

Berliner Sales Figures

by
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One of the most difficult bits of information to acquire is sales figures for the early record companies. The Census did not include sound recordings until 1899 but the figures provided for cylinders at that time included both the blanks and finished cylinders in the same total. It is quite possible that the figure is grossly inflated because of this factor. In the case of Berliner Gramophone Records, it is much easier to obtain figures. Because the various Berliner groups were involved in extensive litigation sales figures were often produced in order to prove the potential value of the merchandise and business in question.

For a portion of the period we also have totals for machines sold and can even distinguish between the so-called Montross motor machines as opposed to those with spring motors supplied by Eldridge Johnson. The United States Gramophone Company reserved Maryland and the District of Columbia so the figures will be a little inaccurate and should be increased because of that factor. Also during 1897 and early 1898 the National Gramophone Company was exporting machines and records to England and the figures will also reflect this factor. To my knowledge this is the first appearance of this information.

(Note: The information provided is taken from several sources but the majority is from materials included in the following court cases:

1. American Graphophone Company versus the National Gramophone Co. and Frank Seaman. Affidavits in opposition to a preliminary injunction. Affidavit of Emile Berliner. (Cited as NAT)
2. Victor Talking Machine Company and United States Gramophone Company versus the American Graphophone Co. Testimony of Emile Berliner. (Cited as AGC)
3. Frank Seaman versus the U. S. Gramophone Company. (Cited as USG)
4. Frank Seaman versus the Berliner Gramophone Co. (Cited as BER)

One Annual Report of the United States Gramophone Co. survives for the year ending March 31, 1898 which provides some additional figures. (Cited as USG-A)

SALES FIGURES

American Gramophone Co. period (1891 - 1893)

(The history of the Gramophone seems to be that of developmental work during this period. There is a patent for a coin-operated gramophone, some more developmental work involving matrix making and the development of a clock-work gramophone that was apparently unsuccessful.

If any records or machines were sold, the figure would be negligible.)

United States Gramophone Company period (1893 - 1895)

(Experimenting continued and new methods of making and pressing records were developed. Enough work had been accomplished that in the Fall of 1894 a combination factory and salesroom was opened in Baltimore. In September 1895 the Berliner Gramophone Co. assumed manufacturing and sales responsibilities and U. S. Gramophone then became a patent holding company. Sales rights were reserved for Washington, D. C. and Maryland.)

Fall	ca. 1,000 machines	ca. 25,000 records	(NAT)
1894		1 to 2,000	" (AGC)

Berliner Gramophone Co. period (Sept. 2, 1895 - Aug. 31, 1900)

(After a very slow start and a failure to meet obligations to the U. S. Gramophone Co. the organization sold sales rights to Frank Seaman on October 10, 1896. Seaman had previously had local sales rights for New York and New Jersey and operated as the New York Gramophone Co. For a large part of the period, Seaman exercised his sales rights by operating as the National Gramophone Co. In 1899 this was replaced by the National Gramophone Corp. There are conflicting sales figures for this period. Both sets are provided.)

1896		ca. 1,000,000 records	(AGC)
1897 (Ap. 1 - Mr. 31 1898)	(USG-A)	408,195 records	(USG-A)
11,211 gramophones		(Note: This figure may have included sales to England)	
499 Clark Hand Governor machines			
710 Montross motor machines (not included in above total)			
2,115 Johnson sound boxes			
1897		248,652	(BER)
1898		713,753	(BER)
1898 (April)	1,012 (Johnson spring motor gramophones)	74,859	(All monthly figures from USG)
	100 (Montross spring motor gramophones)		
	240 Johnson sound boxes		
1898 (May)	1,132 (Johnson)	71,329	
	159 (Montross)		
1898 (June)	703 (Johnson)	35,170	
	396 (Montross)		
	100 (Johnson sound boxes)		

1898 (July)	730 (Johnson) 150 (Montross)	34,133
1898 (Aug)	710 (Johnson) 176 (Johnson scheme goods gramophone) 250 (Montross)	55,016
1898 (Sept)	1,059 (Johnson) 250 (Johnson scheme) 140 (Montross) 200 (Johnson sd. boxes)	30,376
1898 (Oct)	711 (Johnson) 175 (Johnson scheme) 100 (Johnson sd. bx.)	
1898 (Nov)	966 (Johnson) 298 (Johnson scheme) 201 (Johnson sd. bx.)	72,203
1898 (Dec)	1,362 (Johnson) 172 (Johnson scheme) 200 (Johnson sd. bx.)	97,304
TOTALS FOR APRIL TO DEC. 1898		
	3,385 (Johnson spring motor gramophones)	517,352
	<u>1,071</u> (Johnson scheme goods gramophones)	
	9,456 (SUB TOTAL)	
	<u>1,195</u> (Montross motor gramophones)	
	10,651 GRAND TOTAL	
	1,041 (Johnson sound boxes)	
1899		569,154 records (BER)
1899 (Jan)	630 (Johnson) 237 (Johnson scheme)	59,569 (All monthly figures from USG)
1899 (Feb)	765 (Johnson) 316 (Johnson scheme) 100 (Johnson sound boxes)	38,122
1899 (Mar)	950 (Johnson) 350 (Johnson scheme) 200 (Johnson sound boxes)	69,523
1899 (Apr)	91 (Johnson) 202 (Johnson scheme) 200 (Johnson sound boxes)	55,168

1899 (May)	886 (Johnson)	27,412	
	150 (Johnson scheme)		
	200 (Johnson sound boxes)		
1899 (June)	1,571 (Johnson)	40,325	
	98 (Johnson scheme)		
1899 (July)	350 (Johnson)	42,425	
1899 (Aug)	1,657 (Johnson) (Note: called "F" Gramophones in rept.)	67,687	
	100 (Johnson sound boxes)		
1899 (Sept)	467 (Johnson)	46,570	
	500 (Johnson sound boxes)		
1899 (Oct)	957 (Johnson)	25,162	
	20 (Johnson sound boxes)		
1899 (Nov)	1,359 (Johnson)	58,358	
	1,000 (Johnson sound boxes)		
1899 (Dec)	2,071 (Johnson)	65,544	
	500 (Johnson sound boxes)		
TOTALS FOR 1899			
	12,795 (Johnson gramophones)	595,865	
	<u>1,353</u> (Johnson scheme goods gramophones)		
	14,348 TOTAL		
	2,820 (Johnson sound boxes)		
1900 (Jan. to April)		255,784	(BER)
1900 (Jan)	1,164 (Johnson)	62,605	(All monthly figures from USG)
	500 (Johnson sound boxes)		
1900 (Feb)	1,060 (Johnson)	66,297	
1900 (Mar)	801 (Johnson)	80,734	
1900 (Apr)	29 (Johnson)	45,855	
TOTALS FOR JANUARY TO APRIL 1900			
	3,054 (Johnson spring motor gramophones)	255,491	
	500 (Johnson sound boxes)		

It will be noted that the figures supplied by Frank Seaman in his Bill of complaint in the Berliner case do not correspond with those supplied in either the U. S. Gramophone Annual Report nor with the figures supplied for royalty purposes and included in the U. S. Gramophone case.

The discrepancy can partially be explained by two factors. Sales in Washington were under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Gramophone Company and during 1897 and part of 1898 the National Gramophone Co. was also supplying Berliner discs to England. In 1898 these were apart from the regular royalty schedules.

The Montross motor machines were available as scheme goods in 1897 and 1898. A total of 2000 were made although the figures do not exactly bear this out. Scheme goods referred to items supplied for the premium trade.