



# The New York Public Library Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives of Recorded Sound

Guide to the

## **A. F. R. Lawrence papers**

1888-1972 [bulk 1940-1964]

\*L (Special) 16-01

Compiled by Amelia Carlin, 2016.

### **Summary**

**Creator:** Lawrence, A. F. R., 1922-1972

**Title:** A. F. R. Lawrence papers

**Date:** 1888-1972 [bulk 1940-1964]

**Size:** 10.46 linear feet (23 boxes, 1 volume, 5 oversized folders)

**Source:** A. F. R. Lawrence, 1972.

**Abstract:** Alton Forrest Raymond Lawrence (1922-1972) was a sound recording archivist, lawyer, and professional historian who established and organized the record library and company archive of Columbia Records, Inc. beginning in the early 1960s. The collection dates from 1888 to 1972 (bulk dates 1940-1964) and reflects the history, operations, business decisions, and technological developments of Columbia Records while providing some insight into the professional work and outlook of A. F. R. Lawrence.

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**Processing note:** Compiled by Amelia Carlin, 2016.

### **Separated Materials:**

A.F.R. Lawrence collection of historical spoken word [sound recording] 1900-1970 (RHA).

### **Creator History**

Alton Forrest Raymond Lawrence (1922-1972) was a sound recording archivist, lawyer, avid record collector, and professional historian. In the early 1960s, he was commissioned by Columbia Records to assist in the establishment of a company archives, in light of the closing of the Company's record pressing facility in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1964. He was also engaged in researching the history of

Columbia Records and its early recordings.

Lawrence was born in Madison, Iowa, and earned degrees in jurisprudence and history from the University of Iowa and Drake University; he was a member of the Iowa Bar and taught history at Fairmont State College, West Virginia. He was a founding member of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) and built up what was considered the eminent collection of historical dictation recordings in the world. He published or collaborated on many discographies, articles, liner notes, and reviews. Lawrence worked to improve the engineering quality of a number of "pirate" opera labels, and was knowledgeable on the fields of tape editing and the principles of discography building. He died in New York City at the age of 50.

Columbia Records, a part of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), was originally established in the late 1880s, and gained success selling pre-recorded musical cylinders. It was previously known in the United States as the Columbia Phonograph Company and was the most successful subsidiary of The American Graphophone Company, which had merged with The Volta Graphophone Company. It began selling disc records in the early 1900s. In 1938, after CBS acquired the company, its name was changed to Columbia Recording Corporation. It has shared the majority of the record market for decades with one other company, RCA Victor (RCA). In 1987, the company was acquired by Sony Music Entertainment. Columbia Records pioneered a number of technological and manufacturing developments in the history of recorded sound, such as introducing to the market the double-sided disc in 1904, and the Long Playing record in 1948.

## **Custodial History**

The papers originally came to the library alongside Lawrence's sound recording collection, in 1972. They were dispersed into office files at the Library then subsequently regrouped. This collection consists of material that was identified as discretely belonging to the original papers, and is not complete.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The collection dates from 1888 to 1972 (bulk dates 1940-1964) and reflects the history and operations of Columbia Records while providing insight into the professional activities of A. F. R. Lawrence.

Material in this collection concerns the history, products, and manufacturing facilities of the company; and its relationship to other industry players, including its rivals (namely RCA Victor), affiliates, and overseas subsidiaries during the first half of the 20th Century.

A large portion of the collection comprises listings of matrix numbers. These numbers indicate which stamper was used to press which record and distinguish particular sides of a disc; they can also indicate which take was used for the final pressing, and the factory where it was made. Some of these lists were created during the 1950s and 1960s by Helene Chmura, the Company's librarian, and noted compiler and circulator of matrix lists. These files and others in the Corporate Documents section include comprehensive discographical information on production from Columbia Records.

The history and developments of the company from the early decades through the 1960s is traced in Corporate Documents via internal memoranda, meeting minutes, legal documents, financial records, and technical papers. Contracts and agreements with performers, partners, and subsidiaries are also present. The company's marketing strategies are reflected in material in these files, and can be found

scattered throughout the collection.

The preponderance of files on Columbia's rival company RCA Victor demonstrate close competition within the industry, further highlighted by the Court Document files that concern a lawsuit filed by RCA Victor for trademark infringement surrounding the "red seal" label in the early 1940s. The Court Exhibits in this section include a range of Victor promotional material.

