

A Cylinder Industry Survey

It can be difficult to find reliable information about cylinder phonograph records. The books on phonographs or sound recordings that are likely to be found in the typical public library do not provide enough understanding toward the identification of cylinders, let alone safe storage, handling and playback. Decades of independent research concerning cylinder records have been shared mostly through articles in little-known periodicals for collectors. Without comprehensive indexing, a great deal of solid information remains inaccessible. This paper describes a long-term project with the goal of documenting all types and brands of cylinder records and their manufacturers, worldwide. The scope and status of this project are outlined.

In 1958, pioneer researcher Dr. Duane Deakins issued the second edition of his *Cylinder Records*.¹ In that self-published, 36-page booklet, Deakins identified and discussed approximately 75 cylinder brands and companies. He also published separate catalogs listing whole series of Edison cylinders (and some major competing brands) by number, title and artist. Deakins planned to continue this work for the minor producers of cylinder records, to form a “Comprehensive Cylinder Record Index,” but he died in a plane crash in 1962, leaving his projects unfinished.

Since that time, others have produced meticulous listings for the Edison entertainment cylinders and other major U.S. and British brands. However, dozens of important lines of cylinders - particularly those made and sold in Continental Europe - remain unknown to all but the most seasoned veterans.

For fifteen years, I have worked with a number of collectors and researchers to better understand the history, technology, and people behind the cylinder industry. I began to track company names, locations, products, dates, and technologies - first on paper and later with a personal computer.

Scope and Content

The database I have compiled now includes entries for more than 1,300 manufacturers, brands, trade names, trademarks, and cylinder types. This data covers not just commercial entertainment cylinders, but also: dictation blanks used in business; instructional records; doll, toy and clock cylinders; talking-film cylinders; special-purpose cylinders; and experimental cylinders.

A similar set of entries covering the early disc record industry has been included,

for quick reference and to help reconcile confusing situations. (Sometimes, identical brand names were used for records issued in both cylinder *and* disc formats. Company names can coincide, too.) Fortunately, Allan Sutton has published his landmark *Directory of American Disc Record Brands and Manufacturers*,² a model counterpart to my cylinder study.

The *Cylinder Industry Survey* includes information in these categories:

- Cylinder Types** The various kinds of cylinder records and blanks, described in terms of: dimensions, groove pitch, materials, construction, colors, markings, rotational speed and maximum playing time. Each is identified as to the manufacturers who originated and produced them, along with an indication of when they were made.
- Brands** The trade names by which different types and series of cylinders were marketed, as identified on cylinders, on their containers and paper record slips, and in catalogs and promotional material. Manufacturers and the period of production are indicated.
- Companies** The organizations that manufactured and distributed cylinders: their corporate names, locations (office, studio and factory), products manufactured, periods of operation, and key personnel.
- Trademarks** The distinctive designs, words and phrases used on products or in advertising: who “owned” them and when they used them.
- Terms** Words or expressions having a precise meaning peculiar to cylinder records.
- People** Individual participants, identified by name and title(s), with an explanation of their role in the industry. This often includes: company founders, officers, executives, managers, inventors, and recording experts. Some limited biographical data is included.

This project can be considered a continuation and expansion of the program that Duane Deakins began forty years ago - an *ongoing* effort to identify, index, define and interpret information concerning the cylinder record industry, its products and participants.

Sources and Citations

We owe a great debt to all those who have persevered in gathering facts about the early recording industry and then shared their findings with us in one way or another. The data I have compiled has come from numerous original documents, court cases, patents, catalogs, advertisements, trade publications, surviving artifacts, secondary books and articles and even word-of-mouth exchange, but much of it has appeared in print *somewhere*, at one time or another.

Citations for each reference used in the *Cylinder Industry Survey* provide an index to the specific source of the information, for traceability. I monitor the current literature and study entire runs of back issues of the pertinent serials, comparing specifics and attempting to resolve discrepancies.

Project Status and Discussion

The database structure has been refined over a five-year period of development and personal use, but improvements can be made as others consider the material and its organization. I believe the data compiled so far is fairly comprehensive for the U.S. scene, but the international story remains far from complete.

Cylinder Types

At this time, 166 cylinder “types” have been classified according to their defining physical characteristics. Abbreviations have been chosen to generically represent the twenty or so predominant types in the database.

Brands

At least 429 cylinder brands are listed in the database. *Actual* manufacturers are identified whenever known, along with a listing of the cylinder type(s) marketed under that brand name. Cross-references direct the user to further information on related brands or other issues. Comments often describe distinctive aspects of that brand’s recorded genre, marketing, packaging, and so on.

