

East Bay Ham Radio, 1930s -- 50s.

By Bart Lee, K6VK, CHRS Fellow in History

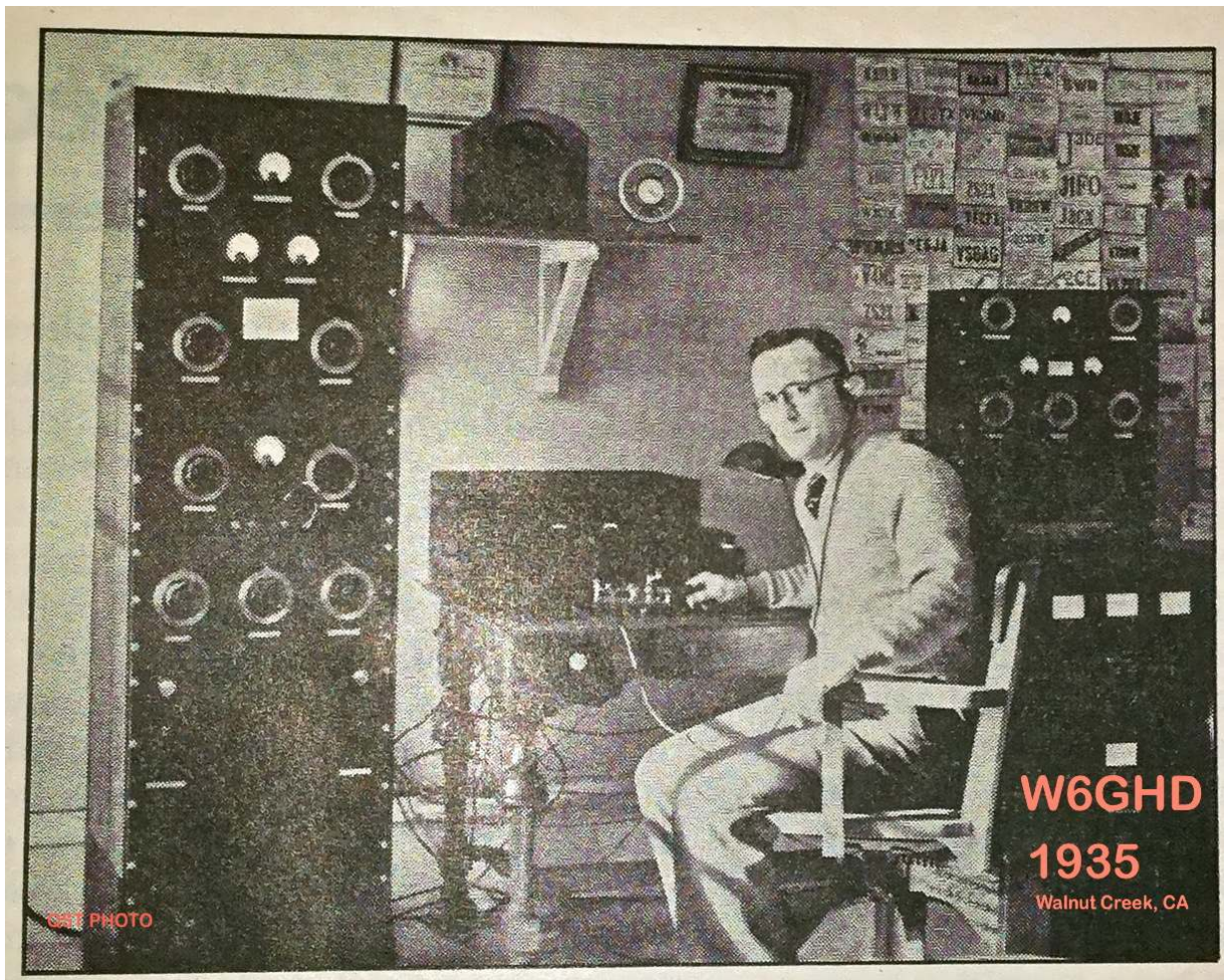
On the East side of the Coastal Ridge across the Bay from San Francisco, the old agricultural town of Walnut Creek (and Orinda and the like) sat happily isolated for many decades. (Now it's freeway linked and hosts its own Tiffany's.) A few East Bay ham stations peek out from the mists of time, through the San Francisco Fog of History:

I. Pre-War: Amateur Radio W6GHD, 1935, Walnut Creek, California; from ARRL QST, 1935 [emended]:

“George S. Bennett of Walnut Creek, California, owner of amateur radio station W6GHD, first ventured into amateur radio in 1909. Seven or eight years of sea-going brass pounding followed [marine operation on spark transmitters]. This must have seemed enough to last a lifetime, since he swore he wouldn't touch a key again!

“However, the bug wouldn't be downed, and 1932 found him back in the game with more enthusiasm than ever.

