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High Drama in the Record Industry: Columbia Records, 1901-1934

by Tim Brooks

In 1978 and 1979 the ARSC Journal *(X:1 and X:2-3) published two articles by the author about the origins of Columbia, its early artists and its role in founding the record industry during the 1890s. The Following article documents the history of Columbia into the disc era, up to 1934. It originally appeared in volume one of* The Columbia Master Book Discography *(Greenwood Press, 1999) and is reprinted here with the permission of the publisher. Some new information has been added, including the startling revelation that Edward Easton attempted to sell the company to Edison in 1911, and a confidential evaluation of Columbia by an Edison executive.*

There is a shrine, somewhere, to Thomas A. Edison and his "favorite invention," the phonograph. The Victor Talking Machine Company and its founder, Eldridge R. Johnson, rate a museum in Delaware. Thanks in no small part to that clever painting of a puzzled terrier peering into the horn of an old phonograph seeking "His Master's Voice," the Victor legend has spread far and wide.[1]

There was, however, a third company completing the triumvirate that dominated the record business in the early 1900s. Far from forgotten, one hundred years later that company is one of the preeminent marketers of recordings in the world. For a variety of reasons, Columbia has been less studied by scholars, and less loved by collectors, than Edison and Victor. Even modern Columbia itself, on its website, pays little attention to its history.[2] In part this latter-day disdain seems to stem from the fact that the company was relentlessly focused on serving the public of its own time, not on pleasing collectors and historians of future generations. Its phonographs were less rugged than those made by Edison, so they are less favored by today's collectors. But they were also less expensive (while still quite serviceable), allowing millions of Americans to afford a phonograph for the first time. Its records often cost less than those of its rivals, while offering consumers top celebrities and an enormously varied repertoire, both popular and classical. Columbia was the industry leader in preserving and disseminating the music of America's ethnic groups, as well as the voices of "ordinary" Americans through its busy personal recording program (an area that deserves further study). It takes nothing away from the contributions of Victor and Edison to acknowledge the crucial role that Columbia played in bringing musical recordings to a mass audience, and in preserving the sounds of its times.

This article will examine Columbia during the first third of the twentieth century, with emphasis on its disc recordings, and serves as a sequel to my earlier articles on the company during the cylinder era of the 1890s.[3] The article will cover the company's corporate history, an overview of its repertoire, numbering and physical characteristics of its disc records, and biographical sketches of key Columbia executives.

Corporate History

Columbia's recording activities began a dozen years prior to time it entered the disc record field.

The company was organized in 1888 and incorporated in January 1889 by a group of Washington, D.C., businessmen and visionaries led by 32 year-old court reporter Edward D. Easton and William Herbert Smith. At the time all rights to exploitation of Edison's phonograph and Bell and Tainter's competing Graphophone were held by the North American Phonograph Company, a marketing organization. Columbia became North American's local agent for the territory covering Delaware, Maryland and the District of Columbia.

Most of the local agencies franchised by North American, including Columbia, initially attempted to market the phonograph as an office dictation machine. They encountered considerable resistance due to the unreliability of the equipment and were soon forced to find other ways to stay afloat. One idea was to sell pre-recorded musical cylinders to exhibitors and coin-slot operators. Edison resisted this "cheapening" of his invention, but in the end he could not stop it. The infant Columbia Phonograph Company, tottering on the brink of insolvency, was one of the first to grasp this opportunity. It soon became the chief promoter of musical recordings, much to the disgust of Edison and other traditionalists. From the vantage point of today it is obvious what direction the phonograph would take, but it was much less obvious then; in fact, it seemed quite possible the "talking machine" would remain nothing but a curiosity. Easton risked his career and personal savings on the belief that it would become something more than that, and he and his associates worked tirelessly to make his vision a reality.

Company pioneer Frank Dorian later said that Columbia began making its own recordings during the first half of 1889; the earliest published reference to these activities was in a brochure dated November 15, 1889.[4] By 1890 the company had published its first "catalog" (a one page listing), with selections by its star attraction, the United States Marine Band, which was conveniently based in Washington. Its cylinders were billed as "superior in loudness, clearness and character of selections to any band records yet offered."

From this point on Columbia relentlessly promoted musical recordings. Some of the other regional North American agencies also made recordings, as did Edison himself for a time, but Columbia claimed that it outsold all others—and it probably did. It certainly out-advertised all others in the limited trade press of the day, and there is evidence that it shipped its products all over the country, despite a ban on doing so (each North American agency was supposed to have exclusive marketing rights within its territory). Columbia was also the first to promote individual recording "stars," among them the Marine Band, piercing whistler John Y. AtLee, the Brilliant Quartette, and "Leather Lunged Auctioneer" W.O. Beckenbaugh.

Sustained by its musical recording business, Columbia survived the economic depression of the mid 1890s, which saw North American bankrupt and most of the other local distributors moribund. Even Edison abandoned the field for a time (because of litigation). Columbia continued to push the sale of musical cylinders to the small exhibition and coin machine trade, and it also absorbed one of the two principal phonograph manufacturers, the American Graphophone Co., with which it had long been allied. American Graphophone, successor to the Bell-Tainter interests, was by this time a mere shell of a company, but Easton recognized the value of its patents. In 1895, freed from the constraints of the North American contract, Columbia opened its first office and studio outside the Washington area, in New York City.

Small spring-driven cylinder phonographs suitable for the home were introduced in 1894, and Columbia moved quickly to supply this new market. Hundreds of titles were now listed in its regular catalog, often accompanied by pictures of the artists. The company absorbed several competitors, including the Chicago Talking Machine Co. in early 1897 and the Northern Talking

Machine Co. of Buffalo a few months later. It also lured away the artists and chief recording engineer of the U.S. Phonograph Co. (maker of "New Jersey" cylinders), a principal competitor, leading to that firm's collapse.[5] Branch offices were opened in St. Louis (1896), Philadelphia, Chicago, Buffalo, Paris (all 1897), San Francisco (1898) and London (1900).

Entering the Disc Business[6]

By the end of the decade Columbia was the dominant force in the recording industry. However it was still a relatively small business, and storm clouds were on the horizon. Recording technology was advancing rapidly, presenting major threats to the company's continued viability. The next few years would hold high drama for Columbia.

After a hiatus Edison had resumed recording around 1897. With strong financial resources and the power of the Edison name it was rapidly overtaking Columbia in its core cylinder business. There were rumors that Edison was on the verge of discovering a means of mass duplicating cylinders (up to this time, only a handful of copies could be made from each original recording), which would dramatically lower costs and increase production. At the same time Emile Berliner's little seven-inch disc records, introduced on a small scale in 1894, were being aggressively marketed. Their sound quality was not as good as that of cylinders, but improvements were being made and backed by a major advertising campaign Berliner discs were beginning to snare a significant portion of the potentially huge home market. According to the U.S. Census of Manufactures, 2.8 million cylinders and discs were produced during 1899 (including blanks); available information suggests that about 600,000 of these (21%) were discs, vs. zero percent a few years earlier.[7]

Never a cautious company, Columbia moved boldly along several tracks to address these threats. Easton kept his chief inventor, Thomas H. Macdonald, funded and busy at his laboratory in Bridgeport, Connecticut, working on improved phonographs and cylinder duplication processes. The company handled promising cylinder phonographs developed by others, including Edward Amet's Metaphone (a.k.a. Echophone) and possibly Gianni Bettini's Lyraphone.[8] Seeking to broaden its base, it also dabbled in motion pictures and typewriters.

It was clear to Easton that he also needed to get a foothold in the disc business, but Berliner held the key patents in that area. So for once Columbia moved cautiously, using its various patents for leverage wherever it could. During 1899 it briefly licensed the American Talking Machine Company, which had been founded by inventor Joseph Jones and businessman Albert T. Armstrong in late 1898 to manufacture the Vitaphone disc machine and red-shellac "American Talking Machine Record Disks." Jones and Armstrong initially tried to manufacture their own products, but couldn't, so they turned to the American Graphophone Co., which also failed. A few Vitaphone machines and American Talking Machine discs eventually reached the market, but they must have sold in very small quantities as they are incredibly rare today.

Once it became apparent that the Jones and Armstrong venture would not succeed Columbia decided to use the experience it had gained for its own first, tentative foray into the disc business. The $3 "Toy Disk Graphophone," designed by Macdonald and produced for the 1899 Christmas season, looked as much like a cylinder machine—and as unlike Berliner's disc gramophone—as possible. The tiny three-inch discs were brown wax, vertically recorded (like cylinders) and center-start. The small, hand-driven phonograph shared parts with Columbia's cylinder machines. One flyer listed five sets of five discs each, mostly children's songs, priced at

fifty cents per set. Few of these phonographs seem to have been sold, although limited advertising for them continued into early 1900.[9]

Columbia next allied with Frank Seaman's Universal Talking Machine Company, which had been marketing discs and phonographs under various names since 1898. Seaman had originally been the sales agent for Berliner, but had split with the inventor and was attempting to start his own disc business. Columbia allowed Seaman some measure of protection under its cylinder recording patents, and for a brief period in 1900-1901, Columbia's large network of dealers stocked his Zon-O-Phone products. However Seaman's company was in constant litigation with the Berliner interests, making his entire venture quite shaky; it finally went bankrupt in 1901.[10]

Columbia was by this time becoming desperate for a means to legally enter the disc business. Fortunately its cylinder sales were still healthy, despite the heavy competition from Edison. Judging by the relative number of copies found today, Columbia and Edison split the business more or less evenly around the turn of the century. Columbia's market share may have been down, but the entire industry had grown so rapidly between 1896 and 1901 that there was plenty of business for everyone.

Columbia and Edison both introduced mass produced "moulded" cylinders during the winter of 1901-1902. They were louder, harder, and cheaper than the 1890s variety, and most importantly they could be duplicated in large quantities. The price of a standard Columbia cylinder, which had averaged $1 or more in the early 1890s, and 50¢ in the mid and late 1890s, was now cut to 30¢, underpricing both Edison and those pesky seven-inch discs, both of which remained at 50¢. Columbia and Edison each employed gold in the production of the new cylinders. Although the processes were different, both called their cylinders "gold moulded," and each claimed that it had invented the process. Curiously neither company embraced an even more revolutionary type of cylinder invented by a man named Thomas Lambert—the unbreakable celluloid cylinder. Lambert's company marketed this product from 1900 to 1905, but there was quite a bit of turmoil within the company (Lambert himself quit in 1902) and constant legal challenges from Edison took their toll. Lambert filed for bankruptcy in January 1906.

Legal warfare was also producing chaos in the disc business. Suits between Berliner and his former sales agent Frank Seaman resulted in Berliner being forced to close its U.S. operation in mid 1900. The Zon-O-Phone label limped along through 1900 and 1901, as did a series of labels produced by Berliner associate Eldridge R. Johnson (called Improved Gram-o-Phone, Improved, and finally Victor). Columbia's crack patent attorney Philip Mauro was deeply involved in the litigation, constantly searching for a way to get Columbia—in which he was a substantial stockholder—into the disc business. He finally found it in 1901. The key was a patent application for a new disc production process submitted by one Joseph Jones.

Jones had once worked in Emile Berliner's laboratory, and latter day historians with an anti-Columbia bias assume that he simply stole his ideas from the disc inventor. However that may be, Jones' patent application showed promise, even though it was turned down several times by the patent examiners. Each time it was rejected Mauro helped Jones redraft it to address the examiners' comments, and by 1901 it was becoming apparent that it might eventually be granted. Columbia bought a financial stake in the application from the cash-starved inventor in the hope that this would happen, and began to lay plans for entry into the disc business "in the proper way."[11]

The Climax Label

Since the Jones patent had not actually been granted yet, Columbia had to be cautious. It opened conversations with the Burt Company of Millburn, New Jersey, a manufacturer of billiard balls and poker chips, which had previously done pressing work for Berliner.[12] Burt hired recording engineer John English from Zon-O-Phone in March 1901, and in August established the Globe Record Company as a subsidiary (presumably to protect Burt itself from lawsuits). Shortly thereafter Globe began producing its first seven-inch Climax discs, with an embossed label containing minimal information, and no patents. A typical label read as follows:

CLIMAX RECORD
Globe Record Co.
New York
Duet
The Girl I Loved In Sunny Tennessee
Dudley & McDonald
257

It is unclear whether Globe ever attempted to sell these records itself, or if they were sold by Columbia from the start. The latter seems likely. Embossed Climaxes are exceptionally rare, and numbered only up to about no. 300. Almost immediately Globe switched to paper labels which read, "Climax Record - G.R. Co., Mf'd solely for Columbia Phonograph Co., New York, London." At first these gold-on-black paper labels were pasted over the original embossed "Globe" identification, with the raised lettering clearly visible underneath. A few semi-flexible examples have also been reported.

The connection between Climax and Zon-O-Phone is tantalizing, and has never been fully explained. Consider the similarities. The same recording engineer (English) was in charge of both. Artists were largely the same, including studio band leader Fred Hager, while Columbia's musical director (for cylinders) was Charles A. Prince. Zon-O-Phone and Climax discs even *look* similar, with a small indentation on the blank side, meant to engage a small pin on Zon-O-Phone turntables. A few Climax discs even bear Zon-O-Phone warning labels on the reverse. Besides the normal Climax/Columbia matrix number, beginning at no. 1 ("In a Clock Store"), about 70 of the first 800 Climaxes have been found to bear in the wax another, "phantom" number, possibly denoting a different recording laboratory (for further discussion see "Numbering, Physical Characteristics and Miscellaneous," later in this article). While no Zon-O-Phone masters have so far been found on Climax, it is possible that initially the two labels recorded in the same studio, and/or were pressed at the same plant.

Simultaneously with the introduction of Climax records Columbia introduced its first regular disc graphophones, the $20 "AJ" with a seven-inch turntable and the $30 "AH" with a ten-inch turntable.[13]

Columbia usually launched its new products with a splash, but it was uncharacteristically quiet about this venture. Although no introductory advertisements or catalogs have been found, both machines and discs appear to have been introduced during early October, 1901. A story about their debut appeared in the October 12, 1901, *Music Trade Review,* and shipments of machines to dealers have been documented as early as October 3rd.[14] A brief mention of the

discs appeared in a Columbia trade advertisement in the November 16, 1901, *Music Trade Review.* Finally, on December 10, 1901, the Jones patent was issued and the company could breath a little easier. This patent date appeared prominently on Columbia disc products for many years to come.

Victor Steals Climax!

By January 1902 Edward Easton and his colleagues must have been feeling a little more secure about their new venture. They had been marketing disc machines and Climax records (manufactured by Globe) for about four months without challenge, and the new, powerful Jones patent covering disc manufacture was in their pocket. There was some friction between Columbia and Globe, which claimed that Easton's company was slow in paying its bills, but nothing that couldn't be handled.

Then the unexpected happened. Easton's arch-rival, Victor President Eldridge R. Johnson, somehow found out about Globe's dissatisfaction with Columbia. He began secret negotiations with the Globe management and on Sunday, January 19, 1902, while Easton was out of town, he bought the company from Burt for $10,000.

Johnson moved fast. Before Easton could find out what happened, Victor shipped the Climax masters out of New York to its headquarters in Philadelphia. Researcher Raymond Wile speculates that this was done so that when Columbia sued, as it would surely would, it would have to do so in several court jurisdictions at once.[15] In addition, it appears that Victor began embossing the circled letters "VTM" on Climax masters, to denote their new ownership by the Victor Talking Machine Co. The "VTM" symbol is most frequently found on numbers up to about no. 600 (although a few are higher), which may give us a clue to the matrix numbers in production as of January 1902. It is also probably no coincidence that there is some confusion in numbering in the 500s. At least eight numbers between 515 and 657 were assigned to two different recordings, possibly a result of confusion due to missing masters or logbooks.

One can only imagine the scene that transpired in the Columbia offices when Edward Easton returned to New York and found out that his source of disc records had been stolen out from under him. As anticipated Columbia immediately filed suit, but Easton, always the pragmatic businessman, simultaneously began negotiations with Johnson. By mid-February Columbia had agreed to buy Globe from Victor for the $10,000 Johnson had paid for it and, equally important, to drop all pending lawsuits against Victor. In a letter to a colleague Johnson bragged that Columbia "tore up the earth for a while and tried to frighten us, but cooled down and came weakly to sue for peace." But this was only part of the story. In the same letter, Johnson admitted "that I was greatly worried over the Graphophone suits. [Their] patents are old and have been sustained in every case... we had nothing to gain in winning and everything to lose in losing."[16] Continued negotiations eventually led to an even more sweeping agreement a year later, in which Columbia and Victor agreed to cross-license each other. This meant that both companies were now free to pursue disc manufacture without fear of litigation from the other, and all others were effectively shut out of the business.

Not wanting any more unpleasant surprises, Columbia bought the Burt Co., which pressed Climax records, securing its source of supply. Ironically Johnson had concluded an arrangement with Burt to press Victor records as well (since he was short of capacity), which meant that Columbia was now pressing Victor records as well as its own. Columbia boasted

about this in its mid-1902 catalog, but Victor was unamused and broke its contract with Burt in the fall of 1902. On December 31, 1902, Columbia closed Burt's Millburn, New Jersey, plant, and moved the entire operation to American Graphophone headquarters in Bridgeport, Connecticut.[17] Burt remained an active subsidiary of American Graphophone for many years thereafter, with Edward D. Easton as its president.

