

PARAMOUNT RECORD'S LEGACY

What happened to New York Recording Laboratories' inventory?

By Alex van der Tuuk



This metal mother of Skip James' 'Devil Got My Woman' (mx. L-746) is one of the few surviving NYRL metal parts. From 'Paramount's Rise and Fall'. Courtesy Alex van der Tuuk

In 1993, when I first became interested in the history of the Wisconsin Chair Company (WCC) of Port Washington, Wisconsin and its recording activities, I got my hands on a copy of Samuel B. Charters' book, 'The Country Blues' (1959; reprinted 1975). Here I found some information on Paramount Records and its dissolution during the Depression. The name of John Steiner (1908-2000) popped up in the book as the person who revived the Paramount label in 1948 and acquired the remaining assets of the Wisconsin Chair Company in 1949.

There then arose a number of questions: Who owns the rights to the Paramount label and logo? Who owns the rights to the name Wisconsin Chair Company? What happened to New York Recording Laboratories' inventory? Did the company just vanish from the face of the earth? Was nothing preserved?

Through the years of my research, I

found clues and bits and pieces to answer some of these questions. In July or August 1932, the final recordings were made in the Grafton recording studio, which had been open since late 1929. More than 1,630 recordings had been recorded there during this period, including so-called 'race' records by African-American artists for the Paramount 12000/13000 series.

Many Grafton recordings involved local dance bands from Wisconsin, which were issued on a Broadway 1000 series. Polkas and German records were issued on custom-pressed series. Along with some country music issues, they accounted for most of the rest of NYRL's later output.

Although recording stopped in that summer, the shipping department and possibly some presses were still in operation until late 1933, when it became evident that the operation was no longer viable as more records were pressed than were shipped out.

It is possible that the NYRL had a connection with American Record Corporation (ARC; later acquired by Columbia, which is now owned by Sony) and/or Jack Kapp. Kapp had left Brunswick and was on the threshold of getting involved with American Decca. A lot of ARC

test pressings have been found in the area around Port Washington and Grafton, which suggests a business connection between the New York Recording Laboratories and ARC. It might also explain why some of the last NYRL records, by the Mississippi Sheiks, have the titles printed in capitals, a style used by ARC.

It has been suggested that the New York Recording Laboratories even revived their series by repressing some of the later issues from their race series. Copies that suggest this are Paramount 13153 ('I'll Be Gone, Long Gone'/'Please Baby') and Paramount 13156 ('She's Crazy About Her Lovin'/'Tell Me To Do Right'). Evidence of an NYRL-ARC connection was further strengthened in 1954, with the discovery of some one hundred file cards on Paramount masters in Columbia's ARC archives.

This was part of a lease contract between the WCC and ARC and/or Jack Kapp. Recently, Grafton inhabitant Ed Kleist, who worked at the shipping department as a fifteen-year old, remembered that the pressing plant became a Montgomery Ward building after the demise of the NYRL, which explains the many ARC pressings that have been found in the area around Port Washington and Grafton.

Sometime between 1933 and 1935, the Grafton plant, where all the records and metal masters were stored, was emptied. Janet Erickson saw three to four trucks in front of the factory. She was the daughter of pressing foreman Alfred Schultz at the time the factory was cleared out.

Cordell Hackett-Shine, who worked for the shipping department in 1931, remembered that her two older sisters helped to clear out the building. Alfred Schultz and engineer



An NYRL Broadway release recorded by country singer Emry Arthur in the Grafton studio in late 1929. Courtesy Kurt Nauck

Walter Klopp were disappointed (to say the least) about the close of the record business. The Schultz family remained in the house situated next to the pressing plant until 1936, and then moved away. Walter Klopp and family never talked much about the whole operation afterwards.

The following is a selection of recollections from interviews about what happened with the inventory and the Grafton buildings. Although not complete, it throws some light on events and maybe even supplies the answers to one or two questions.

