

Clipping, October 28, 1937

Oct. HER. TRIBUNE 28, 1937 NEW YORK First Wax Disk Is Played First Time Since '81 Record, Made by Bell and Two Associates, Quotes 2 Lines From 'Hamlet' Stored in Smithsonian But One of Trio Survives; He's Unable To Be There

By The Associated Press

WASHINGTON, Oct. 27.—The first wax recording ever made of a human voice turned out today to be a quotation from Shakespeare and a bit of humor. The man responsible for the historic message, which for fifty-six years has been locked in a vault of the Smithsonian Institution, probably was Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone. Bell with two associates worked out the wax record method of capturing sound.

Here are the first sounds he had recorded: "T-r-a—t-r-a — 'There are more things in heaven and earth. Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy'—t-r-a. I am a graphophone and my mother was a phonograph."

[The quotation is from "Hamlet," Act I. Scene 5. Hamlet is the speaker.]

First Time Since '81

The words were heard from the graphophone at the Smithsonian Institution this afternoon for the first time since 1881. Only one of the machine's three inventors, Charles Sumner Tainter, is living, and he was unable to come here from his San Diego, Calif., home for the ceremony. He is eighty-four years old and it was his desire that the graphophone be brought out of storage and placed on exhibition during his lifetime.

Tainter, Alexander Graham Bell and a cousin, Chichester Bell, packed their machine away in the Smithsonian in 1881, as soon as they had completed it, so they would have no

Library of Congress

trouble in obtaining patents should any question arise as to when it was invented. Thomas A. Edison had already made recordings on tin-foil plates, which were too fragile to be of commercial value, and Smithsonian officials said the Bell group may have believed Edison also was working on a wax process.

The officials added that the humorous quotation linking the graphophone with the phonograph was undoubtedly an acknowledgement on Bell's part of Edison's early work in voice-recording. Edison had called his tin-foil mechanism a phonograph.

Bell's Heirs are Present

The Bells and Tainter agreed that the box deposited in the Smithsonian should not be opened except by agreement of two of them. They obtained patents without having to produce their first model, and the box remained unopened.

Mrs. Gilbert Grosvenor, of Washington, wife of the president of the National Geographic Society, and Mrs. David G. Fairchild, of Coconut Grove, Fla., daughters of Alexander Graham Bell, agreed to Tainter's request that the box be opened, and they and other members of the Bell family, including a great-grandson, Alexander Graham Bell Grosvenor, were present today.

Mrs. Fairchild said she did not recognize the recorded voice as that of her father but she believed he composed the message. "It's the sort of thing father would have said," she explained. "He was fond of quoting Shakespeare and he would have liked the little joke about the graphophone that came at the end."