

This seismograph was built by Carl J. Wilhide (1914-1995) in the 1970's and was in operation in his home until 1995. Constructed of household hardware and parts he machined himself it is capable of registering earthquakes occurring in any part of the world. This machine recorded tremors picked up by a sensor Wilhide built and placed on a concrete slab buried ten feet under his back yard. The sensor's information was relayed to this recording unit by means of an underground cable. While the needle on the rotating drum is capable of recording the intensity of a quake it could not pinpoint a quake's location. Wilhide relied on news accounts to learn the source of the earthquake's he recorded.

Wilhide had no college degree or formal scientific training. However, he did have a lifelong passion for science and electronics. Besides this seismograph he built other devices including a home receiver to capture weather satellite signals and process them into photographs of weather formations over the East coast of the U. S. He held a ham radio license from the time he was in his teens and had an avid interest in astronomy, photography and geology.

The Earthquake Man

Having been a dental health care provider for twenty years, I have met many wonderful people who have been my patients. Some of these people have been more than just patients; they have become my friends. One of these people is a soft-spoken, distinguished gentleman named Carl Wilhide. Each time that Carl and I are together, I learn something new. He is a brilliant man who always seems to have the time to share his knowledge with me. On top of these admirable qualities, he is the only person I know who has a seismograph buried in his back yard.

Carl has been a resident of Sharpsville since 1948; however, he was born and raised in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Born in 1916, Carl had a somewhat unusual early childhood for the times, as his parents were divorced when he was but three years old. He was raised by his mother and his maternal grandparents until his mother remarried in 1924. Once this new family got settled, Carl remembers the balance of his childhood as uneventful.

When Carl was a teenager, he developed an interest in electricity. It was during those years that he got his first ham radio. A ham radio operator is an everyday term for a radio operator who uses the amateur radio bands. The radio was definitely primitive by today's standards, but it provided him with endless hours of enjoyment. The radio also was the basis for his interest in electricity, and it was this interest that helped to shape his later years. As a youngster in the 1920s, Carl got quite a thrill out of being able to communicate on a clear night with someone three hundred miles away. Carl has continued to hold a ham radio operator's license for sixty-five years, and there are still many nights when he will seek out a voice at the other end of the wire.

One of Carl's other lifelong interests also developed during his teenage years. This was his interest in the field of geology. He had been curious about the earth in regard to the movements of its plates, in other words, earthquakes. It was in his barn that he set up his first primitive seismograph. This first device was made from a broom handle with a pencil mounted on the end of it, suspended above a piece of paper. Just like many famous inventors, Carl's initial inventions were crude, but the ideas were real and workable.

Carl's methods for measuring the earth's movements have greatly improved over the years. Through trial and error, Carl has developed a rather simple but very dependable system to calibrate all the earth's tremblings. The device that actually picks up the earth's tremors is buried at the bottom of a sixteen-foot cylinder of concrete in his backyard. This needle-type device is connected to a recording machine in his house that has an arm which registers the earth's movements on paper. Whenever there has been a major quake anywhere in the world, Carl always sends me a copy of the recording within a few days. This man has even had his seismograph recording talents written up in the Wall Street Journal.

Carl attended college sporadically. Initially after high school graduation, he attended Juniata College for about one year. A few years later, when he was working for Western Electric in Washington, D.C., he resumed his schooling at George Washington University with a little more enthusiasm. He continued to study electrical engineering, the field that initially had piqued his interest. After his time in Wash-

ington, he moved to Columbus, Ohio, and then on to Pittsburgh where he had his first contact with Westinghouse. Carl was offered a job at sixty-five cents per hour; however, he had to move to Sharon because the job offered was available only at the Sharon plant. This was right before the United States would become involved in World War II.

Carl packed up his few belongings and his radio equipment and moved to Sharon. He worked hard, usually ten to twelve hours per day, and the plant was open every day. When the United States was attacked and then entered the war, Carl tried to enlist in the Navy, hoping for a position as radio operator. For a young man who was deeply involved with radios, that would have been a dream come true. However, because of his position with Westinghouse and because Westinghouse was a major defense contractor, he received a work deferment rather than a position as a Navy seaman. He was told that unless he quit his job at Westinghouse, no branch of the service would take him. Since Carl had received a legitimate service deferment, his family encouraged him to stay out of the conflict as they were concerned about his safety. His stepfather and grandfather had both fought in previous conflicts and had told him that since "war was hell;" this deferment was an opportunity to stay stateside and remain safe.

