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Collecting Edison and Victor  
*It’s Not Just About Phonographs and Records*  
by Mark Mathiosian

While I truly enjoy my vintage talking machines I no longer collect them. There is only so much room in my home and let’s face it, they are expensive. Instead, I search for “accessories” from the glory days of phonographs; authentic artifacts in good condition from the late 1800’s through the 1940’s. Buying smaller and less expensive items fulfills my need to collect things and interestingly they receive almost as much attention from visitors as the phonographs and records. Below are affordable treasures I purchased on eBay, at trade shows, and from phonograph retailers. They all tell a small story in their own way.

We’ll begin with my brass Edison Phonograph Works employee tool check tag number 854 that I won for fifty dollars on eBay. On the front it reads, “Thomas Edison, E.P.W 854 tool check.” The back is stamped “Loss of this check should be reported to Time Department immediately. A charge of fifty cents will be made if lost or not returned on leaving the service of the company.” These tags were issued to employees, with each employee having his own number. When he needed a specialized tool he would request it from the tool department and they would hang the tag in place of the tool in use. This was basically an inventory control method and if the tool was not returned, the company knew who was responsible.

I am sure the employee was fully aware of the financial penalty if he lost or walked off with this tag. Speculating that the token was possibly from 1905 or so, I calculated the penalty for losing it to be about $143.00 in today’s dollars. A heck of a price to pay for a phonograph factory worker. This phonograph plant in West Orange, New Jersey, operated from 1888 until 1914 when it was destroyed by a fire. It was then rebuilt and in 1924 became part of Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

Two other favorite collectibles include an original invoice from an Edison phonograph distributor (Jobber) to a customer in 1908 and a 1912 letter from the Advertising Department of Thomas Edison, Inc. to a publishing company in New York about a disputed invoice. The Jobber letter was from The Eclipse Mu-
sical Co. housed in the Erie Building on East 9th Street in Cleveland, Ohio. According to the letter’s masthead Eclipse was a distributor of both Edison and Victor machines, records and general supplies. This particular customer was buying repair parts, feed nuts and four Edison records including one of the recently introduced, and more expensive, Amberol cylinders. The total bill was $5.25, or about $148.00 in today’s dollars. A little research on the internet and I determined the Erie building on 9th Street was close to historic downtown Cleveland in a warehouse district. I found a reference about the Eclipse Musical Company in the 1908 edition of The Edison Phonograph Monthly attesting the company was a legitimate Edison Jobber. From an e-Book titled Encyclopedia of Recorded Sound I also learned the President of the company in 1921 was Charles K. Bennett and that Bennett was elected “President of the National Association of Phonograph Jobbers.”

Another cool collectible I found on eBay is an original bottle of Edison phonograph oil probably over 100 years old and distributed by “T.A. EDISON, Inc. in Orange, New Jersey. While I have no intentions of using this oil on my machines, it looks great sitting next to my Edison STANDARD. It cost me $29.00 back in 2014. Not sure how much it cost when new, but I am certain I can find out with a little research.

Other fun items I occasionally collect are phonograph needle tins and paper needle packages. The artistic images on the packaging are often whimsical and colorful. It is obvious there was much competition in this business sector as needle manufacturers battled for market share in a lucrative phonograph accessory market. I usually, don’t use these original needles, but every once in a while I pop one into my Victor reproducer.

Music catalogs issued by record and phonograph manufacturers are also fun to collect. The ones in my collection came from phonograph trade shows I attended in Orlando, Florida. Again, the front pages of these booklets are colorful, dated and look very nice when placed near a phonograph from the same time era. As you
can see from the photo with this article, the Columbia Records guide was published in April 1920. It is almost one hundred years old and in excellent condition. These booklets are filled with details about new records and cylinders including revival hymns, novelty songs, dance tunes and band compositions. There are also many photos of singers, bands and entertainers in Broadway musical shows. This particular catalog has a wonderful black and white photo of one of my favorite artists, Al Jolson, standing next to another popular singer of the day, Nora Bayes. The byline under the photos reads, “Exclusive Columbia Artists.” You definitely step back in time when you browse through these catalogs and it is fun searching for records you own.

Finally, another thing I collect are vintage magazine and newspaper advertisements. No matter what your interest, you will certainly find ads about items in your collection. One of my favorites is a small newspaper ad for my Columbia Model Q Graphophone. During the early 1900’s the Model Q sold for a meager five dollars, or $7.50 with a wood case. My little Model Q plays like new and my tiny vintage ad announcing it is “NO BOTHER, MUCH FUN” sits next to it in a protective acrylic frame.

In closing, my suggestion is that you think about ways to enhance your phonograph and records collection with timely artifacts from the glory days of phonographs. There are still many goodies to be found and little gems pop up in the market place on a daily basis. Till next time, happy collecting.
For many years, I have operated the “Victor-Victrola.com” website as an informational resource for both new and seasoned phonograph collectors. The amount of traffic has continuously increased, and now amounts to thousands of hits daily, along with an ever-growing stream of incoming emails. Much of the correspondence consists of serial number submissions for the phonograph survival database, numerous questions of all types, and of course, frequent offers to sell a Victor or Victrola that the reader has found. The process of sorting and selectively answering the stream of 130+ emails daily can become quite a chore. The menagerie of “look what I found” items that are offered for sale, varying from rodent-ridden RCA TV/Phono consoles, beat-to-death VV-XI’s, portable machines that appear to have been pulled from a swamp, and random rusty motor parts arrive by the scores every week. And there are the never-ending, but occasionally entertaining, attempts at fraud and hacking.

However, some interesting items are occasionally offered for sale. During the past 20+ years via this online presence, I have purchased several dozen exceptional phonographs from email-based solicitations, so it is always worthwhile to be vigilant in reading each note that arrives.

In March, 2014, I received a two-line message from a woman in central New Jersey, stating that she had “a bunch of old typewritten meeting notes from RCA Victor, along with some posters and a few record-players” that belonged to her late father. She was simply asking if anyone would be interested in this assortment. I do not typically respond to such vague descriptions, as most document-related offerings are nothing more than random 1960’s RCA interoffice correspondence or mundane summaries from television dealer sales meetings.

It was very fortunate that her note was not ignored. After a few days of back-and-forth correspondence, it became apparent that she had something of significance. Rather than risk losing an opportunity, I immediately booked a flight to Baltimore, rented a car, and drove up I-95 to her suburban home. After being warmly greeted by the polite and articulate woman and her family (and painfully bitten by her large Labradoodle), we reviewed what she had in her basement, set a price over lunch, and shook hands. It was a lot of material to gather-up on short notice. I jammed as much as would reasonably fit into the rented Ford Fusion, and drove down to Alexandria VA to safely store the boxes and folders at my brother’s house before flying home. The seller was promised that the rest of the collection would be picked up in a few weeks’ time, which was accomplished ahead of schedule. The tenderness and bruising from the dog bite lasted for several months. The smooth transaction was successful but not painless.

Her surprising collection consisted of a nearly-complete set of original 1901-1929 Victor Talking Machine Company documents, including stockholder, management, and financial
summaries, issues dealing with the consolidation and purchase of other companies, a large assortment of dealer advertising posters, magazine proofs for review, a few promotional items, and two very nice Electrolas. From what the woman told me, her father worked at RCA when they were closing the main office building in the early 1970’s. The company safe and file cabinets were opened-up and everything was literally “shoveled out” onto the floor for disposal. Many of us have heard about the senseless purges that occurred in Camden around that time, but the story she told was still remarkable. Her dad (and some others) asked and received permission to take whatever they could haul away, and so they did, including some machines found sitting in storage. He hauled it all home and put everything in his basement, where they remained until his passing, at which time his daughter took possession. They were all found exactly as her dad had left them back in the 70’s. And so we have the makings of this story...

While the documents don’t cover Victor’s product design or engineering efforts, they do provide some interesting reading. A good friend was sifting through them a few years back and made an interesting observation; many of the documents prior to 1904 are singed on the edges; this indicates that they were likely in the company safe at the time of the 1904 factory fire. It is therefore a good assumption that these were the “master copies” of business records, legal documents and shareholder voting proxies, stored for safekeeping to document board elections, disbursement of stock, business decisions, etc. Copies of some of these documents were certainly provided to directors and shareholders, but to the best of my knowledge, none have yet turned-up elsewhere. So this may be the only existent set of these important records, and certainly is the only set that would have been personally signed by those involved in the decision-making processes. All signatures appear to be ink-signed and authentic. There are many hundreds of pages, found in the original legal-sized envelopes, detailing the business-side of the company’s operations. This includes the 1901 documents of incorporation and the formation of company leadership, signed by the founders and directors.

Some of the financial and legal information that is contained in these papers was summarized in the 1964 publication by B.L. Aldridge on “The Victor Talking Machine Company”. I am of the opinion that Mr. Aldridge may have retrieved these original papers from the company safe to compile some of the data he reported. However, in the interests of time and space, he condensed many of the details and missed a few others along the way. By the time Frederick Barnum began his monumental work for “His Master’s Voice in America” (1984), the original documents had long since been purged from Camden, and were in the hands of the former employee who took the time to save them for posterity. Therefore, much of the history available in this material may never have been previously documented.
Regarding the founding of The Victor Talking Machine Company, there are some conflicting points from what has been previously written on the subject. Mr. Aldridge indicated that, at the time of incorporation on October 3, 1901, the Consolidated Talking Machine Company was issued stock in return for rights to the Berliner patents, and also paid Victor $50,000 to serve as operating cash. This does not appear to be a correct summary of events.

Per the official meeting minutes of the Board of Directors, the formal certificate of incorporation (simply a legal filing with the state) was the only document issued on October 3, 1901, and did not involve an official meeting of the founders. That didn’t happen until two days later. There were actually TWO meetings on the day that the company’s structure was established. The first one, starting at 11:00 AM on October 5, 1901 at 120 North Front Street, Camden, was attended only by Leon Douglass, Albert Middleton and Charles Haddon representing the interests of the not-yet-structured company, and C.V.D. Joline and Horace Pettit acting as legal counsel. There is no mention whatsoever of Eldridge Johnson during this first meeting. The first order of business was to elect Mr. Douglass as Chairman for the meeting, and then the documents of incorporation and bylaws were approved. The company name and address was established for the record, and $2,500,000 of Capital Stock (at $100 per share par value) and $500,000 of Preferred Stock was authorized. At 2:30PM, an official Board of Directors roster was voted on, with Leon Douglass, Albert Middleton, Charles Haddon, John T. Cross and C. Roy Bair being each authorized with “10 votes” for any future proxies and business decisions. Then the meeting was adjourned.

At 3:15 PM, the second meeting of the day was recorded as “The First Meeting of the Board of Directors for the Victor Talking Machine Company”. The only documented participants were the newly-elected directors noted above, the legal counsel team, and Mr. Thomas S. Parvin. An election was held for the Office of President; John T. Cross was the only nomination and was duly elected. The office was to be held for one year. Leon Douglass was elected to “Vice-President and General Manager”, Mr. Parvin was voted as “Treasurer” and Mr. Haddon became “Secretary and Assistant Treasurer”.

