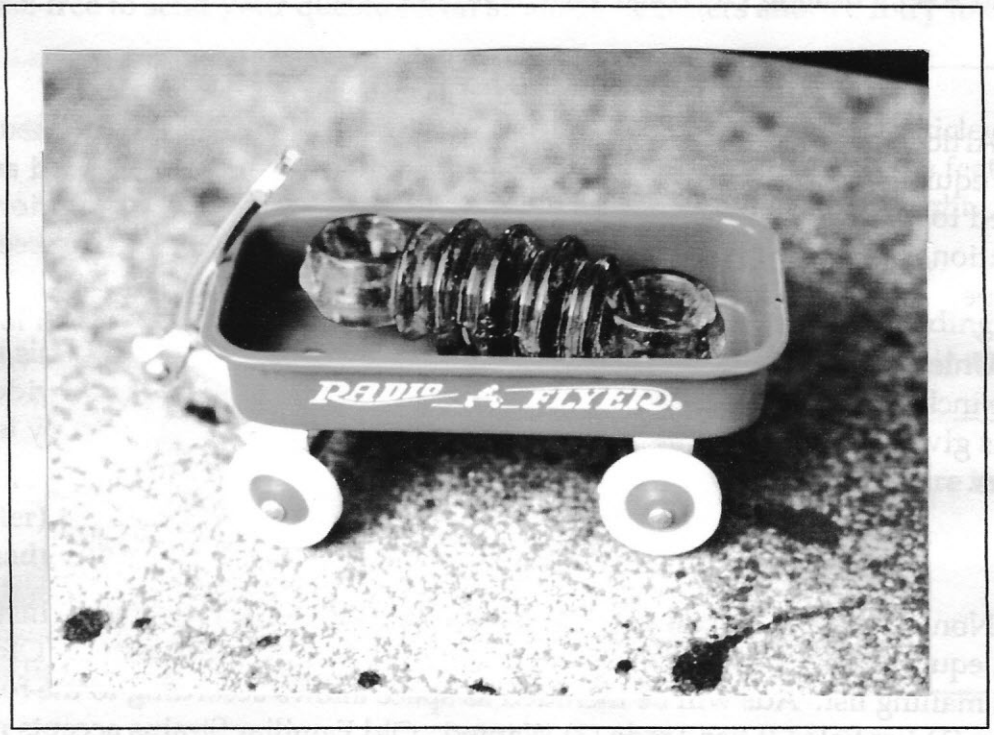
# 2016 PDF edition

# Old Familiar Strains

A newsletter for Collectors of Radio Strain Insulators and related items
Volume 4 No. 1 February 1997

# What a Haul!




It's a good thing that they weren't charging by the pound on the day that Bob Dennison found this green beauty! (Actually the wagon is only 4 inches long. But what a picture!)

# Editorial

Thank you all for continuing to support Old Familiar Strains. The annual roster sheet is included as an insert in this issue. Our circulation regularly numbers over 50, now. Of those, 49 are regular subscribers. This is our all time best. Which reminds me, have you sent your donation in? Check your mailing label for the month and year of your "renewal."

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As promised an the last issue, I am starting the year off with some color illustrations. Thank you for providing photographs and ads for me to use. They certainly tell the story much better than I ever could using words alone.

I love Bob Dennison's cover photo. And the shots that Jimmy Burns provided helped me to quickly identify the insulator that he was inquiring about.

If you have similar inquiries, I would like to make "Thanks For Asking" a regular feature. Feel free to send your questions on strains or arresters and we'll try to help you out.

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A couple readers have promised articles. If you would like to submit an article or article idea, please feel free. Special thanks go to **John Lewis** for this issue's feature: Building a Lighted Rotating Display. I hope that I got the instructions straight. John welcomes your calls if you would like to build one.

A variety of motors and other parts which you might find useful when building your own display are available from C & H Sales, in Pasadena, CA. To order their surplus catalog - which includes a bunch of interesting stuff - call (800) 325-9465

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Old Familiar Strains welcomes the following NEW READERS (their vitals are included on the roster):

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|---|---|
| **Mark Bahadurian** | **Rick Bentley** |
| **Tony Benjamin** | **Neil Eidson** |
| **George Hanson W7BKB** | **Eric Heinze** |
| **Terry Kornberg** | **Larry Seybert** |

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**Rick Soller** called with some great news for OFS readers. As a co-host for the 1997 NIA National Show, Rick is currently planning display themes. He is proposing a non-competitive, joint display for radio strain insulators. I am sure that more information will be coming on this topic. If you are planning to go to nationals, call Rick or **Bob Stahr** soon. This will be a huge show. Swap tables and display spaces are filling up rapidly. If you would like to lend radio insulators for the combined display, stay tuned for details.

