

The Phonographic Record

The Journal of The Vintage Phonograph Society of New Zealand

A Society formed for the preservation of Recorded Sound

Vol. 5. Issue 4

April, 1970.

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and Walter T. Norris

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FRED SPENCER

It is with regret that we record the death of member, Fred Spencer. Fred was, in the words of Wellington Chapter Chairman, Donald Cameron, "a father-figure to Wellington collectors". He must have been one of the first in the hobby in New Zealand and was one of those who had made a detailed study of Edison even to the extent of corresponding with historians at the Edison Foundation. Fred was also keenly interested, in his youth, in motor-cycles and later in vintage cars - in particular Rolls-Royces of which he owned two; he was the founder of the Rolls Royce Owners Club of N.Z. (Inc.). Other interests included films and antique harps. Truly a man of many parts who will be missed from the collecting scene in New Zealand.

AN ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF EDISON PHONOGRAPHS

The Tin Foil

Much time and thought has been given to a problem which besets many, if not all collectors at some time or other. That is 'which model phonograph do I have and how can I identify it?' There are so many models that Edison manufactured; some having model names, some numbers and some both.

We start right at the beginning with the tin foil as these machines were the first to be manufactured. A collector cannot easily miss one of these although the casual observer might easily pass one by; however, we remember reading not long ago of a collector who almost passed a machine by because he was told it was a dictaphone; it turned out to be a rare phonograph. The tin foil as illustrated, B has a brass cylinder and has a weight at one end and a handle at the other. It is built on a cast framework which makes the whole machine very heavy. In fact the ones we have seen are so heavy and cumbersome that it is uncomfortable to carry them very far. Those who are fortunate enough to have the book 'From Tin Foil to Stereo', will find eight models of tin foil machines including the original one. They are all different; one having two flywheels, one at each end. These illustrations are on pages 19, 20 and 24; two further models are on page 30, the final one being on page 252, plate 1.

'From Tin Foil to Stereo' claims that about 600 of these machines were manufactured by different companies but we in New Zealand think there could have been even more than this due to the fact that two have turned up in this country since the book was written. These are identical and yet are different from the ones illustrated, the nearest being the weight driven one on plate 1. Volume 2, Issue 6 of 'The Phonographic Record' shows a photograph of the two New Zealand machines.

The following has been supplied by Walter Norris, the owner of one of the New Zealand machines. (See Illustration A).

TECHNICAL DATA:

The machine weighs 55lbs. The brass cylinder (recording drum) is $5\frac{1}{2}$ " long and $4\frac{1}{2}$ " wide and is set on a steel shaft. The cast fly wheel is $8\frac{3}{4}$ " across. The heavy base is $1' 3" \times 9\frac{1}{2}"$. The only identification is the number 21 which is indented into the rim of the fly-wheel. The original wooden box in which the machine was stored is $2' 1" \times 1' \times 10"$.

(Editor's note:- We would draw members' attention to the latest edition of 'The Hillandale News', No. 54, April 1970. An article by Mr. F.A. Jansen tells of buying in France a tin foil phonograph made by a Spanish firm.)

The first model having a motor was produced in 1878 by the London Stereoscopic Company (a replica of this machine is in the Sydney Science Museum). This was a tin foil the same as the hand driven New Zealand models except it was weight driven.

THE SPECTACLE MODEL

There is a time lag of ten years between the tin foil phonograph and the wax cylinder models and this seems to be due to the fact that Edison was working on other inventions - mainly the light bulb. This lag of ten years is commented upon in 'The Phonograph and How to Use It', and also in many other publications.

The 'spectacle model' as it is called is driven by what appears to be a rather unusual electric motor. This drives a large cylinder which is, we estimate, a five inch one. Some claim it was larger than this - what we are sure of is that the later models used a standard size cylinder. It is not known whether a 'spectacle model' is still in existence but we have not seen a later photograph of one in any publication. The reproducer and the recorder are fitted into a holder which resembles a pair of spectacles - hence the name.

THE PATHE 'PULL START'

This motor starting mechanism appears to be fitted to most early models of Pathe disc machine. It consists of a lever, a ratchet and a gear. By pulling the lever to the right, the ratchet engages the gear and brings the motor up to full speed instantly. By moving the lever to the left the ratchet re-engages the gear which, when reversed, applies a brake which brings the motor to an immediate stop. As far as is known this start/stop method applies only to Pathe. Many of the advertisements for early Pathe disc machines show this starting mechanism. (See 'The Phonographic Record', Volume 2, Issue 6 for an illustration of a machine in which the lever can be clearly seen.)

