



EDISON

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Before The Grammys: How Thomas Edison Invented The Music Industry

Jan 28, 2018 by Tomas Kellner
(<https://www.ge.com/reports/author/200020778/>)

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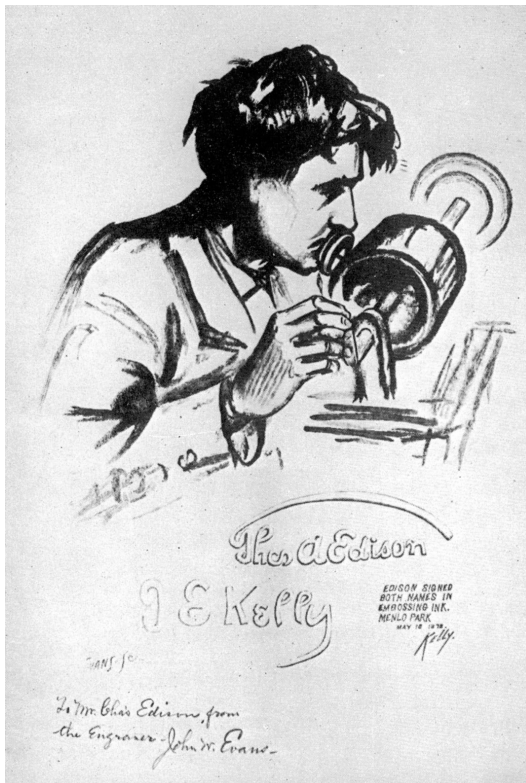


Thomas Edison lost much of his hearing when he was still a child. "I have not heard a bird sing since I was 12 years old," he once remarked. But that did not stop him from inventing the phonograph in 1877, a device

that for the first time recorded sounds and played them back. He was just 29 years old and the lightbulb

(<https://www.ge.com/reports/say-goodbye-say-hello-ge-stops-making-cfls-says-go-go-go-to-leds/>) was still in his future.

The phonograph created a whole new way of experiencing the world through sound. In 1958, when the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences was thinking about naming their music industry awards, one suggestion was the Eddie (<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=ca9NAAAAIBAJ&sjid=cEgDAAAAIBAJ&pg=7065,1739274&dq=paul+weston&hl=en>) to honor Edison's contribution. The Academy eventually decided on Grammy, after the gramophone. The 60th Annual Grammy Awards took place in New York on Sunday.



(<http://s3.amazonaws.com/dsg.files.app.content.prod/gereports/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11192712/Sketch-of-Edison-speaking-into-tinfoil->

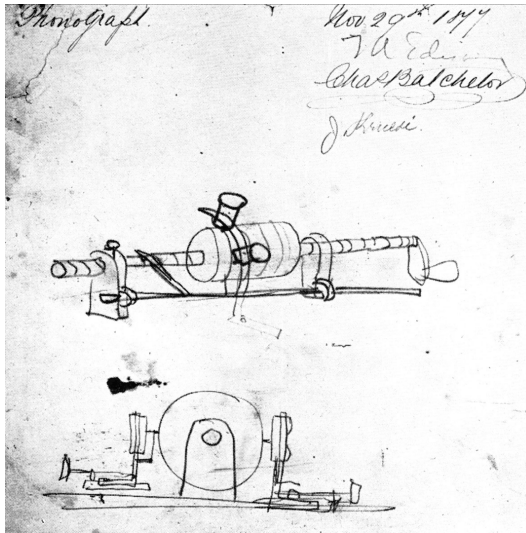
phonograph.jpg)

Above: A drawing from 1878 of Edison speaking into the sound collector of his tinfoil phonogram, the first device that could record and also play back sounds. The frenchman Édouard Léon-Scott made the phonoautogram, the first recording-only machine in 1857. Top image: Edison with his phonogram. Images credit: Museum of Innovation and Science Schenectady.

