

2016 PDF edition

Old Familiar Strains

A newsletter for Collectors of Radio Strain Insulators and related items
Volume 3 No. 2

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Some of Jim Singleton's "brilliant" glass

Brilliant Glass Company

by Dan Howard

Brilliant, OH

Brilliant, Ohio, lays on the banks of the Ohio River less than 10 miles downstream from Steubenville.

Originally called Philipsburg, the town was laid out by Philip Doddridge in 1819. In 1836, the LaGrange Addition to Philipsburg was platted and the name of the local railroad station was changed to LaGrange.(1:476)

(continued on page 4)

Editorial

The last couple of issues were fairly well received. I made 50 copies of each and they all went out. Ten December reprints are about gone and I have had to reprint February as well!

I hope that you enjoy the article on Brilliant Glass. I got help from The Jefferson County Historical Association and a nice lady from the Water District in Brilliant and they will be receiving copies of the issue. Thanks go, again, to **Dick Roller** for his invaluable research into the history of the glass manufacturing industry.

This may be a little early in the season for show reports, but I would be interested to hear of your new finds when you get them.

We have two real classified ads in this issue! No, I didn't just write Rick a check when I got his letter. That would be unethical. But then, how would you find out? However, since I am being good, you guys could leave a couple of them for me....

We have a couple of new readers with this issue. A big thanks is owed to **Elton Gish** for his outstanding efforts on our behalf. Elton has been spreading-the-word to folks in Texas through the Lone Star Insulator Club and by including flyers with his mailings.

I understand that we are getting on-going publicity through the insulator page on the Internet, as well. Thanks to those of you who set us up. I am still waiting to take the plunge.

I am still planning for Long Beach. The registration packet arrived earlier this week. Currently, I am planning to prepare a competitive display of antenna insulators. (Can you believe that they have suggested putting me in a "go with" category? Come on folks, these are real insulators. How about having a Radio Insulator category instead?)

I am as yet undecided about having a sales table. Again, I would like to get in touch with whoever else is planning to go down. If someone wants to split one....It would be great to have a place to congregate, tell lies, and show off new acquisitions. Time is of the essence. Call me.

Brilliant Glass, continued from page 1

The first Brilliant Glass Company was organized in LaGrange in 1880 by Charles Henderson and others.(1:300) In the mid-1880's LaGrange/Philipsburg was incorporated under the name Brilliant. (1:476)

Brilliant glass companies came and went from the 1880's through the early 1900's due, in part, to fire and flood. The company that we are most interested in, Brilliant Glass Co. (Brilliant Glass Products Co. Inc.) was organized by Leroy Duke in 1923 and was apparently the last to bear the name. (2:1)

Brilliant Glass Products Co. Inc.

In June, 1923, Brilliant Glass acquired and remodeled a vacant power plant that had formerly belonged to the Wheeling Traction Company. The company specialized in manufacturing automotive and railroad glass, hardware and furniture glassware, and advertising and specialty glassware. (2:1)

According to the Glass Factory Directory, Brilliant Glass had added "radio glassware" (presumably strain insulators) to its product line by 1926.

During 1926 and early 1927, the company was headed by a new president, Stanley A. Frolking. U.S. patent records show that Mr. Frolking filed three design patents for ornamental bathroom fixtures during 1927 which were assigned to the company (numbers D-72366, D-72367, D-74422).

In mid-1927, Charles Snaith became president of Brilliant Glass. Under his direction, the company arranged to erect a new manufacturing facility 90 miles away in Edmiston, West Virginia (near Weston). After some negotiation with the local Chamber of Commerce, a site was acquired. Construction of a 12,000 square foot factory began in September, 1927. Operations were transferred from Brilliant to Edmiston in the Spring of 1928. (2:1) Perhaps the floods that had plagued the company's namesakes prompted the move.

Subsequent entries in the Glass Factory Directory indicate that Brilliant Glass may have gone out of business in June, 1929 and/or incorporated under a new name, Balmer-Westite Co.. Directories show that Balmer-Westite produced glass bathroom fixtures and specialty glassware in Weston from 1929 until 1936, but radio glassware was not mentioned. (3:1)

Brilliant Glass Insulators

This month's cover photo shows items from **Jim Singleton's** beautiful collection of glass. A Brilliant Glass insulator is second-from-the-left in the bottom row. As shown in Figure 1, the insulator has hexagonal ribs with a middle which resembles a bundle of reeds.

