



The Phonographic Record

The Journal of The Vintage Phonograph Society of New Zealand

A Society formed for the preservation of Recorded Sound

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Page 41.

Editors:- Pamela G. Rogers
and Walter T. Norris.

Editorial and Secretarial Address
73 Flockton Street,
Christchurch, 1.
New Zealand.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

The fourth Annual General Meeting will be held at 8 p.m. on Monday, September 22nd, at the Red Room, St. John's Anglican Church, Latimer Square, Christchurch.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Nominations for the Election of the following Officers: Patron, President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, Auditor and three members of the Committee must be in the hands of the Secretary not later than September 7th. We would remind you that, under the Constitution Rules of the Society which allow a President to remain in office for only two consecutive years, Bill Dini will be retiring so nominations for President will be a priority. All nominations must be signed by the member nominated as an indication of willingness to serve.

CONSTITUTION RULE BOOK: These have not been automatically sent to new members but are available from the Secretary free of charge, on request.

EDISON PHONOGRAPH PARTS: Thanks to the co-operation of the Trustees of the Will of the late Mr. C.E. Woledge, the Society has been able to purchase a number of small Edison parts. These are mainly reproducer parts (no diamonds unfortunately) and very few actual motor parts. If there is any such part you require please let us know as being 'ones and twos' it is almost impossible to circulate a list. As always these parts are for members only.

REPRODUCTION PARTS: Next issue we hope to illustrate many of the reproduction parts which are being made by the Society. We can now add the 'cygnet' part of the cygnet horn used on some of the Edison machines. This is in fibreglass, performs beautifully and sells at \$3.50. We can also supply the metal grilles for the Amberola 30 and Amberola DX. The front grilles sell, unpainted at \$1. or, if required, grained by our member, Bill Flecknoe, for \$1.25. The inside grilles sell, unpainted at \$1. We can also supply the horn-crane-holder for a cygnet horn in aluminium, not machined, at \$1. and for the same price the reproducer carriage for a gate Standard, also in aluminium not machined. All these prices are in New Zealand currency and should have postage added.

NEEDLES: Good news for those who are running short of steel needles. We can supply an English

needle (in a most attractive blue tin) of the make 'Britain's Best' 100 needles per tin - 2 tins for 35 cents - 6 tins a dollar.

CATALOGUE REPRINT: One of our members, Wally Golledge, of Nelson, has shown enterprise and has had some photo copies produced of a parts catalogue issued by Charles Begg & Co. Ltd., - a large New Zealand musical firm. This must be one of the few 'New Zealand flavoured' catalogues issued in the hey-day of the talking machine and the copy is an excellent one. Copies are available from the Secretary at 85 cents. We recommend this addition to the growing number of reprints being issued in many countries.

A.J.R. has pointed out that as he was unable to be in two places at once his report does not cover all sessions of :-

THE 1969 WELLINGTON CONVENTION.

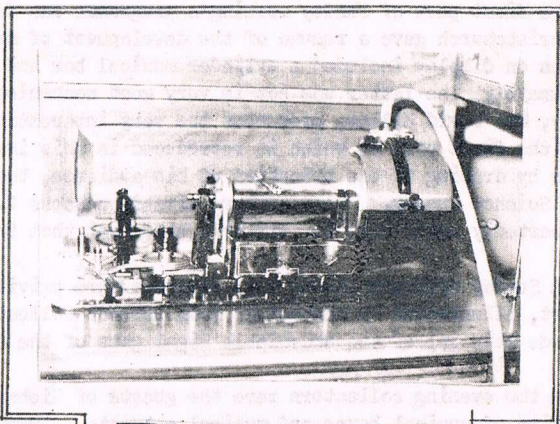
A Report from A.J.R.

