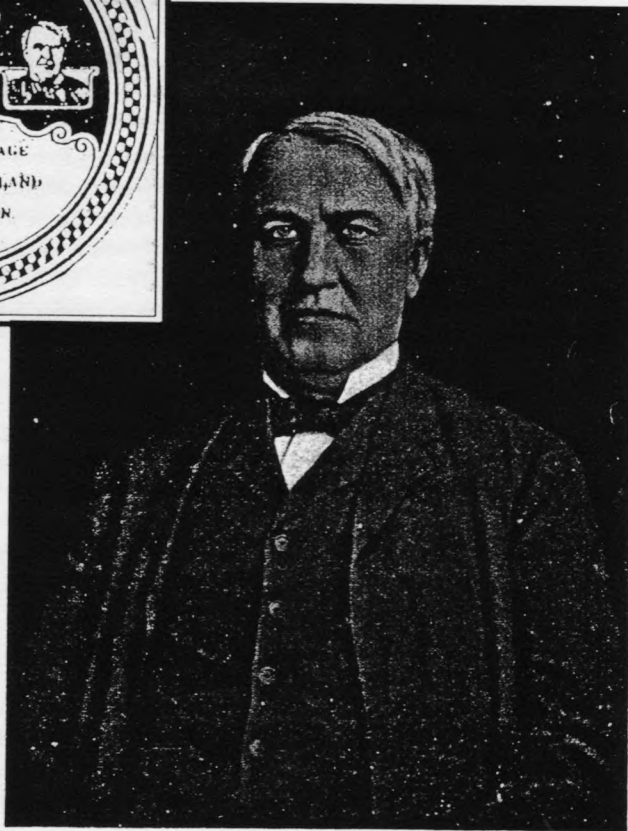


# G&T GAZETTE

Established 1995. Incorporating the *Edison Echo*

APRIL/MAY

2005



*Thomas A. Edison.*

Mr. Edison is not only the inventor of the Edison Phonograph, but he still controls its manufacture and sale. He regards it as the greatest of instruments for home entertainment and education. That is why he was quoted as saying: "I want to see a Phonograph in every home."

## EDITORIAL

Although we still have a few months to go before we celebrate our 10th anniversary issue of the G&T Gazette, I feel a sense of achievement coming on which I may have to suppress at meetings of our group. So if you see me bouncing off the walls in an unseemly fashion, throw a bucket of cold water over me, as I accept the tumultuous congratulations of associates. That said what have we got for you this time around.

The main item is a special disc which Edison recorded made at the request of his friend A.R. Harris which he addressed to "The People of New Zealand". This was originally published in an American publication called *The New Amberola Graphic*, a publication which originates out of Vermont. It was written by a friend of mine called Alan Robb who lectures in accountancy at Canterbury University. Alan and I go a way back to the days when there used to be fairly regular contact between the Scratchy Record Group and the Christchurch based Vintage Phonograph Society. Through a network of mutual friends, we still keep in touch but it came as a complete surprise to me to see that he had written this article which was advertised in the publications section of Nauck's catalogue. I successfully bid for the magazine that was listed and contacted Alan to get permission to reprint his account of this extremely interesting event in the annals of early New Zealand Radio.

The other feature of this issue is the double page spread advertising the beginning of Edison's Tone Tests across America in 1915. How I would have loved to be able to publish the discovery of a similar occurrence here in New Zealand. But that will have to wait for another day.

My final item is a postcard portrait of Franz Liszt. Look closely at the facial and hair features for a surprise! Just one of the many fascinating things I've discovered since I began collecting postcards.

Speaking of which. At my presentation in February, Les Austin gave a valedictory about his friend in Don Overend who died recently. A founder member of the NZ Postcard Society, Don had given Les an album of picture postcards which featured Opera Houses around the world. So if you ever would like to know what some of these edifices looked like, Les is your man.

## "A Personal Message to the People of New Zealand," by Thomas A. Edison by Alan J. Robb

Introduction: Ron Dethlefsen tells us that the New Zealand recording was made at West Orange early in January, 1928 and was acoustically recorded. We can only speculate as to why it was not made electrically: West Orange may not yet have been equipped with the new process; possibly Edison felt more comfortable with the acoustic method; or, finally, Edison was against electrical recordings and may not have been aware that the company had recently begun issuing them-and no one wanted him to know!

This Edison disc was the only copy ever to come to New Zealand and was never released commercially. It bears no matrix number or other pressing details [matrix numbers may be under the labels --ed.] It is believed that a second copy was retained by the Edison company and has been reproduced on an American LP called "Edison Speaks" issued by Mark56 Records in 1985. The labels are printed in dark blue ink on a gold background.

The 1928 recording was made at the request of A R Harris, General Manager of the Radio Broadcasting Company of New Zealand Ltd. Harris had worked with Edison in America before returning to New Zealand. The Radio Broadcasting Company was established by William Goodfellow and A R Harris to provide a broadcasting service covering the whole of the country in accordance with government policy. It absorbed and expanded small provincial stations and replaced them by the YA stations in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin in July 1927. It also published *The Radio Record* from 22 July 1927.