After the close of the Grafton pressing plant, Brian Wilburn, Jr., whose father was a sales manager for the WCC, recollected the following during a June 2002 telephone conversation: "The main building (of the Wisconsin Chair Company) was considered downtown Port Washington. They moved everything from the Grafton pressing and studio buildings to Plant Number 2, which is on the west side of town. It was a two block long building, four stories high. That building had to be 100 to 150 feet long and about fifty to sixty feet wide and fourteen feet high and it was just packed with cases of records. Just packed. I mean there were thousands of them. They quit selling and when they quit selling, they kept making them. When they finally figured out this was not going to work, that's when they closed the Grafton plant. They had all this stuff and I believe they didn't make any effort to try to sell it. They just closed it up and said forget about it, the hell with it. Stuck everything in Plant Number 2 and let it sit there."

Plant Number 2, or Chair Factory Number 2, is still in existence as part of the Simplicity Manufacturing Company, near the Port Washington railroad. The records were stored on the third floor.

Ralph Klopp, related to engineer Walter Klopp, who ran the Grafton operation, remembered playing in the Grafton factory during a 14th September, 2003 interview: "After the close I played at the Grafton site, but I only remember the dam and the red building. We were in the factory. When the factory closed down my uncle Walter Klopp stayed down and went over there for

insurance purposes. You know, you couldn't just abandon the building and walk away. He stayed there for maintenance. I was told he was working there for a couple of years."

Ed Kleist, who had worked in the shipping department under Harry Diggerman since 1929, got fired after sales dropped in the early 1930s. During a March 2000 interview he recalled: "After the NYRL was dismantled then we could walk through the place because I stayed and I helped after a while with Penning Corporation (who took over the building to set up a production line for bakelite products). I helped them set up certain machines and so forth, and after they got started then I went somewhere else because they didn't pay any wages.

At the time I was there we set up for the Penning Corp., which made plastic parts for the toilets. After it was set up, they didn't get so many orders, so they didn't have enough work for anybody else. So I left and went working for the Mechanic Factory. (The Penning Corporation incorporated on 12th March, 1936).

The Penning Corp. took over real quickly. Even before the Penning Corp. took over they (WCC/NYRL) tore down the water tank. They weren't using it that much any more. In order to avoid damage by ways of storm they tore it down.

When Penning took over the buildings, they also took over the presses. Whatever form they had for a die they put into the presses. Your presses were more or less a two-piece deal. It had a cover and your base plate. There you put your die on. Then you had your cool water coming through and that's how come they used that same press and that was adjustable. You could put in any kind of die. I think a die could not be higher than six or eight inches. That was the opening of those presses. They were hydraulic presses. There were two rows of presses."

Janet Erickson, 9th February, 2000: "The Penning Corporation took over the plant and manufactured Bakelite handles for pots and pans – terrible odors came from there."

Ralph Zaun, 23rd August, 2001: "The Penning Corporation, in the difficult time of

Grafton Chair Factory Being Torn Down

The old chair factory at the Milwaukee Falls at Grafton is being torn down. A wrecking crew bought the building, and started tearing it down Monday. About five weeks will be required to raze the building. Old lumber in the plant is being offered for sale by the wreckers.

The plant is owned by the Wisconsin Chair Co. of Port Washington and years ago was operated as a branch factory. Later it was used for the manufacture of phonograph records, and until a year ago was occupied by the Penning Corporation who later went into receivership.

30th November, 1938 announcement of tearing down of the recording studio. From the Grafton News Graphic. Thanks to Mike Hatfield

the Depression, was a welcome addition to the industrial base, small as it was at the time. As I remember, they made plastic articles such as handles for utensils, tools etc. The material they used was called Bakelite, which was a formulation of carbon black in the dust form and a plastic resin. This company did not prosper, unfortunately, and went out of business. In October 1939 Wisconsin Plastics, Inc., started doing business, using the old pressing plant. By November 1938 the building which housed the recording studio and the viaduct were torn down. The building stood vacant for a time. It was then stripped of metal pulleys, shafts, etc. during the early years of World War II, and subsequently torn down."