Queen's Birthday Weekend, May 31st - June 2nd, saw the 1969 Convention for Gramophone, Phonograph and Record Collectors in Wellington. Registration and morning tea enabled many collectors from throughout New Zealand to renew old friendships before the formal programme commenced. The Chairman of the Organising Committee, William Main, welcomed collectors to Wellington and outlined briefly the debt which collectors owed to the late Charlie Lindsay, who had been responsible for calling the first Convention in 1963. He also spoke of the co-operation among collectors which had resulted in the rare electric Edison phonograph being located and restored to working order. The machine had been keenly inspected earlier by those present and was then formally presented to the Director of the Dominion Museum, Dr. D.K. Dell, as a memorial to the late C.J. Lindsay.

In accepting the machine, Dr. Dell thanked those responsible for their kind gesture and said that while he regretted that the Museum's collection of machines, largely built up by Mr. Lindsay, could not always be on display owing to lack of space, it was the Museum's policy to arrange special displays periodically. Dr. Dell said that he was very happy to allow the Convention to be held in the Museum and thought of the assembled crowd as a family gathering. He then invited his 'family' to view the Museum's collection of machines in an adjacent room.

In the afternoon machine collectors were invited to enter in a Concours d'elegance while record collectors assembled in another room to play their favourite records. It was an innovation to hold two programmes simultaneously and appeared to meet with general approval. Unfortunately there were very few machines entered in the Concours and so the idea was not given a fair trial. Nelson collector Wally Golledge was the judge of the entries and commented on each machine, drawing the attention of the audience to points which he thought added to or detracted from the restoration work. Comments from the audience made this a very interesting session. One machine was a rare Lioret which was on loan to Dunedin collector Rod Cornelius. (See page 34 of John Cain's Talking Machines for an illustration of a similar type of machine.) The volume was surprisingly weak for a celluloid recording. However, a light application of machine oil to the surface made a noticeable improvement. This little trick surprised many collectors but was in accordance with M. Lioret's instructions.

The Organising Committee had left Saturday evening free and many visiting collectors were



THE 1969 CONVENTION

ABOVE:- THE C.J. LINDSAY MEMORIAL

EDISON CLASS M ELECTRIC PHONOGRAPH

TOP WORKS (UPPER) WALTER NORRIS LISTENING IN
(LOWER)

LEFT:- 'PERSONALITIES'

TOP:- PETER READ

CENTRE:- ERNIE HUNT

LOWER:- BILL DINI

very hospitably entertained in the homes of the Wellington collectors.

The first part of Sunday morning's programme was devoted to "mechanical music". Bill Dini from Christchurch gave a resume of the development of musical boxes and similar instruments. Machines on display included a cylinder musical box and a Herephone 'cardboard-disc' machine. Unfortunately, the latter was not in very good mechanical order. The Curator of Colonial History, Mr. David Millar, presented the very interesting address on The Phonograph in New Zealand, (the first part of which is reproduced in this issue of the magazine). He prefaced his address by drawing to the attention of his audience, the excellent booklets published by the London Science Museum. Many members already possess V.K. Chew's book Talking Machines. (I wholeheartedly agree with Mr. Millar's statement that these books are excellent value for money).

On Sunday afternoon Music Hall devotees were privileged to hear an address by Mr. Peter Harcourt, illustrated by recordings from several collections. His wide knowledge of his subject made this one of the undeniable highlights of the Convention.

In the evening collectors were the guests of Michael Woolf who threw open his extensive collection of musical boxes and musical automata. Many hours were spent listening to his various machines which include a rather nice Kalliope disc music box. (Incidentally, included in his collection of discs was one most appropriate for 1969 - God Bless the Prince of Wales.)

Two of the most numerous of Edison's models of phonographs were the Gem and the Standard. Collectors heard just how numerous in Wally Gollidge's address on Monday morning. Those who thought they knew all about the Gem must have come away knowing how wrong they were for we all learned something.

A discussion on the general philosophy of collecting was led by Mr. Peter Read, himself a long established collector of arms and armaments. He posed the question of the propriety of using reproduction parts to restore incomplete machines and showed how the arms field manufacturers would turn out copies of almost anything if they felt a sale could be made. The possibility of this happening in the phonograph field is something which has not occurred to many collectors, but which is a definite possibility. An auction of records and a few machines was very energetically conducted by Michael Woolf.

