

FRANK L. CAPPS—

(Continued from preceding page)

ing my real feelings they were overjoyed and insisted on giving me a second helping because I had seemed to enjoy the first so much! Some people really like the stuff," he goes on, "but to me it was awful. That was the hardest thing I ever did."

Mr. Capps was with Columbia for many years after that, supervising the manufacture of records and the building of machines, working far into the night at home on new mechanical improvements to be tried out at the factory. He was with them in fact, except for an interval when he performed similar services for the Pathe company in Brooklyn, until a few years ago when he set up once more in business for himself.

Radio Pioneer

It is typical of him that he fore-saw new possibilities that radio would bring to the recording field and set out in advance to meet them. With the advent of radio his home became one large experimental laboratory. Wires were strung all over the place and whole boxloads of radio parts cluttered up his workshop. He said radio was going to change the whole recording field and before more than an isolated one or two people had thought of it, he was making recordings off the air at home, static and all. Some day, he said, there would be a lot of recording off the air. His prize such recording is Woodrow Wilson's last speech, delivered from the White House bedroom when Wilson lay at the point of death. It is not a very good recording; it was a pioneer.

Invented Needle

Then in 1929 he made the decision that has brought about the triumphant climax of his career. Talking to his daughter about it he said, "You know I think that there is going to be a big demand for recording needles soon. Engineers are busy now perfecting a new kind of recording machine and there is a new kind of disc that can be played right back without having to be processed. I think radio stations and studios will start making recordings as soon as these machines are built; and people will buy them to use in their homes, too. But it is going to require a different kind of needle than we use for cutting wax and I think I'll go into the business of making them."

He admits now that he did not anticipate the vastness of the present demand. Nevertheless, seeing the possibilities for a business of his own he set out to perfect a cutting needle that could be used successfully in the new instantaneous recording technique.

Friends who saw him at work during the year or two that followed this decision, marvelled at the energy, the patience and the wonderful skill of the man. His health at that time was poor, in fact several years before that he had been pronounced incurably ill by several surgeons.

Frank Capps, however, not only disagreed with them but characteristically worked out his own treatment. He studied himself as impartially, as thoroughly, as he would have studied any mechanical problem. When he had isolated reactions that could be called facts he worked out the means for counteracting the symptoms. His friends and associates were amused, considered him merely eccentric. Today they know that this study of himself was a real scientific experiment for he is in better health now than for many years.

Hours No Object

So it was with the handicap of bad health that he put in long patient hours of experimenting on a new type of recording needle. Two, three and four o'clock in the morning would find him still at work, using his lathe to make new tools and the tools in turn to put new finishes on his needles. And while he worked engineers were constantly in and out or calling him on the phone for advice on the designing of new machines. That he finally succeeded in getting

just the effect he wanted is well enough known and his business has grown from a small laboratory to a flourishing enterprise.

Those who know about those experimental years from 1930 to 1933 credit him with making new strides in recording technique possible. Herbert Berliner of Canada, himself an expert recording technician with a life long association in the phonograph field said recently, "You know, there's no possible doubt about it, the phonograph industry and particularly this new instantaneous recording technique would not be where it is today, if it had not had the help that Frank Capps has given it. He advised the engineers on how to build the machines and he perfected a needle capable of the same high quality they used to get only on wax. He is a great man."

He is a big silver haired man today, with kindly eyes and the careless poise that comes from wide travels and a deep simplicity. From long habit his mind singles out the essential things, discards irrelevancies, a habit which automatically keeps him from worrying. A care in point is his unconcern in the following matter. Some time last winter a man announced over the radio that he was the inventor of the first spring motor for the Edison phonograph. More recently a magazine printed the statement that still another man invented not only the spring motor but the duplicating machine as well. I asked him about it. For reply he got up and sorted out the patents, a great sheaf of them, that had been issued to him from time to time in Washington. The spring motor and duplicating machine patents were both there, plainly issued to Frank L. Capps, a man who never bothered about getting publicity for what he had made because he was too busy making something else. He showed me the patents and smiled. "All I know," he quipped, "is what I read in these papers." He wasn't bothered about it.