The late Robert Reisinger, who bought the house that was built on the remnants of the pressing factory, was in a legal dispute about who was responsible for the restoration of the then still partially intact millrace, when I interviewed him on 22nd March, 1997: "I would assume they (the WCC) couldn't find a suitable tenant, the taxes and the maintenance on the building were so high that they could hardly do more than sell the land. If you look at the millrace you will see that the concrete walls on the riverside have



Otto Moeser (fourth from the left) and Wisconsin Chair Company 1936. Courtesy Erik Moeser

big cracks in them and big chunks taken out of it. What happened here was after the factory moved the maintenance of the millrace and the locks that control the level of the millrace rotted out and the millrace must have filled with water and froze, and actually the freezing pushed out the walls of the millrace."

It would have cost the Grafton community about \$1 million to restore the millrace and the dam. Eventually, in the winter of 2000, the Department of Natural Resources had the dam and the millrace removed.

Clearing Out Chair Factory Number 2, Port Washington

The metal masters, thousands of records, record sleeves, and recording ledgers laid dormant in Chair Factory Number 2 for almost a decade, until the summer of 1942. The United States had declared war on Japan after the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941. Now, with shellac, metal, copper, and paper drives being organised by the war department, WCC president Otto Moeser realised there was some money to be made. Brian Wilburn, June 2002: "When we were kids, Chair Factory Number 2 was closed and all they used it for was storage. Of course we found our way into it. Kids were going in and out all the time, we weren't supposed to be, but we were. Empty buildings are a magnet for kids. There was no security at all. In those days Port Washington had a police force of three cops. Nobody knew the meaning of the word security in those days. We were in that plant all the time and I probably destroyed two to three thousand records. We made frisbees out of them, we sailed them off the roof. And when we got a little older we used a shotgun. You could get away with it, using a shotgun in city limits. The building was right next to the railroad tracks. There was nothing around it so it was not dangerous." Close to the Chair Factory Number 2 there was a small garage like building next to the railroad tracks that was used to store records, and these were shipped from this building after orders came in.

In the 1960s collector Dennis Klopp saw a wood eagle-on-a-globe on top of this building, which resembled the Paramount logo. It was one foot high and orange in colour. Klopp took it off the building and still owns it.

"They had all the masters, the castings, the bronze and brass, stuff to produce records, stored in Plant Number 2 on the west side. It was all in one great big room. After the war started they started scrap metal drives, find bronze and brass, that kind of stuff, for the war. They suddenly realized they had a load of that stuff they didn't need. So it all got loaded in a couple of freight cars [and was] shipped off. I am sure it got sold to some scrap dealer. That was the end of that. This was during the summer of 1942."

Grafton remembers

Dick Muhlitz, 2003: "In the late 1940s, possibly 1949, I was visiting my sister who lived outside of Hartland, Wisconsin, and I went over to Grafton to see if I could find out anything about the old Paramount company. I decided to go find the old Paramount recording studio in Grafton. At Grafton I did not find anything except where the old recording studio was supposedly built. The dam was still in existence, and there were remains of foundations where a building once stood.

"What I found was the old building that

housed the Wisconsin Chair Company. It was by this time inhabited by another company (Edmunds-McKlapp), and I asked permission to wander through the old studio – actually the vacant WCC buildings in Port Washington. This was granted, so I just wandered about the old building. What I found was old mothers (made from the original wax masters) that had been used to patch holes in the wall, chair seats, and other miscellaneous patch jobs that a thin piece of copper could be used for.

"I met a janitor who had worked for Paramount in the halcyon days, and he regaled me with stories of how the various black artists used to come up from the South and record. They were not allowed to use the front stairs to get into the offices to transact business, and were forced to use the freight elevator to get to the second floor where the office was.

"There was also no hotel for them to stay at, so arrangements had to be made if the trip was to last overnight or more. They had to stay with one of the few black families that lived in or around Grafton.

"He gave me the name of a person who had worked in the pressing room, and after leaving the old studio, I went to see this person. He had hundreds of old Paramount records lying on the staircase leading to the attic. However, they were all classical and popular music of the time. When I asked him about the blues and blues artists, I thought he was going to throw me out of the house. He told me he couldn't stand that 'nigger' music or the people who played it. I left feeling very sorry for what I had seen and heard, and sometimes I wished I had not gone to find the place."