The Columbia Label

Climax records continued to be produced throughout the first half of 1902. Although with the Victor settlement it was no longer necessary to be surreptitious, no changes were made at first. The company was preoccupied, perhaps, with the introduction of moulded cylinders to compete with Edison's newest product.

By the summer the company had turned its attention to the disc trade, where Victor, through heavy advertising, was rapidly gaining ground. During 1902 Edison produced about four million cylinders, while Victor produced 1.7 million discs.[18] Figures are not available for Columbia, but judging by the relative number of surviving copies the company trailed in both fields. Sometime in mid 1902 the decision was made to change the disc label name from Climax to Columbia. Matrix numbers had by this time reached the 800's, and the same numbering system continued on the new label. A 32-page "Columbia Disc Records" catalog was issued in mid 1902, indicating that all discs were available in both seven and ten inch size. No catalog is known to have been issued during the Climax period, however a printing code on the mid 1902 catalog suggests that one had at least been planned.[19] Perhaps it was planned for early 1902, but aborted during the short Victor takeover of Climax.

Due to the limited technology of the day it soon became necessary to re-record virtually the entire catalog that had been built up during 1901-1902. This is one reason why so many early Columbia titles were recorded by two or more artists; the original artist may not have been available when the re-recording was made. In 1902 a significant new manufacturing process was introduced which drastically reduced the need for such re-recording. Under the old method only one stamper was made from each original wax master, which destroyed the master; the number of copies that could be pressed from the stamper was limited to about a thousand copies. After that the song had to be re-recorded to produce a new wax master. Under the new technology multiple stampers could be made from a single master, multiplying many times over the number of copies that could be pressed from one original.[20]

The change in label name, combined with massive re-recording, resulted in considerable confusion in the studio and pressing plant. Discs have been found from this period announced as "Climax Quartette, Columbia Record" and there are numerous examples of the new Columbia labels pasted over pressings announced as Climax. I have even seen a few examples of the reverse, masters announced as Columbia, but bearing (leftover?) Climax labels. A copy of no. 286 has been found which is announced as "Hager's Orchestra," but the label says Climax Orchestra, and identifies it as a Columbia record. Customers might be forgiven if they didn't know exactly what they were getting.

The highest master known to have been issued on the Climax label is no. 826, "The Flying Dutchman: Selections." Leftover Climaxes appear to have been sold off through Columbia's British affiliate, which issued an undated 16-page Climax catalog listing numbers up to no. 826.

By January 1903 business was booming. Thomas H. Macdonald claimed in that month that Columbia was manufacturing 20,000 cylinders and 10,000 discs per day, and that the factory was working day and night to keep up with the demand. If maintained throughout the year (assuming a five-day week) this would work out to roughly five million cylinders and 2.5 million discs per year. This is probably high, as summers were slow for the record trade and Macdonald may have been exaggerating a bit, however it is probably not far off. Based on known production figures for Edison and Victor, Columbia probably produced four or five million cylinders and perhaps 1.5 million discs in 1903.[21]

Columbia's growth was fueled in part by its rapidly expanding international operations. The company had been active in Europe since 1897, and began disc recording in England as early as 1902, using a special matrix series (25,000s). During 1903 additional series were assigned for records made in Italy (10,000s), Russia and Poland (35,000s), Germany (40,000s) and France (50,000s). A Mexico City laboratory was opened at the end of 1903, making Columbia the first U.S. company to record there.[22] Many of these foreign recordings were issued in the U.S. Less frequently seen in the U.S. were the products of a recording expedition to Shanghai in early 1903, and to Tokyo later in the year. The Shanghai and Tokyo recordings are numbered in the regular U.S. matrix series, in the ranges 1260-1350 and 2000-2999, respectively.

Grand Opera Series

The Spring of 1903 brought a truly historic series of recordings, and a coup over rival Victor. Grand opera stars, particularly those associated with the prestigious Metropolitan Opera in New York, were among the most famous and highly paid musical celebrities in the world. Most had never recorded commercially, in part for artistic reasons (recording technology was too crude to reproduce their voices properly), in part because the record companies would not pay their high fees. Operatic excerpts did appear in the catalog, but they were by studio bands, popular instrumentalists, and lesser known opera singers such as Emilio de Gogorza (as "Edward Franklin"), Alberto De Bassini and Bernard Bégué. Given the popularity of this second-rate material, it must have been tempting to imagine how well arias by "real" opera stars might sell.

Industry scuttlebutt in late 1902 was that Victor had sent its recording manager, Calvin Child, to London in December to arrange an exchange of masters with that company's English affiliate. These would include grand opera recordings by the greatest stars of the continent—the first ever sold in the U.S. The publicity value alone would be enormous. Not to be outdone, Columbia quickly arranged with several major stars of the Metropolitan Opera in New York to record at its own 26th Street studio. These were the first "celebrity" opera recordings made for general release in the U.S., and they preserved for posterity some of the greatest voices of the age.

The first appear to have been made in late 1902 or very early 1903, when soprano Suzanne Adams (of the Paris Opera, Covent Garden and the Met) recorded six selections with her husband cellist Leo Stern, including "Je veux vivre" from *Romeo and Juliet,* and "Home, Sweet Home." In quick succession recordings were made by baritones Antonio Scotti, Giuseppe Campanari and Charles Gilibert, basso Edouard De Reszke (his only recordings), soprano Marcella Sembrich and contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink. All were available as ten-inch discs only, and were announced in a special "Catalogue De Luxe" which was rushed out. The first advertising appeared in early April.[23]

Prestige did not come cheaply. The discs sold for $2 each, twice Columbia's usual price, reflecting the high fees demanded by these superstars. Columbia continued to publicize the discs for the next several years, and sometimes appeared obsessed by the amount of money it had been forced to pay for them. Sembrich was said to have been paid $2,000 for her three recordings, while Adams received almost that much for two.[24] Although most of these illustrious singers had recorded before, their previous recordings (mostly for Bettini cylinders or for G&T discs in England) had very limited distribution in the U.S. and their appearance on Columbia was a major event.

The records did not generate large sales, however, which must have disappointed Easton and his bottom-line oriented management. Moreover Victor quickly counterattacked by issuing its own classical recordings on a special "Red Seal" label in early April. The first releases were those obtained from London, but beginning on April 30, 1903, Victor also began recording domestically. It even established a recording studio in Carnegie Hall itself. Backed by enormous promotion Victor quickly won the title of "the" label for Grand Opera superstars. Victor clinched its triumph with its acquisition of a phenomenal young Italian tenor named Enrico Caruso, who would become perhaps the most famous recording artist of the early twentieth-century. Several of Caruso's Milan recordings for G&T were among the first batch of imported Red Seals, and beginning in 1904 he recorded for Victor in the U.S., exclusively. In addition, Victor records of the period were simply better made than those of Columbia, a fact doubtless not lost on the discerning ears of higher class customers.

Faced with the relentless barrage of Victor publicity, as well as its own disappointing sales, Columbia abandoned Grand Opera celebrity recording in the U.S. for the next several years. Its high-priced Metropolitan artists, including Scotti, Campanari, Gilibert, Sembrich and Schumann-Heink, switched to Victor Red Seal records.[25]

Leased Masters

Columbia opened another line of business c.1903 that was much more successful, and which distinguished it sharply from its competition. This was the business of pressing "custom" labels for department stores and others, using Columbia masters. Easton's management believed in marketing its products in every way possible. Victor and Edison, on the other hand, did not allow their recordings to appear under any other name, so among the majors at least, Columbia had this field to itself. This also means that we should be careful about estimating the relative sales of Victor and Columbia recordings of the late 1900s and early 1910s based on the frequency with which those labels are found today. Columbia masters turn up on many other labels, some of which had wide distribution.

Columbia generally disguised its artists' names on these customized issues, but the matrix number—and often the issue number—was usually the same as Columbia's. More research needs to be done in this area, but Columbia appears to have begun custom pressing around 1903 when it began manufacturing the Harvard label for Sears, Roebuck, in Chicago. This was a natural outgrowth of a long relationship with the mail order giant, which had been carrying Columbia products since the late 1890s. The President of Sears was even a member of the American Graphophone Co. Board of Directors during 1904-1905.[26] In May, 1905, Columbia proudly noted that it had received its largest single order ever, for nearly one million cylinders and discs, from Sears, Roebuck.[27] The Harvard label lasted until 1907, and was succeeded by

Oxford (1907-1916) and Silvertone (1916-1930). These labels sometimes used masters from smaller manufacturers as well. Columbia also continued to produce seven-inch and single-faced discs for Sears, long after Columbia itself had abandoned those formats.

Additional custom-pressing contracts followed, including Peerless (1903) for the W.S. Simpson department store, Golden Crown Musicalphone (1905) and New Improved Silver Tongued (1906) for a Chicago mail order firm, Kalamazoo (1907) for the Duplex Phonograph Co. of that city, and Thomas (1907), D&R (1909), Manhattan (1909) and Cort (1910) for various stores. Columbia also produced records and phonographs for a group of related Chicago firms that offered the phonographs as "scheme goods," inexpensive (or free) premiums to induce the customer to buy other products. The cheap phonographs were fitted with oversized center spindles, so that customers would then have to buy records with matching oversize spindle holes from the same firm. Huge quantities of these large-spindle records were sold, and they are frequently found today. The Chicago labels included Standard (1905), Diamond (1906), Harmony (1908), United (1909) and Aretino (1909), the latter sporting what is possibly the largest spindle hole in record history—three inches in diameter. By the late 1910s most of the Chicago companies had run their course, and they appear to have merged into a single company marketing the appropriately named Consolidated label (1916), which also used Columbia masters.[28]

The booming business resulted in Columbia's most profitable year ever with earnings of $730,000 for the year ending September 1904.[29] Business was growing rapidly in Europe as well, leading to severe strain on the company's production capacity. Columbia had only one pressing plant, in Bridgeport, and although it was expanding rapidly it could not keep up with the demand. Recordings made in the various foreign recording laboratories were shipped to Bridgeport for processing, and pressings were then shipped back to the originating country for sale. A small factory had been set up in Paris in 1901 or 1902 to supply the continent with cylinders, but this proved wholly inadequate. To relieve the strain Columbia secured a 50,000 square foot factory complex outside of London in early 1905 and, under the supervision of Thomas Macdonald and European General Manager Frank Dorian, installed full manufacturing facilities which were operational by mid-1906. Initial capacity of the British plant was said to be 10,000 cylinders and 5,000 discs per day.[30]

A company magazine, *The Columbia Record,* was inaugurated in January 1904 containing news of the company, sales tips and new product information.[31] Columbia also began regularizing its release patterns around this time. Previously discs had been released in irregular batches consisting of both new and old masters which may have been made months or years before; a single release list could thus span a very wide range of record numbers. The *Columbia Record* instituted a monthly list of new releases, and by mid 1904 each monthly list consisted primarily of recent recordings.

The Awards Wars

An important element in the battle for prestige was the competition for awards at the great expositions of the day. Columbia and Victor both exhibited at these celebrations of consumerism, often showcasing special "advanced" phonographs especially designed for the event. The exhibits were seen by hundreds of thousands of visitors, and any awards won could be trumpeted in advertising long afterwards. Columbia scored early in the "awards wars" by

winning a prize at the Paris Exposition of 1900 for a three-horned Graphophone which played a single long cylinder containing three tracks. (The only known example of this machine was sent to the Shah of Persia, evidently a man who had to have everything.) For the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Fair in St. Louis, Thomas Macdonald came up with an even more bizarre machine, a four horned, four turntable disc phonograph.[32] Columbia's huge, temple-like exhibit was presided over by company Vice President Paul Cromelin.

The 1904 competition turned somewhat comical when Columbia and Victor each insisted that it had won the "Grand Prize" at the fair (both were right; each got an award from a different jury). The dispute spilled over into a court case, but both companies boasted "Grand Prize - St. Louis, 1904" on its labels for several years thereafter, no doubt confusing buyers.

Columbia snared yet another Grand Prize at the Milan Exposition in Italy in 1906, for another four-horned monstrosity, this one with four morning-glory horns intertwined like a tangle in an untrimmed garden.[33]

The year 1905 brought the belated introduction of Columbia twelve-inch discs in July, and a major price reduction in December (ten-inch discs went from $1 to 60¢, and twelve-inch from $1.50 to $1). This matched a similar reduction by Victor. Net earnings for the year were $804,000, setting another all-time record.[34]

By 1907 Columbia was boasting that it had 9,000 dealers nationwide.[35] It was not too difficult to become a dealer, however. In a February 13, 1908, letter, a Columbia executive advised a local Pennsylvania man that "in order to become a dealer in Columbia goods you place an order for 2 machines of your own choosing and 150 cylinder records, or 100 disc records, 10 inch. The total investment is very modest and after the initial order everything you buy is at best dealer's discount, no matter what the quantity."[36] The initial investment, at list, could thus be as little as $100. The subsequent dealer's discount on records and on most machines was 40%, and the company provided circulars, window strips and store signs for free.

The Marconi Label

Columbia was constantly fighting the "prestige gap" between it and its larger competitors. Edison cylinders bore the name of the world's most famous inventor, while Victor discs shared the glory of the label's prestigious Red Seal records. Columbia flaunted its Grand Prize awards, and constantly reminded the trade that it was the "creator of the talking machine business" (which, literally, was true). However neither claim had the impact of a name like Edison or Caruso.

During the summer of 1906, on a trip to England, Edward Easton struck a deal with world-famous scientist Guglielmo Marconi, who had gained fame just five years earlier as the inventor of wireless communication with the first transatlantic transmission. In September Columbia proudly announced that the 32 year-old inventor would join the company as a "consulting physicist," working on recorders, reproducers and record composition. Marconi sailed to New York, was feted at a banquet, was given a whirlwind tour of the American Graphophone plant in Bridgeport, then promptly returned to London.[37]

The first tangible result of the arrangement was the flexible Marconi "Velvet Tone" disc, introduced c.May 1907. Described as "Wonderful as Wireless," they were single-faced and pressed from regular Columbia masters, although the numbering was different. Because of their soft surface—resembling a modern LP—they had to be played with a special gold-plated needle.

Marconi discs were priced at 75¢ for 10-inch and $1.50 for 12-inch, only slightly above comparable Columbia issues.

It is unclear how much Marconi had to do with the unusual discs that bore his name. More than 400 titles were released on Marconi, and the quality was quite good. However they apparently did not sell very well, and were discontinued in 1908.

The Depression of 1908

The year 1908 brought a crisis that shook the company to its foundations. A financial panic in October 1907 led to a nationwide economic depression which devastated the phonograph business, and Columbia found itself in the unaccustomed position of laying off workers and cutting salaries. Victor and Edison, with their substantial resources, were in a better position to weather the storm, but as number two in both disc and cylinder sales, Columbia was particularly vulnerable.

Founder Edward Easton, now 52 years old, went through a period of severe depression. All that he had struggled so hard to build over the past 20 years was in danger of being swept away. His daughter Mary later recalled,

> "The Columbia company was on the verge of failure. A deep melancholy settled over father. He could not smile. He would hardly speak in the long evenings at home. He would sit for hours staring into space.
>
> "Hundreds of employees of the Columbia Company were laid off, and those who were still necessary to the business had their salaries cut twenty percent or more. We cut our home expenses in every possible way. Father went to the office on the train every day as usual. One day he deliberately got up from his seat in the train, opened the door to the platform and stepped off into space. The train was going over a trestle. Someone saw him fall and signaled for the train to stop.
>
> "He was not killed, but his head was injured. For weeks he was in a sanitarium, scarcely recognizing any of us. He never had any recollection of stepping off the train. I don't know how we lived through those dark days."[38]

The incident, which occurred on January 23, 1908, was hushed up and Easton returned to work after about eight months, but in his daughter's words, he was "never the same." However, Easton had built a strong executive team, which developed an ingenious and daring strategy to save the company.

Double-Discs

There was not a hint during the summer of 1908 as to what was coming. Executives at Victor were caught totally off-guard when, on September 10, they were hit with a massive barrage of publicity stating that Columbia was converting its entire catalog to "double-discs," recorded on both sides. "Music on *both* sides, two records at a single price... *no other record is worth considering*" screamed the advertising.[39] Moreover the price was practically the same as for the

older single-faced discs, 65¢ for the ten-inch and $1 for the twelve-inch. In a market which for 15 years had known only single-faced discs (aside from a few double-faced novelties), this was revolutionary.[40]

The introduction was accompanied by a new "Note the Notes" logo (previously used in some print advertising), a new label design, and the biggest advertising blitz in the company's history. Whatever was left in the treasury went totally into the "Double-Disc" campaign—this was do or die. Double-page spreads and back covers appeared in *Good Housekeeping, Munsey's, Everybody's, McClure's, Cosmopolitan, Harper's, Collier's Weekly* and dozens of other national magazines, as well as major newspapers across the country. A single ad in *The Saturday Evening Post* was said to cost $6,000.[41] Nor did the campaign let up after the introduction. By 1909 Columbia could tell its dealers that it was spending hundreds of thousands of dollars per year on national advertising.[42] Columbia, which had increased the operatic representation in its catalog through an arrangement with Fonotipia in Europe, even attacked Victor's "Caruso card," claiming that "Four of the Five Great Tenors of the World Sing for the Columbia."[43] The four tenors were Bonci, Anselmi, Zenatello and Bassi, all on Fonotipia discs distributed in the U.S. by Columbia. Whether or not these were in fact the "four greatest tenors" after Caruso is of course a matter of opinion.