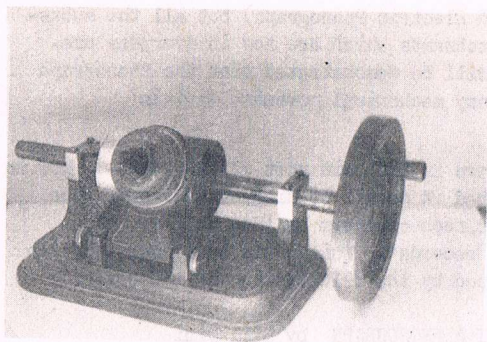
BOOK REVIEW:

"THE PHONOGRAPH AND HOW TO USE IT"

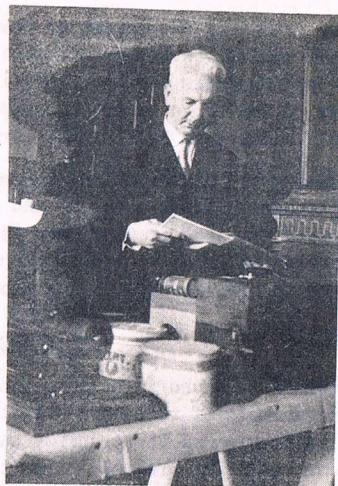
Published in 1900 by the National Phonograph Co.

In this issue we begin our Encyclopaedia of Edison Phonographs. Some of the earlier articles in the series make reference to 'The Phonograph and How to Use It.' Of all books on early Edison Phonographs, this is probably the most detailed and most useful. The purpose of the publication is best described by the Editor's Foreword:-

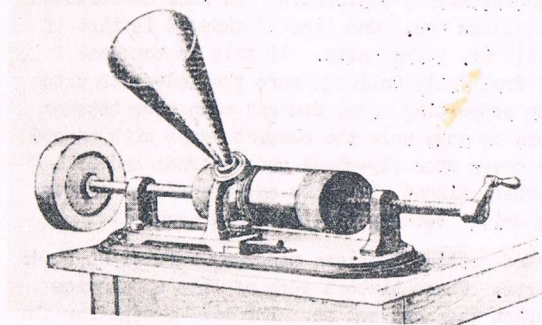
'Much has been written concerning the Phonograph since Thomas A. Edison startled the world with the first tin foil machine, a round generation ago. The history of its development, step by step would fill volumes. The earlier types have become obsolete in the march of progress. It is the purpose of this book to illustrate and describe, not only the first



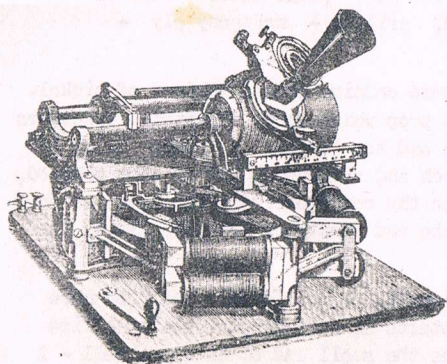
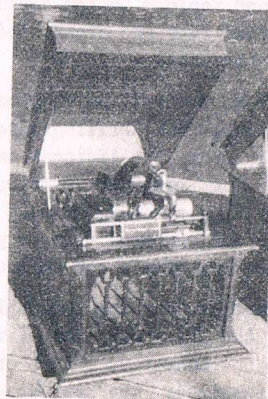
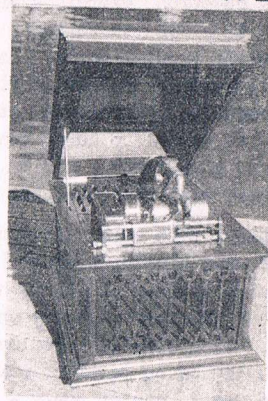
THE TIN FOIL
ILLUSTRATION A.



THE LATE FRED SPENCER



THE TIN FOIL
ILLUSTRATION B



THE SPECTACLE PHONOGRAPH
2ND MODEL

THE AMBEROLA V
WHICH IS WHICH?

distinctly practical Phonograph of Commerce (the type M Electric Phonograph) but all the subsequent types and styles; together with the various attachments which are now in everyday use. What with the diagrams and the plain instructions, it will be demonstrated that the Phonograph is as easy to take care of and as simple to manage as any mechanical movement that is thoroughly understood by its operator.'

