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"HELLO POSTERITY": THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF G. ROBERT VINCENT, FOUNDER OF THE
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Douglas E. Collar

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"HELLO POSTERITY": THE LIFE AND TIMES
OF G. ROBERT VINCENT, FOUNDER OF THE
NATIONAL VOICE LIBRARY

By

Douglas E. Collar

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ABSTRACT

"HELLO POSTERITY:" THE LIFE AND TIMES OF G. ROBERT VINCENT,
FOUNDER OF THE NATIONAL VOICE LIBRARY (1898-1985)

By

DOUGLAS E. COLLAR

This study examines the life and career of G. Robert Vincent, founder of the National Voice Library. It uses the letters, documents, scrapbooks, recordings, and memoirs from Mr. Vincent's extensive collection. It draws upon interviews with Vincent, his family, and co-workers. The approach is influenced by the work of cultural historians like Russel Nye and Ray Browne.

The study suggests that G. Robert Vincent reflected several of the major social-cultural themes of his generation: the Horatio Alger archetype, the work ethic, and rugged individualism. Vincent's relationship with Theodore Roosevelt fulfilled his early need for a suitable mentor. His affiliation with the Edison Recording Company provided him with an apprenticeship in the preservation of historical sound recordings.

Vincent's combination of idealism and pragmatism is rooted in the American character. In his own way, Vincent's was a uniquely American life which mirrored the adaptation of the American Dream to the technological and cultural developments of the early Twentieth Century. Also, Vincent's conscious cultivation of a persona suggests elements of

myth-making which strongly inform the democratic ideal of the Self-Made Man.

Chapters one, two and three recount Vincent's family background and his establishment of an amateur boys' newspaper in New York City. His relationship with ex-President Theodore Roosevelt and involvement in The Boys' Progressive League is examined.

Chapters four and five are devoted to Vincent's involvement in the First World War. Vincent ran away from school in 1915, serving in France. Later, he joined the American Army and was a Junior Attache at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.

Chapter six recounts Vincent's activities in the liquor trade during Prohibition and his work in the preservation of early Edison cylinder recordings. Later, Vincent established his own sound studio in Radio City.

Chapter seven details the productive World War II period when Vincent was officer in charge of the V-Disc section. He was Chief Sound Engineer at the San Francisco Conference and at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials.

Chapter eight traces Vincent's activities as United Nations soundman and his production work in New York and California. Chapter nine presents the history of the establishment of The National Voice Library at Michigan State University where Vincent was Curator from 1962 to 1974.

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To my parents, George M. and Florence M. Collar,
and to all my teachers. Also to my wife,
Cassandra, for her strength and endurance.

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The love and support of my family has sustained me in completing my dissertation. I hope that by finishing what I started out to do, I have justified their faith in me.

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INTRODUCTION

This biographical study examines the ways in which certain aspects of the "American Dream" informed and helped shape the life of its subject G. Robert Vincent. Aside from his considerable achievements in the field of sound recording and historical voice preservation, Mr. Vincent was a compulsive chronicler of his own, often colorful life. Thus, this project afforded a rare opportunity to examine a variety of primary source materials including a lifetime collection of letters, documents, pictures, newspaper clippings, and memoirs from Mr. Vincent's personal files. Because of Mr. Vincent's many associations with historical personages and events of the Twentieth Century, his experiences are worth preserving. My thesis is based on the general assumption that Vincent was not only a product of the social-cultural milieu of his time, but that he was also a conscious myth-maker who strove to create an epic life of his own which, viewed in retrospect, represented the evolution of the Horatio Alger archetype into the Post Modern Age.

In this study, I will establish that Mr. Vincent was influenced by two significant American cultural heroes: Theodore Roosevelt and Thomas Edison. His recording of Roosevelt at Sagamore Hill in 1912 was the most significant

event of Vincent's life. It not only galvanized his interest in the possibilities of sound recording, but it also brought him into contact with the most influential masculine role model of the era. Vincent later learned the craft of sound engineering at the Edison Recording Company where he began his work in restoring Edison's earliest experimental voice cylinders. Thus, Roosevelt and Edison became seminal figures both in Vincent's life's work and in his concept of himself. In forging the mythology of his life, Vincent assimilated significant portions of Rooseveltiana and Edisonia. In the sense that both Roosevelt and Edison were advocates of rugged individualism as well as prototypes of the prevailing Alger ethic, Vincent's admiration of them placed him in the tradition of American boyhood which runs from Benjamin Franklin to Fitzgerald's Jimmy Gatz.

As a result of Vincent's meticulous documentation of his life, I have drawn upon considerable self-generated material. The problem with Vincent's memoirs is that one must recognize that they tend to make Vincent the center of events which might exaggerate his role or ignore the fact that Vincent was often a peripheral figure. However, that Vincent cared enough about events to write about them at all is remarkable in itself. Aside from his romantic "mission-oriented" style, Vincent is an observer. He creates in his memoirs a persona which is not disingenuous. Yet, there is always a perspective in Vincent's writing. He had a strong

sense of history and was always aware of what he was seeing and doing.

Methodologically, I tried to cross-reference events in the memoirs with evidence in other primary materials: letters, clippings, or recordings, which Vincent often made of telephone conversations and radio broadcasts that he was connected with. My interviews, especially those with his wife were of immeasurable assistance. Fortunately, I had recorded several hours of conversational interviews with Mr. Vincent before his death.

A major consideration in doing this dissertation was how I would approach my own relationship with Mr. Vincent and his family. Having virtually completed the entire project at Vincent's desk on his typewriter, I was aware of my heavy burden. As a scholar, I have tried to be objective. Yet, my association with Mr. Vincent is an evident advantage as well as a limitation in creating the text of his life.

It is my hope that this dissertation will suggest new avenues of social-cultural analysis through the consideration of a diverse variety of primary source materials. Biography, after all, is another way of constructing a text. G. Robert Vincent's biography is not so much a story of a great man as it is a collection of one man's great dreams. Our real lives are lived in our heads. As Mark Twain wrote, "What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and words!" In an important sense, though, our acts and words - if we preserve them - constitute not only the texts of our lives

but those of our culture. Perhaps, this biography of G. Robert Vincent will illuminate, once again, the strength of the American Dream and the vibrance of its self-creational qualities in the text of one Twentieth Century life.

CHAPTER I

CHILD OF THE CENTURY FAMILY BACKGROUND

George Robert Vincent was born in Boston, Massachusetts on July 17, 1898. His parents were Dr. John R. Vincent, a physician, and Lisa Bloch, an Austrian emigre. While available research on the Vincent line is sketchy, it is known that the Vincents were English. Lisa Bloch had grown up in Vienna where her father, Dr. Joseph Bloch, was a rabbi and a member of the Austrian parliament from a district in Galicia.¹ John Vincent met Lisa Bloch while studying medicine in Europe in the mid-1890's. They married, despite objections from Dr. Bloch, and in 1896 had a daughter, Ellen. The family moved to Boston where Dr. Vincent set up his medical practice. Subsequently, around 1902, Lisa and the children returned to Vienna, and the marriage was dissolved.

Divorce was a matter of reproach in the early 1900's. As a result, little is known about the cause of the breakup of the Vincent family. It might be assumed that Dr. Bloch encouraged Lisa to return to Vienna, perhaps owing to his long standing opposition of his daughter's marriage to a gentile. Infidelity may have been a factor.² However it happened, Lisa brought her children to her father's home

where they were raised in the European tradition. Young Robert Vincent began school in an Austrian academy where he became fluent in German. Grandfather Bloch was a strict tutor who would rap Vincent's knuckles when his handwriting failed to pass muster. In the absence of his father, Dr. Bloch represented paternal authority during Vincent's formative years. The boy must have chafed under the admonitions of the old Talmudic scholar for he was an outgoing and fun-loving youth. Yet, in later life, Robert Vincent would prove to have absorbed some of his grandfather's exacting work habits. He too would become a perfectionist who demanded hard work and precision from his co-workers.³

Dr. Joseph Bloch cast a long shadow over the lives of his daughter and grandson. Having brought the errant Lisa and her children back to Vienna, Bloch arranged a marriage for Lisa which was more to his own liking. He introduced her to Dr. Joseph Tarlau, who became Lisa's second husband in 1903. Described by family members as a gentle, quiet man, Tarlau was older than Lisa and was - like her father - a rabbi. Lisa had nurtured dreams of a writing career, so the new Tarlau family moved to New York City in 1905 to be near the publishing industry. Lisa give birth to three more sons: Tommy - born in 1904, Teddy - born in 1907, and Milton - born in 1910. Curiously, Lisa's daughter Ellen was left behind in Vienna where she was raised by Dr. Bloch. Years later, after Ellen's return to America, Lisa Tarlau would refer to her only daughter as a cousin from Vienna.

Beautiful and vain, Lisa did not want others to know that she was old enough to have an adult daughter.⁴

Tracing the maternal line of Robert Vincent's family is enriched by Joseph Bloch's documentation of his own life in My Reminiscences published in 1923.⁵ A detailed and often turgid accounting of his education and rise to political prominence during the fight against Austrian anti-semitism in the 1880's, the volume provides a useful picture of the forces which shaped Bloch's life and which indirectly influenced Vincent and his mother. Bloch's was an archetypal European rise from the provinces to fame in the center of empire. Like the Horatio Alger novels of Vincent's youth, his grandfather's success story must have echoed in Vincent's young consciousness. In Vincent's mother Lisa, however, it produced a reaction. Free-spirited and proud, Lisa rejected religious orthodoxy in favor of literary ways. If she could not measure up to her father's standards, she would set her own. All her life, she seemed to be at war with convention. Yet for her eldest son, Robert, there was liberation, both from Judaism and the struggles against parental strictures. The progression from Grandfather Bloch to Lisa to Robert Vincent brought the family line into twentieth century America with all its pluralistic and secular attractions. Robert Vincent's youth was charged by a kind of Promethean light provided by the tension between his clerical grandfather and his beautiful writer-mother.

Dr. Joseph S. Bloch was a man who knew what he wanted. Born in Dukla Galicia on November 20, 1850, Bloch rose from peasant stock to become an influential publisher and member of the Austrian parliament from 1883 to 1895.⁶ Sent to Cheder or private school at the age of three by his baker parents, Joseph was initiated into the Bible at five and at six came to a Melamed (teacher) of the Talmud. Writing of this, Bloch recalled those dark afternoons spent at his teacher's house which served as bedroom, parlour and schoolroom:

In this room I spent the whole morning, afternoon and also part of the evening till about ten o'clock, with pauses only of one hour for each meal. But I did not find it too much. I had learnt to love the dull, gloomy room at my teacher's, not so much from mere love of learning as from aversion to staying home; my father was extremely severe and I was glad to avoid him.

A quick study, Joseph soon became a model student used by the teacher as proof of his excellent teaching method to win children of well-to-do families to the Cheder.

After his barmitzvah, Joseph was sent away with only two florins in his pocket, which he promptly lost before leaving town. After returning home and being thrashed by his father for the loss, he began a period of wandering. He wrote.

I traveled through different Galician cities without staying anywhere for a long time. There was a restlessness in me which drove me from one place to another. My standing quarters in every town was the Beth-Ha-Midrash where I used to sleep on a bench. However, I was not the only one who slept there. To get a warm place near the stove wild battles were fought and I was not always victorious. So I spent my first years⁸ of wandering in poverty, yet I was never homesick.

Soon, Joseph gained a reputation among the men who came each day to the temple to study. Arranging a sort of public performance, he asked them to choose from out of the hundreds of sforim (books) that were on the shelves, any two volumes. Though they differed in content and theme, Joseph offered to find out some connection between them in ten minutes. As he wrote, the act was successful:

This performance would always cause great admiration, and for the sake of fun they would put the most heterogeneous works together; a Talmud treatise on temple sacrifices with one on civil law suits; once they gave me responses from the Gaonim of the 8th century and a work of responses from the 17th century. I solved these problems with more or less subtlety. I would always find out some important connection.

After becoming a local celebrity for these feats, Joseph was taken in by Rabbi Wittmayer in the town of Sambor, where he learned the history of Napoleon from the old man's grandson. His early Daf Folio (memorized) learning of the Talmud would gain him status as pupil to the famous Rabbi J. S. Nathanson of Lemberg and would eventually lead him out of the provinces into Vienna where he would seek a secular education.

Despite his growing reputation as a scholar, Joseph Bloch demonstrated a sense of humor and glib tongue which often presented him with problems. Returning to his home at 16, he was engaged to the daughter of a grandson of the renowned Rabbi Mendele of Rymanow. After signing the agreement of betrothal, Joseph grew impatient to see more of his future wife. He wrote:

My life at home was unbearable and one day I went to my fiancée's father and mother, and suggested that I wished to marry. Such a remark was naturally considered most shocking; a thing one never would have expected from a well-bred pious young man, and moreover from a Talmudist. The mother who prided herself on being the granddaughter of the author of "Maor ve Shomesh" . . . began to enumerate her ancestors, famous rabbis, and said whoever would marry her daughter was not to forget her descent and must show himself worthy of these great men.¹⁰

In answer to this, Joseph said something he was sorry for the next minute: "With so many Seides (grandfathers) there will scarcely be room in bed." This was, of course, followed by a flood of invective from the mother, so Joseph hurried away without saying goodbye.

Joseph Bloch's tendency toward practical jokes, which would find its way into grandson Robert's personality, is evidenced in a later episode at Eisenstadt. Joseph had obtained letters of introduction to Dr. Esriel Hildesheimer, head of a famous orthodox school. He wrote:

I had come to Eisenstadt like so many of my comrades not to enlarge my knowledge of the Talmud, but to participate in the lessons of secular learning.¹¹

The lessons were stimulating and began each morning with the rabbi bringing his students black coffee at 4 a.m. However, this routine ended abruptly when Bloch "helped" two fellow students in a debate club by providing them with identical lectures. As he related in his memoirs:

Saturday afternoon came; the audience was assembled, the room quite full, and as soon as the rabbi entered the "Kopenhagen-man" stood up before him and began to speak He had scarcely spoken

a few minutes, when his comrade interrupted him, crying out: "But this is my Pshetl (lecture). That was, what I wanted to say." This scene was repeated several times and naturally elicited peals of laughter. When the first speaker had concluded his comrade's turn came, but to the great amusement of the audience it became evident after a few minutes that he could present nothing else but what had already been said . . . The rabbi was very angry about this affair in his beloved school, and so I lost favor for a long time.¹²

Unable to follow Dr. Hildesheimer to Berlin with his more favored disciples, Bloch traveled to Breslau, then the principal seat of Jewish education, where he learned German. Soon mastering logic, esthetics, chemistry, physics, and political economy, he proceeded to Munich where he wrote a study of the Jews in Spain for his doctorate.

While working as a rabbi in Floridsdorf, a small manufacturing town with a population of working class "distinguished by a certain hunger for education,"¹³ Joseph Bloch wrote the most important tract of his life. It would propel him into a position of leadership in Austrian politics during the next crucial decade which would focus the volatile issue of anti-semitism.¹⁴ On August 12, 1882 the workers came en masse to hear Dr. Bloch's history of their brother workers at the time of Christ and after. Galvanizing his audience with his detailed picture of the relationship of Judaism to the working class, Bloch volubly linked Judaism with labor through the ages. It, apparently, was an impressive piece of scholarship. As a political statement, the tract was a well-timed thrust against the anti-semitism linkage of Jews to the stereotypic banker-capitalist bugaboo.

Bloch was immediately praised by such liberals as Adolf Fischot, who helped circulate copies of the tract. 1882 had seen furious public agitation against the Talmud in Austria. Anti-semitism was at its peak. The movement was incited principally by Dr. August Rohling, professor at the University of Prague, who promised a prize of 1000 Thaler to anyone able to prove to the German Association of Orientalists that that a single quotation from his book The Talmudic Jew was false. The book, predictably was a screed of lies and distortions.

After a season of charge and counter-charge, Dr. Bloch on December 22, 1882 published a special pamphlet in Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung. It was a clear and logical point-by-point refutation of Rohling's attacks. So persuasive was his writing that Bloch became the nominal leader of the movement to combat the growing tide of Austrian anti-semitism. Allied with him were not only Jewish leaders but also such powerful men as Count Taaffe, the premier, and Count Falkenhayen, the minister of agriculture. What made Joseph Bloch a man of the hour was his knowledge of the Talmud, target of Rohling's attacks.¹⁵

A Roman Catholic priest and appointee of the Emperor to teach ancient Hebrew, Rohling was able to take advantage of the widespread ignorance of the Talmud among contemporary Austrian Jews. As Bloch wrote:

In public houses the articles were read out to guests, and the Jews shunned public establishments. The worst about it was that a great many Jews began

to believe in this slander. The Jews were greatly depressed and their fate was pathetic to a degree. They were not acquainted with the Talmud nor did they want to know anything about it, and now they heard nothing else from morning till night.¹⁶

Even the leading rabbis of Austria were remaining silent. Clearly, Bloch's December 22 essay was the first attempt to deal with Rohling scientifically tricked out hatred against Jews. What came to be known as "The Talmud Question" was the first flush of anti-semitism in Austria.¹⁷ It worked the Talmud for what it was worth not only to inflame the instincts of the lower classes but, worse, to justify anti-Jewish sentiment to the more open minded intelligentsia.

Despite some dissent by the more cautious Viennese Jewry who feared that he had gone too far, Bloch was a hero to those in the provinces. In March of 1883, he was elected a member of parliament for the electoral districts of Kolomea, Buczacz, and Sniatyn. Serving the Polish district for 13 years, Joseph Bloch was to become more than a historical footnote in an era when not only anti-semitism but socialism and German nationalism were burning political questions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

By 1900, Joseph Bloch had become an elder statesman. Politics had given way to his publishing interests. Robert Vincent remembered his grandfather as a stern mensch, yet he offhandedly referred to the old man as "mayor of Vienna or something" when pressed about Bloch's political career.¹⁸ Vincent could be coy about things he did not wish to discuss.

Significantly, Bloch's autobiography contains no mention of his immediate family. Concentrating on his rise from poverty and his political triumphs, the book (in the introduction) curiously alludes to Bloch's joy at visiting his brother and family in New York in 1912. There is no trace of his own wife or daughter Lisa in the book. Rather, Bloch dwells on the happy "ideal home and family" of his brother where "hearty affection of parents and children" and "mutual love and attachment" flourish.¹⁹ At the center of his effusive tribute is an idyllic portrait of his sister-in-law whom Joseph describes as a kind of Old Testament Ruth. He wrote of her:

Only a poet could do her full justice. She was a stately beauty with great personal charms and a striking presence when receiving guests; she was a judicious woman but an experienced and most able business-woman - and more than anything else she was remarkable for the choice virtues of her heart. Her charity and sympathy were quite out of the common, and she gave with so much love and grace that who received it felt double and thrice-fold happiness . . . this woman, whose Hebrew name meant . . . queen, ruled her house like a true princess by the grace of God²⁰

Whether Joseph Bloch's wife deserved equal praise we do not know. It is known that she was a provincial girl and that Joseph divorced her. From the omissions in Bloch's memoirs and the extravagant praise of his sister-in-law, it can be inferred that Joseph Bloch found much to be desired in his wife and daughter.

Rebellion from parental strictures constitutes a strong theme in the Bloch family. Lisa Bloch's early marriage to

George Vincent echoes her father's flight from an oppressive homelife. Strong-willed, spoiled, unlikely to have inherited her father's piety, Lisa Bloch was a child of a different age. Bright and headstrong, she appears to have been a sort of Viennese Alice Longworth Roosevelt, willing to try new things and the intellectual equal of men. Bohemian by temperament, she was eccentric and selfish, yet is known to have loved her four sons and daughter.²¹ Seemingly free to live her own life in America after 1905, Lisa Bloch Tarlau must have fallen short of her father's traditional conception of women.

Throughout her life, until her death in 1948, Lisa Bloch Tarlau was a powerful but enigmatic force in the lives of her children. No nest builder, she pursued a writing career during a time when journalism was mainly a masculine profession. However, all five of her children grew up to become successful and prosperous.²² She was a parent who demanded and espoused love but found it hard to give. Kenneth Vincent, Robert's son, now a psychologist, relates a story which demonstrates this. While playing with his toy billiard set, Kenneth was confronted by his grandmother bearing a miniature cane as a gift. Lisa tersely addressed the small boy saying, "here, this is for you." She then tossed the toy cane on the billiard table scattering the balls and turned out of the room leaving the boy terrified.²³ While others recall her as a manipulative mother always trying to set one of her children against another, she must have loved them in

her own way. A strange typed note, presumably written to Robert, remains as a testament to her need to be loved by her children. It reads:

Dear Little Junior Machine: - I like you and I wish you would like me too and bring me luck as your little sister did whom I gave away. If you will be my little mascot I will treat you always good and with as much care as I can and you will have a real loving home with me.²⁴
L.Y.T.

Found among her old manuscripts the note represents the promise, if not the fulfillment, of Lisa's desire to be a loving mother. A portrait of Lisa Bloch Tarlau still hangs in Robert Vincent's bedroom. Taken in her thirties, the photograph reveals a countenance that is poised and proud. The face has the aspect of a young Ethel Barrymore and resembles the forthright beauty of a James Montgomery Flagg subject with a strong jaw and clear eyes. It is inscribed, "To Robert, the first young man I ever loved" ²⁵

As a writer, Lisa achieved a modest level of success in the years before 1920. Writing under the name of Lisa Ysaye, she was an editor with various publications including The Delineator. A contributor of essays and occasional fiction to magazines including The Atlantic Monthly, Lisa wrote in a style which was intended for an audience composed mainly of women. Her main genre was fantasy with an emphasis on themes of regret and longing for a better, more fulfilling world. In a letter of acceptance from The Atlantic Monthly, the editor wrote:

There are scores of manuscripts on my desk, but fancy dwells in only one of them. I find "Blue Roses" a real oasis in a trying desert. It calls up memories of old delights in reading "Fantasio" and "On ne Badine Pas" and those other kindred fantasies, with their sentiment and inevitable touch of cynicism.²⁶

Yet, in retrospect, her stories seem more often cynical than romantic. The fantasies are, in reality, vehicles for Lisa's acute knowledge that life seldom avails moments of complete satisfaction. The clash between dreams and reality, illusion and truth pervades her writing.

For example, in "The Eidolon" published in the collection The Inn of Disenchantment²⁷ (Houghton Mifflin) in 1917, the narrator seeks out the mistress of her favorite poet only to discover a common old house frau who tells of nursing the poet's colds and of making him wear his "flannels until May." Bewildered that this is the same passionate lover who inspired the poet to write "words of fire and lines of flame," the young narrator states:

'Was "dear Artie" as silly as all this? Oh, I think could cry! I think I can never read his songs again; they are utterly spoiled for me. I shall always think of his flannels or the cold in his head.'²⁸

The story employs a "voice of truth" called "the Gentleman in Gray" who explains that, like Helen of Troy, the mistress is like the mythical eidolon. That is, she is a phantasm, "a woman fashioned in her likeness by Zeus, out of light and mist" that "the god in us fashions out of the mist of our desires and the light of our fancy." The woman who is,

is but a symbol for "the cloud-bride," for the woman who is not and never will be. He concludes:

The eidolon he took with him on his perilous journey to all the heights and depths of passion, whereas, the real woman lived safely and unsuspectingly in quite another spiritual latitude, in Philistia, and flannels were the matter of concern. And wherever you find une grande passion, a love and a passion that seem more human, be sure that they were given merely to a dream, a dream²⁹ seen in a mirror in the form of the loved one.

The narrator's final question forcefully raises the major issue of the story. She asks.

And does one never, never . . . love the real woman? Is the real woman never cherished for just what she is? Is there always an eidolon to whom the best gifts of the heart are given? Tell me the truth - are there no exceptions to your rule?³⁰

The Gentleman in Gray replies, "no . . . there are no exceptions. Shadows are we and shadows we pursue."

The New York Times called The Inn of Disenchantment a ". . . slender volume which contains fifteen little essays, brief, fragile trifles, touched with a certain wistfulness and charm" Adding that "a pleasant fragrance of dried rose leaves and lavender seems to linger about the little book,"³¹ the reviewer appears to have fallen for the overt sentimentality of the book but has missed the deeper, psychological overtones of many of them. "The Eidolon," in retrospect, is a skillful and incisive (though mystically drawn) presentation of the sexist duality confronting women in a masculine society. Not loved for "just who she is", the poet's mistress must embody a romantic muse or "eidolon"

for whom the poet "dear Artie" writes his Swinburnian verse. The narrator, a young innocent, in confronting the truth about her idol has discovered more than she has bargained for. As a woman, she - like the old mistress - must confront the essential enigma of her sex, the schizoid nature of being female and a servant of men. A woman must be at once an enchantress, an eidolon, and a nurse.

In a novella entitled "Loutre",³² Lisa creates a character named Aristide who actually becomes what he pretends to be. Informed by the popular psychological theories of Emile Coue, the story is built around the mythical novel Loutre which the bohemian Aristide creates to make some easy advance money from his editor. Through word of mouth, the novel becomes the rage of the Parisian literary society though Aristide has not written a word of it. Through his literary Frankenstein, Aristide becomes a success. He is given better jobs, has new works published, and gains a wealthy patron who forces him to adopt the opulent lifestyle "suitable for the author of Loutre." Finally, in despair, Aristide tries to renounce Loutre but realizes that he is enslaved by his own lie. As he explains to one of his old bohemian friends who has encouraged him to throw off the hoax:

All right, all right . . . I'll put it to you in twentieth century language, if you insist. Loutre is not the devil outside of me but in me. Split personality, you know. You remember the case of Miss Beauchamp and Sally B? There is Loutre and I. Part of the same ego, yet antagonistic to each other, each with a different set of preferences, views, demands upon life and so on . . . Why, he even invades me physically. Changes my appearance.

People used to say I looked typically the poet.
 Now, everybody thinks I am or ought to be an actor.
 Loutre, you see. Playing the master in the house.
 And soon he'll have me crushed down altogether,
 and the I you knew, the I that still tries to per-
 sist will be submerged - gone forever. Well, what's
 the difference? Things are as they are.³³

The story ends with Aristide signing a contract to take an editor's position in Nancy, a future he loathes with the words "Aristide Tritou, author of Loutre." The theme here is, of course, post-Freudian and typical of Lisa's conclusions, resigned and cynical. Clearly, Loutre was the work of a mature modernist who could see the darkness beyond the fulfillment of getting exactly what you want.

Lisa Ysaye, the writer, was a sensitive person keenly aware of the inherent ironies of life. However, Lisa Tarlau, the mother, was a different person. Unable to overcome her frustrations as an artist, and perhaps stifled by a world not yet willing to accept her liberated ideas, she put on an eccentric, often selfish face to her family. From her son's memoirs we draw an outward picture of middlebrow gentility in the Tarlau household in 1910. Settled into a comfortable post-Victorian routine in New York City, the family is pictured as busy and happy. Outwardly, her second marriage does seem to have settled Lisa's life. Her editorial career at The Delineator was prospering. Her three sons by Joseph Tarlau - Tommy, Teddy, and Milton - filled the house with bustle.³⁴ Eldest son, Robert, was excelling in grammar school. Most significantly, perhaps, Vienna was in the past.

The family was now an American one, and the future looked bright for them all.

For Robert Vincent, known now as Robert Tarlau, the permanent move to New York was perfect. Away from the stuffy traditions of Vienna and the stern rebukes of Grandfather Bloch, he was free to explore the friendly horizons of America's greatest city on the brink of its most glorious era. In America there was opportunity, and young Robert Vincent was nothing if not enterprising. As his grandfather wandered through the villages of Galicia, the boy would wander the streets and neighborhoods of New York in search of his destiny. Enterprise and expectation were traits Vincent seemed to have abundantly inherited from his grandfather. Photographs of Bloch and Vincent in old age reveal physical similarities; shortness of stature, large hands, high forehead, and a formal bearing. One is also tempted to draw other parallels, especially the moralistic strain that ran in both men. Yet, temperamentally Vincent differed from Bloch. He was less pious and more open-minded toward the world than his grandfather and was on the whole, irreligious though strongly principled.

Both men were idealistic, yet were tempered by the practical necessities of survival. By his own admission, Joseph Bloch had become a scholar not so much from "a mere love of learning" but to escape an oppressive home life. Vincent, alienated from his natural father and a stepchild in a new land, also turned away from home at an early age in search

of his future. The search for significant mentors is a strong theme in both men's lives.

The subject of his natural father was always difficult for Robert Vincent. While Dr. Tarlau, a quiet and kindly man,³⁵ treated his stepson Robert as his own, Vincent seems to have distanced himself from the family as soon as the opportunity presented itself. He reverted back to the name Vincent around 1912 though he called Dr. Tarlau "Pa" as did his brothers. Vincent's memoirs make no distinction between his natural father and his stepfather. References to "father" give the impression that there was no divorce or remarriage. His description of the generic father as "quite conservative in his opinions and a devout conformist" might apply to either Dr. Vincent or Dr. Tarlau, though this might be Vincent's attempt to portray a typical turn-of-the-century father type.

Perhaps a more revealing aspect, is a favorite anecdote that Vincent liked to tell about being imprisoned in France in 1915 after being wrongly accused of being a German spy. Protesting his innocence, Vincent convinced the American consul to telegraph his father in America to confirm his identity. Since Vincent had run away several months earlier to get into the war, his father was reportedly angry. Upon receiving word that the boy might be shot for espionage, the "father" is supposed to have replied, "Go ahead and shoot him."³⁶ A Boston American news story which reported the story of Robert Vincent's war exploits included the following reference:

The boy's happiness was unconfined, yet he expressed a fear over the reception awaiting him at home. Though he had tempted death time and again on the battlefield, he showed extreme nervousness at any reference to his father.

"I guess its³⁷ a good old fashioned spanking for me," he said.

Since the article makes reference to Dr. Vincent as "a prominent physician of Boston," it is assumed that the story Vincent told - even if apocryphal - is in reference to his natural father. Yet, since he ran away from the Tarlau household does the spanking in the news story refer to Pa Tarlau? Also, is the comment about Vincent's "extreme nervousness" about his father a telling sign that he perhaps wanted to seek out Dr. Vincent and gain his approval for the adventure? If so, the placement of the story in a Boston paper under the headline "Hub Doctor's Son is Back From War" would have been a difficult banner for Dr. Vincent to have ignored. However, nowhere in his memoirs or in interviews does Robert Vincent establish that he ever made contact with his natural father, other than the "shoot him" anecdote. Without engaging in amateur psychology, one can at least assume that Vincent's relationship with his natural father was never fully resolved.

Finally, one can assume that Robert Vincent's youthful habit of seeking advice and guidance from significant adult figures and his lifelong admiration of men like Theodore Roosevelt and Thomas Edison was part of a pattern in which Vincent was attempting to establish a relationship with a mentor.

Any boy born in 1898 might reasonably be expected to indulge in a certain amount of hero worship. The early twentieth century extended the Victorian virtues of chivalry, service, self-sacrifice, and personal initiative through the popular culture and social institutions which influenced youth. Aside from the obvious examples like the Horatio Alger novels and the Boy Scout movement, part of the archetype suggested that success could and should be modeled for children. Parents, while themselves often standing behind post-Victorian facades, were enthusiastic about presenting hero figures or mentors to their children.

With Grandfather Bloch in Vienna and her own writing career and younger children to busy her, Lisa Tarlau was not concerned that her son Robert was looking away from the family for guidance. Since he was a mature, responsible boy there was little danger that he would fall into bad company. His newfound interest in journalism, she decided, was healthy and would place him in proximity to her own field and the influential editors who might guide him.

As she grew older, Lisa Bloch Tarlau would remain a strong part of Robert Vincent's life. Vincent, in later years, spoke warmly of his mother's support of his adventures. Lisa valued freedom and self-expression above other human virtues, and her willingness to let her son be himself can be seen as a counterweight against what must have been an oppressive conformity forced upon her by her father. Vincent, too, appreciated his mother's eccentricities, which, it seems, increased

with age. Once in need of money, Lisa pawned the diamond brooch presented to her in 1908 for a poem she had written in honor of Emperor Franz Joseph's 60th anniversary. Her sons, now successful men, dutifully bought it back, only for Lisa to repawn it.³⁸ As she aged, her writing skills diminished, and her stories fell out of style.

Working on a radio series in the 1930's called Adventures With Admiral Byrd, Vincent hired his mother to write scripts. However, her scripts were too romantic even for radio adventure, and Vincent had to re-write them for her.³⁹ A photograph of Lisa taken in the early 1940's reveals a proud, matronly woman in her seventies. The pose is erect and proud and, despite the tight coiffure and polka dot dress, the impression is striking.⁴⁰ Growing increasingly reclusive and eccentric, Lisa Bloch Tarlau lived her last years in a cluttered apartment in New York. She was reunited with her daughter Ellen, though not on close terms. Finally, a relic of a bygone era, Lisa died after cancer surgery in the late 1940's

Over 35 years later, G. Robert Vincent would speak of his mother with respect and admiration, both for her writing talents and her unconventionality. Shortly before his own death in 1985, he would set aside his own memoirs to begin a project of transferring Lisa's yellowed manuscripts to computer disc. The link between mother and son was still strong.

CHAPTER II

THE BOY EDITOR: 1910-1912

In his 1978 book, The Child in the City, Colin Ward asserts that "we have to explore every way of making the city more accessible, more negotiable and more useful to the child."¹ In assessing the quality of life for contemporary urban and suburban children, Ward's thesis revolves around the idea that - despite social progress since the days of what Lincoln Steffens called "The Shame of the Cities" - childhood today lacks the necessary experiential support base which previous generations gained from their environments.

The city child had the streets, the rural child had the idyll of the farm, and both learned "True Education," as Ward calls it, from mentors like the farmhand, the farrier, or the merchant down the block. In other words, the School of Life began when the afternoon school bell rang. The environment provided a third dimension for the child which augmented the family and the school.

Without sentimentalizing the past, Ward advocates an enlightened return to The School of Life for children who inhabit the modern city which Ward calls "too opaque" for exploration or the suburb which Ward suggests "was built as

a nursery."² True, the city child of the late 19th century was often the subject of cruel exploitation. But, Ward asserts, "he was not trapped in a situation where there was nothing economically rational for him to do and where his whole background and culture prevents him from benefitting from the expensively provided educational machine."³

For Robert Vincent, the move to New York City during the first decade of the twentieth century, provided the boy with not only "True Education" but also presented him with his first significant adult male mentors outside of his immediate family. New York City would become the shaping environment in his life. He would learn to navigate its neighborhoods and streets, but more significantly, he would meet and learn from its powerful men. The publishers, editors, and politicians he encountered in putting out his own publication would become his models for manhood. Their acceptance of him and encouragement served as a vital rite of passage for Vincent during his adolescent years. Yet, in a broader way, Robert Vincent's New York boyhood can be seen as a living embodiment of the archetypal American gospels of initiative, self-reliance, and hard-work. The "self-made man" was already a cliché by Vincent's time, yet that is in fact what Robert Vincent had decided to be.

Despite his parents' divorce, Vincent was by 1910, an energetic and curious boy⁴ eager to explore the exciting possibilities of life in New York. Politics, particularly, in the aftermath of the hotly contested 1908 presidential

race was enough to divert him from any lingering family problems. His memoirs, in fact, devote much attention to the national and local political scene. Having been exposed to politics in Grandfather Bloch's house, Vincent exhibited an early interest in political and social issues. Perhaps due to his mother's influence, he wanted to write about them. As Vincent recalled:

There were a lot of things I wanted to write about now that I had tried expressing myself on paper, such as my impressions of the recent lively presidential campaign that showed pictures of the famous orator William Jennings Bryan all over town and posters of big, good natured William Howard Taft Taft had made a phonograph record that sold at Byrne's Music Store for eighty cents and father listened to it through a tin horn on a spring wound talking machine on top of the bureau in the sitting room; it spoke of prosperity and a fine high tariff, in a scratchy sort of way.⁵

Politics, in the wake of the reform era, was a popular spectator sport in America. Also, in 1910, the Horatio Alger myth was still in its heyday. Self-reliance, pluck, and ambition were presented to boys as touchstones for success. So when Robert Vincent decided, at the age of 11, to publish his own magazine, no one suggested that it was an unrealistic undertaking. Despite some reservations by Pa Tarlau who cautioned Vincent not to neglect his schoolwork, The Boys' Paper seemed a plausible start on the pathway to success for the boy. As he thought, "writing is fun but publishing an entire magazine of one's own would be an even greater thrill."⁶

Verbally gifted, Vincent was in the habit of correcting his teacher's grammar at P.S. 40. Poised and quick witted,

Vincent could get around the most difficult situations, even those of his own making. He once avoided severe punishment when accused by a teacher of disrupting class. "You made that noise dincha Robert?", the teacher said. "No", he replied, "I dinch."⁷ Bored with most of what New York Public Education had to offer, Vincent looked to his own devices and the streets beyond P.S. 40 for education.

Like many boys of his era he sold copies of the Saturday Evening Post on the streets for a nickel a copy. Loosely supervised at home. Vincent roamed the streets of Manhattan looking into the windows of the businesses and saloons, observing the variety of the city. While he must have enjoyed his trips to the Polo Grounds to watch Christy Mathewson and the rest of John McGraw's baseball Giants, Vincent was moved by a muse much stronger than baseball.⁸ Writing rather than sports was Vincent's youthful passion.

The urge to publish my own magazine had not subsided; rather it turned into a burning desire. Being a boy, I decided to slant it toward the things that interested other boys. I would call it The Boys' Paper. However, there were a few things to be considered. Who would do the typesetting, the printing, the binding? Who would write all the stories and poems and do the illustrations? I thought that I myself would attempt to write the editorials. But, primarily, who would pay for the printing? My own funds consisted mainly of shiny new Lincoln pennies that had recently replaced the old Indian head on U.S. one cent copper coins. Still, I did not want to be subsidized by my family or by anyone else.

The idea of starting The Boys' Paper had its origins in a St. Nicholas magazine writing competition which Vincent

entered in 1908. St. Nicholas, the foremost magazine for boys and girls during the first decade of the twentieth century, devoted eight of its more than one-hundred-fifty pages each month to the "St. Nicholas League," a section where young folks competed for prizes by submitting original prose, verse, drawings or photographs about subjects specified by the editor.¹⁰

Vincent was ten years old when he wrote a short description for the "St. Nicholas League" about "My Most Memorable Journey." His piece dealt with his recent voyage back to New York after a family sojourn in Hamburg, Paris, and Vienna. As he wrote in his memoirs:

The highlight of my composition was my boyish reaction to the persons on board the S.S. Philadelphia and the fact that some of the distinguished names appearing on the passenger list must have cancelled their reservations, for they were not present. The Statute of Liberty, Ellis Island, the skyscraping Singer Building looming in the distance, the colorful sign-boards advertising Gold Dust and Heinz 57 Varieties and other American products all had a sort¹¹ of patriotic impact on me, and I wrote about it.

This trip and an earlier, longer stay in Vienna with Grandfather Bloch heightened Vincent's affection for his native land. He returned to America with a keen receptivity to the American scene which would last all his life. Somewhat resistant to Joseph Bloch's attempts to make him into a proper Viennese gentleman, young Vincent was glad to be home. His enthusiasm must have found its way into the St. Nicholas piece, for he won a gold badge for it when the story appeared some months later.¹²

Another important influence on Vincent was the other colorful magazines of the era which caught his eye. In particular, he was impressed by the beautifully bound publications printed by the Roycrofters of East Aurora, New York. Published by Elbert Hubbard and illustrated by his wife Alice, Roycrofters journals included: The Philistine (a "periodical of protest"), The Fra (a "journal of affirmation"), and Little Journeys which presented "little journeys" to the homes of "good men and great." Hubbard's publications were not only visually rich but carried the weight of inspirational preaching. His most famous effort was "A Message to Garcia" which told of an American army officer who carried out an order under great obstacles. While their subjects were uplifting, it was the Roycrofters printing technique that stimulated young Vincent. Using deckle edged, heavy buff paper, Roycrofters printed with rich red and black ink employing intricate ornamental border designs.¹³ It was a Gothic graphic style that set the standard in the field at that time.

In November of 1909, Vincent wrote to Elbert Hubbard of his plans for a youth magazine. In a letter dated December 13, Hubbard replied:

It is impossible for the Roycrofters to undertake printing your magazine and for this, we are extremely sorry. Could we do it, there is nothing we would like better than to print such a magazine edited by one who has gotten such an early start in the literary world.¹⁴

Hubbard's polite response is characteristic of the encouragement that Vincent received from those whose help he sought.

Deciding that it would be more practical to have a printer closer to home, Vincent remembered a large stationary store that he often passed on 14th Street near Fifth Avenue. Visiting the Mercantile Printing and Stationary Company one day after school, Vincent described his specifications for the magazine to Mr. H. N. Loomis, secretary of the firm. It was to be about twelve pages, size $6\frac{1}{2}$ by $9\frac{1}{2}$. The copy would consist of text for single spaced articles set in double column. There would be some illustrations but no half tones and as many ads as possible. The first run would be 300 copies. Loomis calculated that the job would cost about 55 dollars, in advance.

Convinced that he could sell enough advertising to cover initial expenses, Vincent put his salesmanship to work. Coming home from the printer, he sold Mr. Isadore Fischer two inches for his custom tailor shop on Third Avenue. Vincent's next stop was the huge Wanamaker Department Store on Astor Place. There he asked to see "the founder," Mr. John Wanamaker himself, but had to settle for his son Rodman. Vincent proposed a layout displaying boy's clothing and a cut of John Wanamaker's signature. As he wrote:

. . . eventually I was promised a half page "ad" to be inserted for the next three months and told to pick up the copy for it during the following week - at which time I would also be given the opportunity of meeting the founder himself . . . Now I was in seventh heaven. I left the department store with a sense of awe. Wanamaker's was a New York landmark and here was I, still a boy in short pants, talking without fear to its managers. On the street, I had the distinct feeling that I possessed more than a little business ability .
 . . .
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In obtaining his first advertisements for his magazine, Robert Vincent had discovered something within himself, a confidence in his ability to communicate and a poise which made him mature beyond his years. "Crashing in,"¹⁶ as he called it, on the offices of the powerful and the influential was a habit that would become an important resource for Vincent in his pursuit of future plans.

As the winter of 1909-10 began, Vincent solicited more advertising from such sources as Remington-Arms Union Metallic Cartridge Company, Yachting Publishing Company, and Street and Smith's Publishing Company.¹⁷ By mid-January, he had enough advertising to pay for printing The Boys' Paper which could appear as early as February. However, a problem presented itself. Mr. Loomis and the Mercantile Printing Company wanted its money in advance, but the advertisers wouldn't pay until they had a copy of the magazine and were properly billed. The solution, Vincent discovered, rested in the good offices of Frank A. Munsey Publications in the Flatiron building at Broadway and Fifth Avenue.¹⁸

By now Robert Vincent had developed confidence in himself. After all, he had successfully sold advertising to important companies. Why not call someone important to help him work through this business problem? The Munsey publishing empire was indeed one of the most influential establishments in the growing New York publishing world. Its keystone publication was Argosy which Frank A. Munsey had started in the 1880's. Others in the stable included Munsey's Magazine, The Scrap

Book, All-Story Magazine and others. The Argosy had started as an illustrated weekly for children and had contained stories by Oliver Optic, Horatio Alger Jr., R. H. Titherington, and Matthew White who was now its editor. In retrospect, it seems improbable that a busy executive like White would take time to visit with a boy in short pants, but Vincent was no ordinary boy. For he did see Matthew White and obtained a solution to his financial bind. Vincent wrote:

Right from the start I loved Matthew White, and his modest manner and snow white hair. He made me so comfortable, talked to me as an equal and did not make me feel like a novelty. His advice, from a background of long experiences¹⁹ was valuable, his reminiscences just fascinating.

After a chat about the old days of magazine writing, White took Vincent next door to the office of Robert H. Davis, editor of Munsey's Magazine. David, Vincent recalls, "was an entirely different type of person, somewhat stout, witty (and) energetic." He seemed genuinely interested in The Boys' Paper, and yes, he would write a tale of his boyhood days for a later edition of the paper. He would also try to get Vincent an ad from the Munsey Company. Hearing of Vincent's financial problem, Davis said "something about good credit being the mainstay of all businesses"²⁰ and took Vincent next door to meet Mr. William T. Dewart, general manager of the Munsey Company. Dewart authorized Davis to telephone Mercantile Printing and guarantee payment for the February issue of The Boys' Paper. Overcome by these developments, Vincent made a fast exit. He remembered:

All of the Munsey editors and Mr. Munsey himself remained my advisors throughout the two and a half years of life of The Boys' Paper. Mr. Davis claimed that he heard me give a "whoop" when I ran out of his office that day and, while he was still talking to the printer on the telephone, I had arrived all the way to 14th Street, nine blocks away.²¹

Soon, the galley proofs for the first issue were ready. Vincent writes that he had learned the correct symbols for making corrections and omissions. Mornings at school now seemed less satisfying than Vincent's afternoons, busy as they were with editorial duties. He remembered that it was snowing when he completed the dummy lay-out and rushed it to Mr. Loomis at Mercantile Printing. He wrote:

Altogether Volume I, number 1 of The Boys' Paper was no disappointment. It did not have a cover - that would come in due time. The subscription list, before publication, was close to one hundred. I was sure that the three hundred copies, and there were a few extras, would not last long.²²

Vincent also noted that publication made him "a minor celebrity among his P.S. 40 classmates." The principal even commented on it, yet his own family took the accomplishment in stride.²³ Although his mother was "quite pleased" at his effort, this was likely a tacit form of support. In Grandfather Bloch's house praise had been scarce, and writing was no rare talent to Lisa. Lisa Bloch Tarlau was presently an editor of The Delineator, a woman's magazine. Pa Tarlau was "as usual, skeptical." Vincent recalled:

He preferred me to be an outstanding student, enthusiastic mainly about my schoolwork. "If you don't grow into an educated adult," he said, "you will not have anything in common with the learned editors whom you meet. Now, they are only amused at your precociousness . . .".²⁴

Clearly, Robert Vincent was a precocious youth. No doubt his stepfather was right. The learned editors probably were amused at young Vincent's boldness and initiative. Yet, his magazine was no childish game. He had planned it, and it was a success.

Buoyed by the moderate success of his first issue, Vincent sought to improve The Boys' Paper. Now confident of his abilities as a promoter, Vincent ventured further into the New York publishing world in search of mentors. He wrote:

. . . as I went forth into the big world of grown ups . . . I felt that I could talk the birds off trees if I had to, and that America ²⁵ was a land of opportunity for those who persevered.

