



# AMICA International

## Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

### Honor Roll

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## ERNEST L. STEVENS

By Emmett M. Ford

The late Ernest Stevens (1894-1981), Honorary Member of AMICA, was interviewed by John and Susan Edwards Harvith regarding his association with Thomas Alva Edison. Mr. Stevens was Mr. Edison's personal pianist-arranger from 1922 to 1924 when Edison was experimenting with recording sounds and making recordings on wax cylinders.

Mr. Stevens, born in Elizabeth, New Jersey, December 15, 1894, was involved with music until his death in Montclair, New Jersey, April 6, 1981.

His basic musical training was in Plainfield, New Jersey, with Howard Case. A study of the pipe organ was with the well-known Mark Andrews (who made many pipe organ recordings) in Montclair, New Jersey. From 1917 to 1919 he made piano rolls for Aeolian, Piano Style, Gulbransen and Rose Valley companies.

In 1919 he began making test records for the Edison Studios in West Orange. Mr. Edison hired Ernest to be his personal pianist in testing for the proper procedure to record on cylinders. He played sheet music for recording and for test records at the West Orange Columbia Studio. His test records

were used to evaluate placement of instruments relative to the recording horn. He was a prolific Edison recording artist, appearing on the Edison label as solo pianist, a member of his own trio and dance quartet and was the leader of his own dance orchestra. Records for Edison were under pseudonyms. After 1919 he gave instruction in piano and pipe organ.

The Harviths interviewed Mr. Stevens, August 14, 1974, in Montclair, New Jersey, and it is included in the large book, "Edison, Musicians and the Phonograph; A Century in Retrospect" It was edited (including the introduction) by John Harvith and Susan Edwards Harvith.

This book is extremely interesting as it reveals the efforts of those involved in the development of recording voice, and musical instruments.

Credit Line: *EDISON, MUSICIANS, AND THE PHONOGRAPH; A CENTURY IN RETROSPECT*, John Harvith and Susan Edwards Harvith, Eds. (Contributions to the Study of Music and Dance, No. 11, Greenwood Press, Westport, CT, 1987). Copyright (c) 1987 by John Harvith and Susan Edwards Harvith.