# Build a Lighted Rotating Insulator Display

by John Lewis


**Making the Display Base:**

For the base of the rotating display, I use an 11-1/2" length of 2" x 12" (which is actually 1-3/4" x 11-1/2"). On the back side of the square, notch out a recess for the motor and its mounting hardware (determine the dimensions necessary for the motor you plan to use, allowing adequate clearances for heat dissipation).

**Mounting the Motor:**

I was lucky enough to find two (surplus) motors which had enough torque to turn the approximately 40 pound display at 1 RPM without overheating or other problems. I mounted the motor on a 1/8" x 1/2" x 3" piece of aluminum which serves as a tensioning bracket.

For the drive wheel, go to a hobby shop where model or gas powered airplanes are sold and purchase a rubber wheel and tire assembly. The hub can be drilled to fit the motor's drive shaft.

Drill a hole into the wheel and through the drive shaft. A finishing nail, cut to the diameter of the hub, is used to pin the two together.

The motor is mounted on the base so that the wheel bears on a rotating plywood display board. I found that a spring was useful to place tension on the motor assembly and hold the wheel snugly against the bottom of the plywood.

**Mounting the Bearing assembly:**

Now take the display base and mark the center by drilling a 1/4" hole. Remove the bearing race from a lazy susan and cut a piece of 2" thick wood to match it. Drill a 1/4" hole through the center of the board. Using the center holes for squaring, mount the board to the base.

**Making the Rotating platform:**

I used a piece of 1/2" plywood to make the rotating display platform. Measure the diameter of the top of a 5 gallon bucket (with the top removed) and add 2". The bucket I used was 12" so I cut the circle 14" in diameter. Next, I cut a 1/2" wide groove 1/4" deep in the plywood so that the lip of the bucket would fit in it.

**Mounting the platform:**

Cut a groove from the 1/4" hole in the center of the base to an edge for the lamp cord. Also cut a groove in the top of the display so that the motor cord will pass under the bearing race.

Place the rotating display platform on the swivel. Insert a long 1/4" bolt all the way through the assembly to center. Drill four holes through the plywood and fasten the rotating display to the bearing race. Now, cut a circle in the platform to match the inside of the lazy susan swivel. Sand and paint it any color you desire. I chose white.

**Mounting the light:**

To light the display from inside, I used a porcelain lamp socket. Fish a light cord through the center holes in the display. Attach the wire from the motor and light to the cord. Mount the socket so that it projects through the cut out in the center of the platform. To hold down heat in the bucket, I limit the bulb size to 40-60 watts.

At this point the base is finished and is ready for testing. I have hard-wired the light and motor together. You could mount a switch on the back of the display.

**Bucket Preparation:**

Remove and discard the metal handle from a clean 5 gallon white plastic bucket. Carefully cut away the plastic ears where the handle was attached and remove any label or printing on the bucket.

Drill 8-12 3/8" holes in the bottom of the bucket to allow heat to escape. Turn the bucket upside down. Now, using a piece of string, measure the circumference of the bucket, about 1-2" down from the bottom. My bucket measured 33" around. Allowing 2" for each strain insulator, 16 insulators would fit in the top row. Mark the line with marking pen (the ink can be removed later with rubbing alcohol).
Assuming that all 16 insulators are 3" long, measure down 4" from your first line and measure the diameter of the bucket again. After determining the number of insulators on each row, I installed brass "L" hooks by drilling 1/16" holes in the bucket and screwing them in. Create your display by mixing and matching, staggering, or whatever.

# Belknap Hardware

Manufacturers often arrange to produce "private label" products for large department stores or mail order houses. A standard off-the-shelf insulator may be made in a mold with a store's trademark applied instead of, or in addition to, the manufacturer's own mark. You may be familiar with the Sears "Silvertone" or the Wards "Airline trademarks. Did you realize that these private label products were actually produced by a number of manufacturers and not by the stores themselves?


The 1995 Fall double issue featured the products of L.S. Brach Manufacturing Company. The checklist included several non-Brach items under the assumption that they were private label products from the same sources as the Brach items. One of these Brach/non-Brach items was a bakelite "Blue Grass" lightning arrester sold by Belknap Hardware Company. Lloyd Spivey recently ran an ad in Antique Radio Classified magazine looking for information on Belknap. In response to my letter, Mr. Spivey directed me to the following article which tells the interesting story of the Belknap Hardware Company.