It is not often we are able to welcome a guest contributor to The Phonographic Record. We are pleased to introduce David Millar of the Dominion Museum. Below is the typescript of the talk given by him at the 1969 Convention. Observant members will note that each of the two parts is a little longer than the limits set in our last issue. That is a courtesy extended to a guest.

THE EARLY PHONOGRAPH IN NEW ZEALAND.

PART 1.

It is amazing to discover that the tin foil phonograph arrived in New Zealand within a few months of Edison's invention. If we take November - December of the previous year, 1878 as the completion date of his machine, then within six months it had arrived in New Zealand. At first it seems unusual that a small colony should have come across the Edison machine so early in the piece. But in 1879, New Zealand was not so far away from the knowledge of the United States as was later to be the case. American gold miners had flocked to this country in the sixties, and there would still have been plenty of people alive in the New England States who once had whaled off the New Zealand Coast. Moreover, in 1870, a mail service was opened between San Francisco

and New Zealand. Many people and much mail went to Europe via this route, which crossed two Oceans and one Continent. The Panama Canal was not opened until much later. So although isolated geographically, there were substantial personal and transport links between this country and the U.S.A., as well as the other two well-known routes to the United Kingdom.

In May, 1879, the tin foil machine came to Wellington. The previous month it had been reported in Marlborough, as Wally Gollidge has pointed out in the Pre-Conference supplement. Perhaps local collectors might like to chase its journey through the country; let me know and we can track down its movements and document the newspaper references.

On 16th May 1879, it was announced in the columns of the 'Evening Post' that on the first floor of the Athenaeum (admission 2/-), Mr. Edison's machine would be on view. "Science and Mystery" trumpeted the headline - "The Greatest Marvel of the Day. The Phonograph".

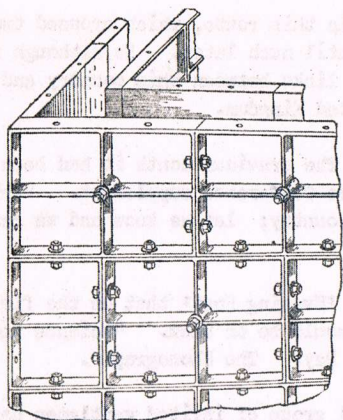
Twenty-four hours later, the 'Post' reported that a small group of invited gentlemen had been shown the marvels of the tinfoil by its exhibitor, Mr. W. Griffiths. Speaking into the wooden mouthpiece the vibrations set up by the human voice agitated a diaphragm of iron, which indented, by means of a small steel needle, the revolving piece of tin foil which had been wrapped around the six-inch long brass cylinder.

To reproduce the recorded voice, the transmitter, as it was called, was swung into place. The paper diaphragm then vibrated at one end of the conical metal drum and the reproduced voice came out of the other. The apparatus was driven by a clockwork motor.

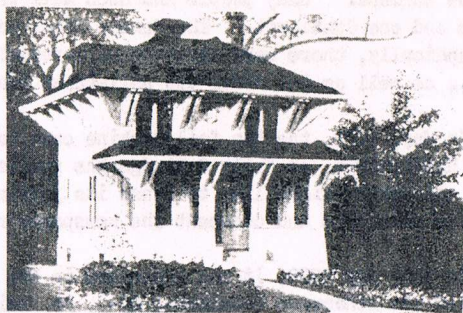
The 'Post' reported the exhibiting of the Phonograph. I quote:- "The sound reproduced by the instrument is of a peculiar character and more like the echo of a voice. Occasionally it would repeat the words in a very drunken manner, to the great amusement of those present. 'Old Mother Hubbard' repeated by Mr. Griffiths was reproduced with marvellous fidelity and some good results were obtained under the treatment of Mr. Barry O'Neil, the comedian, who was among those present. Under his skilful management, the instrument tendered to those present, cheerful but delusive invitations to drink, repeated snatches of songs and reproduced laughs, crows and barks, with most amusing exactitude." The dress rehearsal had gone off well. Mr. Griffiths must have been well satisfied. On 19th May, the 'Post' reported the first public viewing of the machine. The audience it wrote, included "several legal gentlemen of great scientific attainments and one or two judges." The paper continued:-