Victor was furious, and said so in its counter-advertising, complaining that Columbia was disrupting the business and that consumers didn't want these double-disc records.[44] But of course they did, and sales over the holiday season were tremendous. (An interesting editorial in the October 31, 1908 *Musical Age* accused Victor of whining.) Victor, stuck with huge stocks of single-faced discs, was forced to respond, rushing out its own list of 125 double-faced discs. This compared with Columbia's initial 120-page catalog containing more than 700 domestic double-faced discs, followed shortly by hundreds of foreign-language couplings. Victor stubbornly kept issuing single-faced discs, along with double-discs, for the next few years but within months it was clear that the public wanted the new format. Unwilling to concede gracefully, Victor even attacked legally, buying a dubious 1904 patent for double-faced discs and suing Columbia over their manufacture. The case dragged on for more than a year. At one point, a frustrated Columbia attorney held up an offending double-disc and asked the Court, "If we are to be restricted to one side of the record, which shall it be?" Victor lost the suit.[45]

Victor sales declined during 1909 and only slowly recovered during 1910 and 1911.While Columbia sales are not known, the frequency with which Columbia's early double-discs are found today suggests that the company regained considerable market share, perhaps even equaling Victor for a time.

Simultaneously with the launch of double-discs a new numbering system was introduced, starting at A1 for 10-inch discs, and A5000 for twelve-inch. Other prefixes were assigned to foreign-language issues, as shown in the following chart. Single-faced discs were re-introduced on a limited basis in 1910, for selected classical selections (which were also available on double-face), but for all intents and purposes it was now, for Columbia at least, a double-faced world.

COLUMBIA DOUBLE-DISC PREFIXES[46]

Repertoire

[ ] = labels pressed by Columbia.

A - American
B, BO - Brazilian; [B also used by Phoenix, U.K., 1910s*]
C - Central and South American (Spanish)
D - England (1907-1909; 1915-1930**); European territories
E - General Foreign Language (U.S.)
F - Columbia-Fonotipia (imports); England (12", 1919-1922)
G - [Regal, U.K., 1914-1930]
H - Symphonies (South America)
J - Japan, Java, Malaya
K - [Climax, 1909]
L - Trinidad (1912-14); England (12", 1915-on)
M - Filipino (1910s); U.K.
N - Indian (1910s)
P - Peruvian (1911)
R - Canadian; Spanish (1920s, later "RS")
S - Spanish Concertos and Opera; School Series (1912); also Holland?
T - Argentinean (1910s-20s)
X - [Climax, 1909]; England (1915-on)
Y - Hawaiian

* According to Frank Andrews, Phoenix (1913-1916) was a subsidiary of English Columbia which normally used a zero prefix. The "B" prefix was applied to deleted Regal and Columbia-Rena discs which were later sold under the Phoenix name.
** The "D" prefix seems to mean pressed in England, with numerical blocks indicating the territory in which sold. Some U.S. masters turn up on these pressings.

Simultaneous with the introduction of double-discs Columbia reorganized its consumer catalog into a convenient "A" to "Z" listing, the first major label to do so. (Previously record catalogs had been organized by category). The easy-to-use format was an immediate success. Victor and Edison, loathe to imitate anything Columbia did, did not follow suit until 1912-1913.

Indestructible Cylinders

Columbia landed a one-two punch in the fall of 1908. In addition to the spectacular launch of "double-discs" it discontinued its wax cylinder line (which had been trailing badly behind Edison) and replaced it with a catalog of unbreakable celluloid cylinders manufactured by the Indestructible Record Company of Albany, New York. "Wax cylinders are as out of date as wax candles" crowed one Columbia advertisement.[47]

The nature of the Columbia-Indestructible relationship is somewhat unclear. An editorial in the October 1908 *Talking Machine World* said that Columbia had purchased Indestructible "lock, stock and barrel," however legal documents located by researcher Raymond Wile indicate that the deal was a distribution arrangement (possibly an intended purchase fell through). In any event for the next few years the cylinders were sold exclusively by Columbia, under the name "Columbia-Indestructible." Indestructible had been eating into the wax cylinder business of both Edison and Columbia, and Edison had retaliated during the summer of 1908 with an order

forbidding its distributors to handle any other cylinder line. Edison's frontal attack on the small company's distribution was intended to destroy it. However with Columbia's vast network of dealers behind it, Indestructible was once again a potent threat.

Columbia-Indestructibles were well recorded, far more durable than the Edison product, and sold for only 35¢, the same price as Edison's fragile wax cylinder. Edison countered with a new line, a four-minute wax cylinder (the "Amberol") for 50¢. It was, however, still made of a breakable wax compound. (Columbia countered that with four-minute Indestructibles in 1909.) Despite an inferior product, the power of the Edison name was such that it kept its hegemony in the largely rural cylinder market. Unable to break the Edison hammerlock on the cylinder business, even with a superior product, Columbia threw in the towel in 1912, discontinuing cylinder sales entirely.

Columbia moved quickly to exploit its momentum in the disc field, signing new dealers at the rate of forty per day. By March 1909 it was claiming 17,000 Graphophone dealers in the United States—presumably that meant a shelf in the back of practically every general store in the country.[48] A new line of popularly priced internal-horn Grafonolas was introduced in 1909-1910, forcing Victor to lower prices on its popular Victrola line (the Victrola had originally been introduced as a premium priced machine in 1906).

Columbia and Victor agreed on one thing at least, and that was the need to clear the field of competing disc manufacturers who were siphoning off business from both of them. Despite the strength of their joint patent position, this took time, but after a long series of lawsuits by the two companies, they accomplished their goal. Casualties included the American Record Company (American), International Record Company (Excelsior, Kalamazoo, Silver Star, Vim, etc.), Leeds & Catlin (Leeds, Imperial, D&R) and Hawthorne & Sheble (Busy Bee, Star). All had been driven out of business by 1909.[49] Columbia apparently absorbed parts of the last-named company, and Horace Sheble became American Graphophone's factory manager in late 1909, succeeding Thomas Macdonald.[50]

The period from 1908 until 1920 was the first "Golden Age" for Columbia discs. All serious competition had been driven from the field through the patent infringement suits, creating a virtual disc monopoly for Victor and Columbia. At the same time sales were growing exponentially, and cylinders were no longer a competitive threat. The following chart shows total U.S. production of discs and cylinders, according to the *U.S. Census of Manufactures.*

Unit Production (millions)

Year	Cylinders	Discs	Total
1904*	21.0	4.0	25.0
1909	18.6	8.6	27.2
1914	3.9	23.3	27.2
1919	5.9	101.1	107.0
1921	1.8	103.4	105.2

*estimates based on dollar value.

No wonder Columbia Double-Discs from the mid-teens and later are found with such

frequency today.

Curiously, Columbia conducted tests of vertically cut discs beginning in 1909, or possibly earlier, although there was no move to market them. Edison finally introduced its own thick, vertically-cut "Diamond Discs" in 1913. Many survive today because they are virtually indestructible, but they do not appear to have posed much of a threat to Columbia or Victor sales because they could be played only on Edison equipment.

A Proposal to Sell Columbia to Edison

Despite–or perhaps because of–the improved condition of Columbia, in late 1911 founder Edward Easton floated a proposal to sell the company. A fascinating memo dated October 5, 1911, from Frank L. Dyer, president of the Edison company, to Thomas Edison has surfaced at the Edison National Historic Site, outlining a hitherto unknown proposal by Easton to "consolidate" the two companies.[51] The reasons given were compelling. The businesses were complementary–Edison sold cylinders, while Columbia's main business was discs (it would soon terminate its arrangement with Indestructible). Even if Edison did eventually enter the disc business, it would probably be with a premium-priced product. A combined company would serve all segments, disc and cylinder, lateral and vertical cut, premium and popular-priced. Considerable savings could be effected by combining overhead, sales expenses and staff, resulting in greatly increased profit margins. Moreover Easton felt that the power of the Edison name was so potent that in the long run it would sell more records and phonographs than Columbia ever could alone. He certainly had reason to believe that, given his experience pitting Indestructible cylinders against the Edison product.

Tellingly, Dyer attributed one additional reason to his veteran counterpart. "[Easton] said, furthermore, that personally he was anxious to get out of the business, that his old friends and associates in the business had most of them died and that he did not feel the interest that he once did."

Dyer outlined many reasons why Mr. Edison should consider the offer, which despite its positioning as a consolidation was essentially a sale (Edison would manufacture and sell Columbia goods, paying a royalty to the former owners). Speaking with remarkable candor about his own company, he said "we cannot disguise the fact that our phonograph business is in a most unhealthy and hazardous condition." Edison did in fact suffer a sharp decrease in sales during the wax Amberol years, as well as being driven out of many foreign markets. Taking on a popular, established disc line could represent a shot in the arm. Edison would gain matrices, artists, patents, a renewed presence overseas, and "some very good men" from the Columbia staff. Easton said the records could be called "Edison Disc Records," "Edison-Columbia Records," "Edison Records," or practically anything else Edison wished. Edison would overnight become the largest talking machine company in the world. If it declined the offer, Dyer warned, there were rumors that Europe's Lindstrom (makers of Odeon and Fonotipia) might buy Columbia, as a way to get into the U.S. market.

Dyer acknowledged two possible objections. In order to insure that the Columbia product line was treated fairly, Easton wanted a Columbia executive–probably General Manager George W. Lyle–to assume a senior position within Edison. That might be viewed as a "fox in the henhouse." Second, there was suspicion of Easton's motives. Why would he walk away from a company he said was so financially successful? There was also, Dyer acknowledged, the matter

of personal animus. "There is a feeling that has always existed against the Columbia Co., and Mr. Easton personally, as being unscrupulous and unreliable. This seems to be almost a tradition with our company. I know that Mr. Johnson [President of Victor] entertains the same feeling."

What a fascinating insight into the human dynamics that drive business decisions, then and now! There was no shortage of outsized egos in the executive suites of Edison and Victor, of course, and it is not surprising that their leaders would despise the man who had denied them their "rightful" monopolies. Unfortunately, we have no record of what Easton thought of *them*. Dyer, however, was very calm and balanced in his analysis. In Easton's defense he pointed out that "many of the men who have worked with Mr. Easton for years speak in the highest terms of him. Mr. Cromelin, for example, has told me that Mr. Easton has always been most considerate of him and that he regards him most highly." [This is presumably Paul Cromelin, a high Columbia executive who had just left to join Edison.] "Whatever may be said of the Columbia Company or Mr. Easton, can they possibly be any worse than some of our friends in the moving picture business?" Yesterday's enemies are often tomorrow's allies, when interests converge.

Dyer clearly thought Mr. Edison should consider the offer. The next step would have been for auditors to go over the books. But the cranky inventor, evidently, would have none of it. Just as he had slammed the door on Bell and Tainter in 1886, when they offered to combine their improvements to the phonograph with his own, there is no evidence that he seriously considered Easton's surprising offer of 1911. He would run his own company his own way–eventually, into the ground. It is fascinating to consider, however, how different the industry would have been had things turned out differently.

Columbia Demonstration Records

Meanwhile, Columbia's promotion of Double-Discs continued unabated. For the 1910 Christmas season the company released a special 10¢ promotional record which caused an unexpected sensation. On one side basso Frank C. Stanley delivered a strident sales pitch for Double-Disc records ("Double Disc, double value, double wear, double everything except price. Don't put your money into any other!"), followed by examples of various instruments playing. On the other side the Columbia Male Quartette rendered the old chestnut, "Kentucky Babe." Circumstantial evidence suggests that hundreds of thousands of copies of this record were distributed, the equivalent of a modern-day multi-million seller. Its success prompted Columbia to issue another demonstration record in 1913, this one selling for 25¢. Although the speaker on this has not been identified, historian Jim Walsh believed that it might be none other than Edward D. Easton himself! (No documented recording of Easton's voice exists, so this is impossible to verify.) On the reverse side was "Good Night, Little Girl, Good Night" by tenor Henry Burr. The success of the 1913 demonstration record exceeded everyone's wildest expectations; later reports claimed that it had sold three to five *million* copies, which, if true, would surely make it the biggest selling record during the first half century of the phonograph.[52]

In January 1913 the Columbia Phonograph Company, Gen'l, was renamed the Columbia Graphophone Company, finally recognizing its principal product, the Graphophone. That spring the executive offices were moved to the newly opened Woolworth Building, an ornate, sixty-story skyscraper that was at the time the tallest building in America, and one of the most prestigious addresses in New York City. Columbia seemed to be asserting its stature among the great corporations of America. Although Edward Easton remained titular President, there were a

number of changes in the executive ranks. Paul H. Cromelin, Vice President and a moving force behind many triumphs of the early 1900s had resigned to join British Edison in 1911, and George W. Lyle, General Manager since 1904, left that key position to become 1st Vice President. The company began to actively pursue several new lines of business. An Educational Department was opened with the goal of selling Graphophones and records to schools around the country. Two new numerical series, the S3000's (10-inch) and S7500s (12-inch) were begun for this purpose c.1912.[53]

Personal Recording

In 1915, with some fanfare, a Personal Record Department was set up to solicit business from private individuals who wanted to make a record. Columbia had always been willing to provide this service for a fee, and "private recordings" have been located dating from pre-1910, but now the service was formalized with brochures, special labels, and a schedule of fees.

Correspondence has been located relating to the private recordings made by black tenor Roland Hayes, which give a fascinating insight into the specifics of personal recording at Columbia.[54] Hayes was quoted a base price of $50 to make one ten-inch master, with three single-faced pressings provided. Piano accompaniment was included. However if he wished to record additional instruments or voices, such as a quartet, the price escalated: $60 for two or three instruments or voices, $75 for four to eight, and $100 for more than eight. Sound balancing for multiple artists was a difficult and time-consuming process. Prices to make a twelve-inch master or to receive double-faced pressings were commensurately higher. Columbia had no objection if he sold these records commercially (which he did, by mail order), but the cost of additional pressings was high. Columbia charged $1 each for the first 50 copies of a ten-inch, single faced disc, declining to about 60¢ each in quantities of 500. Ten-inch double-disc pressings cost about 92¢ each in quantity, and to all of these amounts had to be added the original cost of recording. With standard store-stock Columbias retailing at 75¢ in 1917, there was not much profit to be made by a small operator hoping to get into the record business this way. This was essentially a vanity business. Its chief customers were churches and other religious groups, along with an occasional lodge or corporation that wanted a recording for promotional purposes.

The industry was thrown into an uproar in late 1914 with the introduction of another kind of record, the 10¢ "Little Wonder."[55] Although Little Wonder was not owned by Columbia, the 5½-inch discs were manufactured at Columbia's Bridgeport plant under protection of the company's patents. They were single-faced and only had room for a single verse and chorus of a song, but at such a low price they sold like hotcakes. Reportedly a total of 4.5 million were sold in January 1915 alone, and 20 million by mid 1916. Little Wonder was run by music publisher Henry Waterson, but it soon became known that Columbia executive Victor Emerson, who had authorized the use of the company's facilities and patents, was personally profiting from them as well. As a result he was forced out of Columbia, which eventually took over the label and wound it down. Like the huge-selling Columbia Demonstration records, Little Wonder demonstrated that there was an enormous potential market for low-priced records, posing an obvious threat to Victor and Columbia's high profit margins. As long as the two companies could maintain market control and keep prices high through their patent monopoly, they had no intention of undermining profits through price cutting. Had they done so, there would be a lot more records from the 1910s surviving for us to study.

The following year marked the end of an era at Columbia. Founder Edward D. Easton died on April 30, 1915, severing the last link with the company's earliest days. Although he had been intermittently ill and less involved in day-to-day affairs in recent years, he was a symbol of continuity. Most of the other top managers of the early 1900s were gone as well. Paul Cromelin and Victor Emerson had left, and inventor and factory chief Thomas Macdonald had died in 1911. Former General Manager George W. Lyle left the company shortly after Easton's death.[56] Ace attorney Philip Mauro, responsible for the patent victories that had kept Columbia alive at the turn of the century, was apparently less involved in company affairs as well.

Easton's son Mortimer Easton served briefly on the Board of Directors after his father's death, but the "founder's era" was over. As a sidelight, it is interesting to note the relative wealth gained by the various participants in Columbia's success. Easton's estate was estimated at $1 million, a considerable sum for 1915.[57] When Macdonald's estate was probated in 1911, it was estimated to be worth only $25,000.[58] It pays to own the company.