[This article originally appeared in the Old Radio Times Fall 1994 issue. Old Radio Times is the official publication of the Mid-South Antique Radio Collectors. The article is excerpted and reprinted by permission of the publisher and the author. If you would enjoy reading the article in its entirety, I can put you in touch with the publisher.]

## The Radio Manufacturing Industry of Kentucky, Part Five: Belknap

by Steve Baron

Before we examine the radio part of Belknap's business, it seems appropriate to take a brief look at the history of the company. William Burke Belknap founded the firm in 1840 at Third and Main streets in Louisville, selling rough hardware, bar iron, cut nails, fencing, and blacksmith's equipment. The business prospered and was incorporated in 1880. It adopted the famous "Blue Grass" trademark around 1883 and took the name Belknap Hardware & Manufacturing Co. in 1904.. (cont. pg. 9)

During the 1880's and 1890's, the product line was vastly expanded: carpenters' and farm tools, door and window hardware, stoves, police supplies, hunting and fishing goods, and cutlery. The company began stocking furniture in 1905 and built its own harness factory in 1908, which continued until 1948. Automobile accessories were added in 1911 and electrical supplies three years later. Radio, of course, came in the 1920's.

The physical plant had taken on huge proportions by the 1920's. A visiting journalist observed in 1925, *"the Belknap Hardware & Manufacturing Company travel 257 salesmen and regularly employ 1,400 people." "The Belknap buildings are in the heart of the Kentucky metropolis and it is a big day's work just to walk through these offices and warehouses.... There are 37 acres of floor space under one roof...."*

By the early 1960's, Belknap listed some 80,000 items in its catalog, from 5,000 manufacturers in the U.S., South America, Asia and Europe. There were more than 25,000 Belknap retailers. In the 1960's and 1970's, Belknap attempted to accommodate changing patterns in the retail hardware industry, but the decline of the independent hardware store was a serious problem. In 1985, Belknap called it quits, after 145 years in business.

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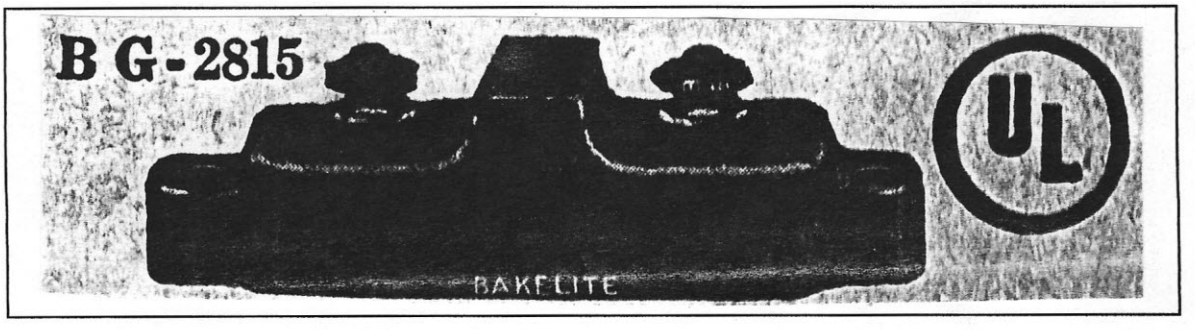
Editor's Note: When preparing this article for OFS, I recalled that a co-worker of mine was from Louisville. Bob said that his first bicycle came from Belknap and that they were "**the**" place to buy hardware when he was a young man.

The arrester shown below is a brown bakelite model that is identical to others which bear the "L.S. Brach", "Parkson", or other trademarks. I believe that all were produced from molds owned by Brach (although we still don't know conclusively that Brach manufactured its own goods).

The trademark is placed in raised lettering on the center portion of the examples that I have seen. The part number "BG-2815" is printed on the box, but the arrester is not marked. This example probably dates from the 1930's or 1940's. Mr. Baron reports in his article that "Belknap's 1940 catalog contains 10 full pages of radio batteries, **aerial parts**, and other accessories, carrying the Blue Grass brand name as well as several popular national brands."