Creation of The Victor Talking Machine Company. The three principals sign an agreement to hold the “First Meeting of Incorporators” on October 5, 1901.
A $10,000 surety bond was to be issued for the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer, to assure the “faithful discharge of their duties”. The property of one Mr. Eldridge Johnson (including his patents) had been appraised, and was offered for sale per a letter dated October 4, 1901. This property, being deemed “of great value” was then approved for purchase by the company at an equivalent of 19,990 shares of Common Stock and 5000 shares of Preferred Stock (this equates to $2,499,000 par value) plus $1,000 cash. Mr. Johnson had issued previous instructions that 9,990 shares of common and 2,000 shares of preferred stock issued in his name be transferred to Mr. Parvin (Treasurer) as company trustee, presumably for use as company assets and/or for business negotiations. The remainder of stock was held by Mr. Johnson. There is absolutely no mention of Consolidated Talking Machine Company or their patent rights in these early minutes. No binding agreements regarding the sale or exchange of Victor stock could have been made with Consolidated prior to October 5, because no stock allocations or value had yet been established, and ergo there was nothing with which to transact! Mr. Johnson was to be notified of the acceptance of the offer, and the State of New Jersey was to be informed of the approved structuring of the new company and the “taking over of the business and plant of Eldridge R. Johnson”. At that point, Mr. Cross resigned both his Directorship and Presidency of the Company, and Mr. Johnson (who was apparently not present) was immediately nominated and voted onto the Board of Directors, and then to the Office of President. The second meeting was adjourned. Thus the structuring and stock allocations were complete, and the company was formally operating. At that point, negotiations regarding patent rights and cash considerations with Consolidated could begin. Their influence did not last long. By October 27, 1903, The Consolidated Talking Machine Company was out of the picture as an independent business partner; on that date, they signed-over all authority for proxies and decision-making for their interests to Mr. Johnson.

Who’s In Charge? A few of the shareholder proxies from the 1912 Annual Meeting. Mr. Johnson votes with 29,259 shares, far overshadowing the impact from other well-vested executives such as Louis Geissler and Bedford Royal. Of course, any open disagreement with the boss was very unlikely in those days; everyone is on the same page regarding the pending amendments.

of “President of the Victor Talking Machine Company” for the better part of an hour, and was then relegated to a long-lost history. John T. Cross from Red Bank, New Jersey appears
listed as a member of the civilian Atlantic Defense Council in 1942; but this may or may not be the same person. Presumably he was a law clerk or banker who stood-in long enough to legally allocate stock to Mr. Johnson and other participants, before turning-over the company to the founder. We know equally little about C. Roy Bair, one of the other directors at that first meeting. Neither Mr. Cross nor Mr. Bair appear as directors, nor are referenced in any subsequent Victor documentation after 1901.

On October 28, 1902, the “First Annual Report to Stockholders” boasts “splendid prosperity and the outlook for the future is bright”, and that “there is not a dollar of bonded indebtedness”. Profits during that first year amounted to $388,477.74, on assets of $2.7 million. Not bad for a start-up!

In the early years, all annual reports were simply typewritten carbons on bond paper. As the years passed, the shareholder and company status reporting became more sophisticated, and deluxe printed “Annual Report” booklets were issued after 1912. The volume of shareholder proxies for each year became larger and larger as more people bought into the company.

Moving forward in time, in the December 31, 1924 Annual Report, the company states on page 3 that:

“1924 was unusual in the experience of the Company. In all prior years, it had been impossible to satisfy the demands of the trade at the Christmas season. Consequently, with the additional facilities provided by recent plant enlargements, an increased manufacturing schedule, considered adequate for the anticipated demands for the year, was put into effect. The sales for the first 10 months were about on par with the previous year (one of the largest in the history of the Company), thus indicating that the program was well-advised. However, an executive canvas in October gave indications of a decrease in the holiday trade, owing to the great demand for radio receivers and the general business depression. Schedules were reduced, but it was impossible to check the output before a considerable surplus of instruments...had accumulated”.

It then goes on to comment that the export business was doing very well, and that a controlling interest in the Berliner Phonograph Company was purchased. After this rather blasé summary, the balance sheet then shows an incredible $13,495,116.80 in unsold inventory sitting at the plant, not counting tens of thousands of unsold machines that were stored at distributors and retailers. To give this figure some perspective, the latent inventory value equates to over $197,000,000 in today’s money. At the snail’s pace retail sales rate in December, 1924, this would indicate that Victor had approximately 92 weeks of product supply on-hand at the plant alone, and this estimate assumes all future production would cease! Since distributors were already overflowing with excess inventory, they had no need to order machines from the plant, so the 92 week supply figure may be a gross underestimate of the true situation.

The tremendous and well-publicized growth of radio sales during 1923-1924, and the subsequent decrease in enthusiasm for the stale acoustic phonograph market, makes it very hard to fathom that Victor’s large field sales organization did not provide a “heads-up” to Camden prior to October. Any retailer they contacted would certainly mention that customers were far more interested in radios than in phonographs. Victor’s Christmas sales for
1923 were lackluster at best, and while the plant kept pumping-out Victrolas at a frantic rate during that month, one wonders how much unsold 1923 holiday inventory was still being held by dealers and distributors on New Year's Day 1924. Of course, 20-20 hindsight is easy, but while the sales of inexpensive (and low-profit) portable machines were faring well during the first half of 1924, there had been a very significant downturn in orders for upright and console models, the bread-and-butter of the company. This fact has seldom been discussed in the published literature, but often-heard explanations to the effect that "the bottom suddenly fell out" of the phonograph market in December 1924 do not ring true. It was a long-term and measurable market deterioration, accelerated by the decreased cost and improved performance of home radio sets.

Given that no new innovative Victor products were being offered, nothing was being done to adjust production rates, and that the standing inventory of obsolete phonographs was spinning out of control, one would presume that the Board of Directors had been caught napping, or were very poorly informed. Panic set in during the early fall, with crash-programs to "put lipstick on the pig" with the development of the unsellable VV-107 and 350/360/370 products, do-it-yourself radio-adaptable machines, and the never-realized longer-playing 14-inch records. Nothing worked, and the axe fell hard and fast in December. Payment of stock dividends were ceased. Over 2000 Victor employees received a layoff notice as their 1924 Christmas present. Many more were to come. To make things worse, Eldridge Johnson was experiencing some serious health issues at that time, and was no longer effectively serving in a decision-making capacity with the company. It must have been an interesting time to be working in Victor's executive offices, perhaps not too dissimilar from what transpired in the American automobile industry during 2008-2009 (which I experienced firsthand). The train wreck is coming, we have no plan, and nobody is in charge. Certainly a tough holiday in Camden.

It is impossible to summarize this collection of documents in a single article, so I anticipate writing further summaries for APS in the coming year. The two nice Electrolas (a 9-54 and 9-16) that I purchased with the collection have since been sold. The large assortment of advertising posters and advertising proofs (mostly for 1920's-era machines and records) have become part of my personal collection. The boxes of original Victor documents, while likely not of great financial value, will be donated to a museum in 2019, as these have an historical importance beyond that which should be maintained in a personal collection; especially true since they contain the original documents of Victor's incorporation. All the papers have been carefully sorted and placed in acid-free library binders, and are well-preserved for the present time. While many of the company reports, proxies, and legal transactions between 1901 and 1929 are present, a few years are notably missing, possibly having been overlooked during the purge and relegated to a dumpster in Camden. Perhaps they are still in the hands of another former employee who was also present at that time, frantically scooping-up papers as they were being pitched out of the Victor safe. With any luck, the missing documents will turn-up in the future.

If you care to discuss further, I can be contacted at pcedie@gmail.com.
Try as I might to uncover the true identity of the elusive W. Gillett, nothing within the hundreds of pages I read through would yield to me that for which I searched.

I only recently became aware, quite accidentally, of a William Gillett, who very neatly fit into my identity criteria. As was reported in his obituary (see below), “W. Gillett” was interred at Deal (Kent, England). As subsequent searches presented encouraging results, I discovered only one Gillett with the corresponding first initial and surname who had been born in 1869 and died in 1894. He is buried at St. Andrews Church, Deal, Kent, England, and had also apparently been married there in 1891. His bride’s maiden name, I discovered, would likely have been Elizabeth Brigham, of Newington, Sittingbourne, Kent, England.

By 1891, the young Mr. Gillett had become established and respected in his own right, and had later published a series of articles in The English Mechanic And World Of Science (henceforth referred to as TEMAWOS) entitled “Elementary Physics” – throughout the scant three years between his Phonograph plans, right up to his untimely death on Sunday, August 12, 1894, as reported in the Slough, Eton, and Windsor Observer, August 18, 1894, pg.8:

DEATH OF A PROMISING YOUNG MAN AT SLOUGH.

It was only in our issue of Saturday the 14th July that a very interesting article from the pen of Mr. W. Gillett, author of a work, entitled “The Phonograph,” appeared upon the subject of “The Electric Telephone; a brief account of its history, construction and working,” and we now regretfully record the fact that this promising young writer on Sunday evening last joined the great majority, after suffering a brief but painful illness. Mr. Gillett, who at the time of his death was only 25 years of age, pursued with intense application the study of mechanics and science, and suitably enough both the house and the street in which he lived were associated names of most distinguished scientists, the house being known as Faraday Cottage and the thoroughfare in which it was situated being Herschel-street. So high an opinion did a well-known firm of publishers of scientific works entertain of his manuscript on “The Phonograph,” that they not only undertook the responsibility of an issue at their own expense, but offered to pay royalty on all sales above a certain number. To those who have any knowledge of the publishing business this will be acknowledged to be a most encouraging start, as publishers are as a rule extremely wary, and instead of promising royalties are more likely to require indemnification against loss. For seven and a half years Mr. Gillett had been in the service of Mr. Henry Middleton, the well-known engineer and inventor of Wellington-street, Slough, and
had applied himself to his work with a fidelity and zeal which could not fail to command the approbation and commendation of his principal. In his leisure time Mr. Gillett wrote articles upon elementary physics, and a series of articles from his pen has lately been appearing in the English Mechanic, the subjects treated being “Sound,” “Electricity, Light, and Heat,” &c. He was the teacher appointed for the class in “Magnetism and Electricity,” one of the subjects taught in connection with the Slough Technical School, and was so popular with the students that on the occasion of the funeral at Deal on Wednesday last, prominent among the floral tributes was one from the students in his class, including Miss Newlyn, Mr. Lovegrove, Mr. Cherrie, Mr. Ball, and Mr. Porrie. It is a singular thing that the funeral service of the deceased young man whose career, so prematurely terminated, gave evidence of so much promise, was christened and married in the same church where the funeral obsequies were performed on Wednesday afternoon last. He had made every arrangement for experimentally illuminating his own house, and those of one or two of his nearest neighbors by electricity, and the motive power was to be furnished by a petroleum engine, with which he had provided himself, but his good-natured designs were frustrated by death, the immediate cause of which was peritonitis, or inflammation of the bowels [sic].

In the August 17, 1894 issue of the TEMAWS, a short but respectful memorial was published:

Our readers will greatly regret to hear that Mr. W. Gillett, who has for some time contributed to our columns, passed peacefully away on Sunday last after a short illness of only eight days. His constant readiness to impart information has made his name familiar to all readers, and his memory will live as one of the many who have so heartily helped to build up “Ours” as their common monument, and to benefit their fellows and humanity at large.

After William’s death, enthusiasts of his published works continued on without him; one such individual persisted with his Gillett Phonograph, seeking assistance from another TEMAWS contributor – a Mr. Bottone – on December 6, 1895:

If your electro-motor is noisy, examine it carefully, and you will find that the noise depends on one or other of the following causes, which you can easily remedy when once located:—(1) The armature is excentric and bumps against the horns of the pole-pieces. (2) The horns of the pole-pieces are not truly circular, and the armature bumps against them at some part of its rotation. (3) The spindle is too loose in its bearings, and makes a noise by bumping against the bearings. (4) There is too much end-play in the spindle. (5) The brushes are not sufficiently pliable, or are pressed down too hard on the commutator, hence make a scratching sound. (6) The commutator is not dead true, so that it wobbles during rotation, hence the brushes give a rhythmic sound in passing from points of higher to those of lower level. (7) Bearings want lubrication. S. Bottone.

Another participant had written to TEMAWS illustrating his own modified motor-drive, which included a rubberized wheel to quiet down the drive, in the January 24, 1896 issue:
I HAVE been troubled with this in the same way as a recent correspondent, and suggest the following remedy, which I find very successful: I reduce the friction of the machine by getting rid of the guide wheels, and can now drive it with two cells instead of four. I lengthened the spindle of counter-shaft (also supports of top bearing of same to correspond) and moved it closer to driving wheel on main shaft. The upper end of counter-shaft is fitted with an indiarubber ring (an umbrella ring does well); this just touches the flange of driving wheel. I find with very slight pressure there is no slip in driving, and the machine runs much more easily and quietly.

