

- Atelier Eich -

A major European counterpart to the American automatic phonographs of the early 1930s was produced in Belgium by Atelier Eich alias Firma W^{wc} Pierre Eich in Sint-Amandsberg, a part of the city Ghent. The first two versions of the patented "Radio-Discophone" came out in 1930 and 1931, and as a matter of fact the manufacturer, Firma W^{wc} Pierre Eich, received a special prize, 'Médaille de la foire de Paris 1931', for the phonographs at the autumn trade fair in the French capital. The two machines represented an interesting type of mixed coin-operated radio and phonograph units often used in cafés in Belgium, and they initiated the production of a line of "Discophone" models leading to the "David-Discophone" and the legendary "Goliath-Discophone" models manufactured in the late 1940s and the first half of the 1950s. The company named Firma W^{wc} Pierre Eich was founded in the autumn 1887 by Pieter (*Pierre*) Eich supported by his father *Jacobus (Jacques)* Eich (born 1842 in Langenlonsheim), and it was primarily known for production of street and fairground organs, pianos, and orchestrions, first at Zaimanstraat in Ghent from the late 1880s and later at Gestelbergenstraat until the autumn 1939, when the factory was closed as one of the last makers of electric pianos due to the coming of World War II. Most assets of the company were taken over then by the Van Hyfte Piano Co. of Ghent. Pierre Eich Sr. (born *Petrus*, 1864 in Gemünden), the founder of Atelier Eich alias Firma W^{wc} Pierre Eich, died on the 30th August 1927, and it was his Norwegian widow Jeannette (born *Wendel*, 1875 in Bruxelles), who headed the company from 1927 until 1939, and the second of three sons, Pierre Jr., developed the 48-selection "Discophone" prototype based on two patents filed in Belgium on the 18th October 1929, and 10th October 1930, and in France on the 19th April 1930. Jeannette Eich passed away on the 1st April 1943, and after the war Pierre Eich Jr. founded the Discophone Co. (*Eich & Bartholomeus Cie.*), and the Eich family again started production of automatic coin-operated radio and phonograph combinations at Gestelbergenstraat. Pierre Eich Jr. also developed a special "Cine Discophone" around 1947, which had not only 32 selections (78rpm) but also 10 film selections (8mm film). Pierre Eich Jr. (born *Petrus Paulus*, 1903) died in 1951, and his older brother Albert (born *Albertus Ernestus*, 1900) took over the production of the fantastic "Goliath Discophone". After Albert Eich passed away in 1956 the jukebox production with the family name Eich ceased, and none of the last 80-selection "Maestro" jukeboxes created by Albert Eich shortly before he died are known to exist today. It is not known to the author if the third brother *Josephus* or other siblings were involved in the company. The 48-selection "Goliath-Discophone" developed by Pierre Eich Jr. was probably the largest 'modern style' jukebox ever produced. Only 24 "David" machines, a scaled down version of the "Goliath", were produced around 1949, but some of the 600 impressive "Goliath" or "Melodica" machines produced in the period 1948-1956 can be found today in private collections and museums.

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The Eich family of St. Amandsberg:

Parents: Pierre Eich Sr. (*Petrus*) (☼ 12.01.1864) († 30.08.1927)
Jeannette Wendel (☼ 27.08.1875, *Norwegian*) († 01.04.1943)
(*married in Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, Bruxelles*)

Children: Clementine (☼ 23.09.1894) († 27.01.1983)
Albert (*Albertus*) (☼ 11.10.1896) († 22.11.1899)
Charlotte (☼ 08.07.1898) († 05.10.1965)
(*married to Emiel Fischer, 26.01.1926*) (*moved to Switzerland*)
Albert (*Albertus Ernestus*) (☼ 15.02.1900) († 26.07.1956)
(*married to Lucia Noninckx, 21.12.1922*)
Louise (*Ludovica*) (☼ 19.02.1902) († 21.08.1902)
Pierre Jr. (*Petrus Paulus*) (☼ 28.04.1903) († 25.09.1951)
Margareta (☼ 07.01.1905) († 23.02.1971)
(*married to Charles Laurent Marie Martiny, 17.06.1939*)
Bertha (☼ 04.04.1907) († 13.06.1959)
(*married to José André Marguérite Doudlet, 12.09.1934*)
Joseph (*Josephus*) (☼ 04.06.1910) († 28.08.1936)
(*married to Celine van Malderen, 1935*)
Son Pierre III (☼ 16.02.1936) (†), *married to Lisette de Veirman* (☼ 11.05.1934) (†)

Family grave monument at the Kerkhof Gentbrugge in Ghent, plot GEB-4303.