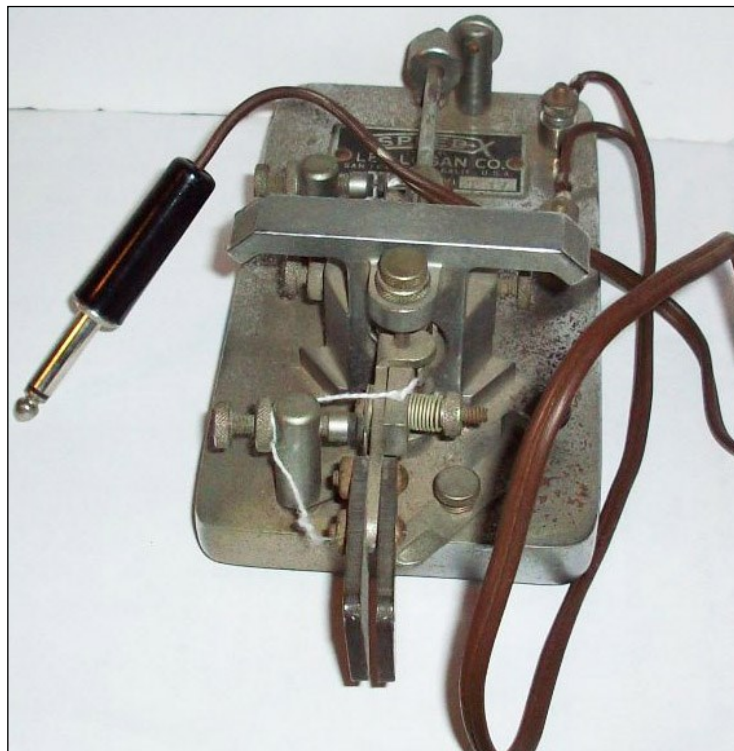


Artifact Showcase

Les Logan Speed Key

Amateur radio operators (“hams”) know that Morse code transmission gets through under difficult conditions better than voice transmission. Years ago knowing Morse code was a requirement for getting a ham license, but that is not true today. Many hams still use Morse code regularly for the satisfaction and challenges it offers.

Hams refer to Morse code transmission as “CW” which stands for continuous wave. In CW mode the transmitter generates a continuous radio wave but the signal goes out over the air only when the key is depressed. As the operator taps on the key, dots (short sounds) and dashes (long sounds) are transmitted.



The earliest and simplest type of Morse code key is a straight key. The operator taps on a lever that moves vertically up and down to open and close the contacts. To provide faster operation, a number of companies patented speed keys in which the operator pushes a lever horizontally left or right. When pushed one way and held, it makes a string of dots, pushed the other way, a string of dashes. The speed can be adjusted. Hams call speed keys “bugs.” A ham highly proficient in CW can send and receive messages faster than most people can type on a keyboard.

The largest manufacturer of speed keys was Vibroplex, but there were smaller firms like Les Logan that also offered them.

We appreciate your support of the museum so that historical artifacts like this one, and the stories that go with them, can be preserved for future generations. THANKS!