After school, he roamed the city via the subway and the elevated trains making his publishing rounds visiting the offices of famous magazines and newspapers. His memoirs express his boyish romance with the city and its diversity. Recalling the New York of 1910, he wrote:

The Waldorf Astoria Hotel, where the famous "robber barons" dabbled in millions, the old Astor House downtown, Sherry's, the sedate Union League Club, the high Metropolitan Life Insurance Tower - then the highest office building in the world - they all had special charms of their own. I greatly revered so many of these New York buildings and, during my wanderings in Manhattan, hummed songs in their praise, making my own ²⁶parodies to current popular of musical comedy tunes.

On his treks beyond the confines of P.S. 40, Vincent must have begun to ponder the larger questions of life, for he wrote of those afternoons in Manhattan:

It seemed to me that all the people of the great city, rich and poor, old and young, in ghettos, silk stocking districts, foreign and financial sections, ²⁷all had one common goal: a search for happiness.

Inspired by such moods of adolescent reflection, he would "call" on such men as Adolph S. Ochs, the publisher of the New York Times. Ochs had bought the Times in the 1890's and, by 1910, had built it into New York's leading paper. His leadership brought rapid growth to the newspaper, and in 1904, he built the Times Building at Seventh Avenue and 42nd Street. Vincent was fascinated by men like Ochs who had begun their careers with little and had succeeded on the strength of their vision and organizational skills.²⁸ Then, too, such men were accessible. A boy with an idea and an earnest manner might get an appointment for a few minutes to discuss, which - in 1910 - was apparently not so hectic that an executive was unavailable to callers. Vincent, almost instinctively, sought out help from the best men whom he thought could help him the most, the leading publishers of the day. He wrote: "would such an important man (Ochs) consent to impart his wisdom to an eager boy starting out on a shoe-string in the publishing world?"²⁹

Successfully obtaining a four o'clock interview, Vincent met with Ochs in his private office and received the advice which became almost standard with such chats. Telling Vincent of his rise from an eleven year-old newsboy in Knoxville, Tennessee, Ochs advised that a boy should "always live up

to a high moral code and never get discouraged at great odds."³⁰ Ochs then perused a copy of The Boys' Paper, gave his approval, and arranged for Vincent to tour the Times composing and editing offices. Inspired by this, Vincent planned to increase circulation of his paper and "had visions of getting the American News Company to distribute the paper" on newstands.³¹

Meanwhile, advertising space continued to fill up as Vincent now had a finished copy to display. New clients included Lord and Taylor, who ordered a half page displaying woman's silk stockings which showed the Onyx Hosiery emblem, trademark, and a shapely female leg.³²

Naturally, Vincent wanted to show the first edition of the paper to his friends at Frank A. Munsey Company. Robert Davis had sent on the story which he had promised to write, and several Munsey editors had expressed their views about the paper in letters to Vincent. One of them was from the editor of The Scrapbook, J. Earl Clauson, who congratulated Vincent "on displaying at so early an age a perception of what is true and uplifting in journalism."³³ Matthew White Jr. called The Boys' Paper "one of the most remarkable publications within my ken" and marveled at the names of the contributors and the character of the advertisements.³⁴

Eventually, Vincent met Mr. Frank Munsey himself on one of his regular visits to the Flatiron building. From his triangular office in the apex of the building, with its spectacular view up Fifth Avenue, Munsey told Vincent his

own success story beginning with his youth in Augusta, Maine and ending with his acquisition of Argosy in 1882. A believer in the power of advertising, Munsey took out a full page "ad" in The Boys' Paper. Writing out the copy himself long-hand, Munsey wished Vincent good luck.

Outside the office, Vincent read the "ad." It said:

The Frank A. Munsey Publications Pay Their Compliments to Robert Vincent, The Young Editor and Publisher.

Uneasy, Vince felt somewhat patronized. Wouldn't it, he thought, be better to boost a Munsey publication? Mr. Dewart, Munsey's business manager, replied that it was not an editor's prerogative to censor the copy of his advertisers. The ad was printed as written in the next issue.³⁵

Clearly, for Robert Vincent the city was the source of his True Education. With no television images to distort his view of the world and with somewhat safer Manhattan streets to walk, Vincent was learning how to do business in the adult world every day as he went about his rounds for The Boys' Paper. Yet, his mentors were not only the lions of the publishing world, for he was a boy who was aware of the streetwise men like those dandies who followed the sporting life in the cigar stores and saloons of old New York. As Vincent recalled:

On the 4th of July, 1910, throngs swarmed into Ted Allaire's saloon on 3rd Avenue at 19th Street. I squeezed in among them. It was not to celebrate the independence of the United States or to partake of the free lunch, but to get the latest reports from Reno, Nevada, over the Western Union news ticker

about the world's championship prize fight between Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson.³⁶

For diversion, Vincent punctuated his journalistic duties with frequent trips to The Polo Grounds to watch John McGraw's vaunted Giants. Trips to the Boardwalk in Atlantic City where he shared a chocolate soda with his first girlfriend and a memorable World Series in 1911 where the Giants lost to Connie Mack's Philadelphia Athletics were among Vincent's favorite memories of that period.³⁷

There were also the usual trips to haggle with the printer and other publishing errands, but there were interviews that introduced him to celebrities like Dan Beard, founder of The Sons of Daniel Boone - the forerunner of The Boy Scouts of America. Meeting with Vincent in his home in Flushing, Beard told him of his pioneering days in Kentucky and of meeting Abraham Lincoln during the 1860 campaign. Later, calling on scout headquarters at 200 Fifth Avenue, Vincent became friendly with the original staff of The Boy Scouts and publicized their activities in The Boys' Paper.

One afternoon in 1910, shortly after the first issue of The Boys' Paper had been printed, Vincent attempted to introduce himself to John D. Rockefeller, Sr. As he related the incident in his memoirs, the story illustrates the self-confidence and initiative which propelled Vincent, not only in his youth but all his life. Recognizing the Rockefeller car parked outside a house across from his own home on 17th Street, Vincent entertained thoughts "to go out and tell

him about The Boys' Paper." Rockefeller, Sr. was visiting a sculptor who was making a bust of the venerable oil tycoon. Thinking quickly, Vincent "put on a clean white shirt and waited outside" the sculptor's studio. He wrote:

There was a chauffeur and one passenger sitting in the car and of course I could not resist telling him about my publishing venture. The passenger turned out to be John D. Rockefeller, Jr. He told me so himself.³⁸

Young Rockefeller became interested in the copy of The Boys' Paper which Vincent showed him. He "promised to introduce" Vincent to his father when he returned.

The rest of the account rings with an air of legend as Vincent met the senior Rockefeller and once again was blessed with the wisdom of one who had helped shape the modern American scene. Vincent wrote:

The front door opened and Mr. Rockefeller slowly walked down the steps onto the street. True to his promise, his son gave him a brief outline about the ten-year-old boy editor, before he got into his car. The old gentleman smiled, shook hands with me, pulled a dime out of his pocket as he took a copy of our first edition and, in a rather thin voice, advised me to become a Baptist if I ever wanted to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.³⁹

Nothing that he never became a Baptist, "although there was a Baptist church not far away from Stuyvesant Square," Vincent ended the anecdote. While his true mentors were men like Frank Munsey and, later Frank H. Kenny of The World Almanac, Vincent would always look to American archetypes like Rockefeller, Theodore Roosevelt, and Thomas Edison. He strongly believed in heroes and consciously created his

personal pantheon of them. It was as if, by meeting them - if only briefly as in the case of Rockefeller - some of their greatness might rub off on him.

Meanwhile The Boys' Paper was becoming well-known. In his memoirs, Vincent wrote that "almost all New York newspapers mentioned it in their columns as an interesting news item."⁴⁰ As a result, Vincent became a "sort of protege" of General Manager Don C. Seitz of The New York World. An associate of Joseph Pulitzer, Seitz gave Vincent advice on publishing matters and opened the doors of the Pulitzer Building to him. Vincent often visited the golden domed building overlooking City Hall with its picturesque view of the Brooklyn Bridge and the East River. There he met Frank H. Kenny, editor of The World Almanac. Kenny wrote Vincent a letter praising his publishing efforts which is a significant insight into what was obviously an ethos to these publishing men, the Algerian virtues of resourcefulness and determination. Kenny wrote:

. . . the need of better facilities for publishing The Boys' Paper, I understand, is urgent and, as a wide-awake business manager, you will doubtless accomplish what you have set out to do toward this end. This aptly illustrates the inherent power in boys to do something practical ⁴¹when accompanied with the determination to succeed.

Today, a man in Kenny's position might well order a young Vincent out of his office and back to school, if he could even have gotten past the phalanx of secretaries in the outer office. However, it must have pleased men like Munsey, Ochs,

and Kenny to see an eager youngster following in their footsteps. What better endorsement of their own success than a boy publisher in short pants? To these men of action, school must have seemed a side track on the real pathway to True Education through experience. Nowhere, it seemed, was Vincent turned away in his quest. Vincent remembered others who helped him:

At the New York Tribune's editorial office, I had the privilege of conversing with Mr. Ogden Reid and Mrs. Helen Rogers Reid, who were both very kind and friendly. The New York Mail's publisher, Mr. Henry L. Stoddard, took a special interest in my little twelve page sheet and promised to write an article for it. I also had a chat with their famous cartoonist and illustrator, Rube Goldberg.⁴²

While a negative note was heard from a staffer on Printer's Ink about Vincent getting "too much free publicity," word about The Boys' Paper was spreading. The National Amateur Press Association wrote from St. Louis with an invitation to join, but Vincent turned them down on the grounds that he was a professional. Closer to home, Vincent was soon included in a circle of young free lance writers and editors which included Homer Croy and Raymond Howay as well as Guido Bruno who published a literary magazine called Bruno's Attic in Greenwich Village. Through Bruno, Vincent met Charles Edison, son of the great inventor, who helped Bruno when he came to New York from M.I.T. where he was a student.⁴³

Vincent's friendship with the younger Edison led Vincent into a lifelong interest in sound recording. Charles Edison

took Vincent to the offices of the Thomas A. Edison Recording Division located in a private dwelling on Fifth Avenue at 8th Street. Vincent recalled:

The first floor was filled with Edison Blue Amberol cylinder records and the newer Diamond Discs and improved phonographs; an upper floor was made into a small amateur theater, known as the "Little Thimble Theater".⁴⁴

Two years later, armed with an Edison recording machine borrowed from the younger Edison, Vincent would record the voice of Theodore Roosevelt at his home in Oyster Bay. But before he turned to politics and the newer, more dazzling medium of sound recording, Robert Vincent still had much to accomplish as "The Boy Editor".

By 1911, The Boys' Paper had become an established success with a circulation of several hundred copies.⁴⁵ By 1912, with the increased pressure of high school, Vincent decided to change the format to a quarterly. His maturing interest in politics, spurred by the three party presidential race of 1912, moved him to bill The Boys' Paper as "The Only Juvenile Political Magazine in America."⁴⁶ Fiction would give way to issues, and Vincent himself would become involved in the Progressive Party campaign.

By the age of eleven, Robert Vincent had witnessed the breakup of his first family, had travelled to Europe twice, and had watched his mother move resolutely into her own writing career. In starting the first big enterprise of his life, Vincent gave strong evidence of the organizational skills and resourcefulness which would sustain him in later

professional ventures. The Boys' Paper would serve as his practical primer in human relations. Like his Grandfather Bloch, young Vincent had learned to put across an idea to important men. He had learned the art of selling himself and the importance of delivering on his promises. In short, he had learned True Education in producing The Boys' Paper, and his teachers were the professionals who ran the New York publishing business.

Self-reliant, plucky, and resourceful, Robert Vincent was also an effective self-promoter who was not ashamed of his title, "the youngest editor in America".⁴⁷ Looking beyond his family for approval, Vincent sought almost instinctively the best mentors. The Boys' Paper proved to be his "rite of passage" into the adult world, and he passed his tests well. Over 75 years later, Vincent's files and scrapbooks abound with the material evidence of his adolescent triumphs. Over his lifetime, Vincent regularly saved the letters and clippings which established his credibility. It was a credibility not only of his abilities but of his manhood. By working hard on a tangible project and seeking the approval of men who had succeeded at what he was attempting, Robert Vincent executed what was both a pragmatic and typically American ritual of manhood.

While one is reminded of the apprenticeship of Benjamin Franklin in Vincent's story, there is also much of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Gatsby in Vincent's memoirs. Like an urban Jimmy Gatz, Robert Vincent had a "platonic conception of himself"⁴⁸

and would in many ways create a life for himself which would in some way approach his romantic dreams of what a life should be.

Yet, a third and perhaps stronger parallel can be made in Vincent's youthful years to the Alger hero. Vincent was, to the publishing men who helped him, a real life Horatio Alger boy who embodied the same values that they lived by and promulgated in their journals. Here was a 20th century American boy who recalled the archetypic values carried down from Franklin through Ralph Waldo Emerson to the Alger characters in the Munsey pulps. Roaming the streets and subways of New York, calling on important men, carrying his newly acquired "combination satchel-briefcase"⁴⁹ made of imitation leather, Robert Vincent embarked on a classic American life in the early years of the new century.

Soon, he would turn from publishing to politics and would encounter Theodore Roosevelt, himself the most recent incarnation of the self-reliant and resourceful traits in the American character. For one so young and so fresh from a European background, Vincent had become - by the time of his adolescence - an extension of the prototypic enterprising American boy.

CHAPTER III

THE BOY PROGRESSIVE 1912-1913

As the first year of The Boys' Paper came to a close, there were many reasons to rejoice. Not only had advertising income permitted the first illustrated cover, but Scribner's - one of the top monthly magazines - had taken the entire back cover for an advertisement soliciting yearly subscriptions.¹ It was, however, the Christmas, 1910 number which would prove to be most fortunate for it created the circumstances for Vincent to meet Theodore Roosevelt, an event which changed his life.

The Scribner's relationship provided Vincent with yet another helpful mentor, this time in the person of Mr. Fred L. Goddard who was Scribner's circulation manager. Goddard's helpfulness and enthusiasm for Vincent's publishing efforts are duly noted in his memoirs, yet there is also another small clue about Vincent's need for a father figure in his description of Goddard. Vincent wrote that Goddard was:

. . . one of the kindest and most considerate men I have ever met, never tired of helping me in all sort of ways. He seemed almost as enthusiastic about The Boys' Paper as I was and if I were to say that he was like a father to me, it would be an understatement. He was an improvement.²

Goddard introduced Vincent to Robert Bridges the poet and a later editor of Scribner's who agreed to write an original poem for The Boys' Paper, "with the understanding that there would be no errors in spelling punctuation, or printing."³ Goddard, too, sounded the Alger virtues in an April 1, 1911 letter of encouragement to Vincent. Goddard wrote:

Do not be diverted by the kindly but indiscreet flattery of anybody. Take all the advice you can get, and study it carefully, but, above all, be true to yourself and hustle all the time to fit yourself for work that will be satisfying to your own criticism. Never be content with sloppy work, and let me repeat, never be improperly affected by the praise of other people.

Make all the friends you⁴ can and continue to command their respect⁴

The good will of Goddard's missive notwithstanding, Vincent has already received what would ultimately prove to be a more significant letter a month earlier on March 11. It came from Hamilton Wright Mabie, the distinguished and influential associate editor of The Outlook. Mabie had helped Lymon Abbott, the editor, build the Outlook into a potent weekly whose main stock was political and sociological commentary. Mabie had not only been a friend of Mark Twain but had recently persuaded former president Theodore Roosevelt to become The Outlook's contributing editor. What attracted Mabie to Vincent was a story written by Vincent's mother for the Christmas edition of The Boys' Paper. The story described the "editorial family" of the paper around a cherry log fire pondering the quest for happiness. Echoing a recurring theme

in Lisa's other fiction, the story pleased Mabie. In his letter, written on Outlook stationary, he hailed Vincent as "probably the youngest business manager and general editor of a newspaper in this country." Of Lisa's story he commented:

. . . I thought the picture of the editorial family of the Boys' Paper (sic) around the evening lamp and before the evening fire, talking about happiness, one of the most delightful I have looked in upon for many a day: the talk I thought very interesting and sensible. I intend to practice the doctrine which the Boys' Paper preaches; I am . . . one of its most appreciative readers.⁵

It is impossible to identify just what "doctrine" Mabie found so attractive because there are no extant copies of the 1910 run of The Boys' Paper. However, a 1912 contribution by Lisa to the paper used a similar "family" format in which the children in the family discuss the presidential race.⁶ Like some of her "modern fairy tales," this piece utilized the voices of children to communicate sagaciously on the world at large. Perhaps it was this aspect that so pleased Mabie, or - perhaps as his letter indicates - it might have been the discovery of so close an embodiment of the Alger type in Vincent himself whose magazine itself represented enterprise and initiative.

Actually it was Mr. Frank Hoyt, advertising manager of The Outlook, who had brought The Boys' Paper to Mabie's attention. Hoyt had purchased advertising space in Vincent's paper and had persuaded Mr. Otto Koenig of The Christian Herald to do the same. It was also Hoyt who introduced Vincent to Mabie who agreed to contribute an essay entitled "Willing

to Shovel" for the spring number. A Horatio Alger piece, it "received acclaim not only from . . . boy readers but important grown ups as well."⁷ Vincent became welcome in the offices of The Outlook at 287 Fourth Avenue, and in the spring of 1911 was invited by Mr. Mabie to meet contributing editor Theodore Roosevelt in his office at The Outlook. Roosevelt has been on the magazine's staff since departing the White House in 1908. He was then resuming his editorial tasks after his widely publicized wild game hunting expedition in Africa.

Finally, the day of Vincent's appointment with the former president arrived. The boys at school that day were skeptical when Vincent told some of them that he had a four o'clock appointment with Teddy Roosevelt, but as Vincent reported, "there were those who thought anything out of the ordinary was quite probable for an odd bird like me."⁸ Carrying three recent copies of The Boys' Paper in his satchel, Vincent took the elevator to the seventh floor of The Outlook offices and waited outside a door marked "THE OUTLOOK - OFFICE OF THEODORE ROOSEVELT." Soon Mr. Mabie and Mr. Roosevelt arrived. Here is how Vincent described the meeting in his memoirs:

Sure enough . . . there appeared that familiar face, grinning, exuding a dynamic personality that seemed to envelop the whole area. There was an aristocratic manner about him, yet he appeared quite approachable, although not the hail-fellow-well-met type . . .

Teddy grasped my small hand in his large one, took the papers and, as far as I can recall the exact words of the conversation, it went like this: "Why, thats bully, Robert! You and I are the most energetic editors in the United States

I'd like you to visit Sagamore Hill in the summer and meet some of the many Roosevelt boys. Tell them about your experiences and, if I can help you at any time, let me know."

Recognizing that this was too good an opportunity to let pass, Vincent asked Roosevelt to write a special message for all American boys through The Boys' Paper. As Vincent noted, he requested that Roosevelt not "make it too long" because he had heard that the ex-president "was getting two dollars a word." He thought "it just possible that he would send . . . a bill."¹⁰

Some weeks later, an envelope arrived containing Roosevelt's statement for The Boys' Paper. The text was brief, and it contained similar thoughts to other such pieces written by Roosevelt, but it must have been a special thrill for Vincent to get a specially typed and signed manuscript from such a distinguished personage. It read:

Of course, what I have a right to expect of the American boy is that he shall turn out to be a good American man. Now, the chances are strong that he won't be much of a man unless he is a good deal of a boy. He must not be a coward or a weakling, a bully, a shirk, or a prig. He must work hard and play hard. He must be clean-minded and clean-lived, and be able to hold his own under all circumstances and against all comers. It is only under these conditions that he will grow into the kind of American man of whom America can be really proud.¹¹

The signed manuscript along with a portrait of Theodore Roosevelt still hangs near Robert Vincent's desk in his studio.

1911 brought Vincent into contact with other well-known editors including Edward J. Wheeler of Current Literature

and W. S. Woods of Funk and Wagnall's Literary Digest. In a June 23rd letter, Wheeler advised Vincent to put more of himself into the paper. He mildly critiqued Vincent for using the contributions of professionals like Mabie and J. Earl Clauson and encouraged Vincent to ". . . be frank (and) speak your inside thoughts right out, and let us have a boy's view of the world."¹² Yet, Vincent was reticent about sharing his experiences. As he stated in his memoirs:

I did not follow his advice then, because I believed it to be presumptuous for a boy to write about important contemporary figures with the rather immature,¹³ hero-worshipful sentiment which I felt for them.

Vincent continued to visit and seek advice from the many publishing houses which were so conveniently close to his home on 17th Street.

One such publisher was Doubleday, Page, and Company at 133 East 16th Street. Doubleday which had recently published Upton Sinclair's The Jungle, advertised in The Boys' Paper featuring their books for younger readers. During an afternoon visit to Doubleday, Page, Vincent met Walter Hines Page - former editor of The Forum and The Atlantic Monthly. Later, Vincent met with Mark Sullivan of Collier's Weekly and Samuel S. McClure of McClure's Magazine which had contributed so much to the muckraking period just passed. Elbert Wortman, editor of McClure's praised The Boys' Paper in a May 24, 1911 letter for its "very fine quality of stories and articles."¹⁴ A visit to the venerable Harper and Brothers, gained Vincent

not only a half page "ad" for a new Zane Gray novel, but also an interview with editor Henry Mills Alden. Vincent wrote that his meeting with Alden, who began his editorship of Harper's Magazine in 1869, was a "cherished memory" of those days. Others outside the publishing business who began to notice The Boys' Paper were mayor of New York William J. Gaynor, who wrote a letter on July 31, and Henry L. Stimson, unsuccessful candidate for governor in 1910 and a future Secretary of State and Secretary of War. Stimson wrote to congratulate Vincent on "the zeal and ability you display in your work" ¹⁵ It should be pointed out that Vincent, always an alert businessman, must have initiated many of these contacts. Yet, the thoughtful tone of the many letters which Vincent received from these important people must be considered in any assessment of the quality of The Boys' Paper.

As the summer of 1911 waned, Vincent was drawn back to Theodore Roosevelt's world. Responding to an invitation to visit the Roosevelt family at Sagamore Hill, Vincent traveled to Oyster Bay. This visit clearly cemented his personal identification with Roosevelt and gave him a brief, privileged glimpse of the most famous family in America. Vincent recalled:

It was thrilling to see the trophy rooms, drink lemonade on the huge open porch, roam the grounds and meet some of the young cousins from adjacent homes in Oyster Bay. Quentin, T. R.'s youngest son, was only three years older than I; the other youngsters to join us were Philip and Oliver and Nicholas Roosevelt. ¹⁶

The boys talked about The Boys' Paper and other amateur magazines, "Cousin Theodore's" new Haynes automobile, fishing, current and past events. Vincent writes that Mrs. Roosevelt was a gracious host and the Colonel himself inscribed his book The Strenuous Life . . . as a memento of the occasion."¹⁷

It is not difficult to determine what personal effect the visit to Oyster Bay had on Vincent. The meeting with Roosevelt earlier in the year at The Outlook office had had a galvanic effect on the boy; it would become a point of reference throughout the rest of his life. Yet, taken as a whole, all of his brief encounters with Roosevelt during the next two years would take on an aura of legend to Vincent. On a certain level, Roosevelt represented the current model of manhood. He was a hero who embodied the adventurous spirit of the new century. To an adolescent like Vincent, intelligent, ambitious, searching for a father figure, Theodore Roosevelt was the perfect hero.

In his biography The Young Hemingway, Michael Reynolds writes:

For any young boy at the turn of the century, Theodore Roosevelt was a living legend: western rancher, rough rider, hero of San Juan Hill, the President, African hunter, South American explorer The legend that Roosevelt became was a conscious creation, whose message was simple: a man of moral fiber and physical endurance can do whatever he can imagine himself doing.¹⁸

Like Ernest Hemingway or any other boy born just before 1900, Vincent was responsive to the ethic of the strenuous life. Of course, Roosevelt's was a more romantic and potent version

of the Alger myth. Both stressed the Emersonian virtues of self-reliance and self-creation. Yet, it is evident that while the Alger myth proved to be a didactic ethos used by adults to guide their children toward socially acceptable ambitions in the business world, the Rooseveltian maxims were likely to have more efficacy to boys attracted to T.R.'s well publicized adventures. Moreover, Roosevelt's strongly reformist politics would have added appeal to those boys, like Vincent, who might be divergent enough to look beyond the field of business for their future. As Reynolds puts it, Roosevelt's message was simple: "a man of moral fiber and physical endurance can do whatever he can imagine himself doing."¹⁹

In a larger sense, Roosevelt represented a contemporary recasting of the older Puritan work ethic. Reacting against the excesses of the new post-industrial leisure class, Roosevelt eschewed "a mere life of ease" in favor of a more demanding philosophy of endeavor and accomplishment. In The Strenuous Life Roosevelt wrote:

A man can be freed from the necessity of work only by the fact that he or his fathers before him have worked to good purpose. If the freedom thus purchased is used aright, and the man still does actual work, though of a different kind, whether as a writer or a general, whether in the field of politics or in the field of exploration and adventure, he shows he deserves his good fortune. But if he treats this period of freedom from the need of actual labor as a period . . . of mere enjoyment, he shows that he is simply a cumberer of the earth's surface A mere life of ease is not the end of a very satisfactory life.²⁰

Clearly, to Roosevelt, enterprise meant more than piling up wealth in the market place. In fairness to the Alger books, there was a spiritual side to the Ragged Dick character too. yet, in his diversity of accomplishment and celebration of various kinds of human endeavor, Roosevelt considerably broadened the somewhat narrow nineteenth-century vision of success: to wit, the "adventures" into Africa and the Amazon where T. R. could be a boy again, yet justify the trips as scientific expeditions. One could "play" if the outcome were serious and high minded not to mention "strenuous" enough.

In light of this, Roosevelt's "bully" enthusiasm for The Boys' Paper and his invitation to Vincent to join the Oyster Bay circle of "Roosevelt kids" becomes clearer. Vincent, the boy editor, represented the proper outcome of "play." The paper was taken seriously because Vincent took it so seriously. It was a perfect example of enterprise that had as its end neither venality nor pleasure alone. Rather, The Boys' Paper productively combined a boy's leisure time and his True Education in a way that reinforced all the virtues operable in the Roosevelt-Alger ethos. One is immediately reminded of the kid computer "hackers" of the 1980's who precociously seized the current technology of their time and applied it to ends beyond play. That The Boys' Paper was growing beyond the boundaries of adolescence, can be observed in Robert Vincent's plans during the last months of 1911 to change the entire format of the publication into a political quarterly for boys. Whether Roosevelt had

intended it or not, Vincent's visit to Oyster Bay had wrought significant changes in the boy. Vincent was now interested in politics, and The Boys' Paper would play its own small part in the hectic presidential race of 1912.

While Vincent reported that nothing of a political nature was discussed during his visit, it was an open secret that Roosevelt was dissatisfied with the performance of his successor, president William Howard Taft. Vincent noted that if T. R. chose to run again, all his "friends and subscribers and The Boys' Paper itself would be there to help him."²¹ Vincent's rationale for shifting the format of The Boys' Paper to a political quarterly is typically pragmatic. He commented:

I felt that the age group of our readers, should they wish to read fiction, poetry or sports, had other magazines to choose from, like The Youth's Companion, St. Nicholas, Boy's Life, The American Boy, . . . but there existed no publication . . . especially for them which dealt exclusively with civic and political matters.²²

Further he noted, "it would give me an opportunity to meet many of the leading public figures and maybe get them to expound their ideas in writing."²³ Vincent wanted to be at the center of things, and - in 1912 - that was progressive politics.

The 1911-12 school year brought changes for Vincent and his family. After his desultory period at P.S. 40, Vincent's education began to improve when he and his brother Tommy received scholarships to Ethical Culture High School

on Central Park West. Sponsored by The Ethical Culture Society, the school employed good teachers like Dr. Moskowitz, husband of the well-known Belle Moskowitz who was later the personal advisor to Governor Alfred E. Smith. Vincent's family moved from his "beloved old neighborhood around Stuyvesant Square to a seven room apartment in Washington Heights, at 153rd Street."²⁴ With the increasing amount of schoolwork and the trip uptown, Vincent found it more difficult to continue The Boys' Paper. However, the switch to quarterly publication and some well-timed encouragement by Mr. Nathan Straus, Sr. sustained Vincent's efforts. Meeting the bearded head of R. H. Macy's Department Store, through his son Nathan Jr., Vincent found that the elder Straus "was interested in the Ethical Culture Society" and liked his magazine. For the rest of the year, The Boys' Paper carried a half page Macy "ad."

The official announcement on February 24, 1912 of Theodore Roosevelt to run for a third term as president against the incumbent Republican president signalled an upswing in the political activities of Vincent and The Boys' Paper. The magazine made no pretense of objectivity in its support of the ex-president. Vincent and his friends "formed an organization of about sixty future voters"²⁵ called The Boys' Progressive League. The League met at various New York hotels and discussed ways in which the boys could help in the Roosevelt campaign.

Correspondence to Vincent during the spring and early summer of 1912 supports his memoirs in depicting the involvement of The Boys' Paper in the progressive campaign. On April 25, William Prendergast - comptroller of the City of New York - sent a statement of his views on "the Republican nomination which I promised for your paper."²⁶ On May 3, Hamilton Wright Mabie refused Vincent's request for a pro-Roosevelt statement on the grounds that his "personal relations to Mr. Roosevelt are so close that . . . I have refused to say anything whatever on the situation."²⁷ Persistent, Vincent wrote again and received a reply on May 10 from Mabie's secretary stating that "it would be useless to ask Mr. Mabie again . . . because, even though he wants to oblige you, it would be going against his conviction of what is right and best in this matter . . . "²⁸

On June 26th, a lengthy letter arrived from William Prendergast encouraging Vincent's efforts "to arouse the interest of other boys in political questions"²⁹ The text included a prophetic charge to get girls as well as boys involved in politics. The letter also employed the "square deal" diction and idealistic rhetoric so germane to Roosevelt's political ethic. Prendergast wrote:

When I saw you today you told me that you were a boy progressive. I knew that you meant that you and boys like you believe in the American idea, which is a square deal for everybody. We are at the beginning of a long, hard fight to obtain justice for every American citizen. This fight cannot be finished in weeks or months but will last for many years. Before it is finished you and the other boys will be called on as men to do your

part in the final establishment of those ideas for which Colonel Roosevelt and the rest of us are fighting now. There is only one way for an American citizen to strike, and that is through the ballot. By the time that you are voting I expect that the women as well as the men will be voting on the questions which have to be decided. May I suggest that you and your helpers on the Boys' Paper, try to interest the girls in these questions.³⁰

Other letters arrived from R. H. Titherington of Munsey's enclosing an address from Frank Munsey with a suggestion to cite "the passage . . . marked near the end of the address where he gives a brief sketch of Mr. Roosevelt."³¹ Attorney Philip J. McCook responded to a letter from Vincent inviting members of The Boys' Progressive League to join "as your members reach an eligible age" the New York Young Republican Club "whose dues are not excessive being only \$2 a year."³² Business continued, however, as Vincent received a dun letter from the James L. Walsh Company for payment of an overdue printing bill. Joseph M. Cicato, the secretary, threatened to "pay a visit to (Vincent's) parents whom I am sure would not tolerate any such nonsense."³³

It was during the summer of 1912 that members of The Boys' Progressive League requested Vincent to capitalize on his friendship with Roosevelt by inviting him to speak to the group at The Hotel Manhattan. It was a request that was impossible to fulfill during that hectic "Bull Moose" campaign, but - as Vincent wrote - "it was a sort of challenge . . . nevertheless I decided to try to uphold my reputation."³⁴ Subsequently, Vincent and a delegation of four

boys set out for Oyster Bay in a model T Ford. With them, they took an Edison cylinder recording machine that Vincent had obtained from his friend Charles Edison. As Vincent wrote, they came prepared; it was their goal to get Roosevelt to address the club "either in person or through a recording."³⁵

At the Oyster Bay Inn, the boys enlisted the aid of the corps of newspapermen stationed there to cover Roosevelt. Vincent recalled:

Mr. Issac F. Marcossion of the New York World and the Saturday Evening Post said that he would keep us informed as soon as Frank Harper (T. R.'s secretary) left Sagamore Hill, so that there would be no obstacle in the way.³⁶

Waiting at the inn until the right moment, the boys drove to the Roosevelt home and asked the butler if they could see Roosevelt. After refusing their invitation to address the club because of a previous engagement, Roosevelt agreed to give an impromptu talk into the Edison machine. The recording proved to be the best and most natural reproduction of Theodore Roosevelt's voice ever made and was heard "amidst much cheering at the club's meeting" later at the Hotel Manhattan.³⁷ The speech echoed the familiar principles of the Progressive persuasion, "fair play and a square deal for every man and every woman in the United States." Its conclusion, however, was thoughtfully aimed at the boys who would hear the speech. Its diction and sentiment is pure Roosevelt:

I wish to see you boys join the Progressive Party and act in that party and as good citizens,

in the same way I'd expect one of you to act in a football game. In other words, don't flinch, don't foul, and . . . hit the line hard!³⁸

Robert Vincent's reputation with The Boys' Progressive League was upheld, but more significantly, he had registered an accomplishment which would earn him fame. The Roosevelt recording became the cornerstone in his lifelong career as a sound engineer and, later, as a voice archivist. The Edison Recording Division not only plated the wax cylinder so that it could be permanently preserved, but it presented Vincent with the actual machine on which the recording was made. As he wrote, "it was this recording . . . which really prompted me to start on my mission of recording and collecting the spoken words of men and women identified with the contemporary world scene."³⁹ Although he did not know it then, Vincent had discovered his true calling. Sound recording, still in its infancy, would be his metier, not journalism.

Yet, Vincent and his paper still had much to accomplish as the 1912 presidential campaign became more intense. In February, Roosevelt had announced his intention to run against Taft. Later that spring, Roosevelt announced his intention to make an unprecedented personal appearance at the Republican convention in Chicago. On June 18th the Republican National Convention met and on the 22nd nominated President Taft and Vice-President Sherman for a second term. Later that day, Roosevelt followers met and invited Roosevelt to head a third party declaring that the nomination of Taft had been

accomplished by fraud. On June 23rd a committee to lead the third party effort in the fall election was appointed.⁴⁰ Progressive party headquarters was opened in New York. Roosevelt's remark in reply to a newspaperman that he felt "like a bull moose" gave the new party its nickname. During the first week of August, the Progressive Party Convention in Chicago nominated Roosevelt and Hiram W. Johnson of California as its presidential ticket.⁴¹

The fall 1912 election number of The Boys' Paper proved to be the largest to that date. Sixteen pages long with a red cover emblazoned with a portrait of "our next president" Theodore Roosevelt, the issue was partly underwritten by George W. Perkins and his associates who were the financial angels of the Progressive Party. As a result, circulation jumped to two thousand copies, and Progressive Party advertising copy was carried to help defray costs. With this issue of his magazine, Robert Vincent had "become a soldier today in the battle for human rights" as the back cover exhorted. The Boys' Paper was now an official organ of the Bull Moose campaign.

A complete copy of the 1912 election number remains to document Vincent's political connections. It contains William Prendergast's letter and his article entitled "The Progressive Party" which outlines the reasons for the party's split with the Republicans after the Chicago convention.

Oliver and Philip J. Roosevelt (two of the Roosevelt cousins that Vincent had met at Sagamore Hill) contributed

articles. Oliver's is a standard editorial piece called "Looking Ahead". Philip's story, however, is an interesting account of the coming of direct primaries to Gunnison, Colorado. Its villain is a crooked politician named Tom O'Keefe with the "great, sordid money interests" behind him. The hero is one Si Lawson who, like T. R., fights the established machine as a fighting independent. Lawson's election to town clerk brings home the progressive analogy that "national politics are but municipal politics on a larger scale."⁴²

The issue also included an attractive fantasy piece by Vincent's mother, Lisa Tarlau. Set in the family nursery, "Politics in the Nursery" centers around a family discussion of the upcoming election. Each boy, obviously Vincent's half-brothers, gives his youthful opinion of why he wants to be like T. R. when he grows up. Tom, the eldest, admires the Colonel "because he is so clever, and because he knows all things, and all laws, and knows which are the best laws for us . . . and because my teacher said he is a true American and loves his country." Teddy, "A graceless little sinner, with scowling brows and flashing eyes" speaks next. He alludes to Roosevelt's recent recovery from an October assassination attempt in Milwaukee:

"Because Roosevelt is f-f-fine," he says, "and because he is a hero. And because he w-w-was shot, and he didn't care a bit and laughed, and because he shot tigers in Africa, and because he is stronger than the Giants and the Red Sox together."

The youngest, Milton - born in 1910 is described as "dreamy and full of sleep . . . his little hand cuddling into his mother's protecting fingers." He says, "want to be Roosevelt . . . Roosevelt is dood - very, very dood."

Concluding on a strong note of maternal patriotism, "Politics in the Nursery" echoes the powerful appeal of Theodore Roosevelt, the popular hero. It states:

Mother's eyes are full with tears. "Yes," she says, Roosevelt is good, and he is clever, and he is a hero. You are all right my boys. May God bless him and bless us, and make you all men like him. More, not even a mother, could wish for you."

And then the supper gong rang and the Poltiics in the Nursery came to an end.⁴³

Finally, the election number ends with a sentimental appeal for The People's Dollar Campaign by Maud Howe Elliott, the daughter of Julia Ward Howe. She offers ten dollars in gold "all that is left of a present of gold pieces given to" Mrs. Howe "on one of her last birthdays." On a facing page, there are printed donation certificates to the campaign. Other advertisements for contributions offer "facsimile signatures and photographs" of Roosevelt and his running mate and bronze Bull Moose "Founder's Buttons."⁴⁴

While the election number of The Boys' Paper is clearly an enthusiastic anthology of Bull Moose propaganda, Vincent in his memoirs declared the publication "had a broader purpose than just whooping it up for Teddy Roosevelt and the Bull Moose candidates."⁴⁵ Vincent claimed to have maintained a wider interest than partisan politics:

We commended progressive Democrats, Republicans and Independents as well as Bull Moosers and hoped to defeat the reactionaries and the old time political machines and party bosses, feeling that it was a feature of good citizenship to take an interest in the great questions that concern the welfare of the people.⁴⁶

The defeat of Theodore Roosevelt at the polls on November 6 did not dim Vincent's political interest despite losing an opportunity to become a page in the United States Senate. Vincent had been promised such a post by one of the Progressive leaders. On election night Vincent and his parents attended the "victory party" at the Hotel Manhattan where the boy recalled seeing Jacob Riis, Hamilton Fish, the Roosevelt cousins, and Alice Roosevelt Longworth, and several of his friends from the publishing field like Frank Munsey and S. S. McClure.

After the 1912 election, Vincent had two more encounters with Theodore Roosevelt which turned out to be less glamorous than previous meetings. In June, 1913, Colonel Roosevelt was scheduled to speak at The Outlook offices about the then controversial Direct Primary bill. Vincent had recently heard another Roosevelt cousin, Franklin D. - then an Assistant Secretary of the Navy, deliver a speech in favor of the bill. He wanted to get a statement from the Colonel about the bill for The Boys' Paper. Striding into the group of reporters at The Outlook, Roosevelt directly confronted Vincent who was sitting among them. Vincent recalled the incident in his memoirs:

"Why aren't you in school?" he thundered . . . "I've had a letter from your teacher . . . You'll never be a good Bull Mooser if you don't study."

"But . . . but Colonel Roosevelt," I stammered, "I know why Mr. Friedrich wrote you. He told me that I had the Roosevelt bug in my system and since he was a strong Taft man he resented the aid which I tried to give your campaign last fall"47

Vincent reported that Roosevelt then requested a letter from his mother indicating that the boy's schoolwork was satisfactory. Hurrying directly to the Butterick Publishing Company on Spring Street, Vincent obtained the letter from his mother who wrote to the effect that Vincent was "an alert and eager boy and that she was completely satisfied with (his) work in and out of school." The letter returned Vincent to the Colonel's good graces.

In October, Roosevelt was making plans to embark on one last great adventure, his exploration trip to South America with his son Kermit. On the eve of his departure for Brazil, the Progressive National Service gave a farewell dinner for Roosevelt at the New York Roof Garden. Presided over by Gifford Pinchot, the program included addresses by Albert Beveridge and Colonel Roosevelt and a presentation to the Colonel by Robert Vincent from The Boys' Progressive League. The boys had each contributed a dollar for an engraved loving cup. Vincent's mother had helped him to write and memorize an appropriate speech, but the results were impromptu. Vincent recalled:

A fine dinner was served but I had very little appetite . . . Finally, Gifford Pinchot came over to our table and said to me: "Are you ready, Robert?"

When I reached the center of the speaker's table with the loving cup in my hands, I could not be seen by the many diners. "Stand on a chair!" said Mr. Pinchot. But even that did not help much, so I got right up and stood on the speaker's table, turning toward Colonel Roosevelt. Then it happened! In the excitement of the moment I forgot the entire speech; not a word came to me. I took the loving cup and handed it to T. R., saying "Here you are!"

Of course, the Colonel was dee-lighted, all smiles; he seemed actually glad to receive the gift. "Bully!" he said, "thats simply bully Robert. Thank you and thank your club members."⁴⁸

Later, Vincent noted, Theodore P. Shonts - one of the subscriber's to The Boys' Paper told him about the speech, "I saw your lips move, but I didn't hear a word."⁴⁹

1913 proved to be an active year for The Boys' Progressive League as well as The Boys' Paper. The New York Mayoralty race was heating up in view of the decision of Mayor Gaynor not to seek re-election. Part of the Roosevelt legacy that Vincent had absorbed was to oppose machine politics. Thus, his efforts in both The Boys' Paper and The Boys' Progressive League was directed at supporting candidates who were running against the New York Tammany Hall machine. In the mayoralty race, this took the form of backing the "Fusionist", or anti-Tammany, ticket.

As editor of The Boys' Paper, Vincent sought to interview all of the candidates for mayor. As an influential member of The Boys' Progressive League, he was in a position to

sway opinion in the upcoming league mock election. Vincent described the progressive candidates he interviewed in his memoirs:

There was young, handsome John Purroy Mitchel, an Independent Democrat . . . whom President Wilson had just appointed Collector of the Port of New York. Then, there was Comptroller William Prendergast . . . Charles Whitman, the District Attorney of New York County who had made a reputation for prosecuting Police Lieutenant Charles Becker for the murder of gambler Charles Rosenthal. Also a possible candidate was George McAneny,⁵⁰ President of the Borough of Manhattan

Convinced that McAneny was the superior candidate, Vincent strongly supported him at the mock convention. This was reported in a news item headlined "M'Aneny is Boomed By Boy Progressives."⁵¹ The story indicated that the Manhattan borough chief won over Charles S. Whitman by a "slightly higher vote."

Vincent reported that on July 31st, after many ballots, the executive committee of the Fusionists chose John Purroy Mitchel as their candidate for mayor. The rest of the ticket included McAneny, nominated for President of the Board of Alderman; Prendergast for Comptroller; and District Attorney Whitman to succeed himself. On August 21st, the Tammany ticket was selected at Delmonico's Restaurant. Ex-judge and Public Service Commissioner, Edward E. McCall was selected as their choice for mayor.

Vincent immediately brought The Boys' Paper into the contest by soliciting funds and actively helping out at the Fusionist headquarters after school. As he remembered:

. . . we formed the "Junior Fusionist Fund Committee, and I was put in charge of it. I even had a desk at headquarters and occupied it as soon as I got out of classes in the afternoon.⁵²

In addition, Vincent was drawn to the cause of ex-Governor William Sulzer. In the preceeding months, "Plain Bill" as he was called, had run afoul of Tammany Hall which had helped impeach the crusading governor over a trumped up charge that Sulzer had used campaign contributions to speculate in the stock market. Sulzer, a reformist Democrat, had strong bipartisan support among Independents and Progressives. He was running in the fall election as a candidate for the New York State Assembly on the Progressive ticket.

Governor Sulzer's support of the Direct Primary Bill in the face of strong opposition of boss Charles F. Murphy had angered the Tammany machine. Too, he had started an investigation of the Highway and Prison Departments, the Adjutant General's Office, and other state Bureaus finding them seething with graft and Tammany patronage. Sulzer appointed John A. Hennesy, a New York newspaperman, as state executive auditor and began to reform the tangle of corruption. However, Tammany Hall still controlled the State Assembly and eventually forced the successful impeachment vote which ousted Sulzer who, ironically, had the strong support of not only the Fusionists in New York City but no less than that of newly elected president Woodrow Wilson, a Democrat.

The involvement of The Boys' Progressive League in Sulzer's fight is documented by a letter from Amos Pinchot, a New York lawyer and Progressive leader. He wrote on June 4, 1913:

I certainly hope that you will have a rousing meeting, not only because I am in sympathy with your organization, . . . but because I think that Governor Sulzer's campaign for direct primaries should be supported in every way. . . . It is a hopeful thing to see the boys of this city taking so much interest in the fight and organizing in order to carry it through.⁵³

Also, Vincent saved a news clipping in which Sulzer wrote directly to The Boys' Progressive League to deny the Tammany charges. In the letter, Sulzer thanks the boys for their support and states that when Boss Murphy "found out that he could not control me and make me a rubber stamp he did everything on his power to destroy me politically."⁵⁴

Further, the governor stated:

The grafters are hounding me. Mr. Murphy and his hirelings are traducing me and are trying in every conceivable way to throw mud at me Most of the stuff Murphy and his agents put in the newspapers about me is baseless and pure fabrication With the aid of the decent people of the state I shall go forward.⁵⁵

The overwhelming force of public opinion in favor of Sulzer, did not help him avoid impeachment, but it did return him to office in the fall election as a state assemblyman. Of the impeachment scandal, the Albany Knickerbocker Press wrote:

Surely government by the people is a sham if a band of agents of a political Boss may, by the passage of a frame up resolution, remove from office the highest Executive Officer of the greatest State in the greatest Republic of the world⁵⁶

As Vincent noted, even Theodore Roosevelt wrote to support Governor Sulzer expressing that "we have never seen a more startling example of the power of the invisible government under the present system."⁵⁷

For Robert Vincent, the summer and fall of 1913 had been intense and exciting. When asked by newspaper reporters about the loss of support of fellow Democrat Dudley Field Malone - Collector of the Port of New York, Tammany candidate for Mayor Edward McCall said: "I care as little about losing Mr. Malone's support than I do about the little fellow who plays at politics, the boy editor, what is his name?"⁵⁸ Vincent, "the boy editor," was by now a well-known minor thorn in the heel of Tammany politicians.

Vincent was present at the large Fusion rally at Madison Square Garden where the orator Job E. Hedges excited the partisan audience. Vincent was among those who shouted:

McCall?
Tammany Hall?
Grab it all?
Not at all?⁵⁹

Election eve at Fusion headquarters was spent more joyously in 1913 than had been the case for the Progressives in 1912. As Vincent noted, ". . . this time our side won." John Purroy Mitchel was elected mayor of New York.