“W6GHD operates two transmitters, the large rack mounted one at the left in the photograph being a [Morse code] c.w. rig capable of inputs up to a kilowatt. It uses a type 47 crystal oscillator, push-push type 45's as doublers, a 50-T driver and a pair of 150-T's in the final. An auto-transformer with plenty of taps makes it possible to vary the plate voltage to the final in steps of 500 volts. For trans-Pacific work, a specialty of this station, the input usually is about 600 watts.



“The small rig on the file cabinet at the right in the photo is a low-power I60-meter 'phone, job using a pair of 46's to modulate a pair of 45's in the final. The r.f. plate input is about 40 watts. [160 meters, just under 2 MHz, was used as the local talk-around band at the time]. The receiver will be recognized as a Hammerlund Comet Pro.

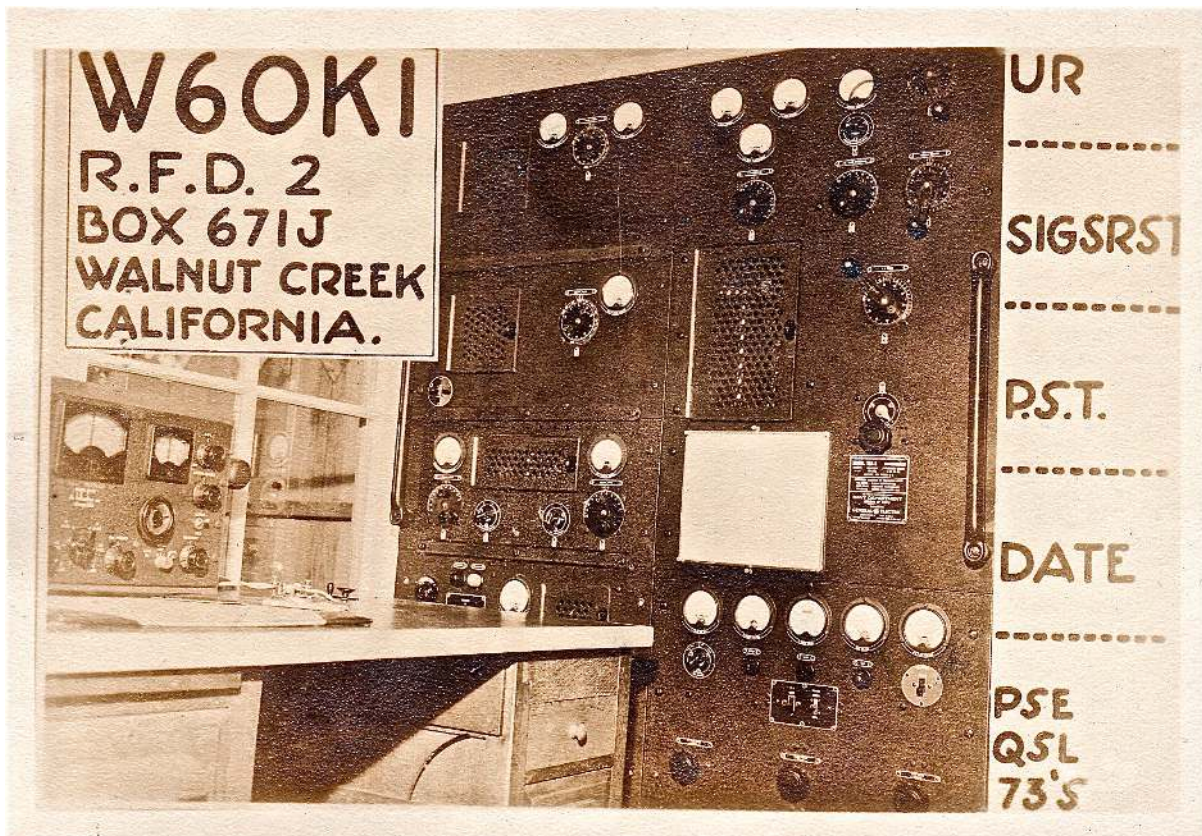
“W6GHD's chief interest is handling traffic over the Pacific. Schedules were maintained with AC2RT and KA1NA [U.S. Philippines] for about two years before these stations closed down. At the present time schedules are kept three times a week with OM1BT and VK6MO, [western Australia] considerable Carnegie [welfare] traffic being handled with the latter. W6GHD

is WAC [Worked all Continents] and also an ORS [Official Relay Station].”

These transmitters look “homebrew” and as good as it gets for 1935. The c.w. Morse code key he is using is a “bug” -- semi-automatic for fast code sending. The Hammerlund Comet Pro receiver was the first all band superhet receiver, state of the art in the early 1930s. It utilized plug in coils.

As late as 1939 W6GHD was heard in the Philippines in the 20-meter band.¹ He probably worked DX mostly on 20 meters. The 1936 Callbook lists his address as R.F.D. [Rural Free Delivery] Rte. 1, Orinda, California.