Thomas Edison's impact on the world is probably equal only in the present time by the founder of Microsoft, William Gates. The impact of these two men is very comparable and today Gates would probably be as well known as Edison was seventy years ago. Edison was known all over the world as the inventor of the electric light, the phonograph, the ticker tape machine. He was widely known as "the Wizard of Menlo Park."

It is not surprising then to find that A R Harris

planned a celebration of Edison's 81st birthday as a feature by the Radio Broadcasting Company. The person whose life was being celebrated would be known to all households possessing a radio.

The first announcement concerning the special programme planned for 11 February from station 2YA in Wellington is found in *The Radio Record* of 20 January 1928. It shows that Harris had invited Edison to send a personal message to the New Zealand public by means of a gramophone record. "In a typical Edison was the reply has been cabled back 'Message shipped.'" This report indicates that the recording had been made by January 1928.

On 3 February *The Radio Record* reported some details of the planned programme including speeches by Sir Frederick Chapman, a retired judge of the Supreme Court and President of the English Speaking Union, and Mr W L Lowrie, American Consul-General.

This was a programme that was expected to have wide appeal throughout the country. The programme listing for station 3YA in Christchurch showed that it was planned to try to link up with 2YA: "7:55-Circumstances permitting, the special programme which is being broadcast from 2YA, Wellington, in celebration of the eighty-first birthday of Thomas A. Edison, the world-renowned inventor, will be received and rebroadcast."

No alternative programme was listed for 3YA, should the circumstances not be favourable, so the technicians (and A R Harris in particular)

# The Test



Musical history was made a short time ago at Orange, New Jersey.

At the laboratories of the New Edison Diamond Disc Phonograph, 300 phonograph experts were witnesses to an epoch-making experiment.

When the test was done, the entire gathering agreed as one—a modern miracle had been performed before their eyes!

Three factors predominated.

Alice Verlet, the famous Belgian prima donna, whom European musical critics have hailed as the "New Queen of Song."

The New Edison Diamond Disc Phonograph.

And Thomas A. Edison. He alone knew of the revelation to come; of the human voice with all its range, its sweetness, its mellowness, its sympathy and pathos coming from the instrument he had created.

Miss Verlet stood beside the New Edison Diamond Disc Phonograph. Mr. Edison sat with his head bowed upon his hand.

There came the clear notes of the beautiful song, "Caro Nome," from Rigoletto.

Which was singing, phonograph or lady? The ear could not distinguish. Only the eye could discern that Miss Verlet's lips were not moving. The Edison Diamond Disc was singing alone. Then—a greater volume—but *only* a greater volume—Miss Verlet joined her voice with the singing of the Edison Diamond Disc.

Two voices—exactly the same two—were singing together. No one among the 300 could tell which was the more clear or distinct, or more full of feeling.

The song volume decreased. The ear heard but one voice. The eye must tell again. *Miss Verlet's lips were moving.* It was she who was singing.

Faces were lit up with surprise—even with amazement—a modern miracle was happening just before them.

The phonograph and the lady continued their duet to the end. Enthusiasm, almost unbounded, ran through the audience.

must have been reasonably sure that the linkup would work satisfactorily. In contrast, probably due to the greater difficulties in maintaining a link between Wellington and Auckland, station 1YA in Auckland had a full programme listing running through until "God Save the King" was played at 11:00 pm, but it was followed by the note that: "Circumstances permitting, a portion of the above programme will be omitted, and will be replaced by a rebroadcast of a special programme from 2YA, Wellington."

The technical difficulties of linking with station 4YA in Dunedin appear to have been major, for there was no plan to interrupt the programme with even a portion of the special broadcast.

However, all did not run smoothly. The key item, Edison's address, did not arrive as expected. *The Radio Record* of 10 February announced that the Edison Evening was being changed to February 18:

"Unexpected delay in the arrival of the "Message to New Zealand" which Mr. Thos. A. Edison had specially recorded for broadcast from 2YA, Wellington, in commemoration of his 81st birthday has necessitated the postponement of the programme specially arranged for that occasion".

In reluctantly making this announcement, the Broadcast Company advises that at both ends every precaution was taken to ensure the arrival of the recorded message in time for use on February 11, the date of the great inventor's birthday. The Company was advised both by letter and cable that the record had been mailed in ample time to catch the Vancouver mail steamer "Aorangi." A letter from Mr. Edison confirming the cabled message advising the dispatch of the record was posted in New York two days after the cable was sent, and duly arrived per "Aorangi" last week. Unfortunately, however, the record was not included in the ship's mails. Inquiry of the Post Office authorities elicited the information that American parcel mail is not forwarded via Vancouver. All such mail comes via Frisco, either by the regular mail boats or by cargo or oil-carrying

vessels. The assumption, therefore, is that the parcel containing the record is on the "Tahiti," due on the 13th inst. In the circumstances the Company could not do other than postpone the broadcast of the special programme for a week - from the 11th to the 18th inst.