Jim brought his gem for show-and-tell at the October picnic. (See OES 12/95 pg. 8, Fig. 4) It is truly lovely and unusual. Charles Crews provided the drawing in Figure 1 and reports that his insulator is "light green." Steve and Lois Blair report having the insulator in clear, "very light green," and "ice green." David Benko has an example in "peacock milk glass." I hope to present his insulator in color in a future issue. It is stunning!

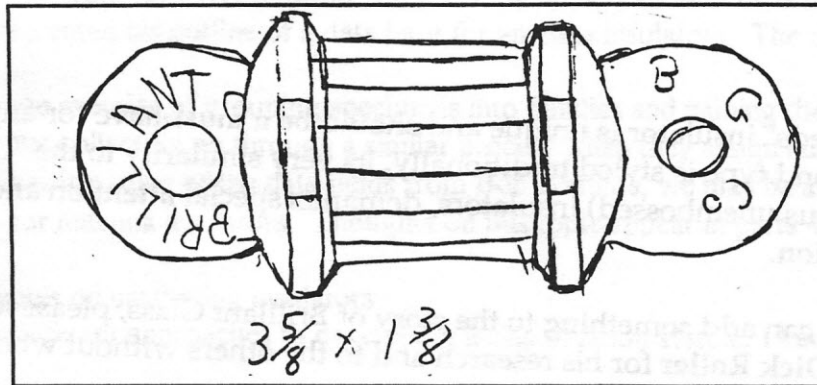


Figure 1

In order to manufacture an insulator with longitudinal (end-to-end) faceting in a standard two-piece mold, the designers had to carefully avoid acute angles. While the facets give the appearance of radial symmetry, a truly symmetrical design that incorporated acute angles could not have been made in a standard mold. Similar "tricks of the eye" were incorporated into Froelking's bathroom fixture designs.

Dick Mackiewicz found a second style of B G Co. insulator at the New England Antique Radio Club swap meet in July, 1994. One of Dick's insulators is pictured in Figure 2. Jim pointed out the obvious similarities to L.S. Brach's patented design. (OES 8/95 pg. 9).

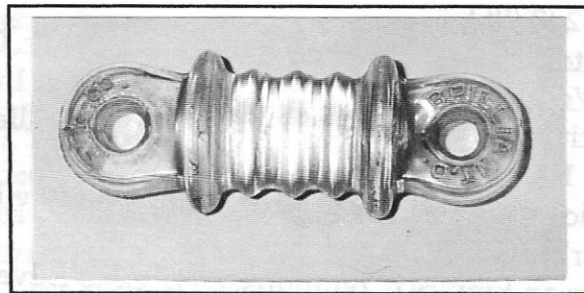


Figure 2

Both styles of insulators are embossed "B G Co" and "Brilliant O". With the two or three green varieties and the peacock milk glass, we have identified two styles and at least four colors (so far).

The 1928 Glass Factory Directory notes that the company's product line includes "opal"

bathroom fixtures.(2:2) My guess is that the peacock milk glass insulator was not a regular production item but may have been made from glass left-over from a run of bathroom fixtures.

Based on the bits of company history that we have, and general industry trends, I would bracket Brilliant Glass Company's insulator production between 1926 and 1928.

Conclusion

The "bundle of reeds" insulator is unique and should be a must-have for any collection. Although the second type is styled traditionally, its very similarity to the "L.S. Brach," "Ajax," (and various unembossed) insulators, demands special attention and warrants further investigation.

As always, if you can add something to the story of Brilliant Glass, please let me know. Thanks again to **Dick Roller** for his research and to the others without whose help, this article would not be nearly as Brilliant.

End Notes:

- 1) Doyle 20th Century History of Steubenville & Jefferson County Ohio, 1910.
- 2) Roller, Dick "Brilliant Ohio History Notes" [12/4/95] Unpublished.
- 3) Roller, Dick "Brilliant Glass Products Co. (Corp.) / Balmer-Westite Co. Notes" [2/17/96] Unpublished.