The Engineering files contain reports on research into different technologies, internal correspondence and memoranda that detail new projects and developments, and are concentrated on the 1940s. Correspondence and reports trace the development of technologies in production of discs, recording, and playback; such as wire recording, variable pitch, needle design, and long playing records. Also present is a detailed overview of manufacturing facilities (1949), and plans for their expansion and development. The effect of raw material restrictions during World War II is documented in the company's research into alternatives.

Historical Research provides further background to the corporation through originals and copies of correspondence and memoranda, catalogs, press material, and other printed matter. Business functions are recorded through stockholder correspondence, stock plans, and articles of association. The history of the early recording industry in the United States is represented in transcribed excerpts summarizing record companies active prior to the electric era.

Lawrence's development of the Columbia Records archives, and efforts to preserve metal parts from the record pressing process is outlined in the Projects section. His independent research and writing activities are also represented, and include notes, clippings, office memoranda, catalogs, and other printed matter.

## **Key Terms**

### **Occupations**

Archivists  
Historians  
Sound engineers

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Blueprints  
Business records  
Clippings  
Correspondence  
Phonograph records  
Photographs  
Posters  
Styluses (audio equipment)

### **Subjects**

Discographies  
Record labels  
Sound recording executives and producers  
Sound recording industry

### **Names**

Bachman, William S.

Goldmark, Peter, 1906-1977  
Williams, Bert, 1874-1922  
American Record Company  
Columbia Records, Inc.  
International Zonophone Company  
OKeh Records (Firm)  
RCA Records

## Container List

### Artists 1911-1960s

- b. 1 f. 1-6 Discographies 1960s
- b. 1 f. 7-12 Matrix Record Cards - Artist Cards 1960s
- b. 1 f. 13-14 Matrix Record Cards 1960s  
Copies of source material from the 1910s-1930s.
- b. 1 f. 15-23 1941-1956  
Includes contracts and royalty payment listings for the popular entertainer Bert Williams from 1911 to 1928, including correspondence.

### Corporate Documents 1893, 1907-1960s

#### Columbia Records Distributor Policy Manual

- b. 1 f. 24-26 1955-1962
- b. 2 f. 1-5 1955-1962

#### Correspondence

Material from the World War II period concerns restrictions on materials such as shellac, detailed correspondence on the production of "V-discs" for the War Department's use in the army and navy, and includes a memo stating that the company will offer cash prizes to staff who can suggest viable substitutes.

- b. 2 f. 6-19 1931-1957
- b. 3 f. 1-14 1935-1960

#### History of Columbia and Predecessors

- b. 3 f. 15-29 1893, 1904, 1914-1959
- b. 4 f. 1-5 1914-1940s

- b. 21 f. 1-4 Moody's Manuals 1960s?  
Copies of Moody's Manuals from 1901-1922, most likely made during the early 1960s.

- b. 22 f. 1-3 Lists of Masters 1931

- b. 4 f. 6-11 Public Relations - Press Releases and Press Books 1940s-1961

#### Victor Trademark and Patent Applications

- b. 4 f. 12-18 1940s
- b. 5 f. 1-7 1940s

- b. 5 f. 8-11 Victor Warning Letters and Agreements 1960s

#### Legal Documents, Printed Matter, and Correspondence

Includes Columbia marketing material.

- b. 5 f. 12-19 1919-1946
  - b. 6 f. 1-26 1924-1925, 1940s
  - b. 7 f. 1-8 1907-1940s
  - b. 22 f. 4 Supplemental License of Foreign Corporation 1946
  - b. 7 f. 9-11 *The Columbia Record* 1955-1964
  - b. 7 f. 12-16 E.M.I. Material Retained by Columbia Records undated
- #### Sales Records
- b. 7 f. 17-18 1939-1940s
  - v. 1 Sales Ledger 1941-1946

### Court Documents 1899, 1923, 1940s

Copies were made circa 1941 to 1943 of material dating from the early 1900s.

Court Documents (cont.)

