

Gabel



Jukeboxes

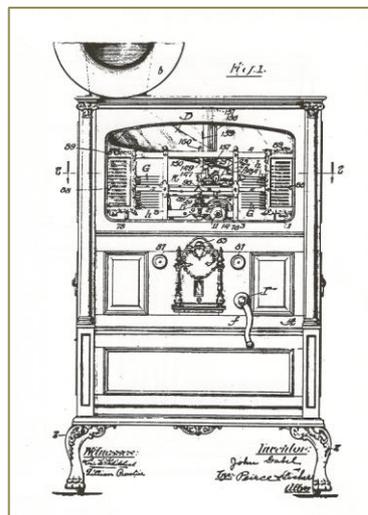
Company History

The history of the Automatic Machine and Tool Co. in Chicago started with an immigrant teen named John Gabel, who was born in 1872 in Metzenseifen (Medzev in Slovakia) in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as son of a nailsmith. John Gabel did not receive much school education as a child due to illness, but did attend a course in metalworking in his hometown encouraged by his father, and in 1886 at the age of only 14 he immigrated to America to stay with his older brother in Cleveland in Ohio. After two years with odd jobs to learn the language the 16 year old John Gabel was encouraged by friends and of course his family to try to make it on his own in the industrial city Chicago, and he soon found a good job at the Felt & Tarrant Manufacturing Co. at 52-56 Illinois Street, making calculating machines. After a few years and looking for a new job John Gabel was hired by the newly formed Chicago Vending Machine Co. (M.B.M. Cigar Vending Co. later to be known as the Mills Novelty Co.) on the corner of West Washington and South Canal Street producing coin-operated vending machines. That happened just before the Mills company, founded in 1891 by the grocer Mortimer Birdsul Mills, had to move to new and better facilities on South Jefferson Street after a fire in the (American Leather) Link Belt Co. building at 46 South Canal Street. The Mills company had at the time serious problems with a new line of floor roulette and counter wheel amusement machines, and John Gabel immediately started working on adjustments and improvements, especially for the machine to be known as The Owl. He was quickly promoted to machine shop foreman, but due to some disputes over compensations and credit for the improvements John Gabel left the firm. After leaving the Mills company John Gabel was approached by John F. Bower, owner of the Bower Machine Co. at 2607 South Halsted Street, who wanted to make a new line of slot machines at his facilities. John Gabel then developed a new 6-way floor amusement machine to be known as the Master Mechanic, but he left the company even before the new floor machine was introduced early in 1899, maybe because he felt that the Bower company was inadequately financed for the new production. Thus, in October 1898 John Gabel became one of three founders of the Automatic Machine and Tool Co. together with the contract cabinetmaker Edward Mikkelsen, an immigrant Dane, who helped financing the firm for part ownership, and the patternmaker Emil C. Mueller, an immigrant German, whom he already knew from the Bower Machine Co.. It is known, however, that John Gabel purchased Edward Mikkelsen's part of the Automatic Machine and Tool Co. about one year later. During the first years with the new company John Gabel created a whole line of floor amusement machines, counter wheels, and trade stimulators, and by 1900 the firm employed not less than fifty men. John Gabel, by the way, became a naturalized citizen of the United States on the 9th June 1900.

It seems the company founded in October 1898 started in facilities used for cabinet making owned by Edward Mikkelsen at 25 North Jefferson Street, but when he was bought out as co-owner the production was moved to new facilities at 43 South Canal Street. Edward Mikkelsen, however, still produced and delivered nice oak cabinets for John Gabel's amusement and music machines. Emil C. Mueller stayed with the company for decades as foreman, treasurer, and even co-owner.