The December 19th banquet of The Boys' Progressive League at Healy's on the corner of Broadway at 145th Street, was a real celebration. There was, of course, the Christmas season, but also the first anniversary of the founding of

the club, and the Fusion victory. Tickets were three dollars and entertainment included music and a talk by some old Civil War veterans. Honored guests included ex-Governor Sulzer who said "some complimentary things about the editor of The Boys' Paper."⁶⁰

For Robert Vincent, however, the celebration was muted by the fact that the winter edition of The Boys Paper was to be the last. The magazine had survived over three years and was never "in the red" financially, yet the effort to sustain it had taken a toll on Vincent's schoolwork. By mutual agreement with his parents, and at the suggestion of Grandfather Bloch who had been visiting New York, Vincent would be enrolled at a private boarding school in Riverdale-on-the-Hudson starting with the Spring 1914 term. Grandfather Bloch, apparently satisfied that the boy had academic promise, agreed to finance the experiment in hopes that Vincent would graduate with honors and perhaps enter a good college. Additionally, Vincent would spend the summer months at the school's summer camp at Lake Sobago, near Portland, Maine. This was, undoubtedly a blow to Vincent. As he stated in his memoirs:

Somehow I felt that I had failed in my responsibilities as an editor and publisher and that I was letting down my subscribers and the many friends I had made, both in the editorial and political field It was a little sad to give up a project which had⁶¹ challenged whatever ingenuity that I possessed.

1914 would bring vast changes not only to the life of Robert Vincent, but it would also bring the world to war. The end of The Boys' Paper marked the beginning of a new phase of Robert Vincent's life. No longer, the "boy editor" in short pants, Vincent would be drawn into the larger, more uncertain world as it embarked on world war. Pictures of Vincent taken during 1914 reveal a young man and not a boy. With his celluloid collar and three piece pin-striped suit, Vincent at 16 looked resolved and manly. Now officially cut off from the status of protege to the New York publishing community and divested of his paper and political connections, Vincent was now an alien, an outsider at a strange new prep school. World war and the pressures to succeed would bring new challenges to be met.

In accepting Grandfather Bloch's sponsorship to prep school, Robert Vincent was making a choice that seemed logical. Good, formal schooling was a must if he were to build upon the promising foundation he had laid through The Boys' Paper. Yet, in going to Riverdale, Vincent in a sense was going against the grain of his individualism. What attracted him to Roosevelt and the Progressives was, in some sense, the glamour and uniqueness of being the idealistic outsider. Prep school was a risk since it represented the establishment. Impatient, a doer and a self-starter, Vincent had always had difficulty working "inside" the proscriptions of the establishment. Roosevelt's style had become his own, in a certain sense. Vincent liked to "crash in" as he called

it, relying on his native intelligence and wit. After three years as a free agent with access to the highest offices in the world's greatest city, would Vincent not find the traditions of the Riverdale Academy confining?

CHAPTER IV

WOULD-BE WAR CORRESPONDENT 1914-1916

Removed from his Manhattan neighborhood and freed from his responsibilities to The Boys' Paper, Robert Vincent grudgingly turned to his studies as the winter semester of 1914 opened at Riverdale Academy. Beautifully landscaped and located on the heights about the Hudson River, Riverdale offered a strenuous curriculum to the scions of New York's wealthy families. As Vincent recalled it, the "spring of 1914 was one long study period."¹

Naturally bright, but more inclined to action than study, Vincent worked hard during his first term. Perhaps this was to please Grandfather Bloch who had sponsored him, or maybe it was an attempt to fill the void created by the loss of his editorial career. His curriculum included German, which he already knew from his family, and English for which he had a natural talent. While mathematics was a struggle, geography soon became his favorite course.

In recalling Riverdale, Vincent's memoirs paint a muted picture of resignation in the boy. Vincent was impressed by the "cheerful atmosphere" of the dining halls and the "inspiring view of the Hudson"² but offered less enthusiastic

reactions to his fellow students. An outsider, small of stature, and younger than the others, Vincent felt "tolerated" by them. Less sheltered in his upbringing than these affluent preppies, he remembered the late night story telling in the dormitory:

In order to excite their listeners, bigger boys told fantastic stories about amorous conquests which they claimed to have had, but those things didn't bother me much. My love was slanted more toward real rugged adventure and there was little of that taking place at present. Besides, having knocked around for the past three and a half years, I had become sophisticated. Birds and bees were old hat.³

To escape his obvious unhappiness at Riverdale, Vincent turned to reading. A favorite at that time was Richard Harding Davis whose reputation as a war correspondent during the Spanish-American and Russo-Japanese wars was well-known. Vincent mentions the "Van Bibber" stories which took him "out of the school surroundings and . . . into a freer world."⁴ His favorite Davis book, however, was Soldiers of Fortune, which provided enough excitement and action to balance the regimentation of Riverdale. Finally, during a weekend trip to the city in the spring, Vincent discussed his plight with his mother. Lisa convinced him at least "to finish the year and go to camp" that summer.⁵

Robert Vincent was preparing to go to camp in late June when news broke of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. Throughout the summer, headlines detailed the events which ultimately

led to outbreak of world war during the first week of August. Although far off in the Maine woods during the period of ultimatums and mobilization, Vincent, returned from Lake Sobago for a three week period at home before resuming school in September. As the first war dispatches reached American newspapers, Vincent's interest in the crisis became intense. American journalists, like Richard Harding Davis, rushed to Europe to cover the battle for Belgium,⁶ and Vincent's inquisitiveness took him to the piers along the North River between 14th and 23rd Streets for a "reconnoitering trip." Typically, Vincent wanted to be near the action.

Since I could not be an actual war-correspondent on the scene, I thought it would be fascinating to meet face to face and to speak with some of those who had had personal experiences and adventures . . . either on land or at sea.⁷

The docks were located in a tough neighborhood inhabited by drunks, longshoremen, and seamen of various nationalities. A sharp contrast to the manicured lawns of Riverdale, the waterfront had, in Vincent's words, "a sort of dangerous attraction" for him.⁸ During his first trip to the docks, Vincent reports that he was able to walk on board the Mauretania, the sister ship to the Lusitania. While touring the decks of the ship, Vincent met an assistant steward named Bill Phipps who introduced him to other sailors and showed him around the ship. Later, before returning to Riverdale, he visited the White Star liner Arabic (later torpedoed and sunk) and an all-cargo vessel of the Atlantic Transport Line.⁹

With the resumption of school in September, Vincent had already made a resolution to get into the war at the earliest opportunity. His trips to the pier had immersed him once again in the "real" world. While he would continue to pursue his studies at Riverdale during the 1914-1915 academic year, his burning desire was to see the war first hand, preferably as a war correspondent. In this regard, Vincent mentioned Richard Harding Davis' classic account of the German occupation of Brussels in August as an inspirational factor.¹⁰ His pattern of emulating heroes continued. Davis was now his idol, and the journalist in him yearned for action.

As the school year wore on, Vincent took some immediate steps to become involved. In December, during holiday break from school, Vincent instigated a benefit performance for the Belgian War Relief Fund at the Claremont motion picture theater at 135th Street and Broadway, near his old neighborhood. Vincent knew the manager, Mr. Dollinger,¹¹ and arranged to bring to the theater a group of Scottish Highlanders led by Alick Lauder - brother of the famous humorist and singer Harry Lauder. Vincent had known Lauder since being introduced to him by William Morris Jr. in 1910.¹² He recalled the day of the performance:

When the time came, I met Alick Lauder at his living quarters on West 44th Street and rode uptown with him. There were four open touring cars in the procession and the bagpipers blew with gusto in a deafening but inspiring manner all the way up to the stage entrance on 135th Street. It was a triumphant invasion of Manhattan by the Caldonians. The performance was a great success.¹³

This was also the period when former Chief of Staff General Leonard Wood, Theodore Roosevelt and others were pressing the Wilson administration for increased military preparedness. Vincent, predictably, was in favor of compulsory military training and sent letters to public officials in support of such legislation. Louis Stotesbury - adjutant general of New York and Governor Herbert S. Hadley of Missouri replied to Vincent by letter thanking him for his support of military preparedness.¹⁴

By the spring of 1915, unrestricted submarine warfare had become an avowed tactic of the German navy. On Friday, May 7th the Lusitania was sunk by a German U-boat.¹⁵ On board were not only Alfred Vanderbilt and Charles Frohman, a leading theatrical producer, but also Alice and Elbert Hubbard the publishers whom Vincent had contacted five years before to print The Boys' Paper.¹⁶ The discussion that spring at school centered on the growing issue of American involvement in the war, and Vincent noted that at that time he became a "hawk . . . with a strong desire to do something myself other than talk."¹⁷

The events that followed in the spring of 1915 have become part of the consciously created legend of Robert Vincent's life. Motivated by restlessness and a large portion of callow romanticism, Vincent formulated a plan to run away from Riverdale to see the war first-hand. However, an early miscalculation jeopardized Vincent's reputation at school. Attempting to leave school for a few days to further his

plans, Vincent botched a scheme to get sent home by asking one of his roommates to slap him for ten minutes on his chest and back. The "scarlet fever" only got him quarantined to the school hospital. The subsequent doctor's examination not only embarrassed Vincent but led to a thorough reexamination of his principles.¹⁸

In times of crisis, Vincent said that he often speculated on what his heroes would do. Theodore Roosevelt was often his touchstone. He recalled:

I thought what I really needed was a private set of "policies" which would tend towards efficiency, "principles" that I could follow at all times, to be used like a steering wheel for heading in the right direction. Teddy Roosevelt had policies and principles for everything under the sun, only he didn't have to memorize them like I intended to do.¹⁹

Like a young Ben Franklin or James Gatz, F. Scott Fitzgerald's prototypic American boy, Vincent jotted down his list of maxims. As they are listed in his memoirs, the maxims are familiar evocations of Emersonian idealism and pep talks from the bully pulpit. "Always favor the underdog," "Think before you act," "Use initiative," and "Always be faithful to your beliefs" and the other cliché resolutions were in fact a synthesis of all the advice Vincent had gleaned from his mentors in the publishing world. The important purpose of the list, however, was to instill self-confidence in the boy. A dreamer, a romantic, and an outsider to his more conventional peers, Vincent revealed a need to accomplish his goals, no matter how far-fetched. As he wrote in his

memoirs, the resolutions "gave me confidence in myself I should have been greatly mortified if any one else knew about them and laughed at me."²⁰

With the end of the academic year, Vincent travelled to New York with his roommate Herbert Van Driel to see the popular show Chin Chin playing at the Globe Theater. After visiting the stars, Fred Stone and Dave Montgomery backstage, the boys parted company at Grand Central Station. Vincent saw Van Driel off to Scarsdale with the comment that he would not be back at school in the fall. On the following Wednesday, Vincent was aboard the S. S. Adriatic bound for Liverpool, England.

The genesis of Vincent's plan was a memory of his 1908 voyage from Europe with his family aboard the S. S. Philadelphia. Vincent remembered that several noted names from the published passenger list were not among those who had actually sailed on the ship. Accordingly, Vincent obtained a boarding pass for the Adriatic under the pretext that he wanted to get to London as soon as possible due to the "serious illness" of his uncle. The boarding pass was issued so that the young gentleman could see the accommodations aboard ship first hand. Promising to return to the White Star Lines office with a check for the three hundred dollar ticket and his passport, Vincent gambled that the passenger agent would add his name to the ship's list.²¹

Arriving at Pier 60 on 20th Street and North River at ten o'clock on Wednesday morning, Vincent used his boarding

pass and got aboard the ship. Asking directions to Cabin B-346, assigned to him Monday by the passenger agent, Vincent settled in for what he hoped would be the beginning of a great adventure. Having written a letter to his mother at The Delineator office notifying her of his intentions to become a "free lance war correspondent," wearing his blue serge suit and carrying his stachel with an extra shirt and the latest Street and Smith "Frank Merriwell" novel, Vincent was excited and not a little apprehensive.

How did I feel? Yes, I was a little scared and my conscience did trouble me but I made appropriate excuses. I would pay the White Star Line their fare from the earnings that I would receive as a writer of stirring human-interest war stories. . . . What would Dr. Eliot, my former ethics teacher think about my actions, and more important yet, what would Teddy Roosevelt say? I could still hear his fierce admonition, "Why aren't you in school?" But he also said: "Don't flinch, and hit the line hard!" I was pretty excited inwardly.²²

In the second installment of his memoirs, written in 1984, Vincent gives a detailed account of his shipboard experiences and odyssey through England. Though his memoirs end with his departure for France in an attempt to join the French Army, a twenty-two page outline summary documents his wartime activities through his service with the 106th infantry of the federalized United States National Guard at Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina in 1917. However, the most complete record of his service in France in 1915 is contained in a manuscript copy of an unpublished book which Vincent wrote after his return to the United States in January

of 1916. In 1984 Vincent re-wrote the memoirs under the title "Would-Be War Correspondent." The second version is a more restrained, less self-glorifying account than Vincent's first attempt.²³

"Would-Be War Correspondent," though written almost 70 years after the fact, is a richly drawn account. Vincent depicts himself as an innocent pushing on regardless, though well aware of the risks to his reputation should he be caught in attempting to defraud the White Star Line. Vincent's "sick uncle in London" story, vaguely reminiscent of one of Huckleberry Finn's deceptions, seems to work in conversation with the fashionably dressed passengers at dinner. However, the frayed appearance of his blue serge suit and quick exit as the tipping plate was passed at mealtime must have caused suspicion. Always a humorist, Vincent notes that he almost welcomed a submarine attack.

Probably I was the only one who felt that being torpedoed would be a boon if one survived; at least I could account for my lack of personal effects and clothing.²⁴

His lack of a hat had, however, already been accounted for; it blew off into the sea while Vincent was observing from the promenade deck the departure of the ship's pilot.

Detained upon arrival in Liverpool by customs and immigration officials, Vincent escapes from the Continental Hotel on Duke Street and begins a cross-country trek to London. Impelled by the same drive to action that produced The Boys' Paper, Vincent notes that "the idea of some action made me

feel better at once, so I put on my clothes, left the little satchel now containing just laundry in the room and climbed out the window"25

After a short excursion on a freight train out of Liverpool, he decides that it would be safer to walk the rest of the distance to London. Likening himself to a latter day Dick Whittington, Vincent gets a meal of ginger beer and bacon sandwiches at a pub in Crewe after telling the owner that he was a Canadian on his way to join the forces. His patriotism so moves the people in the pub that they "force a tenner" on him. Vincent buys a loaf of bread and some cheese which he carries on the journey.

At Lichfield, he sleeps in a hayloft. Though his "teeth chatter," Vincent - "the perpetual optimist" - trudges on through the cold morning "repeating the tuneful melodies from Chin Chin" which he had seen in New York.²⁶ At Castleton, he makes friends with a storekeeper, is invited to dinner and entertains the family with stories of life in Canada and the States. Stopped by a policeman, Vincent becomes "William Pritchard . . . on my way t' London fer to jine tha army."²⁷ At Stone, he observes army recruits drilling and notices posters persuading "Young Women of the Empire" to encourage their "Best Boy to Join the Colors."²⁸ In Coventry, he meets four bicycling youths and is invited to dinner at the home of one of them, Dick Marsden. At the Marsdens, seventeen year old Katy Marsden takes a liking to Vincent and plays him "Alexander's Ragtime Band" on the

piano. Mrs. Marsden gives her opinion of the Germans who, she says "will not be satisfied until they see their flag over Buckingham Palace." The family agrees, however that "they'll get a thrashing instead."²⁹

Finally, obtaining a ride on a truck which is part of a military transport caravan, Vincent is dropped off in front of the Edgware Road subway station near London. He takes the underground for a tour of the city savoring the names of places he had only read about in books: Baker Street, Blackfriars, Waterloo, Paddington, Westminster, Oxford Circle, and Ludgate. After a week in the hinterlands, the Manhattan-bred youth was back in his urban element. Looking back on his first day in London, Vincent wrote:

After a lapse of over three score years, my accuracy in naming the underground stations that followed each other may be faulty . . . but I was eager to explore the imagined wonders of the largest metropolis on earth.³⁰

Interviewed in 1985 about his London experience, Vincent saw nothing remarkable about his ability to survive in the city. He said that he "smashed baggage" for money in Victoria Station and slept in the underground stations. Travel, he said, was easy since he was adept at eluding ticket takers on the subway.³¹ Finally, forced to seek more conventional lodging by a bowel accident caused by eating too many goose berries purchased from a street vendor, Vincent went to the Central Y.M.C.A. There he fell in with a friendly group of Australian soldiers who took him to the Royalty Theater

on Dean Street to see "Dennis Eadie in The Man Who Stayed at Home."³² That night, Vincent and his "digger" companions toured the Piccadilly district. The next morning, Vincent visited a recruiting station to enlist.

Vincent's plan was to join one of the crack regiments like "The Buffs" or "The Devil's Own." But the tough sergeant asked him sarcastically, "does your mother know your out, sonny?" Mortified by this, Vincent wondered if he would ever see active service. Commenting in his memoirs, he reflected upon his motives:

I didn't want to get into the war to kill anyone for I didn't have the instincts of a warrior, but the adventure of it would give me a first hand insight and exciting material to write about, just as though I had been a real war correspondent.³³

Sensing that he must "get out of London as quickly as possible" he decided to proceed directly to France via "the Continental Express for Folkestone."³⁴ Before leaving, however, he tried to reach Ambassador Walter Hines Page whom he had met while editing The Boys' Paper. This attempt to use "pull" failed when an embassy clerk suggested that Vincent follow the standard procedures to obtain a passport.

By seven o'clock the next morning, Vincent was at Victoria Station, and - by eight - he was sitting in a third class compartment full of British Tommies en route to battle. At the Port of Folkestone, Vincent bluffed his way onto the steamship by pretending to be a French youth whose father had already gone on board with his passport. Eluding a ticket

taker by following him around the ship, he recognized dime store magnate Frank W. Woolworth among the civilian passengers. He departed the ship at Boulogne-sur-Mer and proceeded to a local recruiting office where, posing as a French Canadian, he enlisted in the French army as a dispatch scout.³⁵

Looking back on his experience, Vincent later supposed that his failure to live up to expectations at school and a "desire to do great things" motivated him to "crash into" the First World War.³⁶ It is not a remarkable thing for a boy to dream of glory, but in Vincent's case his ability to execute a real plan toward that end is exceptional. His survival skills and durability at age 16 seems, by today's standards, epic. Yet, Vincent's was a hardy generation which had been strongly imbued with Rooseveltian values as well as a somewhat romantic view of manly service. Participation in The Great War was the generational benchmark of those born in the 1890's. If the greatest regret of some was "I Didn't Get Over," as in one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's stories,³⁷ combat service "Over There" was a searingly cruel initiation into manhood for others.

In Vincent's case, the war was both an opportunity to escape from the stifling routine of school and a call to glory. However, if he began his journey into war like an urban Tom Sawyer dreaming of glory, brass bands, and "memorable crusades,"³⁸ he would leave France humbled and deepened by what he saw. His six months in France would, like Huck

Finn's metaphoric raft, provide him with an excursion into mankind's heart of darkness. Like Twain's resourceful, foot-loose protagonist, Vincent left his adolescence behind. Despite his self-described optimism, he is somehow galvanized and touched by the inhumanity of the war. His experiences, always more significant to him than other sources of education, is fully attenuated by his wartime service. Seventy years after his French active service, Vincent remembered most vividly the men he had served with. One of them, his best friend Rene Dardenne, had been killed in combat leaving a young wife and infant son.

In summary, Vincent's service with the French began with his training in the Paris area in the early summer of 1915. From some reporters at the Paris office of The New York Herald, Vincent learned that while he was too young to join the regular French army, the French Boy Scouts were on active service doing certain military tasks. At Boy Scout headquarters, "near the rue de Faubourg St. Honore,"³⁹ Vincent enlisted and began a period of training. According to his 1917 memoirs, the scouts wore the regular Boy Scout uniform but performed non-combat duties such as Red Cross work, interpreting, and carrying dispatches. The boys were taught military discipline and received weapons and drill instruction. The French scouts were built on Lord Robert S. S. Baden-Powell's British model which was based on the tradition of manly service and ancient chivalric code.⁴⁰

After training, Vincent was assigned to the Amiens and Arras sectors as a dispatch courier with the 39th French infantry division.⁴¹ Billeted with regular infantry regiments, the scouts mingled with the soldiers and received the same pay, which Vincent noted increased from one cent to five cents per day during his service.⁴² Finally, Vincent and a group of scouts headed out from Paris for the front to evacuate some casualties to be brought to the Lycee Pasteur. Vincent's first reaction to the realities of war was subdued.

How clearly all the horrors of war were described on the faces of those poor wounded soldiers. What a story of pain and agony their eyes told One of the men we carried out was crying like a baby. It touched me ⁴³more than I can say. I had seldom see a man cry.

Other scenes from Vincent's wartime memoirs evoke the color and comradeship of young men serving together in a common cause. Like a similar scene from Erich Maria Remarque's classic All Quiet on the Western Front, Vincent described a group of soldiers on a troop train discussing why they fight.

A Canadian fellow had said that it was a war of tea against beer, or beer against tea - I don't remember which. He meant to imply that the conflict was between England and Germany. And upon our request, he gave us his definition of every important belligerent and neutral country. England, he told us, represents tea; France represents ice-cream; Russia represents caviar; Italy represents bananas. Beer is a symbol of Germany; Vienna rolls is a symbol of Austria. "And how about les Etats Unis?", I asked.

"They are noted for chewing gum," he replied.⁴⁴

Shelled near the town of St. Patrice, Vincent and his friend Gaston Diembre promised to stick "together and be still closer friends than before."⁴⁵ They also learned the code that common soldiers no doubt have learned since the time of Caesar, 'if others can stand it, I can stand it too; if others can do it, I can do it too, I'm not any better than anyone else."⁴⁶ After describing the bombed out city of Arras, Vincent echoes the futility of war. The men sing, "we're here because we're here, because we're here, because we're here . . . but as to the real purpose---who knew? Did anybody know?"⁴⁷

Once in his permanent billet near the front, Vincent observed that the "poilus" from the trenches are a breed apart.

We note at once their simplicity of talking. Trench life must have made them simple. Simple and cheerful. They were like children . . . laughing about trifles. They told awful stories amidst hilarious laughter.⁴⁸

Soon Vincent was delivering dispatches with his partner Rene Dardenne on a Peugeot motorcycle. His frequent visits to British posts in the area brought him into contact with the "Tommies" whose talk made him homesick. On a mission to the British headquarters, he saw Field Marshall Sir John French and was impressed by his simple khaki uniform in contrast to the decorative French officers' garb. He detailed the results of a baseball game which he instigated between his French scouts and some British soldiers. Relying on

his Canadian players, Vincent reported a 15 to 14 victory.⁴⁹ In one exciting assignment, Vincent delivered a dispatch via airplane and got a panoramic view of no-man's-land from the air.

During the late summer, Vincent reported that an offensive⁵⁰ was rumored. Expecting large numbers of German prisoners, the French increased the number of interpreters in the sector. Since scouts, who were bilingual, were eligible for this duty and since he was fluent in German - Vincent volunteered. Vincent "had this job for several weeks"⁵¹ but feared that he "had too much of a German accent"⁵² which made him appear suspicious to his superiors. After the "drive" lost momentum, Vincent returned to his old unit but discovered that Rene Dardenne had been killed in battle. Shaken by the loss, Vincent was soon transferred to a "colonial" regiment further south and bade farewell to his other companion, Gaston Dimpre. His memoirs reveal his sense of isolation and loss:

On my way south, I said to myself: Both are lost to me now - Rene and Gaston: the two best friends I had. How many air castles I built, and how often I had seen Rene and Gaston after the war, back in America with me. I felt their loss keenly - more than I can express.⁵³ . I never saw or heard from Gaston Dimpre again.

After serving for a time with the colorful French colonial unit, Vincent was wounded en route to another assignment. Knocked unconscious by an artillery blast, he awoke in a field hospital with shrapnel wounds in his left leg

and a broken right arm.⁵⁴ In his 1917 memoirs, Vincent claimed to have been treated at the English hospital at Dunkirk. He also spoke of falling in love with his nurse, Regina Graves, but this may have been an embellishment since he never spoke of this in subsequent interviews. What is supported by fact is that Vincent was arrested upon his discharge from the military hospital and charged with being a German spy.

His mastery of the German language had caused suspicion, but it was his delirious ramblings in German while in the hospital that placed him in jeopardy. His explanation of how he got to France without official papers further compounded his problems; Vincent wryly noted that the interrogating officer even observed that he looked German: "They even said I had a square head." Vincent was taken to the American consul in Boulogne, but received no help from the consular agent who spoke no English. Imprisoned with other suspicious detainees, Vincent spent three months at the "Hotel Militaire" at Boulogne until his release in late December, 1915.

While awaiting his court martial, Vincent met some fascinating characters in the military prison. Some, like him, were wrongly accused of espionage; others were real spies. One of them was a "Mysterious Johnson" who claimed to be the bastard son of the late Austrian Emperor.⁵⁶ Another was Monsieur Marshall who was accused of being the German spy responsible for the sinking of the Lusitania.⁵⁷ An

aristocratic Englishman who was mistaken for the chief of the German spy system, had an unlimited supply of gold sovereigns and ordered out for expensive meals and wine. As Vincent said seventy years later, "I had chow de luxe in prison because I was a friend of this guy."⁵⁸

There was also the case of Peter Theisen, a German spy, who asked Vincent to deliver a message to Count von Bernstorff, the German ambassador in Washington. Theisen wanted von Bernstorff to negotiate his release in exchange for the release of Burgomaster Adolphe Max of Brussels by the Germans. As Vincent noted:

If the deal did not go through, Max was to be shot. I guess Theisen thought he was a pretty valuable spy and that ~~the~~⁵⁹ the German government was eager to get him back.

After his eventual return to America, Vincent reported the overture to the Assistant U.S. Attorney, Harold A. Content, in New York City.

Vincent's return to The United States was finally secured after Secretary of State Robert Lansing was able to verify that the youth was indeed an American who had run away from school. Among the documents in Vincent's scrapbooks are telegrams from Robert Lansing to his parents and a French "Laissez-Passer dated December, 1915. A telegram from Secretary Lansing to Vincent's mother states that Vincent "sailed for New York on steamship Touraine" on December twenty-fifth.⁶⁰

In contrast to his voyage on the Adriatic, the trip on the Touraine was in steerage. Accompanied by five Spanish

laborers, Vincent must have reflected upon the meanness of his situation. He knew that there would be no welcome home parade for him. He was, despite his adventures, now nothing more than a school drop-out. His delight at entering New York Harbor was reduced by the indignity of having to pass through immigration inspection at Ellis Island. "Broke, tired, and hungry,"⁶¹ Vincent was lice ridden and downcast. He could not go home in that condition. For better or worse, Vincent was on his own in the town which had once considered him one of its most promising sons.

While his nine months in Europe might not constitute an official wanderjahr, his war service did mark a rite of passage. Vincent had planned an escape from school, and it had worked. His experiences in France had made him into a man by any traditional standard of measurement. He had been responsible to both his own principles and the higher calling of world events. There could be no turning back, no going home again. The rest of his life would be what he would make of it. As 1916 began, Robert Vincent might be down and out in New York City, but he was his own man.

CHAPTER V

THE ORIGINAL JOB-LANDER 1917-1919

Alone and broke, Robert Vincent must have faced the cold of January, 1916 with the realization that he could not go home, for a number of good reasons. He had failed to make a success of school, but more significantly, his war experiences separated him even further from his parents. He had not vindicated Grandfather Bloch's support in sending him to prep school. Thus going home to mother would be a tacit sign of defeat. As for his father's home in Boston, it was - he wrote - "the last place I wanted to go."¹ The hard fact was that Vincent had no home, except the city which he knew so well. The glory that he had sought in war eluded him, yet in Robert Vincent there were strong survival instincts.

Raising some money was his first priority, so Vincent walked "way downtown . . . to the French Consulate" near the Battery.² Showing the consul his laissez-Passer, he hoped to get some quick money to tide him over for the next few days. Yet, after telling him the story and answering dozens of questions about his experiences and the condition

of French towns, the consul gave Vincent a quarter and told him to buy himself a good meal.³

Disgusted, Vincent left the office but was approached by a man who must have listened to part of the conversation. The man was a reporter for The New York American, and he offered Vincent seventy-five dollars in cash for the story of his adventures in France. After proceeding to the newspaper office near the elevated trains at Pearl Street, Vincent related his tale. After talking for more than an hour and having his picture taken, Vincent received the agreed upon sum and went to the Bowery where he bought a new suit of clothes, ate an ample dinner, and purchased some "blue ointment" to combat his bad case of lice. As he wrote, "that night I slept at Fleischmann's Turkish Baths at Sixth Avenue and 42nd Street and steamed all the impurities of the old world out of me."⁴

Naively assuming that the newsroom would honor his request not to print the story until a later date, Vincent was surprised to pick up an edition of The American and see his picture on the front page under the headline "WARRIOR OF 16 BACK, FEARS SPANKING."⁵ Having assured his role as the prodigal son, Vincent might also have sensed that this publicity might someday have its positive benefits. Aware of the importance of self-promotion since his days as "the boy editor," Vincent was formulating plans for the future.

First there were some practical matters to attend to. Taking up lodging in the new Brooklyn Central Y.M.C.A., he

decided that he would not contact either of his parents for the time being. Next there was the matter of employment. Vincent obtained a job staining church windows for a company on East 13th Street.⁶ There were also the usual diversions of a young man recently returned from the wars. At the office of the United States Attorney, Vincent met a secretary named Flo Murray.

Vincent had gone to the office of Assistant United States Attorney Harold A. Content to report what he knew of the Peter Theisen spy case. While at the office, Vincent not only impressed Mr. Content with his story but charmed Miss Murray with whom he began a brief romance. Vincent visited Content later that summer when the attorney was at Flower Hospital with a hip infection. Letters from Flo Murray from this period include one coy post-script added to a typed thank you note to Vincent from Content for a book Vincent had brought him.⁷ In a letter to Vincent dated September 6, 1916, Miss Murray joked that Vincent is a "turncoat . . . serving in the French army and then working for a Dutchman."⁸ The reference is to the stained glass company which was owned by a German. The letter also gives some indication that Vincent had big plans. Miss Murray cautioned him not to "do anything reckless; if you take a studio on Gramercy Park, you'll be spending all your salary on rent."⁹

Showing real signs of becoming a man about town, Vincent soon gave up his Gramercy Park dreams and again returned to the war zone. As the German threat to allied shipping

spread to American ships, the merchant marine began to outfit some of their ships with gun crews. Vincent wrote the International Mercantile Marine Company about volunteering for a gun crew.¹⁰ However, on the 9th of September he shipped out as an assistant butcher aboard the S. S. Philadelphia bound for Liverpool, England. It is not known why he left when he did, though it was characteristic of Vincent to act on impulse.¹¹ Perhaps Miss Murray's solicitous letter of only three days before had given cause for concern.

Certificates of discharge¹² reveal that Vincent landed at Liverpool on September 18 and spent five days there before the Philadelphia sailed back to New York arriving on October 1. On the return trip Vincent was promoted out of the ship's cold storage to an assistant steward's job. While it is possible that adventure might have been the motivation for this brief period as a seaman in the U-boat infested North Atlantic, it is more likely that the White Star Lines had been dunning Vincent for the price of his unauthorized trip to England on the Adriatic the previous year.¹³

Upon his return from sea, Vincent resumed living at the Brooklyn "Y" and hired on as a copyboy on the night shift at The New York American, a Hearst paper.¹⁴ Always ambitious and perhaps cramped by his six dollar a week salary, Vincent told the story of his wartime exploits to his superior on The American, Mr. J. Willicombe. A letter of introduction from Willicombe to a friend on The New York World Sunday Magazine dated October 28, 1916 reveals that Vincent had

lost no time in polishing his promotional skills. Written only three weeks after Vincent had signed on at The American, Willicombe's letter outlines the story that his new copy boy had told him about running away to serve in France as a dispatch courier. Pointing out that "he might have a good Sunday magazine story" about these experiences, Willicombe even suggests that "if you cannot use the story you might have a better job for him around your establishment."¹⁵ Finally, attesting to Vincent's ability to make a good impression, the letter alludes to some of Vincent's recent creative writing.

He is an utter stranger to me excepting for the little while he has been around here and I am frank to say that he has made such a good impression on me that I would like to be able to help him get along. If you can do nothing else you might be able to advise him in the direction of getting rid of some of the stuff he has written; especially with reference to one story, THE HOUSE THAT JACK DID NOT BUILD, which seems to have merit.¹⁶

During the autumn of 1916, Vincent continued to work at The American and began to write the article he hoped would be accepted at The World. On December 21, a letter from John O'Hara Cosgrove - editor of The World Sunday edition - arrived. Cosgrove indicated interest in the piece and suggested that Vincent come to the editorial office to make "whatever alterations are considered necessary."¹⁷ Yet, Cosgrove was so skeptical of the tale, that he checked Vincent's credentials with a mutual acquaintance, Ray Brown, who had remembered Vincent from his Boys' Paper days.¹⁸

On January 11, Cosgrove wrote Vincent that "we are using the story, and after it is printed you can get the money for it."¹⁹ The money was, Vincent recalled seventy years later, to reimburse The White Star Line which was pressuring his family for payment.²⁰

Entitled "The Boy Who Played Hookey to See The War," Vincent's article is prefaced with an editorial comment that "this is the story of a healthy, ruddy-faced youngster who cared very little for school and a great deal about adventure."²¹ The piece is a straightforwardly written account of Vincent's overseas adventures, but its opening paragraphs reveal frankly what the boy had thought of school and what school and the adults in his life had thought of him.

When the war broke out in 1914, I was a high school student, and I used to day dream so much about what was going on in Europe that I got hopelessly behind in my studies. My teachers thought I was a dunce; my parents thought and acted at the same time. But I don't think I was as stupid as they considered me. I'll have to admit, though, that I was no shark at my studies, because I had always had the habit of thinking a great deal, and when a boy thinks, he generally thinks about something interesting, and I could never find anything interesting in the school books they gave me.²²

Published for its currency and human interest value, The World piece was also a public manifesto of Vincent's adolescent frustration. By today's standards, Vincent would be considered a classic underachiever or a "gifted" student unchallenged by the standard curriculum. However, in 1914 the boy was an incorrigible dreamer who had failed to face up to the demands of society to conform to the narrow dictates

of its educational system. Vincent's wartime odyssey was in large part a gamble to win acceptance both from his parents and the world at large. His article in The World was the final page in the frustrating story of his adolescence.

Still working as a copyboy and bored with a routine that was broken only by weekly trips to the residence of William Randolph Hearst to deliver weekly editorial copy, Vincent was looking for new opportunities and, frankly, a way to capitalize on the fresh notoriety from The World story. One day while passing Times Square and walking up Broadway, Vincent "lingered in front of the Astor Theater" between 45th and 46th Streets. Noticing a billing for a musical show called "Her Soldier Boy," he entered the theater. The placard outside the theater indicated that this was a war play starring Clifton Crawford. The cast included Beth Lydy, Adele Rowland, Al McWilliams, and John Charles Thomas. The music was composed by Sigmund Romberg.²³ Staged by the Schuberts, "Her Soldier Boy" was described in a favorable Times review as "a wartime piece . . . that proves to be one of the most enjoyable musical plays to pass this way in the last five seasons."²⁴ Filled with war songs like "Pack Up Your Troubles" and "Song of Home," the play evoked the growing American sympathy for the Allied cause.

Carrying The World story, Vincent entered the stage door and asked for Clifton Crawford. Told by his Japanese valet, Reo, that Crawford was on stage, Vincent showed him the story. Impressed, Reo introduced Vincent to the actor

after the matinee performance. That evening, he dined with Clifton Crawford and won a role in the play at a salary of twenty-five dollars per week.²⁵ Once again, Vincent - without portfolio or formal training - had "crashed in" through his gift of personal charm and ability to take risks. Using his war experience and playing the angle that there might be some publicity for the Schubert production in hiring him, Vincent offered his services to Crawford. As he remembered it:

"How many in your chorus has seen action overseas?" I asked Clifton Crawford. "Wouldn't you like to have a veteran just back from the war zone in France in the cast?"

And then I told him all about my experiences, asking Mr. Crawford to find a place for me in the show. He seemed to like me and promised to take me over to the Schubert offices to see Jake and Lee. The result was that I became a youthful Belgian soldier at \$25 a week.²⁶

It was a case of art imitating life. Issued a uniform and given the line "it is a sad thing for a mother to learn of the death of her son,"²⁷ Vincent soon began a routine of "two matinees and six evening performances" a week.²⁸ Affluent by his former standards, he enjoyed his life as an actor and struck up a friendship with the wardrobe attendant - Minnie Ellison - though he did not appreciate the attentions of some of the chorus boys.²⁹ The Schubert office, of course, sent forth a steady stream of publicity exploiting Vincent's connection with the play. Vincent was "named captain of the khaki-clad male singers" known as the Crawford

Guard. In another release Vincent was "painfully burned Saturday by an explosion of powder in the prologue piece."³⁰

While still playing in the cast of "Her Soldier Boy," Vincent was a volunteer in "The Friars' Frolic," an all-star variety show produced each year by the Friars' Theatrical Association at their clubhouse on 47th Street. The 1917 show was produced by Frank Tinney, star of the current hit, "The Century Girl." A headliner who did comedy and black-face humor, Tinney made in excess of \$3,000 per week during the peak of the vaudeville era.³¹ Although Vincent's role in "The Friars' Frolic" was small,³² he and Frank Tinney became friends. "Adopted by his wife, Edna," Vincent spent various weekends at Tinney's large home in Freeport, Long Island. There and at the LIGHTS club, an actor's country club near Freeport,³³ Vincent met many of Tinney's theatrical friends including George M. Cohan, Victor Moore, Harry von Tilzer, and Bert Leighton. Vincent noted that he was, to his annoyance, always introduced as "this boy, who's seen active service in France."³⁴

On one such weekend after the United States had entered the war, Vincent was present when George M. Cohan played a new composition which he had written to capture the new wartime spirit. This incident became one of Vincent's favorite anecdotes:

On one occasion I heard George M. Cohan seated at the piano in one of the club rooms, surrounded by an admiring audience, singing his new war song "Over There." Edna Tinney said she didn't like it, that it would never become a hit, there wasn't

enough variety to the melody and that it sounded more like a bugle call than a song.³⁵

Frank Tinney's interest in Vincent's war stories proved to be more than passing. On March 13th Tinney and Vincent signed a contract authorizing Vincent to write his memoirs with the financial backing of the comedian.³⁶ The contract called for Vincent to "veraciously [sic] narrate" his war adventures "in as interesting, graphic, forcible, and thrilling a manner and style" as he was capable of. Vincent would draw twenty dollars per week against future profits and was to have completed the book by June 12, 1917. Tinney's enthusiasm for the project was spurred by the recent success of Guy Empey's war book, Over The Top. For the next two months Vincent worked on the manuscript during the day at the Brooklyn "Y" while spending his evenings at the Astor Theater.

President Wilson's war declaration on April 2 hastened Tinney's anxiety over the project. On May 1, he wrote from Freeport, "of course Bobby, I do not expect you to do anything on the book if you're ill, but I do hope you'll get well and strong again for your own sake."³⁷ On May 13, he wrote to compliment Vincent on a "great chapter" and enclosed his check with news that he settled a contract dispute with the management of the Coconut Grove "for \$3,000."³⁸ From The New Willard Hotel in Washington, Tinney asked "what about that chapter you almost had finished a week ago?"³⁹ By June 25th, the deadline had passed by Tinney was still encouraging:

I shall certainly be glad that you're going to have the whole book finished by Friday (am I right?) of this week. . . . I really think you and I will make a great deal out of it - if we get it out quick before some American writes a book "My Experiences in France with an American army" . . . That is what we must beat Bobby ⁴⁰ and we will do it if we get the book out NOW.

Vincent finished the book by the beginning of July, motivated - perhaps - by his enlistment in the 23rd infantry regiment of the New York National Guard based in Brooklyn. As discussed earlier, the manuscript is a detailed account of Vincent's adventures in England and France. The account contains some discrepancies with later versions of the story. For example, Vincent wrote that he went to school in New York and then Boston, where he "flunked in all my exams" in February, 1915. Also, the ship Vincent took to Europe is the Arabic rather than the Adriatic, and his departure date is February and not June as in later versions.⁴¹

Obviously the work of an eighteen year old, the manuscript is filled with slang. The food was "punky." Vincent felt pretty "chesty." "Gee," Vincent remarks about his regretful purchase of the green gooseberries, "I was might sorry I made that investment afterwards."⁴² Yet, there are insightful glimpses into England at war with thoughtful, realistic descriptions of the passing scene. Vincent, for example notices the well-dressed London gentlemen walking quietly with their khaki-clad officer sons in a park.

There in early evening, fathers and sons were strolling; they didn't speak; each understood the other. I suppose both were content just to be

permitted⁴³ once more to walk side by side. Father and son!

Vincent's interior monologues are often effective, though sometimes fraught with superpatriotic cliches. Yet, as in this example, Vincent could be revealing and introspective.

Shortly I would be riding in just such a train, with a khaki uniform on, and brass buttons with a crown and puttees and everything else. I would be a "defender of Civilization! Me! Bob Vincent! Its a joke. My dad had always called me the most uncivilized human being he had ever seen. Well, I'd show him, after I was decorated up with Victoria Crosses⁴⁴ and Legions of Honor and that sort of thing.

The disapproving father-figure is a strong theme in this manuscript as it is everywhere else in Vincent's early life. A related theme in the manuscript is Vincent's evident anti-German feeling. While this is due, in part to the American entry into the war which took place while Vincent was writing the book, it is possibly more personal. Vincent opens the text with a negative memory of his childhood schooling in Europe.

I was nine years old when my folks went to Germany . . . I remember it well.

I remember the old school-house in Hamburg to which I was sent to learn the language, and the proud domineering school-master with his birch-wood rod. I distinctly remember the many times he used that rod to wake me up when I fell asleep at my desk. Also of the strict German⁴⁵ governess, I have not the sweetest recollections.

Later, Vincent has no problem identifying which side of his mixed heritage he is loyal to.

. . . several companies of the "London Scottish" passed by with their kilts and bagpipes. And they played . . . "The Campbells are Coming." It went right through me. My Scotch blood (if I have any) seemed to come out . . . I certainly wouldn't like to be one of a German regiment when the Scotch get after them⁴⁶

An anglophile all his life, young Vincent recognizes that England is "fighting Prussian militarism." He is impressed that in England, "everyone has the same thing at heart, everyone is a friend and a good comrade."⁴⁷ His need for acceptance is fulfilled. "It felt good to be with real men and with friends."⁴⁸

As we have discussed in a previous chapter, Vincent's account takes on a more serious tone when he reaches France. Vincent's juvenile search for glory gives way to descriptions of "poor mud-caked, lousy, bearded men" and "the Great Nightly Performance" of the bombardment. While serving in rear areas, Vincent gets forward enough during his dispatch duties to recognize the shallowness of his dreams. He tempers his dislike of the Germans realizing that "they were to be pitied . . . instead of being hated."⁴⁹

As the manuscript draws to a close, Vincent tries for both pathos and patriotism. Frank Tinney's exhortations to finish and his own appointment with the 23rd of Brooklyn pending, the ending seems stilted. After the death of his friend Rene Dardenne, Vincent learns that Rene has a wife and a child which he has named Robert. The likelihood of this is small since Vincent never discussed it in any of

his later accounts of Rene Dardenne. Rather, it appears to be an attempt at a kind of recognition scene in which Vincent is trying to bring home the pathos and senseless waste of war. His subsequent imprisonment as an alleged spy and ignominious return home, devoid of the glory he sought, is - however - quite effective. This does place Vincent's manuscript, on one level, in the mainstream of World War I fiction. The loss of innocence and the inevitable disillusionment of the protagonist may be found in a variety of war novels from Sigfried Sassoon's Memoirs of an Infantry Officer⁵⁰ to Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms.⁵¹

In a hurried denouement, however, Vincent undermines the tender believability of his memory of Rene Dardenne with a flag-waving barrage of patriotic cliches beginning with a paragraph of unabashed cheerleading for America, "the champion of Real Democracy . . . the hope of the world."⁵²

Go to it Uncle Sam, old scout, we're behind you
 . . . Come on, you boys out west; come on
 Southerners: Come on Alabama, come on Tennessee.
 Go to it! We've got to beat the huns. Come on
 you darkies from Carolina; come on you cow punchers
 from Texas . . . Come on Frisco . . . Illinois
 . . . Ohio . . .⁵³

Vincent concludes as the Statue of Liberty comes into view. He tearfully stands at attention and salutes. The book closes as he recites The Pledge of Allegiance.

On July 15, Vincent's regiment was scheduled to go to Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina for further training. Preparing to leave, Vincent left the cast of "Her Soldier Boy"

and was presented with an autographed copy of sheet music from the show. He had time to visit Frank Tinney's dressing room at the Century Theater on Central Park West. After the show, Tinney would entertain a variety of friends including Harrison Fisher - the illustrator, Leon Errol - the comedian, and Elsie Janis - later known as "the Sweetheart of the A.E.F." Vincent recalled that he met Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. at The Century and Joseph P. Tumulty, secretary to President Woodrow Wilson, who dropped by to learn the latest jokes to tell the president. Sometime, around midnight, Tinney and some of his entourage would go over to Reisenweber's restaurant where Vincent remembered meeting songwriter Gus Edwards.

Tinney soon informed Vincent that "some publishers had turned down the manuscript because new war books were getting too plentiful."⁵⁴ American boys serving overseas was no longer a novelty. However, near the Bedford Avenue Armory, a uniform was the current source of social status. Inoculations, drilling, and not a little trysting became routine for the citizen-soldiers as the departure date for the 23rd was moved back to August. On the 4th, Vincent took part in a "farewell stag" sponsored by headquarters company. The Evening World included Vincent in a caricature layout of "famous men in the 23rd."⁵⁵ Finally, after marching to Van Courtland Park where it encamped with other New York National Guard units, the Brooklyn regiment entrained to Camp Wadsworth. A snapshot of Private Vincent, taken by

his mother, on the train platform reveals a stocky, smiling soldier wearing puttees, a campaign hat and other doughboy equipment.