His employees literally adore him not only because he is a monument of achievement but because he never fails to enliven the day with his dry wit.

Recently he sent a suit out to be cleaned and donned a very old one as a temporary expedient. Wally Rose, startled at the sudden transformation said, "Well, hello Capps! I think I've seen that suit before." "Yes," Capps replied, "but have you seen it behind?" and turning around he revealed a gaping tear in the seat of his pants.

On another occasion standing beside the bench where one of his employees was making reproducing needles, a friend asked him if he might have one. Mr. Capps handed him the needle with his usual elaborate casualness.

"Take it along," he said, and waved his friend away. The friend, however, reached for his wallet. "No, no!" he exclaimed. "I'm paying for it."

"Why should you?" Mr. Capps grinned. "It doesn't cost me anything! All I have to do is ask the girl for one!"

If his lathe could talk it would tell a fascinating story. Beside it the great and near great, executives, artists, engineers, and an occasional friend in distress have sat and talked while Frank Capps worked. The reminiscences, the witty conversations, technical discussions and hard luck stories that have taken place in its presence would fill a volume of highly entertaining reading.

Together Frank Capps and his lathe have had a remarkable career and bid fair for many years to come. No doubt Frank's father, if he were alive today, would be proud of his son and glad that he gave a lathe to the boy who was always "monkeying around with tools."

Frank Capps has always supervised in a big way and the lathe was where he made the necessary parts for his brain children. When he had the model perfected he would turn it over to his machinists, of which he always had the best, and they would take it up from there. He is an exceptional executive and most

NEW YORK TIMES CARRIES STORY OF MASTER POINT MAKER F. CAPPS**Russian Imperial Looks On As He Records Czar's Band**

The accompanying article is reprinted from the New York Times, Sunday, Feb. 21, 1943:

By T. R. Kennedy, Jr.

"This is the story of a master 'point-maker' whom many today acclaim as the dean of artisans now active in the upkeep of America's tremendously growing wartime recording industry. When you buy a phonograph record, or listen to a transcribed air program, chances are the wavering 'needle' groove on the original or 'master' recording was initially cut by a jewel point fashioned by this expert, whose sanctum is an obscure little workshop in this city.

"Point-making" today is important war business because American radio entertainment or music now finds its way to our distant war camps and fronts principally on recorded disks of one sort or another. The current shipment overseas to the Army alone, is about 26,000 per month. More than a half million have been sent to all branches of the service.

A recording "point", it should be explained, is generally a finely shaped and polished bit of sapphire. In use, the finished point literally plows out the original needle track on the master disk, thus transferring the "sound" of voice or music to the disk's groove as a lot of kinks and wiggles.

Skill Is Required

Synthetic sapphire, of near-diamond hardness, is now largely used. Roughed out of the original material on diamond-dust impregnated 'wheels', then lapped to within a few thousandths of an inch — all under high-power viewing lenses — point-making is now a skill that rivals that of the most artful gem-cutters. The modern point fabricator, therefore, must be expert in "near-microscopic mechanics." Such, in a nutshell, is Frank L. Capps, who is so busy these days that he is seldom seen except among his unique collection of tools, wheels and scopes—"third floor back—244 W. 49th St."

America's new wartime recording industry perhaps owes as much to the uncanny skill of Mt. Capps as any living artisan in sound, and there's plenty of supporting evidence. In Manhattan, the "Hollywood" of sound-on-disk recordings, "Ask Capps" is a common expression.