Companies

The corporate entities included in this survey are primarily *manufacturers*, not wholesalers or retailers. The volume of information available for them ranges from abundant to little more than the company name itself.

Geographic locations have been determined for many firms: country, state, city, and (often) the street address. If multiple sites or addresses have been identified, the period of occupancy is noted for each, if known.

As they are uncovered, the exact dates of founding and/or incorporation are entered into the database for each firm. Dates for other significant business events are included, such as: restructuring, change of name or ownership, bankruptcy or dissolution. Corporate genealogies are thus traced.

A description of the company’s product line is given, along with the brand names or record types involved.

The current count of 687 cylinder-related companies includes corporate divisions and foreign subsidiaries. For example, there are 35 entries for “Edison ...” companies, 21 for “National Phonograph Co.,” and 32 related to “Thomas A. Edison, Inc.” Bettini has five, Columbia 28, Edison Bell nine, and there are seven for “Excelsior ...”!

Trademarks

The state of this category is very preliminary, because I have not yet made any systematic search of trademark registrations. The *claim* of a trademark design or phrase appearing on packaging or in advertising is being noted, as well as mentions in our current literature.

Only 148 trademarks have been specifically listed so far in this survey; many more remain to be confirmed. The field of trademarks has been sporadically explored in connection with phonograph records, but several researchers have made closer studies of trademark registrations in recent years.

Letter

Disposal of Record Collections

I write with a particular commendation for the commentary on "Disposal of Record Collections" (*ARSC Journal* 1995;26[1]:53-61) - and to mention an important publication on that topic. Such commentary is needed to protect collections at the death of the owner/compiler. Jazz is not highlighted in those discussions, but one commentator was Mildred Petrie of our local Sarasota Music Archive. Their interests - like mine and ARSC - extend to jazz and all other popular music, as well as classical.

ARSC coverage of IAJRC (International Association of Jazz Record Collectors) publications may not extend back to 1990 when we issued *IAJRC Monograph No. 1*, "Assessing, Insuring, and Disposing of Jazz Record Collections", edited by David Goldenberg, ISBN 0-9625487-0-7. It is still available from C.H. Waters, Jr., 8809 Echo Valley, Houston TX 77055. Price is \$10.95. Its chapters are:

- Appraisals
- Insurance
- Donating Your Collection to an Institution
- Disposing of Microgroove Record Collections
- Disposing of 78 RPM Record Collections
- Appendices:
 - Institutions and Archives
 - Dealers/Appraisers
 - Jazz Publications
 - Determining Value of Donated Property

Although its coverage is strictly jazz collections, many ARSC members should be interested.

James B. Weaver
Sarasota, FL.

Terms

Jargon of the cylinder industry and trade is defined and explained, particularly when the sense or meaning of a term has changed over the years. Modern collectors' terminology is covered too.

People

The survey identifies individual participants by their role in each organization, along with their period of involvement, whenever known. Because these entries can easily be sorted and searched, the database facilitates the tracing of each person's movement – through the years, and from company to company. For example, Victor Emerson is shown to have been connected with at least eight companies, Cleveland Walcutt with six, James E. Hough with seven, and Russell Hunting with ten.

Future Possibilities

Many North Americans and a few Europeans are contributing to our pool of data. I seek contact with others in more remote corners, who are interested in cylinder records and wish to share information. It is clearly difficult to access materials scattered all over the world. That is why I see this project as a *continuing* effort - much help is needed to make the data more complete and accurate. (Significant contributions will be acknowledged in any version of the survey that is published.)

Some enthusiasts have urged me to publish an interim listing of cylinder companies, brands and types, to draw out more details - especially from international collectors and archives. The title *World Cylinder Directory* has been suggested for such a preliminary "checklist".

The entire database may be offered in digital form on CD-ROM, to permit rapid searching, sorting and analysis. Publishing costs would be much lower for that medium than for massive paper volumes. Use of CD-ROM could permit more frequent updates and offer the potential to convey graphic images from cylinder box labels and lids, and, perhaps, selected sounds from the records themselves.

I welcome comments and advice regarding the form and direction of the program.

Bill Klinger is an *Electronics Reliability Engineer* and record collector who researches the history and technology of sound recording in the cylinder format. He is Chair, ARSC Cylinder Subcommittee.

Endnotes

1. Dr. Duane D. Deakins, M.D., *Cylinder Records*. 2d ed. [Stockton, CA,] 1958.
2. Allan Sutton, *Directory of American Disc Record Brands and Manufacturers, 1891-1943* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994). Reviewed in *ARSC Journal* (1994; 25[2]:222-224).