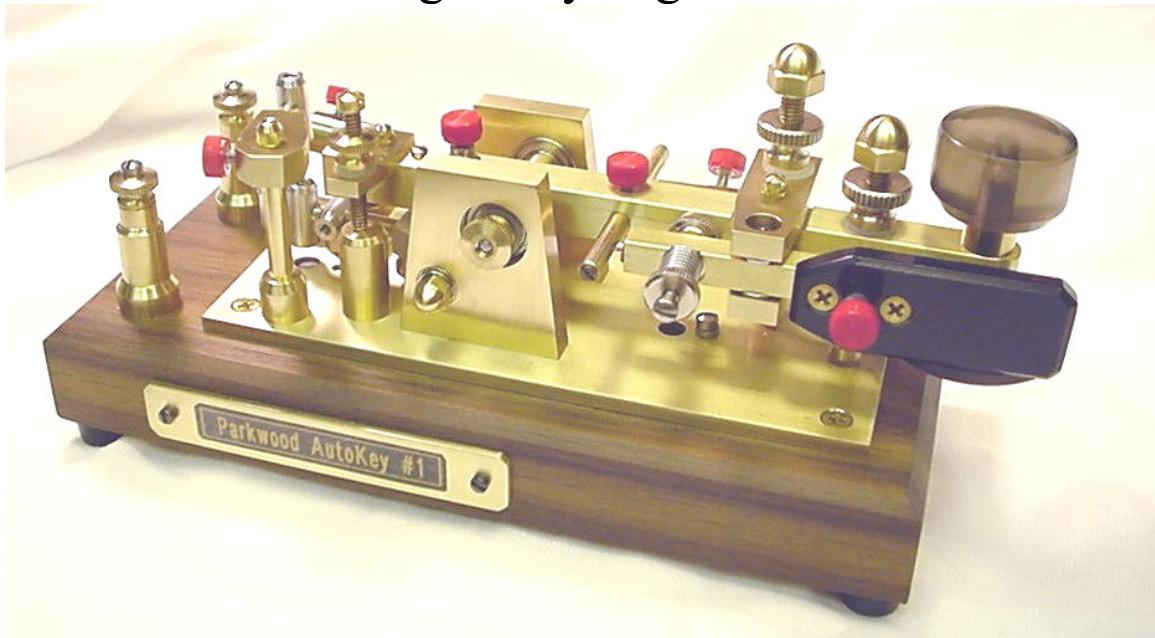


Straight Key Night 2002



This is a picture of a key that I made especially for Straight Key Night 2002. For want of a better term, I call it a “semiautomatic straight key.” In operation, using the conventional knob in the usual way, it functions as any other straight key. But when the side paddle is pressed (using the thumb) and the lever is down, the key generates a string of dots. So the letter “V” would be sent by pressing the lever and then pushing the knob down. After three dits are generated, the thumb paddle is released and the knob held down for the final dah. In practice, the key helps with letters such as V, B, I, S, H, and the numbers. It is hard to use for letters like F and L. All in all, I found the learning curve rather steep, although with practice I could send good CW with it. If you get in trouble with the dit operation during a QSO, you can just forget about it for the moment and use the key as a conventional straight key with no switch-over required.

The mechanical and electrical function is as follows. There is a magnetic pendulum below the main lever that is set in motion every time the knob is pressed down. The pendulum motion closes and opens a magnetic reed switch to generate the dit-stream. A second magnetic reed switch keeps the dit-stream shorted out unless the thumb paddle is pressed. This then places the dit-stream reed switch in series with the main lever contact, and the key generates dits. This arrangement prevents false dits from arising from “afterbounce” of the pendulum. Pressing the thumb paddle when the main lever is not pressed results in no action.

I hope that the use of this experimental instrument was in keeping with the spirit of the rules of SKN. At any rate, the design and construction were a challenge, and the people I worked heard something a little out of the ordinary.

Richard Meiss, WB9LPU