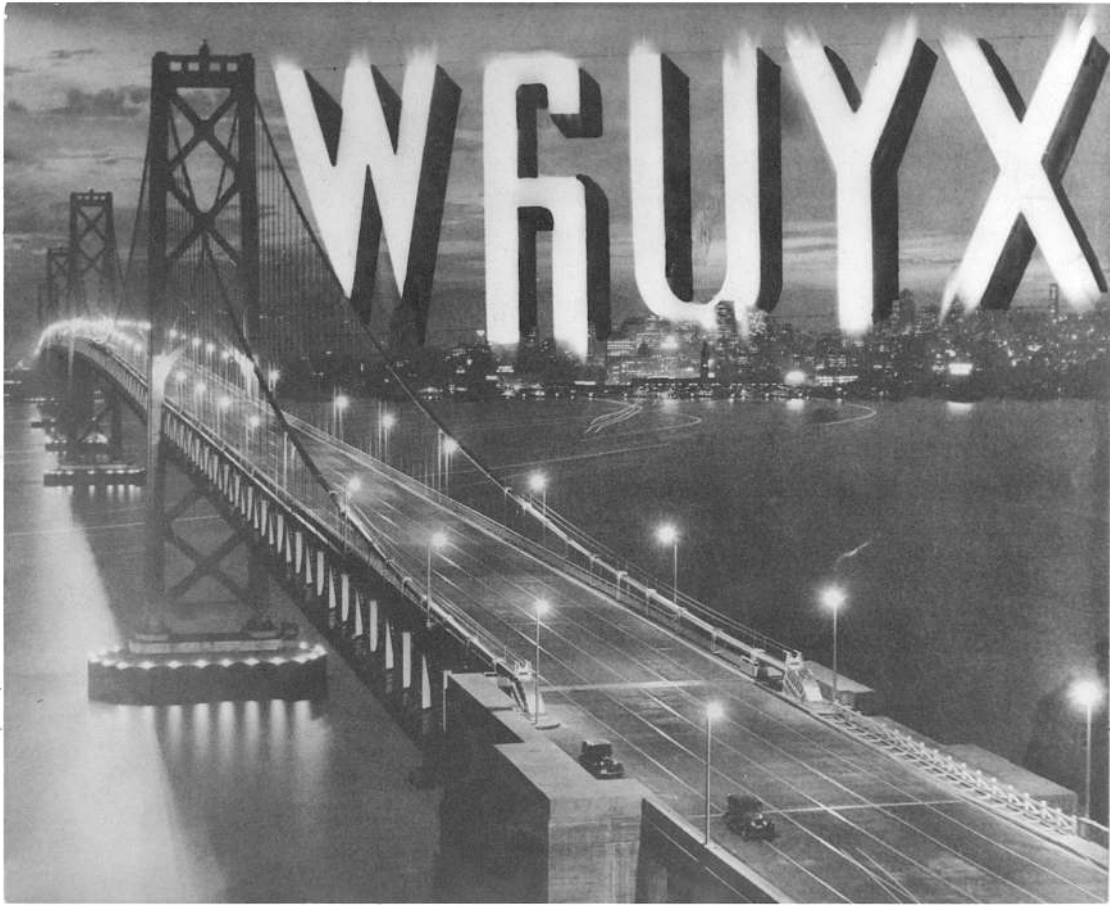
II. Post War: Amateur Radio W6OKI, 1949 +/-, Walnut Creek, California.



This QSL card shows the amateur radio station of William Gentry in Walnut Creek. (That's his callsign, according to the Callbook). The monster transmitter is a Navy TRA-6. It covered four to 20 MHz. It also weighed two tons! With a transmitter like that, one could infer that Mr. Gentry had served in Naval Communications. The receiver is the Hallicrafters SX-28, state of the art for post-war hams. The key is a straight key, not a bug. Gentry's address is shown as R.F.D. Rte. 2, Walnut Creek.

III. Post-War: Amateur Radio W6UYX, 1950s (?), Berkeley, California (later Moraga)

Richard A. Lanzit operated amateur radio station W6UYX initially in Berkeley, California.



The image above is a photo of the Bay Bridge after 1936 but judging by the automobiles, not too much after. The view is into San Francisco with Coit Tower under the X. This is an 8” by 10’ sepia print, with the callsign added perhaps as a “retouch” to the negative. No doubt many were made, but it is rare to find a photo like this relating to amateur radio. It could easily have been made up decades after the period of its image.

Mr. Lanzit may have been born in 1926. He enjoyed a membership in the Northern California DX Club as early as 1951. He also enjoyed contesting on 20 meters in the 1950s.ⁱⁱ Perhaps he studied at the University of California, Berkeley in this period. He lived on Hilldale Avenue in Berkeley.

Later W6UYX moved to Moraga, on the East side of the Coastal Range. He is there listed in the 1983 Callbook.

(de K6VK)

ⁱ [www.americanradiohistory.com/ Archive-Short.../ SWTV-1939-09.pdf](http://www.americanradiohistory.com/Archive-Short.../SWTV-1939-09.pdf)

ⁱⁱ This information from the CHRS library and Internet searches.