Walton.

By 1897 the Phonograph and Graphophone industry had exploded with increasingly affordable products, products which no doubt discouraged even the most enthusiastic hobbyist from building his own machine. By 1897, advertisements for the sale of such goods are increasingly seen published in TEMAWOS pages – one such purveyor was the American Talking Machine Co., of 32, Glendarvon street, Putney, S.W. – and there were others.

In the December 31, 1897 issue, a short article appeared extolling the attributes of “A Simple Graphophone”, being sold by “Messrs. Hawthorne and Sheble.” This diminutive machine, we all know now as the “Eagle”:

A SIMPLE GRAPHOPHONE.

THE illustration represents a graphophone of very simple construction, which embodies the essential features of the high-priced machines, but which is placed on the market at a greatly reduced price by Messrs. Hawthorne and Sheble, of 604-606, Chestnut-street, Philadelphia, Pa. It is run by a clockwork spring motor, wound by the thumbpiece shown at the left in the engraving, and the same instrumental and vocal records are used on it as on the high-priced phonographs and graphophones. The reproduction of sound is, as is well understood, caused by the vibration of a diaphragm opposite the small end of the horn or trumpet, such vibration being caused by a jewel-point connected with the diaphragm, and which passes over the wax cylinder at the right, the surface of the cylinder having been previously indented by a like process, when a sharp cutting-point has been passed over the cylinder, to indent or mark it in accordance with the sounds vibrating the diaphragm.
It seems that William Gillett has left a living, indelible mark on us; who knows how many hobbyist Phonograph builders he had inspired to build their very own Phonograph. And how many of the “one-off” machines that exist today were inspired by his writings? Had he lived even just a few short years longer, I’m sure he would have been astonished to see how quickly the transformation was from nearly experimental, to perfected talking machines; machines that were becoming available even to those of meager means, almost overnight.

I wonder what great things he might have accomplished, had he lived to “old” age.

Corrections or additions? Please contact the author directly at FPratt1426@gmail.com, or through the editor.

NOTES:

1 – Kent, Canterbury Archdeaconry Marriages – www.findmypast.co.uk.


As mentioned at the end of Part I, appearing in the December 29, 1893 (pg. 420) issue of the “E.M”, a chap named “Ubique” had decided to overhaul Gillett’s design extensively, to accept so-called “Eidison Cylinders.”

The following is my transcription of those complete instructions:

HOW TO ALTER A “GILLETT” PHONOGRAPH TO TAKE EDISON CYLINDERS:

HAVING constructed a phonograph after the design given by Mr. Gillett in the pages of this paper, I found that the casting of the cylinders was a great trouble, and as Edison’s cylinders are to be obtained, both in the form of blanks and that of records, I determined to alter my instrument to suit them. At the same time, I make use of one diaphragm only, as in Edison’s latest pattern, and I have altered the countershafting so as to bring all the shafts parallel and avoid the change of direction of the belts and consequent friction. The method which I pursued may be of help to some of ours who desire to alter their machines, and therefore I will take the parts in the same order as in Mr. Gillett’s papers.

2. Bed-plate and Standards. —These remain precisely the same.

3. Guide-rods. —These are unchanged, except that the upper square tube is not required.

4. Main Shaft and Mandrel. —The shaft, Fig. 1 is of tool steel, just over 1/2in. in the rough, and turned to the dimensions shown in the figure. The portion A is for the driving pulley, and the screwed portion, B, which is 4in. long, is cut with a thread of 100 to the inch, this being the pitch of Edison’s screw. No other will be of any use for his records. Then comes a portion C, 7/16in. diameter, and 1-1/2in. long, the remainder, 4-3/4in. long, being 3/8in. diam. The mandrel, which is built up in the same way as before, is 4-3/4in. long, tapered from 1.84in. diam., at D, to 1.7in. at E. This must be very carefully done, or the cylinders will not fit properly.

5. The Gate


7. The Gate Catch

8. The Baseboard and Stand. —The baseboard is 19in. by 9in, by 3/4in., having a 1/2in. bevel round the top edge. Two strips, 1-1/2in. by 3/4in., are screwed across the under side at 2in. from the ends, to prevent warping. The stand is panelled, as shown in Fig. 2, having a door at each end, two doors and a panel in front, and three panels at back. The doors are to enable the bearings and belts to be got at. The framework is made of 1in, by 1/2in. Kauri pine, and the panels of 1/4in, mahogany, and the doors of 3/8in. mahogany. The frame is in four portions, the two ends being 6in. by 7in., and the sides 18in. by 6in. over all, the sides being screwed to the ends, and the holes plugged. The recesses for panels are rebated out 1/4in. wide and 3/8in. deep, from the inside, and the panels secured by screws put in slantwise. Those for doors are not rebated; but a small strip is secured by pins and glue for the door to butt against inside. This brings the inside of panels and doors flush with frame and set in 1/8in. from outside. The doors may be hinged, or have two dowels at one end, so as to take right out, and small spring bolts at the other end. A piece of 3/4in. mahogany, shaped as shown in Fig. 3, is screwed to the baseboard from below, at 4in. from right-hand end. The points x y should be marked on it. A top frame of 2-1/4in. by 1/2in. Kauri pine, halved together at corners, 19in. long and 7in. wide outside, is screwed on top of the framework, and on this the base-plate of the machine is secured. The ends project 1/2in. to serve as handles. The framework is secured to the baseboard by screws from below, and the top frame is also screwed to the upright piece of 3/4in. mahogany. This latter is to carry the motor, and one end of second counter shaft.

9. Mounting Framework. —The base-plate is screwed down to the upper frame of the pedestal by means of four bolts
with fly-nuts underneath. One of these is shown in Fig. 4. They pass through the four corner holes in base-plate and the wood of frame.

10. Sliding Tubes. – These remain as before.

11. Motion Lever. – This is shown in Fig. 6 and is only different from the original in the nut. In place of the nut being cut in the lever, itself, a notch 1/4in. deep and 3/8in. long is cut in the under side, where the nut was, and a block 1/8in. thick, being portion of a nut, slides in this, being held to the lever by a 1/16in. screw passing through a vertical slot in a small brass plate screwed or sweated to one side of the lever. This allows the nut to adjust itself.

12. Repeating Lever. – There is no change in this.

13. Supporting Column. – This is of the dimensions shown in Fig. 6. The turning tool for shaving the cylinders being of a different pattern, no provision need be made for it on the column. It has a screw, shaped as shown, in place of the bearing post.


15. Stop Plate Not required.

16. Turning Tool. – Will be described later.

17. Spectacle Frame. – Which in this case is a “single eyeglass” frame, is shown in plan and section in Fig. 7. It has holes drilled in it at the points a b c d, which are tapped for 3/32in. screws. This figure also shows the adjusting screw and plate at c. It is advisable to prolong the saw-cut beyond the screw and bore a small hole at the end; this gives more spring. The holes f g are drilled in this instead of in the stop plate to fit on the pins b b, Fig. 6. A quadrant must now be made, as shown in Fig. 8, A, of the section shown in B. This is fastened to the frame by a 3/32in. screw passing through the hole d in quadrant and screwing into hole d in the frame, the quadrant pivoting round this screw. Through the hole a in quadrant, and screwing into hole a in frame, is another 3/32in. screw, which has its head in the form of a thumbscrew as at C. Into hole b is screwed a plain cheese-headed screw as a stop, and into d a pillar, D, with 1/8in. set-screw passing through it at 4/4in. from bottom.

18. Diaphragm Cell. – This is shown in section and plan, looking from below, in Fig. 10. It consists of a piece of brass tubing, if any can be procured of suitable dimensions; if not, a casting. It has a flange 1/16in. thick, and same width on the outside at the top, and one of the same size inside at bottom. The interior should have a fine thread cut in it. A ring 1/6in. thick, with milled flange 1/8in. wide and 1/16in. thick, is fitted to screw into cell, and should, when screwed home, come to within 1/8in. of bottom flange. The cell must be a nice fit in the frame (Fig. 7) in which it is rotated, to bring either stylus into action by means of the ring (Fig. 9) of 3/32in. brass, which has a projecting handle, and which is sweated round the cell just below the top flange. It is held in its place in the frame by the quadrant, Fig. 8, but is free to rotate between the fixed stop b and the adjustable stop D, which bears against the flat side of a pillar, f, 3/8in. high, screwed into the handle in a position best obtained by trial. The cover is made of a piece of 3/32in. brass plate, and is hollowed on the under side to the extent of half its thickness. It has a short piece of tube 1/2in. external diameter sweated into the centre. On to the bottom flange is sweated a small piece of brass, 3/8in. by 1/8in. by 1/8in., to form lugs, to which the compensating lever is hinged. The position of this will be about 100° in the direction of the hands of a watch from the handle of Fig. 9 when the cell is upside down. The hole for a very small hinge-pin may now be bored, and the centre part cut out 3/16in. wide, as shown in under plan.


20. Styli and Compensating Lever. – The compensating lever is shown in plan and section in Fig. 11. It is of 3/32in. brass, with a 3/16in. hole in centre, and the narrow end carefully fitted to hinge between the lugs shown in Fig. 10. At a distance of 1/8in. from the centre a short pillar, k, is screwed, which is slotted 1/32in. wide and fitted with a pin, on which the lever will pivot. At the broad end, in the centre, a slot is cut, as shown at 1, to take the head of a 1/16in. screw, which is fixed into the bottom flange of cell, and which regulates the movement of the compensating lever. The stylus lever is forked and is shown about two-thirds size in Fig. 12. The styli are set in small tubes, soldered on to the arms of lever. The recording styli should be on the right-hand arm, looking from above, when the cell is in place, and should be formed of a piece of No. 22 steel wire, having a conical hole drilled in the end with a drill of same size as the wire, so as to form a circular cutting edge, which must be made very hard, and touched upon a fine oilstone. It must be set at the correct angle by trial. The reproducer, may be either glass or sapphire, with a knob on the end about 1/64in. diameter. It should be set at right angles to the lever. Both the styli should be equidistant as to their points from the pivot, and both should be the same vertical distance from the face of compensating lever; these measurements are 3/16in. and 7/32in. respectively. To the other end of stylus lever is pivoted a pillar, the broader end of which will be cemented to the diaphragm, of whatever material it may be made. I have used mica; celluloid, and glass; but the latter is unquestionably the best.

21. Adjusting Stops. – These have already been described. PG. 421:

22. Toggle Joint. – This is not required.

23. Turning Tool. – The turning-tool is preferably fitted into the spectacle frame, as then the contour of the cylinder will be the same for the styli, irrespective of any slight deviation in the parallelism of the main shaft and the guide-rod. In the Edison machine it is a little sapphire knife carried in a block in prolongation of the sliding tube and having a screw-adjustment to bring it into play as required; and, of course, where accuracy to 1/1000in. can be depended on, this cannot be bettered. But for all practical purposes, the arrangement I am about to describe will do well.

A plate (Fig. 13), A, is turned out of a piece of 3/32in. brass, to fit in the spectacle frame and under the quadrant, so
that it can be clamped tight —i.e., by leaving it slightly full in the flange. On the top of this is screwed a pillar, B, which has a 1/8in. set-screw, E, filed square, passing through a square hole in it, and with a nut, N. C C are two short pillars screwed to the under side, on each side of a 1/4in. hole, through which the steel tool D passes, which is pivoted on two pointed screws, m m, passing through the pillars C. This tool is kept up to its work by being pulled against the set-screw E by the spiral spring F. The cutting edge of the tool D must be as keen as a razor, and have the left corner just rounded off, and the right corner sloped off to about half the width, so that the plan will be as at G A small bracket, H, is soldered to top of plate, with a hole in it to go over screw b on frame.