No photographs were taken at that time of the Grafton site.

Reviving an old label

In the early 1940s, collector John Steiner formed a partnership with a friend, Hugh Davis, and reissued Paramount titles on their S-D label. To avoid copyright infringements, Steiner contacted Otto Moeser of the WCC to get permission to issue these titles against a percentage of royalties.

By October 1947 John Steiner was discussing reviving the old Paramount label. Moeser explained that apart from the legitimate concerns that issued Paramount material, only that year infringers reissued forty of their sides. Investigating the financial status of these concerns proved that taking legal action against these companies would not be worthwhile. Moeser then suggested going back in business with the old Paramount label. Fred Boerner, of F.W.

Boerner Company, said that he would again manage direct sales, as he had in the label's heyday. Chuck Kimball with the Ashcraft office was available for legal services (his father had served on WCC's board of directors for years). Steiner was asked to set up a programme.

For the Paramount reissue programme, a 14000 series was started, succeeding the original 12000/13000 series. It used the same Paramount logo and credits on the label, but in silver characters instead of gold. Steiner recalled in March 1997: "I had no trouble with the Port Washington post office. They gave me a postal box for the NYRL, because they were still familiar with that. They built a postal business on the activities of the original Paramount Company."

Just as the original label used 'New York' to impress people, we used the original address for the same reason. They would think we were making records from the original masters, think that the original company was back in business". Steiner's subterfuge worked, as the label's announcement in the March 1948 issue of Jazz Finder makes clear: 'The old Paramount label will soon be back on the market. This has just been announced by the NYRL of Port Washington, Wisconsin, the original manufacturer of the Paramount record. New records will be pressed as far as possible from original masters, the company announced'.

In the 'Jazz Finder' of June 1948, Steiner continued that 'as far as original masters are available and suitable, they will be used'. At that time they were inspecting 135 plates that had been withheld from the mass scrapping of fifteen years earlier (when the Grafton plant was cleared out, a lot of the masters were sold as scrap because of the exposure to the plant's atmosphere, which frequently caused visible oxidation or sulfurisation to the surfaces. The rest went to Chair Factory Number 2).

In addition, over 100 sides on loan to Decca were presumed to be intact at the Gennett plant in Richmond, Indiana, which Decca used for its pressing facilities.



Above: *Tin Roof Blues*. A Steiner Paramount reissue from the late 1940s, using the original logo and NYRL credits, but printed in silver rather than the original gold. Despite some press reports, original stampers were not used.

Courtesy Kurt Nauck's *American Record Label Image CD*

Below: *Powerhouse Piano* label shot. Courtesy Alex van Der Tuuk

The first sixteen of the new Paramount records were made in conjunction with the WCC. In 1949 Steiner bought Paramount's remaining assets and produced another sixteen issues.

John Steiner buys Paramount's assets

Bob Koester, of Delmark Records, came to Chicago in September 1958 and received financial help from Steiner to set up a store. Koester, in an August 2001 telephone conversation, recalled: "Steiner said that when he bought Paramount, all he got right away in terms of resource material was a stock of Black Swan records which they still had (the merger between Black Swan and the New York Recording Laboratories was announced in local newspapers in April 1924). They were not in very good shape, but they existed, and he got them and he was hoping he would get some Q-R-S records. They (WCC) got Q-R-S the same way like Black Swan. One sad thing on the deal is that Steiner was offered the Grafton recording apparatus and he said it was SO old-fashioned."

John Steiner recalled the recording equipment in March 1997: "Moeser was a quiet fellow who didn't seem to know anything about the record business at all. He was just amazed that anybody was still interested in old Paramount. There wasn't much left though. The equipment was so old that it was of no interest to me. The equipment was sold to a Milwaukee dealer, an Italian who was located on the way from here on South Superior St. in Milwaukee to downtown, the street we used to take before the new bridge was there. I knew just where the yard was. The fellow bought even the old building for the lumber that was there. The recording equipment was still there in Chair Factory Number 2, in Port Washington when I came to visit Moeser. The equipment was as big as most portables except on larger tables. It was very crude. It was on a table and it was a large platter, I think it was a sixteen-inch with a motor underneath it and there were other things that were with it that apparently had been used in the studio.