Around 1902-1903 John Gabel wanted to improve the public acceptance of gambling machines, like most other slot-machine manufacturers, and he wanted to install Swiss musical boxes, a small musical device that played whenever a coin was inserted, in his floor machines. As a consequence he visited the Lyon & Healy department store on the corner of Wabash Avenue and Adams Street in order to purchase musical movements. During the meeting John Gabel was introduced to the talking machines, but the machines were in his opinion too noisy and lacked musical quality. It is not unlikely that John Gabel was aware already of the market for developments in public musical entertainment. In August 1897 advertisements for the Amet Long Distance Talking Machine Co., described as 'small red boxes', appeared in "The Chicago Tribune". In these advertisements stores wrote 'popular songs and funny jokes brought to you over the wires....drop 1 cent in the slot'. Obviously, John Gabel also knew about the non-selective phonographs in phonograph arcades and on routes in the countryside, but especially the Tonophone coin-op piano introduced in 1898 and successfully operated on routes by The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co. caught his attention. At the meeting with the Lyon & Healy department store John Gabel borrowed a Victor machine and a selection of records, and he started thinking seriously of the possibilities of a selective coin-operated talking machine for public use. John Gabel was still on the road as a salesman, and he was aware of at least one big advantage for a selective coin-op musical entertainment machine. The main advantage was simply that contrary to the gambling machines such a device would be legal to operate in all states. The development of a prototype for the new talking machine went slowly but steadily for a little more than a year, and then in the spring 1905 John Gabel, who by then was not only a mechanical but also an acoustic expert, had developed a functional but complicated, all-mechanical, coin-operated talking machine playing two stacks of 12 disc-records. Late in the summer 1905 John Gabel could present a machine to the patent attorneys Pierce, Fisher & Clapp, and by the end of October the patterns were ready and the first three machines with 40-inch brass horn on top were produced with nice oak cabinets made by Edward Mikkelsen. To make it through this difficult period John Gabel did get financial help again from Edward Mikkelsen, but also from John Sherwin of the Chicago Hardware Foundry Co., the supplier of all metal castings to the Automatic Machine and Tool Co., and to several other slot-machine makers in the Chicago area. The first of the three music machines was delivered to Joseph Hallner, who also operated amusement machines in Wisconsin together with William Hass, the company Hallner & Hass at 158 Gault Court, and he

was very satisfied with the reliability of the device. However, there was a problem with record wear on the first machines, and John Gabel had to find a substitute for the single diamond point needle, which had to be changed often by the operator. John Gabel needed about one week to solve the problems and develop an automatic needle changer able to change needles automatically but mechanically. The needle-changing mechanism looked like an old Gatling gun, but it worked and was used in the machines for more than twenty years until the electrically amplified versions of Gabel's machines were introduced late in the 1920s. The talking machine was originally nicknamed The Automatic Entertainer by one of Gabel's employees, a name that soon was officially accepted for this new music machine, and the first patent was filed on the 26th February 1906. In 1915, at the same time as the first, original patent for the talking machine was finally granted, John Gabel won the Gold Medal for his talking machine display at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, held 20th February - 4th December 1915.



The first Gabel talking machine patent filed 1906

John Gabel and the Automatic Machine and Tool Co. ran into many problems with patent disputes from the start. It was mainly the Emile Berliner groove-driven reproducer patent owned by the Victor Talking Machine Co. in Rahway, New Jersey, that caused most of the problems. John Gabel did very soon get around that problem by adding a feed screw propellant to the tone arm. The Automatic Entertainer surely was loaded with features to insure the reliability of operation, and the machine was highly competitive to most selective machines on the market, of which many like the 24-selection Multiphone, the 12-selection Autophone, and even the 6-selection Hexaphone made by the Victor company in Rahway, were playing cylinders and not disc records. Due to the serious patent problems, and a filed suit by Victor, it was difficult for John Gabel to sell machines to dealers, who were connected to the Victor Talking Machine Co., so he had to concentrate on visiting the independent dealers nationwide. After the earthquake John Gabel visited Peter Bacigalupi of the Edison

