PILBARA GHOST TOWN SET TO RISE AGAIN

The ghost town of Cossack in Western Australia’s far north will be brought back to life under a new heritage and restoration project commissioned by the State Government. So says an article featured in the West Australian on October 10, 2005.

The Pilbara town 12 km north of Roebourne was first established at the mouth of the Harding River in 1863. It was officially declared a town site in 1872 but by 1910 the harbour had silted up, Point Sampson became the main port for Roebourne, and the pearling fleet had moved to Broome. It was eventually abandoned after World War II, when attempts to revive the local pearling industry failed.

Under the Government’s plan, beautiful stone buildings, which include the Customs House, the Court House & the Post & Telegraph Office, will be restored to their pristine condition. The Department of Housing and Works, who have the services of a heritage architect, have already done some restoration work.

Apart from being a busy port for the pastoral, gold mining and pearling industries, Cossack was an important link on the famous original number 6 telegraph line, which stretched from Perth to Wyndham. At 3322 kms, it was the longest telegraph circuit in Australia and allowed direct working between Wyndham and Perth.

The above was the subject of discussion at our General Meeting of 17th October 2005 when it was suggested that a telegraph presence in the former Cossack Post & Telegraph Office would be of significant benefit from a Heritage and Tourism aspect. The possibility is being investigated and the secretary has written to the Director of the Heritage Council of WA with a proposal that could see a display of telegraphic equipment installed.

VACANCY: ASSISTANT SECRETARY

The vacant position of Assistant Secretary is to be filled at our meeting on 20/2/2006. Nominations are invited and will be received by the Secretary up to the time of dealing with this matter at the meeting.

Thanks to API, our sponsor.

NEXT MEETING

Hyde Park Hotel

20th Feb 2006
10am

Please note the time and date for our next get-together. Members and non-members welcome.
In a telegraph tournament held in New York in May, 1898, the winner in the championship 5-minute sending contest sent 254 words with only one error, and his Morse was said by the judges to be perfect. The highest recorded speed of legible telegraphy in which the Morse code was used, was made in a previous contest in which 265 words were sent in 5 minutes.

An expert operator can send from 35 to 40 words per minute, but a steady working rate of 25 to 30 words per minute is regarded as good. [from "A Treatise on Telegraphy," Vol. II, 1901]

That was 1901, so the semi-automatic/jigger key was not yet invented. The sender was using a hand key.

We don't know what standard they were using for testing in the late 19th century, but 254 words in 5 minutes is 50 words per minute by the metric of the day. Now let's put this in the proper context. The American Morse code is different from the International Code by 11 letters. The American Morse code makes use of the 'spaced characters.'

For example C is .. . rather than --. and Y is .. .. rather than ---. Hence the American Morse code is about 25 to 30 percent faster than the International code.

So for comparative purposes and with all else being equal, you could reduce the above speeds by 25 or 30 percent to compare to speed's of International senders. So 50 words a minute in American Morse should translate to 35 words a minute in International Morse.

MEET THE CHAMPION, by Tony Smith G4FAI

In 1942 Harry Turner became the world champion hand key [straight key] operator and his record of 35 w.p.m. using International Morse has never been beaten. By the time Harry was ten years old, he had learned American Morse. He went to work on the railways at the age of 14, working relief telegrapher until 1934 when he resigned.

Harry attended the Signal Corps School, Camp Crowder, Missouri, in October/November 1942. "Having known both codes and worked with them I graduated in one month but the army did not teach me any of it." November 9th, 1942, was the big day. Harry describes what happened. "The day I set this record General Ben Lear, Sixth Army Commander, toured the School and was present while I was sending the code at 35 words per minute. One was also required to copy back what one sent.... the machine used for sending and recording on tape was an army machine and would only record at 35 words per minute."

"It could have been that I sent faster than what was recorded.... also the tape was inked and run back through a receiving machine, and one copied the code back from that machine.... the machines were accurate. I sent for the full five minutes and then copied it all back, no mistakes. I have a certificate from the U.S. War Department regarding this record."

"I really did not try for a record. I was just putting on a demonstration for the General. It made him feel good to think the School was turning out such fast operators, but the top speed of the operators that the School really did turn out was not over 20 words per minute sending and receiving.... they were taught to print. I copied my test in longhand. That was what we had to do on the railroad, everything copied on a typewriter or in longhand."