During his initial time with Westinghouse, Carl was very busy as the war was in full operation. Once the war was over and the men came home, the work at Westinghouse slowed from its former breakneck pace, so Carl decided to enroll in college once again. Youngstown State University was the next institution of higher learning that Carl attended. He went at nights, still pursuing that ever elusive electrical engineering degree. It was also during this early postwar time that Carl would marry.

Having met Katherine Mulligan, a resident of Sharpsville, through a mutual friend, Carl visited her while she was a nursing student at St. Vincent's in Erie, Pennsylvania. He would occasionally make the drive to join her for dinner; however, his trips were few as gas was rationed because of the war effort. When her training was over in 1945, Katherine returned to the Valley and started her nursing career at what was then Sharon General Hospital. From there, she went on to Sharon Steel where she was the industrial nurse. Katherine and Carl were married in 1948, and she continued to work at the mill until her first pregnancy in 1951.

Carl and Katherine resided in Sharpsville. The Wilhides had three children: Tim, Mary, and Patricia. Mary still lives in Sharpsville with her family and her sister, Patricia, resides in Erie, while brother Tim and his family live in Hartford, Connecticut.

Continuing to move up in the electrical engineering department, Carl worked as an electrical engineering technician. This position required him to follow testing, monitor testers, and then report the results. He monitored such things as the noise put out by transformers. Transformers were beginning to emerge all over the country and residential areas were being affected by the noise emitted by these electrical devices.

While Carl was in this position, he began to notice on his own that other energies were coming from these transformers. He never tested his theories until recently

when he was making a trip to Erie to visit his daughter Patricia. On the particular route that he drives to Erie, he passes by a very large transformer. Carl noticed that as he approached this transformer, the music from his radio turned to static and stayed that way until he was quite a distance from it. On a subsequent trip, Carl took with him a fluorescent bulb from his basement workshop. Instead of driving past the transformer, he stopped the car and took out the bulb and held it near the transformer. It lit up! There was so much "loose" energy in the air, that the bulb had lit up without benefit of being plugged in. At eighty years of age, Carl is still forming and testing theories.

When he retired in 1976, Carl and Katherine traveled extensively during the initial years of his retirement. They journeyed to many different types of places from Nova Scotia to Hawaii and from the Canadian Rockies to the Grand Canyon. Katherine's health was not good due to her lifelong battle with Addison's disease (disease of the adrenal glands), so they wanted to do as much traveling as possible before her health failed and they would then be unable to do so.

Being a very organized and methodical man, Carl had set up his financial affairs so that after his death (he always assumed he would die before Katherine), his wife would be able to live comfortably and without having to pay much attention to finances which did not interest her. However, Katherine died first in 1989, after many years of failing health brought on by Addison's disease.

Never expecting to live alone, Carl found himself in a very lonely environment after the death of his wife but, because of his interests in many different areas, he has been able to keep his mind active. What was once Carl and Katherine's dining room, now looks like a major control center of some sort. There are at least three or four different types of radios and Carl is still active in ham communications, talking to people all over the world. These radios are controlled by one computer. There is another computer that is a much larger system where Carl can jump onto the information superhighway and take a trip to wherever his mind would like to go. Then there is another computer that seems to be a backup or it might do something different than the other two.

It has been my distinct pleasure to know this man and I feel that I have personally benefitted from spending time with him. Carl Wilhide is not only a good friend but a walking textbook of information. If I ever ask him a question to which he does not have an answer, he will search for it and I will have an answer within a day or two. I have encouraged him to share his experiences and knowledge with high school students or students here at Penn State. I feel his lifelong insight and wisdom are not things that a person can find in a book.

—Laurie Kay King

Works Cited

Wilhide, Carl. Personal interview. 18 Nov. 1994.