Cover photo: Courtesy Jim Singleton

Figure 1: Courtesy Charles Crews

Figure 2: Courtesy Dick Mackiewicz

Sources:

Crews, Charles, "letter" [2/2/96]

Doyle, 20th Century History of Steubenville & Jefferson County, Ohio, 1910.

Hamond Ambassador World Atlas (Maplewood, NJ: Hamond Inc.), 1973.

Howard, Dan, "L.S. Brach Manufacturing Company," Old Familiar Strains, Vol. 2 No. 4/5, August/October, 1995.

Jefferson County Historical Association P.O. Box 4268, Steubenville, OH 43952.

Mackiewicz, Dick, "letter" [9/4/94]

Ohio: An Empire Within an Empire (Columbus, OH: Ohio Development & Publicity Commission, The), 1950.

Roller, Dick, "Brilliant Ohio History Notes" [12/4/95]. Unpublished.

Roller, Dick, "Brilliant Glass Products Co. (Corp.) / Balmer-Westite Co. Notes" 2/17/96]. Unpublished.

Singleton, Jim, "letters" [7/31/94], [11/22/94]

Siva, Sallie, Wells Twsp. Water & Sewer Dist., Brilliant, OH.

CATALOGING RADIO ANTENNA INSULATORS: Part IV

by Dan Howard

Part 1: Introduction

Although the definitive answer to cataloging radio antenna insulators may not be at hand as of this writing, a recent letter from **Bob Drummond** prompted me to add another installment to the series. In his letter, Bob presented his outline of a data base for antenna insulators. The outline begins below.

Biologists refer to the exercise of grouping specimens into families and naming them as "developing a taxonomy." Insulator collectors go through a similar process when they assign numbers to different insulator styles. By using some of the data fields from Bob's outline, we may be able to develop a numbering system for antenna insulators. Thoughts on this topic appear in parts 4 and 5 of this article.

Part 2: General notes on cataloging insulators

When considering different approaches to developing a classification system, I keep the following goals in mind:

- 1) **The system should be easy to learn and remember. (intuitive)**
- 2) **The system should provide clearly-defined classification guidelines such that collectors, working independently, will follow parallel courses when classifying "new finds."** (This will ensure that duplication will be minimized and searches can be made efficiently).
- 3) **The system should be broad enough to easily assimilate previously undiscovered or un contemplated individuals or groups of insulators.** (Where do diamond-shaped insulators fit in?)
- 4) **The system should work within the parameters of a computer data base.**

Part 3:

Classification of Non-Pin Type Insulators

by Bob Drummond

I. Assigned Catalog Number

II. Type of Material

- A. Glass
- B. Ceramic - glazed
- C. Ceramic - unglazed
- D. Porcelain - glazed
- E. Porcelain - unglazed
- F. Rubber
- G. Wood (metal)
- H. Composition

III. Color [Base Code followed by (1) = light in color. (2) = medium in color or (3) = dark in color. Exception: clear and black followed by a zero.]

- | | | |
|----------|----|--------------|
| A. Clear | CL | |
| B. White | WH | |
| C. Red | RD | Salmon = RD1 |

D. Yellow	YE	Straw = YE1
E. Green	GR	
F. Blue	BL	Cobalt = BL3
G. Purple	PU	Dark Purple = PU3
H. Brown	BR	Tan = BR1
I. Multi-colored	MC	
J. Gray	GY	Smoked = GY1
K. Black	BK	

IV. General Style (See OFS 2/95 for definitions)

A. Tension (Per OFS 4/95)

1. Ribbed (See OFS 6/95 for patterns)

- a. straight line**
- b. cork screw**
- c. grooved spirally**
- d. round, ball-like 'V' shaped**
- e. 'M' shaped**
- f. 'U' shaped**
- g. 'W' shaped**

2. Non-Ribbed

- a. rectangular, bone shaped**
- b. circular**
- c. diamond**
- d. square**
- e. other**

B. Compression (Per OFS 4/95)

- 1. Type I**
- 2. Type II**
- 3. Type III**
- 4. Type IV**

C. Feedline

D. Stand-off

E. Feed Through (tubular)

F. Spreader

G. Shell (See OFS 12/95) [Type II compression?]

H. Lightning Arrester

V. Measurements

A. Overall length, in tenths of inches

B. Number of Ribs

C. Rib diameters

D. Other

VI. Manufactured by

VII. Date of Manufacture

VIII. Misc. Data, etc.

Part 4: Discussion of the data base

I really appreciate Bob's efforts in developing this outline. A data base modeled on this outline would capture virtually all the data necessary to catalog a collection. Bob's idea of differentiating between glazed and unglazed material was a something that I had overlooked.