"The phonograph, having been 'wound up', the proprietor, Mr. Griffiths, invited anybody present to speak into it. Thereupon a well-known and genial public official solemnly marched up to the instrument and said gravely and deliberately, "Victoria, by the grace of God!" All present strained their ears to hear these words reproduced, but all that the machine did was to give a dismal wail. Mr. Griffiths explained that this generally occurred at first, because it took some time to adjust the instrument. One of the judges then tried a song and this time the effect was much better, the words coming out tolerably clearly. After some experiments had been made successfully by Mr. Griffiths, a gentleman present repeated a couple of lines from Othello, but his voice was apparently not suited to the phonograph, for the machine, in answer to him, made some wonderful noises, not at all Shakespearian."

Business does not seem to have been too brisk. The doubtful reliability of the machine and the poor reproduction kept the crowds away. On 21st May, the 'Post' reported that "it is the intention of the proprietor to reduce the price of admission to 1/-, in which case it ought to attract a very much larger number of visitors." On the following day, it was noted that the exhibition was now "somewhat more successful".



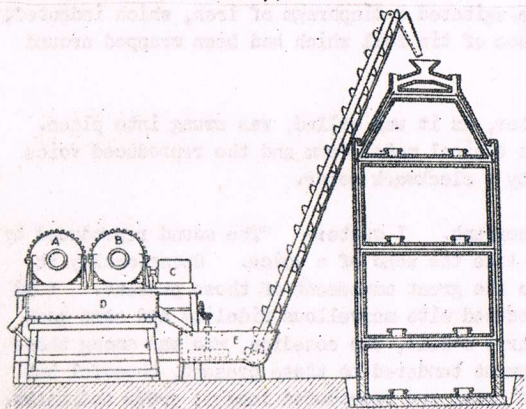
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4.

EDISON'S CONCRETE HOUSE

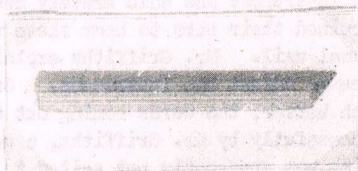
1. EXTERIOR VIEW OF MOULDS BOLTED TOGETHER
2. POURING THE MIXTURE INTO THE MOULDS
3. THE LONG CEMENT KILN
4. A CONCRETE HOUSE



2.



3.



H.M.V. FIBRE NEEDLE TIN

AND, MUCH ENLARGED, A FIBRE NEEDLE

The point which is so intriguing, is that the tin phonograph is reported in both the 'Post' and the 'Marlborough Express' as having a shaft, which "is attached to the clockwork machinery which gives it motion". The question now is - was it driven by a spring, or as in a cuckoo clock, by weight. The 'Post', when mentioning Griffiths preparing the machine for recording, said it was wound up. But these words, 'wound up' are placed in inverted commas, which makes me think it was gravity driven and not spring-powered.

Now, if it was gravity driven, perhaps this was like one manufactured by a Mr. A. Stroh in Great Britain. Stroh was an assistant to Mr. (later Sir William) Preece, at that time Chief Engineer of the G.P.O., London. Preece had heard of the Edison tin foil through Henry Edmunds, a British Engineer who had been on tour in the U.S.A. and who had written an article to the 'Times' on the invention published on 17th January 1878. Under Edmund's tuition and with Stroh's assistance, Preece constructed his own tin foil machine. This he demonstrated to the Royal Institution on February 1st. By the end of the month, Preece had three instruments at his disposal for a lecture to the Society of Telephone Engineers. The first was a copy of the original; the second was sent by Edison himself; the third - and I quote from V.K. Chew's 'Talking Machines' Page 7 :

"was driven by a clockwork motor operated by a falling weight, the speed being governed by a fan mechanism."