Phonograph Agency on Market Street in San Francisco, who had been operating Columbia coin-op Graphophones for several years, and on the same trip Gabel visited the Eilers Music Co. with main offices in Portland, Oregon, but also with two affiliations in San Francisco and one in Oakland to get orders for the new device, and on the way back to Chicago he was able to get an order for another ten machines from Carstensen & Anson Piano Co. in Salt Lake City. The financial situation was difficult for many small businesses due to the economic crisis around 1907, but a break for John Gabel came late in the year, when Howard Eugene Wurlitzer visited him in Chicago. He was impressed with the sound reproduction of the Automatic Entertainer, and asked Gabel if the Wurlitzer company could be the exclusive distributor of the Entertainer nationwide. The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co. was indeed a big player in the field, but not quite able to stand up against the Victor Talking Machine Co. in the end. Howard Eugene Wurlitzer did during the meeting order 100 machines to be delivered to the firm in Cincinnati in Ohio. During the following month the Automatic Machine and Tool Co. was able to produce and deliver 26 of the first-generation, open-horn Entertainers to the Wurlitzer company. The battle with Victor represented by the manager Arthur D. Geissler of the Victor Talking Machine Co. at 72-74 Wabash Avenue in Chicago, was indeed tough, but before the Court the case was finally dismissed, and John Gabel was free to improve the machine and to build up a sales network of state agents. In 1907 the Automatic Machine and Tool Co. had to be moved from 43 South Canal Street due to building plans for The Northwestern Depot (the Union Station built 1910), and new production facilities were established on the corner of West Lake Street and North Ann Street (North Racine Avenue).

The new version of The Automatic Entertainer for the year 1909 still had the same ornate oak cabinet, but a rounded enclosure on the top was added to make it look less old-fashioned. The improved version was equipped with an electric motor to replace the crank on the front, but the beveled glass window to show the mechanics was still there. In 1910 an argument over patent rights with the successful wholesaler and operator Julius Wellner in Philadelphia ended with a favorable business arrangement, which meant that Julius Wellner became the sole distributor of Automatic Entertainer machines on the East Coast. In fact, Julius Wellner did file a patent for a disc-playing mechanism in December 1903, and it was granted in July 1909. The machine was, however, not working properly, and Julius Wellner admitted he had problems with the patented mechanism.

In July 1912 the company was incorporated with a capital stock placed at \$25,000 and again Edward Mikkelsen and Emil C. Mueller were registered as founders together with John Gabel. Also in 1912 Arthur D. Geissler and the Victor Talking Machine Co. came up with yet another suit against the Automatic Machine and Tool Co., and John Gabel again won the first case. Victor did appeal all the way to the Supreme Court this time, but on the day of the court case in 1913 the Victor company

abandoned the lawsuit. This long fight with the mighty Victor company over patent rights had been a very costly affair for John Gabel and his firm, but now the lawsuits finally ended. However, it is known that The Victor Co. appealed to the Commissioners and accused them of unfairness at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, when Gabel's exhibit in the Palace of Liberal Arts won the Gold Medal. In fact there were two versions of the Automatic Entertainer presented at the Exposition in 1915. One of them winning the prize was of course the coin-operated version for public use. The other version was made for home use, and operated by push-button only. This version was probably similar to the improved continuous-play machine offered under the name Gabel-Ola in the following years. Around 1915-1916 quite a lot of piano dealers nationwide like Carstensen & Anson Piano Co. in Utah were handling the Automatic Entertainer models as a most profitable auxiliary to their other business. Another major representative in the years around 1920 was the firm E. T. Barron & Co. at 4724 Ashland Court in St. Louis, Missouri, covering several states.

Later versions of the Entertainer with more simplified cabinet styles were rather popular, and produced in large numbers, and the Automatic Machine and Tool Co. became a respected player in the field of coin-operated music machines.

The year 1917 was very important for John Gabel and his company. In the spring the name of the incorporated company was officially changed to Gabel's Entertainer Co., and the main reason for the change was simply that the company would give up the manufacture of other products except the Gabel-Ola and the Automatic Entertainer. At the same time a new subsidiary company was organized. The subsidiary Gabel's Entertainer Sales Co. located at 117 North Dearborn Street would take care of the sales end of the company, and the daily management was in the able hands of E. S. Garrett, an experienced talking machine salesman who came to work for Gabel three years earlier. E. S. Garrett came back then from a position at the Kansas City branch of the Columbia Graphophone Co..