Of course Easton's fortune paled in comparison with that of Victor founder Eldridge R. Johnson, who sold his Victor stock in 1927 for $28 million.[59]

A new generation of management now took over. Industrialist Philip T. Dodge, longtime head of the Mergenthaler Linotype Co., and the man who in 1914 had saved the financially troubled International Paper Company, was recruited as the new president of Columbia.[60] He immediately put his stamp on operations, which may have helped precipitate a bitter strike later in the year that closed the Bridgeport plant for more than two weeks.[61] After about two years Dodge moved up to the new post of Chairman of the Board and was replaced by Francis S. Whitten. In December 1917 the new management reorganized the parent American Graphophone Co., giving it the new and rather descriptive name, the Columbia Graphophone Manufacturing Co. "American Graphophone," a name that dated from the birth of the industry (1887), was no more.

Columbia continued to be an aggressively managed company, number two in sales to Victor but always looking for an ways to increase its market share. It pioneered the recording of first-class symphony orchestras in 1916, and in late 1917 concluded a deal with Harper & Co. publishers to manufacture 5½-inch recordings of children's songs (numbered in the Little Wonder series) for inclusion in Harper's "Bubble Books" for children. These were best sellers.

Another strike at the Bridgeport plant, this one lasting for a month, slowed things down in the late summer of 1919. It ended only after the company threatened to move the plant elsewhere. Nevertheless the postwar boom of 1919 and 1920 resulted in banner years for the industry. Columbia reported net income of $7.8 million in 1919 and $7.3 million in 1920.[62] President Whitten observed in his 1920 report that as a result of the new tax law the company was forced to pay more than 45% of its net profits to the government, hampering its ability to expand, and he called for Congress to change "this unwise law." If it had, Columbia might have been in a better position to weather the difficult times to come.

Individual hit records, which five years earlier might ship 20,000 copies, were now selling in the 100,000 range, and some did much better than that. The highest totals I have documented during this period were 674,000 copies for "Beautiful Ohio" by Henry Burr, backed with "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" by Campbell and Burr (A2701), and 832,000 for "Dardanella" by Prince's Dance Orchestra (A2851).[63] Sales of phonographs were also strong, and anticipating further expansion in 1921, Columbia placed large orders for phonograph cabinets and other supplies.

Then disaster struck. A major economic downturn hit suddenly in 1921, affecting all segments of the entertainment industry. Columbia saw its total sales plummet from $47 million to $19 million, and net income from a $7.3 million profit to a $2.3 million loss.[64] This might have been sustainable except that the company was also heavily in debt due to its orders for goods (now unneeded) and plant expansion. There were widespread layoffs and a shakeup in the Board Room. President Whitten moved up to Chairman of the Board in January 1921 and was replaced by Van Horn Ely, President of the American Railways Co. and a member of the Columbia Board.[65] Ely lasted only a year before being replaced by H.L. Willson, a former Columbia General Manager.

Management scrambled to try to save the company from creditors, who were already circling. In May 1921 Grafonola prices were slashed by as much as one-third to try to stimulate sales, bringing the cheapest table model down to $30.[66] But there was little improvement, and in February 1922 a number of disgruntled bond holders petitioned the court to force the company into involuntary bankruptcy.[67] A creditors' committee was formed and the petition was denied, at least for the time being. Continuing drastic cuts in operating expenses were made during the following year, including the termination of many employees. It is perhaps not coincidental that Charles A. Prince, who as a longtime employee was probably making a relatively high salary by this time, left in early 1922.

As if a full-blown depression wasn't enough, competition was proliferating with the expiration (or overturning in court) of the company's fundamental patents. As a result a price war had broken out in the record industry. As recently as 1920 Columbia ten inch discs had sold for $1 each, but new labels such as Regal (1921) and Cameo (1922) were entering the market with 50¢ discs. In April 1921 Columbia cut the price of its popular ten-inch discs to 85¢, and in March 1922 cut them again to 75¢. (Victor made similar cuts.) In a desperate effort to raise cash, the British branch was sold in December 1922 to a group of investors led by English Columbia's General Manager Louis Sterling.[68] On January 1, 1923 the profitable Dictaphone division, established in 1908, was sold for $1 million.[69] January 1923 also saw the introduction of "New Process" records, a laminated disc with a smoother playing surface promoted as "virtually noiseless... music unalloyed by distracting scratch or scrape."[70]

All of these efforts helped a little, but not enough.

In October 1923 another creditors' group demanded payment, filing a petition for involuntary bankruptcy. Despite the company's pleas for patience, the Columbia Graphophone Manufacturing Co. was forced into receivership. Assets were estimated at $18.7 million, and liabilities at $23.9 million. Judge Learned Hand appointed James R. Sheffield and Columbia President H.L. Willson to carry on the business under court supervision. Operations continued uninterrupted during the reorganization, with monthly lists of new releases. In December, in fact, a new label design (the "flag" label) was introduced and the disc numbering system changed for the first time since 1908. Ten-inch popular discs were now numbered from 1-D upwards, and twelve-inch from 50,000-D. Other series were introduced for specialty series; an "F" suffix was used for ethnic releases.

Columbia emerged from receivership in February 1924 as the Columbia Phonograph Company Inc., only to be dealt yet another devastating blow in the form of competition from radio, which was spreading like wildfire. Full price labels were especially hard hit. Why should consumers pay 75¢ for a new Columbia disc when even better sounding music was free on the radio, and if you wanted a record you could get a perfectly good one from one of the minor labels

for 35¢ or 50¢? Victor saw its business drop 20% from 1923 to 1924, and another 20% from 1924 to 1925, to the lowest level since 1915 (except for the war year of 1918, when supplies were short).[71] Columbia's losses were probably even greater.

Columbia sold off more assets, including its Canadian operation in July 1924, but drastic action was needed in order to stave off utter collapse. Then, out of the blue, a "white knight" arrived. He was none other than Louis Sterling, the Managing Director of the English Columbia Company, which had spun off from the American company in 1922. Through adroit management Sterling had turned the failing British branch around, and he thought he could do the same for the American "mother company." He also had his eye on the rights to something the American company had access to, that he wanted—a potentially revolutionary electrical recording process. A number of record companies had been experimenting with electric recording to replace the antique, and quite limited, acoustic recording horn. British Columbia had actually pressed an experimental electrical disc in 1920 (Burial of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey), and in 1921 U.S. Columbia had made a number of electrical trials with some of its popular artists. The results were disappointing. It was the engineers at Bell Labs-Western Electric who got it right, however, and in the fall of 1924 they offered their process to both Victor and Columbia. Victor was having a management crisis at the time and delayed its response, while Columbia was simply too broke to afford the considerable investment. In December Louis Sterling found out about Western Electric's breakthrough and wanted it, but Western Electric would only make it available through an American affiliate. So Sterling immediately sailed to New York and opened negotiations to buy Columbia. In March 1925 he purchased a controlling interest in the company for $2.5 million.[72] Columbia promptly signed with Western Electric, followed a few weeks later by Victor.

Electrical recording at Columbia began on a regular basis in April, although the most spectacular of the early electric issues was a field recording of the Associated Glee Clubs of America—4,850 voices strong—made at the Metropolitan Opera House on March 31, 1925 (50013-D). Surprisingly, neither Columbia nor Victor billed their new releases as electrically recorded until 1926, however. This was in order to give dealers time to sell off their huge stocks of older acoustic discs. However the change must have been apparent. Even on cursory listening the records *sounded* different, fuller and with much more bass, just like radio. It was the beginning of the rebirth of the battered industry.

Sterling installed H.C. Cox as President and himself as Chairman of the Board, and began liquidating the large stock of obsolete records and phonographs and upgrading the company's manufacturing plant. In order to get a cut of the expanding low-priced record market he launched a series of budget labels, beginning with Harmony (September, 1925) and followed by Velvet-Tone (1926) and Diva (1927), the latter a custom label for the W.T. Grant department stores. These were recorded separately from Columbia, but they often used Columbia artists recording under pseudonyms. In a master stroke of economy, Sterling put his now-obsolete acoustic recording equipment to work recording the budget label material. Those releases remained acoustic until mid 1929. Sometimes old acoustic Columbia masters were recycled on these cheap labels as well.

On November 1, 1926 Sterling expanded further by buying the leading blues and country label, Okeh, from the General Phonograph Company. Okeh was operated as an independent, separately recorded subsidiary for the rest of the 1920s. Also during late 1926 he countered Victor's stunning new Orthophonic phonograph (an acoustic machine engineered for the best

possible reproduction of the new electric discs) with Columbia's own Viva-tonal phonograph. The first electrically amplified models were introduced about a year later.

It took time, but Sterling's hard-nosed management eventually began to turn the company around. After a loss of $875,000 for the year ending February 28, 1926, Columbia/Okeh posted a $270,000 profit for the following year—its first profitable year since 1920. Nineteen twenty-seven was even better ($760,000), thanks in no small part to the phenomenal success of a comedy record issued without any particular notice during the summer. "The Two Black Crows" by Moran and Mack sold over a million copies.

Emboldened by success, Sterling undertook other ventures that proved less profitable. In July 1927 Columbia signed a deal with Federal-Brandes to market its Kolster radio set as the Columbia-Kolster. Several companies had been fabulously successful in the mid 1920s by being first on the market with reliable and affordable home radios. However in 1927 everyone was jumping on the bandwagon, and by 1930 Kolster was in receivership.

Also in 1927 Columbia lent its name to an incipient radio network that would in later years become a colossus. Columbia took over the chain from promoter Arthur Judson when it was still in the planning stages, and renamed it the Columbia Broadcasting System.[73] The new network went on the air in September with 14 stations in the East and Midwest; Columbia provided ten hours per week of programming. Programs included "The Columbia Phonograph Hour" with the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, conductor Fritz Reiner, Charles Hackett and Sophie Braslau.[74] Columbia no doubt hoped to reap publicity from the venture, as Victor had from its association with NBC, but the costs proved too great and Columbia sold out to United Independent Broadcasters in November. The name CBS stuck, however.

In 1928 Columbia signed the most famous (and highest priced) band leader of the 1920s, Paul Whiteman. Although Columbia flooded the market with Whiteman recordings (as had Victor before it), his sales were on the decline, and he stayed with the label for only two years.

Columbia nearly merged with Paramount Pictures in 1929, but the deal fell through. There were also negotiations with Westinghouse Electric toward the possibility that Columbia might begin marketing television sets.[75] Columbia had posted another substantial profit in 1928, and seemed to be in a strong position once again. To celebrate his fiftieth birthday, and his twentieth anniversary with the company, Louis Sterling showed his generosity by distributing $500,000 as a gift to Columbia employees around the world. Individual employees received from $75 to $5,000 according to length of service.[76]

Then, for the company, for the industry, and for America, the bottom suddenly fell out. The stock market crash of October, 1929, looked at first like another temporary downturn. But as the crisis worsened during 1930 and 1931, Columbia—like other record companies—saw its business shrivel away to almost nothing. Even the legerdemain of Louis Sterling could not pull it out of this one. The record industry as a whole went from 105 million units produced in 1929 to 31 million in 1931, and to an incredible 10 million or less in 1933.[77] Practically all of the independent labels were swept away. Victor survived only by virtue of its ownership by the powerful radio conglomerate RCA.

Conditions were dire in England as well. In March 1931, the Gramophone Company, the Columbia Graphophone Co., Ltd. and Parlophone merged to form Electric and Musical Industries, Ltd. (EMI). This raised anti-trust problems in the U.S. British Columbia owned U.S. Columbia, while the Gramophone Co. was a wholly-owned subsidiary of Victor, which meant that Victor now indirectly controlled its chief U.S. competitor, Columbia. As a result in May

1931 Sterling was forced to turn over his interests in the U.S. company to a voting trust composed of U.S. banks.[78] Eight months later, on January 16, 1932, the Trustees sold what was left of U.S. Columbia to the Grigsby-Grunow Company, a manufacturer of refrigerators and radio sets.[79] Grigsby-Grunow's chief claim to fame was its best selling radio set, the Majestic, "Mighty Monarch of the Air."

The new owners began clearing out obsolete stock, and in June discontinued the now-moribund "budget" labels Harmony, Velvet Tone and Clarion (begun in 1930). A five minute "longer playing" disc (18,000-D series) was introduced which played at standard speed on regular machines, presumably to compete with Victor's long play 33 1/3 rpm discs which required special equipment.[80] Columbia standard issues switched to a "Royal Blue" label, with a newly formulated, very quiet-sounding blue wax surface, in December, 1932.

Columbia's new president H.E. Ward said that Columbia would soon begin manufacturing radios, and confidently declared that the company "had no debts, that cash on hand was sufficient for effective operation and that there were no plant maintenance costs."[81] But by November 1933 parent Grigsby-Grunow itself was in receivership, and Columbia was once again on the block. In early 1934 it was sold to the American Record Corp., a kind of dustbin for failed record labels, for a paltry $70,000. Edward Easton must have turned over in his grave.

Throughout this troubled period Columbia continued to issue new releases, splendidly recorded, although not at the rate of earlier years. Because of its high cost and low margins, classical repertoire was largely imported from Europe. Popular issues continued until 1936, after which the Columbia label was used only for occasional classical releases and specialty product. For its revival Columbia would have to once again wait for a white knight to appear. History repeated itself when a subsidiary that Columbia had discarded emerged to save the beleaguered parent. In 1925 it had been British Columbia, in 1939 it was the Columbia Broadcasting System, which in the intervening years had grown large and powerful. CBS would build Columbia into something it had always wanted to be, but never achieved: America's number one record label. That, however, is another story.

Popular Recordings, 1901-1925

Columbia was responsible for a vast range of recordings over the years, as documented in the *Columbia Master Book Discography.* The following suggests the extent of its recording activity.

The initial Climax recording program was designed to build up a catalog quickly, and not surprisingly consisted mostly of "standard" songs and marches rather than current popular hits. Master number 1 was the orchestra selection "In a Clock Store," in which various timepieces clang and bang, perhaps an appropriate analogy for the busy Climax studio. Others among the first few dozen recordings included nineteenth century art songs and show tunes ("The Lost Chord," "The Heart Bowed Down"), snatches from opera ("Si Puo?" from *I Pagliacci*), the Broadway hit "Tell Me, Pretty Maiden" and the inevitable "The Holy City." Artists included names familiar to buyers of cylinders and discs of the period: Emilio de Gogorza (as "Ed Franklin"), Dudley and Macdonough, Joseph Natus, William F. Hooley, Edward M. Favor, J.J. Fisher, John Kaiser and banjoist Ruby Brooks. All of these were non-exclusive artists who worked for almost every label in the New York area. The little known Julia Allen was one of the few women recorded. Violinist Fred Hager, previously associated primarily with Zon-O-Phone, appears to have been the Climax studio band leader.

There were few celebrity recordings. One was a single record of Broadway stars Max and Gus Rogers, in their sketch "The Rogers Brothers Playing Golf" (no. 296), the only known recording by these important entertainers. Reputedly three of the original chorus girls from the smash hit show *Florodora* took part in the sextette recording, "Tell Me, Pretty Maiden" (647), but if so nothing was written about it at the time.[82] A major project was Len Spencer's minstrel series, nos. 641-646, in which a troupe of performers realistically recreated parts of an old fashioned minstrel show (Spencer, with his Imperial Minstrels, had been producing minstrel vignettes for various companies since 1894). Black performer George W. Johnson, one of the few African-Americans to record commercially in the 1890s, remade his specialties "The Laughing Song" and "The Whistling Coon" for the new discs.

As noted earlier, the Climax recording laboratory appears to have been separate from that of Columbia, which continued to turn out the strong selling cylinders. One obvious difference between Climax discs and Columbia cylinders was the studio orchestras. The leader on disc was generally Fred Hager, while cylinders featured the Columbia Orchestra (led, presumably, by Charles A. Prince). Band selections on Climax are by the "Climax Band," while on cylinder they are usually by Gilmore's Band.

Among the best sellers of 1902, judging by the number of surviving copies, were Harry Spencer's "Arkansaw Traveler" (21) and the ragtime instrumentals "Creole Belles" (330) and "At a Georgia Camp Meeting" (406). Ragtime was represented on early Climax/Columbia recordings, although not always in the solo piano performances favored by purists (few piano solos of any type were recorded in the early 1900s). Banjo virtuoso Vess L. Ossman recorded numerous rags for the label during the first decade of the twentieth century, including Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag" (3626) in 1907, and Mike Bernard began a notable series of ragtime piano recordings in 1912. Often overlooked are the raggy accompaniments to vocal recordings of the day, for example the heavily syncopated piano accompaniment to Len Spencer's "On Emancipation Day" (1028), recorded in 1902.

Classical snippets such as the "Anvil Chorus" from *Il Trovatore* and "The William Tell Overture" always did well, as did standard selections such as "The Holy City" and "The Jolly Coppersmith." A few selections first made around this time remained in the Columbia catalog for nearly 30 years.[83] Len Spencer's sketches "Backyard Conversation Between Two Jealous Irish Washerwomen" (398, with Steve Porter) and "Scene at a Dog Fight" (887, with Gilbert Girard), classics of their genre, were available on Columbia until 1928, and on the budget Velvet Tone label after that. The Climax/Columbia Quartette's "Onward Christian Soldiers" (754) marched on and on in the catalog until 1930. Cal Stewart's "Uncle Josh" routines were best sellers that remained available for years, although he frequently remade his routines.