24. Diaphragm. —As before stated, this may be of either, mica, celluloid, or glass, and should be 1/250in. thick. Two indiarubber rings must be procured, of such a size that they will just fit into the cell; and be about 3/32in. wide and 1/32in. thick. One of these is dropped in, and the diaphragm placed on it, the other ring placed on that, and the cover put over it, and clamped down tight with the screwed ring. The pillar must be slightly warmed, and a bit of shellac melted on to the broad end. The pillar is then pinned to the stylus lever, which is mounted on the compensating lever, and this pivoted to the lugs on the cell. A wire, with a flat end, is then warmed sufficiently to melt the shellac, and introduced through the tube in centre of cover till it touches the diaphragm, the pillar being just held up with the finger while the shellac is melted, and the wire withdrawn, the pillar, being held for a moment, till the shellac is hard. Prout’s glue, or some similar elastic cement, will be even better than shellac.

25. Fitting Together. —We can now proceed to fit the machine itself together. Having slipped the sliding tubes, with attached supporting column and motion lever, on to the guide-rod, screw up the nuts on ends of guide-rods, and screw standards down to base. Place the spectacle frame in position, and screw it down, having previously attached the adjusting screws. Place a cylinder in position on the mandrel, and carefully put the cell into its frame, taking care not to let either of the sty lens touch the wax, except by gently lowering the frame by means of the adjusting-screw. Turn the lever hard against the stop b, Fig. 7, and notice if, when the recorder is just touching the wax, the repeater is clear of it. Now turn it down against the other, adjustable, stop and see that the recorder is clear when the repeater is just touching the wax. If in either of these positions the sty lens are in wrong position, the arms of the lever must be bent till they are right. This operation requires a great deal of care. Having got this right, take out the cell, and replace it by the turning tool, taking notice of the angle by which, the tool meets the Wax. It should act like a plane and leave a nice polishing surface.

26. Speed-Reducing Wheels. —These are contained in the panelled case, and are on two counter shafts, one of which, the next to the main shaft, is 12-1/4in. long, and 5/16in. diameter, and carries the 3/4in. pulley below the large pulley on the main shaft, and at the other end the 3-7/8in. pulley. Both of these were transferred from the old vertical shaft.

27. Countershaft Supports. —The centres on which this shaft runs consist, at the end next small pulley, of the original plate for base of the vertical shaft, whose supports are fixed, one on the back upright of frame, and the other on the panel itself at left end of case. The other centre is a 3/16in. screw passing through a brass plate let into the right-hand side of Fig. 3 so that the centre passes right through the wood at y.

28. Guide Wheels. —These are not required.

29. Small Intermediate Wheels. —The other countershaft on which these are mounted is the old vertical shaft, which is supported on two sliding brackets (Fig. 14). On the shaft are mounted, at the left hand end, a 3/4in. pulley, and at 1-9/16in. (centre to centre) the original double pulley from centre of baseboard. The shaft passes through the 1in. hole near the front of Fig. 3. Of the brackets, that at left hand end has a fixed centre, while the right hand one has the screw and its lock-nuts formerly the top centre of vertical shaft. The brackets are fastened by their slots to the plates which formerly carried the motor, which are let into the baseboard in new positions, determined by trial. By this arrangement there is no difficulty in tightening the belts, as there is in the case of the original pattern.

30. The Electo-Motor. —This is mounted on the right hand side of the partition, as shown in Figs. 15 and 16, of which the former is an end view, and the latter a plan. The centre is fixed over the point x in Fig. 3; it is secured by two round-headed wood screws, and the ends of the F.M.’s rest on the baseboard. The oil-cup arrangements have to be modified, the channel and cup on the base-plate being removed, and vertical pipes arranged, as shown.

32*. Finishing. —In connection with this, I would remark, that I find that porpoise bootlaces, slit down the centre, and sewn with “butt” joints, answer admirably for belts and avoid the trouble of hooks and eyes. I have cut a slot in the base board just below the smaller intermediate pulley, so that I can drive the machine on a sewing machine stand by throwing off the motor belt, and driving off the flywheel of sewing machine.

Ubique

*Number 31 does not exist in the original document.
The Biggest Thing I Have Ever Done

By Paul Morris

They say that it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and, ill wind that it certainly was, my workshop fire of the 4th May 2017 caused me to re-invent much of what I do in the wax cylinder business. This was particularly true for the various moulds and tools that I use; and whilst redesigning the new Concert moulds I realised that Concert cylinders were made with some of the same dimensions as another, long-forgotten format.

The Pathe company of France was a far bigger concern than we often realise today. Of obvious significance in England from the turn of the last century, but none-the-less a minor player, Pathé Frères were more known for their motion pictures in the English-speaking world. The student of the history of the talking machine, however, soon learns that throughout continental Europe, Russia and beyond, the Pathé company was in fact a huge enterprise. The generic name for a talking machine in Russia, for example was a “Pathephone”, and catalogues of current titles at this early stage bear witness to the scope and breadth of recordings available. The company had started with an Edison class M electric phonograph and in the ‘90s were offering directly recorded brown wax cylinders of music and artistes from around Paris and further afield. They were also, like everybody else at the time, working on methods of duplication and mass production.

All of their early records were vertically cut (“hill and dale”) and like several other companies of the day, they eventually decided on a system of dubbing from a master cylinder of large diameter onto the smaller format by a process of pantography. Unlike other companies, however, Pathé saw commercial opportunities in making its records available in many different sizes. The actual master cylinder (“Paradise” size all of Pathé’s cylinder sizes were given a name) were huge; measuring 200mm wide and 220mm long. That is about 8 inches by 9 inches!! Truly a monster master. It is not thought that any of these survive, and that none were issued commercially. From the “Paradise” master record, no less than 4 sizes of cylinder were dubbed: “Standard”, “Inter” or “Salon”, “Stentor” or “Concert” and biggest of all, “Céleste”. A little later, a plethora of discs – vertical and lateral recordings – were also dubbed from these same “Paradise” masters. It must have been very complicated, and to the modern researcher, rather curious.

To the uninitiated, or to one who has never heard a Pathé recording in good condition played on a well maintained machine with a stylus of the right form and size, it might appear a ridiculous eccentricity. The results obtained when these records are played correctly, justify the means of producing them. The genius of the Pathé was the slow speed pantographic method with which the sub masters were produced, and the high fidel-

Céleste cylinders are BIG! One is shown here compared to a standard cylinder.
ity that the huge girth of the master cylinder allowed.

My involvement around 90 years later started after seeing several large cylinders whilst teaching in North America in 1989. A visit to the re-doubtable Jean-Paul Agnard at his museum in Ste. Anne-de-Beaupre, Québec allowed me to see and hear what I later found out was a “Céleste” cylinder, and I was able to afford a broken, worn out specimen for my collection. Many years later, at the Union Phonograph show at Donley’s Wild West Town, I chatted to Jalal Aro, a collector-dealer from Paris. We both agreed that it might be interesting to have a go at making some of these “Céleste” cylinders, but not much more transpired. Then, the wake-up call came, and having lost all my tools in the disaster of 4th May 2017 I set about ordering materials for new moulds and equipment, and this is documented online and elsewhere. Suffice it to say that during my calculations for the Concert moulds I realised that a “Céleste” cylinder shares the same external diameter, and the same internal taper. It is just longer. A little over twice as long in fact. This was important, because I was ordering large quantities of aluminium tube for Concert moulds, and delrin bar for a reamer, so a little bit extra would be no problem and if “Céleste” moulds could be made at all, this was the time to do it. My engineer-friend Mr. Desmond Chudley accepted the challenge and duly set his taper-turning attachment to one of his high precision lathes which then had to be worked at maximum capacity to accommodate the sheer size of the job demanded of it.

The moulds and reamer were made in due course to Des’ usual high standard, and the first casting made about a year ago. This was sent to Jean-Paul, unfinished, as a little souvenir. He had, after all, got me started all those years ago, in Québec. The only problem remaining – a major problem – was shaving these monster cylinders. Again, Des’ ingenuity (and long suffering) overcame the difficulty. The machine that had served as a “Concert” cylinder shaver had already been cut in half once and expanded when it was modified from a dictaphone shaver. Now it was decided to cut it in half again, at right
angles, to make it long enough for a "Céleste" cylinder. Would it work? I had no doubt that Des could bring it off. A new (and very long) feed screw of 40 t.p.i. had to be cut, necessitating a special technique to be developed, and, of course, a new and longer mandrel.

The machine had to be able to record as well since I had no Céleste-sized Pathephone of my own. All went to plan, and a moulding session to produce, and finish some examples to take to Paris for evaluation ensued. The mighty moulds required some hefty manoeuvering to be sure, and I found myself pulling muscles that I did not know I had during core extraction, but the results were simply gorgeous, and, if I may be allowed to “blow my own trumpet,” quite the most beautiful cylinders I have ever made: brown, shiny and very big.

Samples were taken to Paris and shown to Messrs. Aro of the Phonogalerie, and Chamoux, sound archivist and inventor of the Archeophone, and deemed satisfactory. The result of this is that a limited number will be offered in France by M. Aro, and I will be offering a small number to be delivered at the phonograph show in Florida in January 2019. Now, you would not expect them to be cheap, and you may well wonder why you should have one. Let me put it like this. In a similar way to the exceedingly rare (and slightly smaller) Edison Kinetophone cylinders, a “Céleste” sized wax cylinder might well form the centerpiece of a collection. It will certainly be a talking piece! Like a bigger brother to my standard cylinders, it will stand tall in a beautifully labeled stout cardboard box, replete with a scarlet chamois-covered lid. Like a Kinetophone cylinder, you probably will not be able to play it, but for a limited time only, cylinders ordered for the Orlando show, and deposits paid, can feature a custom recording! Just send an MP3 file of talking or music of your choice, and I will record it for you and send a video of the cylinder being played. For those of you lucky enough to have a vintage machine that will play them, a list of titles and more details of cost and ordering procedure please write at once to me, on musicurio@yahoo.co.uk. Thank You!
In this article, we will explore the mystery of a recently discovered phonograph. Over my years of collecting, I have encountered several phonographs that were unknown to me. Usually, after some persistent investigation and lengthy discussions with other knowledgeable collectors, these phonographs turned out to be known, understood, and documented within the collecting community. The phonograph we will explore today has not followed that same path to enlightenment, leading me to ask, "what the heck is that phonograph?"

I suggest we start with an observational review of the topic of this article (Exhibits A, B, and C). On first impression, the phonograph is clearly, at its core, an Amet phonograph, specifically the Echophone. This is the source of my, hopefully temporary, name for this machine, the "Undocumented Echophone." Compare this machine with the traditional Amet Echophone (Exhibits D and E). The Undocumented Echophone's motor frame, motor, and Gutta-percha mandrel, exactly match the Amet Echophone. The wooden case is longer and slightly taller than the Amet Echophone to accommodate the horn support. It is also executed in oak. The Amet Echophone case is normally executed in a softer wood, most likely poplar. Later, Amet Echophone cases were stained to appear like mahogany; ear-
lier ones were stained much lighter. The handle and brass hook attachments on the case are identical to the Amet Echophone. The most striking difference between the two machines is in the sound production. The Amet Echophone has a glass tone arm attached to a bellows that produces sound transmitted through listening tubes. The Undocumented Echophone has a reproducer attached to a horn that pivots on a pin to produce sound. And while a horn was available for the Amet Echophone, the Amet Echophone still used the glass rod to produce sound. The horn was merely inserted into the hole where the listening tubes were normally attached (Exhibit F). To support the glass tone arm when no record is present on the Amet Echophone, a rod attached to the motor frame extends parallel to the mandrel (Exhibit F). On the Undocumented Echophone, this same attachment point on the motor frame holds a cradle where the reproducer and horn rest off the record mandrel (Exhibit A).

So “what the heck is that phonograph?” Let us push forward with a brief overview of the story of the Amet Echophone and its inventor. Edward Hill Amet was the first inventor in the United States to introduce a commercially available, spring-powered phonograph motor, patented in 1891. Amet’s phonograph was available for sale and could be fitted
with either the top works from a Bell-Tainter, or Edison Class-M phonograph to complete the machine. The first incarnation of the Echophone appeared in late 1895 as the Amet Talking Machine. In 1896, Amet produced the Metaphone, later renamed the Echophone. The Amet Echophone was obviously targeted and priced for a different market than his previous, more robust, spring-motor offering (Exhibit G). The motor for the Amet Echophone was even designed by a clockmaker, the Waterbury Clock Company.