All this was involved, package and some place to put it. Moeser asked if I was interested in it, I said no. I took some of the cutting needles and so forth, so we know the shape of the groove very accurately. That was all that was of interest for me, to know the dimensions of the groove."

Bob Koester: "John Steiner showed me a bunch of label order information that he got from the printer. They were still using these vinyl type, metal type labels, even though (lithographic) offset printing had happened by then, although I guess it was at very primitive stage, so they would have to make these plates for the A and the B sides of these labels and then they would order ten or twenty accepted labels. Very small quantities, and these were 13100s. It's really shameful that they let all that stuff go – consigned as scrap metal. I would imagine it would be quite a bit of space but for them to just shut down the whole thing.

"Steiner bought Chicago Music Publishing Co., that was part of his acquisition, and he spent some time trying to chase down the copyrights so they could be renewed and was not very successful. He did manage to renew a few of them. He tells a story when he calls up the Axel Christensen Piano School to speak to Mr. Christensen because Mr. Christensen had recorded for Paramount and wanted to talk to

him about renewing copyrights. They told him Mr. Christensen is dead and what John didn't realise was there were some ridiculous number of Axel Christensen Piano Studios around this part of the country."

Bob Eagle, 2005: "One potential problem with Paramount copyrights is whether Steiner had the right to extend (or 'renew') each copyright claim for the extended term.

"He certainly purported to do so – there are numerous copyrights of works by Blind Lemon Jefferson, Blind Blake, etc., where the claims were extended in the 1950s. However, the Blake copyrights were claimed as by Blake Higgs, the Bahamian guitarist, which leads one to wonder if Steiner had access to the original contracts. If he did not, then how could he prove that the composer had granted the publisher rights for the extended term? Also, if the composer had died in the interim, had the rights for the renewed term reverted to the composer's estate?"

David Evans, 2005: "Steiner also acquired some of the actual recordings, apparently from Mayo Williams and renewed selected items. I'm told he didn't have enough cash to renew them all. But one would have to question on what basis he could have done this, as renewal rights normally reverted to the author, after the initial 28-year period. Steiner may have believed that the Bahamian Blake Higgs was the Paramount Blind Blake. There was some speculation to this effect in the early days. Maybe he even went to Nassau and got Higgs to sign something."

Bob Koester, on Steiner acquiring the metal mothers back from Decca, 2001: "Steiner obtained the fifty metal mothers via Decca who used them for their Champion label. Probably within a year or two after Steiner got all the papers the WCC had regarding the record business, he asked Decca to return the metal masters (sic).

Steiner: "Amongst the papers was this lease of masters, and eventually I decided that I better keep them myself rather than leave them in Richmond, Indiana where Decca leased floor space from the Starr Piano company, which had produced Gennett Records, among others, where they had been sent and sure enough they had them. I was surprised at that; they released them to me, sent them back."

Koester: "Bumble Bee Slim told me shortly after the issue of his World Pacific record, a year later in 1962, that Aletha Dickerson paid him out of her own pocket for his Paramount session in Grafton. Part of the fifty metals were the two titles by him, which were used by Decca to issue on the Champion label. By 1934 Bumble Bee Slim recorded for Vocalion, and so Decca had recordings of a popular artist. Shortly afterwards Bumble Bee Slim went to record for Decca.