Early Days Are Recalled

Mr. Capps' interest in recording dates back just 50 years. His sister was a pianist. It would be interesting, he thought, in 1893, to make records of her playing. Of course, Thomas A. Edison had invented the phonograph and made a few machines, but they were scarce and expensive. One day in Chicago the mechanic met a music-loving truckman who had an Edison hidden under his mattress in a nearby flop house. A deal was made — in return for fixing up the machine Mr. Capps was allowed to make a copy of it for himself. He fashioned not only one, but two, exactly like the original, and with an early form of microphone made not only original cylinder records but reproduced them in small quantities by "dubbing" one from another.

An early maker of Edison machines, hearing of Mr. Capps' success and needing the system, hired the man that built it. But soon the mechanic was "on his own" again, having invented a sapphire "ball" to play the old "wax" cylinder records without destroying the groove. Actually the cylinders were made of hard "soap". His peculiar mechanical ability, however, could not long be hidden. An offer came from Camden, N.J., to help produce a completely new machine. The result, it is said, had much to do

of his work came under that heading. The lathe was his hobby and outlet resulting in his approximately 50 patents.

with the beginning of the Victor Talking Machine Co. Then came another offer — to join the Columbia Phonograph Co.

He Went To Europe

Columbia, it seems, had uncovered a new "quantity" method of producing or processing recordings by pouring hot wax into molds. A new type of sapphire point was needed to cut the masters. Mr. Capps made it. When records of foreign singers and bands were needed the mechanic turned recordist and journeyed to Europe. He set up a recorder in the Summer Palace at Peterhof and made disks of the Czar's band and favorite singers, as the Imperial Russian court looked on. Later, in this country, he adjusted his machine and 48-inch horn for such as Edouard de Reszke, Schumann-Heink, Scotti and Sembrich. The microphone wasn't so well-known in those days.

"Often," Mr. Capps recalled, "the powerful" singers wrecked

the machine by singing too loud. We had to wear them down by many repeats, and it often took hours."

Music "Off The Air"

Years passed. Early in 1932, with the record business "not what it once was," Mr. Capps—again on his own—was in need of work, when he heard a young band leader, who, with makeshift apparatus linked to his radio set in a New York Hotel room, was "taking music off the air." Would Mr. Capps gamble and help perfect the machine and fashion a few cutting points? He would!

Result No. 1—The modern sapphire cutter—a Capps invention—which not only cuts but burnishes the groove too, a technique now considered quite indispensable in recording.

Result No. 2—The current Capps workshop has scarcely a moment to spare from the job of helping to turn out jewel points to cut the new master recordings, of one type or another, from which to press disks for Uncle Sam's overseas forces scattered throughout the world."

ASHES OF FRANK CAPPS BURIED HERE (Oct. 21, 1943)

Memorial services for Frank L. Capps, will be held at the grave on the old Beidler family lot in Mount Pulaski cemetery about 3 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 24, 1943, immediately following the interment of his cousin, Donald C. Beidler, who died suddenly at 5 p.m., Monday, Oct. 18, in his photographic studio in Manhasset, Long Island, N. Y. The ashes of Mr. Capps arrived Mon-

day morning at the Schahl funeral home, from New York City.

Only last week Donald C. Beidler wrote to his brother, Paul E. Beidler, and wife, requesting that the ashes of his cousin be interred on the Beidler lot, next to where he would be buried when the final summons came. Little did he dream those few short days ago that he, too, would be called, and that services for both of them would be held the same day. The memorial service will be in charge of J. Wayne Staley, pastor of the Christian Church.

OUR MOTTO**...NOW AS THEN...****"FAIR DEALING and COURTEOUS TREATMENT"**

● Back when this picture was taken of the three Hanger Brothers, founders of the oldest established musical enterprise in Logan County, they set the above as their motto. Today, we still serve you in the same courteous, fair way with the best in musical instruments and related items.

● We are proud that our business had a part in the early history of Mount Pulaski, and we appreciate the patronage the people of your community continue to give us year after year.

● We salute the citizens of Mount Pulaski on the 125th Anniversary of the founding of their city, and wish them the best for the years to come!

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