Edward Amet attempted to not intrude on existing patents with techniques such as an indented mandrel, to avoid Edison's tapering mandrel patent. However, he was constantly under attack from Edison and more importantly the American Graphophone Company. In April of 1896, the American Graphophone Company finally won a patent infringement case against Amet and his spring-motor talking machines. Amet was not only required to pay damages to the American Graphophone Company, but to cease the production and sale of any Amet phonograph. The American Graphophone Company were also to be the recipient of much of Amet's remaining stock of phonographs. The ruling was appealed in January of 1897 by Edward Amet and his backers, but that appeal was overruled and the infringement case stood. Interestingly enough, in the March 1898 issue of The Phonoscope, where the court case previously referred to is well documented, there was a small "correction" printed. That correction reads: "We wish to correct a statement made recently in reference to E. H. Amet going out of business. We have been misinformed and understand that they are doing business on as large a scale as ever."

Though the timing may be unclear, what is clear is that Edward Amet was forced from the phonograph business. Edward Amet continued working in film, another field where he was a pioneer. Earlier in his career, in 1894 he teamed up with Waukegan, Illinois, theater manager George Kirke Spoor to produce a competing film projector to Edison’s Kinetoscope called the Magniscope. In 1911, Amet once again returned to the phonograph when he designed the Audo-Moto-Photo, a combination phonograph and film projector.

This brings us again to the question asked previously: "What the heck is that phonograph?" It would be tempting to think the Undocumented Echophone is the singular work of a talented craftsman who "upgraded" his Amet Echophone with more competitive technology. Without another example, this would seem a plausible answer. However, there exist at least two other real-life examples of the Undocumented Echophone in addition to the one in this article. And while one of the other examples is missing its horn and reproducer (the horn pivot is present), in all ways mechanically, dimensionally, and cosmetically, they are identical. Additionally, at least one of the other two examples was found in Pennsylvania,
where the subject of this article was located. That being said, the truth is I have not been able to answer this question conclusively. I can offer three plausible answers to this question, ordered with the least probable of the three answers first, and the most probable of the three answers last.

**Plausible answer 1:**

The Undocumented Echophone possibly represents the last upgrade by Edward Amet on his Echophone to make it more appealing than competitive offerings. Edward Amet did not give up easily. He constantly improved his first spring-motor offering, and even the Echophone.

**Plausible answer 2:**

The Undocumented Echophone could be what was produced by the American Graphophone Company as the Lyraphone. In the May 1897 issue of the Phonoscope, the Lyraphone was announced as a new phonograph, similar in construction to the Amet Echophone, and manufactured under the authority of the American Graphophone Company. The machine was advertised for sale for $10.00. However, no physical example of the Lyraphone matching the advertisement has yet been discovered. Comparison of the Undocumented Echophone to the ink drawing from the Phonoscope accompanying the announcement (Exhibit H and B) shows striking similarities, as well as differences. The written introduction of the Lyraphone even referenced the Echophone, saying that the Lyraphone was similar in construction. The Amet Echophone inventory gained from winning patent infringement case against Amet
could have been used as the basis to more cheaply produce the Lyraphone than a ground-up build of a machine. This would have been quickly abandoned as Columbia introduced the highly successful Eagle Graphophone in July 1897, only two months after the announcement of the Lyraphone.

**Plausible answer 3:**

The Undocumented Echophone is probably a machine produced by an enterprising business concern from an Echophone that was obtained from the American Graphophone Company. After winning the lawsuit against Amet, the American Graphophone Company needed to divest of the remaining stock of Amet Echophones. As evidenced by the ad in Exhibit F, we know that Frank Leslie advertised the Echophone in 1897 as an incentive to purchase his magazine. W. Hill & Co. in Chicago advertised the “Gem Echophone,” including a picture of an Amet Echophone with an oddly angled horn in 1898 (Exhibit I). In the March 1898 *Talking Machine World*, Anthony Loforte announced his new machine, the Euphonic Talking Machine. This machine appears to be constructed from, or based on Amet parts, but with a horn and reproducer. Mr. Loforte is even so bold as to say it was built on the same plan as the Echophone, but quickly adds that it is far superior to the Echophone (Exhibit J).

Some enterprising business concern probably used the motor frame, motor, and Gutta-percha mandrel of the Echophone, abandoned the glass tube and bellows for a horn and reproducer, and replaced the poplar case with a larger oak case to accommodate the new configuration. All this must have been done to compete more effectively against current offerings such as the Columbia Eagle and Edison Gem.

So, without further information, we are left with our primary question unanswered. What we do know is that the Undocumented Echophone is not a one-off, but a production machine, and would be considered to be darn scarce in the collecting world today.

The best outcome from writing this article would be to have someone come forward with more information that could help us answer the question: “**What the heck is that phonograph?**”

I want to thank René Rondeau for providing a picture of his early Amet Echophone with a horn for this article. I look forward to sharing future articles and welcome any of your questions or comments. Just email me at MShawnORourke@gmail.com.
The story of Victor's most disastrous year has been told before, but the recent discovery of notes and memorandums from the company's formerly secret reports gives us a little more insight into the troubles being experienced and the decisions that were made to deal with them.

Victor made a quality product designed to provide entertainment within the home, and the Victrola along with competing phonographs was the most popular way to provide music and culture for the entire family. The Victrola could provide virtually any sort of audio entertainment. It could teach a skill such as telegraphy or dance, provide relief from stress courtesy of the world's finest comedians, or bring celebrated stage performers into the home. As such, the Victrola was a valuable addition to family life, and Victor could count on robust sales of machines and records every Christmas time as more and more families treated themselves to the luxury of home entertainment.

For nearly 20 years the phonograph and the Victrola in particular had no real competition for the holiday dollars, at least until 1923. It was at about this time that radio became well enough developed to appeal to the average consumer. Radio was still rudimentary, of course, but factory-built receivers were becoming more commonplace and easier to use. For about the same price as a nice Victrola, the family could purchase a moderately reliable and acceptably easy to use radio. Quality programming was just beginning to appear in some markets, but even in smaller towns, the local broadcasters could provide timely news of local interest and be a welcome addition to the home. Probably more importantly, the broadcasts were free and always fresh.

Victor most certainly noticed that many radios were being sold by the same dealers that handled the Victrola and records, but they were slow to react to the competition. Radio was not able at this time to match the musical quality of a Victrola, so many in the phonograph industry thought of radio as an amusing hobby and not a serious threat to the record. After a weak 1923 Christmas season, the Victor company continued producing the same style of talking machines that had served them well in the past. The spring and summer months
had formerly been relatively slow selling seasons, but Victor always used this time to stock-pile Victrolas for the fall, when most of the sales had traditionally been made. In the fall of 1924, however, the surge in demand never came. Victor was saddled with a huge inventory of Victrolas choking every possible storage space at the factory. Distributors were in a similar pickle. Retail dealers invested in radios for the holiday trade and kept only a modest supply of talking machines in stock. Victor was not alone in this predicament, of course, but as the largest phonograph manufacturer, the change in buying habits hit them particularly hard.

It is difficult to imagine how the directors of the company could not have seen this coming after the experience of the previous holiday season, but their reaction was tepid at best. Once the 1924 selling season was underway, even the most stubborn director could see that the situation was serious. At the end of December 1924, Victor still had 93,153 instruments in storage at the factory. The distributors likely had an equal or greater number of unsold Victrolas in their warehouses. In the best of the previous seasons, both the factory and the distributor's warehouses would have been virtually empty on December 26th.

In January 1925, management issued orders to cut expenses in all areas of the company to rock bottom and department leaders were instructed to avoid all even remotely unnecessary expenses. The new office building had been designed to have a receptionist at the entrance to each floor, but these positions were eliminated and a single receptionist on the first floor took care of all visitors. Similar reductions in staff were made throughout the company. Even the factory's last two horses and their handler were victims of the emergency.

Any material in stock that was not deemed suitable for immediate production was sold for whatever scrap value it could bring. Management ordered the mill to run samples of flooring using the company's stock of oak, in order to turn the lumber into income.

Victor had been in discussions with Western Electric and the Bell System for a while, and would soon set up electrical recording studios at Camden, but they were slow to grasp the fact that the new phonograph technology made their existing instruments totally obsolete. Reading the minutes of Victor's Management Committee, there is very little mention of any change in direction for the coming year. In spite of the fact that the company planned to use the Western Electric technology in the future, the managers were approving new models of Victrolas that were little different from the ones that had been in production for a couple of decades.

The Minutes indicate that as late as April 1925, Victor management was still ordering production of new models of traditional Victrolas. Ultimately, none of these models were released, and the company had to scrap a lot of unfinished products.

Victor had no good options when it came to moving the stagnant stock of unsold Victrolas. Heavy advertising early in the year did not do the trick, so by the middle of the year they were trying to embrace the enemy in the room, radio, by putting on a series of radio shows that featured many of Victor's best selling artists. It must have been galling to some of the directors at the company to give away the company's jewels on a free radio broadcast, but it was a good way to get the message out that the finest of entertainment could be found on Victor records. While the broadcasts were useful for publicizing the quality of recordings available, they did little to stimulate machine sales.
The Hecht Co. announces first—for the first time in Washington—and the first time in America—and the first time in the History of the Victor Talking Machine Co.—a twelve-CARLOAD purchase and sale of brand-new, latest models, VICTOR Victrolas.

Practically every model in their catalogue now reduced as follows:

- $30 Portable Victrolas, Now $15
- $110 Console Victrolas, Now $55
- $110 Upright Victrolas, Now $55
- $150 Console Victrolas, Now $75
- $200 Console Victrolas, Now $100
- $250 Console Victrolas, Now $125
- $225 Upright Victrolas, Now $100

—and similar half-price reductions throughout the entire line.

Sale Begins Tomorrow Morning at 7:30; We Will be Open Until 9 P.M. in the Annex 613 E Street N.W. Practically every model that Victor makes is included in this monumental close-out. All at half price and less, so we are using the entire floor space in our Annex, 613 E Street, for display—5,000 square feet of floor space—and twenty-five extra salesmen to speed service. This sale will revolutionize the talking machine business in the District. We will be crowded as never before—but we have made our plans to take care of all of our customers. In order to give the best service, we will open at 7:30 Wednesday morning and close at 9 o'clock Wednesday night. But take our advice and shop as early as you can. You don't need us to tell you that this is THE sale of a lifetime!

Ten Months in Which to Pay Terms to meet your convenience.

Mahogany, Walnut, Art Finishes Every type of new Victrola is included, models that you find in their latest catalog—all at half-price and less. Portable Victrolas, Console Victrolas, Electric Victrolas and Victrolas built for Radio Installation.

Note: This Sale only in our Annex, 613 E Street N.W. 5,000 square feet of floor space
Slowly the company came to the realization that their salvation lay in embracing the new technology offered by Western Electric, and that the older phonograph technology could not coexist with the new.

The question became, what should they do to get rid of the old in order to prepare for the new? Orders for production of parts for any of the old style instrument originally scheduled were cancelled. Designs for the new Orthophonic models were not yet complete. This left an idle factory with no work. A great number of employees were laid off. The cabinet factory sank from a high of 3,900 employees in December, 1924 to 585 in January 1925. To keep this remaining crew engaged in some meaningful activity, the company contracted to build radio cabinets for their competitors. As an example, Victor built 7,000 cabinets for Gilfillan, 30,000 small cabinets for Atwater Kent at a cost of $3.55 each, 15,000 Radiola 25 cabinets for Western Electric at a cost of $8.65 each along with 3,000 #104 speaker cabinets at a cost of $14.50 each, and 5,000 cabinets for A. H. Grebe at a cost of $12.00 each. The Management Committee noted that the last item cost the company $11.62 each to build, so there was not much profit made at this time. With these and several other orders, the core of the factory could remain busy while the plans for the new Victrolas were finalized, and the company continued to accept contracts for the fabrication of radio cabinets until it finally needed all the factory capacity for its own products in October 1925.