A topical novelty that turns up often is the notorious "Address by the Late President McKinley at the Pan American Exposition" (833). McKinley gave the speech at the opening of the great exposition in May, 1901, four months before he was assassinated at the same location. The title implies that it is McKinley himself who is speaking, but it is not. Columbia finally came clean in a later Marconi label release, where the speaker was identified as Harry Spencer. The Climax/Columbia Quartette also eulogized the martyred leader in "Hymns and Prayers from the Funeral Service over President McKinley" (453), which includes chimes and the quartette rendering "Lead Kindly Light" and "Nearer My God to Thee" in suitably solemn tones.

Other notable early recordings include a series of "clever imitations" of famous stage personalities (660, 662, 744), which seldom turn up today, and five titles by the great 19th-

century cornetist Jules Levy (917-921), made the year before he died. The versatile Len Spencer produced the multi-disc set "An Evening with the Minstrels" in early 1903 (1109A through 1109L). Played back-to-back, the 12 discs constituted a continuous half hour minstrel show hosted by Len and his brother Harry, complete with the rarely heard olio, and featuring a wide range of Columbia talent in gags, specialties and songs.

Artists with large numbers of releases during the later single-face era included baritone George Alexander, balladeer Henry Burr, comedians Arthur Collins and Byron G. Harlan (together and separately), the Columbia Quartette, comic singer Billy Murray, popular baritone J.W. Myers, "coon singer" Bob Roberts and storyteller Cal Stewart. Producer Len Spencer lent his highly melodramatic delivery to a variety of skits (which he often wrote) as well as songs. The female voice did not generally record well, and was less often heard. Perhaps the most popular female singer of the period was foghorn-voiced Ada Jones, alone and partnered with Len Spencer or Billy Murray.

The Spencer brothers were two of the most active figures in early recording history. Harry (Henry) Spencer (1875-1946) is often confused with his older brother Len (1867-1914) on record. Both had deep, resonant baritone voices, although Len, who recorded more widely, had a more florid style of delivery. Harry specialized in spoken word recordings, and was Columbia's regular studio announcer from about 1898 to 1904. His most widely circulated recording was undoubtedly the aforementioned "Arkansaw Traveler," which is often misattributed to Len.[84]

Myers and Stewart signed exclusive contracts with Columbia for brief periods, but by and large most of these New York "studio men" were heard on many other labels as well.[85]

No individual sales figures survive for this early period, but one of the biggest sellers must have been Arthur Collins' ingratiating rendition of the story-song, "The Preacher and the Bear." He recorded it in 1905 for all three major labels (Columbia, Victor, Edison), as well as many minor ones. Also very frequently found in piles of old records is "The Herd Girl's Dream," by the violin, flute and harp trio of Stehl, Lufsky and Sürth. Issued during the summer of 1908, at the very end of the single face era, it was immediately reissued on double faced discs and sold steadily for many years. In 1912 Columbia said that it was "the most popular selection that our catalogue has ever contained," and in a widely seen advertisement claimed that it "has already had the largest sale of any record in the world."[86]

Columbia, like Victor (and to a lesser extent Edison), enhanced its lists with occasional recordings by well-known celebrities. These brought prestige although most did not sell well. They represent important historic documents, and are of special interest to collectors. Among the earliest were a pair of recordings by renowned actor Joseph Jefferson, who made both disc and cylinder versions of scenes from his most famous play, *Rip Van Winkle,* in mid 1903. Columbia was especially grateful to Jefferson. The old actor was evidently such a publicity hound that he agreed to make the recordings for free, a gesture that cash-strapped Columbia deeply appreciated! It was not Jefferson's first time in front of a recording horn. He was said to have recorded while playing Dr. Pangloss in *The Heir at Law* (1890), and later made Berliner discs. He even filmed some scenes from *Rip Van Winkle* for Biograph. He died in 1905 at the age of 76.[87]

Later stage personalities on Columbia included Thomas Q. Seabrooke (1904), Emma Carus (1904) and Lew Dockstader (1905), the last of the great minstrel stars. A coup in 1906—and for posterity—was the signing of Broadway stars Bert Williams and George Walker, the most successful black entertainers of the day. Williams and Walker had previously recorded for Victor in 1901, but those primitive recordings had limited distribution and were already out

of print. Walker made only one Columbia recording, a duet with Williams. It would be his last, as he retired in 1909 and died two years later. Williams, however, would become one of Columbia's biggest stars. During the 1906 sessions he made his first recording of his signature song, "Nobody," which became a substantial hit.

Among the other recordings of historical interest from this period were a 1905 talk by Admiral Robert Peary, who was about to leave for the North Pole. (He didn't make it, and the records were not released. Peary finally reached the Pole in 1909, then recorded his reminiscences for Victor.) In 1905 Columbia released in the U.S. a pair of cylinders made by the aged Pope Leo XIII in 1903. These were the first recordings of a Pontiff to be released, and had been recorded in Rome by Gianni Bettini. They evidently were not widely distributed. No clear copies are known to survive, although a disc dubbing made long ago is at the Library of Congress.[88]

Major recording stars of the teens included Bert Williams and Al Jolson, the latter moving over from Victor. Jolson's first session for Columbia, in June 1913, produced one of his all-time hits, "You Made Me Love You." However probably the biggest unit sellers were standard selections such as "The Herd Girl's Dream" and numerous Hawaiian selections recorded during the Hawaiian craze of the mid teens. Judging by figures in the Columbia files, a typical successful record at this time might ship 15,000-20,000 copies. Hawaiian guitarists Louise and Ferera's "Drowsy Waters" (A2016), released in 1916, shipped 25,000 copies initially but by the early 1920s had reached 322,000 copies in print. Similarly "Aloha Oe" by the Toots Paka Hawaiian Company (A1616, 306,000 copies), "Hilo, Hawaiian March" by the Irene West Royal Hawaiians (A1812, 279,000) and "Kalima Waltz" by Palie K. Lua and David Kaili of West's troupe (A1874, 226,000) were long-term mega-sellers.

Novelty hits were unpredictable, but could also score huge sales. Two series that did extremely well in the teens were Joe Hayman's English "Cohen" series, beginning with "Cohen on the Telephone" in 1913; and Julian Rose's "Levinsky at the Wedding" discs (1917). The first two installments of the Levinsky series shipped more than 200,000 copies each.

Many celebrities were recorded during this period, among them Broadway stars Bert Williams, Jolson, Weber and Fields (1912), Lillian Russell (unissued, 1912), Chauncey Olcott (1913), Nora Bayes (1918), Van and Schenck (1918) and Eddie Cantor (1922); and vaudevillians Gene Greene (1911), Marion Harris (1920), and Blossom Seeley (1921). Other famous personalities who stepped before the Columbia recording horn included songwriter Irving Berlin, then still in vaudeville (1910), naturalist and boy scout leader Ernest Thompson Seton (1913), Margaret Woodrow Wilson (1914), gospel singer Homer Rodeheaver (1916), composer Percy Grainger (1918) and war hero Lieut. Gitz-Rice (1918).

The dance craze that swept American during 1913-1914, spearheaded by the fabulous Vernon and Irene Castle, brought a sudden demand for dance records. Victor had managed to sign Vernon Castle himself to supervise a series of records by his "house" orchestras—the Castle House Orchestra for waltzes, and James Reese Europe's black orchestra for the hot numbers. Columbia responded in early 1914 by engaging noted dance instructor G. Hepburn Wilson to "supervise" its dance records by Prince's Orchestra and others. Wilson remained with Columbia for at least five years. In addition, elegant dancer Joan Sawyer, a chief rival of the Castles, lent her name to two Columbia dance records by her personal orchestra, which was then appearing at her Persian Garden club in New York. Although Columbia did not admit it, "Joan Sawyer's Persian Garden Orchestra" was in fact a black orchestra led by Clef Club President Dan Kildare,

and only the second black orchestra to record commercially in the U.S. (after Jim Europe).[89] A series of special dance instruction discs (A1540-A1543) was released in August 1914.

Columbia was a little slow in responding when recorded jazz arrived noisily on the scene in early 1917. The explosion was sparked by the sensational success on Victor of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, a band that Columbia had earlier tested but failed to issue. During the following months Columbia rushed out sides by Borbee's Jass Orchestra (1917), Earl Fuller's Rector Novelty Orchestra (1917), Harry Yerkes' Jazarimba Orchestra (1918), W.C. Handy (1918) and Wilbur Sweatman (1918). The company finally released its own Original Dixieland Jazz Band sides in September 1917, but they paled in comparison with the vibrant recordings the group had made for Victor.

With the arrival of the 1920s jazz and dance bands were the rage. Columbia featured the Louisiana Five (1919), Ted Lewis' Jazz Band (1919), Earl Oliver's Happy Six (1919), Art Hickman's San Francisco orchestra (1920), Sam Lanin's orchestra (1920), Ray Miller (1922), the California Ramblers (1922), Frank Westphal and his Rainbo Orchestra (1922), the Paul Specht Orchestra (1922), the Georgians (1923), Jan Garber (1923), the Original Memphis Five (1923) and the Fletcher Henderson Orchestra (1923). Charles A. Prince continued to lead the studio band and orchestra until 1922, and was assigned many of the passing hits of the day. His infectious recording of "Dardanella" (A2851) shipped 832,000 copies, possibly the biggest selling regular Columbia release of the entire acoustic era. One suspects buyers bought it for the song, not Prince's name; practically everybody recorded this monster hit, including classical violinist Sascha Jacobsen.

After Prince's departure the name "The Columbians" was frequently used for studio orchestra recordings.

The blues explosion on record began in 1920 with the unexpected success of Mamie Smith's "Crazy Blues" on the small Okeh label. Columbia's first authentic blues artist was Mary Stafford, who recorded Mamie's big hit for the company in early 1921. She stayed with the label for about a year, followed by the Southern Negro Quartet (1921), Edith Wilson with Johnny Dunn's Jazz Hounds (1921), Leona Williams and her Dixie Band (1922) and then Bessie Smith (1923). Bessie's "Down Hearted Blues" in 1923 shipped a phenomenal 275,000 copies, establishing her as the number one blues singer of the era.

Country music made its appearance during the summer of 1924 with the initial recordings by fiddler/showman Gid Tanner and banjo player Riley Puckett (of the Skillet Lickers), along with banjo picker Ernest Thompson. Country entered the mainstream later that year with popular singer Vernon Dalhart's twangy version of "The Prisoner's Song" on Victor, which became something of a national disease. Dalhart recorded the song for every other label in sight (his Columbia version was issued in January 1925), and promptly converted to country music. He seldom recorded anything else for the rest of his career.

African-American Artists

Besides the black jazz bands and blues artists of the 1920s, Columbia recorded a surprising number of African-American artists over the years. The novelty songs of black street performer George W. Johnson remained in the Columbia catalog (first on cylinder, later on disc) from the time the company moved to New York in 1895 until 1915, two years after Johnson's death. As noted earlier pioneer black stage star Bert Williams began with the label in 1906 and was a top

seller until his death in 1922. One of the best known groups performing serious black music was the world famous Fisk University Jubilee Singers, who joined Columbia in 1915 after recording for Victor and Edison. They remained with Columbia until 1926, and several of their spirituals were best sellers.[90]

Not all African-American artists were so highly promoted, however. In some cases, Columbia hid the fact that an artist was black. Carroll Clark, a concert tenor from Denver, was a Columbia artist from 1908 until 1924, but he was assigned mostly standard "Southern songs" (Stephen Foster, etc.) and his race was never revealed. The catalog listing for his version of "Swanee River" was accompanied by a picture of the river!

Less well known today are the Apollo Male Quartette, an apparently black jubilee group whose race was also not specified (1912); the Afro-American Folk Song Singers (1914), a chorus led by composer Will Marion Cook; Joan Sawyer's Persian Garden Orchestra (1914); and New York cabaret artists The Right Quintette (1915). Recording in Columbia's "personal" series (not for general issue) were such notables as black leader Booker T. Washington (1908), heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson (1910) and concert tenor Roland Hayes (1917).

Popular Recordings, 1925-1934

Even before the advent of electrical recording the phonograph industry had acknowledged the rapid spread of radio. Songs such as "Mr. Radio Man (Tell My Mamma to Come Back Home)" and "Radio Lady o' Mine" clogged record stores as well as the airwaves. There was also a short fad for having radio announcers appear on records, to "announce the next number"—a throwback to the announcements once found on cylinders and discs. George D. Hay, the "Solemn Old Judge" of station WLS, Chicago, introduced vaudevillians Ford and Glenn (on 303D) and band leader Art Kahn (336D), while Lamdin Kay of WSB, Atlanta, did the honors for Ed and Grace McConnell (314D). Later, Phillips Carlin of New York powerhouse WEAF introduced radio's Ipana Troubadours (680D).

The real answer to radio was not parody or gimmicks, however, but sound quality that could match the sound that was coming out of the electronic speakers in more and more homes. Columbia and Victor introduced electrical recording in the summer of 1925 without fanfare, but the difference must have been noticeable even on older machines. Suddenly the treble sparkled, and the bass boomed—albeit accompanied on occasion by noticeable hum and distortion, as the engineers got used to their new equipment.

An article in the May 30, 1925 *Billboard* magazine remarked that band leaders were experimenting with their instrumentation in order to cope with the new demands of electrical recording. Harsh-sounding banjos might be on the way out, while pianos, drums and cellos, which had never recorded well acoustically, could have a new lease on life.[91] Also in vogue were soft-voiced crooners, and even "whispering" tenors. Art Gillham, a radio performer billed as "The Whispering Pianist," began on Columbia in late 1924, but came into his own when the microphone arrived; Victor's answer to Gillham, in 1925, was the even more famous Whispering Jack Smith.

Leading the phonograph's recovery were dance bands, now increasingly cheery and increasingly featuring vocalists. Among the better known names joining Columbia in the late 1920s were Harry Reser's Clicquot Club Eskimos (1926), the Paul Ash Orchestra (1926), Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians (1927), and Will Osborne (1929). The early 1930s brought

a flood of new baton-wielders to Columbia: Ted Wallace, Anson Weeks ("Dancin' with Anson"), Bert Lown, Smith Ballew, Claude Hopkins, Art Kassel, Enric Madriguera, Freddie Rich, Phil Harris, Joe Haymes, Paul Ash, George Olsen, Ben Bernie, Benny Goodman, Ben Pollack and Emil Coleman among them.

Ben Selvin, a prolific free-lancer who had been directing Columbia studio groups including the Knickerbockers and the Cavaliers since 1924, became exclusive to Columbia from 1927-1934. Of course the biggest coup of all was snaring Paul Whiteman, "The King of Jazz," from Victor in 1928. Leading a band loaded with some of the greatest sidemen of the day (Bix Beiderbecke, Frankie Trumbauer, Andy Secrest, Matty Malneck, arrangers Bill Challis and Ferde Grofe, vocalist Bing Crosby) Whiteman made some classic recordings during his two years with the label.

Vocal stars on Columbia Viva-tonal discs included Ethel Waters (1925), Ruth Etting (1926), Kate Smith (1927), Lee Morse (1927), and Cliff "Ukulele Ike" Edwards (1928). Stage and screen stars included Gertrude Lawrence and Jack Buchanan (1926), Jimmy Durante (1929), Ken Maynard (1930), Charles "Buddy" Rogers (1930), and George Burns and Gracie Allen (1933). Controversial radio evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson cooed into the microphone in 1926 ("Come... come, unto me"), and George Gershwin was heard in 1927. Radio sensation Rudy Vallee, who had made personal recordings at Columbia in the early 1920s, made a brief appearance on the company's budget labels in 1928-1929 before moving to Victor for his biggest hits (he returned to Columbia from 1932-1933).

The biggest single hit record of the era, however, was an innocuous novelty by two black-face comics who were appearing in *Earl Carroll's Vanities.* Moran and Mack had previously been turned down by Victor, and Columbia issued their "lazy" comedy routine in June 1927 with no special expectations. To everybody's astonishment the "Two Black Crows, Parts 1&2" (935-D) took off like wildfire, eventually selling more than one million copies—one of only a handful of recordings to do so prior to the 1940s. Subsequent installments were also huge sellers.

Blues and country records continued to sell well, and were now listed in separate series in separate catalogs. In 1927 the rather remarkable "Fiddler's Convention in Georgia" (15140D) featured Clayton McMichen, Gid Tanner, Riley Puckett, Bob Nichols, Fate Norris and Bert Layne all on one disc.

Classical Recordings

After the 1903 Grand Opera debacle, Columbia looked overseas for classical vocal recordings. The April 1904 *Columbia Record* reported that engineer Frank Capps was in Italy securing discs and cylinders from a mix of Neapolitan artists and La Scala stars including Mieli, De Negre, Galli, Cecarcelli, Fornari, Vaili, Feberici, Parvis, Sambo, Migliardo, Olietti, Alasia, and Cantallamessa. By 1906 Columbia was recording some lesser known artists in the U.S. A March 1906 supplement in the author's collection is accompanied by a small slip headed "Columbia Operatic Records," which contains cylinders and discs by Arcangelo Rossi, Francisco Nuibo, Gina Ciaparelli and Taurino Parvis of the Met, A. Moser and Karl Meister of the Vienna Royal Opera, U. Pini-Corsi of La Scala, and Spanish baritone Alberto Seresca Caceres. All were issued in regular domestic or imported series, and sold at normal prices. Joining Columbia's roster somewhat later were Anton Van Rooy, Vittorio Arimondi, Lillian Blauvelt, Mme. José Grayville, Eduardo Castellano, Ruth Vincent, and David Bispham.