At Camp Wadsworth, the 23rd became known as the 106th infantry and was now part of the 27th division under the command of General O'Ryan. Vincent, who - earlier in the summer - had been turned down by the Marine Corps for defective vision, was assigned to the sanitary or medical detachment of the regiment.⁵⁶ Despite this, as a buck private, he was still subject to perform the duties of an ordinary soldier. For when the unit arrived in South Carolina, Camp Wadsworth was still largely nothing more than barren fields. Digging latrines was never a choice assignment in any man's army, but for Vincent the job was made worse by the ragging of a certain corporal Kreller. Vincent recalled that he "endured a string of discordant expletives" and finally threw his "shovel at him and ran off."⁵⁷ Vincent's fear of an early court-martial was put to rest when Major McClintock, perhaps still more in a civilian than a military mood, scribbled a note to Corporal Kreller: "Don't swear at this boy. Everyone do his duty without favor."⁵⁸ Soon the company street had taken shape, and the men of the 106th were being assimilated into regular army routine.

Army life agreed with Vincent, in fact he relished it. In a sense, Brooklyn had become his home and the old 23rd with its close associations and local esprit d'corps was an extension of that new found sense of belonging. In the

army, Vincent was an "insider" rather than the lonely outsider he had been at school. His scrapbooks are filled with mementoes of his days at Camp Wadsworth. Pictures of the company street, the latrines, tent life, and even the officers remind the observer that the National Guard was, and still is, as much a social club as a military organization. Vincent's old employer, Mr. Heinigke, from the stained glass business, sent a beautiful glass lampshade that Vincent attached to the center of their tent.⁵⁹ The Camp Wadsworth Gas Attack soon came into publication, and regimental boxing matches under the direction of former heavyweight contender Frankie Moran were held.

Though camp life was agreeable to Vincent he had not lost his ambition. He noticed the glamour of Division headquarters where his friend Neil Vanderbilt was a chauffeur to one of the staff officers.⁶⁰ There was, however, the social caste system of the organization to negotiate if Vincent was to rise about his lowly status in the division. National Guard units, particularly because of their regional flavor, had a pecking order that mirrored the civilian status of their soldiers. The officers of the 106th were inevitably professional men or socialites. Vincent later said that he wanted to become an officer because he coveted the leather boots of a second lieutenant, but it was more his urge to be at the center of action that motivated him to "finagle" a transfer to headquarters.⁶¹

Because he could type and take shorthand Vincent was able to obtain a transfer to the division headquarters troop. His first job was clerical assistant to Captain Wickersham, the Deputy Judge Advocate. As the summer passed, Vincent gained another assignment as clerk for Major John B. Sharpe, the head of the British Military Mission and a veteran of "The Buffs," the crack unit that Vincent had tried to join in 1915. Able to by-pass reveille, Vincent got along well with Sharpe although he found that his new boss was serious about opening the office at 9 o'clock. One day he found a laconic note on his typewriter stating, "our ideas of 9 o'clock do not coincide, JBS."⁶²

Among the camp diversions of that autumn was an interest in hypnosis and telepathy. Vincent arranged a session with members of the headquarters staff and the British military mission. His friend Pvt. Gerry Young, a master of auto-suggestive hypnotism performed some strange feats which included giving a post-hypnotic suggestion to a certain enlisted man that he would believe himself to be the race driver, Barney Oldfield. An unforeseen circumstance was that the enlisted man happened to be the chauffeur for the Assistant Chief of Staff. As always, Vincent was near the center of action.

On November 19, Vincent was ordered back to his medical unit by a new commanding officer who took a dim view of his men being under detached service. Vincent, however, used his influence with Major Sharpe to obtain a permanent transfer to headquarters. Vincent had a good billet with amenable

comrades who included Frank Moran, the company boxing instructor, with whom he shared a room. Moran was dating the film star Pearl White of "The Perils of Pauline" and generally spent evenings visiting her in Spartanburg.⁶³ There is a photograph of Moran in Vincent's scrap book inscribed "to Bob Vincent, Private Third Class, To the young Svengali and hero of the Marne."⁶⁴ Vincent, too, had taken up hypnotism.

By January of 1918, several of Vincent's influential friends in headquarters company were promoted to second lieutenant. Wishing to join Neil Vanderbilt, Sam Florsheim and the others as a commissioned officer was not easy since Vincent had no social "pull." With a well-conceived plan, however, it could be done.

Obtaining a ten-day furlough under the pretext of going home to have his eyes checked, Vincent decided to go directly to Washington to try for an appointment to Officer Candidate School. To finance the train fare, Vincent sold his Corona typewriter. Having let Major Sharpe know of his plans, he obtained an enthusiastic letter of introduction to the head of the British Military Mission in Washington. Having full rights to his manuscript, Vincent had tried to send it off to Maxwell Perkins of Scribner's for publication, but Perkins sent a polite letter of rejection.⁶⁵ Vincent would not need the typewriter in the near future.

The paper trail of Vincent's week in Washington in January of 1918 is impressive. His scrapbook attests to his diligence and nerve. In rapid succession Vincent saw

Senator James W. Wadsworth, Jr. of New York, the head of the British Military Mission, and the Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr. Roosevelt wrote a note of endorsement:

I shall be personally very glad if something can be done for this young man, Mr. Vincent. He has had real experience and has made good.

F. D. Roosevelt⁶⁶

The best the War Department could do was to approve Vincent for Officer Candidate School starting in three months.⁶⁷ Always impatient, and perhaps fearing that he would lose the appointment when his commanding officer discovered his scheme, Vincent went to the White House to call on his old acquaintance Joseph Tumulty. Tumulty, President Wilson's secretary, suggested that Vincent try for a direct appointment as Army Field Clerk. Field Clerks were considered commissioned officers and wore the officer's uniform though not an insignia of rank. Tumulty's letter to Assistant Secretary of War, Benedict Crowell was enough. Orders were cut to discharge Vincent from active service and reappoint him an Army Field Clerk on January 30.⁶⁸

Upon returning from his furlough, Vincent was summoned by the division adjutant and asked who his friend was in Washington. Vincent "had the temerity to reply, 'Woodrow Wilson, sir'."⁶⁹ Having been issued his coveted officer's uniform, Vincent reported to the headquarters of the Port of Embarkation at Hoboken, New Jersey. Shortly, he was transferred to the Overseas Casuals Troop at Camp Merritt where

Vincent did a variety of work including translation and intelligence work in assisting his commander Lt. Colonel D. G. Berry, a West Pointer. In April, after obtaining a favorable endorsement from Berry, Vincent again applied for a commission. However, an adjutant at the Port of Embarkation of whom Vincent had run afoul refused to forward the request to Washington for approval. Despite a second request from Berry, Vincent's promotion was turned down. In frustration, Vincent resigned as Army Field Clerk on May 29, 1918.⁷⁰

Using the excuse that he wanted to re-enlist in the regular army, Vincent had another plan in mind. Using his old technique of "crashing in," he went to Washington early in June and visited Mr. Frank L. Polk at the State Department. Vincent had known Polk years before when he was Collector for the Port of New York. Polk suggested that Vincent apply for the Consular Service which needed bright young men not presently in the military. Using this connection Vincent obtained an appointment to the Consular Service from its director, Wilbur Carr, on June 11. His assignment was perfect; he was to be a clerk in the American Consulate General at Marseille, France. His compensation was \$1,600 a year, more than four-hundred dollars higher than his Field Clerk stipend.⁷¹

Vincent was issued a diplomatic passport on June 18 and soon sailed for his assignment in Marseille. During the summer and autumn, Vincent performed his duties at the embassy, but he found time to write some of his old friends

with the 106th who were preparing to go into action on the western front. He also did some informal interpreting for army and navy clients at La Maison Aline on Ventomagy Street.

As Vincent wrote:

Madame Aline ran the fanciest and most elaborate brothel in Marseilles. I did not patronize her girls but spoke with them and tried to interpret for their army and navy clients in order to improve my proficiency in the French language.⁷²

As the fall offensive picked up momentum, Vincent heard from his friend Captain Nils P. Larsen of the 106th fighting along the Hindenberg Line.

Our regiment has made a reputation for itself as you will, no doubt, hear in time All the docs are O.K. except _____, and he had had one of those hospital vacations since our battle in Belgium. A German fragment departed with one of his fingers and cut another. We expect him back soon.⁷³

What Larsen did not mention was that ten days before at Busigny he had been gassed while ministering to many of his men during an attack. Larsen, a physician in Vincent's old medical detachment, was promoted and later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroism in this action.⁷⁴

Vincent, too, had been wanting to get closer to the action, but on November 11 he was alone at the American Consulate in Marseilles when armistice was declared. That afternoon, a noisy, jubilant crowd gathered in front of the Consulate. As the ranking American on duty, Vincent appeared and said "a few words in ungrammatical French."⁷⁵ That night the town celebrated the end of four and a half years of war.

Vincent joined the throng, drinking sparkling burgundy and accepting the gratitude of thankful Frenchmen.⁷⁶

On November 17, Vincent received a letter from his friend, Don Howell - an assistant to Frank Polk at Department of State, thanking him for the gift of a French charm. Howell urged Vincent to "ask for an assignment to the Peace Conference" where "a man of your service in the army and your qualifications should be able to do good work there."⁷⁷

With his usual timing and friends like Howell, Vincent was transferred to the American Embassy in Paris as a special attache. On December 13, Vincent was on duty when President Woodrow Wilson arrived, and on December 17 he was assigned to assist with the ambassador's grand reception for Wilson. In Vincent's scrapbook, there is the original seating chart for the dinner which Vincent himself made up. Among the dignitaries present were President Wilson, President Poincare, Generals Pershing, Bliss, Foch, and Joffre.⁷⁸ Vincent's primary duties were decoding the many messages which poured in prior to the meeting of The Supreme War Council in January.

"The Boy Who Played Hookey to See the War" had come a long way by December of 1918. His friend Vice Consul John Tracey put it succinctly in a letter of December 7 from Marseilles:

You sure are the original "job-lander." And in almost the same sentence I charge you to land me one too. . . . Old Wilson gets around this week and so will I. I will have to wait until tomorrow to spring the intelligence to Papa Gaulin because your letter put a bit of a surprise into us all, we expect to hear of your being the ambassador himself soon.⁷⁹

Vincent had an ability to go over the head of his immediate superiors, yet somehow was able to remain in their good graces. This was evident in his dealings with the 106th after his trip to Washington and is seen here in a friendly note from Alphonse Gaulin, the Consul General in Marseilles to Vincent, now in Paris.

Glad to hear that your trip is proceeding most satisfactorily and I hope that you will enjoy it to the end.

If you could find in one of the Anglo-American grocery shops . . . a few pots of cranberry jam, both Mrs. Gaulin and myself would appreciate it greatly.

With best wishes,⁸⁰
A. Gaulin

Another insight into Vincent's reputation for sidestepping normal channels is a note to Vincent from his former Marseilles colleague, James P. Davis, who at the time of this 1922 letter was stationed in Bangkok.

I was surprised and delighted to hear from a chance reference in a Christmas card from Tracey, that you were still alive. I could have sworn that you would have got yourself killed before 1920.⁸¹

With no long range career plans in either the military or diplomatic services, Vincent had not mortgaged his future in his attempts to get into the center of things. Impatience and high risk gambles had paid handsomely for Vincent. He had made it to Paris in time to witness history being made. His personal collection of encounters with famous and influential men was becoming impressive. His personal charm and

initiative had created opportunities ordinarily available to only the powerful or privileged.⁸² Jack Tracey, Vincent's envious co-worker at Marseilles in a series of letters in December, wrote his friend for news of another opening in the Paris Embassy.

Damn your old hide - kid - I read your letter to Mr. Gaulin - good stuff. You get me a job now or I'll sell your ⁸³right jewel. This town is obnoxious to me now!

A later letter from Tracey indicates that the Consul-General had become tired of young embassy assistants conniving for choice assignments in Paris. Mr. Gaulin turned down Tracey's request for transfer. Tracey's letters also give the impression that life for a young Consular Service official after the armistice was not grueling duty. On December 12, he writes: "Mr. Gaulin is sore at me . . . I am getting on famously with Pretty Myrtle - I stayed all evening in her dressing room."⁸⁴ On December 18, Tracey wrote:

I am having an awful life here with all these permissionnaires Americaines that I meet, old friends on their way to Nice. Last night I went to bed early - about 12, night before that a quarter past six of the morn, night before that four thirty but all perfectly innocent. There are two English girls here who are really nice and it is a great pleasure to talk ⁸⁵to them. I'm off this French girl stuff . . .

Yet, with all the attractions available to a single young American living in post-war Paris, Vincent again did the unpredictable. Perhaps, homesick for New York and ready for other challenges, Vincent departed on the troopship

Leviathan in early January.⁸⁶ While waiting in Brest for the ship, Vincent learned of the death of his old mentor, President Theodore Roosevelt. As twenty-seven nations were assembled in Paris to design a lasting world peace, Roosevelt's death signalled a fitting denouement to a way of life that had really ended with the outbreak of World War in August, 1914. As Vincent and others of his generation mourned their beloved T. R., the troopships were already bringing home some of the almost four million young men who had been mobilized for the war. The benchmark of Vincent's generation, the young men and women for whom Theodore Roosevelt meant so much, was what one writer has called "the quintessential modern experience," the violence of The Great War.⁸⁷

Yet, in Vincent there was no lingering sense of the wasteland and no disillusionment. As one of his officers at Camp Wadsworth had reported of him, he "tended to look on the bright side of life."⁸⁸ In January of 1919, Vincent's generation was "riding a crest of patriotic fervor."⁸⁹ Like everyone else, Vincent intended to ride it for a while himself to enjoy for one brief moment the fruits of victory.

After returning to New York harbor under more auspicious circumstances than in January of 1916, Vincent visited the offices of The Brooklyn Eagle to deliver messages from his former comrades in the 106th still stationed in France. With a keen eye toward public relations, Vincent praised the Eagle's Paris Bureau for "the work they have been doing

for the boys in Paris." In an article based on his visit, also illustrated by a handsome picture of Vincent in an officer's uniform, he told of the reception given to President Wilson at the French Embassy.

He believes that he is the only person in America who was present at that auspicious occasion. Dismissing the presence of the most important diplomats of the world at the reception as an unimportant matter, Vincent spent much time describing how much more sincere Wilson looked than did the hundreds of suave European diplomats.⁹⁰

Vincent also reported the exploits of Captain Nils P. Larsen who was awarded the D.S.C. while awaiting shipment home with the other members of the 106th. In a separate clipping, Vincent - identified as "Lieut. Vincent who was attached to the French Embassy in Paris" - also reported that Major General O'Ryan "has frequently said that the 106th infantry, the old Twenty-third of Brooklyn, is the best regiment in the Twenty-Seventh Division."⁹¹ The story also reported that Vincent brought "many souvenirs of the battlefield including helmets, and the order of the Iron Cross which he captured from a prisoner."⁹²

Soon, Vincent had obtained a job himself on a newspaper as a cub reporter for his old paper, The New York American. With the return of the 106th to Camp Upton where the medical detachment remained on duty processing the remaining draftees, Vincent rejoined his former outfit. He was granted a commission as a second-lieutenant in The New York National Guard on April 3, 1919.⁹³ Enthusiasm and esprit de corps in the

106th ran high in the spring of 1919 as it reorganized after its brilliant record in the engagements of the previous year. In the flush of victory, the first issue of the regimental newspaper, SPUNK, called young men and old veterans "to join its colors and to become part of those who lived splendidly, died gloriously and won a fame that will endure forever."⁹⁴ Encouraged by his friend Larsen, Vincent once again attended drills at the Bedford Street Armory. With no war to fight, however, interest waned. By the end of the year other matters beckoned.

In early April, Vincent received a letter from Larsen with notes on an upcoming Farewell Party at the Hotel Brevoort for the demobilized 106th. Vincent would cover the story for his paper. Larsen, a thoughtful and moving correspondent in all his letters to Vincent, told of the hardships of the trenches and the "wet, gloomy hours" of the "boys who really planted the red cross rose in no-man's land." Of the sixty-five men in the medical detachment sent overseas, only thirty-four had finally mustered out unscathed by wounds. There would be several vacant places at the party for "those who stayed on in the poppy fields of" Belgium and France. The dinner would be a "last fond memory - a last good-bye before" the men "tackle the even harder battle of daily trying to become better citizens."⁹⁵ In rejoining his old unit, Robert Vincent had finally entered the company of heroes.

CHAPTER VI

BETWEEN THE WORLD WARS: ADVENTURE AND APPRENTICESHIP 1919-1942

As Robert Vincent was preparing to leave Paris in January of 1919, the Prohibition Amendment was nearing the necessary two-thirds ratification to become a federal law. On January 29, the Secretary of State proclaimed that ratification by the states of the twenty-eighth amendment to the Constitution would take effect on January 16, 1920. Prohibition, the appointment of communist-hunter A. Mitchell Palmer as Attorney General, and growing isolationist opposition to President Wilson's League of Nations policy marked the political and social landscape which greeted Vincent and other veterans. The immediate post-war climate was also marked by a series of labor strikes and a general retreat from the reform era of Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson's New Freedom program. As one historian put it, "the revolt of the American conscience was over."¹ F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote that this was "a new generation dedicated more than the last to a fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faith in man shaken"²

If America, on the brink of the twenties, had abruptly lost its "impulse to make over the nation and the world,"³

Robert Vincent was in a full retreat with the rest of his generation. Having left the army and the diplomatic service, the former boy editor was turning to more worldly pursuits. Working on the New York American as a reporter, Vincent took extension courses at Columbia University and settled in a converted houseboat drydocked near the Harlem River. Bachelor life included parties with a variety of friends including "Doc" Nils Larsen, artist Peter Hunt, Broadway actor Leon Errol, and Brazilian businessman Juan Oliviero Ford. Since his first recording of T. R. in 1912, Vincent had been fascinated with technology. In 1920, he devoted himself to the study of radio which was then becoming popular. Vincent soon achieved "ham" status by building a small transmitter and took the nickname "BEVO" after a brand of prohibition near-beer. True to his practice of "crashing-in," he interfered with WJZ's commercial wavelength and was reprimanded via landphone by a radio inspector.⁴ Among his small circle of radio enthusiasts was Laurence Marsham Cockaday, a young research engineer and later one of the pioneers in Naval electronics.⁵ (In 1927, Vincent married Cockaday's younger sister, Viola.) The radio circle included Cockaday's brother, Victor Hall, who was the leader of a popular radio singing quartet, The Rollickers, which later had a half-hour radio program and cut several records for Edison and Columbia.⁶

New York's diverse theater scene provided Vincent with access to his favorite Irving Berlin melodies at the popular Music Box Reviews. Vincent also attended Ziegfeld's Follies

where he enjoyed such entertainers as W. C. Fields, Joe Howard, Fanny Brice, and Will Rogers. Vincent was so taken with Marilyn Miller's rendition of the smash hit song "Who?" that he saw Jerome Kern's show Sunny three times. Vincent's social circle included Jack Mara, Flo Ziegfeld's personal assistant. Mara's son, Tim, later the owner of the New York Giants football team, would spend weekends on Vincent's houseboat at its summer berth on the bay at Port Washington, Long Island. Vincent's press pass was a handy entree to such events as the Carnegie Hall debate between Wayne B. Wheeler of the Anti-Saloon League and Clarence Darrow, who took the liberal side.⁷ Vincent had, in fact, taken more than a journalistic interest in the Prohibition question. He perceived the Volstead Act as a foolish law which had been forced upon society by a few reactionary fanatics. That Prohibition had become the law of the land by Constitutional amendment, did not deter Vincent from a new and potentially dangerous career in what he called "purveying spirits." By 1921, Vincent had joined the growing number of Americans who saw a potential fortune in supplying the public with liquor.⁸

Sixty years later, recalling his days in the liquor business, Vincent said that smuggling was "a national pastime" in the twenties and something which displayed "the temper of the times."⁹ He added that the government agents were not always "ministers" in the performance of their duties and that he knew of at least one prominent New York judge who was an "importer" of spirits. Manhood inevitably involves

a challenge to the ideals of youth, and, for the wartime generation, the world would never again stand at moral attention. The repressive hypocrisy of Prohibition and the retreat into insularity and isolationism signalled both the end of reform and the advent of President Warren G. Harding's "return to normalcy." Never an organization man, Robert Vincent perhaps saw in bootlegging not only a way to make a decent living but also as a protest against a tide of conformity and false virtue.

Starting small with his friend George Schleich, Vincent used his press pass to gain the confidence of a customs official at Rouse's Point, New York. Purporting to be writing a feature on the success of the agent in capturing liquor smugglers from Canada, Vincent learned valuable intelligence about the customs operation. Later he set up a series of Canadian contacts who would purchase bonded liquor from the Canadian government outlets. Weekly "runs" were taken north in his customized Wills Sainte Claire roadster which had a large storage compartment installed behind the seat.¹⁰ A sheaf of addresses and notes, written in euphemistic language, remains in Vincent's files attesting to the range of his clients. The names range from an S. F. Rothchile at the Ritz-Carleton Hotel to Reverend A. P. Duffy of Holy Cross Church on W. 42nd Street.¹¹ Vincent also claimed to have supplied such luminaries as Jerome Kern, the composer, and John McGraw, the manager of the New York Giants.¹² Having learned that the customs agents would shoot, Vincent valued

the speed of the Wills Sainte Claire. On one occasion, he mistimed his border crossing and was fired upon by the guards.¹³

That rum-running could be dangerous is indicated in a letter from Schleich in upstate New York in the summer of 1922. He wrote:

Well Bob, it sure happened. The jews got caught; they went over the mountain trail and went the same way I went with them the first time; and they got caught near Tupper Lake.¹⁴

Vincent, too, had his share of close calls. While leaving a sacramental wine store in Manhattan where he had gone to obtain a supply of liquor for a reunion of the 23rd of Brooklyn, Vincent and another ex-soldier were confronted by the notorious prohibition agent Izzy Einstein. Einstein asked them what was in the sack, but Vincent's partner tossed it into the car and drove away thus preventing their arrest for lack of evidence. Vincent knew both Einstein and his burly partner Moe Smith on friendly terms, but he had no doubt that they would have arrested him in a moment had they ever found him with illegal liquor.¹⁵

Propelled by ambition and the prospect of vast profit, Vincent organized a group of investors in the summer of 1922 to obtain a freighter of Scotch whiskey to be transhipped via the free harbor of Hamburg to just outside the ten mile limit off the coast of the United States. There it would be sold to the so-called "mosquito fleet" which was thriving along "rum row." Vincent got the idea after several visits

to the rum fleet anchored off Long Island where he learned that Scotch, which was purchased for seven dollars per case in Europe, was being sold to the operators of the "mosquito fleet" for as much as one-hundred-eighty dollars per case. There was an obvious fortune to be made, if the capital could be raised to mount a shipment.

As always, Vincent relied on persuasion, and not a few affluent friends who agreed to back his venture. Always a tireless promoter, once he had set a goal, Vincent soon formed a "syndicate." The June 14 letter from Schleich indicated that Vincent was expecting to take the first of two European trips necessary to set up the operation later that summer. Armed with a substantial letter of credit from the Harriman National Bank, Vincent and his friends, John Dodd and Victor Hall, booked first class passage on the Cunard liner "Berengaria." Vincent recalled the details of the operation:

Our immediate destination was Glasgow, Scotland where we registered at the St. Enoch Hotel. I had met Rupert Dawson in France during the war. His father was Peter Dawson, the well known Scotch whiskey distiller . . . Buying alcoholic beverages for ultimate consumption in America was not an unusual practice. The Scotch were pleased at this rush of business but they were not permitted to ship liquor directly to a friendly dry country. Accordingly, it was the custom to ship the cargo to the large free harbor of Hamburg, Germany. A free harbor is a section of land where goods are stored in bond, duty free, for further transshipment to other destinations. Therefore we contracted for somewhat over ten thousand cases of certain brands of Scotch, averaging about six dollars a case of twelve bottles.¹⁸

Vincent reported the results of his first trip and returned hurriedly to Europe where he stayed at the Atlantic Hotel in Hamburg while he co-ordinated details of operation. There he was contacted by a former German army officer, Major von Stulpnagel. Stulpnagel who was now running boatloads of liquor to Finland which also had a prohibition law.

Vincent recalled that:

The conversation was constructive, well worth the lavish breakfast he had ordered, for he gave us helpful information about chartering ocean-going schooners, compared prices of various types of beverages, and soon we became friends.¹⁷

Vincent promised to visit Stulpnagel's son in Vienna where Vincent was going to see Grandfather Bloch who was hospitalized with what would ultimately be his last illness. Major von Stulpnagel would later become a general in the Wehrmacht and Hitler's military commander in the occupied city of Paris.¹⁸

Vincent's trip to Vienna via Berlin where he conducted some transactions at the Deutscher Bank gave him a close view of conditions in post-war Germany. The severe inflation made the U.S. dollar a desirable currency, and its buying power was substantial. Returning from Vienna to Hamburg on the train, Vincent met a shabby but dignified passenger named Paul R. von Pachner. A former admiral in the Austrian Navy, von Pachner became Vincent's choice to supervise operations aboard the schooner contracted to deliver the shipment of liquor. Finally, the shipment was ready for delivery

in early 1924. As Vincent noted, the inflationary rate for chartering the ship came to about "eighty-five cents a case."¹⁹ The crew came from Hamburg and Bremen. While still secretive, over 60 years later about the total profits of the operation, Vincent noted that Admiral von Pachner received ten thousand dollars for his efforts.²⁰

Financially secure, Vincent returned to New York after overseeing the distribution of the shipment to the "mosquito fleet." He invested in several "blue chip" stocks and rekindled his interest in radio and sound recording. Vincent's previous dealings with Wall Street had consisted of a prank undertaken during the summer of 1921. Vincent had made a bet among some friends at Camp Wohelo, Maine that he would capture a bear cub to have dance with the young debutantes at the camp. With Jim Hadgraft and George Schleich, Vincent drove to Aroostock County, Maine where they captured a small cub. Driving back with the cub caged on the running board of their Dodge touring car, the trio was interviewed by a Boston Globe reporter after driving to the Globe city room where the cub did considerable damage.²¹ In Manhattan, they took the bear to the brokerage firm of E. F. Hutton. Vincent enlisted the help of a margin clerk in getting the cub smuggled onto the floor of The New York Stock Exchange where the bear ran amuck. Having successfully mocked the current "bear" market, Vincent was arrested and taken with the bear to the Old Slip Police Station. There the bear defecated on the floor in front of the sergeant's desk.

Vincent later continued the pasquinade at Mayor John F. Hyland's office where he presented the cub to the mayor after the animal partook of the mayor's luncheon sandwich and broke his glasses. Hyland took the meeting in good humor, however, and accepted the bear for the Prospect Park Zoo in Brooklyn.²² Dunned by the Maine Fisheries and Wildlife Department on August 21, Vincent refused to pay the twenty-five dollar fine on the grounds that his was a Canadian bear that had wandered across the border into Maine thus not qualifying under Maine's conservation laws.²³

Vincent's adventures during the twenties exhibit his highly tuned sense of humor and ingenuity. This was the era of fads and follies, but Vincent's activities run deeper than "wonderful nonsense." The child in him had been repressed, perhaps, by the strictures of his upbringing. For the rest of his adult life, Vincent maintained a sense of fun along with a benign anti-establishment outlook. He continued to "collect" encounters with famous people but often recalled an ironic or off-beat aspect. His memory of Herbert Hoover from the Paris Peace Conference was that the envoy's shoes squeaked.²⁴ At Carnegie Hall, Vincent volunteered to be hypnotized by French psychologist Emile Coue. Coue's auto-suggestive maxim - "every day, in every way, you're getting better and better" - was becoming a national motto, but Vincent failed to be hypnotized. Coue announced that his subject was "deficient in proper concentration."²⁵

On a trip to Florida during the winter of 1921, Vincent and Schleich financed the excursion by obtaining the services of barnstorming pilot Bob Moore. Moore flew Vincent to Bimini where Vincent arranged to purchase thirty cases of bonded scotch from the captain of a rum ship called "The Sea Gull."²⁶ Obtaining the cargo later at a rendezvous on the Miami River, Vincent and his partner transferred the liquor to the hidden compartment of the Wills Sainte Claire. To avoid customs inspection of the return trip to New York on a Clyde line ship, Vincent purchased an alligator and strapped its cage to the back of the car. The shipment arrived safely on the Hudson River Pier and the alligator, after causing a commotion at Gansvoort Market, was presented to the Aquarium near the Battery.²⁷

In 1924, after his European trips, Vincent decided to return to Florida to dabble in the speculative real estate market. The so-called "binder business", in which a small deposit was advanced against the future appreciation of the parcel of land, was widespread. Even ex-Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, whom Vincent saw conducting an open air Bible class, was extolling the virtues of Coral Gables real estate.²⁸ While waiting for the land investment to increase, Vincent obtained a job as a reporter on the Miami Illustrated Tab, a Vanderbilt newspaper.²⁹ Assigned to the drama desk, Vincent was praised by editor La Verne Collier for his work on picture assignments. The binder business, however, failed when Vincent's equity on a large parcel of

land in Coconut Grove was lost when the developer defaulted. In the subsequent aftermath of the Florida real estate collapse, even the Miami Tab went out of business.³⁰

As Robert Vincent approached the age of thirty, he had not yet discovered his life's work. While he had more than satisfied his desire for travel and adventure, he did not have a profession or a career.

It was only after his marriage to a young divorcee, Viola Quimby, on June 29, 1927³¹ that his talents began to take the shape of a sustained direction. Viola Marsham Quimby was an intelligent, clear-thinking woman who had known Vincent since the early 1920's when Vincent was a member of a group of radio enthusiasts which included Viola's brothers. Recently divorced from RCA executive, Jay Quimby, Viola was attracted to Vincent's unpredictable wit and free-spirit. A strong woman of sure conviction and a talented homemaker. Viola Vincent provided a secure base of operations for Vincent during a fifty-seven year marriage. Viola had turned down an opportunity to attend Smith College during World War I to stay home with her mother in the absence of her brothers who were serving in the United States Navy. A superb cook and a perceptive manager, Viola Vincent crafted a homelife for Robert Vincent that he had never had as a child. Tolerant of his restless nature and energetic pursuit of projects, Viola seemed to be the perfect foil for Vincent. She did, however, insist on one thing after their marriage. Vincent must leave the liquor business.

As a result, Robert Vincent made a move which brought him into the infant field of sound recording. Through his old friend Charles Edison, Vincent went to work for the recording division of the Edison laboratories. Throughout the twenties, Vincent had continued to pursue recording as a hobby adding to his collection of vintage recordings of the voices of famous personalities. The Edison job was an opportunity for Vincent to add to his technical knowledge of recording. It also put him into contact on a regular basis with old Edison hands like Walter Miller and Bill Hayes whose experience with Edison went back to the earliest days of sound recording in the 1890's. At Edison, the more mundane tasks of his job like cataloguing and filing data from record sessions, was enhanced by working in an environment that represented the virtual birthplace of the sound industry.

While he did not undertake his pioneering restoration work on the early Edison wax cylinders until after he had left the Edison laboratories, Vincent discovered a mission. Not only would he make sound recording his profession, but he would eventually undertake a quest of resurrecting and re-recording some of the earliest and rarest Edison cylinder recordings. In effect, his Edison years were an apprenticeship in a field which was so new that he was able to learn from its pioneers. The special gifts that Vincent brought with him included a acute sense of timing, an innate love of social history, and an attention to detail honed by years of newspaper work and hustling on the streets of New York. In time Vincent

would become not only the first but the best "sound archivist" in America."³²

Shortly after his successful invention of the foil cylinder phonograph in 1878, Thomas Edison called attention to the historical capabilities of the phonograph. He wrote:

It will henceforth be possible to preserve for future generations the voices, as well as the words, of our Washingtons, our Lincolns, our Gladstones, etc., and to have them give us their greatest efforts in every town and hamlet in the country upon our holidays.³³

The phonograph, however, evolved into a medium for commercial entertainment which had a profound effect upon the culture at large but its influence was essentially musical. The role of the phonograph in historical preservation of voices was a secondary function of the new medium. Edison, in attempting to publicize his invention made several experimental wax cylinders by direct dictation in the early 1890's. Some of the earliest cylinders included a recording of the sound of the actual bugle which was blown at Balaclava in 1854 sounded by a survivor of The Charge of the Light Brigade, Kenneth Landfrey at Edison House, London, on August 2, 1890. Other recordings included messages by Florence Nightingale, also recorded in 1890, and a message to America from British statesman William Ewart Gladstone. These and later recordings by showman P. T. Barnum, actress Sarah Bernhardt, and others were never duplicated and languished in the Edison vaults for decades until Vincent re-discovered them and transferred them to modern discs.³⁴ During his Edison apprenticeship,

Vincent realized that historical voice collecting was a field that he had unto himself. After years of unfocused endeavor, he had regained the direction of his boy-editor days. His desire to be at the center of things and his interest in historical personalities could be brought together. Sound recording could place him on the "inside" once again. If he mastered his craft well, perhaps history would even come to him.

It would take Robert Vincent several years, however, before he could bring together all the elements of his new-found field. The stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent decision by Edison to leave the recording business in 1930 left Vincent unemployed along with ten million other young Americans. With all of his liquor business earnings tied up in plummeting investments like New York Bond and Share, Vincent turned his attention to the immediate matter of survival. With a family, now including his young son Kenneth - born in 1928, he would have to fall back on his innate resourcefulness to earn a living. Yet, in the face of The Great Depression, Vincent found himself well equipped for economic survival. Fifty years later, Vincent recalled the early 1930's as a time of improvisation and resourcefulness. Bing Crosby's recording of E. Y. Harburg's lyric "Brother Can You Spare a Dime" may have been Vincent's favorite depression anthem, but he did no panhandling himself. Sustained by his hustling instincts and sense of humor, Vincent viewed the Great Depression as a personal test.

From the time he left Edison until he established his own sound and recording studio in 1935, Vincent worked at a variety of jobs. The Vincents' comfortable life in suburban Pelham Manor, New York was uprooted, but Vincent devised a business selling pies to the Briarcliff Girls School in Westchester County. To house their growing trade, Vincent rented a large mansion near Briarcliff Manor for fifty dollars per month. Viola Vincent's delicious meat pies and other specialty items brought in enough business so that they hired several female helpers. For over a year, the Vincents ran a day and night shift producing baked goods that Vincent delivered in their Buick sedan which was outfitted with pie racks. Finally in 1931, the Emigrant Savings Bank informed them that the mansion was sold. The pie business was closed, and the Vincents moved into an apartment in midtown Manhattan.³⁵

After the failure of a candy business, Vincent did recording work in the studio of Hazard E. Reeves. Later he worked as a housing inspector for the City of New York and was employed by the National Recovery Administration as a labor compliance adjuster. Records show that Vincent worked with the Complaint Investigation Unit of the Works Progress Administration in New York from August 1 until late October, 1935. His superior found him "outstandingly capable in writing clear and concise reports" and "showing admirable investigative ability."³⁶ He added that Vincent was "a clean cut young man, inclined to be optimistic and look(ing) at the

brighter side of things."³⁷ Vincent's sense of humor (and, perhaps, his insecurity about a lack of a college degree) is evident in his N.R.A. application form where he listed the "Ysaye School of Journalism" on his educational record.³⁸

For a brief period during the 1932 presidential election, Vincent was employed at Roosevelt campaign headquarters in the Biltmore Hotel. There, he worked in the office of F.D.R.'s campaign manager James J. Farley. It might be assumed that this experience played a role in Vincent's acquiring the National Recovery Administration job.

During his employment with the Reeves studio at 1600 Broadway in the early 1930's, Vincent learned the practical side of the recording business. Complaining later that Reeves' thirty dollar a week paychecks often bounced, Vincent nevertheless gained invaluable experience in cutting masters on the awkward transcription equipment then in use before the advent of tape recording.³⁹ Later, he modestly said that all he knew about sound recording in those days could be picked up in fifteen minutes by "a smart kid today." However, Vincent's reputation for quality production soon became solid in New York media circles.⁴⁰

Despite his N.R.A. work, Vincent had - since his Edison days - intended to go into the sound business for himself. Finally, by late 1935, he had stabilized his financial condition enough to establish his own sound and recording studio. Calling it The National Vocarium, Vincent set up headquarters in a penthouse suite in "La Maison Francaise" at Radio City.⁴¹

The 610 Fifth Avenue office became a combination staging area, production facility, and archive. Vincent's plan was to integrate his growing collection of vintage historical voice recordings into a business which would provide not only the usual recording services but also would take a leading role in the preservation of the earliest relics of the sound industry. The importance of Vincent's collection cannot be understated since at that time almost no one in the recording industry was concerned with historic preservation.

Reflecting upon his studio days in New York, Robert Vincent said that he "wished he had been more of a businessman and less of an idealist."⁴² What Vincent meant was that his interest in sound recording focused on the historical uses of the medium rather than the commercial. If this sounds contradictory when viewed next to his profit-oriented liquor business, it should be stressed that Vincent - above all else - was a "self-actualizing" personality.⁴³ He defined himself in terms of projects and the completion of them. Once a goal was completed, it was set aside in favor of the next big project. The liquor business had an allure, a challenge. It was dangerous and somewhat romantic. It also satisfied the anti-establishment urgings in Vincent's character. Yet, once he had left "bootlegging" and had lost his profits from it in the stock market crash, Vincent happily moved on to whatever was next.

Yet, in truth Robert Vincent had not gone into bootlegging as a warrior against Philistinism. He fully expected

to get rich. When he did not, he was not unhappy. That, along with a skill at mythmaking, was his charm and his virtue. It is important to any understanding of the man to understand Vincent's ability to put a noble, honorific face on everything he did. Vincent, thusly, went into sound restoration for mixed reasons, not the least of which was the profit motive. However, his pride and creativity soon made this new career another call to glory.

The sound and recording business, then, was not just a new way to make a living; it became a calling, a mission. While his old employer "Buster" Reeves quietly went about building a conventional recording business that emerged a few years later as an established corporation, Vincent kept Vocarium small. Comfortable with a one man show, Vincent captured the quixotic and less profitable restoration market.

While performing free lance work for advertising agencies and doing regular jobs like recording the Standard Oil stockholders' meetings, Vincent continued to add to his collection of records. He haunted estate sales to look for old cylinders and competed with other collectors like Jack Caidin of The Collector's Record Shop.⁴⁴ Several trips out to West Orange, New Jersey to Walter Miller's home paid off for Vincent when he discovered several original Edison experimental wax cylinders in his basement. Vincent borrowed them and re-recorded them electrically on a dubbing device that he and Frank L. Capps set up. Capps had a laboratory on 49th Street in New

York and custom engineered special playback styli for Vincent as needed.

Transferring these historic cylinders to discs became Vincent's obsession. As he noted in 1970, "I spent most evenings and weekends on the historic record collection."⁴⁵ He ran the income-producing activities of Vocarium Studios during business hours and worked after hours as a "sound archeologist"⁴⁶ discovering rare recordings and improving their sound. Typical of his late night labors was the session in which he completed the dub of the Landfrey bugle call. As Vincent recalled:

Actually, it was . . . in 1935 when I first came upon this priceless relic in the cellar of Walter H. Miller (formerly director of the Edison Recording Division) at his home in South Orange, New Jersey.

That same night, some of my friends and I worked for hours at the studio in New York to grind the proper sapphire stylus and make a filtered, electrical duplication on disc of this historic cylinder record. It seemed rather spooky, at about 3 a.m., to listen to the loud speaker play back an unbelievably clear reproduction. We felt like sound archeologists and celebrated the feat by going to an all-night drugstore for chocolate sodas.⁴⁷

Photographs of Vincent from this period reveal his fascination with his new role. Peering over his recording equipment, his face illuminated against a dark background, Vincent looks like a wizard intent upon his experiments. His recording machine used for electrical dubbing is inscribed with the slogan "Hello Posterity." The equipment looks impressive and complicated. Vincent's emulation of Edison is obvious.

The process, however, by modern standards was not difficult. An electrical pickup was connected to an old cylinder machine by a special armature that Vincent designed. The machine was supplied with a variable pitch electrical power source. The pickup was fed into a mixer which enabled Vincent to equalize and filter the sounds of the cylinders which were dubbed onto an acetate or glass base transcription disc by means of a cutting head. The trickiest part of the operation was the selection of the proper pickup stylus which Vincent determined by means of a microscope and which was custom made by Frank Capps at his 49th Street laboratory.⁴⁸

In fact, Vincent owed a great deal to Walter Miller, an experienced veteran of Edison's studio, who became Vincent's mentor. Like the editors and publishers of his Boys' Paper days, Miller provided Vincent with first-hand knowledge. Without him, Vincent could not have obtained much of the rare material which made up the core of his collection. It was, however, Vincent's own idea to re-record and improve the sound of these relics. Together, Vincent and Miller worked out many of the details of the project. Yet, it was Vincent's vision and organizational abilities which brought together all the elements. As he proved in The Boys' Paper and later in the V-Disc project during World War II, Vincent could not only dream but could deliver.

In later life, Vincent spoke of his "desire to halt the fleeting moment, to give those who come after us a more intimate understanding of the men and women of our own time

. . . ."49 The quest to collect and preserve historically significant recordings was becoming Vincent's obsession during the thirties but the more mundane affairs of running a business occupied his time too. Vincent turned to radio as a potential moneymaker by producing a series of transcribed programs. His location in Radio City placed him in contact with network stars like Fred Allen and the coterie of actors like Kenneth Delmar (Senator Claghorn of Allen's Alley) and Santos Ortega (the voice of Admiral Byrd on Adventures With Admiral Byrd) who provided voices on several of the popular sustaining series.⁵⁰ Vocarium Studios was often called upon to provide reference material for the British Broadcasting Corporation which also had its American headquarters in Rockefeller Center. Vincent also provided historical material to the March of Time staff and The Columbia Workshop, a CBS dramatic series. Beatrice Kay, a singer who specialized in songs of the 1890's, used Vincent's collection to expand her repertoire when she became a regular member of The Gay 90's Review, a nostalgic musical variety series on CBS in 1941. MGM Studios obtained Vincent's recordings of the voice of Thomas Edison for Spencer Tracy to study when he was cast in the film, Edison the Man.⁵¹

Vincent's first experience with radio consisted of a venture with Norman Ober into "man-on-the street" interviews which they sold to commercial stations. Ober was a cousin of the distinguished radio writer Norman Corwin whom Vincent also knew. Later, Corwin introduced Vincent to a young songwriter named Earl Robinson who was trying to obtain a

Guggenheim Fellowship. Vincent recorded some of Robinson's original material on discs which helped Robinson get the grant. Robinson subsequently became a hit, and the composer remained a close friend of Vincent's.

In 1936, Vincent met a German Catholic priest named Father Paul Schulte. One in a long series of Vincent's offbeat acquaintances, Schulte had been a pilot in the German air force during World War I. After his ordination, he founded MIVA, The Association for Modern Transportation Facilities in Missionary Districts. Schulte had written a book called The Flying Missionary⁵² and had enlisted Vincent to do the sound production on a film about his adventures. Sensing a project in the making, Vincent suggested producing a radio series which would "make Schulte as wealthy as Father Coughlin," then notorious through his radio pulpit attacks on the Roosevelt administration. Schulte's flying missions in West Africa and Alaska would provide the basis for scripts which Vincent would write and produce. The dramatized series would be distributed to radio stations via sixteen inch transcription discs.⁵³

While not a great financial success, Wings Over The World provided Vincent with valuable production experience. The partnership also produced several favorite anecdotes for Vincent including a story about their escape from a burning Ford coupe in the Holland Tunnel. Some nitrate film stock in Vincent's trunk caught fire, and Schulte ignobly fled on foot fearing an explosion while Vincent was left to

extinguish the blaze with his sports jacket. Schulte subsequently returned to Germany leaving Vincent with the vague suspicion that the cleric was a Nazi spy though this was never substantiated.⁵⁴

In 1938, Vincent originated an idea for a radio series based on the voice actualities in his collection. Called Voices of Yesterday, the series was transcribed on sixteen inch plastic discs and was distributed by the Harry S. Goodman advertising agency of New York. The fifteen minute programs were dramatically scripted to tell a story leading up to the actual recording. In the manner of classic radio, Voices opened with patriotic orchestra theme music and a stentorian voice announcing ". . . thanks to the inventive genius of Thomas Alva Edison and through the marvels of modern science . . . the voices of the great, long silent, actually speak again" ⁵⁵

Vincent's actors for the scripted dramatizations included Kenneth Delmar, later famous as Senator Claghorne on the Fred Allen program. The recordings feathered in the series included the Edison experimental cylinders and newer discs by such figures as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Will Rogers, Admiral Robert E. Peary, and King George V. Voices of Yesterday was syndicated to over one hundred stations. Letters to the Goodman agency from local sponsors indicated a favorable response. The Carr Liggett agency of Cleveland, Ohio reported that "this . . . dignified program . . . is actually exciting - a combination very difficult to find." ⁵⁶

Business was brisk for Vincent as his reputation grew. Publicity, through Vincent's radio appearances on programs like Famous First Facts on station WOR and Martin Block's Make Believe Ballroom on WNEW, brought in additional business from advertising agencies and free lance work. No one else was doing restoration work on old cylinders, so people with rare old cylinders came to Vincent. Deems Taylor, the noted music critic, came to Vincent's penthouse studio with a cylinder of his own voice made in 1887.⁵⁷ Vincent had Frank Capps make a special stylus for it and dubbed it for Taylor. He kept a copy for his own collection. Often relatives of the great came to hear recordings of their loved one. These included Woodrow Wilson's daughter, Hope Davis - daughter of Richard Harding Davis,⁵⁸ and Garret A. Hobart Jr. - son of President William McKinley's first vice president.⁵⁹ Vincent would often make a copy of the recording free in exchange for a recorded "message for posterity" by the visitor. Customarily, as in the case of the widow of President Benjamin Harrison, Vincent was cordial. However, when Helen Frick - the United States Steel heiress - called on him with a cylinder of her long-dead two year old sister it was different. Mrs. Frick, a Roosevelt-hating Republican, turned Vincent's portrait of Eleanor Roosevelt face down on his desk saying, "Do you mind? This woman nauseates me."⁶⁰ Vincent agreed to make her recording, but tripled her fee.