To the ladies and gentlemen who are co-operating with them to ensure the success of a broadcast-programme of unique international interest, the Directors desire to express their regret for the inconvenience occasioned them by the unavoidable change of date. They will, the Directors feel sure, realise that in a programme designed to do honour to one who may well be regarded as one of the foremost citizens of the world, it were much better that there should be a week's delay in its presentation rather than the occasion should be robbed of its most unique feature - the opportunity of making known to the thousands of listeners the voice of Thos. A. Edison.

The announcement appears to have been inserted at the last moment in a fall page relating to the programme and Edison's achievements. The following issue of *The Radio Record*, dated 17 February, but printed on Tuesday 14th before the Tahiti's mail had been distributed, said:

As announced last week the special Edison evening will be given from 2YA on Saturday, February 18. It is confidently anticipated that the missing gramophone record bearing Edison's personal message will be duly to hand by the mail steamer arriving early this week, and in that event the programme, which will be of a highly interesting character, will take place as announced. Our illustration shows Mr. Edison at the radio microphone, broadcasting the same first words that were spoken to the original phonograph - "Mary had a little lamb, etc." For long enough Edison refused to appear before the microphone, but on August 12, 1927, on the occasion of the jubilee of the discovery of the "Edison effect," he was induced to appear. It was Edison's discovery of the fact that a heated filament in a vacuum gives off electrons which paved the way for modern broadcasting. He,

himself, did not proceed with the development of his discovery, leaving that to Fleming, but Edison did lay, in this sense, the foundation stone of modern broadcasting.

Clearly there remained some doubts as to whether the record had actually caught the steamer. But all was well and the broadcast went ahead as scheduled. It was apparently rebroadcast beyond Wellington, *The Radio Record* of 24 February reporting that "The evening as a whole was memorable and distinctive, and rebroadcasts by other stations were very satisfactory." The tribute to the American Consul-General was presented by Mr F W Tufts, of Detroit, Mich., now resident in New Zealand and both that and Sir Frederick Chapman's tribute were printed on the front page of *The Radio Record*. The reverse of the disc contains the same message read by Charles Edison (1890-1969), son of Thomas Edison. That version was not broadcast. One surmises that it was recorded as a contingency backup, in case Thomas Edison died between the date of recording and the planned broadcast date. The recordings provide a valuable resource for linguists who can hear two related people (aged 81 and 38) both born in the same country reading from an identical script. *The Radio Record* reprinted the text of Edison's message, with some minor inaccuracies. The following is the correct text:

"It is a far cry from my laboratory here in this northern land, in its garb of ice and snow, to you in your land of sunshine and flowers under the Southern Cross, but science with its magic makes it possible for me to greet you with the spoken word, though thousands of miles apart.

Surveying the progress of New Zealand in world affairs, it is difficult for me to realize that its establishment as a colony of the Mother country was practically coincident with the year of my birth. During my lifetime I have witnessed many changes, but nothing quite impresses me so much as the remarkable growth of New Zealand. From a handful of sturdy British emigrants who established the Colony in 1840, the population of the Dominion now totals

nearly one and a half million. The scattered farms of the Colony have expanded into many thousands of acres teeming with agricultural activity - a remarkable monument to the grit and enterprise of those who have so rapidly developed the land.

Your harbours filled with shipping carrying products to all parts of the world is another demonstration of growth. Not long ago I saw some statistics issued by the United States Government at Washington revealing the amazing fact that New Zealand [Edison inadvertently says "New England"] occupies the conspicuous position of enjoying the highest export trade per capita of any country in the entire world - a marvellous showing. This present day aspect of the country active in its agricultural and industrial life is a tribute to the dominant spirit of the people of the Dominion - all this virtually in the span of a single lifetime.

We here in the United States find much to admire in the growth of the simple schools of the early pioneer days in Wellington, to the present splendid educational institutions with their realistic application of the democratic principle of unlimited opportunity for the youth of the land.

Looking ahead into the future one feels secure in predicting a country alive with agricultural and industrial growth, its rivers giving an abundance of power development aiding its progress, and a people steadily and courageously fighting forward to make their land one of happiness and contentment. I am glad of this opportunity to greet you and to extend my cordial good wishes for the continued prosperity of your land and people".

The disc is currently the property of the Estate of W S Dini and forms part of his collection of phonographs on display at Ferrymead Historic Park. It was acquired by Bill Dini from the family of A R Harris. Special thanks are due to Bruce Russell and Rachael Lord of Radio New Zealand Archives for their assistance in making the transcription and in making available copies of *The Radio Record*.

*F. Liszt*

Rhapsodie Hongroise.

Andante mesto. *molto espressivo*  
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2  
tranquillo

GG  
5095

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