



# AMICA International

## Automatic Musical Instrument Collectors' Association

### Honor Roll

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## *Adam Gawlik*

### A LETTER FROM ADAM

By Dorothy Bromage

AMICA Chairperson for Honorary Members, The AMICA March/April 1991

*In the Spring of 1988, I recommended Adam Gawlik to the AMICA Executive Board, and he was approved as an Honorary Member of AMICA. We have corresponded since then, and one time I asked him if he would write to me about what he told me when I first spoke with him about his work at the Imperial Player Roll Company in Chicago.*

*To my delight, he obliged, and the answer is below. Adam has a business in Gleason, Wisconsin, selling different kinds of old items, many of which are musical. If you contact him, he will tell you about items he's looking for.*

*Adam's health prevents his attendance at AMICA conventions, but he is interested in what takes place. Anyone wishing to write him may do so, sending to ADAM GAWLIK, ROUTE 1, BOX 9, GLEASON, WI 54435.*

Dear Nice Lady Dorothy,

Very glad to get your card. You know it also was a coincidence that I received a card from my daughter-in-law. She lives in Fresno, California, and then I got a card from that swell lady who lives on School Street in Maine. One. card from the southwest corner of the country and yours from the northeast corner of our country. I thank you for your kindness.

Now, for a little biography. I left school at the age of 14 years, 9 months. I was a sort of wise, snot-nosed kid. I asked my Mother to go with me to a notary public to tell the man to give me a permit for work. My Mother did not understand English and when the clerk asked her if I was 16 years old, I told him that she did not understand, so he asked me to ask her if I was 16 years old. I asked her if I was 14 and she nodded her head to him.

He made out the affidavit for my Mother to sign, and she put an X on the document, and he said, "That will be 25 cents." My Mother walked with me 3 blocks west, and we came to a large building at Paulina and Cermak Road in Chicago. This building was 4 or 5 stories high and took up

about 3/4 of the block. On the roof was a large sign, THE CABLE PIANO COMPANY. I went inside and asked a man if they had any work for me. He shook his head and I walked out. My Mother said that (at) the next place, she would go in with me, and we started back home. At the back of the Cable building, I noticed a smaller building about 100-150 feet from the street with a sign, IMPERIAL PLAYER ROLL. I didn't think my Mother wanted to walk back there, but she said that we are here so we might as well. So we went in. There was a lady who I learned later was named Kateryn Krause. She asked my Mother what she could do for us and I said I was looking for work so she asked us to wait while she called someone. She came back in five minutes with a man. His name was Mr. Hayes. He said, "So you want a job." I said, "Yes, sir. I am strong." He asked how much pay I wanted and I turned to my Mother and told her he would give me three dollars a week, and she raised her hand to show Mr. Hayes four fingers. He smiled and shook his head, but told me to come to work the next day and that we start at 8:00 a.m., with half an hour for lunch, and stay to 4:30. That's how I got my first job and learned about music rolls.

Mr. Hayes took me to a room where two young boys were using a tool with a round wood mallet. They were punching holes in a wide cardboard roll. These holes were single holes, double holes or three single holes.

The table was a 3 x 3 (foot) butcher block. On the left and right side of the block were spindles with about half of the cardboard roll on each of the spindles, and both boys were punching holes on marked lines on the cardboard. Mr. Hayes told the older boy to show me what he was doing, and when he showed me, he explained the reason for the holes and the different punches that must be used. The punching of these holes represented notes on the music.

Well, Tom explained the punches. One hole was a short note, 2 was a little longer note, and 3 holes were a longer note. The holes were not to be punched beyond the stencil mark or make holes in the stencil that do not stay on the straight lines. Later I learned that each straight line was a note.

After lunch, Mr. Hayes asked if I knew where Wabash & Jackson was. I said I knew where Jackson Boulevard was. He said we have an office in the CABLE Building, room G14 at 21 East Jackson Boulevard. There is a package of player rolls. He said to take them there and to stop and get carfare from Miss Krause. I made it back in an hour and 15 minutes.

The following day was Saturday, and we only worked half of the day. Monday, Mr. Hayes came to see me at my block and said that the Stock Boy left, and he thought he would try me out as Stock Boy. He said that I would have to keep a count of how many rolls there were of any one song. When the count was less than 15, I had to report the title of the song and serial number to Miss Krause. She then would give an order to Mr. Hayes and he would get the stencil and give it to a roll machine operator with the number of runs. One run was 12 rolls.