Of course the release of the new Orthophonic models would make all of the older model Victrolas obsolete and considerably less salable. At the July 1, 1925 Management Committee Meeting, Ben Aldridge (see The Sound Box, March 2014) outlined the instrument situation as it existed at that moment. It is clear from reading the minutes of this meeting that no decision had yet been made regarding whether to offer traditional Victrolas alongside the Orthophonic Victrolas, and moreover it was stated that a complete picture of the number of old instruments in the hands of the trade was not to be made available until July 15th. It was noted that a decision on whether to have a cut-price sale of old instruments would be brought up later, although it had clearly been a subject of discussion for some time.

Apparently the decision was made sooner rather than later as ads in some East Coast newspapers announced the beginning of the unprecedented half-price sale on July 14th. Every Victor dealer in the country was authorized to sell their stock for half price and replenish their stock from their local distributor at a similar discount.

The accompanying newspaper ads offer an example of what happened in many cities.

Some newspaper ads show that many small stores were discounting the Victrolas to a much lesser extent than the stores in the large cities, perhaps offering discounts of only 20%. News traveled more slowly in those days, and apparently some stores hoped that they could sell their small stock at a more modest discount. Of course, when the Victrolas were substantially discounted, that made the Sonoras, Edisons, and other brands seem far overpriced, so when a store carried these other brands as well, they often decided to discount every phonograph in stock.

The other manufacturers were caught flat-footed. They had experienced the same decline in demand as Victor, but didn't have a backup plan. Many less well-established brands went out of business, and those that did survive were put in a much weaker position. Sonora, Edison, Columbia and Brunswick all survived for the moment but were at a disadvantage. Only Brunswick at this time had a modern phonograph in the pipeline, their all-electric Panatrope.
Again! Kami's Secures 450 More Victrolas to Sell at HALF or Less!
—This Time, Direct From the Factory at Camden, New Jersey!

This May Be Your Last Chance to Get One
They're Getting Scarce!
—The whole country is clamoring for Victrolas at Half Price! There never was an opportunity like it before! As a result, it is almost impossible now to find a store where there is a large variety of models to choose from. And it is still more difficult for a store to replenish its stock.
—Kami's has hunted everywhere! For the third time it has had to go out and get more Victrolas to supply the overflowing demand. Unprecedentedly, we were able to make a purchase of three carloads direct from the Victor factory! Four hundred and fifty machines in all! But even these won't be enough, and yet we don't know where to look for more when these are gone!
—Tomorrow you will have this one more—perhaps the last—opportunity to secure a Victrola at Half Price or less than half.
—If we can only sell enough to make a purchase of more Victrolas for the demand! We have been able to secure a few more of the 12-inch models, but the demand is still so great that we cannot keep them in stock.
—A few of the Model 80, also at $55, are shown in walnut, too!
—Any model Victrola in the entire collection can be secured for $5 Down Balance in 10 Monthly Payments With No Interest Charges
—The other remarkable feature of this opportunity! Not only do you get a Victrola for Half Price or less—but you get it on terms that are within the means of any home!
—$5 Down, $15 a month for 10 months, with no interest charges, and no extra charges of any kind. Turn the music on and enjoy it, and pay for it as you go.
—A few of the models you can choose from are illustrated here, among which we want to call particular attention to the

Model 210 at $55.00
In Beautiful American Walnut
—One whole carload of this big purchase—150 machines—of this attractive Console Victrola that formerly sold for $110.00. We want to particularly emphasize the surpassing beauty and warmth of coloring in the American walnut finish. To those who believe that mahogany is best, we say just come and see and compare them. See if you aren't convinced that the rich, mellow beauty of the American walnut isn't prettier after all?
—A few of the models that you can choose from are illustrated here, among which we want to call particular attention to the

Model 220, Formerly $200
Now $100

Model 225, Formerly $125
Now $62.50

Model 240, Formerly $150
Now $75

And Here Are 20,000 More New Victor Single-faced Red Seal Records at the Same Low Prices!

10,000 From the Factory in Camden, and We Had to Go as Far as Buffalo for the Other 10,000!

30c For the 10-Inch
—Kami's has already sold more than 20,000 of these Records at these ridiculously low prices. But now, like the Victrolas themselves, they're getting exceedingly scarce. Now, it will be impossible to get them at all, for there seems to be no end to the demand, and we have to replace them at once.
—And as usual! Here are the finest Records music of the world's most
On Sale, Street and Fourth Floors

48c For the 12-Inch

Kami's
Penna. Ave.
8th and D

The Busy Corner

DECEMBER 2018
Once Victor made the decision to clear out its stock at half price, the factory worked feverishly to get its stock in order. Many older model Victrolas had been in storage for some time and required re-inspection and refurbishing to get them ready. Other machines were in a partial state of completion, and a determination had to be made on a case-by-case basis whether to complete them or scrap what was there.

Once the distributor’s stock had been depleted, Victor provided new stock at half of the previous wholesale price so the distributors could continue to offer machines to their customers. In the initial phase of the sale when the distributors were clearing their stock, the retail dealers were able to offer the full line of Victor models. As the sale progressed, the factory shipped the models that they had in stock or could build. At this time, the choices became more limited. Meeting Minutes and letters from the distributors indicate that after the initial phase, the choices consisted primarily of Victrolas #80, 100, 210, 215 Special and some of the 400 series.

Some of the left over Victrolas were considered undesirable because they had an unpopular finish. One example is a group of the Victrola #50 portables. They were finished in Weathered Oak (a dark flat finish) and Early Italian Oak (a two-tone late addition to the catalog). The Management Committee approved refinishing this lot in Golden Oak rather than scrapping them. Many late cabinets, such as these, were instructed to be finished in lacquer rather than varnish to save production time.

The factory pushed every item in stock out the door, because they needed the money and the items would never be worth more than they were at that time. Many one-of-a-kind Victrolas, and art style instruments were sold at half price or less at this time.

The half-price sale did result in getting rid of most of the obsolete instruments in stock. Nevertheless a few stragglers remained and half-price (or less) Victrolas were offered for a couple more years. Many of these stragglers were from Victor dealers whose business failed because they could not afford to sell their stock at less than they paid for it. Later newspaper ads from some of the stronger dealers state that their new stock came from a bankrupt dealer.

The Victor Talking Machine Company had rarely allowed its products to be sold at less than suggested retail, but the 1925 experience redefined the company’s rules. From this time forward, it was common for the company to offer obsolete models at a substantial discount.
Among common appendages for early talking machines, the horn is perhaps the most noticeable, and provides a fertile field for study. Talking machine horns were available in a wide variety of sizes, materials, and configurations. Certain horn types (such as “Silveroid”), paint applications (such as “Baked On”), or designs (such as “Lily” or “Searchlight”), were the proprietary domain of individual manufacturers.

Hawthorne & Sheble was probably the largest manufacturer of horns and other accessories in 1900. The company claimed to be the originator of “Silveroid” horns and seamless brass horns. In addition, Hawthorne & Sheble offered fiber horns, and a nine-foot long giant it termed “Our 20th Century Horn.” Beyond the aforementioned products, the firm’s ingenuity and ambition culminated in a talking machine horn unlike any other: the “Clover Leaf Horn.”

Although it is impossible to know for sure, Hawthorne & Sheble may have been inspired by Columbia’s extraordinary Multiplex Grand of 1900 in the design of what would become the firm’s short-lived Clover Leaf Horn. Whatever the inspiration,
the results were touted by the company with typical confidence:

**Reproduces Louder; Reproduces Clearer; Reproduces Better than any other Horn. Attractive Looking; A Decided Novelty; A Quick Seller. Price, $15.00**

The November 1899 issue of *The Phonoscope* (actually published late February/early March 1900) carried an illustrated article on the new Clover Leaf Horn in which an interesting detail was revealed:

*It has been discovered by experimenting, that a smoother, clearer and louder tone can be obtained by interposing between the horn proper and the diaphragm, a sounding box, providing that the sounding box is of such shape and dimensions as to amplify the vibrations in place of deadening same.*

To further increase and distribute the sound, Messrs Hawthorne & Sheble have attached three horns to the sound box. These horns are so arranged as to distribute the sound to all points, in place of confining it to one point, as is the case with the ordinary horn.

As described, the “sounding box” was considered the critical part of this design. The three horns were assigned merely the secondary task of “further increase[ing] and distribut[ing] the sound...”

*That the results justify the expenditure, which has been made in experimenting, is conclusively proven by the remark made by one of the largest dealers in talking machines, after he had listened to the same: ‘There would be but little market for the Grand and Concert machines, if all small machines were equipped with your horn.’*

The Clover Leaf Horn was naturally of wider...
total girth than other contemporary horns, and an ordinary floor stand could not encompass it. A proportionately large-diameter hoop stand for the Clover Leaf was offered for $2.50.

The following month, this interesting news item appeared:

Messrs. Hawthorne and Sheble recently manufactured a special clover leaf horn in their factory in Philadelphia. The horn was composed of three 56-inch horns having brass bodies and silveroid bells. It presented a very novel and beautiful appearance. It was shipped to New Orleans for exhibition during the Marde [sic] Gras.

On April 4, the Phonoscope Publishing Company mounted its second annual “musical, dramatic, and Phonographic entertainment” to benefit the Montgomery Street M. E. Mission in Newark, N.J. Live entertainers included Estella Mann, Albert Campbell, Dan W. Quinn, John Yorke Atlee, and a number of well-known New York entertainers. A news item went on:

Last, but not least, may be mentioned the Concert Phonograph, which was operated by Mr. T.H. Reed, of the firm of Reed, Dawson & Company. The machine
and records, which deserve special mention, were kindly loaned by the above firm. Each selection was well received. The clover leaf horn from the firm of Messrs. Hawthorne & Sheble was admired and caused considerable comment.

From these period news items, a dealer in talking machines and accessories might have been convinced that the Clover Leaf Horn would be worth stocking in his shop. “A Quick Seller.” Unfortunately, historical evidence suggests that the innovative design was an abject failure. Hawthorne & Sheble’s catalog of 1901 makes no mention of the horn, although the Clover Leaf stand was still available (curiously at an increased price of $3.00). Moreover, until very recently, no Clover Leaf Horn was known to exist. When a battered, heavily oxidized example finally turned up at a small auction in the fall of 2017, it bore mute witness to its own particular past. Hawthorne & Sheble’s “Quick Seller” had taken over a century to fulfill the promise. Still affixed to its hanger was the original price tag.

NOTES:
1) For those interested in examples of the types, styles, and colors of early talking machine horns, please refer to Antique Phonograph Gadgets, Gizmos, and Gimmicks, Chapter One, and Antique Phonograph Accessories & Contraptions, Chapter One, both by Fabrizio & Paul.
3) Hawthorne & Sheble claimed to manufacture 64 styles of horns, 15 styles of horn stands, 18 styles of record carrying cases, and 10 styles of parlor cabinets. (The Phonoscope, December 1899, p.16.)
4) The Phonoscope, November 1899, p.4
5) Ibid, p.7. It’s interesting to note that, although the Clover Leaf Horn would supposedly make 5-inch machines and records unnecessary, Hawthorne & Sheble introduced its Dupliphone Attachment only six months later (The Phonoscope, May 1900 [actually published in August], p.16).
In the last issue I answered Neil Van Steemberg’s request for an article about the first internal horn disc talking machine: the venerable VTLA. When Neil purchased his VTLA he also purchased an Edison Amberola A1 (or is it really IA?) so, naturally, here's a few words on these equally iconic cylinder phonographs.

