

1 Ham "Etymology"

The excerpt from the December 14, 1895, edition of *The Radio Telegrapher* came my way via Long Island CW (LICW) Club member David, N1EA. It explains the origin of the once derogatory term *Ham* as applied to unskilled telegraph operators.



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used by telegraphers and means an inefficient telegrapher; one who has very little ability to send or receive messages but who are eagerly sought after by some railroad superintendents of telegraph because they work cheap. Professors of telegraph colleges pay some of the superintendents a liberal fee for "curing" their hams, but some are so green that their presence in railroad offices causes trains to bump each other and passengers to wear wooden limbs and coffins. Newspaper dispatches tell the public such bumps were caused by an "error in train orders." If green

railroad officials who are old enough to know better than to jeopardize public life and property by distributing green hams among the railroad stations. The only way this ham business can be regulated is by state legislation. Every railroad telegrapher should carry a certificate issued by a state board of examiners.

NEW CARDS READY.

Another fiscal year is drawing to a close and every member should secure a new card. The organization representative of railroad telegraphers to be a



1st DAY



10th DAY



30th DAY

EVOLUTION OF A HAM.

The uninitiated may think that this ham is one of "Armour's best," but it is not. In fact it is not a ham at all; merely a young man from the country who has paid his tuition fee to a so-called Telegraph College. "Ham" is a term

hams were not being cured by avaricious railroad officials there would be fewer "errors in orders." The usual fee for curing hams is \$5—but some first-class curers receive as high as \$15. The largest ham factory is located in St. Louis, Mo., and is owned and operated by some

complete success must be properly upheld financially. Each member is taxed a few dollars per year in order that the organization may have finances to pay its expenses. The railroad telegraphers of this country have reaped great financial benefit from the O. R. T. and

A common term is *ham-fisted*, meaning lacking in dexterity, skill, or finesse, which neatly describes my current level of telegraphic ability.

2 LICW Club

The LICW Club have reworked their curriculum, making it a lot more flexible and easy for people to participate. Their club is very active with a continuous stream of messages via their groups.io account, which I reduced to a daily digest.

2.1 Hearing Character Sounds

Initially, I had learned the code at 25 wpm¹ in blocks of eight random characters while slowly narrowing the Farnsworth spacing as my understanding improved. Later, I discovered that I couldn’t understand code sent at slower speeds.

LICW Club instruction recommends learning Morse at 12 wpm using a straight key. The idea is that the sound and physical rhythm of sending Morse helps reinforce learning, and 12 wpm is fast enough to discourage counting dits and dahs, forcing the student to focus on the sound of each character.

2.2 Practice

Basically, the whole process relies on practice, but not long exhausting sessions, rather it is better to practice for about fifteen minutes twice each day. Practice both sending and receiving is important, including practice at speeds about 10 to 15 percent above what one is comfortable hearing.

2.3 Get On The Air

Main focus of LICW Club is GOTA². Using a straight key, 12 to 15 wpm is about the limit, above which repetitive stress makes itself felt. Fortunately, there are several slow speed activities on air that only require a brief exchange.

2.4 Virtual Classrooms

The club also makes extensive use of the Zoom meeting technology, allowing users from anywhere in the world to attend classes and practice in a low-stress, encouraging environment.

2.5 Motivation and Objectives

One’s motivation and objectives are important. The whole point is to understand and be understood on air. Achieving this is best done in as relaxed and enjoyable way as possible. If learning is stressful or one has unrealistic objectives or is frustrated then things become correspondingly more difficult.

2.6 Membership

Anyone from anywhere can join the LICW Club. Life membership is worth having as an always available resource: <https://longislandcwclub.org/>.

¹ wpm = words per minute
² GOTA = Get On The Air