

In this issue of Hemingray Corner, I'm continuing with Part 2 of "Odds & Dead-Ends," where we'll explore some more unusual (possibly Hemingray?) insulators. I've heard collectors refer to these by various names including aerial spacers, wire separators, or wire span insulators. Whatever term you prefer, these insulators were designed to keep wires apart from each other over long spans. Lou Hall believes these may have also been used as spacers on ladder antennas.

The first time I saw one of these was in 1998 at the age of 17, when my dad Bud took me on a road trip to retrace historic Route 66. Among our many stops, we visited Hemingray historian Bob Stahr. I remember being in awe at his amazing collection and all the shards he had dug from the Hemingray Dump. One such shard was an unusual glass insulator with a wire groove, but no pinhole. He also had a complete specimen embossed "E-50". I had never seen anything like it!



BOB STAHR AND CHRISTIAN WILLIS AT BOB'S HOUSE, 1998

21 years later, in March of 2019, I was contacted by Don Stjeor of New Mexico. He sent a photo of two insulators that instantly sparked my memory, though it was a bit fuzzy by this point. Those ends looked awfully familiar! And I thought I could see a hint of an "E" embossed on one of them. E-50 perhaps? We exchanged a few emails, and Don shared the following information with me:

"I was working for AT&T back in the late 60s when I came across these insulators. We were wrecking out an old AT&T long distance telephone line. The line pretty much followed old Route 66. Our crew of six or eight guys was based in Winslow Arizona at the time. There were some very deep and wide canyons that the line crossed, making the spans quite long between poles. These insulators were used to keep the pairs of wires apart out in the middle of the span.... They've been wrapped in soft clothes in my storeroom for 45 or 50 years..."

I shared with him what little I knew of them, and that was that. Then, at the 2021 National, I saw a similar piece embossed "E-50" (see Style 1) and I decided to purchase it. This prompted me to follow up with Don again, and this time he provided even more information on how he acquired his pieces, which I wanted to be sure to share here:

"Somewhere around 68 or 69 I was just a kid working for AT&T out of Kansas City. We were wrecking out the old long-distance line from Albuquerque to L.A. Somewhere west of Winslow Arizona the line went across a very deep Arroyo. I spotted the insulators out over the wash oh, probably a hundred feet in the air. Decided I would like to have one of those. But if you cut one wire without the other wire it would break the ends off of them. So the trick was to cut both wires and let them down to the ground gently. Finally, after breaking a half a dozen or so, we got four down to the ground without breaking them. Then it was a serious hike to get down to the bottom of the Arroyo. My coworker got two and I took two for myself. Carried them around all these years from Albuquerque to Fort Lauderdale to El Paso to Truth or Consequences where I'm at now."

"Everything ran in pairs. So these held the pairs of part out in the middle of the span. There was a tie wire on each end holding the wire to it. So if one wire was pulled tighter than the other one that broke the ends off of the insulator. That's why it was so hard to salvage them. The wire was pure copper. We rolled the wire up on big spools and shipped it back to factory. Some jobs, we would send a hundred thousand pounds of copper a week. It was a very dangerous job. Of course we were kids and nobody told us that... Some of the lines were put in back in the twenties so the poles were not always in great shape."

After some negotiation and assurance that these would be treasured in my personal collection and not resold, he agreed to sell both pieces to me. Both insulators (see Style 2) are identical in size and shape, with two wire grooves, one on each end, and a third wire groove in the middle (which was not used where these were put in service). They measure 9" long x 1¹⁵/₁₆" thick. One piece is embossed "E_50" (with an underscore, a Hemingray hallmark?) and the other was unembossed.

I measured the "E-50" & "E_50" embossings with calipers and compared them to other Hemingray insulators dating to the 1920s-1930s. The stamps match exactly, so I am pretty confident they are Hemingray products. Intrigued, I reached out to ICON and asked if other collectors owned specimens and knew of any other styles. I received several responses, and was made aware of a third style with a thicker "neck" and uniquely shaped wire groove (see Style 3). Rick Soller has all three styles, and Connie Dueker provided photos of hers. All three styles measure 9" long. Altogether, we have come up with a couple dozen known in the hobby, and there are undoubtedly more out there. Based on Don's story, it's understandable that not many of these may have survived service! I would guess that the advent of the midspan transposition brackets in the 1940s largely made these fragile insulators obsolete.

In the world of Hemingray, the "E-" prefix is believed to signify an Experimental style. Yet, there is a similar non-pintype insulator manufactured by Pyrex, the CD 1180, that is embossed E-61 (photo on next page). Coincidence? What does the "E-" designator mean in this case? Could there be more "E-" styles out there? Given this, it seems likely that both Pyrex and Hemingray produced these wire spacers. While there are still many unanswered questions about these insulators, I'm confident we'll learn more about them with time. If you have a different style from the ones pictured here, I'd love to hear about it! 🐻

ODDS & DEAD-ENDS (PART 2)

GLASS WIRE SPACER INSULATORS



STYLE 1: TWO WIRE GROOVES; EMBOSSED E-50 IN MIDDLE



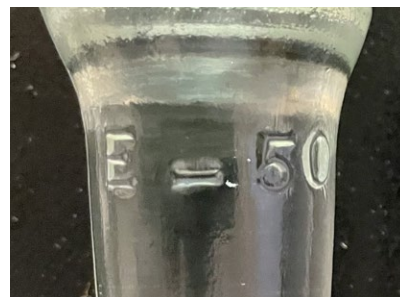
STYLE 2: THREE WIRE GROOVES WITH HOLES IN THE ENDS; FOUND EITHER EMBOSSED E_50 OR UNEMBOSSED



STYLE 3: UNEMBOSSED, THICKER "NECK" WITH ASYMMETRICAL WIRE GROOVES (SQUARE AND ROUND). PHOTO COURTESY CONNIE DUEKER.



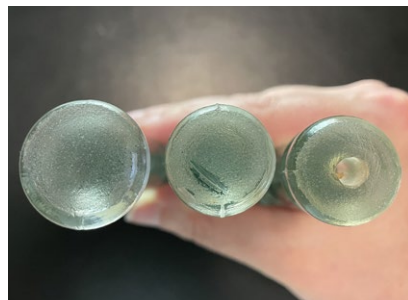
STYLE 1 E-50 EMBOSSEMENT CLOSEUP



STYLE 2 E_50 EMBOSSEMENT CLOSEUP



STYLE 3 CLOSEUP OF WIRE GROOVE.
PHOTO COURTESY CONNIE DUEKER.



STYLE 1 & STYLE 2 GROUND ENDS



STYLE 1 VS. STYLE 2 END DESIGNS



STYLE 1 VS. STYLE 2 END DESIGNS



CD 1180 PYREX E-61
PHOTO COURTESY OF LOU HALL.