The National Vocarium also undertook the job of re-recording the famed Mapelson cylinders.⁶¹ The International Record

Collector's Society was issuing 78 rpm releases of the early twentieth-century opera recordings. Vincent also issued a series of voice 78's from his own collection on the National Vocarium label. Releases were similar to the Voices of Yesterday format with an anecdotal lead-in to the famous recording of a voice from the past. Releases included Captain Robert Bartlett reminiscing about his old commander, Admiral Robert E. Peary; Professor William Lyon Phelps of Yale introducing the voice of his friend James Whitcomb Riley; and Dr. Claude M. Fuess presenting President Calvin Coolidge.⁶¹ Celebrities like Tallulah Bankhead, the actress, came to Vincent's studio to record advertising spots. A young singer fresh from Nashville, Tennessee arrived one day to record demonstration discs. Her name was Dinah Shore, and she would soon be featured on NBC's popular Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street. These contacts would prove invaluable later when Vincent needed talent to record on V-Discs.⁶²

Vincent was also busy polishing his skills as an after-dinner speaker. Using his collection, Vincent scheduled a number of engagements based on the format of the Voices series. The concept relied on Vincent's ability to personalize the character of the great personage whose voice would provide the punchy climax to the anecdote behind the recording. The centerpiece of the presentation was his own 1912 recording of Theodore Roosevelt. Newspaper stories about Vincent's activities furthered his image as one who had "kept the faith" in Edison's mission to use the phonograph as a means of

preserving history for posterity. Typical of these stories is one in the Bridgeport Herald from Sunday, December 11, 1938:

Searching in the dusty attics, browsing through forgotten files . . . of the Edison offices, Vincent slowly and painstakingly assembled a collection of voices which might never have been heard from again were it not for his efforts.⁶³

Time magazine featured a story about Vincent and Voices of History in its April 10, 1939 issue:

Last week, thanks to 20 years of rummaging by an enthusiastic Manhattan hobbyist named Robert Vincent, every town and Hamlet within range of 34 local radio stations in the U.S. and several in Australia, might have heard the voices that Edison and others recorded speaking scratchily from the past . . . the old recordings recapture moments calculated to stir the memories of oldsters and give youngsters shivery earfuls from beyond the grave.⁶⁴

Another Vincent radio production resulted from his association with Admiral Richard E. Byrd, the explorer of the South Pole. Byrd was between expeditions in 1938 when he was seeking a New York base of operations for his writing and lecture activities. A private man, Byrd had contacted the management of Rockefeller Center to discreetly arrange office space for him. They, in turn, asked Vincent if he would mind sub-letting one of his extra rooms in his suite in "La Maison Francaise."⁶⁵ Vincent had obtained a favorable lease on the large penthouse suite for fifty-dollars a month. Now, he shrewdly sublet Byrd the extra room for the entire amount. Byrd and Vincent liked each other immediately, but

Byrd - no piker himself - surprised Vincent by running an advertisement in Program magazine designating Vincent as his agent for a series of lectures entitled "Antarctic Adventure."⁶⁶ For the next two years, Vincent served as Byrd's unpaid assistant. His duties included booking engagements, driving Byrd to local appearances, and taking care of his sled-dog Rickey.⁶⁷ In return, Vincent enjoyed Byrd's company and was appointed to the post of "Chief Recording Engineer and Archivist of the United States Antarctic Service."⁶⁸

In a very real sense, Vincent had "collected" another famous friend. In his collection, there is a disc recording of a telephone conversation between Vincent and Byrd who was on tour in Zanesville, Ohio. The subject of their conversation was an upcoming guest date for Byrd on the Fred Allen radio show. Vincent cannily recorded both the Byrd conversation and the subsequent call to Mark Hanna, Allen's representative in New York. The conversations document Byrd in an informal moment and reveal an insight into the radio booking business. Byrd remarks that the October 15th conflict is "just too damned bad." Vincent informs him that "its a good fee . . . five-hundred dollars" and then gets Hanna to agree to a new date on October 22nd.⁶⁹ Always the archivist, Vincent then made a transcription of the Allen show which fetured Byrd in an inane skit with Allen, Portland Hoffa, and comedian Kenny Baker.⁷⁰ Listening to the entire sequence of recordings almost fifty years later, one gets an eerie insight into the world of radio circa 1940.

Working in Radio City must have been a heady experience for Vincent. The Rockefeller Center complex was the hub of the radio and advertising industry before World War II. It was inevitable that Vincent would produce a series based on Byrd's Anarctic adventures. Typically, Vincent did not crack the network establishment. Rather, he used the same formula - with better material - that he had with Wings Over the World. Preferring the freedom of an independent operation, Vincent wrote and produced twenty-six fifteen-minute programs entitled Adventures With Admiral Byrd. Completed in 1941, the series starred Santos Ortega as Admiral Byrd.⁷¹

Each program opened with the dramatic sound of a polar blizzard wind and the tapping of a telegraph key. Byrd himself read the introduction to each adventure which would be entitled "Alone With Death," "The Devil's Graveyard," or "An Episode From Advance Base." Once again the series was marketed by the Harry S. Goodman agency which provided substantial public relations exploitation including the offer of miniature penguins autographed by Byrd and "live husky dogs" bred in Wonalancet, New Hampshire and offered for sale to Byrd fans.⁷² While no threat to The Lone Ranger and The Green Hornet, the programs were entertaining and professionally produced. The series circulated widely but failed to gain wide appeal, perhaps because World War II was turning public taste away from peace-time heroes. A contract dated February 10, 1942 gives Goodman the option to purchase additional programs from Vincent upon demand.⁷³ However,

Vincent's entry into the United States Army later in 1942 effectively ended the series.

A profile of Vincent appeared in the May 17, 1941 edition of The New Yorker magazine. Its publication marked Vincent's "arrival" as the pre-eminent voice collector. Documenting his career as a "fairly well-known brat," author Barbara Heggie recounts what had become the canon of Vincent's life including several small historical inaccuracies.⁷⁴ His struggles to establish a permanent home for his voice collection, and his expert opinion of several famous voices are recounted. Heggie elicits Vincent's theory that voice and character are interrelated. "There are certain vibrations that help me to tell what a man is like," Vincent says. His advice to the Republicans after the 1940 election is "get a man with a voice."⁷⁵ The overall theme of the New Yorker sketch is that Vincent, "an apple-cheeked, bright-eyed little man in his early forties" is an original who "leaves the breakfast table at nine in the morning and may not be home from the studio until after midnight."⁷⁶

This portrait of Vincent in mid-life reveals the extent to which he had absorbed the traits of his heroes. Described as "happy, if almost alone, in his hobby," Vincent strikes a pose as a lonely wizard pursuing his quest against all odds. Significantly, he flirts with the touchy subject of his family by making a self-deprecating remark that his younger "well-educated brothers . . . regard him as a black sheep."⁷⁷ A suggestion of pain is struck in Vincent's words: "They

think I'm juvenile."⁷⁸ In effect he was, but in a finer sense than he may have realized. Vincent, the mature man had not lost his boyish enthusiasm for his heroes. The lonely boy from a broken home who "used to play the family gramophone and wish . . . that he could have heard the voices of Alexander the Great, Mary Queen of Scots, and other characters from history"⁷⁹ had - in a sense - wrapped himself up in the security of his hobby. The New Yorker profile validated the first half of Robert Vincent's life. In recounting his early dreams, youthful adventures, and quixotic projects, the article was an important token of his acceptance. He was now an "official" New York character, a man with a mission, and "about the best man in the business."⁸⁰

As America embarked into World War II, Robert Vincent was about to end one phase of his life. The war would present him with both his biggest challenges and his greatest opportunities. As he reached middle-age he would find himself well-prepared to undertake the projects that would win him lasting fame in the recording business.

CHAPTER VII

"V-DISC" VINCENT 1942-1946

As America approached its entry into World War II, Robert Vincent enjoyed his reputation as one of the best sound engineers in New York. The 1941 New Yorker profile created new interest in his work. One of the interesting jobs which materialized in 1941 was the recording of a testimonial dinner for Irving Berlin given by the National Committee for Music Appreciation. The event was to honor Berlin for his composition "God Bless America," which had become an unofficial "second national anthem" after its introduction by Kate Smith on her Armistice Day radio broadcast in 1938.¹

The song expressed the patriotic sentiments of an uncertain nation as the inevitability of war threatened Europe. Yet, in a larger sense, the success of "God Bless America" represented the new manifest power of mass communications. Radio made Berlin's song a hit as it was also bringing the European situation into focus via network news broadcasts. Hitler's speeches were beamed into every home so that his voice was as familiar to American listeners in the late 1930's as that of, say, Clem McCarthy announcing the latest Joe Louis heavyweight championship fight.

With the resumption of the selective service draft in 1940, a large sector of the popular entertainment field turned its attention to the impending buildup for war. Sentiment, romance, small-town values, and democratic icons found their way into jukebox hits like "Dreamsville, Ohio", films like Frank Capra's "Meet John Doe", and big band remote broadcasts like Glenn Miller's popular Chesterfield program. By the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, it was evident that mass communications and the power of the American popular culture would play no small part in supporting the war effort. The strength of radio, film, and the recording industry would not only be used for propaganda purposes but also to sustain the morale of those in uniform and on the home front. The armed forces and such agencies as the Office of War Information would require the services of the skilled artisans of the media. After December 7, filmmakers, radio producers, script-writers, actors, directors, and engineers would build an unprecedented government sponsored information and morale machine. As the new year of 1942 passed, Robert Vincent felt restless as he pondered what role he would play in this effort.²

Pearl Harbor Day found Vincent at work in his Radio City studio finishing some projects. Hearing the first CBS news bulletins of the attack, Vincent quickly warmed up his 16 inch transcription turntables and recorded the fast-breaking news flashes. Remaining in the studio for the next forty-eight hours, Vincent collected a variety of airchecks of

history in the making. These recordings remain today in the National Voice Library as a graphic cross-section of the immediate impact of war on the national consciousness.

Four decades later, Vincent recalled somewhat hyperbolically that his "blood boiled" at the Japanese attack.³ A more realistic assessment was his December 17 conversation with his sister Ellen and her husband Arnie who both worked for The New York Times. Referring to the Times layout of Pearl Harbor pictures, Vincent remarked, "I don't feel much like a war, Arnie."⁴ Vincent was a patriotic man, but the memory of his experiences in France in 1915 must have tempered his initial emotional response to the event. Predictably, Vincent wanted to get into action quickly. To that end, shortly after New Year's, 1942 he proposed to tour American military installations along the Atlantic Coast on behalf of the USO. Vincent's mission was to capture the sounds of the new citizen army "at work and at play" and to make a series of "living letters" from servicemen to their families back home.⁵

The "living letters" project lasted for about six months until Vincent's entry into the army in July of 1942. The tour lasted until March and covered major bases as far south as Eglin Field, Florida and included the Marine Barracks at Parris Island, South Carolina and naval installations at Charleston, South Carolina. In addition to recording scores of "living letters," Vincent made transcriptions of army talent shows, dance bands, and informal off-duty events.

The recordings captured the sounds of a farewell dance for a Marine unit bound for the Pacific, a G.I. trumpeter named Benny Benak from Pittsburg imitating Harry James, and a southern soldier crooning his own country lyric about leaving his girl to fight Hitler. These paper discs, now transferred to tape, are valuable sound snapshots of the American soldier in a simpler, more innocent time.⁶

While in South Carolina, Vincent called on composer Lillie Strickland at her home in Charleston and recorded several discs of the writer of "Lindy Lou" singing her own material. He also "crashed in" on the estate of novelist Somerset Maugham and prevailed upon the noted writer to record a message to American troops on behalf of the USO.⁷ As always, Vincent was happiest when engaged in a new project. Typically, he augmented USO financing with his own funds, automobile, and sound equipment. Vincent was altruistic but also recognized that the USO tour might open other doors for him in joining the war effort.

Upon completion of the USO tour, Vincent received an invitation from Eleanor Roosevelt to visit the White House. Mrs. Roosevelt had been aware of Vincent's "living letters" and wanted him to bring his playback equipment and some historical recordings to play for the president and his guests. The event was a luncheon held on Sunday, May 24, 1942 and was reported in Mrs. Roosevelt's "My Day" column on the following Tuesday. She wrote:

. . . the group who lunched with me had the pleasure . . . of hearing recordings made by Mr. Robert Vincent. These recordings, which Yale University is preserving for the future, will be most interesting historical documents.

With the co-operation of the USO, Mr. Vincent has visited many of our army camps. He has recorded letters for many of our boys and sent the records home so the recipients⁸ may hear the voices of the boys they love

Mrs. Roosevelt also noted that Vincent played a recording of Earl Robinson's cantata "as sung over the air by Paul Robeson and the NBC chorus." Also, Vincent played a recording of his own 1912 Theodore Roosevelt cylinder which Mrs. Roosevelt notes "sounded absolutely natural." Vincent, later, remembered that President Roosevelt excused himself after dinner and did not listen to the recordings. Mrs. Roosevelt invited Vincent to stay the night in the residential quarters. He left for New York after breakfast the following morning.⁹

The reference to Yale University in the "My Day" column concerned a plan that Vincent had worked out with Bernard Knollenberg of the Yale library to house Vincent's collection¹⁰ in the Sterling Memorial Library in New Haven. A New York Times article on Thursday, August 20, 1942 outlined the proposal in which Vincent would become curator of the collection. Knollenberg had learned of Vincent's preservation efforts through the publicity surrounding the New Yorker profile the previous year. Before his enlistment in the army, Vincent was able to transfer a large number of historical recordings to discs which were shipped to Yale. However,

because of his army duties and the wartime priorities for building space at Yale the project never reached fruition. Documents in Vincent's files indicate that there was an active plan to house the collection at New Haven, and Vincent was officially appointed curator every year from 1943 to 1948.¹¹

During the summer of 1942, Vincent was busy furnishing "program material for the Office of War Information" from his Radio City headquarters.¹² He also was attempting to enlist in the United States Army. Using all his connections, the "original job-lander" offered his services to the Special Services Division of the Army Service Forces. Friends like Emil Corwin of The Blue Network wrote letters of endorsement, while Vincent used the telephone to track down an assignment.¹³ On June 25, he recorded one such conversation with a Major Bolton. Having been turned down by a Colonel Edward Miller on Governor's Island who is quoted as not "having any need of any damned recordings," Vincent took his case to Bolton who suggested another contact.¹⁴ Eventually, in July, Vincent was contacted by Major Thomas H. A. Lewis of the Radio Section of the Information Services of the Special Services Division, Army Service Forces. Lewis, husband of film star Loretta Young, was looking for technical officers to organize the New York office of the Radio Section which maintained its headquarters in Los Angeles. As Vincent recalled:

I was asked to join the newly formed Radio Section . . . whose job it was to produce and transcribe entertainment radio programs to be broadcast to

our troops overseas. . . . I accepted the commission as 1st Lieutenant, was designated as technical officer and station in New York.¹⁵

Vincent received the appointment on July 29, 1942. A telegram of congratulations from Major Lewis arrived on July 31. Vincent's wife Viola took over management of Vocarium Studios for the duration of the war.¹⁶

At the time of Vincent's enlistment in mid-1942, the table of organization of the Army Service Forces was reaching the final stage of its evolution. In July, 1940 a Moral Branch (Adjutant General's Office) was created under the command of General James Ulio, the Assistant Adjutant General. In the branch were two sections: the Radio Section originally commanded by Captain Gordon Hittenmark and the Recreation and Welfare Section which included a Music Section which was commanded by Captain Howard Bronson, a former member of the John Philip Sousa band. In the summer of 1941, the Morale Branch became the Morale Services Division under the command of General Frederick Osborne. In March 1942, the division was renamed the Special Services Division and was assigned to the Services of Supply which in mid-1942 was designated the Army Service Forces.¹⁷

In joining the Radio Section, Robert Vincent became a part of the greatest military morale effort in history. The Radio Section, which became the Armed Forces Radio Service in 1943, was responsible for broadcasting entertainment and information programs to American and Allied troops in all

parts of the globe. As Richard Sears notes in V-Discs: A History and Discography:

In April 1942, offices of the Radio Section were established in both New York and Los Angeles. The New York office was organized for program production, liason with other Army units, and procurement of material and personnel, while the Los Angeles office was designated as program and production headquarters.¹⁸

Initially the popular Command Performance, Jubilee, and G. I. Jive programs were produced in New York, but by June 1943 the Los Angeles office had become the primary production center for radio programming. This was due in no small part to major Lewis' connection with the Hollywood Victory Committee and former association with many well-known radio programs through his position as Vice President of the Young and Rubicam Advertising Agency.¹⁹

In New York, some of Lieutenant Vincent's duties included the preparation of transcribed commercial radio programs which were shipped via 16 inch 33 1/3 rpm discs to military radio stations and installations overseas.²⁰ These programs minus commercial messages, were rebroadcast or used on camp public-address systems. However, by the summer of 1943, the Radio Section was receiving several requests for current popular music on phonograph records. As Vincent noted in a monograph on his role in the V-Disc project:

By the summer of 1943, quite a few requests for current phonograph records reached our Radio Section Office, in view of the fact that spring wound portable phonographs were being distributed to our troops all over the world. . . . Of Course, there was a Petrillo decreed over-all musical record

ban stateside so that current records of name bands and players could not be filled by us. Rather it was under the jurisdiction of the Athletic and Recreation Branch Special Services Division which had a Music Section, headed by Major Howard C. Bronson in Washington.²¹

Clearly, there was a need for popular records, but how would the army deliver them when the American Federation of Musicians under the leadership of their president James C. Petrillo had imposed a ban on recording new material?

James C. Petrillo was a tough negotiator who had risen through AFM ranks in Chicago. His ban, enforced on July 31, 1942, was a response to the recording musicians' long time displeasure with the use of their records in jukeboxes and by disc jockeys on radio broadcasts without any royalty payments. The AFM wanted the recording companies to pay a royalty for each record and transcription sold, with the fee going to a union unemployment fund. The companies refused to pay, hoping to outlast the union by releasing stockpiled masters by their leading artists or by issuing all-vocal records. The ban lasted until November, 1944 for the two industry giants, RCA Victor and Columbia; Decca and Capitol, the other two major companies, settled an agreement with the AFM in mid-September, 1943.²²

In view of the Petrillo ban and the obvious demand for phonograph records, Lieutenant Vincent came up with a plan. The Army could produce its own records of popular entertainers and big name bands. Recording, production, and distribution could all be done through existing military channels or could

be contracted out. However, two major obstacles had to be confronted. The Radio Section did not have jurisdiction for such a plan which would rightly come under the aegis of the Athletic and Recreation Branch. Moreover, Mr. Petrillo and the AFM would have to sanction any recordings made for the Army by union musicians.²³

Major Howard Bronson, head of the Music Section of the Athletic and Recreation Branch, was an old-line advocate of military march music. Martial music had been a formal component of training and morale since the organization of the Marine Corps band in 1798 and the first official Army band in 1861. In fact each new generation of soldiers since the Civil War had marched to patriotic, stirring melodies typified by those of John Philip Sousa whose band Major Bronson had served with.²⁴ Bronson's enthusiasm for Sousa would prove troublesome for more progressive bandleaders in the Music Branch like Captain Glenn Miller.²⁵ Yet, compared to officers like Colonel Theodore Bank, whose remark "you aren't going to win the war with piccolos"²⁶ he liked to quote, Major Bronson was a liberal. He may have been a "square," but at least Major Bronson recognized the importance of music in maintaining troop morale.

On a trip to Washington in July, Vincent decided to call on Major Bronson with a plan to start an army recording project.²⁷ In effect, Vincent was circumventing channels in making such a presentation outside of his section. Vincent, however, was impatient. Timing was crucial. If

he could convince the Pentagon that it needed a recording program, perhaps the Army would give him the authority to run it. Twenty-five years earlier, he had come to Washington from Camp Wadsworth in pursuit of a commission. Now the stakes were higher. Once he had an idea, Vincent was relentless. Of course, few career officers would have attempted such a bold stroke on their own initiative. Lieutenant Vincent, however, had no fear of bureaucratic authority. His instincts told him that if he requested approval from his immediate superior, Major Lewis in Los Angeles, the project might get lost in the chain of command. The project had to begin before Petrillo and the AFM settled their recording ban.

It was as if Vincent's prior experiences had combined to prepare him for this adventure. Like the Boys' Paper, his adventure to France in 1915, his embassy days in 1918, and success in the liquor trade - his assault on the Pentagon in 1943 was a gamble. As always, "the original job-lander" was at his best operating alone. Chutzpah and his own enthusiasm for the task were important. Yet, Vincent's case was strong; the army had no recording project and with the service taking the offensive on all fighting fronts, the demand for music was increasing.

Vincent recalled his meeting with Major Bronson this way:

. . . I called on Major Bronson and told him it was a damned shame that the men who are fighting our war should be deprived of hearing the same

musicians whom they knew so well, which were as much a part of America and home to them as baseball. He agreed but said that there were no funds for the purchase of even old phonograph records (made even before the ban).²⁸

Undaunted, Vincent recalled a written agreement with Mr. Petrillo and the AFM that allowed the radio section to use any of their members to perform on radio programs. Confident that he could get Petrillo to do the same for the Music Section, Vincent made an exploratory trip to the Special Services Division Fiscal Officer. He explained that the Radio Section needed about three-hundred dollars to fill immediate requests for phonograph records. Vincent recalled:

He sadly informed me that there was no allotment of funds for . . . that purpose. We had quite a thorough talk on the subject and before it was over, I had convinced him that an Army phonograph record project . . . would be a very beneficial project and a great moral builder.²⁹

To his surprise, the fiscal officer "looked through many papers on his desk and came up with the astounding fact that there was a million dollars which was not allotted and might possibly be used for the proposed project."

Capitalizing on this information, Vincent scheduled a series of appointments with Colonel Theodore Bank, Major Frederick Warburg and other top Special Services echelon. Before he left the Pentagon, Vincent was given approval to contact Petrillo for the blessing of the AFM. Funds for the project were earmarked. Major Bronson decided to assign Captain Harry Salter, then turning out "Hit Kits" (printed

books of sheet music) and a former orchestra leader, as head of the musical end of the project. Lieutenant Vincent would be in charge of the technical aspects of the project, which would be in addition to his other duties in the radio section.

Of his meeting with Caesar Petrillo, Vincent wrote:

During my session at the AFM office with Petrillo and his staff, I found that we were natural allies. Their fight was not with the armed forces but with the commercial record companies and broadcasters. We were able to obtain the coveted written sanction and good will of the union.³⁰

Petrillo, no doubt, recognized the public relations value of the project for his union. Yet, Vincent's successful presentation of the proposed project cannot be underestimated. V-Discs would keep AFM musicians visible to millions of service personnel, and press coverage of V-Discs was extensive and always positive. Vincent had presented Petrillo with a proposition he could not refuse.

Next, Vincent was faced the problem of gaining a free hand in running the project. He did not appreciate the prospects of sharing leadership with Captain Salter. First there was the delicate matter of extricating himself from the Radio Section. Major Lewis was fond of Vincent and had encouraged his work in New York. In November of 1942, Major Lewis wrote Vincent praising his report on shortwave radio production as "most concise, as well as intelligent."³¹ Also, Lewis had been instrumental in getting Vincent his commission.

Using his talent for finesse, Vincent prevailed upon the Special Service Division Executive Officer and Major Bronson to request Vincent's transfer to the Music Section. On August 3, 1943 Lewis, now a Lieutenant Colonel, wrote a glowing letter acknowledging the necessity of the transfer. The tone of his letter suggests that Vincent might continue to be of help to the Radio Section "in many ways." He commends Vincent for having "done a splendid job for us."³²

Now free to undertake his duties on the project, Vincent had already taken steps to establish himself as sole head of the new unit which would be headquartered in New York City. Realizing that the project would function more efficiently with a minimum of Pentagon interference and recognizing his own needs to work independently, Lieutenant Vincent negotiated an arrangement with his superiors. He recalled the details in a twenty page account of V-Discs:

Before undertaking my new job, I made a gentleman's agreement with Majors Bronson and Warburg: 1. That I should be in complete charge of the project, pick out a few enlisted men as my assistants, and have no interference either from Washington or New York. 2. That my rank should be raised from 1st Lieutenant to Captain.³³

Vincent also noted that Harry Salter never forgave him for this deal, especially later when the project became famous.

Captain Vincent lost no time in setting up headquarters in three small offices on the thirteenth floor of the Special Services office building at 205 East 42nd Street at Third Avenue. The group's table of organization called for four

enlisted men. The first to join on August 6, 1943 was Steve Shoals, a recent draftee who had been an Artist and Repertoire (A&R) man for RCA Victor. Vincent personally picked Tony Janak who had just been inducted into the service. Janak, a tireless worker, had been a technician with Columbia records and was a competent engineer well versed in popular as well as classical music. Shoals later recommended Walter Heebner, also an ex RCA Victor employee who was put in charge of the paperwork. The fourth member of the unit was Mortimer Palitz, a veteran A and R man with Decca, Brunswick and Columbia. Palitz had also been a violinist and conductor and was known for his possession of perfect pitch. Vincent and "Perfect Pitch" Palitz clashed often on matters of policy which led to Palitz's transfer in September of 1944. His replacement was Jack Hurdle, a former radio producer and Broadway stage manager. Early in 1944, George T. Simon was added to the group. Simon, former editor of Metronome Magazine contributed valuable assistance in producing jazz recordings for the project.³⁴

The matter of naming the project has become something of a legend in recording history. Captain Vincent wanted a "snappy name which would be easy to remember." "Special Services Phonograph Records," an early Pentagon suggestion, was rejected by Vincent. Finally, according to Shoals, a secretary suggested "V-Discs." No doubt inspired by the V motif of the time, V-Discs took its place alongside V-Mail, V for Victory, and Winston Churchill's two-fingered victory

sign. Captain Vincent later suggested that the V was for Vincent.³⁵

Major Bronson approved the name for V-Discs but had other ideas about the label design for the records. He wanted two label designations, one being "Music for Marching Men." This was not adopted although the phrase was printed on a few early V-Disc labels.³⁶ In hopes that the recordings would have a distinctive look, Vincent paid five dollars to a Yank Magazine artist for several designs. The result was a unique un-military graphic with large modern block letters spelling V-Disc emblazoned in red, white, and blue combinations. Major Bronson did not like it, but Vincent prevailed.³⁷ His sense of what would appeal to the G.I. was almost always accurate. His civilian experiences, especially the USO tour, heightened his sensitivity toward the young soldiers who had grown up with films, magazines, and jukebox rhythms. Vincent sensed that V-discs should be as distinctively non-military in sound and appearance as they could be.

With this goal in mind, Vincent set out to obtain the best talent he could find for the initial releases. Until a suitable backlog of new material could be recorded, existing masters from the major recording company vaults would be used. These would be supplemented by off-the-air radio checks of big band remotes and material gleaned from AFRS (the new designation for the Radio Section) broadcasts. As an added personal touch, voice introductions by show business

personalities such as Bob Hope, Jack Benny, and Phil Harris were recorded and dubbed at the start of many of the twelve-inch discs. Singers like June Christy and Perry Como and bandleaders like Glenn Miller often introduced their own new V-Discs. Since the length of each V-Disc was twice as long as the standard 78 rpm record, two selections or extended arrangements could be pressed on one side of each recording. Including both sides, a V-Disc offered almost ten minutes of entertainment.³⁸

Vincent relied upon the taste and expertise of his enlisted men in the unit. He recalled that there was often "terrific in-fighting" among his former A and R men for representation of their favorite artists. Vincent referred to Privates Shoals, Janak, and Simon as his "brain trust." His attitude toward enlisted men was democratic. As a former buck private himself, Vincent was skeptical of "Pentagon brass."³⁹ He ran the V-Disc office much like he ran his own Vocarium Studios. He would eat with his men and might share a drink with them after hours.⁴⁰ Military protocol was secondary to getting the job done. Typical of Vincent's attitude was his reply to a Colonel who reprimanded him for eating in a public restaurant with an enlisted man. He said, "Colonel, some of the most intelligent men in the Army are buck privates." Captain Vincent and his "brain trust" worked well together, although Vincent's perfectionism could be a source of pressure. Tony Janak later remarked that Vincent was a "tough guy to work for."⁴²

If Vincent was a tough taskmaster, he worked at least as hard as his men. Aside from overseeing recording activities and production problems, Vincent had to be diplomatic with requests from top brass whose wives were amateur composers. Such requests, like this one from Brigadier General S. C. Godfrey, were common:

Mrs. Godfrey writes me with pleasure that you have promised to make some records of the "Engineer Fight Song" and the new Infantry Song, for which she composed the music for General McNair's stirring words, "There's nothing in front of the Infantry Except the Enemy."⁴³

Colonel Bronson's preference for Sousa was a continuing problem. Having heard that Bronson was objecting to so much dance music appearing on V-Discs, Captain Glenn Miller - then leading the 418th AAFTC Band at New Haven, Connecticut - brought a new march to a recording session. Miller, formerly the most successful bandleader in America, informed Captain Vincent that he had a tune that men could march to. It was the "St. Louis Blues" in march tempo, a swinging arrangement of W. C. Handy's classic blues.⁴⁴

Vincent recalled later that he liked Glenn Miller because Miller was a man "who knew what he wanted" and usually got it.⁴⁵ Vincent's description of Miller could also be applied to himself in the sense that both men were strongly inner directed and had a sure vision of how they could best contribute to the morale effort. It is fitting that their military careers should intersect, yet more significant that V-Discs were an important medium in bringing Glenn Miller's music

to the troops. The "Miller Sound" was evocative of home and was the musical equivalent of the G. I.'s deepest feelings. At the end of 1944, Miller's Army Air Forces Orchestra (by then stationed in England) lead the V-Disc charts with twenty-eight releases. Harry James' band followed with twenty-seven and Tommy Dorsey's with twenty-six. Bing Crosby was the top singer with seventeen recordings followed by Dinah Shore and Frank Sinatra. The popularity of these artists and the demand for dozens of others was verified by the daily letters received at the V-Disc office from service personnel. In an AP interview Captain Vincent said, "We're giving them what they want. Its the music from home, the music they used to sing and dance to."⁴⁶

The AP story also summarized the first year of the V-Disc program. During the first twelve months, 1,794,240 recordings had been made. 185 top artists - from the NBC Symphony under the direction of Arturo Toscanini to Spike Jones and His City Slickers - had been featured in nearly 800 different selections.⁴⁷ Captain Vincent had initially been skeptical that the recordings, packed in units of twenty records to a box, were reaching their destination. He, therefore printed a questionnaire and packed one in each box of records. This was against regulations but Vincent wanted to see if the records were being used and gathered suggestions from his G. I. clientele.⁴⁸ The response was overwhelmingly positive. Major F. S. Sazama, a hospital commandant in Burma wrote: "you cannot appreciate what the general feeling was

(sic) since the machine and records arrived, it has worked constantly."⁴⁹ Bandleader Spike Jones returned from a USO tour overseas and wrote:

. . . everywhere we went, we saw the men playing V-Discs. We heard them on the boat going over and on the boat coming home; we played them on the LST boat crossing the channel, and we saw them being played everywhere in France, including fox-holes!

I can state definitely . . . that of all the music morale builders, including the various transcribed shows that go overseas, V-Discs are easily the most popular and most effective medium for giving our men⁵⁰ the music they want and need to keep going.

One soldier from the South wrote that V-Discs were unfair to those who favored hillbilly music.⁵¹ A Sergeant from "somewhere on Luzon" wrote the staff that "your job was just as great or greater than ours in winning this war."⁵² It was evident that V-Discs was an unqualified success.

However, during the first year of the project, Captain Vincent had little time to enjoy his accomplishments. A major fire and explosion at the Union Carbide plant in Charleston, West Virginia created a shortage of Vinylite which was used to press V-Discs. After a lengthy search which included experimentation with several substitutes, Vincent came up with Formvar, a Canadian polyvinyl acetal resin developed in early 1943. Testing required some changes in formula and in modifications of machinery at the pressing plant. However, production did not slow down. Walt Heebner and Tony Janak were successful in keeping a tight rein on

pressing operations and succeeded in getting V-Discs of excellent quality produced throughout the life of the program.⁵³

There was also a simmering rivalry developing between V-Discs and its West Coast rival, Armed Forces Radio. Captain Vincent had been cautioned by his former associates "not to muscle into their territory" in Hollywood. It was felt that the artists and entertainers there were already overburdened with requests co-ordinated by the "Hollywood Victory Committee."⁵⁴ However, Vincent did not refrain from making several forays to the coast to obtain material from film studio vaults and to hold recording sessions. Dinah Shore remembered Vincent from his recording work done for her at Vocarium Studios. She offered to make several V-Discs. These activities especially angered Vincent's former Radio Section colleague, Captain Meredith Willson who set a trap for Vincent.⁵⁵

At issue was a series of V-Discs made at a September 16, 1943 recording session in New York with Fats Waller. Waller's uninhibited and free-wheeling performances on piano and Hammond organ were enhanced by his consumption of several bottles of Cutty Sark scotch. Waller's manager, Ed Kireby had informed Captain Vincent that Waller required the liquor to give a maximum performance. The session lasted from early afternoon until late evening. Waller recorded two dozen songs each preceded by a spontaneous, often humorous, spoken introduction. Vincent recalled:

Fats was a wonderful person, a great artist and pianist with a style all his own. His capacity for drinking hard liquor also was unexcelled . . . Even though he was somewhat inebriated, his humor and witty remarks were great, his piano playing clear as a bell. He was having a ball . . . the session kept on and on and we recorded untold numbers - many of them entirely new material . . . but of course there were some selections which we could never release, on the risqué side.⁵⁶

The session turned out to be historic, since it produced Waller's last recordings before his untimely death in December, 1943.

Vincent and his staff could not use all of the material because of the controversial nature of Waller's lyrics. As Steve Shoals noted, some of the records "were a little too juicy for the eager ears of the young."⁵⁷ However a double entendre in "Two Sleepy People" slipped through the censorship process in the January, 1944 release. It was an opportunity that Captain Meredith Willson could not let pass. He dutifully complained to General Frederick Osborne that Vincent was "recording suggestive material and corrupting the morals of the Army."⁵⁸ Vincent was summoned to the E Ramp of the Pentagon to explain the charge. Vincent recalled the trip:

As I walked along the corridor on my way to the General's office, dozens of voices from various SSD cubicles greeted me with "Say, Captain, where can we get a copy of that record?"⁵⁹

The confrontation with General Osborne, however, was cordial. He simply reminded Vincent that he "did not wish the Division

to receive unfavorable criticism through lack of proper screening of recorded entertainment."⁶⁰

With the Waller incident behind him, Captain Vincent set out to produce a network radio program designed to spotlight the V-Disc operation. Piqued, perhaps, by AFRS's attempts to undermine him, Vincent planned a series of broadcasts featuring major musical talent which would be produced by the V-Disc staff. As he wrote, "this would make the whole country cognizant of the V-Disc operation and it would also be a source for a good backlog of selections for our forthcoming releases."⁶¹

During the summer of 1944, Captain Vincent obtained the necessary clearances from the American Federation of Radio Artists which gave permission to use its members gratis. Petrillo's AFM agreement was in place, but the Music Publisher's Protective Association threatened to sue for royalties for its members (although they did not succeed in receiving any). The final hurdle was the Army Public Relations Department, whose bureaucracy had final jurisdiction over all domestic broadcasts involving the Army. To placate this echelon of the Army, Vincent had to agree to make concessions. Vincent recalled the details:

A "message" written by their office was to be narrated on each of our shows (a sort of War Department commercial) which was to be personally handled and overseen by an officer of that sacrosanct organization. Also any of our scripts had to be submitted to and approved by them. Furthermore, if they (PRD) needed any of the recorded material for their own shows, they were to get it.⁶²

The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) agreed to broadcast the series from Studio 8 H in Radio City. However, they raised objections over plans to invite non-NBC talent to perform on the series. Vincent recalls:

NBC's monkey wrench consisted of the fact that we would probably invite C.B.S. or other non-N.B.C. artists on the show, and that they did not think we could keep up the high caliber of production longer than the first or second week.⁶³

To satisfy network management, Captain Vincent agreed to allow an NBC production man in the sound booth despite the fact "that there was nothing for him to do besides get in our hair" ⁶⁴

For the Record debuted on Monday night, July 31, 1944 at 11:30 P.M. to midnight. The first program was hosted by music critic Deems Taylor. Benny Goodman, assisted by George Simon assembled an all-star big band. Guest vocalists Carmen Miranda, Perry Como, and Mildred Bailey were featured.⁶⁵ Variety in its Wednesday, August 2 issue gave For the Record rave reviews. The straight forward script and solid musical appeal was noted. As Variety said, "the tee-off stanza afforded an interesting peek at what sort of radio fare might prove profitable when the 15,000,000 now in uniform return to civilian pursuits."⁶⁶ Later, Vincent praised the work of Jack Hurdle, who directed the series, and George Simon, who recruited much of the talent.⁶⁷

For the Record was broadcast over station WAAF, NBC's New York outlet and the coast-to-coast network of NBC for

for seventeen weeks through November 20, 1944.⁶⁸ A memorandum from Lt. Colonel A. D. Clark of the Public Relations Office to Lt. Colonel Bronson dated November 15, 1944 states the reasons for the cancellation of the series. Clark writes:

Experience with this program has been thoroughly unsatisfactory. Production problems have been almost insurmountable, and (a) serious question has arisen as to the actual value received from Army messages broadcast at this hour.⁶⁹

Clearly, the entertainment values of the program and its exposure of V-Discs to the general public was lost on the Army Public Relations Office. To his credit, Colonel Bronson's six point memorandum of November 24 is a sharp defense of For the Record and a commendation of the men who produced it. He stated:

It is not easy to understand why the experience of your office with this program has been "thoroughly unsatisfactory" . . . since the ASF Group's participation has consisted only in the processing of scripts sent to you, writing your "one minute message" and listening to the show.

. . . It would be appreciated however, if your office were to view in a kindlier light the efforts of the officers and enlisted men of this Section who tried conscientiously, under many handicaps, to make this program a success for V-Discs, for the Special Services Division, and for the Army.⁷⁰

The For the Record programs were impressive in their production value and musical content. Unfettered by what Variety called "script tripe,"⁷¹ the cute patter so indigenous to network musical programming, the series called upon the talents of popular bands like those of Vaughan Monroe, Charlie Barnet, Cab Calloway, and Count Basie. The new Benny Goodman

Quintet debuted on the September 25th program. The Les Brown band broadcast from Chicago on October 2nd and featured Doris Day singing "Sentimental Journey" which was pressed as a V-Disc and would become the most popular "homecoming" ballad of the war.⁷²

By late 1944 Captain Vincent's reputation as an officer was solid. "V-Disc" Vincent,⁷³ as he was now called, was overseeing an empire which had become so popular that the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard decided to join in the distribution of the discs. Vincent's stamina and work ethic proved to be useful in seeing the project through. He could be an exacting, tough officer but had a reputation as a "soldier's officer"⁷⁴ who could break out a bottle with his men and unwind. He had always driven himself. All night work sessions fortified by a bottle of Scotch and drug store send-out food were not uncommon rituals, although Vincent did live at his apartment and had access to his wife Viola and her strong moral support.⁷⁵

Vincent's son Kenneth - by then a student at Phillips Academy - recalled an all night jam session at Gjon Mili's studio at 6 East 23rd Street. Mili, the noted photographer, was shooting the session for Life magazine which ran the story in its October 11, 1943 issue under the title "Life Goes to a Party For V-Discs."⁷⁶ Captain Vincent and Steve Shoals were supervising the recordings of the session; the guests included Eddie Condon's "Nicksieland" mob and pianists Duke Ellington and James P. Johnson. Vocalists Billie Holiday

and Lee Wiley were also present along with celebrities from the fashion and entertainment fields. Kenneth Vincent stayed with his father throughout the event which lasted until after 4:00 A.M. He recalled that Vincent consumed a bottle of Scotch with no ill effects and performed his duties with precision.⁷⁷

Wartime schedules could be hectic. On short notice, Captain Vincent was ordered to fly to Orlando, Florida to record the AAFTAC Symphonette, a large group of the nation's outstanding classical musicians. A General felt that "in order to justify its existence" the group "ought to record some V-Discs." Vincent at first refused but was persuaded to comply when the General offered to provide a transport plane to fly the entire V-Disc staff to Florida for a weekend recording session.⁷⁸ At a For The Record Session, Captain Vincent and George T. Simon took two Army trucks to the Apollo Theater in Harlem to transport the Count Basie band to Studio 8-H.⁷⁹ Basie, perhaps put off by the Army's treatment of black musicians in uniform,⁸⁰ balked at riding in the trucks. Vincent and Simon quickly rounded up five taxis for an anxious ride. At Radio City, they were further delayed until Simon could round up the fare. Finally the Basie band marched down the aisles of the studio just as the program was going on the air.⁸¹ Appropriately, the Basie band's first number was entitled "My What a Fry."⁸² In August, 1944 Captain Vincent called for singer Lena Horne at a club to take her

to a For the Record broadcast; they almost missed the program when Vincent became lost finding his way to the studio.⁸³

On some occasions, leading network advertisers such as Coca Cola would devote their entire programs to fulfill V-Disc requests. Such special programs were good public relations for the companies and provided additional material for V-Discs. One such session was sponsored by Coca Cola on its Victory Parade of Spotlight Bands series.⁸⁴ Vincent recalled that it was held at Carnegie Hall and was part of a plan to get Tommy Dorsey to record new V-Discs at the expense of the soft drink manufacturer. Dorsey, according to Vincent, was not as easily disposed toward doing "free" recordings as the other name bandleaders like Benny Goodman, whom Vincent singled out as being particularly generous with his services.⁸⁵ V-Discs remained foremost an entertainment medium, though they quite often also had international significance. Toscanini's rendition of Garibaldi's "War Hymn," Mark Warnow's "Che Li," and such recordings as "Meadowland" and "I've Got Sixpence" all spoke for the worldwide Allied war effort.⁸⁶

During the last months of 1944 two projects absorbed much of Captain Vincent's time. The first was a first anniversary celebration for V-Discs at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. The second was a gala V-Disc performance to be held at Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. in conjunction with the Treasury Department's Sixth War Bond Drive. The Waldorf Astoria party had grown out of a discussion between Vincent and Frank

Walker, a Vice President at RCA Victor. Initial plans for a staff luncheon at Toots Shor's were scrapped in favor of a cocktail party and banquet for over two-hundred people associated with the V-Disc project in both military and civilian capacities. Vincent described the event:

. . . the guests were to be some of the outstanding artists who contributed to the V-Disc repertoire, also many of the bigger RCA Victor executives as well as their technicians. Moreover, all the Special Services Division brass from Washington, including General Byron . . . Colonel Warburg, Lt. Colonel Bronson were invited - all army and navy personnel who had anything to do with V-Discs.⁸⁷

A huge birthday cake in the shape of a phonograph record with the V-Disc label was cut by General Byron.⁸⁸ Colonel Warburg was the toastmaster and Captain Vincent gave a brief speech. Vincent reported that "we all had a good time but a Washington Navy officer (one of the guests) accused us of 'nesting with the vendors.'"⁸⁹

The Constitution Hall engagement, however, proved to be a more monumental undertaking. Like many of his ideas, this one was spontaneous. Given the V-Disc staff's considerable commitment to For the Record in addition to its regular production duties, the V-Disc gala would be an extra burden. Yet, having proposed the idea to his staff and having conferred with some of his friends at Benton and Bowles Advertising Agency, Captain Vincent forged ahead. Repeating an old pattern, he improvised the details en route to Washington. The purpose of the gala was to make V-Discs

more visible to "the Pentagon boys" as Vincent noted, "the upper War Department brass - who, after all, were allotting the not inconsiderable funds" for the project.⁹⁰ Aside from the definite public relations value of a Washington show, Vincent would - like one of his boyhood heroes, Barnum - add the title of impresario to his recent collection of accomplishments.

Vincent's memoirs are often informed by a "Dick Whittington" motif in which Vincent enters a city with nothing more than a bright idea and leaves with the endorsement of the mighty to perform his mission. In truth, Vincent was the outsider knocking at the doors of the establishment. That he was so often successful in persuading others to trust in him, is seen in his record of accomplishments. He rarely failed, or at least it would seem so during the war. Here is how he described his trip to Washington in early October, 1944:

I went down by train and this gave me time to think. I decided I'd make a pitch to hook up with the Treasury's 6th War Bond Drive. Well, I did just that. The Treasury welcomed me with open arms. They agreed to rent Constitution Hall, pay the travelling and hotel expenses of all artists, as well as our own accommodations, if we secured all the talent for a three-hour long all-star variety show, one-half hour of which would be broadcast over N.B.C. as ⁹¹the final program in the For the Record series.

Weeks of hard work followed. Vincent preserved his army file on the gala, and it reveals a detailed picture of how the planning for the event unfolded. An eleven tier

planning table covered every item from requirements for admission - which was the purchase of a War Bond - to promotion, transportation, and equipment procurement. The total budget for the event was \$4,500.⁹² A detailed chart of the entertainers, their contact persons, and transportation was drawn up. The file includes department routing slips and replies from guest artists confirming their participation. Radio star Edgar Bergen was among the first to confirm in a letter to Corporal Hurdle on October 24.⁹³

Captain Vincent's memoranda are crisply written. His eye for public relations value is evident in an October 12 memo outlining the project. As in his proposal to start the V-Disc project, Vincent wants and gets carte blanche. The memo "respectfully" requests that "instructions be issued by the Director (of Special Services) to the effect that every Branch of the Special Services Division shall cooperate with the V-Discs Department if their help is needed, to make this enterprise a brilliant success."⁹⁴ As the date of the November 20th show approached, Vincent and his staff moved into quarters in the Mayflower Hotel. The event, finally named The Parade of Stars, was a smashing success and a good example of what co-operation between the entertainment field and the military could produce. Admission to the show averaged \$750 per seat. The show raised three million dollars in total ticket sales.⁹⁵

The Parade of Stars featured three "name" bands including those of Raymond Scott, Eddy Howard, and Sergeant Harry

Bluestone's AAF Radio Production Unit. Pianist-comedian Victor Borge and ventriloquist Edgar Bergen headlined the show which was hosted by a number of masters-of-ceremony which included Ed Sullivan and Martin Block. Vincent diplomatically inserted Special Services messages and War Bond appeals throughout the show. As a paeon to Colonel Bronson's love of Sousa, the Air Forces Band played Bronson's "General Marshall March" as a prologue.⁹⁶

After the gala, General Byron hosted a reception at the Mayflower Hotel. Vincent wrote:

It did not get started until nearly 1 A.M. The maitre d' hotel at the Mayflower (whose son was overseas and a V-Disc fan) saw to it⁹⁷ that we had the best of everything in abundance.

Vincent introduced the entertainers to the high Pentagon officers and spread his own brand of goodwill. On December 15, Vincent received a letter of commendation from General Byron for his "splendid work and . . . untiring efforts in the accomplishment of the immensely successful V-Disc Treasury All-Star Performance. . . ." General Byron acknowledges "the educational factor" of the show in bringing to light the role of the V-Disc program in building troop morale.⁹⁸ On December 28, the chairman of the District of Columbia War Finance Committee of the Treasury Department wrote Vincent a similar letter stating that "the show was a tremendous success and for weeks afterward, it was the subject of commendation by those who were fortunate enough to be in attendance."⁹⁹ As 1944 ended, Captain Vincent could look back

over his thirty months of Army service with a sense of accomplishment. Yet, there was still a war on and much work to be done.

