

In Memoriam



Walter L. Welch

Walter L. Welch, honorary member of the AES, died on March 31, 1995 at the age of 94. Known as one of the first people to devote himself to audio restoration, Welch's interest in phonographs and records began as a hobby when he was a teenager. As a boy growing up in Syracuse, New York, his hero was Thomas Edison.

Following World War I Welch began work for the Clark Music company, assisting its owner, a musician and inventor. The company was an authorized Edison phonograph and record dealership. One of Welch's first jobs was demonstrating the Edison units for customers. Later, using the Edison machine, he actually assisted in conducting tone tests with visiting recording artists who gave

performances in Syracuse in the 20s.

After receiving a B.A. degree in landscape architecture from Syracuse University in 1946, Welch joined the teaching staff at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. At that time he was recognized for environmental conservation work.

Pursuing his hobby of collecting old phonographs and recordings, Welch began experiments to determine the optimum techniques for re-recording. After the introduction of magnetic tape it was clear that this was an ideal medium for re-recording to even more exacting standards. As a result, a three-year program was undertaken to establish an audio archive and research laboratory at Syracuse University, which was in part supported by the Thomas A. Edison Foundation and the Charles and Roseanna Batchelor Memorial.

What began as a hobby turned into a lifework of re-recording old records to preserve their original sound quality. After World War II Welch collaborated with his friend and colleague Oliver Read in writing his first major book, *From Tinfoil to Stereo*, published by Howard Sams in 1959. This

work became a classic history, which is still in print. The author of five books on recorded music and sound preservation, Welch also patented a technique for re-recording acoustical disk and cylinder recordings from the early years of the phonograph.

In 1963 he founded Belfer Audio Laboratory at Syracuse University, considered the largest sound archive at any American university. He headed the Audio Archives of Syracuse University Library and was director of the Thomas Alva Edison Re-recording Laboratory for 20 years, retiring as its curator in 1991.

Welch's work has had considerable impact in the field of sound preservation and in education. Unique cylinder recordings of ethnological importance have been re-recorded for the Laura Boulton Collection at Columbia University, for the Bernice P. Bishop Museum in Honolulu, and for the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.

A recipient of awards and citations from all over the world, Welch was a member of the International Association of Sound Archives, the American Institute of Architecture and a principal founder of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections.