted in the U.S. Navy. He was sent to a Navy boot camp in Idaho. After basic training, he was assigned to radio school on Goat Island, which lies between SFO and Oakland. Just about the time he was graduating from radio school, he contracted rheumatic fever (along with several other recruits).

He was supposed to be assigned to an aircraft carrier. While John recuperated, the carrier was sent to Okinawa. John later found out that carrier sustained several kamikaze attacks. The war ended, and John got out of the Navy in 1946.

John came back to Minneapolis, and in 1946, he attended National Radio School and received his FCC first class commercial radiotelephone license. With license in hand, he went to work for WDGY AM radio. John and several other technicians were hired to set up WDGY's 50kw station, located near 104th and Lyndale Avenue South. They tuned the antennas, set up all the transmitting equipment, got the station up and running and then were told their services were no longer required. John was hoping to become part of the permanent staff. Instead, WDGY brought in all the engineers from their 5kw station to take over. John's "career" at WDGY lasted only 6 months.

In 1947, John accepted a job with the Philco Corporation installing and servicing televisions for their dealers. This was television in its infancy. Stan Hubbard's KSTP was the only TV station in town. John remembers getting a call from a Ms. O'Brien to come and fix her TV. She came to the door wearing a fancy riding outfit. While servicing the set, KSTP went off the air. Ms. O'Brien picked up the telephone and called Mr. Hubbard. "Stan," she said, "put the station back on. The TV guys are here to repair my set." A moment later, KSTP was back on.

With the G.I. bill being offered, John used the opportunity to attend the Minneapolis College of Music. Later, this college became the well known MacPhail School of Music. John's music career began in 1952. For over 50 years, on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights, John played the tenor sax in dance bands at the Marigold and Prom ballrooms and with quartets and trios at various country clubs.

At this same time, in 1952, a high school classmate told John that his cousin, Earl Bakken, was seeking a technician for his fledgling company. John was hired in 1952 as Medtronic's first employee. John built the first cardiac pacemaker for the company. John said they grossed \$20,000 their first year. As a global leader in medical technol-

ogy today, Medtronic had over 10 billion dollars in revenues their last fiscal year. After 33 years, and “wearing several hats” during his employment, John retired from Medtronic in 1985.

As you can see from the photos, John has several nice pieces of vintage ham gear. Recently, I visited the Pavlek Museum, where John volunteers his services each Wednesday. He showed me an early Collins 4A transmitter that he and Jon, **KØFQA** restored (see the before and after pictures, at right)..

John has used many antennas through the years, ranging from long wires, zepps, and dipoles, to bi-squares, 8JKs, quads, and beams. DX-wise, John still needs VU4, Andaman Islands. He was down at his Florida home when the VU4 was last on. He could hear us zeros working the VU4, but he could not hear the VU4. With a more favorable treatment of ham radio, maybe the Indian government will allow more activity from there. Let’s hope so.

Thanks for the enjoyable visit, John. I enjoyed looking at all your gear and your pictures.

73 de Dave, KØIEA



Collins model 4A shown before restoration. The model 4A was introduced in October of 1933, one month after the company was incorporated.



Collins model 4A shown after restoration by John, **WØEKS** and Jon Lieberg, **KØFQA**. Beautiful! It resides at the Pavlek Museum of Broadcasting.



The top radio is a Hallicrafters model SX-25, ca. 1942. In the lower right is a National NC HRO 5TA1 with 13 plug-in coils, ca. 1938.



This is John’s National SW-3. It’s a three-tube regenerative receiver, ca. 1934.



Top left is a National FB-7 (first superhet ham rcvr), ca. 1934. Top right is a National NC-240, ca. 1944.