# *Church* Group Makes *Bar* Insulators

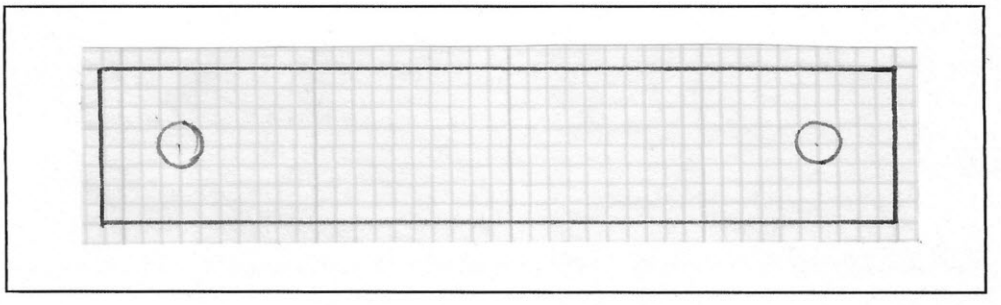
by Dan Howard

I recently responded to an intriguing notice in QST. In a short article, I learned that an amateur radio church group was manufacturing end insulators out of surplus industrial acrylic to benefit a local church. I couldn't resist ordering a pair at only $1.50! They arrived today and I am very pleased.

The insulators are the traditional "bar" style, measuring 4-1/8" long and 3-1/4" center to center in the holes. But the material, a white "mineral filled acrylic" makes them completely different from anything else in my collection. For their size, they are quite heavy. The specified dielectric rating (at an unspecified frequency) of 275V/.001", is comparable to Alsimag and Bakelite materials. (1:47)

The "church" insulators are nicely machined and come shrink-wrapped in pairs on a cardboard backing.

In business for twenty years, although previously unknown to me, The Wireman Inc. sells these and several other styles of commercial insulators, lightning arresters, and accessories. Their catalog, "Wirebook III", is informative and is a must for ordering so that you can get P&H, and other charges straight. If you are interested in the church group insulators, ask for part number 813 (they're not listed in the current catalog). You can reach The Wireman at 1-800-727-9473.



End Notes:

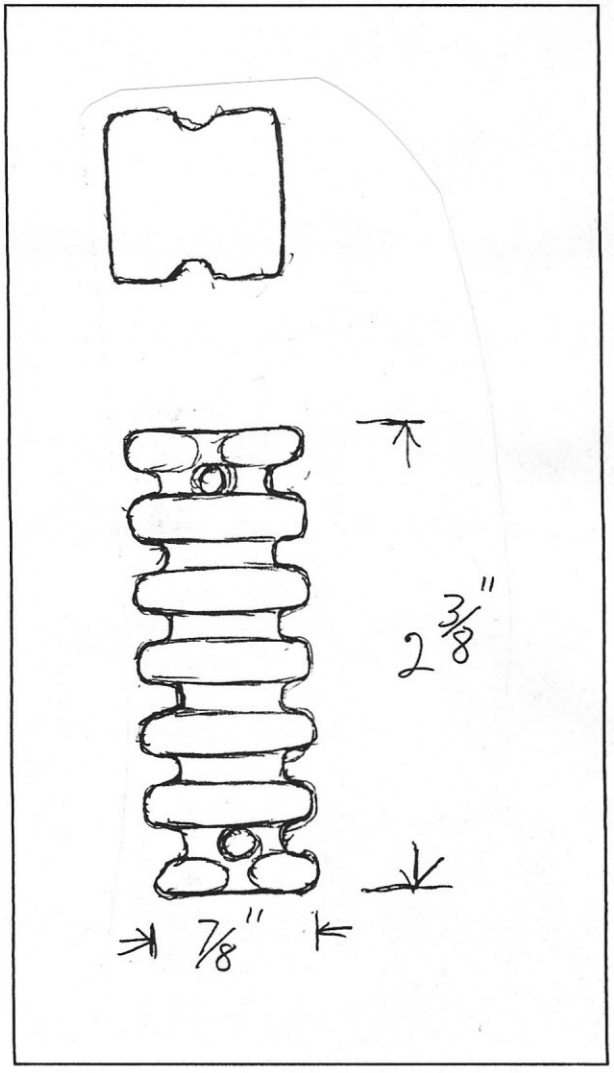
1) Reference Data for Radio Engineers 3rd Ed., (New York: Federal Telephone and Radio Corp., 1949).

Other Sources:

"Antenna Insulators Support Ministry and Wire Antennas" QST Vol. 80 No. 9 (September, 1996) pg. 32.
Wireman Inc., The advertisement QST Vol. 80 No. 9 (September, 1996) pg. 168.