Also in the spring 1917 the John Gabel company purchased a site on the corner of Lincoln Street and Walnut Street for a new factory building expected to be ready for production of mainly the Gabel-Ola models in July the same year. The Gabel-Ola model was introduced late in the autumn 1916, and the model was finished in four attractive artistic styles. All the different styles of the Gabel-Ola home model and the commercial Automatic Entertainer were exhibited at the company's show room at 117 North Dearborn Street. The company also known later as The John Gabel Manufacturing Co. continued making acoustic versions of the commercial Automatic Entertainer until 1928. The following model for 1929 still looked like the earlier acoustic models of the 1920s, but the electric amplification gave the model the nickname Amplified Entertainer.

After the difficult times following the Wall Street crash in 1929 John Gabel still designed and produced automatic phonographs. The vast majority of these early

1930s machines were recalled 1920s models from operators, which were cut down to look more modern and refurbished at the factory facilities in Chicago. Some were still finished in oak, but even more were painted according to the wishes of the operator or even the location. The recycling of older cabinets and mechanical parts may be the reason very few of the acoustic Gabel models have survived. One of the major representatives in the New York area from the latter part of 1929 until around 1933 was the Capitol Automatic Music Co. Inc. at 460 West 34th Street founded by Samuel Kresberg and William A. Goetz. The company did not have production facilities on Manhattan, but did introduce a nice 16-selection jukebox called Sweet Sixteen in 1934 with mechanism patented by Samuel Kresberg and Victor Peterfesa. However, the company still operated Entertainer models successfully until late 1935, and then sold out the last freshly refinished Gabel Entertainer's early 1936, when the company started distributing Rock-Ola jukeboxes. In 1933 The John Gabel Manufacturing Co. established its own offices and storage facilities at 351 West 14th Street. The lease on the facilities ended in 1937, and it seems the Robert Grenner Co. at 250 West 54th Street operated rebuilt Gabel's phonograph models for another year or so in New York. In connection with the line of Entertainer models of the early 1930s it is interesting that the name or rather nickname Sheraton turns up. [If the model was actually made for the Hotel Intercontinental in Chicago in connection with the World's Fair 1933-1934, this name cannot have been used until 1937 as a nickname for the model in shining black Steinway finish; - simply because the founders of the Sheraton group, Henderson and Moore, did not use the name Sheraton until then. This needs to be confirmed by John Gabel company notes not available at the moment.](#) The other names or nicknames used by the company were not strange in any way. The last few years John Gabel served as head of the company he decided also to consult other industrial cabinet designers. The first two patented designs for new cabinets to house the new mechanisms developed by John Gabel for the 1930s came from Theodore E. Samuelson. Both designs were filed for patent in September 1934, and the official names used by the company were Entertainer (1934) and Junior De Luxe Modern (1935). The next series of three designs ordered from outside the company were filed for patent by John William Wilson in September 1935. The official names used by the company were Aristocrat (1936), Cardinal (1936), and Commander (1936). John Gabel retired from the company 65 years of age in 1936 leaving the company management entirely to his sons Kurt and Robert, and they started out with the very nice 12-selection Starlite model, which turned out to be the first modern style jukebox with 'light-up' front corner plastics.