Although Columbia did not attempt to compete with Victor's highly promoted Red Seal series, it gave its own higher class products some distinctiveness in 1906 via a new "Symphony Series." These were ten and twelve-inch issues numbered in the regular series, but sporting a special multi-colored banner, which looked a little like a royal sash draped across the label. Most early 12-inch discs bear this label. Initially the repertoire was mixed (including a vaudeville routine by Ada Jones and Len Spencer), but by 1907 the Symphony Series was reserved for higher class talent including Vincent and Bispham.

In late 1906 Columbia announced the signing of British critic Hermann Klein as its "musical advisor."[92] Shortly thereafter it signed Lillian Nordica of the San Carlo Opera Co., and began importing the Fonotipia recordings of tenor Alessandro Bonci, a rival to Caruso. In mid 1907 Paul Cromelin traveled to Europe to strike deals with Fonotipia and the International Talking Machine Company (Odeon) to distribute their operatic recordings in the U.S. The rich trove included Sammarco, De Luca, Stracciari, Didur, Barrientos, Kubelik, Destinn, Lehmann and Hempel.[93] The Europeans seemed to think that they were doing the Americans a great favor. Emil Rink, General Manager of Fonotipia, was quoted as saying that "One thing we do not have to contend with... is the amazing quantity of rubbish the American trade handles in the line of so-called popular music. Our music, no matter of what kind, is sung by our regular staff of artists. Your talent here have what may be called talking machine voices, but such records would not be accepted by the European trade or the public."[94]

Take that, Collins and Harlan!

Columbia seemed particularly intrigued by the idea of recording larger ensembles. Although recording technology at the time could barely capture an eight or ten-piece brass band adequately, the company in early 1903 recorded several sides by rising young symphony conductor Walter Damrosch and his orchestra. Evidently they didn't turn out very well as only one was released (1208). In September 1910 a recording engineer named Hausmann was dispatched to Salt Lake City, Utah, to attempt to record the 300-voice Mormon Tabernacle Choir and its soloists. *Talking Machine World* dryly observed that "much difficulty was encountered,"[95] and out of approximately 20 masters attempted (mxs. 4878-4898) only half seem to have been issued, and only three of those were by the full choir.

Columbia became a little more willing to compete with Victor for celebrity artists during the balmy days of the 1910s. One of its first steps was to engage Henry Russell, Director of the Boston Opera Company, as its "Consulting Director of Opera" in October 1910. Russell's first project was to organize a Columbia Light Opera company to compete with Victor's wildly successful Victor Light Opera Company (formed in 1909).

Among the notable artists joining Columbia in the years that followed were Alice Nielsen (1910, from Victor), Mary Garden (1911), pianist Josef Hofmann (1911), Giovanni Zenatello (1912, from Fonotipia), Emmy Destinn and Leo Slezak (both 1912, from Victor), violinist Eugene Ysaye (1913), Maggie Teyte (1914), Margarete Matzenauer (1915, from Victor), cellist Pablo Casals (1915), Louis Graveure (1916), Hipolito Lazaro (1916, from Victor), Maria Barrientos (1917), Riccardo Stracciari (1917), violinist Toscha Seidel (1919), Rosa and Carmela Ponselle (1919), Charles Hackett (1919) and a smoulderingly handsome young violinist named Duci de Kerekjarto (1921).

Imports from its European affiliates remained a staple of Columbia's classical strategy during the teens. The March 1915 supplement announced 21 discs of "Grand Opera from Milan," by a wide range of singers who were largely unknown in the U.S. The recordings were

made in Columbia's Milan studio, "under the shadow of the famous La Scala." (Once, while in Milan, I tried to find this address; it is actually several blocks away. La Scala evidently casts a long shadow.) The following month brought an even more striking announcement: the entire opera *Aïda,* by Milan artists, on 17 ten-inch E-series discs. Unfortunately the recordings were not made at the same time and different artists sang the same role on different discs; playing them sequentially the listener would hear three Radames, three Amnerises, and four Aïdas! (L. Remondini was the most common Aïda, and G. Tommasini her most likely Radames.)

Experiments with large orchestras continued. In 1913 Henry Russell recruited the eminent composer/conductor Felix Weingartner to lead the newly organized Columbia Symphony Orchestra in a series of excerpts from the operatic and symphonic repertoire. A latter day critic called them "but faint harbingers of the huge quantity of excellent recordings Weingartner was to make for Columbia beginning a decade later."[96] Weingartner remained for only about a year, producing six issued sides. The Columbia Symphony was then led by Charles A. Prince, and later, in the 1920s, by staff conductor Robert Hood Bowers.

An even more ambitious, and historic, undertaking occurred in 1916. For about a year Prince's studio orchestra had been tackling symphonic overtures by Beethoven, Schubert and others. In October 1916 Columbia announced the release of the first-ever recording by a world class orchestra, the Chicago Symphony under Frederick Stock. Among the tidbits offered by this august ensemble were Mendelssohn's "Wedding March," the Prelude to *Lohengrin,* "The Ride of the Valkyries" from *Die Walküre,* and the inevitable "Poet and Peasant Overture."

The Chicago Symphony recordings were just the beginning. During the next few years Columbia staked its claim to the instrumental repertoire with the Musical Arts Society Choir conducted by Frank Damrosch (1916), the Cincinnati Symphony (1917), the New York Philharmonic under Josef Stransky (1917), the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra (1918) and the Paris Conservatory Symphony Orchestra (1919). Victor responded with the Boston and Philadelphia symphony orchestras. Maestro Walter Damrosch returned to Columbia conducting the New York Symphony in 1924, more than 20 years after his first, abortive recordings for the label. Even though the sonic range was still limited, these recordings by "real" symphony orchestras represented a striking improvement over those by the studio ensembles.

Columbia burnished its upscale image by sponsoring and advertising the book *The Lure of Music* by critic Olin Downes. In October 1924 the first eight Masterworks album sets were released, including full symphonies by leading European orchestras on three to five discs per set. Set number one was Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A Major, by Felix Weingartner and the London Symphony Orchestra.

Classical repertoire benefited even more than popular music from the advent of electrical recording. Orchestras such as the Concertgebouw of Amsterdam, directed by Wilhelm Mengelberg (1927), the London Symphony under Sir Thomas Beecham (1927), and the Halle Orchestra led by Sir Hamilton Harty (1927) could now be heard to maximum advantage. There was increasing emphasis on multi-disc sets in the Masterworks series. In 1927 the Beethoven Centennial was celebrated with a long list of album sets, including Symphonies one through eight. The following year brought a Wagner Beyreuth Festival set, recorded on location with conductor Karl Muck and soloist Alexander Kipnis; and sets memorializing the 1928 Schubert Centennial, which was "organized by the Columbia Phonograph Co." An imported Operatic Series was inaugurated in 1929 with complete symphonies and operas including *Carmen* as performed by the Paris Opera, and *La Traviata*, *Aïda*, *Madam Butterfly* and *La Bohême*, all by La

Scala Chorus with the Milan Symphony. These performances required as many as eighteen 12-inch discs each, but at least the same cast members were heard throughout a single opera.

Other additions to Columbia's classical roster included Richard Tauber (1928), Efrem Zimbalist (1928) and Lily Pons (1931).

Foreign Language Recordings[97]

Columbia had offered a limited number of foreign language recordings in its cylinder catalogs in the 1890s, a practice that continued during the early years of disc production. The very first Columbia disc catalog, in 1902, included a page and a half of vocal solos in French, German, Hebrew, Italian and Spanish. Artists (unnamed) included Emil Muench, Frank Seiden and the multi-lingual Emilio de Gogorza (as Edward Franklin). By 1906 the foreign-language section in the general catalog had grown to ten pages and twelve languages.

Much of Columbia's production in this area never appeared in the domestic listings, however. The company's first major venture in Asia occurred in early 1903, when ninety numbers (1260-1350) were set aside for an expedition to Shanghai. Shortly thereafter the entire block from 2000-2999 was reserved for recordings made in Japan in April and July 1903 under the supervision of Kingoro Ezawa, with the assistance of Shuzo Yano of the San Francisco office. Ezawa was the scion of a wealthy Japanese trading family which introduced the Graphophone to Japan through its stores there.[98] These Far Eastern recordings were sold primarily in that region, although a few have been found in the U.S. Listings of the Japanese recordings are reported to exist in that country.[99]

It quickly became apparent that a single domestic matrix series was not sufficient to keep track of recordings being made around the world, so new series were set up for different regions: 10,000s for Italy, 25,000s for England (begun c.1902), 35,000s for Russia and Poland, 40,000 for Germany, and 50,000s for France. Many others would follow, as outlined in Appendix B of *The Columbia Master Book Discography,* Vol. 1. A Spanish series (5000s) was begun about 1903. Many of these foreign masters turned up on regular singled-faced U.S. issues.

With the advent of double-discs in 1908 Columbia began to vigorously pursue the domestic "ethnic trade." The *Columbia Record* exhorted dealers to think ethnic: "Getting the foreign trade is not a mysterious art or science... You don't have to 'walk Spanish' to sell Spanish selections; juggle spaghetti when Antonio asks for some of Daddi's Neapolitan street songs; nor get the palms of your hand sunburned to convince Abe Rosinsky he wants Cantor Karniol's records."[100] Records in the ethnic E-series and Spanish C-series were widely marketed in the U.S. About 1909 Columbia published a 100 page catalog listing E-series discs and corresponding cylinders. Among the artists most frequently represented were Emil Muench (German), Romeo Berti, Francesco Daddi and Gina Ciaparelli (Italian), Joseph Saucier (French-Canadian) and Jan Stern (Polish). A separate catalog listed Spanish double-discs ("Discos Dobles") in the "C" and "H" series. In 1912 this totaled 160 pages, and in 1914, 226 pages. Leading artists included the Police Band of Mexico, Curti's Band and the Banda Española directed by either Emilio Murillo or "Señor Carlos A. Prince." Another 45 page catalog in May 1913 listed "Dischi Doppi" for Italians.

By the early 1910s the "foreign department" had come under the energetic management of Anton Heindl, who produced some recordings in New York using ethnic American talent, but imported most of his repertoire from the company's European laboratories. The outbreak of

World War I in August 1914 effectively cut off the latter source of supply; 2,000 masters which Heindl had arranged for on a trip to the continent earlier that year were not forthcoming. As a result the company turned to ethnic American performers, opening a temporary studio in Chicago in 1915 where records in dozens of dialects were made.[101] Two of Heindl's principal Chicago discoveries were Frantisek Przybylski and his Polish "village orchestra" and Anton Brousek and his Bohemian military band ensemble.[102] Both would record widely in years to come.

The size of Columbia's foreign-language business can be inferred from the exceptionally large number of recordings made. Researcher Pekka Gronow estimates that between 1908 and 1923 the company issued about 5,000 records in the domestic popular "A" series, and 6,000 in the foreign-language "E" series.[103] Colorful catalogs and supplements were published for each nationality, often depicting idealized scenes of the homeland and prominently displaying the national colors, for those who could not read English.

Of course sales of individual ethnic titles were much smaller than for general popular releases, perhaps less than 1,000 copies in most cases. However production costs were low and catalog life long, so money could be made with a steady stream of this product. Occasionally there would be an unexpected breakout hit. One may have been a 1917 recording called "Nikolina" by Swedish comic Hjalmar Peterson ("Olle from Laughtersville"), on E3494, which according to anecdotal reports sold 100,000 copies over the years.[104] Another legendary ethnic hit was 1926's "Ukrainske Wesilie (Ukrainian Wedding)," a reenactment of a traditional Ukrainian wedding by fiddler Pawlo Humeniuk, on two sides of twelve-inch 70002-F. "No Ukrainian woman could resist it," reports Gronow, "it sold 125,000 copies in a year, not only to Ukrainians but also to Slovaks, Poles and Jews from Galicia."[105] While anecdotal sales figures such as this are suspect (no data survives in the Columbia files), they do indicate the general scale of ethnic sales. Crossovers into the general popular market were rare. One example may have been the frequently found "Three O'Clock in the Morning" by the Columbia Spanish Orchestra (E4772), released in late 1920 as a "Novelty Record" and perhaps the first U.S. recording of that soon-to-be famous song.

Ethnic religious recordings also enjoyed large sales. Cantor Joseph Rosenblatt recorded numerous sides for Columbia from 1914-1919, before switching to Victor in the 1920s, and Swedish evangelist Rev. J.A. Hultman of Worcester, Mass., built up a thriving mail order business with personal recordings he made at Columbia during the mid and late teens.[106]

With the introduction of the "flag" label in December 1923 most ethnic releases sold in the U.S. were assigned to the new "F" (for "foreign") series, which was subdivided into blocks (1F to 324F for Bohemian, 1000F to 1267F for Croatian, etc.). An "X" suffix denoted export titles for South America, the Far East and some other territories, although these discs were also sold in some sections of the U.S. Columbia continued to actively pursue the foreign-language business until the early 1930s, when the general collapse of record sales made it no longer feasible.

Political Recordings

In the years before radio politicians could reach the electorate only through the columns of newspapers, or by travelling endlessly around the country making personal appearances. During the 1908 Presidential campaign a Lincoln, Nebraska Edison dealer had the bright idea to ask native son William Jennings Bryan to make recordings of his views on the issues, which could

then be played for voters in rallies far and wide.[107] During the summer Bryan recorded for Edison and Victor in Lincoln, and for Columbia at its New York studio. To capture Republican candidate William Howard Taft all three companies had to truck portable equipment to his hometown of Hot Springs, Virginia, in August. Columbia's recordings were in a special matrix series numbered in the 14,000s. In addition, Columbia released talks by the Prohibition candidates.

Victor and Edison also made political recordings during the 1912 Presidential Election, but Columbia did not. Political recording did not resume at Columbia until January 1918, when a civic-minded lawyer named Guy Golterman approached the company about manufacturing and distributing records by a wide range of public figures, under the name "Nation's Forum." With the backing of the U.S. State Department, Golterman was able to persuade many important leaders to commit their thoughts to wax over the next two years. Probably the best known Nation's Forum release was "From the Battlefields of France," a short message to Americans by General John J. Pershing, recorded in France in March, 1918. During 1919 and 1920 the project recorded many political candidates, but after the 1920 Presidential election it seemed to peter out. Sadly, the masters of these historic recordings—which were supposed to preserve the voices of the leaders of the day for all time—are now lost. Columbia did not retain them, as they were the property of the Nation's Forum organization, and their disposition is unknown.[108]

Columbia attempted to record the inaugural address of Calvin Coolidge in 1925, apparently off a radio feed, but unfortunately there were "cutter problems" and the engineers wound up with 24 minutes of the 40 minute speech.[109] A recording of the Franklin D. Roosevelt inaugural in 1933 was more successful and was issued as "Set Number 500," which hardly anybody bought.[110]

Numbering, Physical Characteristics, and Miscellaneous

Accompaniments and Spoken Announcements. In the fall of 1903 Columbia began to replace its tinkly piano accompaniments with an orchestra on most vocal records. The change, though not universal, seems to have begun around matrix no. 1650. Regular spoken announcements, another vestige of the 1890s, were discontinued in mid 1904, around mx. 1850. These "little advertisements" had helped establish the Columbia name in the days when cylinders were mostly heard on coin-slot phonographs in public places, but they were redundant on discs, and they were no longer needed on cylinders once titles began to be marked on the ends in September 1904.[111] Disc announcements are occasionally found on later issues of pre-1904 recordings, although in many cases the engineers removed them by physically scraping them off the master.

Matrix and Take Numbering. One to three numbers are commonly found in the surface of early Columbia records, in the form "xxxx-x-x." For example, "3423-2-20" would indicate matrix number 3423, take 2, stamper 20. Later recordings might have four numbers (probably representing matrix, take, mother and stamper). Matrix numbering began, sensibly enough, at no. 1 ("In a Clock Store"). As with Berliner and early Victor, the matrix number and catalog number was the same and was displayed prominently on the label. This practice continued throughout the single-face era.

It is my belief that Climax/Columbia matrix numbers were *not* assigned at the time of recording, but days or even weeks later when the masters were being processed for manufacture.

Thus the artist and repertoire groupings may seem arbitrary. Henry Burr may have recorded several titles at a single session, but those recordings were apparently given scattered (not sequential) numbers later on. Extreme cases include the Admiral Peary recording, made in 1905 but not assigned a number (3846) until c.1908, and several of the Lillian Nordica recordings in the 30,000s which were evidently assigned numbers more than a year after they were made.

It is likely that Columbia did not assign any code number at all at the time of recording. Moreover, when a number was assigned later, it may have been affixed to the metal parts used to press discs, rather than to the original wax master. This would explain occasional anomalies such as test pressings bearing no number at all, and a second pressing of the same take with a different (changed) matrix number. Columbia no doubt varied its manufacturing procedures over time, but the important point is that once a number was assigned it uniquely identified that master in all subsequent issues, including double-faced releases and on other labels. This is the classic definition of a "matrix number."

