

Sparks from the Spa



A PUBLICATION OF SARATOGA COUNTY AMATEUR RADIO ASSOCIATION

January Meeting Schedule Jim KG2H

Our January meeting will be held on January 8, the second Monday of January. The Board meeting will be starting at 6:30, and the General Membership meeting will begin at 7 PM.

We will be discussing the new digital mode FT-8 which has taken the digital world by storm. We might have Frank KA5VVI to stop in and make a presentation, but we will surely have Fred W5BN and Jim KG2H talk about their experiences using this mode. There is a lengthy article from the ARRL in this newsletter that gives you some background.

The meeting is in the usual location, the Wilton EMS building just off of Jones Road in Wilton. We hope to see you there if your car will start in this cold weather!!

Progress ?? Jim KG2H

Remember the old days? The warm cheery glow of tubes, and the great sounding audio coming out of your favorite transceiver, (or separate receiver and transmitter) made things restful in the shack. The worse that would happen is that a little bit of smoke came out of the transmitter every now and then.

Now you have transceivers that are basically computers attached to a bit of RF circuitry. My old HW101 is long gone, and my latest purchase is a Yaesu FT 991A. Well as I said, they are basically computers, and what do you do with computers? Well do an occasional software update.

On New Year's Day, I checked the Yaesu website, and saw there was new firmware out for the radio, the main software was now version 2.0 from October. I had version 1.8. Of course, we all want the newest, so what did I do but download it. I have a Kenwood 590S which also occasionally got upgrades, and it always went slick as a whistle, so the Yaesu should be a pie of cake, right?

What a convoluted procedure this was. You really need to read their instructions to see what was necessary. To make a long story short, the first time I ran the procedure the radio would not boot up. Also no success on the second, third or fourth try. I ended up going back to the version 1.8 software, which reloaded perfectly on the first try. I started this about 10:30 Monday evening, and I got to bed at 1:30 Tuesday morning. I sent an email into Yaesu's tech people, and hopefully they will get back to me.

If anyone out there with Yaesu experience has any inkling of what might have happened, I would be glad to have your input.

New Digital Modes Changing Complexion of Bands and Perhaps of Ham Radio

From [ARRL 11/02/2017](#)

The wave of software-based digital modes over the past several years has altered the atmosphere of the HF bands. Some suggest the popularity of modes that make it possible to contact stations neither operator can even hear has resulted in fewer CW and SSB signals on bands like 6 meters and 160 meters. Traditional modes require far more interaction and effort on the part of the operator; the newer digital modes not so much. The recent advent of the still-beta "quick" FT8 mode, developed by Steve Franke, K9AN, and Joe Taylor, K1JT — the "F" and the "T" in the mode's moniker — has brought this to a head. Some now wonder if FT8 marks the end of an era and the start of a new, more minimalist age.

"We've been as surprised as anyone about the rapid uptake of FT8 for making QSOs on the HF bands," Taylor told ARRL this week. Rather than viewing FT8 as a total game-changer, he sees a dividing line between such digital modes and more traditional modes.

"SSB and CW are general-purpose modes," Taylor asserted. "They are good for ragchewing, DXing, contesting, emergency communications, or whatever. FT8 and the other modes in [WSJT-X](#) are special-purpose modes. They are designed for making reliable, error-free contacts using very weak signals — in particular, signals that may be too weak for the more traditional modes to be usable, or even too weak to hear."

Taylor notes that the information exchanged in most FT8, JT65, and other digital-mode contacts "is little more than the bare minimum for what's considered to be a valid contact." In addition to call signs and signal reports, stations may exchange grid squares and acknowledgments.

Radio amateurs recently commented in response to a Top Band Reflector post, in which Steve Ireland, VK6VZ, averred that because of FT8, "160-meter DXing has changed, perhaps forever" in recent weeks. Ireland said he downloaded FT8 but just couldn't bring himself to use it on the air. "My heart isn't in it," he wrote. "My computer will be talking to someone else's computer, and there will be no sense of either a particular person's way of sending CW or the tone of their voice. The human in radio has somehow been lost."

In his [blog](#), Steve McDonald, VE7SL, compiled not only Ireland's posts, but some responses to it, although not identified by name or call sign. One commenter suggested that the game-changing aspect of FT8 is that those who typically operate CW or SSB will gravitate to FT8. "The amount of activity on the FT8 frequency of any band is phenomenal," the commenter observed. A few complained that no skill is involved in making contacts using computer-based digital modes.

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Another suggested that FT8 is already falling victim to its own success, with too many stations crowding around the designated FT8 frequencies. Others were more philosophical, with remarks along the lines of this one: "It is allowing people who have smaller stations the opportunity to get on and use their radios and a computer to make contacts they never would have been able to make. This is great for ham radio!"

Taylor would agree. As he sees it, FT8 won't replace modes such as CW or SSB.

"Nevertheless, it's clear that — at least in the short term — many hams enjoy making rapid-fire minimal QSOs with other hams, all over the world, using modest ham equipment," he said. "For this purpose, FT8 shines."

In a related "lightning talk" at the 2017 ARRL-TAPR Digital Communications Conference (DCC) earlier this year, ARRL Contributing Editor Ward Silver, NOAX, challenged his savvy audience to develop a keyboard-to-keyboard mode "between FT8 and PSK31" that would support casual and competitive operating, be more interference and noise tolerant, and be usable by those with "compromised" stations and antennas. He also challenged his listeners to develop a "smart" spectrum display that would identify signals by mode, so Amateur Radio could move away from the practice of setting aside specific frequencies for digital modes.