During the years from 1937 until 1940 The John Gabel Manufacturing Co. produced an additional series of six different jukebox designs, of which the last 24-selection model made in 1940 was named Kuro, an amalgam of the names Kurt and Robert. The model designed by Clifford Brooks Stevens was so modern in design that it still compared favorably with early postwar jukeboxes. Clifford Brooks Stevens, by the

way, also designed the Twilight model. During the war years the production facility was turned over completely to manufacturing for the armed forces, and after the war ended the company continued to make parts and continuous play mechanisms for telephone line music systems. In August 1945 Raymond T. Moloney, head of the Lion Manufacturing Corp., announced that the Bally plant in Chicago wanted to put a new coin phonograph on the market as soon as materials were available, and the mechanism would be an improved model completed just before the outbreak of the war by Gabel engineers. It was also stated that nationally famed stylists had produced a line of cabinets for the Bally coin-op phonographs. Robert Gabel, sales manager at the time, was very much involved in this licensing agreement, but it seems the whole Bally project was stillborn. Then in February 1947 a new Gabel coin-op phonograph model already designed was planned for production, but the plan was shelved by the management. *The new jukebox design was unfortunately not patented, and rumour has it that the model should have been named Baretta, the maiden name of John's wife Josephina, who died in San Diego in January 1940. This has to be confirmed by family notes unfortunately not available at the moment.* Robert Gabel, the last president of the company, stated later that the firm decided to specialize in parts manufacture and put aside its coin phonograph manufacture due to uncertainties in the general business world prevalent at the time including the high price on music machines. The production facilities of The John Gabel Manufacturing Co. were closed at the end of March 1948, and the company was finally dissolved in 1949, when shares and remaining patent rights were purchased from the Gabel family by David Cullen Rockola and the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp..

The true pioneer and mechanical wizard in the automatic phonograph business, John Gabel, died at age 83 in a rest home in Elgin a little west of Chicago city on the 23rd December 1955. His mémoires entitled "Biography Of A Man, Whose Destiny Was Guided By An Invisible Hand" based on company notes and diary entries, and dictated on a continuing basis over the years to his secretary Ms. Florence McDonald, have unfortunately never been published.

In March 1949 Robert Gabel, the last manager of The John Gabel Manufacturing Co., joined the staff of the Atlas Music Co. to run the Atlas Novelty Co. at 2200 North Western Avenue and to represent the Seeburg distributor in Illinois.

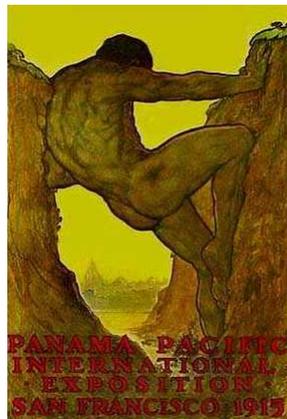
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Gert Almind, September 2010

Phonographs by Gabel, 78rpm Era

Year	Model	Records	Selections	Speed
1906-1908	Automatic Entertainer, horned	24	24	78
1909-1910	Automatic Entertainer, curved top	24	24	78
1911-1916	Gabel's Entertainer, oak cabinet	24	24	78
1917-1928	Gabel's Entertainer, oak or painted	24	24	78
1929-1932	Junior, modern style, electric	12	12	78
1929-1932	Commercial Entertainer, electric	24	24	78
1932-1933	Junior Standard	12	12	78
1933	<i>Sheraton (possible nickname)</i>	24	24	78
1933-1935	<i>Various cut-down cabinet types</i>	24	24	78
1933-1934	Entertainer	24	24	78
1935	Junior Standard	12	12	78
1935	Junior De Luxe Modern	12	12	78
1935	Junior Streamline	12	12	78
1936	Junior De Luxe Modern, <i>Prog. Dial</i>	12	12	78
1936	Junior Streamline, <i>Prog. Dial</i>	12	12	78
1936	Aristocrat	24	24	78
1936	Cardinal	24	24	78
1936	Commander	24	24	78
1936	Junior Realistic	12	12	78
1936	Starlite (<i>light-up corner plastics</i>)	18	18	78
1937	Elite	18	18	78
1937	Charme	18	18	78
1937	Lorelei	24	24	78
1938	Twilight	24	24	78
1938-1939	Rainbow	24	24	78
1940	Kuro	24	24	78

Note: The list of models and especially the production years needs more research.