A second, "phantom" matrix number is found engraved in the wax on some Climax and Climax-derived discs. This second number has been reported on approximately 70 out of the first 826 issues. It ranges from no. 7 to the 1400's, although it is most commonly a number between 1000 and 1300. It bears no apparent relationship to the "main" number. At one time it was thought that this might be the "true" matrix number, but it is absent on too many issues. All Climaxes, including the earliest "Globe" Climaxes, bear the regular number, but only a few have the "phantom" number. The "phantom" number may have denoted masters obtained from another source, or recorded at a different laboratory, and subsequently integrated into Climax's main numbering system.

Another mystery is why so many low numbers have never been found on Climax, but do turn up later on Columbia. This seems to be more than simply a matter of "we haven't found them yet." Whole runs of presumably popular low-numbered recordings do not appear on Climax, among them many early band and orchestra numbers, including no. 1, "In a Clock Store." Nearly half of the masters in the Climax numerical range (1-826) have not been found on that label, even though virtually all of them turn up on Columbia. The missing numbers are scattered throughout the Climax range.

It is my theory that the missing numbers were recorded during the Climax era, but not issued until after the Climax label was discontinued in mid 1902. Columbia was certainly known to hold recordings for months, or even years, before issuing them. This was especially true of standard repertoire, and it is probably not a coincidence that the low numbers most likely to be held for later issue were generally standard selections. Low-numbered topical tunes, on the other hand, usually were quickly released on Climax.

Takes are normally sequential recordings of the same title by the same artist, numbered from "1" upwards. Most Climaxes show no take number. Either only one take was made, or more likely, the engineers at this early stage simply weren't keeping track of remakes. The absence of a take does not mean "take zero." For example, three versions of 7-inch Climax 157 ("Asleep in the Deep") have been identified, one by Hooley, one by Myers and one by Stanley, and none have take numbers. Most Columbia takes were numbered in the usual fashion, although occasionally letters or symbols were used (e.g., mx. 521-a).

On early single-faced discs, the stamper is often represented by a letter immediately following the take, with no hyphen. Sometimes these are lower case, e.g. "-1x" or "-1xx". In the cases studied these have been determined to be aurally identical to take "1" with no suffix. More

often the stamper is represented by an upper case letter. (Stamper "O" often causes confusion since when placed immediately after a take it looks like a zero, e.g. "1O" or "2O".) Early takes were also occasionally underlined (or lined above).[112]

The highest stamper number or letter seen can serve as a rough guide to how many copies were manufactured, and more study in this area would be welcome. Most early discs bear a stamper number under 20, although best sellers could go much higher. Stampers have been seen as high as 254 (on "The Herd Girl's Dream") and 390 (on the 1913 Demonstration Record), further evidence of the huge sales of those titles.

M-Numbers. One of the enduring mysteries of early Columbia discs is the meaning of the additional number, prefixed with an "M", that was neatly scratched into the surface of many (though not all) cylinders and discs made between 1904 and early 1908. The range of numbers reported is M-1 to M-2035, and they are found on all types of recordings produced by the company—seven, ten and twelve inch discs, and standard (4") and Twentieth Century (6") cylinders. In fact, the same M-number may appear on several formats, denoting a different recording in each case. For example M-82 is found on the following recordings: ten-inch disc no. 3063 (Henry Burr, "There Is a Green Hill Far Away"); twelve-inch no. 30080 (Charles Gordon, "From Greenland's Icy Mountains"); two-minute cylinder no. 32661 (Bob Roberts, "Tennessee"); and Twentieth Century cylinder no. 85111 (Columbia Quartette, "A Meeting of the Hen Roost Club").

While M-numbers proceed more or less in step with the regular matrix numbers, the two do not appear to be linked, and in some cases they diverge radically. For example, try to make sense out of this pattern:

3441 - M-996
3442 - M-888
3443 - M-942
3444 - M-1137
3445 - no M-number
3446 - M-938

Twelve-inch discs in the 30,000 series seem to begin with M-numbers in the M-680s, rise to about M-780, then drop back to M-1. Foreign language series also sometimes bear the mysterious M-numbers, in no particular order.

It is clear that separate M-number series were maintained concurrently for different formats—or perhaps for different numerical matrix series (e.g., the 3000s, 5000s, 30,000s). One hypothesis is that M-numbers were the "true" matrix numbers during this period, applied at the time of the original recording, and that what we know as the "matrix" number was actually a release number. I have seen some early test pressings that bear M-numbers but *not* normal matrix numbers.[113] Alternatively, M-numbers may have been some sort of production code, applied at the time of manufacture.

The fact that M-numbers are missing from so many original pressings from this period, even on alternate pressings of the same take, suggests that they represented some sort of experimental program, rather than a regular production system. Perhaps "M" stood for "Marconi," who may have been experimenting with Columbia masters during 1906-1908. Or for

"Macdonald," the company's resident inventor. Hopefully further research, or an as yet undiscovered document, will one day solve the intriguing mystery of the "M-numbers."

Physical Characteristics. One distinguishing characteristic of early Climax discs is the presence of a metal grommet around the spindle hole, apparently to strengthen it. This unique feature was discontinued after a few months.

Seven-inches was the usual size for discs when Columbia entered the market, although Eldridge R. Johnson had introduced longer-playing ten-inch Monarch records early in 1901. The fact that Columbia marketed machines with seven and ten inch turntables suggests that Climax records were available in both sizes from the start, or almost from the start (no embossed "Globe" Climaxes are known in the ten-inch format, so the introduction of this size may have been delayed slightly).

From 1901 to 1903 virtually every selection was produced in both seven and ten inch versions. These are distinct recordings, with the seven inch playing for about two minutes, and the ten inch for three. By 1903, however, sales of seven inch discs had dropped precipitously. The seven inch disc—the format introduced by Emile Berliner only a decade earlier—was phased out beginning in late 1903. Around matrix no. 1700 Columbia stopped routinely making seven inch versions of every title, and thereafter seven inch versions were only occasionally produced. The highest known seven inch number is 3239. The format was dropped from the catalog in 1907, and in a trade letter dated December 26, 1907, General Manager George Lyle announced that dealers could dispose of remaining stock at any price they saw fit.[114]

Victor introduced twelve and fourteen-inch discs in 1903.[115] Columbia waited many months before following suit and then, oddly, announced fourteen-inch discs first, in December, 1904. Reserved for dance records, and running as long as five minutes (at 60 r.p.m.), these were numbered in the regular matrix series. Clumsy and fragile, they did not sell well and only a few were published.

More successful were twelve-inch discs, which were finally introduced in July, 1905. The first few were also numbered in the regular matrix series, but beginning in May 1906 a new matrix series, the 30,000s, was established for them and the few that had already been released were renumbered. Thereafter many twelve-inch discs were released, principally concert and instrumental dance recordings.

It is a bit of a mystery why both Victor and Columbia discs were recorded on only one side until 1908, when technology had long existed to manufacture discs with music on both sides. Perhaps the companies were making so much money from the cheaper (for them) format that they saw no reason to switch; perhaps patents prevented them from doing so. (Believe it or not, the very idea of a double-faced record was patented—by Ademor Petit, in 1904. The patent was struck down by the Austrian courts in 1906, and ruled invalid in the U.S. in 1911.) Odeon marketed double-faced discs in Europe in 1904, and possibly as a result of its association with that company U.S. Columbia announced a small number of doubled-faced discs in August 1904, as novelties. They were carried in the catalog until 1907. Regular matrix numbers were used, with a different number on each side of the disc.

Turntable Speeds. The speed at which these early discs should be played is less clear. Although we call them "78s," few were recorded that fast. Berliners had generally been recorded at 70-72 rpm, while William R. Moran, in his books on early Victor recordings, reports that company's

1900-1902 discs were generally in the 75-76 rpm range.[116] The first Climax and Columbia discs seem to hover in the 74-76 rpm range, and later releases about 76-78 rpm, although there are exceptions. Len Spencer's minstrel series (e.g., no. 644) seems to play at about 72 rpm, perhaps in order to cram more in. It is no wonder that most early phonographs came with a speed control.

During the 1910s Victor advertised its records as playing "correctly" at 78 rpm, and Columbia maintained that its records should be reproduced at 80 rpm, although both speeds are manifestly too fast. Only Edison (at 160 rpm for cylinders, 80 rpm for discs) played as advertised. The reason Victor and Columbia gave their customers patently wrong advice about proper playing speeds is unclear. One researcher has suggested that perhaps the heavy tone arms of the day produced so much drag that the turntable had to be set a couple of revolutions too fast in order for the record to play properly when the tone arm was lowered on to the disc's surface. Another theory is that the records sounded "brighter" when played a little fast.

There were complaints about this state of affairs even at the time. A letter to *Talking Machine World* in 1908 asked why speeds could not be indicated on the label. Some European Odeons, the writer observed, were marked with the notation "74R", meaning play at 74 r.p.m.[117] But Columbia and Victor weren't listening, and not until the advent of electrical recording in 1925 did speeds settle down (more or less) to 78 r.p.m., as advertised.

In any event, on modern equipment, for modern ears, the reader is advised in most cases to "slow it down" from the nominal 78 rpm to a speed that sounds right. For standard selections sung from a published score (such as operatic arias), some experts pitch the recording in the presumed key.

Columbia Executives

The leadership of Edison and Victor is fairly well-known, due to their illustrious inventor-presidents (Thomas A. Edison and Eldridge R. Johnson, respectively). It might be useful to sketch the men who guided Columbia and American Graphophone through the turbulent years of the 1890s and early 1900s.

Edward D. Easton (1856-1915) was the founder, president and guiding spirit of the company from its incorporation in 1889. Early in his career he had been a stenographer, a respected and well-paid profession in the years before recording technology. He made on-the-spot transcriptions of national events for newspapers and others, and had made a small fortune by selling his transcript of the trial of Guiteau, the assassin of President Garfield, in 1881. He used the money to pursue a law degree from Georgetown University (awarded in 1889), and to invest in what seemed at the time a very risky enterprise—the phonograph.

Pictures of Easton, mostly taken later in life, make him appear stern and remote, but by all accounts he was a man of boundless energy who had a very "hands-on" management style. From the beginning he made regular trips around the country to personally visit dealers and the company's branch offices. By the early 1900s this had evolved into a regular pattern: during the winter he would make a month-long circuit of U.S. offices in the North, South, Midwest and West Coast, and during the summer he would sail for Europe to visit the branches there. Sometimes he was accompanied by one of the company's other executives, and often by members of his own family, combining business and pleasure. However there is no doubt that these regular visits by the head of the company kept far-flung branch managers on their toes, as well as keeping Easton himself intimately aware of problems, opportunities and potential talent

throughout the company.

Easton's original executive "brain trust" included William Herbert Smith, Vice President and Treasurer, who remained active in company affairs until about 1901;[118] and Roland F. Cromelin (1857-1902), the company's Secretary from late 1889 until his sudden death in 1902.[119] His son, Aaron Cromelin, was assistant manager of the Berlin store. The elder Cromelin was well-liked and sorely missed. An article in the July 1905 *Columbia Record* referred to him as "so long and prominently identified with the enterprise and whose death in the prime of life is still one of those sad memories whose poignancy time softens but cannot obliterate."

Andrew Devine (1832-1909), an older man who was one of the original founders of the American Graphophone Co. in 1887 (with James O. Clephane and John H. White), remained active as a Vice President of Columbia and Board member of American Graphophone until his death in 1909 at the age of 77. Devine, like Easton, was originally a stenographer.[120]

Others who were key to Columbia's success in the early disc era rose through the ranks, or joined somewhat later. Paul H. Cromelin (1870-1929) joined the company in the mid 1890s, managed several local stores (a common career path for those advancing in the company), and by 1903 had been named one of Columbia's three Vice Presidents. He was responsible for some of Columbia's greatest achievements during the next eight years. In 1904 he managed the Columbia exhibit and awards competition at the St. Louis World's Fair; in 1907 negotiated the deal with Fonotipia that allowed Columbia to re-enter the field of operatic recording in a serious way; and in 1908 led the fight in Washington to protect recording interests under the new copyright law. He resigned to join British Edison in 1911. It is not known whether he was related to company pioneer R.F. Cromelin.

The man primarily responsible for establishing Columbia's European operation was Frank Dorian (1869-1940), who joined the company as Edward Easton's personal secretary in 1889, and rose to General Manager in the mid 1890s. He was sent to Europe in 1897, and for the next 12 years built up the operation there with the assistance of his brother Marion Dorian. (Another brother, John H. Dorian, was Columbia's representative in Cuba and China in 1907-1908.) Frank returned to the U.S. to run the Dictaphone division from 1909-1920, and in later years was one of the chief informants of historian Jim Walsh about the early history of the phonograph industry.

Columbia's chief recording engineer in Europe during the early 1900s, responsible for the company's historic Russian and Italian recordings, was inventor Frank L. Capps (1868-1943). He left Columbia in 1915 to work for Pathe.

Like most companies of the period, Columbia was constantly in litigation to protect and expand its interests. Critical to Columbia's survival during this turbulent period was a brilliant patent attorney named Philip Mauro (1859-1952).[121] Though not a full time employee, he was one of the company's chief stockholders—perhaps he was paid in stock?—and eventually a member of the Board of Directors. Mauro was well versed in the Byzantine rules of the Patent Office, and it was he who shepherded through to approval the shaky Jones patent for disc recording in 1901. This patent was crucial to Columbia; without it the company might not have survived. Mauro was a very persuasive man. In 1890 he even convinced the Patent Office to change the official designation of the talking machine from "phonograph" to "graphophone," a move which must have infuriated its inventor, Thomas Edison!

Columbia's factory manager and chief inventor was Thomas Hood Macdonald (1859-1911), of Scottish descent, who had been with American Graphophone since about 1889 and

with the North American Phonograph Co. before that. A sailor in his rough-and-tumble youth, Macdonald was a favorite of the factory workers in Bridgeport and no doubt had much to do with the ability of Columbia to squeeze maximum production out of minimum resources during its early days. He was granted 56 phonograph-related patents during his lifetime, second only to Thomas A. Edison during the pre-1912 period.[122] According to researcher Allen Koenigsberg, the top three inventors in terms of pre-1912 phonograph patents were Edison (134), Macdonald (56), and Eldridge R. Johnson (54). No one else was close. Among Macdonald's most important inventions were the "Baby Grand" (1894) and "Eagle" (1897) spring-driven Graphophones, which helped open the home market for cylinders, and the "Toy" disc Graphophone, Columbia's first disc machine.

Columbia's recording studios were run by Victor H. Emerson (1866-1926), who joined the company from the rival U.S. Phonograph Co. of New Jersey in 1896. While Mauro was fighting the patent wars, Macdonald was tinkering in the laboratory, and Easton was out terrorizing the branch managers, it was Emerson who was responsible for the recorded "product," engaging artists and approving repertoire. He had no musical training, but was a genial man who appears to have had lots of connections and was well liked. A report on a company banquet in 1904 described him as "delightfully informal, combining in his post-prandial talks the breeziness of the summer wind with the cheeriness of the sunbeams"; Thomas Macdonald, who followed him to the podium, called him "my 'gold-moulded' friend."[123] Emerson left Columbia in 1915 under somewhat clouded circumstances (he appears to have authorized the use of Columbia's patents to protect the upstart Little Wonder label, in which he had a personal interest). He then founded the Emerson label, which continued into the 1920s.

Assisting Emerson was orchestra leader Charles A. Prince (1869-1937), who had entered the industry as a piano accompanist in the early 1890s. The earliest reference to his recording activities located by this writer is in the ledger of the New York Phonograph Company, where he was paid for making "musical records" as early as June 19, 1891. He joined Columbia a few years later.[124] After the departure of orchestra leader Edward Issler in 1897 Columbia organized its own orchestra and band, but the company did not identify the leader until 1904, so it is uncertain exactly when Prince took the baton. The first director of the Columbia Band/Orchestra appears to have been cornetist Tom Clark (c.1898), succeeded by Fred Hager. Hager later said that Prince took over when he left Columbia around 1900 to make Zon-O-Phone and Climax discs.[125]

Prince's career was somewhat unusual in that it was spent almost entirely in the recording studio. Prince's Band and Orchestra did not perform in public, as did the organizations led by Walter B. Rogers, Arthur Pryor and others at Victor. Columbia praised Prince as a genius, but his reputation among modern scholars is somewhat mixed. He was certainly versatile, as required by his job, conducting all manner of popular songs, marches, symphonic excerpts and folk tunes, and accompanying singers and comedians of all types. A lot of the material he was required to record was of the "potboiler" variety, and he conducted it suitably, with swooping trombones, twittering clarinets, and other musical sound effects. He wrote (often with Len Spencer) a number of "descriptive specialties" full of sound effects, such as "Cumming's Indian Congress at Coney Island," "Departure of a Hamburg-America Liner" and "In Cheyenne Joe's Cowboy Tavern." But when it came to more serious material his readings were by-the-book, showing little musical expressiveness. These stock performances paled in comparison with the more musically literate readings by Pryor and Rogers at Victor, not to mention those of the

"name" bands who were sometimes induced to record. By the teens, when "syncopation ruled the nation," Prince's accompaniments sounded awfully dated; by the 1920s, the Jazz Age, they were positively antediluvian. Nevertheless Columbia stuck with him until 1922. After leaving the company he worked briefly for Victor and some smaller labels, then retired to the West Coast to become a music teacher.