Shortly after the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12, 1945, Captain Vincent traveled to Washington for some V-Disc budget matters. Again, Vincent had a "secret plan." In this case it was to quietly explore the possibilities of getting an assignment as the soundman at the upcoming United Nations Conference in San Francisco scheduled to begin on April 25th.¹⁰⁰ As in 1918, Vincent's eye was on "the big picture" and the San Francisco Conference represented another opportunity for Vincent to watch history in the making. Characteristically, he acted on his own and did not go through Army chain of command. Vincent detailed his plan in a twenty-three page memoir about his work at the conference written in 1980. He stated:

While in Washington I called at the unmarked inconspicuous building which housed the O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services).

There I spoke with . . . Oliver Lundquist, whom I had known. He was attached to the Presentation Group whose job was doing graphics for various government agencies. At that time the Presentation staff were working closely with the State Department, preparing for the Big Show (sic) in San Francisco.¹⁰¹

Vincent informed Lundquist that he would like to be in charge of the "p.a. and sound operation for the conference. Lundquist agreed that Vincent's background would be valuable and told him that he would "speak to Mike McDermott at

State."¹⁰² Vincent returned to New York having told no one at the Pentagon of his "unofficial conversation" with Lundquist.

In a few days, the Adjutant at Special Services received a teletype from the Army Chief of Staff's Office assigning Vincent for temporary duty with the United Nations Secretariat, authorizing travel by air to San Francisco. Captain Vincent received a hand carried letter delivered from Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius dated April 17th. Stettinius designated Vincent as "Sound Recording Officer in the Secretariat of the United Nations Conference" and expressed confidence in Vincent's "special qualifications for the task" ¹⁰³

Facing stiff opposition to his assignment from Colonel Kerr, a West Pointer, and the Deputy Chief of Special Services, Captain Vincent acted quickly. He called the Staff officer at the Pentagon who had signed his original orders. Colonel Kerr had sent a message to Washington recommending the substitution of a qualified Signal Corps officer because Vincent was needed at his V-Disc post. Vincent recalled that the Staff officer "vehemently vetoed Colonel Kerr's objection . . . by command of General Marshall." ¹⁰⁴

Special Services, however, rejected Vincent's request to take with him certain Army sound equipment on the grounds that the orders only indicated that Captain Vincent was to be transported. Wishing to be prepared, Vincent stripped a control room of his own Vocarium Studio at Radio City.

At the last minute, he obtained clearance to take along Sergeant Frank Bruno from the V-Disc section. Vincent obtained the necessary freight priorities and flew with Bruno to San Francisco on a night flight arriving on April 21st with only four days until the opening of the conference on April 25th.¹⁰⁵

Setting up a work area in the basement of the Veterans War Memorial Building and Opera House, Captain Vincent quickly went into action. To avoid union problems, he requested the services of four Navy enlisted men who were assigned to the car pool. Vincent gave them a crash course in operating the recording lathes and mixers which were set up in the basement. The ad hoc staff of the newly formed Sound and Recording Division of the Secretariat quickly laid all the necessary cables and conduits to connect the main auditoriums of the War Memorial Building and Opera House. The necessary supplies of electrical transcriptions and acetate discs were supplied by the Signal Corps at the Presidio. The public address systems and microphones including consoles, mixers, and remote amplifiers were supplied by contractors.

It is not known whether the Signal Corps staff at the Presidio wondered why their services were not requested at the conference, but Captain Vincent's performance as sound officer foreclosed any lingering doubts about his assignment. Vincent's gregariousness and helpful manner quickly brought him into the inner circle of diplomats and State Department officers at the conference. Mike McDermott introduced Vincent

to the media representatives and placed him in charge of the radio "feed" of the proceedings. Vincent stipulated that instead of stringing dozens of network microphones with their "Mutual, N.B.C., Blue, C.B.C. and . . . other signplates that would deface the attractive decor of the halls," not more than five Army microphones would be used at each podium. More importantly, Captain Vincent and his staff recorded all Plenary sessions of the Conference which were used by the Verbatim reporters, a new innovation which was appreciated by the court reporters assigned to the Conference.¹⁰⁶ In a letter to Captain Vincent dated June 18, 1945, the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Group - Eugene W. Moore noted:

As a court reporter of some year's experience, and from what I have seen at the Conference, I have come to the conclusion that in the not-too-far-distant future sound recording equipment is going to become a part and parcel of every top-notch reporter's office equipment.¹⁰⁷

Moore especially appreciated the benefits that sound recording gave his reporters in accurately capturing the "accents, enunciation, strange constructions of sentences with English words, and other causes that we have faced at this Conference."¹⁰⁸

Vincent enjoyed his social contacts with Secretariat personnel including Alger Hiss, the Secretary General. Occupying a room at the Mark Hopkins Hotel for the duration of the conference, Captain Vincent had an opportunity to meet various members of the visiting delegations. Vincent noted in his memoir that "there were scores of fascinating

individuals whom, because of my job, I was privileged to rub shoulders with."¹⁰⁹ Captain Vincent did not shirk the role of "good will ambassador" and made friends easily at various cocktail parties and social occasions sponsored by the various delegations. He met General Carlos Romulo of the Philippines at a night club and chatted with Lt. Commander Harold Stassen and Senators Tom Connally and Arthur Vandenberg of the United States delegation.

During Captain Vincent's nine week assignment at the United Nations Conference, his Sound and Recording Division recorded the history making Plenary Sessions which were eventually transferred to the United Nations Archives in New York. During his nine weeks in San Francisco, Captain Vincent left town twice on official business. In May, he flew to Los Angeles to check on the pressing facilities at the Allied Records plant. While in Hollywood, Vincent was the guest of Glenn Wallichs - president of Capitol Records - who took him to a nightclub where they visited with singer Nat "King" Cole. On Hollywood Boulevard, Captain Vincent ran into his old friend Earl Robinson, successful with a hit song, "The House I Live In." The second trip was a one day mission to Washington D.C. to procure some equipment for the Sound and Recording Division. Flying back on the return trip aboard a C-54, Captain Vincent witnessed a vignette during a poker game that illustrated the power of the presidency. Vincent recalled:

On the return trip to San Francisco, the congenial passengers played poker practically the whole way crossing the continent. One of the players was a tall, quite stout, good natured individual who did a lot of talking about the forthcoming visit of President Truman for the signing of the United Nations Charter. He was preparing all the details for the reception and parade planned for the new president on his arrival in San Francisco. I guess that Oliver (Lundquist) felt some of the arrangements were encroaching on his prerogatives as a member of the Presentation Group, so he asked our poker playing companion: "Just who are you?"

He was told: "I'm George Allen, the President's personal representative." . . . And that was that.¹¹⁰

At the last Plenary Session, Captain Vincent installed special microphones in the President's bullet proof podium. On his way to witness the signing of the United Nations Charter, Vincent observed President Truman first-hand in one of the conference rooms. He recalled the event:

A surprise awaited me as I walked into one of the ante-rooms. Several people stood there. I recognized old Tom Connally and there was Congressman Sol Bloom saying to a man who had just entered: "Hello Harry?" It was the President of the United States, unguarded, informally, enjoying the chance to see some of his old cronies.¹¹¹

Before the last Plenary Session, Captain Vincent had one of his most inspired "brainstorms." He requested permission from Secretary General Alger Hiss to record the signing of the Charter. Vincent likened it to a chance to record the Declaration of Independence had there been the possibility of sound reproduction in 1776. Vincent planted a microphone in the "large blue damask covered round table" in the

auditorium of the Opera House. Every signer spoke in his own native language, and Vincent noted the impressive "Tower of Babel" effect of the ceremony. As a personal touch, Vincent underwrote the expense of producing two-hundred United Nations Charter albums. As a member of the Secretariat staff, Captain Vincent received a facsimile copy of the completed United Nations Charter.¹¹² After the Conference adjourned, Vincent turned down a recreation trip to Yosemite with the Presentation Group in favor of an invitation to fly back to Washington on President Truman's plane, the "Sacred Cow," which was also transporting the original signed United Nations Charter.¹¹³

Vincent's unorthodox military ways had resulted in one of the best assignments of the war. There was also some sweet revenge for Vincent as a personal letter of commendation from Secretary of State Stettinius arrived at the Special Services Division. Colonel Kerr, Vincent's commanding officer - who had recently turned down Vincent's promotion to Major with the comment "over my dead body" - was ordered to deliver Mr. Stettinius' letter to Vincent personally when he returned to his assignment at V-Disc.¹¹⁴

Despite the heavy demand at V-Disc and at the San Francisco Conference, Robert Vincent managed to find time to organize a commercial phonograph record project which resulted in a new label called "Superdiscs." The new company was the result of a partnership between Vincent's wife, Viola - then nominal head of Vocarium Studios, and Irving and Israel

Feld - two young enterprising drug store owners from Washington D.C. Vincent scrupulously avoided any conflict of interest with his V-Disc assignment by acting as unofficial advisor to the new company which was headquartered in Vincent's Radio City Offices.¹¹⁵

The Felds recognized the vast urban market for black music, then called "race music." The late war years signalled a shift in popular musical trends. What would soon be called "Rhythm and Blues" and later, "Rock and Roll" was already making its way into urban markets. The Felds recognized the demand for race and hot jazz music at the record counter of their "Super Cut Rate Drug Store." The demographic shift of the Black population to Northern cities during the war and the Petrillo recording ban combined to produce a new force in popular music. The Felds, like many perceptive entrepreneurs in 1945, sensed that the time had come for small recording companies to make their move into the record market as the so-called "Big Band Era" gave way to the ascendancy of vocalists and rhythm groups. Vincent had met the Feld brothers on one of his business trips to Washington; they asked him for advice on starting their new venture. Vincent described their relationship:

Because of the Petrillo ban on big company phonograph records, Irving Feld wished to start his own label. The Felds wanted our guidance and we suggested that it be named "Superdiscs." We all put in seed money to get it started. I was made a consultant.¹¹⁶

While on duty in San Francisco, Vincent's consulting took on a more active function when he supervised a Superdisc recording session via transcontinental telephone. The Felds had scheduled a date with guitarist Arthur Smith at the studios of station WRC in Washington. Vincent monitored the session by requesting the State Department telephone operator in Washington to connect his office at the Opera House with WRC. Vincent described this unusual hookup:

The recording date was with an instrumental quintet . . . headed by Arthur Smith, a South Carolina boy with a heavy southern twang, who played electric guitar and sometimes sang. . . . I was listening to five or six of the pieces over the line and felt that the last number he played would be a hit. He named it "Guitar Boogie."¹¹⁷

Vincent ordered a "protection" copy of "Guitar Boogie" to be dubbed from the fragile glass based transcription master. He suggested that echo effect be added by means of a reverberation unit available at his New York studio. Vincent's instincts were correct. "Guitar Boogie" sold well as a Superdisc release in 1945.¹¹⁸

The Petrillo ban had indirectly spawned dozens of small recording companies like Superdisc which came into existence after the ban was lifted in November, 1944. Superdiscs added such jazz stars as Don Byas, Sid Catlett, and Slam Stewart to their stable in addition to a variety of Negro gospel talent. While Captain Vincent was careful to keep his military duties separate from his role as a "silent partner" in Superdisc, he was accused of "making money off V-Disc" by Mortimer

Palitz, a former V-Disc staffer whom Captain Vincent had shipped off to basic training earlier in 1944. "Perfect Pitch" Palitz's charges that Vincent was getting "free talent" for Superdisc through his V-Disc activities, however proved to be groundless. Vincent and his wife Viola, who was an executive in the company, eventually sold their four thousand dollar share in Superdiscs back to the Felds for a profit in 1946. The Felds eventually sold the entire company and all the masters to MGM.¹¹⁹

During the summer of 1945, Captain Vincent was back on duty at the V-Disc office. It was evident that the V-Disc project would continue indefinitely despite the settlement of the A.F.M. recording ban. Upon leaving the project in August of 1945, Vincent recommended that V-Disc production should end with post-war demobilization. However, the project continued from 1946 to 1949 under the direction of ex-Master Sergeant Tony Janak who acted as civilian consultant. It is estimated that over eight million V-Discs were produced during the life of the project.¹²⁰ In 1945 with the addition of V-Discs to the Office of War Information services, production reached 300,000 records per month.¹²¹ For his "great initiative, keen judgement, administrative ability, and successful experiments with plastics," Robert Vincent was later awarded The Legion of Merit for his "material contribution to the morale of troops in World War II."¹²²

Yet, there was for Robert Vincent one more assignment to complete before he returned to civilian life. In August,

1945 Captain Vincent was ordered to report to Washington. There he met with Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy. McCloy instructed Vincent to report to Nuremberg, Germany to "set up and operate the simultaneous interpretation system for the forthcoming War Crimes Trials."¹²³ Vincent was promoted to the field grade of Major and was told to assemble a staff of five enlisted men to assist him in the operation.¹²⁴

Arriving in Nuremberg in late August, Major Vincent quickly set up the wiring and equipment for the multilingual translation system. In addition, Vincent was responsible for recording the proceedings of the trials on transcription discs. His San Francisco experience served as a valuable education for Vincent, who installed a four-language system. Working with Colonel L. E. Dostert, chief of the interpreting division, Vincent created an efficient system which was used by the Tribunal in executive session and in the courtroom. Major Vincent was, incidentally, now assigned to the Signal Corps. His performance at San Francisco had impressed his superiors at the State Department.¹²⁵

After overseeing the first six months of the sound and recording program at Nuremberg, Major Vincent was assigned to detached duty at the United Nations Security Council which was having its organizational meetings at Hunter College in New York City. A letter from Francis Biddle of the International Military Tribunal to Secretary of State Stettinius on January 15, 1946 suggested that "you (Stettinius) would make no mistake in examining the possibilities of the

simultaneous translation and earphone system."¹²⁶ Could Vincent, who was enroute to London to meet with Stettinius, have planted the seed for yet another wonderful assignment? However, it happened, Major Vincent was soon on his way home to become the first United Nations Sound and Recording Chief.

While in Nuremberg, Major Vincent saw first-hand the effects of the Nazi regime. His scrapbooks are filled with documentation of evidence of The Holocaust in pictures which were entered as evidence at the War Crimes Tribunal. Yet, in his curious way, Robert Vincent came to know the former enemy in his own fashion. He spent Christmas dinner - 1945 with a German artist who had served as an S.S. officer. Pictures of Major Vincent speaking to Field Marshall Herman Goering in the witness box recorded yet another personage from history drolly added to his collection of acquaintances. Vincent said that during a break in the trial he had asked Goering what he thought of the translation system. Goering replied, "flawless, but the interpreters are a lousy lot."¹²⁷

On a brighter note, Major Vincent ventured through the Russian Zone into Berlin with two enlisted men and a jeep in search of some equipment. Stopped by Soviet troops, Vincent and his men were detained and questioned. Convinced that the Americans were not spying, the Russians provided lunch and vodka.¹²⁸ Blurry photographs of a jovial Vincent embraced by smiling Soviet troopers attest to this international adventure.

As the bleak winter of 1946 continued in Germany, Major Vincent flew back to America having played a major role in documenting the transgressions against humanity of The Third Reich. At forty-seven, Robert Vincent had achieved a war record uncommon for a noncombat citizen soldier. Through persistence and persuasion, he had forged a vision of how useful he could be to men of power whose busy agendas required outside help. Robert Vincent was no battlefield hero, but he did represent the best that the Army service and support units could offer. He was a consummate professional who brought both a sense of history and the highest technical skills with him into wartime service. World War Two made Robert Vincent an "insider." After years of apprenticeship, he was now a mature man with a record of solid accomplishment of international scope. No longer a "precocious brat" with an eccentric hobby, Vincent could stand on merit in his field. Prior to his separation from the United States Army on August 20, 1946, Vincent received a letter of commendation from Justice Robert H. Jackson of the Supreme Court of the United States. Jackson had been a justice at the Nuremberg Tribunal. He wrote:

Now that I have a breathing spell, I want to send you a line of appreciation for the excellent work you did in connection with the installing and operating of the sound equipment in the courtroom in the early days of the Nuremberg trial. I do not believe it would have been possible to have carried on the trial without this system and I do not see how we would have had the system in operation but for your energetic and intelligent efforts. You have the appreciation of everyone concerned and my good wishes go with you.¹²⁹

Justice Jackson's reference to Robert Vincent's energy and intelligence were perceptive. The "precocious brat" had come a long way on those two assets. As he re-entered civilian life in the post-Atomic Age, Vincent looked forward to new challenges. At the end of this war, unlike the last one, Robert Vincent had no thoughts of brass bands and glory. The media age was already begun and Vincent was out to "record its every wheeze."¹³⁰

CHAPTER VIII

ECLIPSE AND EXILE 1946-1960

For Robert Vincent, discharge from the United States Army in August, 1946 meant only that he no longer wore the uniform and badges of rank. He continued in his job as chief sound and recording engineer for the United Nations at their temporary headquarters at Hunter College in New York City. The U.N. post suited Vincent well. It was, like his wartime assignments, "damned interesting."¹ Also, it gave him (and therefore Vocarium Studios - still operated by his wife) useful media exposure which might be useful in securing new business. Vincent sensed that the recording field would rapidly change with the advent of new technology. He had brought back one of the advanced German magnetic tape recorders from Europe, and he knew that the transcription business was doomed once the industry retooled.²

As millions of ex-servicemen returned to civilian life, the economy responded quickly to the demand for new products. Consumers in 1946 were advised that "There's a Ford in Your Future" and that "Bendix Creative Engineering MAKES SCIENCE YOUR OBEDIENT SERVANT."³ Wartime technology was being translated into Promethean industrial applications that were reflected in the automobile and appliance fields. As one

advertisement touted, "the same force that keeps 'em flying - CAN NOW FLASH YOUR WINDOWS OPEN."⁴ Vincent, however, resisted the trend by turning down his wife's suggestion that they exploit German technology and manufacture tape recorders.⁵ He traded the German prototype to RCA for some equipment he needed. Ironically, the widespread popularity of home tape recording a few years later would help put commercial studios like Vincent's out of business.

For the time being, "the world's greatest private collector of voices"⁶ enjoyed being an eyewitness to history. Time magazine asked him to analyze some of the U.N. delegate's voices. According to Vincent, "there was not a topflight voice" among them. His comments about selected delegates made for interesting filler under the heading "UNdistinguished Voices" in the April 29, 1946 issue. He characterized France's Henri Bonnet as the "best voice in the U.N." Russian's Andre Gromyko was "deadpan . . . a plugger." Vincent tactfully characterized his old boss Edward Stettinius as having the voice of "a jovial statesman."⁷ Norway's Trygve Lie was "charming, justly fair."

The Vincents' social life included diplomatic receptions like the one given by the Soviet delegation at the Waldorf-Astoria. Vincent recalled that Gromyko's handshake in the reception line was "limp like a dead fish."⁸ He was amused that Soviet hospitality was as calculated as their foreign policy. Promptly at seven o'clock as per the invitation, the lights in the room went off and the refreshments were

taken away.⁹ As always, Vincent got on well with every faction though he did wonder "why all the so-called liberals, even in the International Secretariat, credited the Soviets with always being on the correct side, no matter what unreasonable position they took on a subject."¹⁰ A close Vincent acquaintance both in San Francisco and Nuremberg and later at United Nations headquarters was David Zablodowsky who was later accused of being a Soviet spy. In his U.N. memoirs, Vincent stated his "astonishment" at the charges leveled at his friend. He wrote, "if he should ever read these lines I want to assure him that I liked him a lot better than I liked Senator Joseph R. McCarthy."¹¹ Vincent was a loyal man whose heart was always larger than politics.

As always, Vincent's professionalism impressed his superiors. His yearly evaluation memorandum praised his "initiative" and "enthusiasm." The evaluator, David B. Vaughan, noted that in view of the changing locations and "variety of emergency setups," he could "rely on your (Vincent's) ingenuity and loyalty in any situation"¹² There were no breakdowns in the sound and recording system under Robert Vincent's leadership. On May 17, 1947 Vincent was promoted from Step I to Step II and was awarded a five-hundred dollar raise. He was making \$8,700 per year at the United Nations.¹³

However, after over a year at the U.N. with a secure future in view, Vincent was restless. On February 11, 1947 he received a letter from C. R. Walgreen indicating that

Vincent had been exploring the idea of reviving Adventures With Admiral Byrd under the sponsorship of the drug chain.¹⁴

Another project involved an attempt to record his mother's children's fantasies for possible distribution. Masters were cut of some of the readings, but no sponsor was willing to underwrite production costs.¹⁵ Financially, the Vincents were doing well enough to purchase a large home in suburban Mamaroneck. Their son, Kenneth, was enrolled at Yale under a Naval R.O.T.C. scholarship.¹⁶ Life was as good as it had been for Vincent since the crash of 1929 when he had lost most of his assets.

Yet, by mid-1948, Robert Vincent decided that he would leave his post at the United Nations. Despite the objections of his wife, Viola, who argued that his post was both prestigious and secure, he resigned as Chief of the Sound and Recording Section. Viola Vincent recalled that her husband was unhappy with certain union practices. It might also be assumed that Vincent, who liked to work alone or with a small, intimate staff, was uncomfortable with the growing bureaucracy of the U.N. operations. Vincent's individualistic, creative management style did not serve him well in long-term situations. As his wife put it, "Bob stepped on toes."¹⁷ His "self-actualizing" work habits was better suited to short-term projects in which he had a free hand. Vincent was never a careerist in the traditional sense. His pragmatic, self-directed approach made him more than a few enemies among the more conservative "organization men." That Vincent

often succeeded in "showing up" the careerists did not endear him to some. Although now fifty years of age, he was in a sense still "the precocious brat" pulling off the tour de force showing up the teacher as he had done back at P.S. 40 in 1910.

When Robert Vincent returned to full-time management of his Radio City studio, now called The National Vocation,¹⁸ time was running out for both radio and the large commercial transcription services. 1948 saw the advent of network television, and within two years many of the dominant radio stars of the era had either gone into television or had lost their network contracts. It took slightly longer for tape recording to replace radio transcription discs in the workplace. But within five years, home tape recording machines were finding their way onto the market. Columbia records introduced the long-playing record too in 1948.¹⁹ Clearly, as the 1940's closed, there was a revolution afoot in the electronic media field. The extent to which this revolution would effect American society would be profound. The McLuhanesque vision of "the Global Village" was just around the corner.²⁰ As the medium became the message through television, home recorders, and transistorized radios, the spoken word tended to lose its mystery. The fifties and sixties signalled an apocalypse. It was as though Edison's vision of the media as a means of historical preservation had been eclipsed by the merging of the media with history culminating in the shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald by Jack Ruby on network

television in the wake of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. For Robert Vincent, the fifteen years between 1948 and 1963 were years in which he would experience eclipse as a sound engineer, exile in the boom country of California, and re-emergence as an elder-statesman archivist.

Yet, at fifty, there was still a world to win for Vincent. Renewing his "collection of famous personalities," he set up recording dates with W. C. Handy, "the Father of the Blues" at the old man's Long Island home.²¹ Standard Oil of New Jersey paid him a good retainer for recording its yearly stockholder's meetings.²² In May of 1949, Vincent lectured with his voices at Yale in an attempt to rekindle their interest in expanding the Voice Library he had started there in 1942. Professor Cleanth Brooks wrote Vincent on May 31 that:

. . . you have something most important and that your vision of what might be and what ought to be at Yale is challenging and feasible. I have little doubt that the Yale faculty and students will rise to the occasion. Perhaps a little later we can produce tangible evidence of this.²³

Yale eventually did "rise to the occasion" and endow a substantial historical recordings collection in 1962 but not under the curatorship of Robert Vincent.

Robert Vincent's last year as curator of the Yale Voice Library was 1948-49.²⁴ His thick file of correspondence with Yale, began in 1941 with a letter from Vincent to Bernard Knollenberg of the Sterling Memorial Library on May 27, 1941,

reveals a history of good intentions and a lack of follow-through on the part of Yale.²⁵ Having been rejected by the National Archives, the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian Institution, Vincent turned to Knollenberg whom he had met while at Yale to record the voice of Professor William Lyon Phelps. Knollenberg set up the arrangement whereby Vincent was made curator and had begun the process of sending "dubs" of his voice collection to Yale. World War II interrupted the project although Vincent did continue to send recordings as time permitted during 1942 and 1943.²⁶

After World War II, Vincent was named curator each year but with no budget or space allocated to house the voice collection on an active basis. The 1949 correspondence begins with the usual promise of space and funding. A faculty committee consisting of Cleanth Brooks of the English Department, Ralph Gabriel of the History Department, and Brand Blanchard of the Philosophy Department was appointed to study the importance of the collection to the university and the costs involved in housing it.²⁷ In a letter to Vincent dated December 10, 1948, Knollenberg's replacement - James T. Babb - commented that "my only problem with regard to your collection is to find the funds to equip and service a room for the collection."²⁸ The funding was not forthcoming. By 1950 Vincent had ended his affiliation with Yale.

1949-50 was a year of change for Robert Vincent. His mother Lisa died of cancer in late 1949. Vincent's loyalty for her had never waned. Lisa's collection of rejection

slips from publishing companies had grown longer with each year, and Vincent's attempts to market recordings of her best stories in 1948 might be seen as an attempt to restore her once indomitable spirit. The Vincents were preparing to move her into their Mamaroneck home just before her death.²⁹ In 1950, Vincent's son, Kenneth, graduated from Yale and went on active Naval service just as the Korean War broke out. Vincent was proud of his son's service aboard the U.S.S. Boxer which participated in the Inchon invasion in 1951, yet he would later boast "I'm one war up on the kid."³⁰

During the early 1950's, Vincent branched out into the infant medium of television. Early television was an insatiable maw that devoured all sorts of productions including independently produced documentaries and old Hollywood films. Using his Radio City office as headquarters, Vincent formed an independent production company and filmed a number of short documentaries including one about Dr. Lin Yutang, the philosopher.³¹ Vincent seemed revived by his cinematic endeavors and seemingly juggled several projects at once as was his custom. Using his interest in famous personalities which had worked on radio during the 1930's, Vincent started a documentary on his hero Theodore Roosevelt. In a letter to Elliott Kone, Director of the Yale Audio Visual Center on June 16, 1953, Vincent outlined plans for the T. R. film. "Willing to proceed full steam ahead,"³² as always, Vincent found it more difficult to obtain production funding for

films than he had in earlier days for radio and recording projects. The costs in television and film were much higher. It would take him almost twenty years to complete the Roosevelt film, and much of it was personally financed.³³

While his old-fashioned promotional style and somewhat Quixotic film projects met with resistance, Vincent still had a reputation as a first class soundman. Having supplied Edward R. Murrow's producer with several voices for the famous I Can Hear It Now series on Columbia Records in 1950,³⁴

Vincent was contracted by Capitol records to produce a similar album called Hark the Years.³⁵ Narrated by Fredric March, Hark the Years is a concise, dramatic creation of some of the earliest social events of the twentieth century.

Vincent's deft hand in editing the montage and his choice of voice actualities is evident in the recording. Released in 1951, Hark the Years contains the earliest Edison experimental cylinders. It was reissued in 1963 through the Michigan State University National Voice Library.³⁶

The idea for Hark the Years was germinated at a series of "soirees" which Vincent held at his Radio City Studio in 1949 and 1950. These cocktail party-listening sessions included historian Frederick Lewis Allen and his wife, Agnes Rodgers, a writer for Harpers magazine. Other guests included broadcaster Dave Garroway, later host of the Today Show on NBC. Woodrow Wilson's daughter, Mrs. William Gibbs McAdoo attended one of the parties to listen to a recording of her father. Guests would sit on the floor, drink Scotch, and

listen to Vincent's recordings.³⁷ On April 12, 1950, Frederick Lewis Allen wrote that he and his wife "had a very good time listening to those records and would certainly like to hear more of them" ³⁸ The rest of the letter consists of a detailed outline of suggestions for the album including the suggestion to "avoid looking at first as if you are duplicating the Murrow collection."³⁹

One of Robert Vincent's proudest accomplishments was his association with director Robert Flaherty on the award-winning documentary film, The Titan in 1950.⁴⁰ Vincent did the sound work on this story of the life of Michelangelo which was narrated by actor Fredric March. March and Vincent became friends through this project and Hark the Years. The Vincents visited March and his wife, actress Florence Eldridge, at their Connecticut home.⁴¹

Vincent continued to pursue television projects in 1952 and 1953. He completed one color pilot of a series he called Who's Who in Person. Using the camera as an inquiring eye into the homes of famous personages, Vincent had originated the idea in the Lin Yutang film the year before. This time Vincent filmed a program at the apartment of artist-illustrator James Montgomery Flagg. Vincent used the somewhat coy artifice of a young female newspaper reporter assigned to visit Flagg for a story. The girl acted as a foil for Flagg who entertained her with stories from his colorful life and showed her his paintings displayed in the apartment. In both his radio writing and in film, Vincent employed the

foil concept as a means of creating "human interest" in his subject.⁴² Flagg's worldly repartee is entertaining despite the inherent weakness of this contrivance. By prevailing standards in early television, Whos Who in Person should have been a success.

Once again, financing was a problem for Vincent. He attempted to interest Screen Gems, Inc. in the series and got a warm response on February 4, 1953. John H. Mitchell, Vice-President of the television department wrote:

Personally, I believe that your undertaking, if developed along the lines of your first film would to be a substantial financial success, and . . . makes for an attractive investment.⁴³

Yet, Vincent could not find "an angel" to provide operating capital to produce a twenty-six week series which was standard for distribution contracts. Ironically, a few years later, CBS developed a hit program called Person to Person produced by Fred W. Friendly and hosted by Edward R. Murrow.⁴⁴ In promoting his concept, Vincent had shown the film to Friendly. Viola Vincent today maintains that Friendly "stole" her husband's idea.⁴⁵

Another film project of 1952 was Vincent's adaptation of his mother's story "The Flower of Happiness." The plot centers around a fairy princess who asks her mother, the queen, why modern humans no longer need the services of wish fulfillment. The queen reveals to her how mankind has made many things possible through its own devices: radio, television, and flight. The girl is dispatched to earth with a magic

flower to learn this for herself. There she meets an angry boy, a tramp in the park, and a busy young woman. She is rebuffed by each and loses her flower which the angry boy later retrieves and now values because he has found it himself. Returning to her mother in the fairy kingdom, the princess has now learned the relative value of happiness in the modern world where "each must find his own happiness for himself."⁴⁶

Filmed in black and white at a castle near the Hudson River in Mount Kisco, New York, "The Flower of Happiness" stands up well as a children's film. Superbly narrated by actor John Carradine and containing effective special effects, the film has strong visual continuity. Vincent's niece, Jennifer Tarlau, played the princess, James Montgomery Flagg's daughter, Faith - who also appeared in Who's Who in Person, played the queen. The film was directed by Herbert Delmas.⁴⁷

Vincent's "production gang" during this period was typical of the varied and offbeat characters he liked to work with. Robert Sosenko, an eccentric free-lance photographer, supervised the photography for the film. Talented, but neurotic, Sosenko once presented Vincent with a half-serious plan to "kill" his nagging wife by having Vincent run her down at a pre-arranged corner in his automobile.⁴⁸ A saner, more reliable friend was John Tierney of the media department of Standard Oil who did the production work. Working on weekends, the group bickered often. One hot afternoon in Mamaroneck, director Delmas became so frustrated during a story conference that he walked into Vincent's guest room and went to bed.

Sosenko was often distracted by phone calls from his wife with whom there was constant warfare.⁴⁹

Despite the chaos, "The Flower of Happiness" succeeds as a finished product. In this case, money did make a difference. Vincent received two-thousand dollars to complete the rough cut from Mr. Milton Underdown on July 15, 1952.⁵⁰ Underdown put up the money against fifty percent of the film's net profits. It is not known whether the film made any money beyond expenses.

In October, 1952, Vincent signed an agreement with Sterling Television, Inc. to distribute his films.⁵¹ He also received a favorable letter from Clip Boutell of G. P. Putnam's Sons which praised the Lin Yutang film. Boutell suggested other films based on Putnam's authors including Sholem Asch and film about the Duke of Windsor based on Henry G. Walter's book, A King's Story.⁵²

By 1953, however, it was evident to Robert Vincent that he was not going to make a great deal of money in either television or films. The film projects had been fun, and Vincent enjoyed the creative comradeship of "his gang."⁵³ However, it was not the same as working at V-Disc or the United Nations. The drive to work toward a worthy goal still burned in Vincent, but there were no calls to glory in television.

Television was fast becoming a monolithic industry, and the large networks were bringing up their own younger production men. The independent distributing companies did not finance productions, and there were many independent production

companies with the resources to mount series on a larger scale than anything that Vincent's weekend operation could compete with. NBC's 1952 success with Victory at Sea, an awardwinning World War II documentary series signalled a trend toward network generated documentary projects.⁵⁴ Vincent was an outsider once again, but the game had changed. His one-man entrepreneurship was old fashioned.

Moreover, Madison Avenue was discovering new markets. Postwar America was future-oriented. It wanted to forget the past. Suddenly, Vincent was an anachronism. His collection of first-hand anecdotes and historical voices had lost their immediacy. In an age of Howdy Doody, "Uncle Miltie," and I Love Lucy, who cared about the voices of Florence Nightingale or P. T. Barnum? Audiences laughed at "old-time movies" on television. The twenties was remembered in the popular mind for "The Charleston" and "bath tub gin." The Great Depression was repressed because it still hurt too much to remember it. Nostalgia had not yet transformed World War II into "the good war." After a twenty year cycle of depression, war, and recovery America wanted prosperity, escapism, and novelty. Robert Vincent's thoughtful and retrospective outlook did not serve him well in the television age. Besides, he agreed with his friend Fred Allen that television had robbed the common man of his imagination.⁵⁶

As if to confirm his status as an anachronism, Vincent was inducted into the Edison Pioneers, a society of those who had worked for the great inventor before 1930.⁵⁷ Vincent

still added to his vast voice collection with the distant hope that a permanent home could be found for it at a university or museum. He invited songwriter L. Wolfe Gilbert, composer of "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," to his studio to spin yarns.⁵⁸ He contributed voice actualities to a film on the life of Thomas Edison. However, New York was closing in on Robert Vincent. So, refusing to live in the past, he left the city of his dreams and moved to Los Angeles, California in the summer of 1953.

Southern California was booming during the 1950's. Vincent's son, Kenneth, had expressed interest in settling there after his discharge from Navy service. With prospects dwindling in New York and in view of the high cost of maintaining their Mamaroneck home the Vincents decided to sell their house at 401 Carroll Avenue. Novelist Budd Schulberg purchased the property.⁵⁹ Vincent had it in mind to go into real estate in California with his son who had a plan to build houses in the Los Angeles suburbs. However, as a hedge against the plan, Vincent joined the ADTFC - the Association of Documentary and Television Cameramen.⁶⁰ If real estate failed, he could always do soundwork in Hollywood studios.

In retrospect, the California years represent an exile for Vincent from the world that he had created for himself in New York. His files reveal very little about his activities from 1953 to 1962 when he was asked to bring his voice collection to Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. Viola Vincent believed that her husband was discontented that

his film ventures had not been more successful.⁶¹ He no longer had Vocarium Studios with its familiar Radio City home base. No university or institution had expressed interest in taking on his collection. Yet, Robert Vincent had not gone to California at the age of fifty-five to retire. He may have temporarily lost the momentum of his twenty-five year recording career, but it was a new adventure which re-awakened his survival skills. The California building boom brought out the entrepreneur in Vincent.

The Vincents settled in Beverly Hills and Vincent went to work in partnership with his son and another partner. When their building business broke up in 1954, Vincent loaded all his sound equipment into a pickup truck and drove back to New York where he spent several weeks renewing old contacts. Staying at his old haunt, the Brooklyn Y.M.C.A., Vincent failed to come up with any firm prospects and drove back to California.⁶² A letter from L. Wolfe Gilbert on June 16, 1954 indicates that Vincent was residing in the city at that time and had borrowed some records from Gilbert's collection to copy.⁶³

Back in California, Vincent formed a partnership with Miles Indemill, a builder. For the next two years, they built several single family dwellings in Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica, and Beverly Hills. Vincent took real estate extension courses at U.C.L.A. and used his old hustling instincts to advantage. In 1955, the Vincents moved to Santa Monica. Three years later they purchased a lot at 12426 Idaho Avenue in Santa Monica. Vincent had obtained a house in Beverly

Hills at a bargain and moved it onto the Idaho Street lot.⁶⁴ The Vincents refurbished the transplanted Spanish bungalow and lived there until their permanent move to East Lansing, Michigan in 1964.

If Robert Vincent was unhappy with life in California, it is not evident in his activities. Essentially a cheerful man, Vincent was not given to self-analysis. Like most men of his generation, he solved his problems through hard work, and Robert Vincent was nothing, if not industrious. During 1958 and 1959, Vincent was associated with Hayden, Stone, Inc. selling stocks and bonds.⁶⁵ Also at that time, he was helping his son set up a custom cabinetry manufacturing business. They called the company Guild Master, and purchased property in Agura, California for a factory site. Vincent threw himself into the project, obtaining the necessary clearances and setting up the contracts for construction of the plant. He supervised every step of the project and kept a meticulous photographic record of each phase of the building.⁶⁶

Yet, Guild Master was not something Vincent built for himself. It was an investment in his son's future. Kenneth had married in 1958 and Vincent's first grandson, Scott, was born in 1960.⁶⁷ By 1960, Vincent was back in the production business. On Friday, November 4, the Evening Outlook ran a full page picture story about documentaries being "edited in a west side garage."⁶⁸ The story and the photo layout were vintage Vincent complete with a low-angle shot of the

now-balding "wizard" comfortably attired in a sweater gazing purposefully over the spools of recording tape and camera equipment. Assisting Vincent on the new project were Ed Martin, a cameraman, and Robert Burroughs, a twenty-four year old assistant. Vincent had done the soundwork on Martin's 1957 documentary The True Story of the Civil War which had won an Academy Award in its class that year.⁶⁹

Brentwood Productions, as Vincent dubbed his latest project, rated a mention in Jack Hellman's Variety column of November 10, 1960. Hellman probably had picked up the item from the Evening Outlook story. He wrote:

BOTTOMS UP . . . A DOCUMENTARY SERIES WITH VOICES out of the past reproduced by recordings from cylinders, is being prepared by G. Robert Vincent's Brentwood Productions. He worked in the Edison laboratories and has a complete library of famous voices dating back to 1888. Stills of the world famous figures will be animated by an invention of Vincent's for the series to be called "Panorama of Yesterday" intended for tv⁷⁰ and distribution to schools and colleges

It was actually Martin who had "invented" the animation process, but the new publicity merely added lustre to the now legendary persona that Vincent had created for himself. As early as 1956, Vincent had publicly expressed interest in producing a series of educational films utilizing the resources of his collection. In the Evening Outlook on Wednesday, September 4, 1956 a picture story about Vincent's collection cited his interest in "preserving this treasure for posterity."⁷¹ Vincent said:

I don't want to sell it (the collection).
 I want to carry out Edison's dream. I want to produce pictures with authentic voices and authentic visual material. These could be used in the schools and become part of our educational system, preserving this treasure for posterity.⁷²

Clearly, this was not a new idea. Brentwood Productions' "Panorama of Yesterday" was a recycling of "Voices of Yesterday" with pictures. His work with Martin on The True Story of the Civil War had obviously fired his dormant plans. A transcribed telephone conversation between Vincent and an unnamed advertising executive recorded around 1940 (and still in Vincent's collection) reveals a plan that Vincent had at that time for producing and distributing historical voice recordings to public schools.⁷³ The advertising man, though impressed with Vincent's product expressed the opinion that "the idea is not marketable because kids today would be bored with the voices, no matter how famous they are."⁷⁴ Now in 1960, with pictures, Vincent was convinced that he had a winner. To Vincent, twenty years was nothing, if you had a good idea.

Panorama of Yesterday was actually a good idea on paper only. Brentwood Productions' headquarters consisted of Vincent's garage on Idaho Avenue in Santa Monica. Again, Vincent was operating on a shoestring, pooling his "gang's" resources to produce yet another pilot. The flurry of publicity had been calculated to interest financial backers for the project which nominally had scheduled films on other famous personalities in Vincent's collection such as Admiral Robert

E. Peary, W. C. Handy, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.⁷⁵ The pilot film was entitled "We Stand at Armageddon" and was based on the life of Theodore Roosevelt. In resurrecting his career as a producer, Vincent was delving into the past to re-live his earliest success. As in the ancient biographic tradition wherein, the subject marks a life's course by his first public success, Vincent used his association with Theodore Roosevelt as a touchstone. His Roosevelt cylinder was like an amulet or charm that he carried with him throughout his life. T. R. had helped bring Vincent out of the darkness of adolescence into a world of light. Almost fifty-years later, at the age of sixty-two Robert Vincent was looking again for the light as he threw himself into work on the documentary about his old hero.

Vincent had made a lengthy trip to New York City during the summer of 1960 to procure photographs for the Roosevelt film and to make contacts that might prove useful in producing the project. From June 20th to July 15th, Vincent frantically worked against a self-imposed deadline.⁷⁶ Again, lack of funds was a problem. Vincent's daily typewritten journal of the trip provides a cogent picture of both the excitement and the anxiety of his return to the city. Once again, Robert Vincent was "crashing-in," living out of a suitcase, and improvising his way through a new project.

The fourteen page, single spaced typewritten "log" which Vincent kept is filled with the flavor of New York City in the summer of 1960. It was as though Vincent were

rediscovering the city. Each entry is not only a record of his attempts to obtain photographs for the film, but it is also dotted with pithy asides about people and places Vincent encountered. The first night in the city, he watched "the Patterson-Johansson fight at a saloon on 8th Avenue."⁷⁷ A luncheon reunion with Tony Janak of Columbia Records revealed that Lindy's had "deteriorated." Janak, "wied and generous as ever," arranged for an after-hours session at Columbia's studios to "filter and dub the (soundtrack) tape"⁷⁸ at their leisure. Vincent contracted Robert Sosenko to help him photograph Roosevelt pictures in various archives in the city. Sosenko, still at war with his wife, ruined several rolls of film at the Museum of the City of New York. Vincent noted later:

Sosenko is a heel and a worm who obtains lousy results mainly because he is negligent, nervous, forgetful and sloppy. However, there is something that he must possess in order to survive in his trade. I think his ideas on picture creation and editing are good, and he is able to laugh at his many deficiencies.⁷⁹

The two most important talents in Vincent's philosophy of life were competency and a sense of humor.

Working against time and dwindling resources, Vincent switched from a room at the Yale Club to a cheaper room at Hotel America with its "convenient but bawdy and noisy location."⁸⁰ Completing his shot list for the film and gradually obtaining the necessary photographs from the Morgan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and other institutions, Vincent

visited both the NBC and the CBS documentary production units. In a letter to Bob Burroughs in Los Angeles on June 26, Vincent revealed the results of these "intelligence gathering" forays:

I called on NBC's "Project 20" and saw an old friend. Dan Jones, guiding genius of their films . . . That outfit did a show on Mr. Lincoln which seemed to be a steal from "The True Story (of the Civil War)" and the Camera Eye boys are suing NBC at this time . . . which made my position a little awkward. The real crooks are CBS's "20th Century" They have a terrific staff and no lack of funds but still had to swipe the record of TR that I made myself . . . as a kid.⁸¹

A letter written to his wife on June 25 further told how Vincent handled the discovery that CBS had violated his 1937 copyright of his recording:

. . . I auditioned the film in their screening room, where they had a copy of "Hark the Years" laying on the table. Bob Azman said they used it for references purposes only I did not think it wise to seem too indignant on the spot, but I insisted that they loan me a print of the film, which they reluctantly did . . . They did a nice job. I do not like to sue . . . but I feel that we have the right to use any picture sequence that might be useful to us.⁸²

Vincent admitted feeling "rather depressed about it" but thought that "we can have a much different and more inclusive show."⁸³

In addition to work on the Roosevelt film, Vincent scheduled dinner engagements with his family and other friends including John Ward, a writer, whom he took to dinner "at Mario's . . . in hopes that it may spur him on to do that

Loutre treatment."⁸⁴ Vincent still had hopes for adapting his mother's story.

On July 12, Vincent took the train to Cambridge, Massachusetts to complete his photographic research at Harvard College Library. Conscious of expenses, Vincent used the inventive ruse of putting on his old Army uniform and obtaining a cheap "furlough ticket." He had brought the uniform along originally in hopes of getting a "Navy plane out of Los Alamedas Air Base" eastward from the West Coast but could not make connections.⁸⁵ After meeting with Mr. Haynes, "a cold, stuffy, bureaucratic type," at the Harvard Library, Vincent went back to the hotel "changed from uniform to cooler civvies" and returned to the library to complete his work.⁸⁶ Vincent's diary ended on July 15 as he completed "typing the Harvard picture list and watched the Democratic convention windup." Vincent noted that "Kennedy seems arrogant and somewhat coarse; Johnson looks sick and dejected. Serves the public right for having turned down Adlai Stevenson twice - a far more brilliant man than all."⁸⁷

Unlike his formal memoirs, which were written with an eye to posterity, Vincent's New York diary is more candid and spontaneous. Written in the heat of the moment in hotel rooms late at night, these entries reveal more of the true Vincent than anything short of a conversation with the man. The energy and purposefulness, as always, are evident. However, in the diary we see the small contradictions too. The man who is shocked by corporate plagiarism at CBS

is also the same man who could pose as an active-duty Army officer to save a few dollars on transportation. Vincent could "operate" with impunity, yet in his own ethical manner it was always for a "higher" purpose. Like a latter-day Jay Gatsby, Robert Vincent considered minor expediencies as means to the end of his particular quest. In 1960, the Theodore Roosevelt film represented Vincent's first major creative project in almost seven years.⁸⁸ As a result, the boy in him was reborn and so, too, were his old dreams of establishing a National Voice Library.

CHAPTER IX

CURATOR OF THE NATIONAL VOICE LIBRARY AND RETIREMENT 1962-1985

The foundation of a national voice archive had been Robert Vincent's abiding dream since the 1930's. In 1942, when he thought that Yale would be the permanent home of his collection, he wrote an article for The Yale University Library Gazette. In it he stated that "it seemed not enough for me to unearth and restore what was left of the past, it was equally essential to preserve the present and thus create a treasure house of living voices as a priceless heritage for our children and our children's children."¹

Stirred, perhaps, by the prevailing wartime idealism "in this war against oblivion," Vincent indulged in a sincere "bit of prophecy." He predicted that:

The citizen of the United States living in the year 2042 will look back upon our unenlightened times and marvel what progress has been made and how humanity has gone forward on the path leading to a better life. But he will also recognize that in the dark times of 1942 the seeds of the triumphant achievement of his era had been sown. And often he will make a pilgrimage to Yale and listen to the thinkers, the scientists, the artists of our time.²

When, by 1950, it was evident that Yale would not follow through on its plans for the voice library, Vincent turned

to other projects. Yet, he never lost faith that one day his collection would find institutional sponsorship. By early 1962, Robert Vincent's unique voice library had finally found a permanent home at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan.