After awhile, I had the routine down pretty good. Cohan, he was the shipping clerk, would ask me to take a rush order to Lyon & Healey or pick up some music at a publishing house. Finding a publisher was easy. Most of the song writers were on Wabash Avenue. Many piano companies were there, like Baldwin, Story & Clark, Kimball, Wurlitzer. I remember Lyon & Healy had a small music theatre for some musician who was hired to give a recital. They could seat about 30 people. Also, there were times when I was called upon to bring spools down from the third floor to the second, for the girls who printed the words of the songs.

The spools were assembled by a girl named Bertha. She was a nice girl and always had a smile. She wore thick lenses in her glasses and said her eyes were getting weaker. She was paid 18 cents a hundred for the spools. She had two cake pans on the bench, and she would pour denatured alcohol in the pans. When she had about 1/4 inch of alcohol, she would put the flange into the alcohol--the flange with the slot in the center. By the time she put so many flanges in the alcohol, the first one was softened on the end that is inserted into the tube in a few minutes. The flange would dry in the tube and would be tight. It worked better than glue. After awhile, I would run upstairs on my lunch hour and assemble tubes for 15 minutes, just to help her out.

We had three roll punching machines. These machines were designed by Mr. Fisher. Every time he had to get a part for the machine, he would junk the old machine and put in the new one in its place. The new machines were three times as fast and punched 12 rolls. The machine operator's name was Al Pepler. Benny Muth, also was a machine operator. When he was through with an order, he would take the rolled up stencil and put it by the stencils in the stock room, where the man in charge of the stencil stock would put the stencil on a bench and use the hand crank to reverse the stencil. Then he put it in stock.

The machine operator would pick up the stencil that Mr. Hayes put by his machine, thread it in the machine, study the order and read how many runs were ordered, then he would sign and clip it to the start of the run, then start the machine. When he finished, he would run another order. The machine operator had to check that the punched music sheet slid down easily through the chute in the floor down to the second floor.

On the second floor, we had the large laundry baskets that the punched sheets were guided into. When four or five runs were in the basket, it was taken to the tables where the girls would stencil words of the song. They used a stencil that had the words punched out on it. They placed the stencil on the sheet, and they used a roller that had a wheel that rubbed over a pad which was wet with indelible ink. They repeated the routine on each roll of the run.

When the word stenciling was done, one girl would cut the triangle on the start and paste the tab on the roll. The girl at the other end would put the assemble tube with flanges on the hand cranking device, dabbed a little glue, started the back end of the roll and turned the crank. When the roll was on, the rubber band was put on. The girl glued the label on the box and put the roll into the box, placing it on a dolly down to the first floor and put the rolls into the stock bin.

Mr. Hartman was in charge of selecting songs to be made into player rolls. Composers would submit their



songs to him and he would consult the two ladies who would play them and then would comment on the merits of a song. Of course, Mr. Hartman had the final say on any song. When a new song was selected, Mr. Hartman would sit at a table which had a roll of cardboard. This cardboard would have printed lines which represented the notes of a piano scale. Then he would start marking the lines with pencil or crayon. He would make the note line so the stencil puncher would know that punch should be used and how long the note must be played.

When the boy finished punching holes in the stencil, Mr. Hayes would take the stencil to the third floor and ask one of the men to run three copies and when made, they were rolled onto a roll and both stencil and rolls were taken down to Mr. Hartman. He would then play the roll on a player piano, check the roll to the sheet music, and make corrections where needed. Then he would check the cardboard stencil with the music roll and tape holes that were not the right notes, or the boy had to punch out new holes that were replacing the sealed up ones. When the boy was finished, he would take the stencil to Mr. Hayes and Mr. Hayes would have three more copies of the corrected stencil made. Then copies went down to Mr. Hartman, who would again check the music roll to the sheet music. When Mr. Hartman approved the music roll, one of the ladies would punch out the song word on a long sheet of paper, then would identify certain notes and make cut-outs so they would match the holes on the word stencil.

This all happened about 70 years ago. Perhaps I have missed some vital bit of information. May I take this means to apologize to you for taking advantage of your kindness. I hope you will forgive me for taking so long to write to you.

May your health and happiness be everlasting.

Adam