Following the pictorial and commercial history there is the main part of the book - how to use the phonograph - each machine and accessory described in detail by diagram and word. The third part of the book is much more chatty and includes such chapters as 'How we gave a phonograph party' and 'The secret of making phonograph records'. This would be a most valuable acquisition to any library. Identification may be helped by the illustration of the cover.

HOW I RESTORED AND REBUILT A PHONOGRAPH by Bill Dini

Restorers of phonographs like vintage car restorers have the same problems, and similarly do varying amounts of restoration to their possession - from a touch-up of varnish, or a touch-up of paint to jacking up the cranking handle, and building a new phonograph or car round it. Vintage car restorers probably haven't complete cars to copy; illustrations are rare. In re-building an Edison Amberola V I hadn't the crank handle to jack up, but borrowed a complete machine from fellow member Wally Golledge. What constitutes a restoration and what constitutes a copy? This question exercises vintage car enthusiasts too. One line of thought is that if you have more than 50% you restore, if less you build it, using parts. If this is the case I built an Amberola V using parts. Parts I obtained from Wally Golledge were the bed-plate with name-plate, reproducer arm and driving gear, column supporting horn, damaged connector between horn and reproducer, mandrel and motor. Parts I had to make were the complete case with turned wooden feet, lid, complete horn, handle, cast gear cover over fly-wheel and governor and both grilles. Major components I had to obtain were timber, hinges, lid prop and transfers. Parts I had to restore were the connector and the spring drive between fly-wheel and mandrel.

The complete case being mahogany, I was extended getting American mahogany sufficient to do the job and I used similar timbers in different parts. These timbers were of like appearance to mahogany when stained and it is hard to detect that they are not so. The lid, except for the top which is of American mahogany was the most tedious part of the whole project. It was all done by hand, using old-fashioned moulding planes - no machinery was used. I consider the making of the lid to be equal to making about four of the main cases. Among timbers used in the main case were; corner posts - kerving (Malayan hardwood), back - mahogany, sides and top - Queensland maple, bottom mouldings - mahogany and red gum, panel slats - Pacific mahogany, bottom feet and crank handle - Southland beech, grilles - mahogany ply - a complete timber yard.

Hinges of course were no problem but matching ones were cadmium plated instead of nickel. Another collector, Ivan Skilling gave me a gramophone lid prop which looks original. Transfers were relatively easy, the 'Edison' one being locally made and the 'Thomas A. Edison' being an English copy. The iron gear cover was cast in Christchurch and although I had it shot blasted, I spent a long time cleaning it up. The connector between the reproducer and the horn was in poor shape and was restored using a piece of aluminium tube and plenty of Araldite glue; the top is a frost plug from a car engine-block!

I must confess that the internal horn caused much thought. I imagined it would be more exacting than the lid. How wrong I was. The main part starts as a rectangle, the same size as the grille and converges into a circle the same size as the small end of an Opera bell - I was suddenly inspired; why not use a Society fibreglass cygnet portion of a Triumph horn which, when cut and rejoined into a 'C' shape, instead of an 'S' was the same as the top portion of the Amberola V horn. This I fixed to the tin portion, and when painted black and

tapped, looks and sounds like the tin original. This was a pleasant surprise as I had thought the horn would be the major job.

Another tedious job was the cutting out of the two wooden grilles; this all by hand took me many hours. This was subsequently made most frustrating, as a friend, seeing the grilles, offered me a power fret saw on permanent loan.

After the woodwork was completed I stained it matching the original with mahogany stain. Ivan Skilling then took over varnishing it in true antique fashion and it looks its age in a well-preserved way. The instrument when completed, weighed 42lbs. exactly the weight of the original.

This project which, is to date, my most ambitious phonograph restoration was a source of much pleasure and satisfaction and from the complimentary remarks passed by experts was worthwhile. Perhaps the highest compliment I can pay it myself is the fact that unwittingly I have been fooled into sometimes thinking it is a genuine Edison Amberola V. Maybe this project will spur me to further efforts; perhaps - who knows - to one day make a complete 'genuine Edison copy'. (For those who cannot identify the original 'V' it is at the bottom of the two photographs).

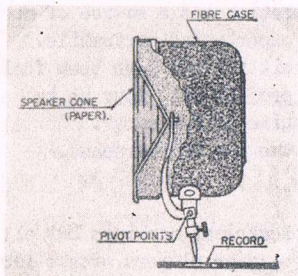
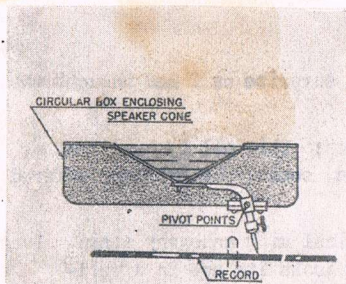
IS A PHONOCON A GRAMOPHONE?