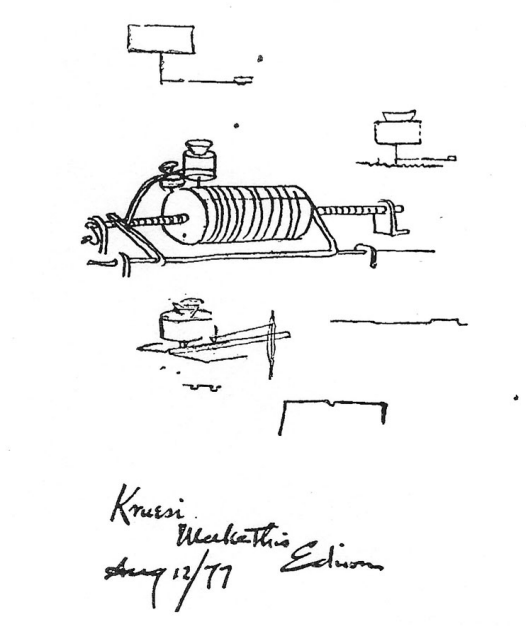
Edison came up with the device by drawing on his knowledge of the telegraph and the telephone. "I was experimenting on an automatic method of recording telegraph messages on a disk of paper laid on a revolving platen, exactly the same as the disk talking machine of today," Edison told a biographer. "From my experiments on the telephone I knew the power of a diaphragm to take up sound vibrations. Instead of using a disk, I designed a little machine using a cylinder provided with grooves around the surface. Over this was placed tin foil, which easily received and recorded the movements of the diaphragm." He recorded the movements of the diaphragm with a needle.

As was his habit with new inventions, Edison immediately estimated the price people would pay for the machine. He guessed \$18 – the equivalent of \$390 today. He then asked a worker named John Kruesi to make it from his sketch. "I did not have much faith that it would work, expecting I might possibly hear a word or so that would give hope for the future of the idea," Edison told a biographer. "Kruesi, when he had nearly finished it, asked what it was for. I told him I was going to record talking and then have the machine talk back. He thought it was absurd. After it was finished the foil was put on. I then shouted 'Mary had a little lamb, etc.' I adjusted the reproducer

and the machine reproduced it perfectly. I was never so taken back in my life."



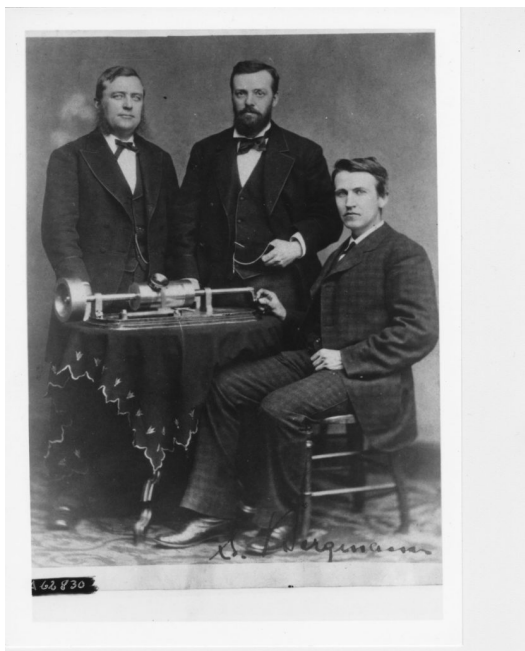
(<http://s3.amazonaws.com/dsg.files.app.content.prod/gereports/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11192712/Edison-phonograph-sketch-November-29-1877.jpg>)



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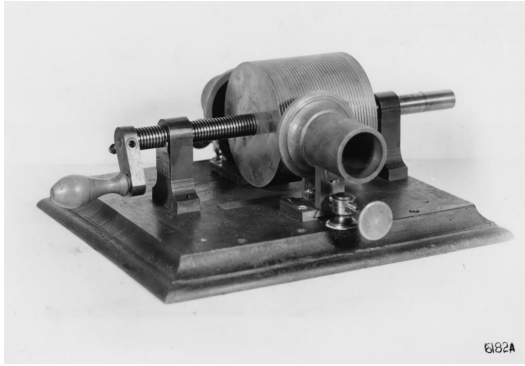
Copies of the original sketches Edison made for his employee John Kruesi. Image credit: Museum of Innovation and Science Schenectady.