# NU-BLAC Update

Three more "NU-BLAC" sightings have been reported since the last issue. In October, we reported on the M.M. Fleron company and its insulators, some of which were marked "NU-BLAC." In the December issue we learned that NU-BLAC was a trademark for the gray porcelain products of the Star Porcelain Company. Here two readers share information on their finds.




**Charlie Crews** writes that he has two of the NU-BLAC insulators. *"One is just like the picture in Figure 5 [of the December issue], but the other is different. Has 6 grooves, and 7 ribs. Has embossing on it but the glaze is so heavy I can't make it out." "Could be NU-BLAC on one side, but the other is impossible to read. Made of a dull black material with a glossy black glaze."*

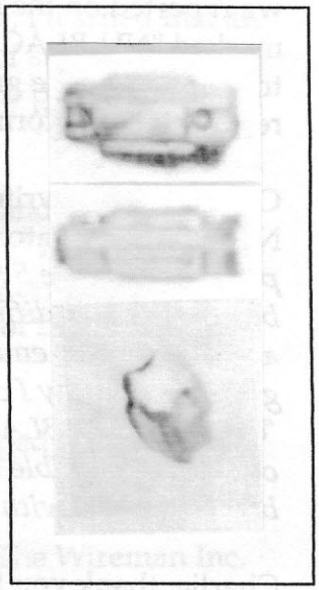
Charlie, thank you for another excellent sketch. I recall seeing an insulator like yours on a table at the October, 1995 swap meet at **Dick Mackiewicz's** house. It changed hands before I got a good look at it. Perhaps Mr. Mackiewicz will take it out one of these days and decipher the embossing....

In his recently updated lightning arrester list, **Bob Puttre** reported the acquisition of a new version of the Fleron No. 20 "Home Guard" lightning arrester. Bob's is glazed in black instead of the previously reported cobalt blue No. 20's. He reports that it is made of dark gray porcelain and is relief-embossed "NU-BLAC" on the underside.

Finally, Charlie also reports that he has one of the Star "dog bone" insulators. In addition to the relief-embossed star, Charlie's has "raised dots" on it -- two on one end, three on the other. Sounds like a cross between Hemingray's "dot code" that **Bob Stahr** told me about, and the chicken pox? If you have one of the insulators, please let me know if yours is also marked with dots. Mine aren't.

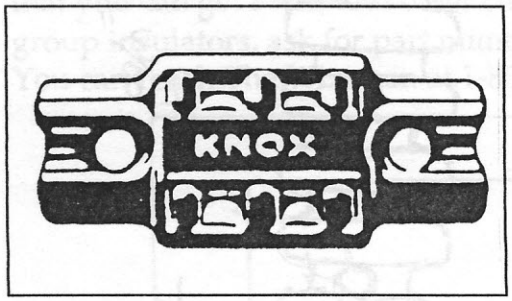
# Thanks for Asking!

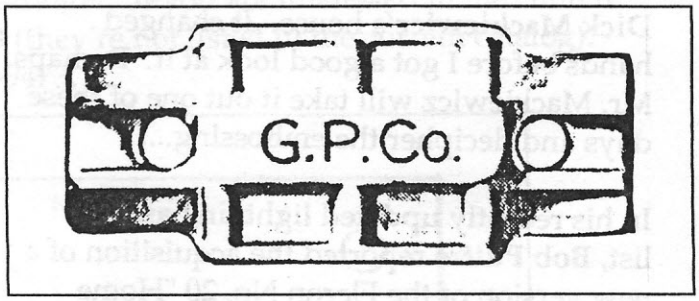
**Jimmy Burns** sent these pictures of his light blue porcelain insulator. He asks *"Does anyone have knowledge of whether Pittsburgh High Voltage Company manufactured small radio strains in the latter years of production (1920-23)? I know of two early strains that bear the glaze characteristics of Pittsburgh H.V., one white and one blue. It is square in design and has small ridges on each side. It looks very old and crude."*



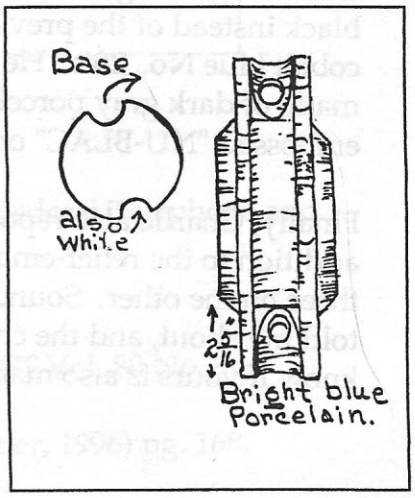
If you can help please contact Jimmy Burns (and please let your editor know, too.)