In the past we have printed articles on this type of unusual non-electrical machines but all of these were made in the early phonograph era and were, as far as is known, poor players except for one; this was the Lumiere which was produced in 1923. (For reference to the other types see Volume 3, Issues 2 and 3 under the title 'The Hole Story'.) In this issue we describe a somewhat similar machine which was produced in the U.S.A. at a much later date. How much later? This was in 1946.

We came across this information in an issue of Radio News which stated that the Pacific Sound Equipment Company under the trade name of Portelec, produced a non electrical phonograph in that the whole unit was spring driven. They did produce an electrically driven model but the sound head was the same as the spring model pictured in our illustrations. These machines were called 'Phonocone' which appears to us a very appropriate word to describe them. We do not know what number of these were produced in the United States so would be very grateful to hear from anyone who has seen or owns one of these machines. Much research went into the production and we list some of the experiments. Cone sizes from one inch to eight inches in size were tried but it was found that a five inch one gave the best results both in frequency and volume. The length of the lever arm was shortened and lengthened but it was found that the length used by the early standard reproducer was as good as any. It was also found that heavy paper cones gave the best low frequency, response and volume. Whereas thinner paper improved high frequencies it lowered the volume. It was also discovered that the thickness of the paper material used for the cone was most important and so various checks were made with the aid of a Columbia test record until a compromise was reached which gave the best tone without sacrificing good volume. It was decided to build the speaker cone in the horizontal position rather than the vertical so as to make a more compact and better looking machine.

As the illustrations show, this assembly can be used to play either hill and dale or lateral records, this depending upon the way the tone head is mounted. All the models being assembled at the time the article was written were for lateral cut records. The needle pressure claimed was under three ounces and it was found that it could be reduced to as low as one and one half ounces with good results. The volume claimed was equal to that of one stage in the electrical field i.e. of a 6f6 or 45, this being loud but not loud enough to cause discomfort in a normal room. Many tone control methods as well as volume controls were tried but the best method of volume control found was the old faithful; that was to use either loud, medium or soft needles.

The phonographic device described in this article was the development of an original invention by Robert G. Metzner. Application for this invention is on file at the U.S. Patent Office.



THE PHONOCON

THE PHONOCON

MOUNTING OF THE TONE HEAD
FOR BOTH HILL AND DALE AND
LATERAL RECORDS..



THE PATHÉ PULL START



THE COVER OF A BOOK
WORTH LOOKING FOR

WANTED: Ultona dual or triple head for Brunswick machine. A miniature player such as Cameraphone, Mikiphone etc. Cylinder or disc of Edison's post-war speech. Any long-playing Diamond Discs. Will pay cash for above, or exchange blue Amberol cylinders. Would also like to hear from anyone interested in swapping blue Amberol cylinders. Reply Charles Slater, Box 22, FAIRY MEADOW, 2519, N.S.W. AUSTRALIA.

FOR EXCHANGE: Early Pathe discs engraved label, various sizes, mainly bands and bells. Exchange for machines, parts and good records. Write for list. Jack K. Root, Box 2827, WELLINGTON, New Zealand.

WANTED TO BUY: Edison cylinder phonograph. Would prefer horn model but would consider an Amberola. Price etc. to Mrs. Yvonne Baker, Box 26, HAWARDEN, New Zealand.

WANTED TO BUY OR WILL EXCHANGE FOR: Fibre needles, ball stylus for Pathe disc reproducer, Pathe classical vocal discs and needle tins. Pam Rogers, 73 Flockton Street, CHRISTCHURCH 1, New Zealand.

AUSTRALASIAN SINGERS:

We would like to commend to all members the work of one of our Australian members, Peter Burgis, 8 College Crescent, Hornsby, N.S.W. Australia 2077. Peter is doing research into Australian and New Zealand singers who recorded in the comparatively early days. He would be interested in any assistance in biographical detail of any such artist and also confirmation of actual recordings. There must be many such artists who did record in this way and we would ask anyone able to assist to write direct to Peter at the above address.

We would also be happy to publicise the needs and wants of any member doing similar research into talking machine history.