Patents for Gabel Phonographs

Name: John Gabel			
No.	Description	Filed	Granted
1,134,603	Automatic Talking-Machine	02/26 1906	04/06 1915
1,182,551	Automatic Talking-Machine	08/18 1909	05/09 1916
1,414,563	Automatic Talking Machine	01/04 1916	05/02 1922
1,414,564	Automatic Talking Machine	03/15 1917	05/02 1922
1,954,871	Automatic Phonograph	03/31 1932	04/17 1934
2,326,633	Automatic Phonograph	08/30 1940	08/10 1943
2,340,418	Automatic Phonograph	08/30 1940	02/01 1944
Name: Emil C. Mueller			
No.	Description	Filed	Granted
2,025,300	Phonograph	11/09 1931	12/24 1935
2,087,095	Automatic Phonograph	11/09 1931	07/13 1937
2,161,483	Automatic Phonograph	01/05 1938	06/06 1939
2,217,845	Control Mechanism	04/19 1937	10/15 1940
2,298,500	Coin Div Mech for Coin Op Phonogr	04/27 1940	10/13 1942
Name: Folke A. Brandstrom			
No.	Description	Filed	Granted
2,003,424	Automatic Phonograph	02/01 1932	06/04 1935
Name: Francis J. Chojnowski			
No.	Description	Filed	Granted
2,362,244	Automatic Phonograph Control	09/02 1941	11/07 1944
Name: Theodore E. Samuelson			
No.	Description	Filed	Granted
D:93,851	Cabinet for Phonographs or the Like	09/17 1934	11/13 1934
D:93,852	Cabinet for Phonographs or the Like	09/17 1934	11/13 1934
Name: John William Wilson			
No.	Description	Filed	Granted
D:97,690	Cabinet for Phonographs or the Like	09/23 1935	12/03 1935
D:97,691	Cabinet for Phonographs or the Like	09/23 1935	12/03 1935
D:97,692	Cabinet for Phonographs or the Like	09/23 1935	12/03 1935
Name: Clifford Brooks Stevens			
No.	Description	Filed	Granted
D:123,316	Cabinet for Phonographs or the Like	03/11 1940	10/29 1940

Note: There may be more basic patents for the Gabel coin-op phonographs.



Finished in Golden Oak, Mahogany or Circassian Walnut as desired. Standard size, 68 in. high, 36 in. wide, 18 in. deep.

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Thousands of this Remarkable Coin-Operated Musical Instrument Have Been and Are Being Sold in "Dry" States and Localities

GABEL'S AUTOMATIC ENTERTAINER

PRODUCES WITH EQUAL FACILITY VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL SELECTIONS

It contains 24 ten inch Columbia or Victor records which may be changed as desired.

When coin is inserted the Entertainer will automatically change the selection and needle.

The patron can choose the record he wishes to hear. Magazine slot plays from 1 to 20 nickels. Equipped with a direct or alternating motor or crank driven where electric current is not available.

THE TONE is marvelous in quality and of wonderful carrying power, but is not unpleasant to those immediately in front of the instrument. Gabel's Entertainer is not only an unparalled money maker but is a most efficient medium for attracting trade as it can be set to play continuously.

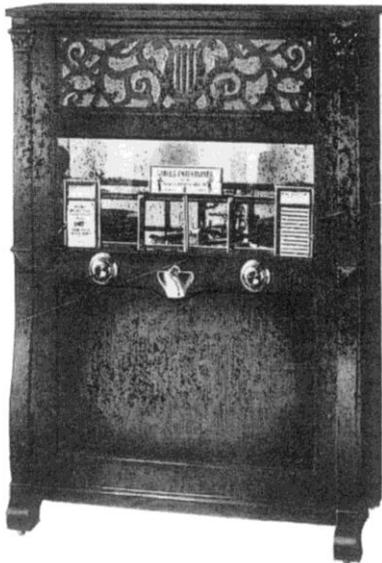
Restaurants, drug stores, moving picture theaters, arcades, cafes, summer resorts and amusement parks are some of the good prospects for the Entertainer.