Thanks for asking, Jimmy. I don't know if PHVC made strains. However, I have several insulators that are similar to yours. Colors include "sooty baby blue," brown, and cobalt blue. Although not all specimens in my collection are embossed, some are marked "Knox" and others, "P.P. Inc.". Dick Mackiewicz has a brown one embossed "F.P. Inc." (possibly "P.P."?).




The cuts are from Knox and Porcelain Products 1930 catalogs. The Knox Porcelain Company of Knoxville, TN, was a known manufacturer of porcelain strains and lightning arresters. G.P. Co. was the trademark of General Porcelain Company, one of the companies that became P.P. Inc. in 1927.




This drawing is from a sheet given to me by Gil Hedges-Blanquez (reprinted from "Old Bottle Magazine" (?)). It shows a plain-sided insulator. Others have small "ribs" on the sides as shown above.

Additional information on this topic would be welcome. Sources for this article are on page 14.

## Classifieds

**Bob Stahr** is looking for someone with copies of Electrical Record Magazine

Does anyone know of a good source for back issues of the Thomas Register of American Manufacturers? The libraries in my area have some back issues, but many editions are missing. Please let me know who might have a better collection. Are they available anywhere on microfiche? **Dick Mackiewicz**

I need information on Knox Porcelain Company, Knoxville, TN, and Super Ball Antenna Company, Green Bay, WI. **Dan Howard**

## Upcoming events

March 8 **Puyallup, WA**, Mic & Key Club Swap Meet, call the editor for details (I'll have a table there and will be glad to bring insulators or arresters along if I know you're coming) Dan Howard

March 15 & 16, **Mobile, AL**, Mobile Bottle Collectors Club Show and Sale, 140 tables of insulators and bottles. For information, contact John Lewis (904) 968-5212 (This might be a good chance to see John's rotating display in person)

July 25-27, **Chicago, IL**, NIA National Convention, Rick Soller (847) 855-9136 or Bob Stahr (219) 365-4171

## New Magazines

In the Winter 1996 issue of Drip Points (pg. 14), **Steve Coffman** announced the launch of two new collector's publications. The first, Old Mud, will be of interest to collectors of porcelain pin insulators. The second, The Electric Fencer, will appeal to collectors of fence hardware and insulators.

## There's nothing new under the sun...

In the last issue I reported on my "new" find - a soft rubber insulator. On a recent trip through Gerald Brown's Unique Collectible Insulators (1975), there it was on page 78. Oh well, I guess that it is allowed for it to be "new" again, once every twenty years, huh?

## Twin Towers Update

**Steve Coffman** writes that he has a catalog from Accessories Manufacturing Company, the maker of the Twin Towers lightning arrester that was covered in the last issue. He has offered to write an article to share a bit more of the company's story with us. I am really looking forward to it.

Reports about Twin Towers arresters are coming in from all quarters. **Shirley Patocka** also has one of the "boat shaped" Chicago lightning arresters.

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## A Report from Rochester

**Bob Puttre** reports that he was at the Antique Wireless Association's annual swap meet in Rochester, New York last Fall.

Although the focus is on antique radios, the AWA swap meets are legendary. The multi-day event includes a large outdoor tailgate swap meet in addition to multiple auctions and fabulous contests and displays. I have not been able to attend myself, but I know that several of our readers have found some very nice insulators and arresters there over the years.

I hope that I am not divulging confidential strategy when I reveal that Bob did his swap meet perusal using moon light and flash light after arriving at some indecent hour.

Well, it paid off for him. He located "a bag full" of lightning arresters on the first day. Included among the new ones was one of the Twin Towers lightning arresters. Congratulations Bob.

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## Sources for Knox Porcelain information on page 12:

"Catalog No. 1" Porcelain Products Inc. 1930. Courtesy of Bob Stahr.
Mackiewicz, Dick "Insulator Notebook", unpublished, 1994.
"Knox Radio Insulators Catalog" Knox Porcelain Corporation, July 1, 1930. Courtesy of Dick Mackiewicz.
Porcelain Products Business Profile, unpublished, 1994.
Tod, Jack, " A History of the Electrical Porcelain Industry in the United States", privately printed, 1977.