"There's no other metal than those fifty titles. None of the other metal survived. Steiner thought possibly someone like Eli Oberstein, who is a very minor player in the record

AGREEMENT made and entered into by and between JOHN STEINER, d/b/a The New York Recording Laboratories, hereinafter sometimes called First Party, and WILLIAM GRAUER, JR., d/b/a Bill Grauer Productions, hereinafter sometimes called Second Party, W I L L I A M G R A U E R:

WHEREAS, First Party is the sole and exclusive owner of the right to issue phonograph records originally issued by The New York Recording Laboratories, of Port Washington, Wisconsin, on Paramount, Black Swan, Puritan, Broadway and Famous labels, and is also the sole and exclusive owner of the copyrights issued to Chicago Music Publishing Company, successor to Chicago Music Company, and

WHEREAS, Second Party wishes to press, issue and market said records upon the terms and conditions contained herein,

NOW, THEREFORE, in consideration of the premises and in consideration of the agreements and covenants hereinafter contained, the parties hereto agree and covenant as follows:

1. First Party hereby grants to Second Party the exclusive right to issue phonograph records in the United States, which said phonograph records were originally produced and issued by The New York Recording Laboratories, of Port Washington, Wisconsin, on Paramount, Black Swan, Puritan, Broadway or Famous labels during the period of this agreement, provided, however, that Second Party shall purchase from First Party any pressings made by First Party as of the date of this agreement up to a total of eighty (80) of any such pressings of each recording which Second Party shall record or press pursuant to this agreement, and Second Party shall pay First Party therefor thirty-five cents (35¢) for each of said pressings,

Contract between John Steiner and Bill Grauer 1st November, 1952. Courtesy Stephen Calt.

business in those days, that some one like Eli Oberstein might have bought it, but it might have been someone in the record business who bought them as scrap."

Koester based his information on the fifty metal mothers returned by Decca on his recollection that he had published a list in Jazz Report magazine in October 1958. He saw 51 metal mothers at Steiner's Ashland address and published a partial list in the magazine, covering forty titles. The remains of the list were intended for the next issue, due to lack of space. However, the list went astray and was never reproduced. The mothers included all the Mississippi Sheiks titles.

Steiner's report in Jazz Finder for June 1948 alleging 'over 100 sides on loan to Decca' is reinforced by the fact that 94 cards were found in the ARC/Columbia files in 1954. These cards contained details of Paramount masters and the production of metal mothers, including some Q-R-S and Gennett titles that were processed in November 1933 for Jack Kapp to issue on his revived Champion label, which he had obtained from the Starr Piano Company.

Bob Koester, 2001: "John Steiner was trying to find sources for all kinds of Paramount material so he could utilize that. I think that perhaps it was his perception that most of the good pressings had floated to New York collections, so he decided it would be better for Bill Grauer to reissue it on Riverside. I think it really is kind of sad he did that. He would have had a going sideline business.

"By the late 1940s or early 1950s Steiner had started producing ten inch LPs, but these lasted only a few years. He had pretty much stopped ten inch LPs. I'm not sure when he did his last batch of ten inch LPs, but I believe he stopped around 1955. Not much activity

COMPLETE LIST - OCTOBER, 1930

**The Popular
Paramount Race Record**

—MAIL YOUR ORDERS TO—
F. W. BOERNER CO.
Port Washington, Wisconsin

NEW RELEASES

BLUES

12906—Dry Spell Blues—Part I—Vocal Blues—Guitar Acc. Son House
Dry Spell Blues—Part II—Vocal Blues—Guitar Acc. Son House

12905—Beale And Main Blues—Vocal—Piano Acc. Dobby Bragg
May Belle Miller
Long Tail Man Blues—Vocal—Piano Acc. Dobby Bragg
May Belle Miller

12902—St. Louis Fire Blues—Vocal—Piano Acc. Buck MacFarland
On Your Way—Vocal—Piano Acc. Buck MacFarland

12903—Ninety Nine Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Blind Joe Reynolds
Cold Woman Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Blind Joe Reynolds

12904—Blub Blub Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Smokey Harrison
Mail Coach Blues—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Smokey Harrison

PIANO SOLO

12908—Eastern Chimes Blues—Piano Solo. Henry Brown
Deep Morgan Blues—Piano Solo. Henry Brown

SPIRITUALS AND SERMONS

12907—Watch And Pray—Prayer and Song
Brother W. M. Mosley and Delta Big Four
God Won't Forsake His Own—Vocal. Delta Big Four