Perhaps it was one like this which had been brought to New Zealand. If the clockwork prototype was invented by the end of February, perhaps several were made immediately by Preece or his imitators. If that were so, the machine would just get to New Zealand in time to be playing in Nelson by mid-March. But even so, it's very fast work indeed, and we don't know what some handyman in the States, or even Australia or New Zealand could have meantime got up to.

(To be Concluded).

EDISON AND CONCRETE HOUSES.

by Walter Norris.

It was felt that a little more about Edison and his concrete house could be included in this issue.

The moulds (or shutters as they are known in New Zealand) were made of cast iron, in sections two feet by four feet and bolted together to form a whole house. Study of our illustrations will show how this was done. After the shutters were put together, the mixer was moved on to the site and by means of an elevator the mixture was carried up to the top of the building and allowed to filter down until all the moulds were full.

Many will consider this impossible, but I believe this was done, the secret being an additive which Edison had discovered. This added to concrete not only made it more 'pourable' but made it come out very smooth.

The project, which cost around \$US100,000 never amounted to much, but was years ahead of its time when it is realized that the patent (No. 1,123,261) for poured cement houses was taken out on December 22nd, 1908.

FIBRE NEEDLES.

A controversy which has continued for many years among record collectors is that of fibre needles v steel needles. Even today there is no one school of thought on the subject. The

earliest needles for disc records were made of steel and it was not long before record lovers were looking for some material which would not wear their records so severely. This led to the birth of the fibre needle which, although hailed with delight by many collectors, was decried by others. Those 'for' said steel needles gave an unnatural metallic tone and also, for good measure, butchered the records. Those 'against' said that fibre needles lacked volume and brilliance and the tone was muddy; fibres would break down on loud recording.

Much of the objection on both sides could have been caused by mis-understanding. If a sound box which was tuned is used for steel; is used for fibre, it may sound muddy; conversely one tuned for fibre and used with a steel needle will sound metallic. However, fibre needles had a tremendous following and were manufactured by many companies, including H.M.V. On our illustrations page we picture the Fibre Needle tin and beside it a fibre needle. To get the very best from fibres there are several conditions which should be observed. Firstly, the tone arm of the gramophone should freely move especially in its path across the record. Secondly, there should be good needle track alignment (perfect alignment is when the line joining the centre of the record to the needle box is at right angles to the face of the sound box.) It is important not to have side pressure on the groove. Fortunately it is relatively easy to detect and to correct. Choose a 12" record; if possible, one which has a lot of blank unrecorded space (or the smooth back of an old single-sided). Set it moving on the turntable and gently lower the sound box with needle, first on the outer blank rim and then on the unrecorded portion just outside the label. Note if the sound box tends to swing inwards or outwards. If it swings inwards, then put a little packing under the feet of the gramophone either at the left or at the front - the former if the tendency for inward swing is greatest at the inside of the record and the latter in the opposite event. If on the other hand it swings out, the packing should be at the right or at the back. This levelling has many times enabled record collectors to use fibre needles which they had previously discarded because of broken points.

It is worth while keeping the motor of the gramophone well oiled and in good order; an erratic motor can have a very bad effect on fibres.

There are other points to note also - records that have been played a number of times with steel needles will rarely be satisfactory with fibres. Also dirty records can cause a fibre to break down very quickly so keep your records in dust free storage and get in to the habit of brushing (preferably with a stiff bristle brush) before playing.

The fibres themselves need attention, too. They are made of somewhat absorbent material and are thus susceptible to changes of temperature. If they get damp, they are difficult to cut cleanly and the points break down easily. Store them in a dry atmosphere.

Cutting fibres can be a real art. Several fibre cutters were manufactured and collectors should not have too much difficulty in cutting, provided the blade is kept sharp. Apparently a quick snappy action is the best, but a little practice should produce the required surface which should look almost polished. The actual point should be as keen as a steel needle.

And something very much of interest to members - in its heyday a fibre needle was thought to "give best results on an open horn gramophone".