As reported in Morsum Magnificat #12, Summer 1989, the BBC "Record Breakers" program has issued a challenge for someone to try to break Harry's International Morse record. The widespread use of electronic keyers and semi-automatic bugs for fast work has long destroyed the old competitive spirit in this field, and it seems unlikely that there are any high speed hand key operators about nowadays who could attempt it. Harry would like someone to try but as he says, "they would have to have a lot of practice." Who knows, there might be someone out there - somewhere!

Harry Turner, world champion hand key operator, died on December 21, 1994, at the age of 88. As far as is known, no one has ever beaten his record.

Phil McGrath at Eden Killer Whale Museum has rigged up a separate key and flashing light so that visitors can now give morse a try when he's not at the museum.
Armadale Outpost Telegraph Office W.A. was again pleased to be selected to receive traffic from the special telegraph office within the Telstra marquee at the Tamworth country music festival 2006. 16 telegraphists were rostered for the 9-day event at Armadale.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Friday 20th</th>
<th>Tuesday 24th</th>
<th>Saturday 21st</th>
<th>Wednesday 25th</th>
<th>Sunday 22nd</th>
<th>Thursday 26th</th>
<th>Monday 23rd</th>
<th>Total received</th>
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Tamworth advised they sent 843 telegrams to various receiving stations. Previous years traffic received in W.A. 2005 — 420, 2004 — 549.

In the last issue, a question was posed: “Where were you on VJ day 15th Aug 1945?”

Ken Knox responded:

“I was on day shift in the RAAF signals office on airstrip at Lae New Guinea, when it was announced that the war was over. There was no dancing in the streets, no people throwing hats in the air, matter of fact things were fairly quiet. We spent most of the day answering questions from crowds of army troops who came to the airstrip for information. We also spent many hours on the radios trying to find out what an atom bomb was. It was great to be able to use plain language on the air, after long time using code. We had a good party that night as the RAAF issued a free beer ration…..actually on the 10th August a rumour was around that the war had ended, that night people were running around firing very pistols, tommy guns and rifles and burning down toilets.”

From the editor:

My uncle was a training officer in the Army School of Signals in New Guinea, he wrote back to his Mum on 16th Aug 1945, “So at last the war is over, the news came through yesterday. The whole of the world seems to have gone mad from what I heard over the radio, we had a very quiet time, we had a drink when the news came through and stopped work until lunch time. We are still carrying on. I believe we are to have a day of rest tomorrow. I doubt very much if I’ll get home for many months yet, but one never knows one’s luck…George Rice.”

Many members will remember Jack Morgan as the Postal Training School Instructor who either polished up our Morse receiving skills with his copperplate hand sending, patiently and diligently instructed us on the intricacies of Technical Telegraphy or lectured us on correct traffic procedures.

Jack has now reached the grand age of 94, but following a couple of falls and a bout of pneumonia, which hospitalized him, he has had to move into an aged care facility. Jack’s new address is Tanby Hall Aged Care Facility, 1 Tanby Place, Cooloongup 6168.

We all wish you well in settling into your new home, Jack.
With sadness we record the demise, on 26/10/2005, of our Late Assistant Secretary Max Bowen.

Unfortunately we did not receive from Max an “official history” form which was introduced some months after the WA Fraternity was formed and after Max became a member. It seems, though, that the following would be fairly close:-

August 1946 : Telegraph Messenger, Northam
1948 : Postal Assistant, Onslow
1950 : Postal Clerk, Northampton (following training)
1956 : Senior Postal Clerk Grade 1, Meekatharra
1963 : Postmaster Grade 2, Pingelly
1964 : Transferred to Administration in Perth as Inspector-in-Training

Max’s career subsequently was within the Administration of Australia Post in WA, retiring from Divisional Management in 1990.

From the family (9 siblings) wheat and sheep farm at Wongamine—20 Km’s from Toodyay on the Goomalling road, to the family home he established with Gloria in Bedford (having married Gloria at Northampton in 1952), Max was unwavering in his Catholic faith and service to the Church, being heavily involved in numerous local, State and even National committees. He also enjoyed a love of cricket and Aussie rules football.

Max’s sudden decline in health and subsequent death was completely unexpected by Morsecodians with whom he was closely associated. Although a very busy man in ‘retirement’, Max was always willing and happy to participate in our activities whenever possible and impressed all with his energy, enthusiasm and fun-loving good nature.

His knowledge, input and help will be missed in many areas, not least by the Morsecodians Fraternity of Western Australia.

Our sympathy and condolences are extended to Gloria and the family.

GB—Max