12908—Something Dead Up The Creek—Sermon
Tend Your Own Business—Sermon. Rev. Emmet Dickman

12906—Jesus Is A Dying Bed Maker—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Charley Patton
I Shall Not Be Moved—Vocal—Guitar Acc. Charley Patton

OLD TIME TUNES

12911—Sunshine And Shadows—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc.
True Love Divine—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc.
Emory Arthur and Della Hatfield

12910—The New Sensation—Vocal—Piano Acc. Bartlett's Gospel Four
Swing Out On The Premises—Vocal—Piano Acc. Bartlett's Gospel Four

12910—Jennie My Own True Love—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc.
A Railroad Lover For Me—Vocal Duet—Guitar Acc. Emory Arthur and Della Hatfield

12910—Don't Marry A Man If He Drinks—Vocal—Inst. Acc. Martin Brothers
Will They Deny Me When They're Men—Vocal—Inst. Acc. Martin Brothers

Paramount Blues and Spirituals Grouped According to Artists

ALL STAR

12886—Hometown Skiffle—Part I
Hometown Skiffle—Part II

HIDDLEVILLE QUINTETTE

12909—Blessed Be The De That Binds
I'm Going Up To Live With The Lord

12907—Jesus Is A Rock In The Weary Land
I Stretch My Hand To Thee

12900—Judas And Jesus Walked Together
Handwriting On The Wall

12947—The Day Is Past And Gone
God Heaven In My View

12948—Didn't It Rain
Pharaoh's Army Got Drowned

BEALE STREET SHIRERS

12904—Philly In Blues Part 1
Philly In Blues Part 2

12758—Wasn't That Deepin' Me
Rockin' On The Hill

12318—You Shall
It's A Good Thing

ISHMAN BRACEY

12570—Woman Woman Blues
Suit Case Full Of Blues

BARREL HOUSE FIVE

12851—Hoo Lovin'
Mama Stayed Out

12875—Endurance Stomp
Some De And Some Don't

12943—Scuffer Blues
It's Nobody's Business

CLARA BURSTON

12881—Weak And Nervous Blues
Georgia Man Blues

IDA COX

12908—I'm So Glad
Jaliscoe Blues

12727—Singing Tears Blues
Separated Blues

12704—Worn Down Daddy Blues
You Sole My Man

COW COW DAVIDPORT

12800—Chinas Blues
Slow Drag

BLIND BLAKE

12964—Keep It Home
Sweet Jinn' Mama

12818—Baby Lee Blues
Cold Love Blues

12904—Joe Man Blues
Chump Man Blues

12888—Police Dog Blues
Diddle Wa Diddle

12907—Lonesome Christmas Blues
Third Degree Blues

12803—Fighting' The Jug
Bastings Street

12924—Too Tight Blues No. 2
Georgia Bound

12810—Doing A Stretch
Poker Woman Blues

12794—Hookworm Blues
Slippery Rag

12787—New Style Of Loving
Bambin' Mama Blues

Advert for Paramount mail order list from FW Boerner Co, October 1930. From the B&R Archive.

on ten inch Paramount LPs. They stopped in 1955 when literally over a weekend the ten inch LPs were obsolete and transition was made to twelve inch.

"I believe Steiner issued five in 1949, five in 1950 and another five in 1951 and then quit. Then the ten inch crash came and he was pretty much out of business."

Reselling Paramount's assets

Bob Koester: "John Steiner got \$10,000 from ABC-Paramount for the sale of the rights to the Paramount name. The way this originated was John was not getting mail. People had addressed mail to ABC-Paramount, and he got pissed off because they would not forward his mail so he went to see his lawyer Squire Ashcraft. They could show that they had used the label for the 14000 series reissues. And there was the use of Paramount, although it was not legitimate, by Gus Statiras and Bill Grauer, who put out that Ma Rainey Paramount album in 1946.