NOTES

1. Early sound recording/reproducing machines were known by several names, according to their inventors or manufacturers. Chief among them were the phonograph (Edison), Graphophone (Bell-Tainter) and Gramophone (Berliner). All three will be referred to here, generically, as "phonograph."

2. As of 2001 www.columbiarecords.com contained no history of the label that I could find. If you dug deep enough, and jumped to a related website for the Sony CD box set "Soundtrack of a Century," you found a kind of hip-hop history by liner note writer Marc Kirkeby, which among other things called the U.S. Marine Band "the original E-Street Band" (because it recorded on Washington's E Street) and described the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair as "the setting for [the movie] *Meet Me in St. Louis*."

3. Tim Brooks, "Columbia Records in the 1890's: Founding the Record Industry" and "A Directory to Columbia Recording Artists of the 1890's," *ARSC Journal* X:1 (1978) and XI:2-3 (1979).

4. Frank Dorian, "Reminiscences of the Columbia Cylinder Records," *Phonograph Monthly Review,* January 1930, pp.114-115 (reprinted in Gracyk, *Companion to the Encyclopedia of Popular American Recording Pioneers*); "Columbia Phonograph Company" [brochure], November 15, 1889, pp.8, 9.

5. The New Jersey Phonograph Company was one of the original licensees of the North American Phonograph Company, and an active producer of musical cylinders in the early 1890s. In 1893 it assigned its rights to the U.S. Phonograph Company (managed by George Tewksbury), which continued to manufacture cylinders under the "New Jersey" name. (Information supplied by Raymond Wile.)

6. The seminal work in this area is Raymond R. Wile, "The American Graphophone Company and the Columbia Phonograph Company Enter the Disc Record Business, 1897-1903," in the *ARSC Journal,* 22:2 (Fall 1991), to which the reader is referred for greater detail.

7. U.S. Census of Manufactures, 1900. While Columbia production figures are unknown, those of its main competitors have been located in court cases. See *Antique Phonograph Monthly* 1:10 (December, 1973), p.3, for Edison cylinder production, and Wile, *ARSC Journal* XI:2-3 (1979), pp.139-143, for Berliner disc production.

8. According to researcher Allen Koenigsberg, a sales brochure exists for the Lyrophone (*sic*), but it is uncertain whether any were actually manufactured. No examples have been found.

9. See advertisement in *Music Trade Review,* Feb. 3, 1900.

10. For a recent and detailed history of Seaman's company see "International Zonophone Company - History," in Bayly and Kinnear, pp.3-36.

11. The quote is from Columbia Vice President Mervin E. Lyle, in court documents cited by Wile, *ARSC Journal,* 22:2, p.214.

12. Sutton and Nauck, pp.256-257.

13. Baumbach, pp.71, 75.

14. Koenigsberg, *Patent History of the Phonograph,* p.li. Information on the Jones patent (no. 688,739) is found on p.lii.

15. Wile, *ARSC Journal* 22:2, p.215.

16. Letter from Eldridge R. Johnson to William Barry Owen, February 19, 1902 (EMI Archives).

17. *Music Trade Review*, January 17, 1903.

18. *Antique Phonograph Monthly* 1:10 (Dec. 1973), p.3 (Edison); Jim Walsh, *Hobbies,* June 1971, p.38 (Victor). The Victor figures, from a 1943 court case, have also been reprinted in the *Hillandale News,* Dec. 1994, pp.186-187; and in Sherman, *Collector's Guide,* pp.168-169.

19. The mid-1902 catalog bore the code "Form 471-A," which in Columbia parlance meant that there should have been an earlier catalog containing similar merchandise ("Form 471"). For a full discussion of this and other early Columbia catalogs see "Columbia Catalogs and Other Consumer Publications," in Brooks, *CMBD,* Vol. 1, pp.437-446.

20. This scenario is based on parallel developments at Victor, as described in Fagan and Moran, *EDVR, Pre Matrix Series,* p.xviii. Presumably Columbia adopted the same technology.

21. Edison produced approximately seven million cylinders and Victor turned out two million discs in 1903, according to the previously mentioned sources.

22. *Columbia Record,* January 1904.

23. A story and advertisement for the recordings appears in *Music Trade Review,* April 4, 1903, pp.36, 39. The special brochure introducing the records included testimonial letters from the artists, written when they first heard the recordings. These letters are dated between February 28 and March 4, 1903, which means the sessions were probably in December or January.

24. *Columbia Record,* April 1904. The reference to Adams is puzzling since she in fact recorded seven titles. Perhaps they meant two recording sessions.

25. The inception of Victor's Red Seal series is thoroughly described in Fagan and Moran, *EDVR, Matrix Series 1-4999,* pp.xxii-xxiii. Background on the singers mentioned has been

drawn from Marco and from Moses.

26. *Columbia Record,* January 1905.

27. *Columbia Record,* May 1905.

28. The best single source of information on these labels is Sutton and Nauck.

29. *Columbia Record,* February 1905.

30. *Columbia Record,* April 1905.

31. A set of early issues, invaluable to this research, is located at the Library of Congress.

32. *Columbia Record,* May, 1904.

33. *Columbia Record,* July 1906, November, 1906.

34. *Columbia Record,* February 1906. The figure is for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1905.

35. Advertisement in the *Columbia Record,* September 1907.

36. Letter from John A. Gouldrup, Local Manager, Columbia Phonograph Co., to Wm. F. McLean of Womelsdorf, Pa., dated February 13, 1908. A photocopy is in the compiler's files; the location of the original is unknown.

37. *Columbia Record,* September, 1906; December, 1906. The September 15, 1906 *Talking Machine World* said that Columbia executive George W. Lyle conducted the negotiations.

38. "Notes of Mary Godwin (née Mary Easton, daughter of E.D. Easton)," undated typed reminiscences. Easton's accident was reported in *The New York Times,* January 24, 1908, p.1, and *Talking Machine World,* February 15, 1908, p.33. His convalescence lasted until August.

39. *Columbia Double Disc Records* (introductory catalog, September 1908).

40. Double-faced records had been introduced in Europe about a year earlier, and Columbia's English branch claimed that it had doubled its business when it introduced them there.

41. *Columbia Record,* November 1909, p.13.

42. *Columbia Record,* March 1909, p.6.

43. Double page ad appearing in many magazines, also reproduced in the *Columbia Record,* November 1908.

44. Reprinted in the *Columbia Record,* November 1908.

45. *Talking Machine World,* February 15, 1910, p.19. The attorney's quote is cited in Koenigsberg, *Patent History of the Phonograph,* p.lviii. The patent (749,092) was granted in 1904 to Ademor Petit, who later assigned U.S. and foreign rights to others. It was ruled invalid in Europe in 1906, and in the U.S. in June 1911. See also Andrews, *Columbia 10" Records,* introduction; Andrews, "More Thoughts on Early Double-Sided Records," *New Amberola Graphic* No. 99 (1998), pp.5-7.

46. Sources: May 1, 1920 Columbia dealer price list; numerous records analyzed by this author; Spottswood, *EMOR,* vol. 1, p.xxxiv; Gronow, *SSAD,* p.14; Vernon, p.113; Andrews, *Columbia 10" Records*; George Copeland, *The Historic Record* No. 8; correspondence with Michael S. Kinnear (1977), Frank Andrews (1997), Dick Spottswood (1997) and others.

47. *Talking Machine World,* June 15, 1910.

48. *Columbia Record,* March 1909, pp.13,15.

49. See various entries in Sherman and Nauck. Ironically, Columbia had earlier supplied masters to some of these "rogue" labels.

50. *Columbia Record,* October, 1909.

51. The full text of this important document has been made available by Tim Gracyk on his website www.garlic.com/~tgracyk.

52. The full story of the Columbia demonstration records is in Tim Brooks, "The Columbia Double-Disc Demonstration Record," *New Amberola Graphic* No. 14, pp.1-9. Anecdotal sales figures for the 1913 disc are cited in a story about Henry Burr, *New York Times,* November 22, 1929 (claims five million); and in his widow's obituary, Associated Press wire story, September 17, 1954 (three million). As noted later, stamper numbers on surviving copies of the record do indicate an extremely large press run–though not exactly how large. Outlandish sales claims have been made for some records of the 1920s, notably Vernon Dalhart's "The Prisoner's Song," but it is unlikely that any single recording sold this many copies prior to the 1940s.

53. The S3000s were renumbered as the A3000s when the regular popular "A" series reached A2999 in 1920.

54. Undated (c.1917) form letter from A.E. Donovan, Manager, Personal Record Department, with attached schedules of fees. Located in the personal files of concert tenor Roland Hayes, Detroit Public Library, 1994. The full story of Hayes' famous personal recordings will be told in a subsequent article by this author.

55. The full Little Wonder story is in Brooks, *Little Wonder Records.*

56. *Talking Machine World,* May 15, 1911 (Cromelin), March 15, 1915 (Lyle).

57. *New York Times,* May 17, 1915.

58. *Bridgeport Evening Farmer,* December 20, 1911.

59. Gelatt, p.246; E. R. Fenimore Johnson, p.119. The other owners of Victor stock, including Emile Berliner, got a total of $12 million when the company was sold.

60. Dodge obituary, *New York Times,* August 10, 1931.

61. The strike received considerable coverage in the *Bridgeport Post* between August 14 and September 26, 1915. It was also noted in the *New York Times*, along with other labor unrest in Bridgeport.

62. *New York Times,* March 14, 1920; February 10, 1922.

63. These figures, from the Columbia files, reflect total shipments over the life of the record. However both discs were released well before the crash, and the vast bulk of shipments occurred during the months immediately surrounding the release.

64. *New York Times,* February 10, 1922.

65. *New York Times,* March 29, 1922.

66. May 1921 supplement.

67. *New York Times,* February 10, 1922.

68. *New York Times,* December 13, 1922.

69. Columbia Graphophone Manufacturing Co. entry, *Moody's Industrials,* 1923.

70. Columbia supplement, March, 1923.

71. See *Hobbies,* June 1971, and other sources previously mentioned for the Victor sales figures.

72. Gelatt, pp.223-226.

73. *Talking Machine World,* July 15, 1927; *Bridgeport Post,* July 1, 1927. The company was also referred to as The Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System (*New York Times,* Nov. 17, 1927); possibly this was a holding company.

74. *Talking Machine World,* September 15, 1927.

75. *New York Times,* October 12, 1928.

76. *New York Times,* May 18, 1929.

77. U.S. Census of Manufactures.

78. *New York Times,* May 30, 1931, December 25, 1931.

79. *New York Times,* December 25, 1931; *Moody's Industrials,* 1933.

80. *New York Times,* April 24, 1932.

81. *New York Times,* April 20, 1932.

82. For more on this famous recording see Tim Brooks, "Early Recordings of Songs from *Florodora:* Tell Me Pretty Maiden... Who Are You? - A Discographical Mystery," *ARSC Journal* 31:1 (Spring 2000), 51-69.

83. It should be noted that although the original master number continued to be used, it is possible that later takes were used in later years. However some artists whose recordings remained in the catalog for decades did not record after the early years (Len Spencer, for example, died in 1914). It is my opinion that most of the long-lived vocal and instrumental masters dated from pre-1905, at the latest.

84. Walsh, *Hobbies,* July-October, 1958. Tim Brooks, "The Case of the Forgotten Brother," in "Some Columbia Controversies," *New Amberola Graphic,* No. 105, pp.5-6.

85. The February 1904 *Columbia Record* cites both Myers and Stewart as exclusive artists. Judging by gaps in their Victor recording histories (documented in Fagan and Moran, *EDVR*), Myers seems to have been exclusive to Columbia for discs from about 1902-1905, and Stewart from late 1903 until the end of 1906. Myers was also absent from the Edison cylinder lists from 1902 to 1906, and Stewart from 1902 until late 1908, so they may have been exclusive to Columbia in that format even longer. (Koenigsberg, *Edison Cylinder Records*).

86. Columbia supplement, July 1912, p.11; *Saturday Evening Post,* April 6, 1912 (reprinted in *Talking Machine World,* April 15, 1912, p.28).

87. *Music Trade Review,* June 13, 1903; *Columbia Record,* August 1904, May 1905.

88. Brooks, *CMBD,* Vol. 1, p.243 (mx. 1969). The Pope may have made a private cylinder for President Cleveland in 1893 ("The Pope and the Phonograph," *Scientific American,* April 15, 1893, p.229).

89. For the full story see Howard Rye and Tim Brooks, "Visiting Fireman 16: Dan Kildare," *Storyville 1996-97* (Chigwell, Essex, England: L. Wright, 1997), pp.30-57.

90. Tim Brooks, "'Might Take One Disc of This Trash as a Novelty': Early Recordings by the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the Popularization of 'Negro Folk Music'," *American Music*18:3 (Fall 2000), pp.278-316.

91. *Billboard,* May 30, 1925; reprinted in Blacker, "Disco-Ing In," *Record Research,* no. 231/32 (Oct. 1987), p.2.

92. *Columbia Record,* December, 1906.

93. *Talking Machine World,* August 15, 1907.

94. *Talking Machine World,* January 15, 1908.

95. *Talking Machine World,* September 15, 1910. The event was also thoroughly covered in Salt Lake City's *Deseret Evening News.*

96. Moses, p.164.

97. The author is indebted to Richard K. Spottswood, a preeminent scholar in the field of early ethnic recording, as well as to sources indicated in the notes, for some of the information used in this section.

98. *Columbia Record,* January and April, 1904. Several of the 2000-series records are listed in the April issue.

99. Letter to the author from Nobu K. Shishido, Chiba, Japan, July 18, 1996.

100. *Columbia Record,* May 1914, reproduced in Gronow, *SSAD,* vol. 2, p.8.

101. *Talking Machine World,* August 15, 1915.

102. Greene, p.75.

103. Gronow, "Ethnic Recordings: An Introduction," in American Folklife Center, *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage,* p.5.

104. Gronow, *SSAD,* p.13.

105. Pekka Gronow, "Recording for the 'Foreign' Series," *JEMF Quarterly,* XII:41 (Spring 1976), p.18. Gronow's source for this information is music store owner Myron Surmach.

106. Gronow, *SSAD,* p.16. See Spottswood, *EMOR,* for discographies of these and other ethnic artists.

107. *Talking Machine World,* August 15, 1908, p.37.

108. The full story of Nation's Forum may be found in a splendid article by David Goldenberg in *The Discographer* 2:4 (c.1971).

109. Brooks, *CMBD,* Vol. 1, p.427.

110. Columbia supplement, April, 1933.

111. *Columbia Record,* September 1904.

112. For additional discussion of these arcane matters see Jerrold N. Moore and Laurence C. Witten II, "The Columbia Grand Opera Records, 1903," *Record Collector,* XV:3-4.

113. Some examples are 12" M-29 (an aria from *Don Carlos* by Rosa Linde Wright) and 10" M-2026 (aria from *Tosca* by Adelina Agostinelli), both in the collection of Lawrence F. Holdridge; and 12" M-5 ("Miserere" from *Il Trovatore* by Nordica and Reseninil). None of these appear to have been issued.

114. *Talking Machine World,* January 15, 1908, p.66.

115. Fagan and Moran, *EDVR, Pre-Matrix Series,* pp.xxvii-xxxi. Twelve-inch Victors, although recorded as early as late 1901, were apparently not issued until 1903.

116. Fagan and Moran, *EDVR, Pre-Matrix Series* and *Matrix Series: 1-4999.* Moran's essay on turntable speeds, in the latter volume (pp.xxxiii-xxxvi), is particularly interesting.

117. *Talking Machine World,* June 15, 1908, p.33.

118. According to court depositions located by Ray Wile, Smith resigned from American Graphophone in 1901 or 1902 (*ARSC Journal,* 22:2, p.219, footnote 26). His dates of birth and death are not known.

119. According to an obituary in the December 22, 1902, *New York Tribune,* Cromelin died of "heart disease" (a heart attack?) in his New York apartment on Saturday, December 20, after spending the day in his office. He was 45. Marco contains a short biography, but no date of death, and seems to confuse him with later Columbia executive Paul Cromelin.

120. See biography in Marco. Devine's obituary is in *Talking Machine World,* May 15, 1909, p.3, where his age was reported as 67.

121. Partial biographies of Mauro are found in Marco, and *Noteworthy News,* Sept. 22, 1996.

122. Koenigsberg, *Patent History of the Phonograph,* p.vi.

123. *Columbia Record,* February 1905.

124. Prince biographies can be found in Marco; Gracyk, *Encyclopedia*; and Jim Walsh, *Hobbies,* December 1952-January 1953. The ledger is located at the Edison National Historical Site, West Orange, N.J.

125. Walsh, *Hobbies,* January 1953, p.23.