Court Exhibits Circa 1943

- b. 8 f. 1-28 6R to Z
- b. 22 f. 5-8 10P, 14P, 19C to 19F, 22L to 22Z, 23S, and L

Victor Advertising

- b. 9 f. 1 1940-1941
- b. 8 f. 29-31 1940-1942
- Posters
  - o. 1 1930s-1940s
  - o. 2 1930s-1940s
- b. 9 f. 2-12 Victor Red Seal 1923, 1940-1943
- b. 9 f. 13 Supplemental Brief for Appellees 1899  
American Graphophone Company vs. Talking Machine Company.

Engineering 1939-1953

- b. 9 f. 14-20 1939-1953  
Includes twelve black and white photographs of the manufacturing process at the Bridgeport facility (1946).
- b. 10 f. 1-14 1939-1955
  - o. 3 Gold Sputtering Machine 1944 (Blueprints)
  - o. 4 Matrix Department 1944 (Blueprints)
- Needles
  - b. 10 f. 15-19 1940-1947  
Contains actual metal and cactus needle samples, some in original packaging.
  - b. 23 Sketches of needles on Celluloid  
Contains three design sketches of semi-permanent needles on celluloid.  
Material is in fragments, handle with care.
- b. 10 f. 20-22 Wire Recorders 1944-1946

Historical Research 1889, 1917-1960s

Copies have been given the approximate date of "1960s," although the source material may be from an earlier period.

- b. 11 f. 1-16 1898, 1940-1960s
- b. 22 f. 9 Pictures of Playback Machinery 1960s
- b. 11 f. 17-20 Discographies 1960s
- b. 11 f. 21-24 Columbia Historical 1960s  
U.S. Record Companies 1960s
- b. 11 f. 25-26 A to G
- b. 12 f. 1 H to Z
- b. 12 f. 2 Zonophone Records Catalog 1960s  
Copies of Zonophone catalogs from 1901 and 1904.
- b. 12 f. 3-4 Administrative Material 1889, 1917-1924, 1940, 1960s  
Columbia Record Catalogs  
Copies of material from 1888 to 1930.
- b. 12 f. 5-9 1960s
- b. 13 f. 1-4 1960s
- b. 13 f. 5 Victor Advertisements and History 1926, 1960s

Historical Research (cont.)

- b. 13 f. 6-7     **Columbia and Subsidiaries Legal Documents 1925-1929**  
                  **Matrices 1960s**  
                  The matrix numbers for some series are incomplete.
- b. 14 f. 1-9     **Matrix Physical Inventory 1961**  
                  **Matrix Numbers**  
                  American Record Company undated
- b. 14 f. 10-19     **6000-18999**
- b. 15 f. 1-7       **19000-22999, 400000-402999**
- b. 15 f. 8-11     **C 501- C 2499**  
                  Chicago Series
- b. 15 f. 12       **Chmura Lists undated**  
                  M 1-M 4, M 105-M 989, MW 990, MW 991, WM 992-WM 1150  
                  **Columbia undated**
- b. 15 f. 13-14     **1-4999**
- b. 16 f. 1-9       **19100-79999**
- b. 17 f. 1-8       **80000-W 151201**
- b. 18 f. 1-5       **W 151202-495058**
- b. 18 f. 6-9       **C 2500-CCO 4999, CL 500-CL 1399**  
                  Chicago series.
- b. 18 f. 10-16     **Dallas, Hollywood, J Series, Los Angeles, and Memphis**
- b. 19 f. 1-3       **San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Jax**
- b. 19 f. 4-6       **ML 2001-ML 5497**  
                  Includes discontinued ML series.
- b. 19 f. 7          **NE 200000**  
                  Nipponophone.
- b. 19 f. 8-10       **403000-405199**  
                  Okeh.
- b. 19 f. 11        **Miscellaneous Matrix Numbers**  
                  Includes HL and HS series.
- Projects 1945-1972**  
                  **Columbia Archive**
- b. 19 f. 12-16     **1960-1964**
- b. 20 f. 1-2       **1951-1964**
- o. 5     **Pitman Plant Inactive Matrix Vault 1964**  
                          Blueprints
- b. 20 f. 3-8       **Shayon 1945, 1960-1972**
- b. 20 f. 9-21      **A.F.R. Lawrence 1950, 1960s**  
                  Includes Lawrence's research notes and lists; artist and record cards; and some correspondence.