



AMICA International

Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

Honor Roll

Eddy Hanson

=====

From the AMICA, June 1980

BY ALF E. WEROLIN

Our new Honorary Member, Eddy Hanson, recently wrote: "I never count the years or talk about death or disease. I never have had a headache in my entire life - can eat anything, drink anything, any time of the day, and sleep nine or ten hours a night. `As a man thinketh so he is.' I'm the healthiest man in the world!"



That's a pretty good attitude for a person who has led such an active life, and was born before the turn of the century. And why should he talk about such things when his life has been so full of interesting people and experiences... plus a wonderful and varied musical career.

Ethwell Eddy Hanson (he prefers to be called "Eddy") was born in Waupaca, Wisconsin. That's a small town in the northeastern part of the state. It was there where as a child Eddy says he would listen to a neighbor play rinky-dink cylinder records on an Edison Amberola, and then run home to duplicate the rhythms on his mother's dish pans! No wonder she bought him a piano! His father insisted that Eddy learn tempo and a clean, exact technique, which has always stayed with him - even to this day!

He began piano lessons at eight from a teacher who gave him 48 lessons at 50 cents each. "I was a poor student then," he admits, "too busy composing on the side." Later, as an acclaimed musician, he was still composing and has since collected royalties on some 300 songs he has written.

At 12, Eddy was part of a local orchestra, playing the piano while his audience kept time to two-step favorites. "At night I usually played the organ for the silent movies." In the Navy, during the first World War, he played on stage with many celebrities like Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford, and others. Then he played the saxophone in one of march-master Sousa's picked bands of 100 men.

In 1923 Eddy Hanson became the first radio organist in Chicago at station WDAP (later WGN). In the 30s he played radio shows with Grace Wilson, Kate Smith and Rudy Vallee. He played comedy shows and soap operas

- "Amos and Andy," "Fibber McGee and Molly," "Helen Trent," "Myrt and Marge" and others. "I worked on them five hours each day, and sometimes had four 15-minute programs a day dedicated to organ music."

Our new Honorary recorded 88-note rolls for QRS, U.S. Rolls, and Imperial. He started recording organ albums at age 72 under the Kobar label (his own label), which he continues to do as well as giving occasional concerts and lectures, and coaching advanced students of music. His compositions include: At the *End of the Sunset Trail*, used by Gene Autry as his theme song,

Only a Weaver of Dreams, The Joy and Pain of Love,

and Solitude... plus many others. [I understand that Eddy Hanson plans to attend the AMICA convention in Pasadena in June-Let's hope he will be willing to tell us more about his fascinating career. A.E.W.]

It's a special pleasure to welcome and induct into our group of wonderful and distinguished Honorary Members of AMICA, a man who attributes his success to this philosophy: "What I believe," he writes, "is: Talent is God given... hence be humble. Fame is man given... therefore **be** grateful. Conceit is self made... so be careful."

=====

Waupaca-born composer Ethwell "Eddy" Hanson befriended gangsters in Chicago, was a guest in most of England's royal palaces and toured the country in 1918, selling war bonds. In his music, though, Hanson never ventured far from home, and "The Wisconsin Waltz" (which has been accepted as Wisconsin's official waltz) is on track to become the official state waltz. State Rep. Marlin Schneider, D-Wisconsin Rapids, has added the proposal to name Hanson's waltz an official state symbol as an amendment to Assembly Bill 21, which also would make "Oh Wisconsin, Land of My Dreams" the official state ballad. Locally, Hanson is remembered as "dapper" and "colorful." "He'd play piano with his left hand and the organ with his right," said Arlin Barden, retired commandant of the Wisconsin Veterans Home at King, where Hanson died in 1986. "He was really something." Hanson was born in Waupaca in either 1893 or 1898. He moved to Neenah in 1910, finished high school, then worked his way through **Lawrence University** playing the organ in movie theaters. By 1918, when he enlisted in the Navy so he could play saxophone in John Philip Sousa's band, he'd published "Rattlesnake Rag," "Moon Maid," "Homecoming Song," and "When Evening Shades are Falling." Later, for Appleton band leader Lawrence Duchow, Hanson wrote "The Polish Piano Polka," the "Windy City Polka," and, in 1951, "The Wisconsin Waltz." After World War I, Hanson moved to Chicago, where he played the organ for a succession of radio stations, including WGN, WLS and WBBM.

[The article also appeared in the June 9th edition of the Madison Capital Times under the headline "Composer Of Waltz Led A Colorful Life. His Piece Likely To Be State Song" and the Wisconsin State Journal, Madison, as "Wisconsin Native Waltzed Into Fame. 'Wisconsin Waltz' Composer, Ethwell "Eddy" Hanson, Made A Name For Himself With His Piano And Organ Playing."]

Eddy Hanson, master organist, composer is dead at 92

Ethwell I. (Eddy) Hanson, nationally known master organist, composer and pianist, **died on** Saturday, Feb. 22, at the Wisconsin Veterans **Home, King**, at the age of 92.

Organist, Ken Griffin, had great success when he recorded Hanson's song, "Why Did You Break My Heart?"

He was recognized as the last of the "super star solo organists" from the golden days of the plush picture palaces, with huge orchestras, the big bands and the lavish stage shows.

Later, Hanson played for various theaters and supper clubs in the Fox River Valley. He also recorded popular albums through Rollo Records in Appleton: Eddy Hanson Master Organist; Eddy Hanson Liquid Soul Album; Eddy Hanson, The Joy and Pain of Love. They are still available in limited quantities.

He lived in Waupaca and the Chain O' Lakes area for many years and was a longtime featured performer at Simpson's restaurant in downtown Waupaca.

He was born on Aug. 1, 1893 in New London, a son to the late Mr. and Mrs. Gustav Hanson.

In his early years, he made his name in music in Chicago, IL. He also played the saxophone and was a soloist with the John Philip Sousa Band. He wrote his first musical composition at the age of 14, and over his career wrote more than 300 pieces which are listed with the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).

He was the first radio organist in Chicago, beginning in 1923 on station WDAP (now WGN), and later became staff organist at Chicago stations WBBM, WLS and WCFL NBC, during the years 1924-1948. He was also the first organist to play the original Amos 'n Andy theme song on radio. His personal radio theme, "If A Wish Could Make It So," introduces the Amos 'n Andy theme on his master album.

In 1924, Eddy wrote "At the End of the Sunset Trail," which became one of the first big radio hits of that year, being featured and headlined by many radio stars. The song was on the "best seller" list for 15 weeks.

A few years earlier, he had written "Rattlesnake Rag," which was used on the sound track of the 1981 motion picture "Reds."

From radio, he was selected to follow the famous Jesse Crawford as solo organist in Chicago. And another noted

Mr. Hanson had lived at the veterans home since April 1984.

He is survived by two sisters, Peggy Hanson Dopp, Wild Rose; and Nioleta Lindermeier, Bethany Home, Waupaca.

Private Christian Science services were held on Wednesday, Feb. 26, at the Holly Funeral Home, Waupaca.

Burial was in the Lakeside Memorial Cemetery, Waupaca.

Contributed by *Theo Walrath*