Field VIII for "misc. data" might hold just about anything including markings or embossings. I would prefer to put this important information in a separate field or fields. Projects such as last issue's D.C. Jenkins / A.G. Kaufmann synopsis would be a lot easier if I could sort through my collection by marks rather than straining to look at each insulator on the pegboards!

Translating a good data base, such as Bob's, into a general classification system, or taxonomy, involves ranking the priority of the data elements. In my opinion, the first split should be on the basis of "General Style" (Category IV).

After grouping the insulators by style, my preference is to divide by material next.

Part 5: How fine is too fine?

I had naively envisioned a numbering system that involved several increasingly-fine divisions. **Steve Blair**, shared his perspective with me recently. Instead of a detailed matrix, Steve advocated a system that just developed major families. Good advice.

Referring back to Bob's outline, sorting by just two factors, style and material (Items II and IV), would create about 100 families of antenna insulators! If the materials were combined into glass, porcelain, and other, we could get the number of groups under 40. Under this system, individual insulators within the groups would be differentiated by dimension and shape, markings, and color.

For cataloging a personal collection of any size, it is clearly necessary to go beyond shape and material. For developing a general classification / numbering system for antenna insulators, Steve's comments have obvious merit.

Part 6: Conclusion

Bob and I welcome your suggestions on classification systems for radio antenna insulators. One area of special interest is philosophies on numbering. Wanting to avoid a system that gets all-choked-up when variations appear, I would like to begin by learning from those who have gone before....

For more information on cataloging, please turn to page 11.

A Novel Insulator by Dan Howard

Have you ever found an unusual piece of porcelain or glass and thought, "Gee, I wonder if that could be an insulator?" While perusing a flea market at a drive-in theater, I saw a small piece of porcelain with a hole through it. At the time I thought that it was either an unusual stand-off insulator or a porcelain fishing sinker (did they ever make such a thing?) Since the item was not priced and the proprietor was not around, I decided to put it back, but I did not forget about it.

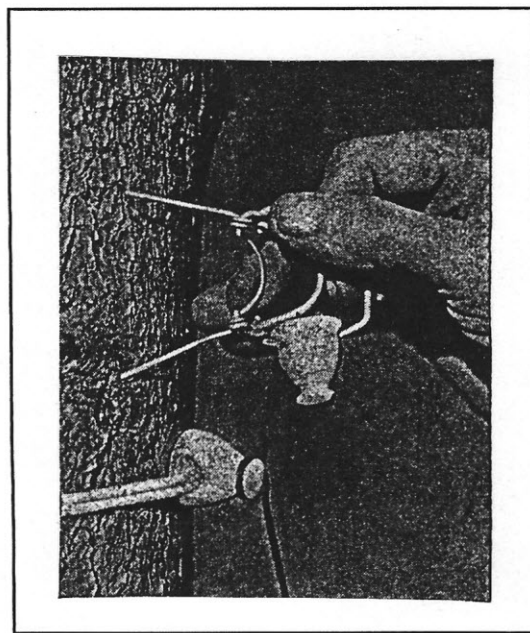
About a month later, I was at an antique shop in Springfield, OR, and saw a box full of the same porcelain pieces. The shop owner said that they were bottle stoppers from old beer bottles. Boy, was I relieved that I had not wasted my time (or my money) on that item!

That evening, while "studying" at the University of Oregon library, I found the article that I have reprinted below on "How to build an emergency antenna insulator from a beer bottle stopper!" I couldn't believe it! On Friday, I wasted my time and my money going back to Springfield to buy a half-dozen of the stoppers.

