

## THE LEGACY OF THE ATTIC ANTENNA

by Bruce Portzer

About a year ago, my wife and I bought a house, a brick Tudor built in 1929 with many of the esthetic features of that era, such as leaded glass windows, coved ceilings, and an arched front doorway. Little did we know at the time of an added bonus -- for me at least -- that came with the house.

One day, a few months after moving in, I noticed a wall plate with a hole in the center, covered with several layers of paint, in a corner of the living room, next to the fireplace. My curiosity was aroused, so I went to work with a screwdriver. A few minutes later I had extracted from the wall a strange metal and ceramic object which looked like a cross between a headphone jack and a 110 volt receptacle. Two 14-gauge wires were attached to it and were routed through the wall to some, then unknown, location. I inspected the basement ceiling below the "outlet" and found that one of the wires emerged from a hole and ran over to a ceramic insulator on the ceiling, at which point it has been snipped off at some time in the past. There was no sign of the other wire.

Not knowing what this strange looking receptacle was used for, I took it to work, hoping that a co-worker might know. One of them suggested it might be a radio outlet, since radio owners back then depended on longwire antennas for adequate reception.

The idea seemed reasonable. The wire which ran to the basement could have been for the ground, and I theorized, the other wire could go to the attic. So I ventured up into the attic and discovered that my theory was correct! At one end of the attic, a wire emerged from below and ran to a ceramic insulator attached to one side of the attic. Several feet of bare copper wire were attached to the lead-in wire; but a previous owner had wadded it up and stuffed it behind a 2x4 stud. So I unravelled it, straightened it out, and found that it reached from one end of the attic to the other.

After a side-trip to the living room, where I twisted the two aforementioned wires together, I went to my basement DX shack, where I connected the attic antenna to my receiver. It worked quite nicely.

I now have the attic antenna connected to my antenna switches, via a military surplus BCB antenna coupler. The antenna, basically an "inverted L" with a 25 foot vertical leg and a 35 foot horizontal leg, is adequate for BCB and shortwave reception. With the antenna coupler peaked, signal strength on the attic antenna is, on some frequencies, comparable to that from the SM-2 and better than on the box loop. The "Q" of the antenna, TVI rejection, and noise rejection aren't as good as with the loops, but then that's to be expected for a longwire of this type.

After reflecting on my good fortune, I realized that my house had been built in the era after radio had become extremely popular, but before sensitive, compact loop antennas had been developed. Since the attic is a logical location for a longwire antenna, it's reasonable to conclude that some enterprising builders in the late '20's and early '30's would build homes with antennas in the attic and outlets for them in the living rooms. After all, houses built today usually have TV outlets in the living room.

If you are now living in a house that was built between 1925 and 1935, you might look around for suspicious wires -- they might be part of a built-in antenna system. Likewise, if you're thinking of buying a house, especially an older house, you might want to look for signs of antennas. Having the antenna already built into the house is much nicer than trying to route a lead-in from the attic, through two floors, to the basement.

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