THE ASSOCIATION FOR RECORDED SOUND COLLECTIONS

Frank Gillis

The Association for Recorded Sound Collections was conceived to fulfill the needs of librarians, archivists, institutions and private individuals collecting and preserving collections of recorded sound materials. Its purpose is to encourage cooperation and communication among collectors and to promote projects relating to the control and dissemination of information in the field of sound recordings of any type or form. It is hoped that the Association would serve, directly or indirectly, to integrate collections, foster exchanges, answer inquiries, and suggest and encourage research in sound recordings. It has been proposed that the Association take an active interest in setting standards for collecting, preserving, cataloging and copying materials; in working with recording companies to make available valuable material held in their archives which is of little commercial but of great historical value; in promoting discussion of matters pertaining to copyright and the control of recorded sound materials; and similar activities through which the group might be influential in improving conditions and promoting progress in the field.

The forerunner of the Association for Recorded Sound Collections was the Recorded Music League, a group formed largely through the efforts of Frank R. Davis, Curator, Department of Communications and Applied Sciences, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan. The group met in the Dearborn area in late 1959 and early 1960. Because of limited interest in the organization, meetings became infrequent and the group ceased to be active.

In the spring of 1965, Mr. Davis sent out an extensive number of invitations for collectors to attend a meeting “arranged to explore the problems and potentials involved in the establishment of a national information service for persons concerned with private and institutional collections of historical sound recordings.” The meeting was held at the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, in conjunction with the national meetings of the American Library Association and Music Library Association being held in Detroit, Michigan. The Dearborn meeting, which included a tour of the Thomas A. Edison Laboratory in Greenfield Village, was chaired by Kurtz Meyers, of
the Detroit Public Library, and the program was coordinated by Paul T. Jackson, a student of library science at the University of Michigan and the author of *A Rare Recordings Handbook*. There was a general discussion at this exploratory meeting of the problems, purposes and other matters pertaining to the formation of an association of individuals and institutions interested in sound recordings.

Temporary officers elected at this meeting were: President, Philip L. Miller, Chief, Music Division, New York Public Library; Recording Secretary, Violette Jackson; Corresponding Secretary, Paul Jackson.

The Association for Recorded Sound Collections was formally organized at the meeting held at Syracuse University, February 25-26, 1966. At this meeting the name for the Association was decided upon and adopted, committees were appointed, and the following officers were elected: President, Philip L. Miller; Vice-President, Carlos B. Hagen, Head, Map Library, UCLA; Recording Secretary, Violette N. Jackson, New York Public Library; and Treasurer, Donald L. Leavitt, Head, Recorded Sound Section, Music Division, Library of Congress. Paul T. Jackson, Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, was appointed Corresponding Secretary.

Among the items discussed at this meeting were the name of the organization, the types of memberships and committees to be considered as a part of the structure, dues, the constitution and by-laws, and publications. The types of memberships decided upon were three: Individual; Institutional-libraries, college and university archives, and other non-profit organizations; Corporate-manufacturers, service organizations and similar concerns which are commercially oriented. Dues were tentatively set at $5.00 per year for all categories. There were plans made for the publication of a directory of the members, with information on the size and scope of their collections. The publication of a bulletin was also proposed.

Highlights of the meeting were a tour of the newly opened Syracuse University Audio Archives and The Thomas Alva Edison Foundation Re-recording Laboratory, both under the direction of Walter L. Welch, and a lecture-demonstration by Jerrold Moore, Historical Records Collection, Yale University.

On October 20-22, 1966, the Association met at the Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. In conjunction with the meeting the Library of Congress officially opened the Secrist Collection, a rare and extensive cumulation of early vocal recordings, prepared an exhibit of recorded materials, and gave tours of their facilities of
interest to members of the Association. Barbara A. Ringer, Assistant Register of Copyrights, addressed the group on the proposed revision of the U. S. Copyright Law, with particular reference to sound recordings.

At the business meetings, progress on the directory of collections was reported by Jean Bowen, Don Leavitt spoke on the development of European organizations interested in sound recordings (such as the Fédération Internationale des Phonothèques) and the possibilities for cooperation with them, and Guthrie Meade presented a brief paper on the computerized cataloging of recordings. There were also discussions on dues, incorporation and the by-laws.

The Association met at Indiana University on March 9-11, 1967. On the program were:

1) A talk on collecting recordings of oral history, given by Maynard Brichford, University Archivist at the University of Illinois.

2) A concert of tape recordings, selected from the Latin American Music Archives, by Juan A. Orrego-Salas, Director of the Latin American Music Center, who commented on the recordings presented.

3) A panel discussion on the possibilities of issuing unpublished and out-of-print recordings through university presses and other non-commercial channels. Participants in the discussion were: Walter L. Welch, Curator, Audio Archives, Syracuse University; Harry Oster, Associate Professor of English, State University of Iowa; Archie Green, Associate Professor, Department of Labor and Industrial Relations, University of Illinois; David Hall, President, Composers Recordings, Inc., New York City, and Head, Rodgers and Hammerstein Archives, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center; Frank J. Gillis, Associate Director, Archives of Traditional Music, Indiana University, served as moderator.

4) A series of talks by curators of sound recording collections at Indiana University in which the history, organization and procedures of the various archives were described. Those speaking were: George H. List, Archives of Traditional Music; Juan A. Orrego-Salas, Latin American Music Archives; Florence Voegelin, Archives of the Languages of
the World; Paul H. Gebhard, Institute for Sex Research; Dominique-René de Lerma, Music Library; and Norman L. Mikesell, Language Laboratory.

5) A tour of the facilities of the various sound recording archives at Indiana University.

At the business meeting there were discussions of the issuing of a periodical bulletin by the Association and progress on the directory, among other matters. At the election of officers, incumbents were re-elected. Don Leavitt was made First Vice-President, Carlos Hagen, Second Vice-President, and Archie Green, Treasurer.

At this point in the history of ARSC there has been progress made on a number of levels and in a number of areas. Meetings have been well attended and have been characterized by an atmosphere in which members have shown a sincere interest in all types of collections and have freely offered data on their holdings. As a result, there has been an exchange of materials and ideas whereby members have profited in obtaining information on the collecting, processing and preserving of recorded sound materials. With over 100 members and several successful meetings completed, ARSC stands as one of the most active organizations of its type in the world.

An important activity of the Association has been the gathering of information on recorded sound collections held by various institutions and individuals in the United States. Details on these collections will be published in a directory which has been compiled under the direction of Jean Bowen, of the New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. Including some 450 entries, the directory will be published by the Association, in conjunction with the New York Public Library, in the near future. It will be of inestimable value to all collectors seeking information on existing collections of sound recordings and the availability of specialized materials for casual listening and for study and research.