Simple Emergency Insulator

The radio experimenter often encounters the need of some kind of a ready insulator and a great many things are made use of. The accompanying photo shows one, quickly and easily made of a snap bottle stopper. The porcelain part was removed from the wire portion and the rubber gasket placed under it, the improvised insulator being then tied to a tree. The neck of the stopper, where the gasket rubber formerly fitted, accommodates the wire. The rubber gasket under the bottom is firmly compressed by the cord and keeps the knob from slipping in spite of the pull from the wire. Frank W. Bentley, Jr., Missouri Valley, IA.

From: "With the Experimenters" conducted by S. Gordon Taylor. *Radio News* Vol. XIV No. 1 (July, 1932) pp. 39-40.



Cataloging Notes

Several specialists read OFS and they have hinted at projects involving different types of insulators. **Rick Soller** asks that we reserve the prefix "S" for his Suspension Insulator numbering project and suggests using "R" or "RS" instead for the radio strains. That shouldn't be a problem.

Steve Blair weighed-in with the majority on the debate over metric measurements (another vote for the good-ole-U.S.A. way).

Steve had an interesting idea on measuring strain insulators. Since most antenna insulators are cigar-shaped, he envisioned a measuring device similar to the tool that you stand on at the shoe store to get your foot measured. With such a device, you could quickly estimate the overall length and width of an insulator (or a cigar). What's that thing called anyway?

Steve also mentioned that pin insulator buffs used to sell plastic wheels with color samples on the edge. Such a tool provides quick reference to the standard colors. Are they still available?

Dick Mackiewicz has found that a pair of calipers with narrow jaws (like those shown on page 10 of OFS Vol. 2 No. 6) helps out when he needs to get between ribs to measure the diameter an insulator. (The jaws of Dick's dial calipers won't always give an accurate reading between the ribs.) [Honest, I just liked the picture when I put it in the December issue. Who could know that it was actually going to be useful? Ed.]

A Swap Meet Story by Dan Howard

I have had tables at two local swap meets in the last two months. You know... get up early... stand on concrete all day... hope that something comes of it. My small display/wanted board got lots of looks and comments and I gave away a few business cards. Past experience has taught me not to get my hopes up.

The day after the first show, I got a call from a Ham Radio operator who wanted several of a specific style of insulator to rebuild some wire antennas. In trade, he offered to take down some of the miscellaneous insulators that were currently holding up his antennas and mail them to me. My ears pricked up when he mentioned the "green" glass insulator that he could see from his patio door. Funny how one man's "green" insulator turned out to be my COBALT BLUE!

Readers Write

Especially enjoyed the last issue [January, '96]. OES is truly a quality publication. Originally I was skeptical of the quantity of information and the durability of such a specialized publication. I'm impressed.

Finally sorted out my radio strain collection. Have quite a few traders. Unfortunately I'm no where near having a list available. **Jeff Hogan** 2/96 [We will be waiting, Jeff. Ed.]

I love the color pictures and the great information. I am truly impressed with the quality of each issue. In the last issue, besides the regular content, I also learned about some useful books to get such as **Dick Roller's Indiana Glass Factory Notes** and **Weatherman's Colored Glassware of the Depression Era**. I am not aware of too much published information on radio strains so any addition is nice. **Rick Soller** 2/96.

Gil Hedges-Blanquez reports that Mike Guthrie's blue porcelain, Christmas tree-shaped, antenna insulator surfaced in Seattle in February, and he bought it! The unusually shaped insulator was profiled on page 3 of the May, 1987 issue of **Crown Jewels**. Once you've seen it, you will never forget it.

Dick Mackiewicz reports that he had some good luck at New England area swap meets over the winter. Dick added an early Wards antenna kit to his collection at the Greater Boston Collector's Meet. He also brought home a Philco "farm radio" antenna kit.

Help Out Your Editor!