**Edison, Fashion and Cutting Edge Technology**

Without doubt, whenever a car manufacturer brings out a new model that is actually different from its predecessor there is a scurry for all of the main opposing manufacturers to go and buy one to see how it is different. I suppose it is a fairly standard form of industrial espionage and may even be legal -- even if it is a bit low down and rotten. Equally without doubt, the same thing happened in the Talking Machine trade all those years ago so I am willing to bet that a VTLA was quietly bought by one of Edison's minions and secreted into the design studio in Orange, NJ and in 1909 the result was the Amberola.

Clearly the American Design Philosophy of “Let's make it big, heavy and beautiful” was foremost in the minds of the design team when the Amberola was first in the planning stages: these things exactly fit this description. There were essentially two different versions of the first model but the grille was the main variation and as my early one is very much unrestored (in many pieces actually) I will concentrate my writings on the final version.

**Big and heavy**

Measuring in at 48 inches high by 21 inches wide by 23 inches deep these are big. I have no idea what they weigh but suffice to say that my (now adult) offsprings all duck for cover if/when I decide that mine need to be moved around. They were available in both oak and mahogany and if you look at the photos you will see that I have one of each.

As with the VTLA there is a lockable lid that is hinged at the rear which closes to nicely protect (hide?) the mechanism from dust, prying fingers and small children. Beneath the mechanism in a first for the Edison factory lives the horn and beneath the horn lies four record storage drawers with room for a total of one hundred records. These drawers are concealed behind a lockable door.
The Mechanism

The Amberola A1 was the first and only internal-horn phonograph from Edison that was capable from the factory of playing both 2-minute and 4-minute records and also has a unique motor. The motor is powered by two huge springs which ultimately deliver their energy via a leather belt and the speed is kept steady by a governor that is typical of the era and underneath the bedplate.

As well as being the first internal horn cylinder phonograph the Amberola 1A is also the first from Edison - and maybe all others too but I don’t know - to come equipped with an automatic brake. Also new for this model was that the reproducer remained stationary whilst the mandrel (and record of course) moved underneath. Cute.

As a side note, the next model (called the Amberola 1B - or B1 and there never was an “Amberola 2”) had a vastly different mechanism which it shared with the Opera/Concert and the Amberola 3. This later mechanism was gear driven and consequently had no leather belt.

The Acoustics

The reason for Edison’s stationary reproducer design is simply so that a totally air-tight connection can be made between the reproducer’s diaphragm and the mouth of the horn. This vast change in acoustic concept also necessitated a radical rethink of the overall design of the reproducer itself. Despite this there is clearly a direct line of relationship between the Model M reproducer as fitted to both of my big Amberolas and the slightly earlier Model O: both are 2-minute and 4-minute and even use the same small knob on the front to change between them but the big difference is that there is no reproducer carriage as such on the Amberola so the reproducer attaches to the bedplate rather than a moving carriage and the sounds exits via the rear rather than the top.

Edison, as always, was thinking of the future (or his hip pocket) when designing the Model M reproducer as it was a very simple change to update it (the design that is) to the 4-minute
only Model L and later on to the Diamond Model A - all three reproducers can be used on the Amberola 1A. Nice thinking!

The mouth of the horn is 16 x 13 inches and the total horn length from diaphragm to mouth is 41 inches (compared to 37 for an Edison Triumph with Cygnet horn) The horn is in two separable sections (which probably slightly ruins the air-tightness of the whole design but you can’t have everything) and although the top section is pressed metal the lower section appears to be made of some kind of heavily-coated fibre.

Cosmetics

I have already mentioned that these were available in both oak and mahogany. Naturally, the grille and drawers are made to match the outside of the cabinet but something that is not so obvious is that the horn is also grained and coloured to suit. A nice touch. The exposed parts of the bedplate and the two small metal covers that are part of the upper mechanism are also coloured: with my two machines the oak has an oxidised bronze finish whilst the mahogany has maroon enamel with gold pin striping and decorations.

But How Do They Sound?

Where I had to admit that I don’t play any of my VTLAs I do actually play both of my Amberola 1As. Not as often as I play a Triumph but they do get used so obviously their sound is to my liking. Does that say enough?

The Name and Model Designation

Clearly there is no way that I can write an article on this topic without making some kind of comment on the name chosen by Edison’s marketing people. Victor with their “Victrola” was new and unique but Edison with “Amberola” and Columbia with their “Grafonola” should have been shot. Why was this allowed to happen? Crazy. Was it just too hard to actually be original?

In the past have whined about model and sub-model designations but the Amberola really takes the cake: according to George Frow the 1A or A1 or (A)1 or whatever ever it is supposed to be was only given to it retrospectively when the next sub-model came out - and why was it not just simply an “Amberola 2”? Also crazy - but I have never understood marketing people and I guess I never will.

Epilogue

I have stated previously that the machines about which I write are almost exclusively in my own collection and although I am far from running dry on material for these articles I would really like to be answering questions and/or responding to requests. This article and the previous one happened as a result of a good friend buying more machines and it does make my life easier - so how about a few from yourself? I can be contacted via the Editor or directly by email at edison@yoaa.com.au or sales@yoaa.com.au.
Consuelo Bettini Rolo: Promoter of Her Father’s Phonograph Legacy

By Robert Feinstein

James F. E. Dennis, late editor of THE RECORD COLLECTOR, reprinted two Bettini catalogues in Volume XVII, Nos. 1 & 2 (1966-67) of that journal. He introduced them with these words: This is the chance of using some entirely new material, which being unique, I seize the chance of reproducing in full. It consists of a hitherto unreported 40 page catalogue of Bettini’s discs and an 8 page brochure on the Papal recordings ... I have borrowed these from Mme. Rolo ... who also has ... one of the Papal recordings in disc form. She is able to confirm that it is her father’s voice announcing the Sembrich cylinder (re-recorded as Primo P. 1001) and also the Papal record, so presumably he announced all recordings ... As the brochure definitely refers to cylinders ... and it is most unlikely that Bettini was granted two audiences, it is obvious that the discs were dubbed from cylinders ... This new information further establishes Bettini as a pioneer recorder. Not only was he the first to record singers and actors of stellar status, but it would now appear he was the first to evolve a method of dubbing discs from cylinders, Pathe being some two years later.

That RECORD COLLECTOR was subsequently republished by the Stanford Archive of Recorded Sound, including Mr. Dennis’ praise for Lieutenant Bettini’s ingenuity. Consequently, historic and beautiful Bettini documents were made available to numerous collectors because of Madame Rolo’s generosity.

Consuelo Bettini Rolo was born in New York City on March 7, 1898. While still a toddler, she, her mother and her brother moved to Paris to join her father, who was busy establishing his French talking machine business, the Société des Micro-Phonographes Bettini. In her letter to me of December 12, 1979, Madame Rolo described her childhood home: We lived at No. 21 Villa Said ... a small private street ... with a gate and concourse at the entrance.
Incidentally, Anatole France also lived there, at No. 3 ... and I believe his secretary wrote a book called VILLA SAID. We lived there until 1914 ... my father then went to the front as a war correspondent for LE GAULOIS. Madame Rolo then mentioned that she had one of his dispatches, but today quite a few of them can be read online by searching the Gallica website.

In 1920, Consuelo Bettini returned to New York, and for the next two years she had a whirlwind social life there. Among these events, she attended an opulent wedding of a friend, garbed herself in a costume for a soiree at the Waldorf Astoria, held for the purpose of raising funds for Italian war orphans, danced at a Hotel Plaza Easter party, which benefited a charity for the blind, and had a ride in an open-seat airplane, operated by famed pilot, Charles S. "Casey" Jones. The flight, which took off from Curtis Field, in Garden City, and passed over Long Island and Manhattan, was a prelude to her appearance at the Third Annual Aviators' Ball of April 7, 1921, sponsored by the Aero Club of America. Her interest in airplanes was undoubtedly encouraged by Lieutenant Bettini, who was an avid pilot, noted for observing an eclipse while flying over France.

In July of 1922, she was back in Paris for her marriage to British diplomat Simon Rolo, the scion of a wealthy Sephardic banking dynasty, which had a close relationship with Egypt’s royal family. In addition to her parents, a number of Egyptian officials attended the wedding.

A profile in THE DETROIT FREE PRESS of February 11, 1923, had this to say about the newlyweds: Another American girl popular and admired on two continents was Consuelo Bettini. But Connie, although surprisingly
little was made of the marriage at the time, did very well in securing a young, handsome, rich, devoted husband and an adoring father-in-law, both of whom, it is said, wake every dewy morn with the one idea of ministering to the pretty whims of their beautiful Consuelo ... I believe Consuelo whiles away the time in Rome, Paris, and the Riviera, where it is said her beauty, extraordinary style, and the magnificence of her toilette never fail to attract.

The couple’s only child, Ronald R. Rolo, was born in London in 1924, where they lived for a time, although they continued to travel frequently. Her brother, Victor, wrote to opera historian William R. Moran, on August 27, 1965 as follows: As far as my sister is concerned, she did live in London some years ago, but now she lives in Italy. She roams around a great deal and I myself never know where to reach her. Madame Rolo’s extensive international voyages had another effect. Like her father, she became very much a polyglot, with a fluency in quite a few languages.

And it was in Rome, Italy, where she was living with her son and his family, that I first wrote to Madame Rolo (from the late 1920s and on, she was always referred to by that title). I did so in early 1979, a time when I had already published several articles about the Lieutenant, and I told her that I intended to write the first full biography of him. Alas, so many years later, I am still working on it, but now, having produced more than forty published pieces about his life and work, I feel that I am beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel.

For the next few years, Madame Rolo and I exchanged warm and frequent letters. Corresponding with her was fascinating. Her memory was very sharp, and she shared with me a considerable amount of information that I previously had been unaware of. One such fact, I have not written about, was Lieutenant Bettini’s equestrian skills. She wrote me that as a young officer in the Third Savoy Cavalry, he set a record in a race between Milan and Turin, a distance of some ninety miles, which his horse galloped through in ten hours and twenty minutes. Other tales I have already used, such as a reminiscence of the time, in 1909, when Lieutenant Bettini brought her and Victor backstage, to meet his friend and recording artist, Sarah Bernhardt. That occasion was included in Sarah Bernhardt and the Bettini Recording Legacy, which I wrote for the February, 2002 edition of IN THE GROOVE.

But not all of her memories were pleasant ones. Madame Rolo wrote of learning that her father was dying, in San Remo City Hospital. She hurriedly left Egypt, where she was then
residing, and got to his bedside shortly before he passed away, on February 27, 1938.

One of the most rewarding aspects of our correspondence, was our exchanges of gifts, I knew that James Dennis had sent the 45rpm Primo disc rerecording of that Marcella Sembrich Concert cylinder, originally found by Walter Norris, in the loft of the Top House Hotel, near Nelson, New Zealand. But in separate mailings, I surprised Madame Rolo with George Garabedian's "World's Rarest Recordings," which contained eighteen Bettinis, and with Edward Smith's Unique Opera Records Corporation disc No. 323, which had six. Each of those mailings elicited the warmest of responses. Sadly, a few of her letters to me are either missing, or misfiled in my personal Bettini archive. In her note of October 22, 1980, she mentioned the receipt of one of those two: "I received your wonderful present and letter ... am writing to you many, many thanks for your always so kind thoughts, and my best wishes to you as always."

Among the items I sent to Madame Rolo was a March 3, 1892 LESLIE'S clipping about the Lieutenant, which included a lithographed portrait of him. That write-up had been typeset in a rather unusual, very wide layout, necessitating me to photocopy it on separate pages, which then had to be fitted together, as if they were part of a puzzle. Madame Rolo's March 1, 1980 reply said: "Thank you so much for your letter of January 21st, and as such, please forgive me for the delay in answering. Thank you also for the enclosed article by FRANK LESLIE'S WEEKLY; very interesting, but I have to admit, a little difficult to read ... How clever of you to have discovered me in Rome, Sherlock Holmes!!" Her letters were often needlessly apologetic, but invariably good-natured and witty.