You are cordially invited to visit our exhibit in the Liberal Arts Building at the Panama Exposition at San Francisco, where in addition to the commercial Entertainer you will also find a model adapted to parlor use.

We would like to tell you about the money earning powers of Gabel's Automatic Entertainer. The Agency for your territory would prove a most valuable asset.

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210 North Ann Street CHICAGO, ILL.

OPERATORS! HERE IS A BARGAIN!



AUSTRALIAN OAK
53 in. high, 38 in. wide, 21 in. deep.

YOU can now buy the best known automatic phonograph at amazingly low prices. Brand new machines equipped with the latest synchronized pickup, amplifier and speaker. **Gabel** stands out as the pioneer of automatic phonographs. When you buy **Gabel** you buy the best! Write or wire today for details.

Watch this space for announcement of our new machine!

THE JOHN GABEL MFG. CO.
1200 West Lake St. Chicago, Ill.

The
GABEL-OLA



SELF-OPERATING

"All the Pleasure Without the Bother"

Suppose that you are in your dining-room

entertaining your guests. There comes the pause in the conversation that always does.

You turn a switch and from the music room comes the notes of a song. Clear and mellow it comes. Some high-priced operatic nightingale is singing one of the sad, sweet arias from "Madame Butterfly" or amid clinking castanets is caroling forth one of the defiant melodies of "Carmen."

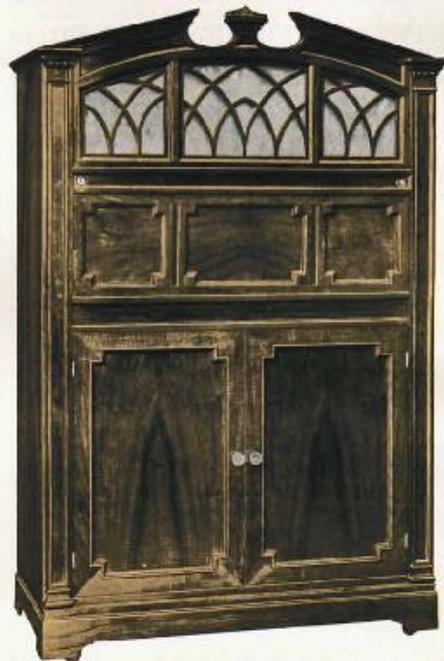
Your guests are amazed and when the song is finished do not hesitate to show their pleasure and delight with the volume of the Gabel-Ola, its resonance of tone and its freedom from the foreign sounds that many reproducing instruments are guilty of.

You do not have to interrupt the exclamations of pleasure and rush into the music room to shut off the machine or to put on a new record. Just sit there—and then announce the encore number—"Chinese Blues."

Then the ladies will want to dance, so go in and dance with them. You won't have to stay out of the fun and watch the machine, for the

"GABEL-OLA"

is "SELF-OPERATING" and gives you
"All the pleasure without the bother"



THE GABEL-OLA

Circassian Walnut—Height 56 inches, width 43 inches, depth: 20 inches.



THE GABEL-OLA

Oak Finish—Height 66 inches, width 43 inches, depth 22 inches.

Have a full evening of dancing if you want, for the "Gabel-Ola" will play 24 different numbers and you won't have to go near it.

The "Gabel-Ola" does everything for itself. It changes the records and changes the needles. It starts and stops itself. The needle magazine holds 600 needles, and you do not have to even think of needles until that number of records has been played.

Ideal for the Home!
Ideal for the Dancing-School!
Ideal for the Restaurant!
and dozens of other places

The cabinets in which the wonderful "Gabel-Ola" mechanism is encased are of the finest type of the woodworker's art. They enrich any surrounding and harmonize with the best schemes of home decoration. Made also in mahogany and mission oak.

AS A MUSIC DEALER WORTHY OF THE NAME, you owe it to yourself and your business to know of the "Gabel-Ola" and its remarkable merits—both artistic and commercial.

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John Gabel, 1872-1955



Gabel family monument at Ridgewood