The device made Edison immediately famous and sealed his reputation (<http://edison.rutgers.edu/tinfoil.htm>) as the “Inventor of the Age” and led to his nickname “The Wizard of Menlo Park.” On April 18, 1878, he even traveled to the White House at the request of President Rutherford B. Hayes, who wanted to see the machine. Many of Edison’s recordings have survived and have been digitized as mp3 files. You can listen to them online (<http://www.nps.gov/edis/learn/photosmultimedia/the-recording-archives.htm>).



(<http://s3.amazonaws.com/dsg.files.app.content.prod/gereports/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11192712/Sigmund-Bergmann-Charles-Batchelor-Edison-with-Edison-tinfoil-phonograph-1878.jpg>)

Edison’s close associates Sigmund Bergmann (left) and Charles Batchelor pose with Edison (seated) and his tinfoil phonograph 1878. Image credit: Museum of Innovation and Science Schenectady



(<http://s3.amazonaws.com/dsg.files.app.content.prod/gereports/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11192712/First-phonograph-1877.jpg>)

Edison's first phonograph from 1877. Image credit: Museum of Innovation and Science Schenectady.



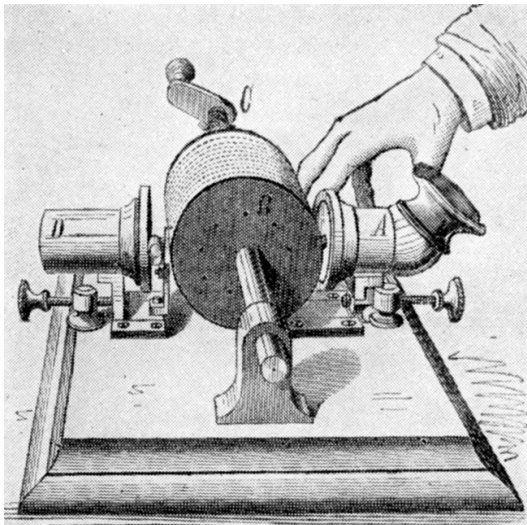
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The mouthpiece used for recording voice. Image credit: Museum of Innovation and Science Schenectady



(<http://s3.amazonaws.com/dsg.files.app.content.prod/gereports/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11192712/Woman-speaking-into-phonograph-sketch.jpg>)

*A sketch of a woman speaking into a phonograph.
Image credit: Museum of Innovation and Science
Schenectady*



(<http://s3.amazonaws.com/dsg.files.app.content.prod/gereports/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/11192712/Early-phonograph-drawing.jpg>)

*An early phonograph drawing. Image credit: Museum of
Innovation and Science Schenectady*



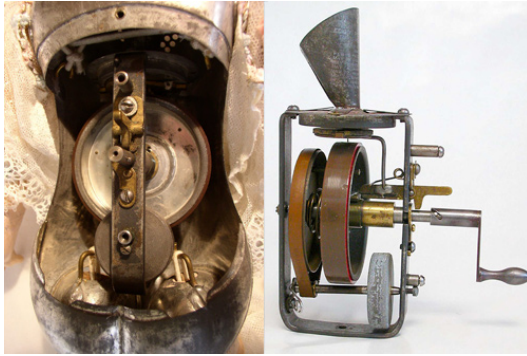
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Edison with his wax cylinder machine. Image credit: Museum of Innovation and Science Schenectady



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Edison later switched to wax cylinders. Image credit: Museum of Innovation and Science Schenectady.