Founded in 1855, Michigan State was one of America's oldest land-grant universities. By 1960, the university was rapidly expanding under the aggressive leadership of its President, Dr. John Hannah. The head of the Michigan State library was Dr. Richard Chapin, a young war veteran with a doctorate in communications from the University of Illinois. Chapin was a futurist who recognized that libraries would have to expand beyond print media to service students of the post-electronic age. In a letter to Vincent written on December 5, 1961, Chapin stated Michigan State's desire "to exert leadership in the field of learning resources."³

He wrote:

We feel, from the President down, that we must marshall all media in solving the problems facing higher education. We realize that print and film are only two of the media available for teaching and research. Your voice collection, as you well know, could be useful in enriching the academic programs of this and other universities.⁴

Chapin called Vincent's collection "a cultural and educational asset to the entire country" and extended an invitation for Vincent to visit the East Lansing campus "to meet with the faculty interested in a voice library."⁵

While Chapin was the official who initiated negotiations with Vincent, the initial contact with Vincent had been made by Herbert Bergman, a professor in the Department of American Thought and Language at Michigan State. Bergman had learned of Vincent's collection while "endeavoring to locate recordings by Theodore Roosevelt, Andrew Carnegie, and William Jennings Bryan."⁶ In a letter to Vincent on October 16, 1961, Bergman indicated that he had spoken "to colleagues in other departments" who "shared (his) excitement at the educational, cultural, and research uses of the Vincent Vocabarium."⁷ He also wrote that "members of the Administration also were enthusiastic, particularly in view of the Learning Resources Center which" was being established at Michigan State. Bergman's letter was not a bona fide offer, but it did "explore the possibility of housing the collection . . . with appropriate facilities for its preservation, cataloging, and use"⁸

Vincent took "nearly a month before answering" Bergman because he was in the final stages of constructing the "10,000 square foot industrial building" that would be the new headquarters of Guild Master. His letter of November 10, 1961 recounted his efforts to "establish a national voice library that would become the 'Mecca of the Spoken Word.'"⁹ The tone of Vincent's letter is restrained but positive. He concluded by stating that "the thought of joining forces with Michigan State in this worthwhile enterprise is a pleasant one."¹⁰

News of Michigan State's interest in his collection came at a fortuitous time for Robert Vincent. Work on the new factory had occupied Vincent for the previous eighteen months. Brentwood Productions had become dormant with half of the Roosevelt film completed and stalled from lack of funds. Vincent alluded to starting a "project with a great deal of enthusiasm but rather limited funds."¹¹ That his mind was still on the T. R. film project was evident in a comment to Bergman that "possibly there might be some University interest among your colleagues" in "these living voices presented with actual and authentic scenes" which "would have an emotional impact on the viewer."¹² Characteristically, with the completion of the Guild Master factory, Vincent was restlessly searching for a new project. The unfinished Roosevelt film weighed heavily in his plans.

On December 17, 1961 Vincent wrote a thirteen-page letter to Dr. John Vosper of the U.C.L.A. library. In it Vincent alluded to a "soiree . . . before a cheery log fire when we delved into the Past and resurrected some of the living voices of bygone personalities."¹³ Since Bergman's letter, Vincent had been busy trying to rekindle interest at U.C.L.A. in his collection. Vincent, in the letter, traced the history of his attempts to find a permanent home for his records. In addition to pre-war attempts to place the collection in the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Smithsonian Institution, Vincent also described the reasons for the breakdown of the arrangement at Yale.¹⁴ Also, he

alluded to discussions "eight years ago" and again in 1958 and 1961 with the U.C.L.A. library concerning placing the collection. That his hopes were rekindled by the Michigan State overture was evident in this paragraph:

But happier prospects appear on the horizon for 1962. A mid-western university, at their own initiative, wrote to me and is eager to take on and continue the voice library on realistic terms as well as help in the production of the historical film series. Besides this . . . U.C.L.A. has a new Librarian.¹⁵

Clearly, Vincent had not forgotten how to finagle. However, Dr. Vosper did not make Vincent an offer to take his collection.

The Vosper letter is also significant because it set forth Vincent's requirements for a National Voice Library. In addition to the technical aspects of storage space and recording equipment the letter set forth the underlying philosophy for such a project. Vincent wrote:

Of course its founders must earnestly believe in its necessity and in the cultural and educational value - for this and future generations - of preserving the actual voice as well as the thoughts expressed by these voices and the sounds of our contemporary life. More than that. The originators of this project must expend time and effort and money in the pursuit of these aims. I would like to be one of those founders.¹⁶

Almost every department of a university could be served and aided in its curriculum through the use of such a source of intimate contact with the subject of their studies. And this relates to events as well as persons.¹⁶

Further, the letter explicated Vincent's theory about the relationship between voice and character. Since the

1930's, Vincent had been expounding upon the use of the human voice as an index to the temperament of the speaker. Wholly an intuitive idea based on a quotation by Disraeli in Tancred that "there is no index of character so sure as the voice," the theory was linked in Vincent's mind with Edison's 1877 North American Review comments that "it will henceforth be possible to preserve for future generations the voices as well as the words of our Washingtons and Lincolns" ¹⁷ However impressive the publicity tag "Voxologist," Vincent was not an academician. His theory is fascinating but inconclusive and somewhat mystical, as the Vosper letter revealed. In using Winston Churchill as a case in point, Vincent wrote:

When I read Churchill's six volumes on The Second World War, I seemed to hear his own voice narrating the entire text. This caused me to reflect that, in order to read an author rightly, one ought first to hear him speak. Thus the written word will immediately become more alive. ¹⁸

Vincent went on to state that "one will then know at what tempo this particular writer ought to be read." He related "tempo and temperament" as "not only etymologically related" but "the one is the expression of the other." ¹⁹ He concluded the explication by saying that the text itself is an insufficient "hint as to the way it ought to be read. The choice of words is often curiously misleading. Body and Soul - Thought and Voice - if that unity is broken, only shadows and shades and echoes remain." ²⁰ That some works of literature are meant to be read not heard, as in the Churchill volumes, did not matter to Vincent. As specious

as his theory might be, it was really meant to extoll the virtues of having the voices of history at hand to use and to illuminate our historical figures. Seen objectively, Vincent's theories were "props" like the publicity photographs and "Voxologist" headlines. His importance was that he had gathered his collection of voices. He was, first, an archivist not a linguist. If it took a little Barnumesque palaver to put across the importance of a National Voice Library, then Vincent was willing to deliver it.

After Bergman's letter in November, events happened rapidly. Chapin put through a three-way conference call from Michigan State with Bergman and Vincent on the line. Bergman's connection failed, but Chapin chatted amiably with Vincent.²¹ On December 5, Chapin wrote Vincent to set up a visit to Michigan State on "December 28th or 29th."²² On January 8, 1962, Chapin wrote that "it has been one week since your visit . . . but your enthusiasm and vitality are still with us today."²³ He offered Vincent a proposal "to get the collection started this month" and promised to "provide space to store, reproduce, and play back the voices" in the collection. Further, Chapin promised a future "of expansion" for the collection. He also mentioned that "the entire resources of the University, both in this country and abroad, would be used to add voices for the sake of history." General Khan in Pakistan, President Diem of South Vietnam, and Premier Azikiwe of Nigeria were three names

that Chapin mentioned as "examples . . . of important figures with which Michigan State personnel have personal contacts."²⁴

Chapin flew to Los Angeles on Wednesday, February 7 to meet with Vincent and to see the collection. He wrote that "the Provost of the University has authorized me to work out all details with you regarding the collection and your appointment as Assistant to the Director of Libraries."²⁵ He added that "the Secretary of the Board has approved the necessary reconstruction for the housing of the collection."²⁶ On Friday, February 2, Vincent sent Chapin an itinerary of his two-day stay. This included a tour of Beverly Hills, a visit to "the unique 35,000 volume library of Mrs. Lion Feuchtwanger (widow of the well known author),"²⁷ and a visit to U.C.L.A. and lunch with Bob Vosper. Vincent closed the letter with a reference to Sherlock Holmes:

Incidentally, it never pays to brag about the weather. Today its somewhat colder and very foggy. You can hardly see across the street. Makes one think of London and hansom cabs and Baker Street with Sherlock Holmes shouting: "Come Watson the game's afoot!"

I think this quote applies to us, too: the game's afoot. I'm confident we can work out the rules for the game,²⁸ which promises to be exciting and constructive.

By the end of February, Vincent was busy in Los Angeles "sorting and re-recording" material in his collection.²⁹ In East Lansing, Dr. Chapin was preparing for the transfer of the collection and trying to come up with operating funds. A letter to Vincent on February 20 indicates that he was

"working on the Senior Class to provide \$3,000 to \$4,000 for 'initial equipment' for the Voice Library" ³⁰

Vincent's three page response on February 28, includes a question about a "contract to do this job for a certain amount of time" so that he could "feel secure enough to concentrate only on this task." ³¹ On April 5, Vincent wrote Chapin about financial matters. He had spent \$218.13 for which he provided a breakdown statement. He had also ordered 288 reels of "Tenzar" recording tape through Guild Master at the customary trade discount. On April 17, Chapin wrote to Vincent cautioning him to let him know in advance about expenditures since "these are very difficult things to clear through the Business Office." ³² He also informed Vincent that he had "tentatively set a speaking engagement" for him to "explain the Voice Library" in the middle of May. Vincent responded with a seven point letter on April 20, explaining, "Gee, Dick, if I were as well off as I was during my studio days, these expenditures would not be a problem." ³³

Financing the National Voice Library was a problem from the outset. Chapin had pinned high hopes on outside foundation funding to provide for equipment and operating expenses. Vincent's files from 1962 to 1966 are bulging with rejections for funding proposals from dozens of trusts. No money was forthcoming. The idea of a historical voice library was simply too unconventional to conservative trustees who still thought in terms of print media collections. In an April, 1988 interview, Dr. Chapin expressed his disappointment in

not securing supplementary funding for the Voice Library. He also acknowledged that Vincent's creative impatience to move ahead was often thwarted by the "bureaucratic necessities" of working in a large public institution.³⁴

Vincent reported to Michigan State on Wednesday, May 9. Jack Breslin, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, had written Vincent on April 27, that the Board had "formally accepted" the gift of his collection of 8,000 recorded voices.³⁵ Having settled into a "sparsely furnished" student suite in Cherry Lane apartments on the campus, Vincent worked on setting up the Voice Library headquarters on the fourth floor of the M.S.U. library. In a letter to his wife on May 13, Vincent reported details of assembling his equipment and of the "beautiful vari-colored trees and magnificent landscaping" of the campus in spring. Yet, there was concern about financial matters:

I must have spent at least \$40. on various things for the Voice Library . . . but broke as I am, I don't like to ask for reimbursement at this time because . . . Dick is having difficulties with the Business Office on such type of things.

Anyhow, he seems most friendly and co-operative and I certainly can't complain of the treatment with all those whom I have had contacts with.³⁶

He also reported that he had obtained a loan for a used 1955 Cadillac from a Vice President at East Lansing State Bank. Vincent wrote:

The Vice-President was rather amused at my attempt to "latch onto some of his dough" when I was in town only a day. Anyhow, he let me have \$950 at once on the promise that I would speak at one of his Lion's Club functions.³⁷

On Tuesday, May 22 Robert Vincent and his collection were presented formally at a gathering of the Friends of the Michigan State University Library at the Kellogg Center on campus.³⁸ Vincent was concerned that "among other brass - the President of the university and his wife were there." However, his debut was a success. He wrote his wife that "the seance lasted one hour but it never dragged. When it was over, dozens of people shook hands and said nice things."³⁹ President Hannah complimented Chapin on the acquisition and told Vincent how much he had enjoyed his program of voices. Later at the Charcoal Grill in Lansing over drinks, Chapin told Vincent that "the way the thing went over . . . meant at least \$10,000 for the project."⁴⁰ In closing the letter to his wife, Vincent observed wryly: "my bank balance is under \$50. Its funny about money. Did you send any of the stuff."⁴¹

Despite the financial stress, Vincent was enthusiastic about his new situation. Living in Cherry Lane apartments was like the old days at the Brooklyn "Y." Important people were "calling" at his new offices on the fourth floor of the library. For the first time since leaving New York in 1953, Robert Vincent had a headquarters. In many ways, Vincent flourished in his campus setting because he was, despite his 64 years, still very much the "merry-eyed gnome of a man" that he had been fifteen years before when he was the subject of a Mort Weisinger article in The Saturday Evening Post.⁴² Dick Chapin said that he always thought

of Vincent as "still the kid in short pants who recorded Teddy Roosevelt."⁴³

Requests for voices began to come into the M.S.U. library almost as soon as the newspaper publicity spread word of the new voice collection. Vincent processed what he could find time for, but his days were taken up with setting up the equipment and dubbing the collection onto reels of heavy-duty tape. In June of 1962, Vincent ended the term with a trip east to obtain material at the Edison laboratory archives at West Orange, New Jersey and other locations. He wrote his wife that Chapin had raised his annual salary to \$8,500.⁴⁴ Vincent also shared some of his frustrations and plans:

There is so much to be done here and for one guy to attempt it (as far as the Voice Library goes) makes progress miserably slow. I'm also anxious to start a documentary⁴⁵ picture section to go with the voices and events.

The first month of the National Voice Library, however, was a marked success. Vincent's first impression on the university community had justified Chapin's faith in him. The faculty was enthusiastic about the possibilities of the collection. In a letter to Chapin on May 25, Gordon L. Thomas, Professor of Speech wrote:

There is no question in my mind that this collection has a great many possibilities in terms of classroom and research utilization Mr. Vincent's collection will be a priceless aid in helping the student understand more fully the impact of the public speaker on the stream of history, of securing a "feeling" of the times which no amount of reading can give him, of helping him catch the real impact

of the speaker Indeed, much of Mr. Vincent's material is ephemeral and cannot be found even in print, much less in transcription.⁴⁶

For two years, Vincent lived in East Lansing during the academic year and travelled home to Santa Monica for school vacations. In a letter to his wife he noted that "the expense of running two establishments requires a higher salary than I'm getting."⁴⁷ Although Viola Vincent was a key member of the Guild Master administration, the Vincents decided to sell their California home and move permanently to East Lansing by the fall semester of 1964. At the age of sixty-six when most women of her generation had settled into comfortable repose, Viola Vincent embarked on a new adventure in Michigan. Later she said that "once Bob decided to move, I never gave it a second thought."⁴⁸ The Vincents' marriage thrived on change.

As time went on it became evident that Michigan State University had obtained more than a collection of voices. Vincent's first-hand experience and his ability as a raconteur not only made him an excellent good-will ambassador for the university but also endeared him to students who could endure his curmudgeonly behavior. Vincent ran the Voice Library like he used to run his sound studio in Radio City. He did not suffer fools generously, but if a sincere undergraduate wanted to hear Edward R. Murrow or Eugene Debs, he would not only play the recordings but might share some intimate anecdotes about the personality or details of the recording

session. A "fan letter" from Don Dick, a graduate student, to Chapin expressed his appreciation of "Mr. Vincent, the man who actually recorded many of these sound documents."⁴⁹ However, on one occasion, Vincent brushed off a visiting professor by telling him that "Mr. Vincent is out of town." The professor, having seen Vincent's picture in a newspaper clipping, diplomatically retreated and continued his research elsewhere.⁵⁰

Local newspaper coverage was pretty much in the vein of the Voices of Yesterday publicity of the 1930's. The State Journal relied on the "eerie . . . spiritualist seance" angle.⁵¹ However, a Detroit News story of November 3, 1963, presented a detailed history of the collection supplemented by an interview with Vincent which evoked one-liners from the curator on the speaking style of American Presidents.⁵² Vincent appeared authoritatively in a photograph peering at an Edison cylinder through a magnifying glass. In fact, Vincent had been polishing his "wizard" persona for almost thirty years; he had grown into the role gracefully with age.

Sometime in 1963, it must have become evident to Robert Vincent that his plan for making historical films was not going to materialize soon at Michigan State. There was no money for a "film section," and there was no time to produce them given the weight of his schedule keeping up with business at the Voice Library. With the publication of feature articles in Time on February 7, 1964, and The New York Times

Magazine on March 22, 1964, Vincent was swamped with letters from all over the country. The Time story was featured in the "education" section and glibly reported that Vincent "can now recreate anything from battle sounds of the Spanish-American War to the words of thirteen presidents starting with Grover Cleveland."⁵³ The New York Times Magazine piece emphasized that the "National Voice Library is the labor and the legacy of Mr. Vincent."⁵⁴ William Barry Furlong, the Times writer, placed the Michigan State Voice Library with the Columbia Oral History Research Office and the proposed oral history project for the projected John F. Kennedy Library at Harvard as proof that history "should be preserved in sound as well as in print."⁵⁵

The Time story not only inundated Vincent with requests for material, but it also drew the corporate ire of Capitol Records who noticed a mention of the Michigan State reissue of Hark the Years. Time noted that:

Out of all this came a memorable record, Hark the Years, narrated by Fredric March, which has been a collector's item selling for as much as \$75. Happily, the Michigan State audio-visual center has just reissued it for \$5.⁵⁶

On April 23, Vincent received a letter from Capitol's general counsel warning of legal action for copyright infringement.⁵⁷ On April 28, Vincent replied to Capitol in a pungent two-page letter which pointed out that not only had Capitol given permission to "press up a reissue of 1,000 of these records" for educational purposes, but that Capitol had performed

the pressing order themselves. Vincent also stated that he and Mr. March were "entitled to get periodic and comprehensive reports" on sales of the original albums and implied that they had not been paid sufficient royalties from the sales.⁵⁸ Obviously, Robert Vincent was shrewd and not easily intimidated by corporate lawyers. Capitol did not press the matter further.

Vincent succeeded in spreading the name of Michigan State University to television when he appeared on the NBC Today Show in New York in November of 1963. Vincent delivered a note from M.S.U. Athletic Director, Clarence "Biggie" Munn, to announcer Jack Lescoulie giving him friendly advice on Today's weekly football predictions.⁵⁹ In April of 1964, Vincent was a guest on I've Got A Secret, a weekly quiz program.⁶⁰ Vincent enjoyed the limelight, and the publicity was beneficial to Michigan State.

With the opening of the fall term in 1964, Vincent taught a course in the history of radio.⁶¹ Students came to the Voice Library and listened to original radio transcriptions and lectures on the famous personalities of radio. Vincent's anecdotal style accentuated the "inside story" of many of the recordings. Later, he would teach an evening college class and was often asked to give presentations to Honors College students. Vincent's popularity with students often resulted in letters of support. Sometimes his enthusiastic discussions would result in well-meaning pleas for increased

financial support for the Voice Library. One such letter came from graduating senior Carl Wood:

The uses to which the Honors College and the American Thought and Language Department have put the resources of the (Voice) Library are a small indication of its potential value to the students and the faculty

I might just mention in passing that one of the National Voice Library's greatest assets is its curator. Mr. Vincent certainly has had broader experiences and has personally known more famous figures than anyone I have ever met. Yet he is one of the most modest and genuinely human people I have ever known.

Dr. Chapin . . . I appeal to you to do all you that you can to increase the amount of assistance available to develop this valuable resource of our University.⁶²

In 1965, Vincent was asked to write an article about the Voice Library for the Library Journal.⁶³ He sent a 6,500 word piece entitled "The Sound of History" which was printed intact. Featured in the October 15, 1965 number, this article is the most comprehensive presentation of Vincent's background and role in founding the National Voice Library. All of Vincent's encounters with famous personalities are recounted in this essay. Vincent also detailed the establishment of the collection at Michigan State and paid homage to Dr. Chapin:

Librarian Chapin's foresight in enabling the voice library to be started at MSU, to furnish a new dimension in learning resources, deserves much praise. He has been most friendly and cooperative and phones frequently to give me the benefit of his advice - generally with the salutation: "Hello, Voice? this is Book . . ."⁶⁴

The Library Journal article also revealed the depth of his commitment to his dream of establishing a national archive of recorded sound history. Significantly, he did not mention the California years but did tell of his frustration in that fallow period:

For the next few years, working on documentary motion pictures took up much of my time. Hopes of ever establishing a national institution to preserve and disseminate oral history were getting dimmer. But I never lost faith, reflecting that P. T. Barnum did not start his big Circus until he was 60. My time would yet come!⁶³

Richard Chapin remembered that Vincent was "mission oriented."⁶⁶ While his long-awaited appointment as curator of the National Voice Library was the fulfillment of a thirty year mission, Vincent saw it as only the beginning. He wrote:

Progress has been made but a lot more help is needed in order to fully realize the possibilities for service to this generation and to posterity by the National Voice Library.⁶⁷

From 1965 until his retirement in 1973, Robert Vincent launched many projects to further his stated goals. A second long playing recording was issued; a collection of speeches by Fiorello LaGuardia entitled Patience and Fortitude.⁶⁸ Westinghouse Electric Corporation asked Vincent to produce a documentary recording which was buried in the "time capsule" at the 1965 New York World's Fair.⁶⁹ Several radio and television series were produced, most memorably Spin Back the Years which was the title of a long-running radio program which Vincent did with Humanities Professor Maurice Crane.⁷⁰

Spin was a fast paced half-hour concept utilizing Vincent's "foil" concept. It focused on a social-historical theme each week with pertinent recordings from the collection. The series was nationally distributed to university and educational stations. In 1969, WMSB television produced Spin Back the Years as a weekly television series.⁷¹ Vincent seemed more comfortable in radio than on television. Crane's enthusiastic ad-libbing was a perfect contrast to Vincent's anecdotal social commentary. Vincent controlled the pace on the radio series by skillfully editing the tapes from the team's Saturday morning recording sessions.

Another series of 126 five minute radio programs was produced at WKAR radio. Called Bob Vincent's Almanac, the programs featured a different famous voice on each segment.⁷² Vincent also had time to publish a column, "History in Sound" in the Michigan State News Bulletin.⁷³ Vincent's writing, cogent and entertaining, covered such subjects as his 1938 recording session with Babe Ruth and his meeting with John D. Rockefeller in 1912.

The Voice Library continued to grow under Vincent's aggressive acquisition policy. Through "reciprocity" agreements with CBS and other networks, Vincent supplied voice actualities for their special projects in exchange for historical material from network archives. ABC News asked for a copy of Vincent's Theodore Roosevelt recording in exchange for "anything on the contemporary scene."⁷⁴ WJR in Detroit traded dubs of Franklin D. Roosevelt speeches for

a recording of Charles Lindberg.⁷⁵ Vincent and a student assistant drove to a cave near Butler, Pennsylvania to pick up a carload of rare transcriptions from the KDKA archives located there.⁷⁶

By 1968, campus life at Michigan State had begun to reflect the social upheaval of the era. Vincent tried to keep informed on the issues but was mildly shocked when witnessed students copulating in the study carrels outside the Voice Library headquarters on the fourth floor of the undergraduate library.⁷⁷ Vincent was otherwise liberal and sympathized with "the kids who faced the draft."⁷⁸ As he observed later, "war isn't as much fun as it used to be."⁷⁹ In his old age, Vincent maintained a sincere respect for the underdog. His experiences during the Great Depression had made him a confirmed New Dealer, and his knowledge of social history motivated his admiration for idealists and reformers. Richard Chapin recalled that he and Vincent were in New York on business when news of the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. broke. Vincent felt so badly about it that he "got thoroughly drunk."⁸⁰

The relationship between Vincent and Chapin remained friendly but became strained as time passed. Vincent felt that there was not enough financial backing for new equipment and location recordings. Chapin did what he could but had other, more pressing responsibilities which included the building of a new multi-million dollar graduate library. Moreover, Chapin preferred purchasing commercial recordings

to augment the collection. Vincent favored first-hand material. He wanted to operate as a field engineer going to remote locations to obtain voices. Chapin thought that Vincent's scope was limited and that the Voice Library should include more oral history acquired in a systematic, focused manner. Vincent was interested in voices; Chapin wanted more sustained content that would be of use to historians and sociologists.⁸¹

By 1970, the delicate balance between "Voice" and "Book" was finally upset by the retirement issue. Robert Vincent believed that he had been promised a "lifetime appointment" as Curator.⁸² In effect the collection was still "his" and would be as long as he felt capable of administering it. Despite gall-bladder surgery in 1966, Vincent had not been slowed by age. He was still energetic and alert. Yet Michigan State University had a mandatory retirement age of seventy.

In fact Robert Vincent was seventy-two years of age when he was notified by Chapin on December 29, 1970 that he would be retiring the following June.²³ Since Vincent's birth certificate had been lost, he generally used 1900 as his birthdate. However, in correspondence with the Social Security Administration in December of 1970, Vincent wrote that he "was born on July 17, 1898."⁸⁴

Professor Maurice Crane observed that Vincent was like "King Lear trying to hang onto his kingdom" and that "Dick Chapin had promised Vincent that he would be curator of the Voice Library for life but didn't figure that he would live

forever."⁸⁵ Chapin, to his credit, extended Vincent's tenure for two more one-year appointments. Chapin informed Vincent that the Voice Library is "your baby and your guiding hand must be visible in the future."⁸⁶ In 1971, Vincent and the Voice Library were featured in a "On the Road" segment of The CBS Evening News.⁸⁷ Charles Kuralt and his crew showcased several of Vincent's most famous voices and highlighted some of Vincent's well-polished anecdotes. Tom Kenny, Program Director at WMBD television in Peoria, Illinois, wrote that "Ol Charles (Kuralt) seemed somewhat in awe, as he properly should. I was delighted to see you looking in such good health."⁸⁸

The Kuralt interview which was broadcast on the nation's highest rated news program in November of 1971 was the electronic equivalent of the 1941 New Yorker profile. In a sense being introduced, as it were, by Walter Cronkite was the final incarnation in the media life of Robert Vincent. In view of his impending retirement, the "On the Road" segment could have been a fanfare for a graceful exit. Yet Vincent did not go gently. He was finally "terminated on March 31, 1973."⁸⁹ He left the library without talking to Chapin. He spurned Chapin's offer of a retirement dinner and took the original recordings from his collection with him to his East Lansing home.⁹⁰

In a three page letter written to Chapin on October 21, 1971, Vincent outlined his hopes and frustrations concerning the future of the Voice Library. Affirming his disdain

for purchasing commercial recordings and stating that "during my nearly ten years as Curator, I've tried . . . as well as a one man organization could without a budget." He also described his qualifications for the next Curator:

. . . it would be comforting to know that the qualifications of a future Curator for this specialized project would be a social historian, archivist and competent sound engineer, dedicated to the aim of preserving the history-in-sound of our contemporary civilization. Such a person should not be a run-of-the-mill librarian, but should be chosen with great care and so compensated that his interest will be constant. In the short run, it would probably be a matter of economy, if not good judgement . . . to re-appoint me for another year
 My health, mental capacity and energy are unimpaired.⁹¹

For the duration of 1973, the Voice Library was run by a student assistant. In early 1974, Professor Maurice Crane of the Humanities Department was appointed Curator.⁹²

Retirement was a restless time for Vincent. He hated vacations so much that after only a few days in California visiting his son, he drove to the airport in San Francisco and flew back to East Lansing leaving his wife to continue the family motor trip.⁹³ He set up a sound studio in his basement and defiantly hung a National Voice Library sign on the door. He contracted with an agent and went on tour with a program of voices and slide photographs of twentieth century history.

The basement studio in East Lansing was a replica of his old Radio City headquarters. The walls were hung with autographed photos of his many famous acquaintances. One

wall was lined with his impressive library.⁹⁴ Another contained tables filled with his array of sound recording equipment. One project followed another as Vincent duplicated and marketed cassettes of Spin Back the Years by mail and resumed writing his memoirs. He assembled twelve scrapbooks of clippings and memorabilia.

In 1981, Vincent was introduced to this writer by a mutual friend, Don Kemp.⁹⁵ A recording session was set up to do an interview on the V-Disc project for Jazz Archives, a series on WKAR radio. As a result of this, Vincent suggested that a new series based on the composers and lyricists of American popular music be produced. Vincent, Kemp, and I joined forces to produce a twenty-six episode series which featured Vincent's first-hand "behind the scenes" stories of composers such as Irving Berlin, Joe Howard, Jack Norworth, W. C. Handy, Hoagy Carmichael, and Fats Waller. Vincent did most of the writing and all of the recording and editing. Kemp did post-production work, and I obtained a \$12,000 grant for the project from the Satellite Program Development Fund.⁹⁶ The project was completed by 1984, and the programs were uplinked on the communications satellite to over thirty public radio stations. At Vincent's insistence, the programs were scripted and employed the "foil" technique with Vincent in the role of sage recording veteran and me as the younger, jazz oriented, visitor to his studio. The concept was old-fashioned by contemporary public radio standards, yet interesting enough to prompt a positive response from listeners,

perhaps, influenced by the "nostalgia craze" of the early 1980's.

I found Robert Vincent to be a warm human being, yet a demanding taskmaster. He would not tolerate sloppy diction or bad writing. Disgusted with my midwestern way of slurring words, he would make me do a dozen "takes" of script lines and would "slug in" the best one to match his pre-recorded part of the script. Since our schedules did not mesh, Vincent recorded all my lines in one sitting.⁹⁷ Later, through his marvelous editing, he would produce a finished show sounding as though we had recorded the program together in a single session. Once when I wrote a script about Johnny Mercer, he sent me a two page memorandum critiquing its deficiencies as to why the program "was not up to our usual high standards."⁹⁸ I came to know why Vincent had earned his reputation as one of the best sound engineers in New York.

Personally, I found Vincent to be an amicable and rewarding friend. Once he tested you and liked you, he was loyal. He liked using informal street slang but could be erudite and thoughtful. Richard Chapin said that Vincent was a "lovable, fun guy who knew more about the history of the Twentieth Century than anyone."⁹⁹ I concur: our sessions in his studio brought forth an endless stream of insights and first-hand stories. Vincent not only read widely in the field of social and political history, he had lived through every major event of the twentieth century. His recall was impressive.

In 1983, Vincent purchased an Apple IIe word processor. Typically, he skipped all the lessons except the first one and learned to operate the machine by trial and error. I introduced him to a talented high school student, Juergen Stark, who wrote him a simplified directions card. In a few weeks, Vincent was making progress on his memoirs. By the summer of 1984, he had written 120 pages. During the summer, Vincent's short-term memory began to fail. Soon he could no longer write. He did not go down into his basement studio, preferring to sit in the sun near his wife and reminisce. It was clear that he was failing.

Early in 1985, unable to convince Vincent to finish his memoirs, I undertook the project of interviewing him on cassette tape. Vincent suggested that I complete the memoirs for him. By the summer of 1985, I had finished a chapter on his studio days in New York. I would ghost-write a section and read it back to Vincent. He would make appropriate suggestions for revision. He was satisfied that I had captured his voice. Our work continued until the fall of 1985.

One of Vincent's abiding pleasures was dining out with his wife Viola. On November 13, 1985, after enjoying a meal at his favorite Chinese restaurant, Robert Vincent died of a heart attack at his East Lansing home.

Two years before his death, the Vincents made the final payment on their East Lansing house. For the occasion, Robert Vincent wrote the following poem to his wife:

The rooms are small
 But they do look good.
The Lot is big enough
 To hold trees and shrubs
And plants
 The house is nice -
Attractive. The lawn is neat;
 No mortgage to pay up!
Neighbors are friendly,
 From zero dollars
We now have plenty
 To last us through remaining years.
Things really aren't bad
 Both of us should be quite glad!

Two themes dominated Robert Vincent's life: the loss of a secure home due to his parent's divorce and his need to create something big, to make a mark in the world. In fulfilling his dream of creating the National Voice Library, Vincent left a wonderful legacy for posterity. In marrying Viola Vincent, he had found a home at last. His was a most useful and productive life.

CONCLUSION

This study advances the idea that G. Robert Vincent was a 'self-made' man. Yet, with his generation, Vincent moved from the Horatio Alger archetype - through the trenches of France - into a new ethos which was best represented by the character of Jay Gatsby in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, The Great Gatsby. Like his peers, born in the 1890's, he responded in his youth to the platitudes of patriotism, pluck, and the Rooseveltian "strenuous life." Yet, through his experiences on The Western Front, he recognized the anachronistic qualities of the heroic paradigm in the modern age. Like Gatsby, Vincent went into the liquor business but not for love. He simply wanted to get rich. Later, when he resumed his interest in sound recording and historical voice preservation, Vincent's idealism re-surfaced. However, there was always a pragmatic aspect to him. Feature writers in the 1940's might refer to Vincent as a "wide eyed gnome" or allude to his former career as a "precocious brat" but he was in his maturity a quintessential urban man who knew the angles and how far he could play them.

Part of Vincent did reflect the lonely, gifted boy in short pants who had "crashed" into the editor's offices. He loved the challenge of putting over a new idea in the halls of power. When he was given the opportunity and the money

to create V-Discs, he proved that he could effect a dream on a large scale. His Legion of Merit and letters of commendation for the San Francisco Conference and the Nuremburg assignment were his greatest laurels. Yet, there was an inner need that drove Robert Vincent. Perhaps it was something that even he did not understand. Having lost his natural father through his parents' divorce and having spent his early years in Austria under the stern hand of his grandfather, Vincent loved the freedom to create his own life. Yet, he worked constantly. In essence, he lead a double life as a sound engineer by day and archivist by night. He wanted to do important work. His half-brothers were all professional men; he thought that they did not take him seriously. Near the end of his life he wondered if he shouldn't have been more like them.

Vincent's heroes were numerous, but at the top of his personal pantheon were Theodore Roosevelt and Thomas Edison. In an age when public figures were held up as examples of the American virtues of self-reliance and ingenuity, the image of "the rough rider" and "the wizard" were held in the public mind as icons of the American Spirit. In a sense, Edison and his "insomnia squad" had extended Roosevelt's ethos of "the strenuous life" into the age of technology. Vincent's 1912 recording of Roosevelt on a cylinder machine borrowed from Edison's son, Charles, was an apotheosis for the boy. Roosevelt and Edison would be fused in Vincent's mind as spiritual fathers. Roosevelt represented the father he wished

for; Edison was the wizard who provided him with a magical machine that would open doors and bring him fame.

Because he was bright, ambitious, and an outsider, Vincent hated school. He sought knowledge from adults with whom he could communicate more easily than boys his own age. Vincent was, like Fitzgerald's Jimmy Gatz, a boy who had "a Platonic conception" of himself. Vincent said that he always knew he would "do great things." However, to avoid the shame of failure at prep school, he ran off to France in an attempt to become a war hero. Having failed to do so, he put a noble face on his motives by writing a patriotic war memoir. Back home at seventeen, he was on his own in New York. He had learned how to survive. Later, he would be proud of the fact that he had slept on both street corners and in The White House during one lifetime. His cheerful acceptance of fortune, good and bad, was close to the essence of the man.

A strong theme in Vincent's life was his innate populist temperament. As the product of a broken marriage between a Boston physician and a free-spirited Austrian writer, Vincent knew pain and alienation. His mother was literate and aristocratic, yet always in need of money. He never knew his natural father. While this study is not a psychological analysis, it is clear that Vincent owed his sensibilities to his mother and his need for strong mentors too his absent father. In his memoirs, Vincent carefully masked his feelings as well as his family roots. His mother's liberalism and encouragement were vital to his growth. His father's absence seemed to

foster his need to mythologize his own accomplishments. Perhaps Vincent had to accomplish "great things" to somehow win the approval of the absent father.

Politically, Vincent was open-minded though he did not favor Republicans who reminded him of Herbert Hoover whom he had noticed at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 "walking around in squeaky shoes." Tempermentally, he was "for the underdog," though he was skeptical of political rhetoric. He was moved by the folk songs of Woody Guthrie and Earl Robinson. He admired the ability of Martin Luther King Jr. to galvanize an audience. Vincent disliked what Senator Joseph McCarthy did to his friends Alger Hiss and David Zablodowsky. However, he resented how the leftists in the United Nations automatically supported the Soviet position.

With regard to religion, Vincent was a practical man. He did not subscribe to a formal faith, yet his son thought of him as the "most moral man" he had ever known. Perhaps he was skeptical of religiosity because of hypocrisies that he had experienced in his mother's family. He said, a few months before his death, that he thought he had lived a good life and was not afraid to die.

Personally, Vincent was a proud man. However, it was a pride which was born out of the high demands that he placed upon himself to produce. He had a strong ego, but he was not egotistical. He did not flaunt his accomplishments but shared them with those whom he trusted and enjoyed. He tested those around him and did not have patience with fools or

incompetents. As he aged, he liked to surround himself with enthusiastic younger people who might see him as a mentor. As an archivist, he said that his most important clients had not yet been born. Without formal training or a college degree, Vincent envisioned and built the first and most important collection of historical voices in the world. Through persistence and determination, he made The National Voice Library into a prototypic learning center of aural history.

Perhaps the value of this study is in documenting the extent to which the significant archetypes of our collective culture have actually found their way into the lives of men and women. G. Robert Vincent's life is an example of how cultural mentors can have, if not a primary influence, then at least a strong secondary influence on the individual. That Vincent retrospectively mythologized the influence of Theodore Roosevelt and Thomas Edison upon his life cannot be argued. Yet, it is a valid assumption that the collective ethos of the Horatio Alger tradition in early Twentieth Century American life was a potent influence upon Vincent. Roosevelt and Edison were touchstones of the myth which runs as deeply in the American grain as the first "American Boy," Benjamin Franklin who mythologized his own boyhood in The Autobiography.

Historically, G. Robert Vincent merits but a minor footnote. He did not command great armies, nor did he invent a cure for a major disease. Yet, in the microcasm, Vincent's carefully crafted life with its youthful scribblings and yearnings faithfully and enthusiastically preserved, speaks

profoundly of the democratic man's faith in his own future. Perhaps Vincent's legacy is not in the archive of voices that he left but in the affirmation that it represents of both posterity and the American Dream.

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I

¹Dr. Joseph S. Bloch, My Reminiscences (Vienna: R. Lowit, 1923), p. 78-80.

²Interview with Viola M. Vincent, wife of G. Robert Vincent, August 14, 1986.

³Richard S. Sears, V-Discs: A History and Discography (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. XIV. Tony Janak, one of the enlisted men in the V-Disc section, is quoted as saying: "Bob Vincent was a tough guy to work for." Based on the author of this disseration's experience with Vincent, Janak's remark is interpreted as a reference to Vincent's exacting and precise approach to recording quality and his overall work ethic.

⁴Viola M. Vincent, August 14, 1986.

⁵Bloch's reminiscences, however, concentrate mainly on his life and political career. His family is noticeably absent from his memoirs.

⁶Bloch, p. 79, p. 350. Upon leaving Parliament in 1895, Bloch turned his attentions to The Austrian Weekly, a publication of which he had been editor for a number of years.

⁷Bloch, p. 11.

⁸Bloch, p. 13.

⁹Bloch, p. 13.

¹⁰Bloch, p. 18-19.

¹¹Bloch, p. 20.

¹²Bloch, p. 22.

¹³Bloch, p. 31.

¹⁴William A. Jenks, Austria Under the Iron Ring, 1879-1993 (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1965), p. 13. Jenks alludes to anti-Semitism among Catholic clerics.

¹⁵Bloch, p. 61.

¹⁶Bloch, p. 64.

¹⁷Arthur J. May, The Hapsburg Monarchy: 1867-1914 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 175-182. May presents a detailed description of the Jewish question during this period.

¹⁸Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

¹⁹Bloch, p. 9-10.

²⁰Bloch, p. 9-10.

²¹Viola M. Vincent, August 14, 1986.

²²Ellen, born in 1896, worked for The New York Times; Robert, born in 1898, became a recording engineer and archivist; Tommy, born in 1905, became a lawyer and a partner of Wendell Willkie; Teddy, born in 1907, also became a lawyer; Milton, born in 1910, became a neuro-surgeon.

²³Interview with Kenneth Vincent, July, 1986.

²⁴Letter from Lisa Ysaye Tarlau, G. Robert Vincent's files, no date.

²⁵Photograph of Lisa Ysaye Tarlau, G. Robert Vincent's personal collection.

²⁶Letter from the editor of The Atlantic Monthly, 41 Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, Massachusetts to Lisa Ysaye, June 10, 1919.

²⁷Lisa Ysaye, The Inn of Disenchantment (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1917).

²⁸Ysaye, p. 41.

²⁹Ysaye, p. 44.

³⁰Ysaye, p. 45.

³¹"Forthcoming Publications" (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Spring, 1918), p. 26. This is a blurb from a New York Times review of the book.

³²Lisa Ysaye, "Loutre" (manuscript copy) in the collection of G. Robert Vincent.

³³Ysaye, "Loutre," p. 58.

³⁴Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

³⁵Interview with Viola Vincent, August, 1986.

³⁶Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

³⁷Boston American (no date available), clipping from the collection of G. Robert Vincent.

³⁸Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

³⁹Interview with Viola Vincent, August, 1986.

⁴⁰Photograph of Lisa Ysaye Tarlau (by Tooley-Myron Studios, New York City).

Chapter II

¹Colin Ward, The Child in the City (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 210.

²Ward, p. 72.

³Ward as cited by Wolf Von Eckardt in "Decrying a Modern School of 'No Knocks'," Washington Post "Cityscape" column, date unknown, 1979.

⁴In a letter to John Tierney on September 18, 1967, Vincent describes himself as "a freakish youngster with adult ideas, lonely, precocious."

⁵G. Robert Vincent, "Spin Back the Years" (unpublished memoirs), 1967, p. 5.

⁶Vincent, p. 6.

⁷Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Another favorite Vincent anecdote dealt with a rhetorical question referring to a young teacher named Miss Fuchs.

⁸Vincent interview. Vincent recalled visiting the Polo Grounds several times and the 1911 World Series during the period of 1911-13 during which the Giants won three National League pennants.

⁹Vincent, "Spin. . .," p. 8.

¹⁰Henry Steele Commager (ed.), The St. Nicholas Anthology (New York: Greenwich House, 1983 edition, xvii-xix). Edna St. Vincent Millay, Stephen Vincent Benet, and Eudora Welty are among those young writers whose work was published in the St. Nicholas League.

¹¹Vincent, p. 4.

¹²Vincent, p. 2.

¹³Vincent, p. 8.

¹⁴Letter from Elbert Hubbard to Robert Vincent, December 18, 1909.

¹⁵Vincent, p. 12-13.

¹⁶Vincent used this expression often, and with relish. For example, in a November 30, 1964 letter to Mr. Michael Shinas of Standard Oil, Vincent writes ". . . why don't you take the card, crash in, and tell Dr. Brewster (president of Yale University) personally what a fine addition your nephew would be to the sons of Old Eli."

¹⁷G. Robert Vincent, personal scrapbook, number 1 of 10.

¹⁸Vincent, p. 17.

¹⁹Vincent, p. 17-18.

²⁰Vincent, p. 18.

²¹Vincent, p. 19.

²²Vincent, p. 21.

²³In a letter to John Tierney dated September 18, 1967, Vincent states, ". . . I knew a little about printing and magazine layout ever since I can remember because my family were in the racket." This is in reference to his mother and grandfather who were both journalists. Thus, his ability to communicate with professionals in the field becomes more credible.

²⁴Vincent, p. 21.

²⁵Vincent, p. 13.

²⁶Vincent, p. 23.

- ²⁷Vincent, p. 23.
- ²⁸David Halberstam, The Powers That Be (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 207-212.
- ²⁹Vincent, p. 24.
- ³⁰Vincent, p. 24.
- ³¹Vincent, p. 25.
- ³²Vincent, p. 26.
- ³³Letter from J. Earl Clausen, editor of The Scrapbook, to Vincent, June 16, 1911.
- ³⁴Letter from Matthew White Jr., editor of The Argosy, to Vincent, date unknown.
- ³⁵Vincent, p. 28.
- ³⁶Vincent, p. 31.
- ³⁷Musical Bylines, radio series, produced by Douglas Collar and G. Robert Vincent. Program text on the melodies of L. Wolfe Gilbert and Jack Norworth, 1982.
- ³⁸Vincent, p. 21.
- ³⁹Vincent, p. 22.
- ⁴⁰Vincent, p. 27.
- ⁴¹Letter from F. H. Kenny, managing editor of The World Almanac, to Vincent, date unknown.
- ⁴²Vincent, p. 39.
- ⁴³Vincent, p. 38.
- ⁴⁴Vincent, p. 39.
- ⁴⁵Vincent interview, Spring, 1985. Vincent did not keep the circulation records of The Boys' Paper. He noted that by the end of the first year, the paper had a print run of 500 copies.
- ⁴⁶A business card for The Boys' Paper remains in Vincent's personal collection. The slogan reads "The Only Juvenile Political Magazine in America." Also it says "Published by Robert Tarlau," indicating that at the time Vincent had not yet reverted to his father's name.

⁴⁷Letter from Hamilton Wright Mabie, associate editor of The Outlook, to Robert Vincent, March 11, 1911.

⁴⁸F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Scribners and Sons, 1925), p. 99.

⁴⁹Vincent, p. 22.

Chapter III

¹G. Robert Vincent, "Spin Back the Years" (unpublished memoirs), 1967, p. 41.

²Vincent, p. 41.

³Letter from Fred L. Goddard, circulation manager of Scribner's Magazine, to Robert Vincent, date unknown, 1911.

⁴Letter from Fred L. Goddard to Vincent, April, 1, 1987.

⁵Letter from Hamilton Wright Mabie, associate editor of The Outlook to Robert Vincent, March 11, 1987.

⁶Lisa Ysaye, "Politics in the Nursery," The Boys' Paper, III, No. 2 (Election number, December, 1912), p. 11-12.

⁷Vincent, p. 44.

⁸Vincent, p. 45.

⁹Vincent, p. 46.

¹⁰Vincent, p. 47.

¹¹Theodore Roosevelt (untitled, signed manuscript), G. Robert Vincent's personal collection.

¹²Letter from Edward J. Wheeler, editor of Current Literature to Robert Vincent, June 23, 1911.

¹³Vincent, p. 48.

¹⁴Letter from Elbert Wortman, editor of McClure's Magazine, to Robert Vincent, May 24, 1911.

¹⁵Letter from Henry L. Stimson, attorney, to Robert Vincent, date unknown, 1911.

¹⁶Vincent, p. 58.