New Year, New Logo Jim KG2H

Back in the September 2016 newsletter, we announced a competition to design a new logo. Entries were to be submitted by October 31, 2016. Interest was so high we only had one entry. What do you think of it? It is a plain and simple design, which should be easy to reproduce on clothing. It boldly states our DBA club name of Saratoga County Amateur Radio Association, while also keeping our legal name of Saratoga County R.A.C.E.S Association, and our affiliation with ARRL



New Logo



Old Logo

HF Rig Available For Loan

In November the club received a donation of a Kenwood TS 430 transceiver, along with a matching external antenna tuner. The club wants to make this available to new hams or perhaps to existing hams who need equipment to get on the HF bands. While we would provide the equipment, the new ham will have someone from the club who can Elmer them on their beginning path in ham radio.

Fred, W5BN has the equipment, and has checked it out. If you know of any new hams who need an older, but still useful HF rig to get going, have them contact one of the board members, as listed on the last page of this newsletter.

The ARRL International Grid Chase Kicks Off with the New Year!

Ready, set, go! The [ARRL International Grid Chase 2018](#) gets under way on January 1 UTC (New Year's Eve in US time zones). The objective of the year-long event is to work stations on *any* band (except 60 meters) in as many different Maidenhead grid squares as possible, and then upload your log data to ARRL's Logbook of The World (LoTW). Many hams are familiar with grid squares from the VHF/UHF and satellite realms, and everyone lives in one. An [online calculator](#) by David Levine, K2DSL, can determine your grid square. Enter a postal address, ZIP code, or a call sign, and the calculator will return the grid square for that location. Each new grid square contact confirmed through LoTW will count toward your [monthly total](#).

Any contact you make in 2018 can count for your Chase score; as long as the other operators participate in LoTW, you'll get credit automatically when they upload their logs. This means that contest contacts will also count, as will contacts with special event stations, or other on-air activity that uses LoTW to confirm contacts.

There are no restrictions on modes or bands, as long as they are legal. Satellite contacts are valid for the Chase. The event is open to *all* radio amateurs.

Complete details of the ARRL International Grid Chase 2018 appeared in the December 2017 issue of QST. For more information, [contact](#) the ARRL Contest Branch.

Warren County Radio Club Meeting

The next meeting of the Warren County Radio Club will be on January 29, at Pizzeria on Route 9 in Queensbury, starting around 7 PM. Meeting topic is GO Kits. Contact Frank KA5VVI, fgito@email.com for details.

Also the club will have a test session on January 13th. You can contact Frank for further information on that subject also.

Its time to renew your dues Jim KG2H

Christmas and New Year's are over. The feasts are eaten, and the dishes are cleaned up, and put away. Many of you are headed back to work after a long holiday week. ALSO, it's a new year for club dues. This year for the first time, I sent out an email to the members which contained the specific information for each individual member. I noted the basic things we need, like name, callsign, ARRL membership, and our record of the last year for which we received dues.

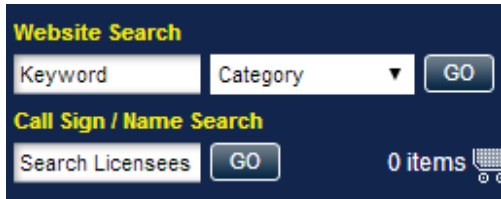
Seven individuals had the email bounce, so I snail mailed a note to them asking for updated information. You are going to get the newsletter regardless if the dues are up to date or not. It would be nice to be currently paid, but we still think that you are interested in what's happening in our little area of the world. If you wish me to remove you, please just let me know and you will be gone in a click of the mouse.

In case you did not get my email, or it went to Junk, or Spam I am reproducing the membership information form below if you just want to get on the mailing list, or to send us dues for 2018 (or beyond)

Saratoga County Amateur Radio Association	Membership Information
Please Print CLEARLY	
Name _____	
Callsign _____	License Class N T G A E
Email Address _____	
Address _____	
City State Zip _____	
ARRL Member	YES NO
Dues are \$10 per year, Payable to Saratoga County R.A.C.E.S.	
You can mail your dues with this form to Jim Polewczak KG2H, 231 Northline Road, Ballston Spa 12020	



Have you checked the expiration date on your license? It's very easy to do. One way to do it is to go to WWW.ARRL.ORG, and just fill in your call sign in the search box on their home page. You do not need to be a member of ARRL to use this service.



K2DLL repeater system:
Corinth NY
147.000 MHz +600KHz 91.5 Hz CTCSS encode/decode
448.225 MHz -5.00 MHz 91.5 CTCSS encode/decode

Providence NY
147.240 MHz 91.5 Hz CTCSS encode/decode.
147.360 MHz +600 Hz (add 91.5 Hz to connect to the NYS Network

Middleburgh NY
448.925 PL 107.2 WA2TTP-R Steve's Repeater is linked to ours via UHF



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Please be sure to visit our webpage for any late breaking news or newsletter archives.

WWW.K2DLL.ORG

Got News or information you would like to get published? How about your own projects or other things you think would be of interest to Club Members? How about (GASP), a letter to the editor? Contact us at our email address :

SparksFromTheSpa@gmail.com

Upcoming program note

We are looking for input from the membership as to what YOU would like to hear. Program suggestions are always welcome. Please let any of the Board Members know of you ideas.

Thanks