(<http://s3.amazonaws.com/dsg.files.app.content.prod/gereports/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/06212900/talking-doll.jpg>)

*The invention also allowed Edison to crack the toy market and start selling talking dolls
(<https://www.ge.com/reports/post/106229305270/a-toy-gone-wrong-edisons-monster-doll-was-one/>).
Image credit: Robin and Joan Rolfs*



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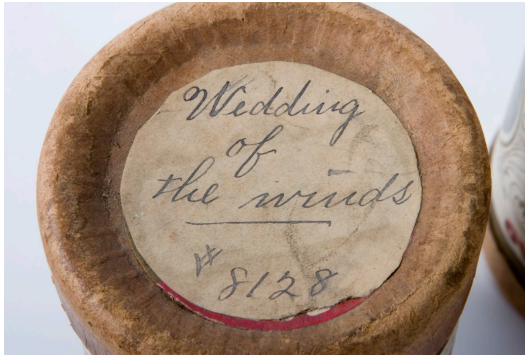
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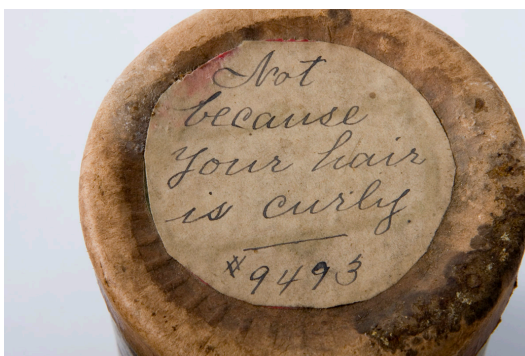
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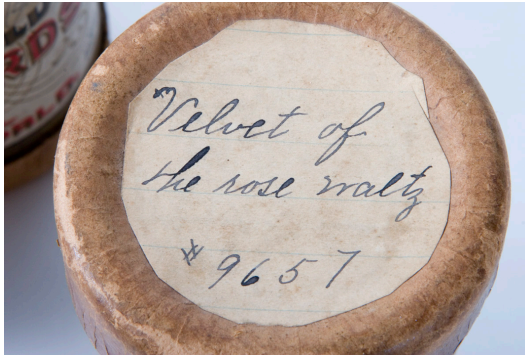
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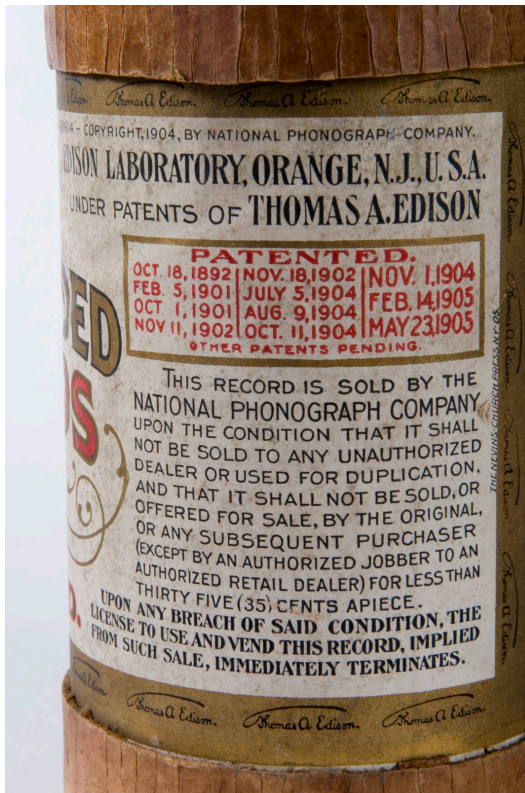
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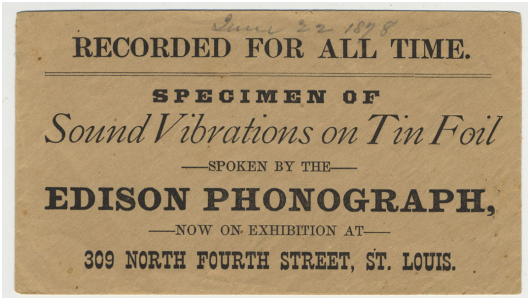
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