Two of the things Madame Rolo mailed me were a Diners Club magazine, which mentioned Lieutenant Bettini's phonographic contributions, and a photocopy of the Papal brochure. She had not realized that I already acquired THE RECORD COLLECTOR reprinting of it. But the most useful presents she sent me, with regard to my research and writing, were contained in her final letter, dated March 2, 1982. She had always included her telephone number in her notes, and in February of 1982 I called her for the first and only time. She had a distinctively aristocratic English accent, tempered by her warmth and a tendency to be self-critical. And she had expressed a strong desire to meet me in person, mentioning that "All roads lead to Rome."

Madame Rolo did not know where or when this photo was taken.
In the course of our conversation, I asked her to send me photographs of her father, and she did exactly that in that communication, saying: *Here at last are a few photographs of my father... it is not much, but that is all I could find... I'm afraid it is not what you wanted, but this is all I could manage... I most certainly am awfully sorry, Dear Mr. Feinstein, but that is the best I could do... what a great and immense pleasure it was to hear your voice over the telephone! I just could not believe it! What a very kind thought and thank you a thousand times. I do so hope that the enclosed will be of some help to you.*

Madame Rolo was wrong. They were exactly what I wanted. The pictures documented his life from when he was a youthful soldier, through his middle-aged years, and into his old age. And I have, of course, used them in my Bettini articles. Included here are two of the fascinating pictures she gave me. They show her father in the immaculate, fancy attire that was entirely typical of him.

I promptly wrote back to her, but received no reply. Then, in a letter dated May 9th, Ronald Rolo forlornly let me know why: *I wished to let you know that my mother died on the 17th of April. It all happened very fast. She passed away serenely and without pain. Your correspondence with her did much to fill her time. She was very excited about your biography of my grandfather.*

All I can say now is that I will keep working on it, and as part of that undertaking I will continue writing articles about him. I have been expediting their output, and they have been placed in two expanding bound volumes which essentially have become a pre-biography. The long distance friendship I had with Lieutenant Bettini's daughter was paradoxically intimate and formal. I always referred to her as Madame Rolo and she always addressed me as Mr. Feinstein. But my contacts with her remain one of the high points of my life. Madame Rolo adored her father, and wanted others to appreciate his achievements. In that regard, she was quite successful.

*Thanks are due to Julien Anton.*
Vendors and collectors alike gave the 2018 annual APS Expo in Buena Park, California five-star reviews. After a brisk and well-attended Early-Buyer Saturday, Sunday saw collectors from all over the country, along with hundreds of local enthusiasts, to admire -- and make purchases -- from a wide array of phonographs and records. The exceptional attendance was partly due to a targeted advertising/social media campaign which brought in many first time guests, most of whom did not leave empty-handed. For the second consecutive year a record number of ‘millennial’ and even younger visitors participated in the Expo on Sunday. We find all this to be encouraging, especially since most first time attendees requested to be put on the mailing list for future events.

On Saturday night, over 100 members and guests enjoyed a delicious catered dinner followed by a presentation about APS’s crowd-funded film restoration of “At The Club” with Billy Murray of the Eight Famous Victor Artists. The program, moderated by APS Program Director John Levin, was delivered by a panel that included Michael Feinstein (via video), famed interpreter and archivist of the “Great American Songbook;” Dick May, Former VP - Film Preservation, Turner Broadcasting and Warner Bros; Elaine Pease, Billy Murray enthusiast and record collector; and Joe Rinaudo, early film historian.

The presentation included the full story about why the restoration was not completed. The evening culminated with a premiere of APS’s alternative project – the Vitaphone short, Ben Pollack and his Park Central Orchestra – shown as a fully restored 35mm digital transfer thanks to over 100 contributors.

We hope to see you at next year’s Expo, August 10-11, 2019 in Buena Park, CA (Los Angeles area).
The Restoration That Never Was

Left: Program Director John Levin (rear) with fellow presenters Joe Rinaudo, Elaine Pease, Julie & Richard May. (Mr. May is the former Vice-President of Film Preservation at Turner Broadcasting and Warner Bros.)
It's time again for my annual year-end “holiday gift wish list” column. A few readers have said they give copies of my columns throughout the year to their families to give them ideas of what they'd love to receive. I think you'll find a bunch more this month so let's get started.

For the early jazz and Broadway musical show collector - For over 25 years I've been “shepherding” the public release of an ultra-rare acetate disc that my fellow collector (and APS member) Peter Shambarger discovered which contains the “backers audition” for a revival of the first all-black Broadway musical, Shuffle Along. The original SA was mounted in 1921 and the composers -- Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle -- wanted to mount it in 1950. To seek backers Sissle and Blake recorded the songs (with Blake on piano and Sissle on vocals) with Sissle providing the plot outline between the numbers. Well, the show was never produced. (There was a somewhat different show - SA of 1952 - but it only played four performances). In 2016 Harbinger Records released some of the songs but none of the dialogue. It won a Grammy. Now the complete disc has been issued (with some neat bonus material) as Sissle & Blake's Shuffle Along of 1950 (Harbinger), with all new liner notes and photos. The sound is amazing (thanks to Doug Pomeroy) and many of the songs were never previously made public. Transparency necessitates that I state that both Peter and I have received “Executive Producer credit for this release. (Available on Amazon.)

If Broadway is your interest, you need to know about the Library of Congress's National Screening Room of Free Motion Pictures. In September - to celebrate George Gershwin's 120th Birthday - the LOC added rare Gershwin home movies to the site which contains hundreds of hours of motion pictures. Those films that are considered to be in the public domain are fully downloadable, while the LOC was granted permissions for others to stream-only on the site. The 17 “Gershwin home movies” were filmed in 1928-39. You can find them here: https://tinyurl.com/y9zm9ys4

The British version of early Broadway is the Music Hall and there is a new tribute CD to that idiom from - of all people - “British folk singer” Linda Thompson, who is probably best known for recordings with her then husband Richard in the 1970s. Linda lost her voice in 1984 as a result of spasmodic dysphonia and I've heard little of her since. But she just released a CD titled My Mother Doesn't Know I'm On The Stage (Omnivore) where she is joined by her son Teddy, Martha Wainwright, movie actor Colin Firth and others to recreate songs made famous by Vesta Tilly and Marie Lloyd. An oddball in this offbeat recording is
“Brother Can You Spare a Dime?”, an American song composed in 1930 by “Yip” Harburg. The concept is interesting but I found the whole album a bit dull.

For the Blues Collector - It’s hard to believe that this is the 16th year that blues record collector John Tefteller has published his annual Classic Blues Artwork from the 1920’s (sic) calendar and CD. The 2019 edition is just as neat with 12 blues classics matched with artwork for each month, and another NINE tracks of super rare records, including four “newly discovered” recordings. He has moved a bit beyond the 1920s this year with inclusion of some 30s and 40s sides plus one from 1950. Tefteller gives back to collectors by paying upwards of $5,000 for a 78 and then having it digitally restored to add to the annual 70-minute-plus CD which, with the calendar, sells for $24.95. (Note: earlier calendars with their CDs are only $14.95, a real bargain for true blues collectors.)

For Banjo lovers – This time I’ve got three items for you – and one is FREE! Starting with the earliest one, there’s a new release from Archeophone Records, which came out this summer but I just received. The singer/musician whose name forms the title for Charles A. Asbury – 4 banjo songs is probably new to you. That’s because, while he made brown wax cylinder records for the North American Phonograph Company, he died in 1903, just as moulded cylinders were being introduced. Collector/audio engineer John Levin found four of these cylinders (recorded 1891-97) and, with Archeophone owner Rich Martin, they researched the artist. It’s a fascinating story -- only part of which is what race Asbury was. There’s a well-documented essay in the 16-page 7x7-inch booklet (plus another essay inside the album). Levin used his $20,000 CPS1 system to make the transfers and they sound great. The only drawback to owning this release is that the four songs have been pressed on two 45-rpm vinyl discs, not a CD. If you still have equipment to play these, I highly recommend them. And, though I’ve only had time to skim it, there is a new biography - Dixie Dewdrop: The Uncle Dave Macon Story (Univ. of Illinois Press) by Michael D. Doubler that you’ll want to check out. I’ve enjoyed what I’ve read so far on this early Grand Ole Opry star. The “freebie” I promised is Dom Flemons’ new podcast “The American Songster” available free on iTunes. Check it out at https://tinyurl.com/y7kw5hhp

More from the Bookshelf - Literally, just as I was submitting this column, the latest volume from one of my favorite “jazz writers” – Gary Giddins – arrived and I know it’ll be great. It’s been 17 years (!) since Giddins bio of Bing Crosby’s early years was published (I loved it). Now comes Bing Crosby: Swinging on a Star- The War Years: 1940-1946 (Little Brown). At 726 pages (the text is 582 of these) it’ll keep you busy through the winter. Giddins does his research (as he did on his “Satchmo” projects), but he writes like a fan and collector. Since “Der Bingle” lived until 1977, I hope it won’t be 16 more years till the next volume from Giddins. Also published in November was a new book on the folk quartet The Weavers -- Wasn’t That A Time: The Weavers, The Blacklist and Battle for The Soul of America (DaCapo) – about their career in the 1940s and early 1950s. And finally, for an essential book for those interested in the elusive Berliner discs, you’ll want E, Berliner’s Gramophone by Michael Sherman and David Giovannoni. My longer review is here on Amazon: https://tinyurl.com/y6um6a98

New movies for “record collectors” - It seems like we are finally being noticed. Check out: Records Collecting Dust (https://tinyurl.com/y7t4b4dn) and Chasing The Blues (http://chasingtheblues.com). Both are fun.

Some quickies – In the interest of space (limited this month) here are some more goodies to consider for your list. Archeophone also released a “remastered” version of their Billy
**Murray Anthology** CD (originally released in 2002) with much improved sound and updated liner notes. They also released **The Product of Our Souls: The Sound and Sway of James Reese Europe’s Society Orchestra** containing eight JRESO recordings from 1913-14 with the same songs recorded by artists like Ada Jones and the Van Eps Trio. You can hear audio samples and learn more at www.archeophonerecords.com. Kris Truelson (who I met at two conferences this year) hails from Bristol, TN (“the Birthplace of Country Music”) and fronts a bluegrass quartet named “Bill & The Belles.” On their debut CD - **Dreamsongs, Etc.** (Jalopy Records) they mix songs you know (“The Preacher and The Bear” played as an upbeat number!) with Truelson’s originals (“Finger Poppin’ Mama”). www.billandthebelles.com.

One of my friends in Indiana found the wine whose label is pictured here at a close-out store last month. According to online reviews it’s not very good but it would make a nice display item. The only other wine with a talking machine I’ve ever seen was a French wine in the 1980s that featured a Charles Cros phonograph. (It’s still on my shelf – unopened!)

Got some time to listen to records online? 5,523 more 78s were uploaded to archive.org, in October to bring the total to 93,915 digitized for the Great 78 Project. They were transferred by audio engineer George Blood – using a turntable with FOUR tonearms! – and you can hear them here: https://tinyurl.com/y9rkctl5.

The DVD **Found at “Mostly Lost” Vol. 2** (Undercrank) contains 10 silent films (with new piano scores) including the 11-minute Edison film from 1903 – Adolph Zink – preserved by the Library of Congress. A must for early film collectors. (www.undercrankproductions.com)

Coming in January: the full-color graphic novel edition of Ted Fox’s **Showtime at the Apollo** (Abrams) which covers this pantheon to black entertainment in the 20th Century.

And my “must have CD” of the month (after **Shuffle Along** of course) also comes from Harbinger records. It’s **Let’s Go In To A Picture Show 1907-22**, packed with 26 rare songs about the movies (including a super rare one by cartoonist Rube Goldberg – whose cartoon I’ve included this month. Details are here: https://tinyurl.com/y7fu7xxx

I’ll end with a fun new documentary on Holiday music. Check out **Jingle Bell Rocks** at www.jinglebelrock.com. Happy holidays and a happy (and healthy New Year!

---

Steve Ramm, 420 Fitzwater St., Philadelphia, PA 19147 (e-mail: Stevenramm@aol.com)
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