"John always said it was Bill Grauer, but Gus Statiras told me once he was involved in that. He had the Progressive label. That sort of bridged the gap between and he could show that they had sold Paramount records via Fred Boerner, who handled their direct mail. I guess they did some distribution. They would not turn down any money. Steiner claims they made a fortune on the insurance by not

packaging records very well, i.e. Boerner. Boerner was on the board of Paramount and he had this other business on the side.

"John sold the eagle-and-globe to Arnold Caplin of Biograph and the Puritan label to Dave Samuelson, who used it for his folk LPs. According to Dave Samuelson, when contacted in February 2005, he leased the Puritan trademark in 1972 from George Buck. Billie Thomas from Michigan bought the Broadway trademark from John. Stan Hester, who issued LPs under a Broadway trademark, said: "We just like the name Broadway. No one ever asked about the Broadway label when we issued these about 25 years ago". He used it for some joint projects involving bootleg reissues.

"This was before George Buck became involved by 1970, and it explains why he could only use the Black Swan label to reissue the Paramount material. At the moment George Buck owns the legal right to New York Recording Laboratories, Puritan, Black Swan, Famous (?) and Broadway. George Buck cannot issue anything that is off Milestone. Apparently the Riverside contract did not have an expiration date" It is unknown who owns the rights to the United Phonographs Corporation.

Lars Edegran, who works for George Buck (allegedly the legal owner of the Paramount material, who has reissued Paramount

material on his Black Swan label since 1987), wrote in 2005: "If there were 100 metals that were on loan to ARC there must be quite a few missing now. As you say only fifty were returned to Steiner. What happened to the other fifty? We are doing some business with Sony (they are leasing material from us) and perhaps we can get some help from them. They were paying royalties to WCC for quite a while. The Steiner Collection has not been catalogued yet, so we don't know exactly how many metals there are. I didn't have time to get all the documents that I wanted from the Steiner collection. But I did read a statement of royalties paid to WCC from Decca, Columbia and other record companies over quite a long period. There's more research to be done in this matter."

In 2004 I contacted Michael Brooks of Sony Archives to ask about the original file cards, which appeared to have been the original NYRL file cards, as the handwriting on it was identified by Janet Erickson to be her father's. (Two of these cards were printed in Max Vreede's Paramount 12000/13000 Series discography, published in 1971 by Storyville). A typed list of these cards was found in the remains of Max Vreede's archive in 2001.

Finding the tests and metal parts

Over the last few decades, many test pressings (some of major importance, but most useless) have been found scattered over the area around Port Washington and Grafton. A collector says about his 'finds': "The NYRL had so many people working there in Grafton, when they closed the place up they just helped themselves through test pressings and what-not and some of that stuff looked like it was stored in the Boerner store. He got some (after the close of the factory) and so many were so warped that you could not even play them. I traced the numbers down 'cause once you gonna trace these dance bands, it's almost impossible. There were a lot of Marsh Laboratories tests there with the 'Amos and Andy' radio show.

"We got another batch of stuff involved with pretty much early stuff and there would be Marsh test pressings for Paramount. That came from a family at West Bend of Wisconsin. The guy just worked there. He was no officer in the company. We got . . . metal masters from some guy in Grafton. His uncle worked there. He just took all the metal masters. None of these batches we picked up had L-matrix numbers - the L-matrix series numbers refers to recordings recorded in Grafton.

"They always took records home, there were so many bad ones, that were pressed there, with the matrix numbers in the middle of the record, because I would find a lot of untrimmed stuff and matrix numbers pressed in the middle of the record. They were taking all the rejects home, but I heard when they closed up there was a free-for-all and they were taking all kinds of stuff with them but the way this guy was talking, this guy like secretly [took] the metal masters out of the building. He was still worried about telling who his uncle was. There was no L-matrix in the dead wax.

"I found a farmer, named Anderson, in a nursing home who used metal parts for cover up a rat hole. He used to take out and flatten out tin cans and tag it to the wall where the mice and the rats came through in the barn. This indeed was the farmer that ended up in the famous John Steiner chicken coop legend. The farm was located one mile out of the Port Washington city limits. Today an antique shop uses this location."

This is an updated and expanded version of an article first published by Alex van der Tuuk on mainspringpress.com