

## **My 1935 Battery-powered Portable Radio**

### **Albert R. Barmby**

About 1935 I was the neighborhood kid who mowed people's lawns and delivered their papers. I helped folks carry out their ashes and waste papers. I knew everyone around town, and they all knew me. We were a little rural back then.

When some senior folk friends got a new super heterodyne receiver radio, they asked me if I would like their old tuned radio frequency radio. It had four tubes and used earphones or a cone speaker. I was into the radio field!

### **Building a Radio at Age 11**

I was all of 11 years old, and I could build my own radios. Sure, I would like that old radio! I could build me a portable battery radio!

I was also into telephony and had a senior friend who was developing the teletype. He only lived a mile away. I even did a classroom report on his work. No one really understood the report. In the Army, however, that was the field I got into along with repeaters and long line amplifiers! The telephone amplifiers and the radio amplifiers were very similar.

Along the way I became good friends with the local telephone operator and her husband. They had the telephone switchboard in their front room. When I took the mail from the shoe factor up to the Post Office, I would go a couple houses up the street and visit with the operator and also the local telephone tech. I found the telephone system fascinating. And it also used batteries!

### **Old Telephone Company Batteries**

When I was given that radio I had found just what I needed for its A, B and C batteries, and I had just the wagon to put it all into! You see the radio only needed about 90 volts for the B battery. That was 60 volt and a half dry cells. Back then every one had a bag of three, one and a half volt cells hanging in their cellar for their telephone system.

When the technician came through town annually to change batteries he left the boxes full of old batteries on the front porch of my telephone operator. I told her I the needed a battery or two for my other radios. Ninety volts meant sixty batteries for three full boxes of cells! They weighed in at a 'ton' a box! But I had my A, B and C batteries for my radio!

### **Birch Post Antenna**

I made a couple of four-foot tall birch posts with foot-wide tee arms and then threaded some 20 gauge copper wire back and forth. I wedged the battery boxes into my wagon to hold the posts upright.

The three battery boxes delivered all the power; the birch tree antenna delivered the signal; and the radio sat on top of it all. I anchored the cone speaker to the front birch pole atop of the batteries in front of the radio. I was off and running.

### **A Wagon-load of Radio and Newspapers**

I could tune in any local station, and the sound was quite loud for those days. I could pull the wagon, weighing about 150 pounds, behind me, and so I delivered my daily papers, which were sitting on top of the whole assembly!

It all worked finely. The senior folks who gave me the radio just gaped when I first came up their drive to deliver their paper with their old radio playing.

Thanks to the local telephone company I had lots of battery power, as I took all the used batteries the technician could leave me. Most batteries were up to voltage. As a result he had very few bad batteries to return, and I had my first battery-powered portable radio.

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