

## OUR PUBLISHED HERITAGE

### **Introduction**

Some 4 years ago, in realization that we have an opportunity to make good use of the magic and power of the internet, I began a program of digital archiving, making a beginning with our AMICA Technicalities to establish proof of concept. That initial modest beginning has gradually expanded to embrace our AMICA Bulletins, original Literature, and selected publications either in public domain or with permission.

### **AMICA Bulletins**

Our AMICA Bulletins are now on-line to most current 18 issues. These 18 issues, while in existence in digital PDF format, are withheld from our on-line website to protect their subscription value. The PDF files on-line are in compressed optimized format. All will be available from AMICA in high resolution format on a DVD disc. This should be an excellent research resource for our members.

This project had its origin within a casual conversation with new member Roger Stumfoll of Pittsburg, KS at the 2005 Convention in Minneapolis. He approached me about an article of mine of many years previous. Knowing he was a new member, I inquired how he managed to know about my old article. It seems that he was a guest during a Chapter meeting, and acquired a small collection of AMICA Bulletins about to be disposed. That Chapter meeting and small bundle of old Bulletins inspired him to become a member. That chance discussion made me realize that all our new members had no way to research AMICA's history. Now it's possible.

### **Index**

As a companion to digital archiving of the Bulletins, our first ever complete computerized master index of all articles ever published is now available on-line. By the time this report appears before the Board, this master index will be complete, and will be updated with each passing issue of our AMICA Bulletin. The Master Index will be available on disc from AMICA.

### **Obenchain Catalog**

Thaddeus Kochanny, an AMICA member from Chicago, perceived a need to republish the Obenchain Ampico Catalog in digital format. He first approached me with the idea and I urged him to first appeal for permission to do so from the holder of the copyright, held by the Vestal Press. The current owners of the Vestal Press

granted permission, and following that, Thad contacted Elaine Obenchain as a courtesy to advise her of our intentions.

Elaine happily concurred with Thad's initiative, conditional that a substantial improvement in visual appearance be implemented. That meant that the whole of the book needed to be OCR scanned and edited. Thad invited Brian Benson to assist him with this initiative. My role in this was the easy part – OCR scanning. Brian and I experimented with various scanner settings and I then scanned the whole of the book through OCR.

As the original type face was a conventional typewriter with a fabric ribbon, it presented a most challenging OCR project. The OCR scan produced at best about a 90% accurate output. Brian and Thad then spent many, many months examining every single character and editing it into a whole new format. The original book's 197 pages expanded into 690 pages in electronic form. The resulting display on a computer screen is a dramatic improvement in appearance and legibility. Brian and Thad are to be commended.

### **Purple Welte Book**

Dick Howe, of Houston Texas, co-authored "The Welte-Mignon, It's Music and Musicians, with Charles Davis Smith in 1995. He persuaded AMICA to fund the initial print run in return for AMICA holding the copyright and retaining any modest profits that might emerge. The complete original run was sold out in a couple years and a modest profit did emerge.

Dick perceived a need to re-issue the book in electronic format and approached me with his initiative. The original print photographic plates, while still available, could not be used for conversion to electronic format. The original typewritten manuscript, emerging from an MTST electronic typewriter, was no longer available, nor was its companion magnetic tapes. Therefore, the only alternative was to OCR scan the book itself.

AMICA member Dave Kerr loaned me his copy, and I OCR scanned all 1,000 pages. As all pages were all printed in excellent font and appearance, the OCR result was 99.999% accurate, requiring little or no editing. The book is now on a self-starting CD, and will be available from AMICA, in disc format only.

### **Original Literature**

About 4-5 years ago, in realization that my heirs would one day most likely dispose of all my collection of original literature without regard to the value of its contents, I started scanning my own collection into electronic PDF format. These PDF files are relatively large and I quickly ran out of website space. At that time, Jody Kravitz kindly made available some disk space on MMD to help establish proof of

concept. To date, about 100 items from my personal collection are now available off my personal web site, although stored on the MMD server.

A couple years ago, our Webmaster, Karl Ellison, negotiated with Yahoo an inexpensive contract providing for unlimited disk storage space and unlimited file transfer. That provided an opportunity to donate my collection of digital PDF files to AMICA to establish a beginning of an on-line library based upon my original proof of concept. There are now some 225+ items now available on-line, and growing constantly as AMICA members loan pieces of their original literature.

This is really not new, as Robin Pratt, our Publisher of many years, negotiated with our Board and our printer, Engler Printing, to reproduce many items out of his personal collection of original literature. They emerged from time to time as freebies within our AMICA Bulletin. What we are doing now is quite similar, only the method has changed.

Our quest for original literature is colliding with elderly members who dispose of their collection of original literature either on eBay or by institutional donation. Either way, access to them is effectively denied. One by worldwide dispersal, and the other by unfriendly institutional policies forcing personal visits for access.

Best example is the mammoth Howe Collection donated to the University of Maryland (UML) in 1996. UML will only allow access to the Howe Collection on their premises during their hours of business. A few people have successfully done this with satisfactory results. However, no attempt is being made to digitize the Howe Collection, which effectively denies access to all AMICA members but a few living in the immediate vicinity of College Park, MA. Similar policies exist in other institutions that I encounter in my quest for original literature.

That means that access to original literature, as Plan B, is by appealing to AMICA members to loan pieces from out of their personal collections, BEFORE eBay disposal or institutional donation. This is of critical importance because if not BEFORE, then access after is basically impossible. An appeal is expressed to all members to consider loaning items of original literature from out of their collections in a timely manner while still possible to do so.

All the original literature on our AMICA web site is in compressed, optimized format. A DVD containing all of the original literature on our AMICA web site, in high resolution format, will be available from AMICA, as an option to downloading, or for research where high resolution may be needed.

### **Other Publications**

In 1961, Harvey Roehl published the "Player Piano Treasury" through his newly built Vestal Press. The publication and his Vestal Press had the effect of provoking and nourishing an ever widening interest in this unique slice of our musical heritage. His ever expanded offerings of reprints of original literature kept us nourished in satisfaction of our hunger for new/old information.

Then Vestal Press was sold, and not long after Harvey passed away. Thereafter, in the absence of new/old information, AMICA membership began to shrink. Then Robin Pratt took up the torch and carried on to the best of his ability to continue nourishing this hunger for new/old information. Our current Publisher, Dr. Mike Kukral, continues and from time to time, a nifty reprint appears as if by magic.

There are a number of items in the Vestal Press catalog that we would like to reissue in digital PDF format. Permission to do so is being sought and we are optimistic. Stay tuned.....

It is interesting to note that 48 years after Harvey's initial book, Player Piano Treasury, Brian Dolan has recently published "Inventing Entertainment, The Player Piano and the Origins of an American Musical Industry". This is a commendable book, representing extensive interviews with respected old-timers in our avocation, particularly referencing AMICA and its members, even managing to do some research within the Howe Collection. His footnotes and bibliography are an outstanding roadmap for further research by interested members.

I have just learned from Kevin Brown that "Selling Sounds" by David Suisman, is about to be released. It contains much about the Commercial Revolution in American Music, and focuses attention on the mechanical music machines industry. Advance copies can be ordered off Amazon for \$29.95. Hopefully, these 2 publications will mark a revival of interest in our published heritage, and just possibly lead to a kind of repeat of what Harvey Roehl provoked and nourished nearly 50 years ago.

Respectfully submitted  
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