IF YOU WERE THE ONLY BOY IN THE WORLD By Pamela Rogers

I think most of us remember George Robey purely as a Music Hall star famous for his comic songs. It was a surprise recently to get a 12" Columbia recording on a bright green label of him singing, as a duet with Violet Lorraine, 'If you were the Only Boy in the World.' This had its premiere in the revue 'The Bing Boys are Here' in 1916. The audience reaction to this still popular song is best described by Robey himself in his autobiography, 'Looking Back on Life'.

"The vocal success of the production however, was the duet, 'If you were the only Boy in the World and I were the only Girl.' That took the fancy of the public instantaneously. We sang it seriously, and I think they were surprised to hear me sing a straight song in a straight way. I had often done so in provincial pantomimes, but never before in London. The audience fairly roared an encore for it."

The song is now generally thought of with the word 'girl' preceding the word 'boy' in the title. The recording has the title quoted above by Robey and is sung slowly with that unmistakeable 'Robey' voice.

HANK SNOW by Walter Norris Country and Western Singer

This singer is well known among country and western fans in this country. Collectors will find his records around, on 78's; some are on the red and green label Regal Zonophone. These are not easily obtained second hand in New Zealand due to a shortage of records generally, after the Second World War - a period when I last obtained these new for the large sum of thirty cents each.

Hank Snow was born on 9th May 1914 in Canada in a little town called Brooklyn which is two

miles East of Liverpool in the province of Nova Scotia. His real name, that is the name he was christened, was Clarence Eugene but, by his classmates he was called Jack, and by the entertainment world he was known as Hank. At the age of twelve he went to sea on a fishing schooner as a cabin boy, and it was here during the lonely trying days at sea off the Canadian coast that he thought of home and his mother, and of the Vernon Dalhart records she played. It was here that he virtually entered the world of entertainment by performing for his shipmates, imitations of Dalhart's records which he knew so well. With his mother's help in giving him a mail order course of guitar lessons as well as a guitar itself, he came to realize that this was the life he wanted to lead.

Hank Snow made his first public appearance at a Minstrel Show in the town of Bridgewater and followed this with a job in radio under the name of Clarence Snow. He married a pretty Halifax girl and called his first child, a boy, Jimmie Rodgers Snow. His first big break came when a large Texan glass manufacturing firm hired him for ten dollars a week for their Canadian radio show. Although this was not big pay, it earned for him the needed publicity to gain a disc contract which made it 'down hill' all the way. Within two years, he became Canada's number one Western recording star. Hank, in 1944 composed the song 'I'm Moving On' for the purposes of selling war bonds on the air. This proved most successful and from it he graduated to a radio programme in Wheeling, West Virginia. By 1950 he was well on the top having become a permanent member of Nashville's famous Grand Old Opry.

'I'm Moving On' remained on the 'Top Ten' billboard for 1950 and 1951. Hank Snow recordings are still played; one very well known song being 'With This Ring I Thee Wed.' This singer can often be heard in this country on the 3ZB Radio Station's Country and Western Programme on a Wednesday evening.

"G. and T." by Stylus

Any record which bears the magic words 'Manufactured by the Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd., and Sister Companies' is usually spared more than a passing glance. As with most labels, some of these records are of tremendous value from a musical history point of view, some should be kept for the sheer musical pleasure they give and others again because of their historical significance. Record No. G.C. 3-2088 was issued in August 1904 and is the Leoncavallo composition 'Tis the Day' (Mattinata), sung by Mr. John Harrison, London. Many collectors will have this song on record as it was recorded by many artists. I think, however, that few will have inscribed on the label that Leoncavallo composed this work "expressly for the gramophone."

Looking back from 1970, from a world which has accepted the gramophone and all its successors, the primitive early records and their successors, it seems hard to conceive any reason why a typewriter became involved with the gramophone - so much so that the Gramophone Company changed its name to The Gramophone and Typewriter Ltd. William Barry Owen, the first managing director of the original Gramophone Company became obsessed in 1900 with the idea that the successful but still very primitive business of gramophones and records would be little more than a passing craze. To offset what he saw as a fast looming disaster, he persuaded his associates to enter another field quite unrelated to the talking machine business. The final choice was the Lambert typewriter which was unusual in the fact that it employed a rotating disc instead of the normal keyboard. The company was recapitalized and set about to sell their new asset whose sole superiority appeared to lie in its very low price. The fact that the typist had to waste so much time and energy to twirl its dial meant that the commercial world paid it little attention. This unsound venture was one of the acts which forced Owen's resignation from the Company which he had in fact formed. The Lambert was acknowledged as a failure in 1904; shortly after this the Company dropped 'Typewriter' from its title and we have been left with a record label which, possibly as much for its rarity as anything else, is sought by collectors.