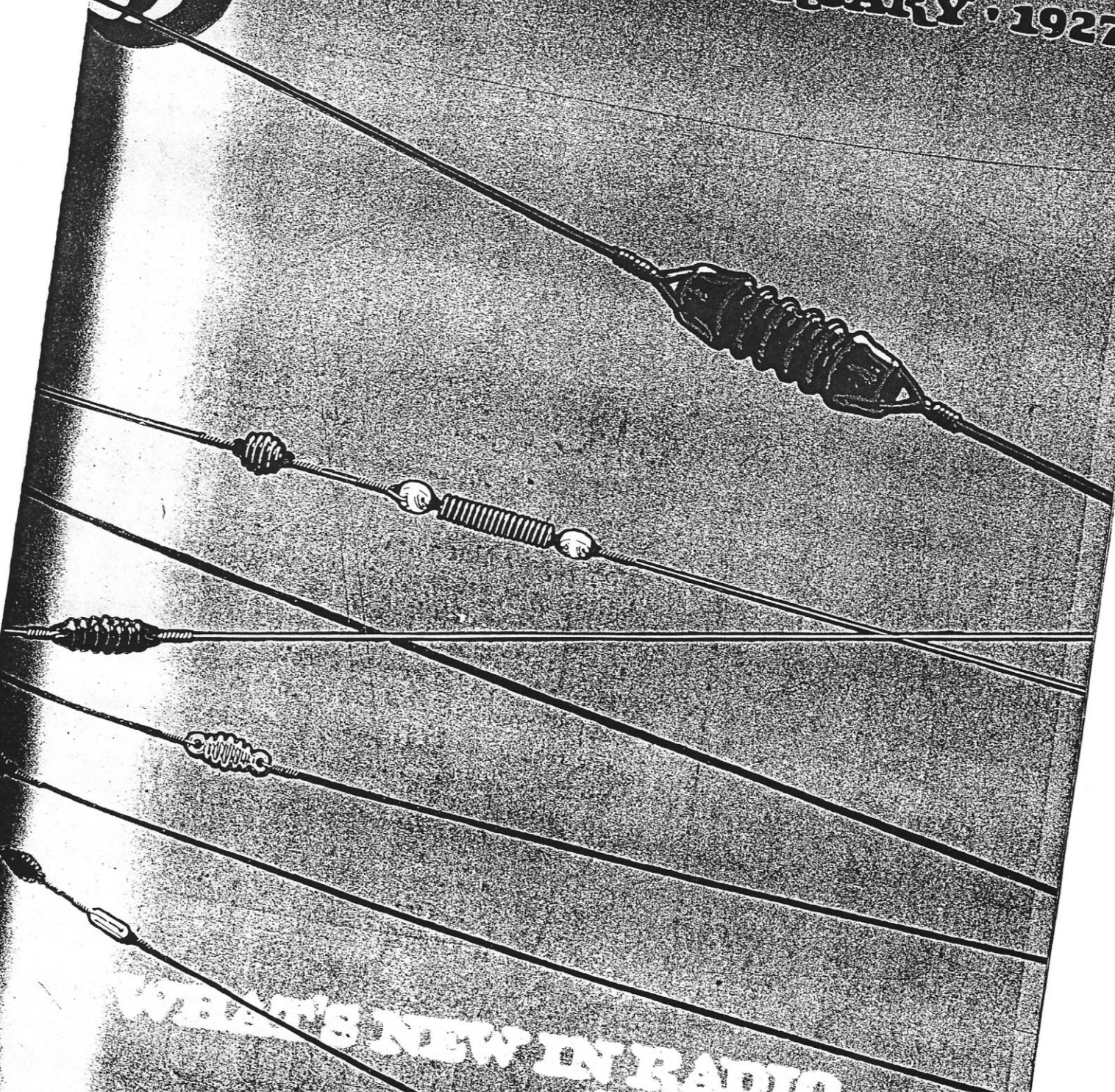
I always appreciate your notes, stories, copies of ads, etc.. Your input makes the newsletter. Currently I am especially looking for information on:

- ▶ **E.F. Johnson Company**, Waseca, MN (on-going project).
- ▶ **M.M. Fleron Company**, Trenton, NJ for a planned double-issue this Fall.
- ▶ **Military insulators**. If you have insulators marked **IN, MT, MX, NL, SE** or with other codes, they are probably of military origin. I am working on an illustrated survey of U.S. Military insulators. Lists and descriptions of your insulators, catalog copies or what-have-you will be appreciated.

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WHAT'S NEW IN RADIO
See page 151