- 17 Vincent, p. 58.
- 18 Michael Reynolds, The Young Hemingway (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 25.
- 19 Reynolds, p. 25.
- 20 Theodore Roosevelt, The Strenuous Life (New York: Century Co., 1904), p. 155.
- 21 Vincent, p. 58.
- 22 Vincent, p. 58.
- 23 Vincent, p. 59.
- 24 Vincent, p. 60.
- 25 Vincent, p. 64.
- 26 Letter from William Prendergast, comptroller of the City of New York, to Robert Vincent, April 25, 1912.
- 27 Letter from Hamilton Wright Mabie to Robert Vincent, May 3, 1912.
- 28 Letter from Anna Knight, secretary to Hamilton Wright Mabie, to Robert Vincent, May 10, 1912.
- 29 Letter from William Prendergast to Robert Vincent, June 26, 1912.
- 30 Prendergast.
- 31 Letter from R. H. Titherington, editor of Munsey's Magazine, to Robert Vincent, date unknown, 1912.
- 32 Letter from Philip J. McCook, attorney, to Robert Vincent, date unknown, 1912.
- 33 Letter from Joseph M. Cicato, secretary James A. Walsh Co., to Robert Vincent, March 5, 1912.
- 34 Vincent, p. 65.
- 35 Vincent, p. 65.
- 36 Vincent, p. 65.
- 37 Vincent, p. 66.

³⁸Theodore Roosevelt, transcription of the speech recorded by Robert Vincent at Sagamore Hill in 1912, from Vincent's personal collection.

³⁹Vincent, p. 69.

⁴⁰Helen Rex Keller, The Dictionary of Dates, Volume II (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1934), p. 271.

⁴¹Herman Hagedorn, The Roosevelt Family of Sagamore Hill (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1954), p. 310-311.

⁴²Philip J. Roosevelt, "Like City, Like State, Like Nation," The Boys' Paper, III, No. 2 (Election number), December, 1912, p. 2.

⁴³Lisa Ysaye, "Politics in the Nursery," The Boys' Paper, III, No. 2 . . . p. 11-12.

⁴⁴Advertisement, "The Organization of Progressive Founders," The Boys' Paper, III, No. 2 (Election number), December, 1912, p. 13.

⁴⁵Vincent, p. 69.

⁴⁶Vincent, p. 69.

⁴⁷Vincent, p. 88-89.

⁴⁸Vincent, p. 93.

⁴⁹Vincent, p. 93.

⁵⁰Vincent, p. 82.

⁵¹Newspaper clipping, "M'Aneny is Boomed By Boy Progressives," source unknown, in G. Robert Vincent's personal collection.

⁵²Vincent, p. 94.

⁵³Letter from Amos Pinchot, attorney, to Robert Vincent, June 4, 1913.

⁵⁴William Sulzer, as quoted in a newspaper story headlined "Sulzer Writes to Boys," source unknown, clipping in G. Robert Vincent's personal collection.

⁵⁵Sulzer (as above).

⁵⁶Vincent, p. 91.

⁵⁷Vincent, p. 91.

⁵⁸Vincent, p. 95.

⁵⁹Vincent, p. 95.

⁶⁰Vincent, p. 96.

⁶¹Vincent, p. 97.

Chapter IV

¹G. Robert Vincent, "Spin Back the Years" (Unpublished manuscript, 1967), p. 98.

²Vincent, p. 98.

³Vincent, p. 99.

⁴Vincent, p. 99-100.

⁵Vincent, p. 99.

⁶Mark Sullivan, Our Times: Over There 1914-1918 (New York: Scribners and Sons, 1933), p. 20.

⁷Vincent, p. 108.

⁸Vincent, p. 108.

⁹Vincent, p. 110.

¹⁰Mark Sullivan, Our Times, citing Richard Harding Davis, p. 21-26.

¹¹Letter from Fred J. Dollinger to Robert Vincent, December 11, 1914.

There was some misunderstanding on Dollinger's part. He thought that Harry Lauder was to be the headliner. A handbill in G. Robert Vincent's collection advertises Hary Lauder as appearing at the Claremont. Dollinger mentions in the letter that "possibly Billy Morris could be of assistance" in clearing up the problem. Morris was the son of the famous theatrical booking agent William Morris and a school-mate of Robert Vincent.

¹²Vincent noted that Billy Morris Jr. had introduced him to Alick Lauder in 1910. William Morris Sr. was the theatrical agent in America for Alick's famous brother Harry Lauder. Harry Lauder details his relationship with William Morris in his autobiography, Roamin' in the Gloamin' (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1928), p. 166-171.

¹³Vincent, p. 110.

¹⁴Letters from Louis Stotesburg, adjutant general of The State of New York, and Governor Herbert S. Hadley, Governor of The State of Missouri to Robert Vincent (dates unknown) from the scrapbook of G. Robert Vincent.

¹⁵Helen Rex Keller, The Dictionary of Dates, Volume II (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), p. 285.

¹⁶The New York Times, May 8, 1915, p. 1.

¹⁷Vincent, p. 117.

¹⁸Vincent, p. 120.

¹⁹Vincent, p. 120.

²⁰Vincent, p. 121.

²¹Vincent, p. 124.

²²Vincent, p. 125.

²³"Would-Be War Correspondent" is an extension of the 1967 manuscript, "Spin Back the Years." Vincent died before he completed this chapter but left a 22 page detailed outline of his war experience. This outline and the untitled 175 page manuscript Vincent wrote in 1917 provide the substance of this chapter. Interviews conducted with Vincent in 1985 reinforce the basic story of his period abroad in 1915 as it is told here.

²⁴Vincent, "Would-Be War Correspondent," p. 2.

²⁵Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 4.

²⁶Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 6.

²⁷Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 6.

²⁸Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 7.

²⁹Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 8.

³⁰Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 9.

³¹Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985. Vincent claimed to have paid for no transportation during his entire trip. He said that any means of transportation he thought of "as mine." Small and elusive, he claimed to have mastered the art of "elusion."

³²Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 11.

³³Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 12.

³⁴Vincent, "Would-Be . . . ," p. 13.

³⁵Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

³⁶Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Vincent's habit of "crashing in" was consistent with his individualistic, outside image. He rarely took a conventional pathway during his life, preferring (or perhaps compelled to take) the most direct route to his goal.

³⁷F. Scott Fitzgerald, "I Didn't Get Over," Esquire Magazine, October, 1936, cited in Arthur Mizener's The Far Side of Paradise (New York: Houghton Mifflin, Sentry edition, 1965), p. 72.

³⁸G. Robert Vincent, untitled manuscript, 1917, p. 51.

Vincent wrote the manuscript while under contract to vaudeville entertainer Frank Tinney. Tinney saw a potential investment in Vincent's account of the war as seen through the eyes of an American boy. In view of the success of Guy Empey's Over the Top, he paid Vincent twenty dollars per week in hopes that the book could be quickly written and printed before America entered the war. Vincent finished the book, but too late. In Vincent's files is a letter of rejection from Maxwell Perkins of Scribner's dated November 5, 1917. Vincent was, by that time, a private in the New York National Guard serving at Camp Wadsworth, South Carolina.

³⁹Vincent, untitled MS, p. 70.

⁴⁰Mark Girouard, The Return to Camelot (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 253-258.

⁴¹Vincent, "Outline" appendix to "Spin Back the Years" (unpublished manuscript, 1967), p. 6.

⁴²Vincent, untitled MS, p. 87.

⁴³Vincent, untitled MS, p. 90.

⁴⁴Vincent, untitled MS, p. 97.

⁴⁵Vincent, untitled MS, p. 99.

⁴⁶Vincent, untitled MS, p. 100.

⁴⁷Vincent, untitled MS, p. 101.

⁴⁸Vincent, untitled MS, p. 102.

⁴⁹Vincent, untitled MS, p. 125.

⁵⁰This may be a reference to the September offensives on the Western Front which resulted in The Battle of Loos from September 25 to October 8 or the Second Battle of Champagne from September 25 to November 6. Also, there was offensive action in the Arras sector on September 28 when the French captured the western slopes of Vimy Ridge and part of Givenchy Wood. The Dictionary of Dates, Volume I, p. 534.

⁵¹Vincent, untitled MS, p. 141.

⁵²Vincent, untitled MS, p. 141.

⁵³Vincent, untitled MS, p. 149.

⁵⁴Vincent, outline, p. 6.

⁵⁵Vincent, outline, p. 6.

⁵⁶Vincent, untitled MS, p. 170.

⁵⁷Vincent, untitled MS, p. 170.

⁵⁸Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985. Vincent was consistent in this interview with the facts he set forth in his outline summary. While his memory had lost many of the small details of his detention, the major outline of events was consistent with his 1917 manuscript. He did, however, recall all of the major characters mentioned here.

⁵⁹Vincent, outline, p. 12.

⁶⁰Documents in G. Robert Vincent's personal scrapbooks.

⁶¹Vincent, outline, p. 7.

Chapter V

¹G. Robert Vincent, "Outline," appendix to "Spin Back the Years" (unpublished manuscript, 1967), p. 8.

²Vincent, "Outline," p. 8.

³Vincent, "Outline," p. 8.

⁴Vincent, "Outline," p. 8.

⁵Boston American (no date available) from the collection of G. Robert Vincent.

⁶Letter from Flo Murray to Robert Vincent, September 6, 1916.

Letter from Edward Lumbard Jr. to Robert Vincent, May 24, 1916. The letter is addressed "c/o Heinigke and Smith, 24-25 E. 13th Street, New York City."

⁷Letter from Harold A. Content to Robert Vincent, August 11, 1916.

Content added a handwritten note to the typed postscript: "I am not responsible for this. You may recognize it as the work of the young lady you saw in my office."

⁸letter from Flo Murray, September 6, 1916.

⁹Letter from Flo Murray, September 6, 1916.

¹⁰Letter from Commander F. N. Freeman, Navy Department, date not noted.

G. Robert Vincent, note in scrapbook, "Book Two: World War I," p. 5.

¹¹Interview with Viola Vincent, August 14, 1986.

Mrs. Vincent said that when she was dating Vincent, he would often break a date at the last minute. For example, one time he made a date for a movie on Friday, but a telegram arrived on Friday from Vincent who had gone to Florida. This was typical behavior for Vincent who also unexpectedly flew back to Michigan after only two days on a motor trip in California because he "had to get back home." His wife and family continued the trip without him.

¹²Certificate of Discharge, Number 477, United States Consul, Liverpool, September 19, 1916.

Certification of Discharge, Number 472, Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, New York, October 1, 1916.

Both of these certificates are accompanied by notes written by Vincent for his scrapbook, as in note 10.

¹³Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Vincent indicated that he intended to pay back the entire cost of the ticket.

¹⁴Letter from J. Willicombe to Mark _____, October 28, 1916.

¹⁵Willicombe letter.

¹⁶Willicombe letter.

¹⁷Letter from John O'Hara Cosgrove to Robert Vincent, December 21, 1916.

¹⁸Ray Brown was the art editor at Everybody's Magazine, a Butterick Publication. Letter from Brown to Vincent, March 20, 1911.

¹⁹Letter from John O'Hara Cosgrove to G. Robert Vincent, January 11, 1917.

²⁰Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

²¹G. Robert Vincent, "The Boy Who Played Hookey to See the War," New York World Sunday Edition (date unknown), clipping from the collection of G. Robert Vincent, probably a January, 1917 edition.

²²Vincent, "The Boy Who . . . ," introductory paragraph of article.

²³New York Times Theater Reviews: 1912-1919, "Her Soldier Boy," 1916, 11:1.

²⁴New York Times Theater Reviews.

²⁵G. Robert Vincent, note in scrapbook, "Book Two: World War I," p. 7.

²⁶G. Robert Vincent scrapbook, p. 7.

²⁷Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

²⁸G. Robert Vincent, Outline, p. 10.

²⁹Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Vincent remembered the names of two of the chorus boys: "Castoria" Sparks and "Cafeteria" Hoag.

³⁰G. Robert Vincent, scrapbook, clipping (source unknown) p. 8.

³¹G. Robert Vincent, Outline, p. 13.

³²G. Robert Vincent, Outline, p. 13.

Vincent's part was that of a dead soldier on stage.

³³Vincent, Outline, p. 13.

³⁴Interview with GRV, Spring 1985.

³⁵Vincent, Outline, p. 15.

³⁶Legal contract between Frank Tinney and Robert Vincent signed on March 13, 1917.

³⁷Letter from Frank Tinney to Robert Vincent, May 1, 1917.

³⁸Letter from Frank Tinney to Robert Vincent, May 13, 1917.

³⁹Letter from Frank Tinney to Robert Vincent (date unknown).

⁴⁰Letter from Frank Tinney to Robert Vincent, June 25, 1917.

⁴¹G. Robert Vincent, untitled manuscript, 1917, p. 4.

⁴²Vincent, untitled MS, p. 22.

⁴³Vincent, untitled MS, p. 37.

⁴⁴Vincent, untitled MS, p. 39.

⁴⁵Vincent, untitled MS, p. 1.

⁴⁶Vincent, untitled MS, p. 42.

⁴⁷Vincent, untitled MS, p. 54.

⁴⁸Vincent, untitled MS, p. 54

⁴⁹Vincent, untitled MS, p. 104.

⁵⁰Sigfried Sassoon, Memoirs of an Infantry Officer (New York: Coward McCann, 1930).

⁵¹Ernest Hemingway, A Farewell to Arms (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1929).

⁵²Vincent, untitled MS, p. 174.

⁵³Vincent, untitled MS, p. 174.

⁵⁴Vincent, Outline, p. 17.

⁵⁵New York Evening World, August 4, 1917.

⁵⁶Clipping in G. Robert Vincent scrapbook, "Book Two," headline "Served 18 Months in France: Rejected by U.S. Marines" (date and source unknown), p. 10.

⁵⁷Vincent, Outline, p. 18.

⁵⁸Vincent, Outline, p. 18.

The actual note is in Vincent's files.

⁵⁹Vincent, Outline, p. 18.

⁶⁰Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Vincent also told a colorful story about Vanderbilt's reaction to a "short-arm inspection." He noticed that some of the "blue bloods" in the ranks reacted with shock to this well-known army practice. Also, outline, p. 19.

⁶¹Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

⁶²Vincent, Outline, p. 20.

The actual note is in Vincent's files.

⁶³Vincent, scrapbook, p. 17.

⁶⁴Vincent, picture of Frank Moran, in scrapbook, p. 17.

⁶⁵Letter from Maxwell Perkins, Charles Scribner's Sons Publishers, to Private Robert Vincent, November 5, 1917.

Perkins commented that he did not think that boys' magazines would wish to publish the book because the parents of their readers "might object to anything that they would think might induce their own boys to go through the dangers and adventures" which Vincent described.

⁶⁶Vincent, scrapbook, p. 18.

The actual note is in Vincent's files.

⁶⁷Vincent, scrapbook commentary, p. 18.

⁶⁸Telegraphic instructions from the War Department to the Commanding General of the 27th Division, scrapbook, p. 19.

⁶⁹Vincent, scrapbook commentary, p. 19.

⁷⁰Letter from H. B. McCain, The Adjutant General, accepting Vincent's resignation as Army Field Clerk, May 29, 1918.

⁷¹Letter from Wilbur Car, Director of the Consular Service, to Robert Vincent, June 11, 1918.

⁷²Vincent, scrapbook commentary, p. 24.

⁷³Letter from Captain Nils P. Larsen, "seated in a German dugout" in France, to Robert Vincent, October 9, 1918.

⁷⁴Newspaper clipping, Vincent's files (probably from The New York American, date unknown), headline "Captain Larsen Winner of D.S.C."

⁷⁵Vincent, scrapbook commentary, p. 25. Also, in the Spring, 1985 interview, Vincent mentioned that he drank sparkling burgundy for the first time that night. Vincent said that "everything was free . . . everyone got quite hilarious."

⁷⁶Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

⁷⁷Letter from Don Howell, The Department of State, to Robert Vincent, November 17, 1918.

⁷⁸Diagram for the Ambassador's Grand Reception, scrapbook, p. 26.

⁷⁹Letter from John Tracey, American Vice-Consul in Marseilles, to Robert Vincent, December 7, 1918.

⁸⁰Note from Alphonse Gaulin, American Consul-General in Marseilles, to Robert Vincent (date unknown, 1918.).

⁸¹Letter from James P. Davis, American Consul in Bangkok, Siam, to Robert Vincent, February 25, 1922.

⁸²In reviewing Vincent's fast moving career during World War I, it must be pointed out that he was a high school drop out and had not been to college. One is reminded of Jay Gatsby, F. Scott Fitzgerald's protagonist from The Great Gatsby who became the apotheosis of the self made man in the modern context.

⁸³Letter from John Tracey (date unknown but obviously a follow-up to the letter of December 7, 1918) to Robert Vincent.

⁸⁴Letter from John Tracey to Robert Vincent, December 12, 1918.

⁸⁵Letter from John Tracey to Robert Vincent, December 18, 1918.

⁸⁶Signal Corps Telegram to C. G. Brest ordering that a reservation be made for Vincent on the Leviathan. Vincent, it says, "will report to you on the fourth of January," December 28, 1918.

⁸⁷Michael Reynolds, The Young Hemingway (New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1986), p. 35.

⁸⁸Letter of endorsement from (then Lieutenant) Nils P. Larsen for Robert Vincent (date unknown, probably late 1917).

⁸⁹Reynolds, p. 35.

⁹⁰The Brooklyn Eagle article "Robert Vincent Served Under French and American Flags: Lauds Eagle Paris Bureau" (date unknown, probably January, 1919), in Vincent's files.

⁹¹"Captain Larsen . . . D.S.C." clipping in Vincent's collection.

⁹²"Captain Larsen . . . D.S.C." clipping in Vincent's collection.

⁹³Commission of Robert Vincent as 2nd Lieutenant in New York National Guard, April 3, 1919, in Robert Vincent's collection.

⁹⁴SPUNK, Vol. I, No. 1, April, 1919, p. 1.

⁹⁵Letter from Captain Nils P. Larsen to Robert Vincent April 3, 1919.

Chapter VI

¹Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change (New York: Bantam, 1961), p. 94.

²F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), p. 282.

³Allen, p. 94.

⁴G. Robert Vincent, scrapbook, Book III: A Chronicle of the Twenties, p. 9.

⁵Who's Who in America 1950-51, Volume 26 (Chicago: The A. N. Marquis Company, 1950), p. 515.

⁶Brian Rust, The American Dance Band Discography (New Rochelle, New York: Arlington House, 1975), p. 2052. Eight listings in the index of recordings by this vocal group in recording sessions on Edison and Columbia.

⁷Vincent, scrapbook, p. 11-12.

⁸Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

⁹Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

¹⁰Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

¹¹Handwritten sheet of addresses and liquor orders kept by Vincent.

¹²In an interview, Vincent claimed to have received a lifetime pass to the Giant's games at the Polo Grounds from McGraw. There is a J. Kern listed in Vincent's addresses residing at 105 West 84th Street.

¹³Interview with Vincent, Spring 1985. Vincent claimed to have been shot at "many times."

¹⁴Letter from George Schleich to Robert Vincent, June 14, 1922.

¹⁵Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

¹⁶Vincent, scrapbook, p. 14. Vincent's detailed description of the operation is supported by details revealed in the Spring, 1985 interview.

¹⁷Vincent, scrapbook, p. 14.

¹⁸William L. Shirer, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 957, 1031, 1074-77. Stuelpnagel was not only the German commander in France, but he was a central figure in the plot to assassinate Hitler in July, 1944. While en route to Berlin, Stuelpnagel stopped at Verdun, the scene of his World War I command. There he shot himself in a unsuccessful suicide attempt. He died on August 30, 1944 after being tried by the People's Court in Berlin.

¹⁹Vincent, scrapbook, p. 16.

²⁰Vincent, scrapbook, p. 16.

²¹Vincent, scrapbook, p. 6. Also, there is a Boston Globe news clipping about the event, not dated. The clipping is headlines "Young Bear Right at Home in Globe Financial Room." A picture of Vincent and the bear appears with the story.

²²Vincent, scrapbook, p. 6.

²³Letter from Willis Parsons, Maine Inland Fisheries and Game Commissioner, to Robert Vincent, August 19, 1921. Vincent comments on page 6 of his scrapbook that he refused to pay the fine "on the grounds that our bear was a Canadian bear who had merely wandered across the line into Maine."

²⁴Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

²⁵Vincent, scrapbook, p. 17.

²⁶Vincent, scrapbook, p. 8.

²⁷Vincent, scrapbook, p. 8.

²⁸Vincent, scrapbook, p. 19.

²⁹Vincent scrapbook, p. 19. Also, a letter from LaVerne Collier, Managing Editor of the Illustrated Daily Tab, to Vincent dated March 5, 1925 grants Vincent a leave of absence from the paper. Collier remarks that Vincent "displayed an abundance of potential talent to become a first-rate news writer."

³⁰Vincent, scrapbook, p. 20.

³¹Marriage license dated June 29, 1927 in the town of North Pelham Westchester County, New York.

³²Maurice Crane, as quoted in the Detroit Free Press, November 17, 1985, p. 17D.

Crane said: "G. Robert Vincent was the first and the best voice librarian in America. It is impossible to calculate the effect his pioneering work will have on generations of scholars."

³³Thomas Alva Edison, from an article in the North American Review published in 1878, cited in a letter from Norman R. Speiden, Historical Research Department, Thomas A. Edison, Inc. to Robert Vincent; October 8, 1937.

³⁴Vincent's restoration work on the experimental cylinders has reported in various publications. The earliest documentation of this work, however, is the letter from Norman Speiden on October 8, 1937. In it Speiden acknowledges Vincent's interest in the need for preservation by the best modern technical methods of these fast disappearing records." He promises Vincent the cooperation of the Edison Library in West Orange and ask that copies of the recordings be sent to the library. Until Vincent made them, no duplicates of the original cylinders had been made by anyone.

³⁵G. Robert Vincent, "The Pie Interlude," an essay on p. 54-55 of the scrapbook.

³⁶Letter from H. R. Browne, Manager, Complaint Investigation Unit, U. S. Works Progress Administration For The City of New York, to "Whom it May Concern," October 11, 1935.

³⁷Browne letter.

³⁸Robert Vincent, National Recovery Administration Application for Employment, Form 400, May 17, 1935, p. 3.

³⁹Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁴⁰Two views of Vincent's professional reputation are found in letters of recommendation from Emil Corwin of The Blue Network and Joel O'Brien of Young and Rubicam, Inc. The letters have been cropped for inclusion into one of Vincent's scrapbooks. From the dates of other similar letters in this section of the scrapbook, it can be assumed that these were written in early July, 1942 when Vincent was applying for a commission in the United States Army. Corwin states that Vincent is "one of the top men in his profession" and "that he has distinguished himself . . . for the improvements he has brought to the science of recording . . ."

O'Brien, a producer of the "We The People" series, states that "here in New York in radio circles it is generally conceded that Mr. Vincent knows more about recordings than any man in the country." He goes on to say that "unlike most people his ideas are both sound and exciting."

Other letters in this groups include ones from Lawrence Hammond, "Coordinator of Information, Radio Production Division . . ." dated July 5, 1942 and from P. J. Macy of Federal Advertising dated July 3, 1942. These are equally positive about Vincent's reputation.

⁴¹A copy of the blueprint of Vincent's offices in La Maison Francaise is dated September 6, 1940. This appears to be a renovation plan. Vincent's original office was in The Time-Life Building, but he moved into La Maison Francaise after obtaining a favorable lease in the new structure. Vincent estimated that the move took place in 1937 or 38. The blueprint, however, raises the possibility that the move may have taken place at the time of the renovation in 1940.

⁴²Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁴³Bernard Paris, A Psychological Approach to Fiction (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1974), p. 43-52.

I have used Paris' useful summation of Abraham Maslow's concept of "self-actualization" as defined as "fulfillment of mission," p. 43.

⁴⁴Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁴⁵G. Robert Vincent, "The Story of the National Voice Library and the Man Who Made It," Spoken Records, ed. Helen Roach (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1970), p. 180.

⁴⁶Vincent, Spoken Records, p. 190.

⁴⁷Vincent, Spoken Records, p. 189-190.

⁴⁸"Hunting Lost Voices," Popular Mechanics (March, 1939), p. 377-144a).

This article details the restoration procedure and includes photographs of Vincent and his equipment.

⁴⁹Vincent, Spoken Records, p. 184.

⁵⁰Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁵¹Vincent, Spoken Records, p. 191.

⁵²Rev. Paul Schulte, O.M.I., The Flying Missionary (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1936), translated by George N. Schuster.

⁵³Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁵⁴Vincent, interview, Spring 1985.

⁵⁵16 inch transcription disc of Voices of Yesterday, stock introduction taken from program number 16, "Joseph Jefferson," (New York: Harry S. Goodman Productions).

⁵⁶Letter from Carr Liggett to Harry S. Goodman, December 23, 1938 reproduced in a promotional pamphlet for Voices of Yesterday (New York: Harry S. Goodman Agency, 19 E. 53rd. Street).

⁵⁷"Voices From the Grave," Mechanix Illustrated (September, 1941), p. 133.

This article details the major outline of Vincent's life and tells several stories about his unusual voice recordings. It also relates Vincent's attempts to interest the National Archives and the Smithsonian Institute in his collection. Of his rejection by these institutions, the article states: "rather bitterly, Vincent puts them all under the heading: Lack of vision."

⁵⁸Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁵⁹"They Still Speak," Rockefeller Center Magazine, (March, 1940), p. 13.

⁶⁰Vincent, , interview, Spring, 1985.

⁶¹Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985. Photographs of Vincent's interview with William Lyon Phelps are included in the September, 1941 Mechanix Illustrated article. Claude M. Fuess, headmaster of Phillips Academy was also a noted historian and author of The Life of Calvin Coolidge (New York: Little Brown, 1940). Fuess recorded an introductory commentary to Vincent's Vocarium records issue of a Coolidge speech. Fuess autographed the Coolidge volume for Vincent on March 15, 1940.

Professor Phelps, a professor of literature at Yale, autographed a copy of his Autobiography With Letters (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939): "For Robert Vincent, with admiration for his art in preserving the human voice and with pleasant memories of our association in the good cause." The inscription is dated April, 1940.

⁶²Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁶³The Bridgeport Herald, Sunday, December 11, 1938 (as reproduced in Voices of Yesterday pamphlet.

⁶⁴"Ghost Voices," Time Magazine, (April 10, 1939), p. 43.

⁶⁵Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985.

⁶⁶Full page advertisement for "Antarctic Adventure" clipped from a magazine (Vincent collection). The text includes: "Number of Dates Available Limited. Apply to Robert Vincent, 610 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. (Telephone Circle 5-7084).

⁶⁷Vincent, interview, Spring, 1985. Also, Viola Vincent, interviewed in November, 1987 verified the details of Vincent's friendship with Byrd including the name of Byrd's dog which they cared for when Byrd was out of town.

⁶⁸Letter from Rear Admiral Richard E. Byrd to Robert Vincent (cropped, no date) appointing Vincent "Chief Recording Engineer and Archivist of the United States Antarctic Service." The appointment is "for a duration of five years." The letter is typed on United States Department of Interior stationary.

⁶⁹Transcription of a telephone conversation between Richard E. Byrd and Robert Vincent, exact date unknown, 1940, (Vincent collection).

⁷⁰Transcription of October 22, 1940 Fred Allen radio show, (Vincent collection).

⁷¹Adventures With Admiral Byrd, (promotional booklet distributed by Harry S. Goodman, 1941).

Vincent in an interview in the spring of 1985 indicated that Byrd's role was performed by Santos Ortega, a New York radio actor.

In The New Yorker magazine profile, May 17, 1941, the Byrd radio series is mentioned. "Lately, he (Vincent) has branched out into the literary end of radio, collaborating separately with his mother and Admiral Byrd," p. 31.

⁷²Adventures With Admiral Byrd, booklet, p. 10.

⁷³Legal contract between Robert Vincent and Harry S. Goodman, February 10, 1942.

⁷⁴Barbara Heggie, "Profiles: Voices," The New Yorker, (May 17, 1941), p. 24-31.

Vincent's birthdate is listed as 1900. Reference to Vincent's being "at college for a year" in 1915-16 is inaccurate. Also, there is a statement that Vincent recorded "William Jennings Bryan conducting a Bible class" in Miami." Research does not support these statements.

⁷⁵Heggie, p. 24.

⁷⁶Heggie, p. 28.

⁷⁷Heggie, p. 25.

⁷⁸Heggie, p. 25.

⁷⁹Heggie, p. 25.

⁸⁰Heggie, p. 31.

Chapter VII

¹G. Robert Vincent, "Irving Berlin," program number 6, Musical Bylines (radio series produced for the Satellite Program Development Fund), 1982.

²Richard R. Lingeman, Dont' You Know There's a War On? (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970), p. 175-243.

³Vincent, "The Songs and Sounds of World War II," program number 24, Musical Bylines.

⁴Transcription of a telephone conversation between Robert Vincent, his sister Ellen Struhs, and his brother-in-law Arnie Struhs, December 17, 1941.

⁵New York World Telegram, February 16, 1942 (clipping, page unknown).

Vincent is shown in a photograph with Corporal John F. Dube of South Portland, Maine. The headline of the item reads, "Service Men Send 'Living Letters' Back Home."

⁶Musical Bylines, program number 24.

Vincent details his USO tour. The recordings are on file at the National Voice Library, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.

⁷Musical Bylines, program number 22.

Vincent details his meeting with Lily Strickland.

⁸Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day" column, Sunday, May 24, 1942.

⁹Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

¹⁰New York Times, August 20, 1942 (clipping, page unknown).

¹¹Vincent files, correspondence with Bernard Knollenberg, Yale Libraries, 1942-1948.

¹²Vincent, V-Disc memoir (unpublished manuscript), p. 3.

¹³Letter from Emil Corwin of The Blue Network endorsing Vincent as "a pioneer in his profession," (letter cropped, date unknown).

¹⁴Transcription of a telephone conversation between Vincent and Major Bolton, June 25, 1942.

¹⁵Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 3-4.

¹⁶copy of Vincent's orders from The War Department dated July 29, 1942. Telegram from Major Lewis, July 31, 1942.

¹⁷Richard S. Sears, V-Discs: A History and Discography (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1980), p. xxv-xxvi.

¹⁸Sears, xxvii.

¹⁹Sears, xxvii.

²⁰Vincent V-Disc memoir, p. 3.

²¹Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 4.

²²Sears xxvi-xxvii.

²³Interview with G. Robert Vincent, February, 1981.

²⁴Sears, xxv-xxvi.

²⁵Interview with Vincent, February, 1981.

²⁶Sears, xxv.

²⁷Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 4.

²⁸Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 4.

²⁹Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 4-5.

³⁰Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 5

³¹Letter from Major H. A. Lewis to Lt. Robert Vincent, November 16, 1942.

³²Letter from Lewis to Vincent, August 3, 1942.

³³Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 6.

³⁴Sears, xxxi-xxxv.

- 35 Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 6.
- 36 Sears, xxxii.
- 37 Interview with G. Robert Vincent, February, 1981.
- 38 Personal record collection of V-Disc material, Douglas E. Collar.
- 39 Interview with G. Robert Vincent, February, 1981.
- 40 Evidence of this is heard on a transcription disc of an after hours "session" recorded at V-Disc headquarters. Tony Janak, Steve Shoals, and another unidentified voice are reading from the unexpurgated memoirs of Frank Harris. The ribald and joyful proceedings are punctuated by Vincent's voice from the control room. The recording ends with an a cappella rendition of "Friendship."
- 41 Interview with G. Robert Vincent, February, 1981.
- 42 Sears, xiv.
- 43 Letter from Brigadier General S. C. Godfrey, Headquarters China Burma India Air Service Command to Captain Robert Vincent, September 12, 1944.
- 44 Interview with G. Robert Vincent, February, 1981.
- 45 Interview with Vincent, February, 1981.
- 46 AP news story, "V-Discs Prove Morale Lifters For Servicemen," October 28, 1944.
- 47 AP, October 28, 1944.
- 48 Interview with Vincent, February, 1981.
- 49 Major Sazama's letter is cited in part in the AP news story, October 28, 1944.
- 50 Letter from "Spike" Jones, bandleader, to Captain Robert Vincent, February 7, 1945.
- 51 Interview with Vincent, February, 1981.
- 52 Letter from Sergeant George Rhett Butler to Captain Robert Vincent, October 6, 1945.
- 53 Sears, lxxv-lxxvii.
- 54 Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 12.

⁵⁵Interivew with Vincent, February, 1981.

⁵⁶Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 11-12.

This incident was also told in detail by Vincent on Musical Bylines, program number 3.

⁵⁷Sears, p. 918.

⁵⁸Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 12.

⁵⁹Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 12.

⁶⁰Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 12.

⁶¹Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 12.

⁶²Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 12.

⁶³Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 14.

⁶⁴Vincent, V-disc memoir, p. 14.

⁶⁵Sears, p. 296-297.

⁶⁶"Radio Reviews," Variety, Wednesday, August 2, 1944, large photocopy attached to copy of memorandum from Lt. Colonel Howard C. Bronson to Assistant Director For ASF, WDBPR (War Department Bureau of Public Relations), November 24, 1944.

⁶⁷Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 14.

⁶⁸Sears, p. 296.

⁶⁹Memorandum from A. D. Clark, Assistant to Director, ASF, WDBPR to Lt. Colonel Howard C. Bronson, November 15, 1944.

⁷⁰Memorandum from Lt. Colonel Bronson to Lt. Colonel Clark, November 24, 1944.

⁷¹Variety review, August 2, 1944.

Also in Newsweek on August 14 it was noted that "the network also got a top-flight program for the minor costs of technicians and air time." Newsweek, August 2, 1944, p. 96.

⁷²Sears, p. 296-323.

This is an inclusive listing of programs personnel, and songs.

⁷³The New York Times Magazine, March 22, 1964, p. 74.

Vincent promulgated the story that V-Discs were named after himself. "Everybody thinks that they were V-for-Victory discs. Actually I named them after myself V-for-Vincent," says Vincent in the article.

⁷⁴Discussion with Stan Kuwick, former enlisted man and V-Disc aficionado, at the International Association of Jazz Record Collectors Annual Convention, Detroit, Michigan, August 14, 1982. Kuwick offered his opinion to this interviewer that Vincent "was for the enlisted man" and that V-Discs reflected a sympathy for the young G.I.'s tastes and interests in music.

⁷⁵Vincent's respect for his wife's abilities is exemplified in his using her as the contact person in a telephone request to the Pentagon for a particular piece of electronic equipment needed in Nuremberg in 1945. Viola Vincent was flown to Washington on short notice because Vincent insisted that she was the only person who would understand what equipment he needed from their Vocarium Studio. Ironically, Mrs. Vincent was not allowed to speak to her husband because "a woman's voice" would "not be understood over the transcontinental lines." During his conversation with Vincent, the Pentagon officer could not understand what Vincent wanted, so it was decided that Vincent should fly to New York to pick up the item himself.

⁷⁶Life Magazine, October 18, 1943, p. 117-124.

⁷⁷Interview with Kenneth Vincent, July, 1986.

⁷⁸Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 10-11.

⁷⁹Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 14.

⁸⁰During 1944, Basie's former tenor saxophone star - Lester Young - was incarcerated at Camp Lee, Virginia. While at Camp Lee, Young suffered a nervous breakdown after racist treatment by a southern officer. Young was not allowed to play in the Camp Lee band. He subsequently was discharged and returned to the jazz scene but was permanently scarred by his military experiences.

⁸¹Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 14.

⁸²Sears, p. 315.

The date of the Basie broadcast was October 30, 1944.

⁸³Interview with G. Robert Vincent, February, 1981.

- ⁸⁴Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 15.
- ⁸⁵Interview with G. Robert Vincent, February, 1981.
- ⁸⁶Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 15.
- ⁸⁷Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 16.
- ⁸⁸There are photographs of this event in Vincent's collection, including a shot of General Byron cutting the V-Disc cake.
- ⁸⁹Vincent, V-Disc memoirs, p. 15.
- ⁹⁰Vincent, V-disc memoir, p. 17.
- ⁹¹Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 17.
- ⁹²"Stars on Parade" carbon copy of three page memoranda, November 5, 1944.
- ⁹³Letter from Edgar Bergan to Corporal Hurdle, October 24, 1944.
- ⁹⁴Memorandum from Captain Robert Vincent to the Director, Special Services Division, October 12, 1944, p. 2-3.
- ⁹⁵Sears, p. 320.
- ⁹⁶Sears, p. 320-323.
- ⁹⁷Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 18.
- ⁹⁸Letter from Major General Joseph W. Byron to Captain Robert Vincent, December 15, 1944.
- ⁹⁹Letter from W. J. Waller to Captain Robert Vincent, December 28, 1944.
- ¹⁰⁰Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 18-19.
- ¹⁰¹Vincent, "Thirty Five Years Ago," United Nations memoir, unpublished manuscript, p. 3.
- ¹⁰²Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 4.
- ¹⁰³Letter from Secretary of State Edward R. Stettinius to Captain Robert Vincent, April 17, 1945.
- ¹⁰⁴Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 5.
- ¹⁰⁵Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 5-6.

- ¹⁰⁶Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 7-8.
- ¹⁰⁷Letter from Eugene W. Moore to Captain Robert Vincent, June 18, 1945.
- ¹⁰⁸Moore letter.
- ¹⁰⁹Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 12.
- ¹¹⁰Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 17.
- ¹¹¹Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 19.
- ¹¹²Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 20.
- ¹¹³Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 21.
- ¹¹⁴Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 14.
- ¹¹⁵Interivew with G. Robert Vincent, August, 1982.
- ¹¹⁶Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 15.
- ¹¹⁷Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 15.
- ¹¹⁸Interivew with G. Robert Vincent, August, 1982.
- ¹¹⁹Interview with G. Robert Vincent, August, 1982.
- ¹²⁰Sears, xivi-xivii.
- ¹²¹Sears, lxxxvi.
- ¹²²Citation for Legion of Merit awarded to Major George R. Vincent.
- ¹²³Vincent, V-Disc memoir, p. 19.
- ¹²⁴Vincent's promotion to Major was effective on September 29, 1945 according to the extract of his promotion.
- ¹²⁵On May 19, 1945 Secretary of State Stettinius wrote an appreciative letter to Vincent stating that he has "heard many favorable comments on the ingenuity and energy" with which Vincent and his staff were accomplishing "this difficult sound documentation of the proceedings."
- ¹²⁶Letter from Francis Biddle to Secretary Stettinius, January 15, 1946.
- ¹²⁷Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.
- ¹²⁸Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

¹²⁹Letter from Justice Robert H. Jackson to Robert Vincent, August 20, 1946.

¹³⁰This phrase was used in a headline from a newspaper clipping (no source or date) in Robert Vincent's scrapbook. It is a part of a montage of news accounts of Vincent's role as United Nations Sound and Recording Engineer.

Chapter VIII

¹Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

²Interview, Spring, 1985.

³Bendix Aviation Corporation advertisement, Time, April 29, 1946, p. 71.

⁴Trico Products advertisement, Time, April 29, 1946, p. 95.

⁵Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

Vincent also told a similar version of this incident in the Spring, 1985 interviews.

⁶"UNdistinguished Voices," Time, April 29, 1946, p. 56.

⁷Time, p. 56.

⁸Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

⁹Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

¹⁰Vincent, "Thirty Five Years Ago," United Nations memoir, unpublished manuscript, p. 9.

¹¹Vincent, United Nations memoir, p. 18.

¹²United Nations Interoffice Memorandum, from David B. Vaughan to Robert Vincent, April 16, 1947.

¹³United Nations Notification of Personnel Action to Robert Vincent, May 6, 1947.

¹⁴Letter from C. R. Walgreen to Robert Vincent, February 11, 1947.

¹⁵Transcriptions of these readings are located in the private collection of G. Robert Vincent.

¹⁶Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

¹⁷Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

Vincent's impatience was well-known. His U.S. Army service record contains a memorandum to Major Thomas Lewis from an officer who interviewed Vincent for his commission application. He noted: "This man is very persistent, but I cannot blame him for that." Dated July 2, 1942.

¹⁸Pamphlet advertising "Complete Sound and Recording Service," The National Vocarium, 610 Fifth Ave., New York 20, N.Y.

This post-war advertising publication mentions Vincent's war service and includes a photograph of Vincent talking to Reichsmarschall Goering as well as facsimile letters from clients.

¹⁹Oliver Read and Walter L. Welch, From Tinfoil to Stereo (New York, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959), p. 339.

". . . Columbia announced its new long-playing records . . . in the spring of 1948.

²⁰Gerald Emmanuel Stern, McLuhan, Hot and Cool (New York: The New American Library, 1969).

²¹Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Vincent's friendship with W. C. Handy is also documented in "W. C. Handy," program number 1, Musical Bylines (radio series produced for the Satellite Program Development Fund), 1982.

²²Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

²³Letter from Cleanth Brooks to Robert Vincent, May 31, 1949.

²⁴Letters of appointment from the Yale Library to Robert Vincent indicate that his last year as curator of the Yale Voice Library was 1948-49.

²⁵In the Spring, 1985 interview Vincent felt that Yale had "reneged" on their agreement to house the collection. He thought that lack of space and a shift in post-war enrollments were factors.

²⁶Correspondence between Vincent and Yale indicates that plans for the voice library reopened in August of 1947 after a four year hiatus. A six point letter from David Clift, Associate Librarian at Yale, to Robert Vincent outlined an agreement for the operation and outfitting of the voice library.

²⁷Letter from David Clift to Robert Vincent, May 6, 1949.

²⁸Letter from James T. Babb, Librarian at Yale, to Robert Vincent, December 10, 1948.

²⁹Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

³⁰Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring 1985.

³¹"Lin Yutang," Who's Who in Person (film produced by G. Robert Vincent), 1952.

³²Letter from Robert Vincent to Elliott Kone, Director of the Yale Audio Visual Center, June 16, 1953.

³³Vincent took up this project seriously in 1960 by going to New York City to collect still photographs for the documentary from several museums and archives. Some footage was shot, but Vincent did not complete the Roosevelt film until 1973 as a fifteen-minute segment of the "Bob Vincent's Almanac" series.

³⁴Vincent is acknowledged as a contributor to I Can Hear It Now on the liner notes to the album, copyright 1949, Columbia Records.

The acknowledgement reads: "ROBERT VINCENT, who has one of the finest historical record collections in the world and who supplied us with much material."

³⁵Billboard, clipping, August 4, 1951.

"Album is narrated by Fredric March with musical backgrounds by Nathaniel Shilkret. Sounds contained in the album are culled from the George Robert Vincent collection of more than 2,000 voices. Many of them come from early Edison rolls."

³⁶Hark the Years was not a financial success for Vincent as indicated by a handwritten note (undated) from Fredric March to Vincent upon news of the Michigan State University reissue of the album in 1963.

March wrote: "Too bad you got so royally screwed (we both did) on Hark the Years - you did a great job on it and deserved much better."

March apparently agreed to do the narration on a projected Volume II. In another handwritten note to Vincent, March wrote: "Now that I'm older I'm sure I can do a better job on the album! I'm anxious to tackle it again."

³⁷Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

³⁸Letter from Frederick Lewis Allen to Robert Vincent, April 12, 1950.

³⁹Allen letter.

⁴⁰The Titan promotional booklet, United Artists Corporation, 1950.

⁴¹Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

⁴²Vincent used foils in his later radio series, Spin Back the Years and Musical Bylines.

⁴³Letter from John H. Mitchell, Vice-President of Screen Gems, Inc.

⁴⁴Vincent Terrace, Encyclopedia of Television, Volume I (New York: Baseline Productions, 1986), p. 347.

Person To Person debuted on CBS on October 2, 1953.

⁴⁵Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁴⁶The Flower of Happiness film soundtrack, a G. Robert Vincent Production, 1952.

⁴⁷The Flower of Happiness credits.

⁴⁸Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Vincent loved to tell stories of "the screwballs" he worked with. Sosenko's "plan" was a sick joke which Vincent enjoyed but did not take seriously. A detailed insight into Sosenko's professional work habits exists in Vincent's diary of a trip to New York City in 1960 to obtain still photographs for the film on Theodore Roosevelt.

⁴⁹Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁵⁰Contract between Milton Underdown and Robert Vincent, July 15, 1952.

⁵¹Contract between Sterling Television Co. Inc. and Robert Vincent, October 6, 1952.

⁵²Letter from Clip Routell to G. Robert Vincent, November 28, 1951.

⁵³Vincent enjoyed working with creative, interesting people. While he could be demanding, Vincent was loyal once he was confident in the people he placed his trust in. He worked best in an ensemble of friends. He cultivated "contacts" in the media field throughout his career and, in contemporary terms, was very effective at "networking."

⁵⁴In his 1960 correspondence from New York, Vincent recognizes the limitations of his small-time operation. A constant theme in Vincent's post-World War productions is the lack of sufficient operating capital.

⁵⁵Studs Terkel, The Good War: An Oral History of World War II (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), author's note.

⁵⁶Jim Harmon, The Great Radio Comedians (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 183.

Harmon cites Allen's comments from his book Treadmill to Oblivion: ". . . thee was a certain type of imaginative comedy that could be written for and performed only on radio."

⁵⁷Edison Pioneers 36th Annual Meeting, program, Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, New York City, February 6, 1954.

Robert Vincent is listed as an associate member.

⁵⁸Vincent's interview is heard in part on Musical Bylines program number 7. Also, Vincent interview, Spring, 1985.

⁵⁹Interview with Vincent, Spring, 1985.

⁶⁰Receipt, ADTFC, New York Chapter to Robert Vincent for dues, June 11, 1953.

Letter from "E. B.," Executive Board ADTFC to Robert Vincent, June 5, 1953. This form letter announces that Vincent has "been accepted as a regular member in the capacity of soundman."

⁶¹Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁶²Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁶³Letter from L. Wolfe Gilbert to Robert Vincent, June 16, 1954.

⁶⁴Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁶⁵Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

Vincent also kept a photograph album of a Hayden, Stone social event for clients. Vincent assembled the pictures in a Hayden, Stone folio dated 1959.

⁶⁶In a personal letter to friends in Florida dated April 24, 1961, Vincent describes progress on the new plant. He wrote: ". . . the present quarters of Guild Master Corp. are not adequate to handle this huge amount of work, so we planned to build our own 10,000 square foot plant on the 4½ acres of land that we recently acquired, adjacent to the Ventura Freeway. And, of course, it was I who took on the assignment to erect it and take care of the myriad details necessary for such a project - not the least of which was raising \$40,000."

⁶⁷Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁶⁸The Santa Monica Evening Outlook, November 4, 1960, p. 21.

Brentwood Productions, the fictitious firm name for the new production company, was filed and notarized on May 18, 1960. the proof of publication of this venture was published in the Evening Outlook on May 20, 1960. G. Robert Vincent and Robert S. Burroughs were listed as partners in the company.

⁶⁹Richard Shile, ed. Academy Awards: An Unger Reference Index (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Company, 1978), p. 431.

The True Story of The Civil War was the best short documentary of 1957.

⁷⁰Jack Hellman, "Light and Airy," Variety, Thursday, November 10, 1960, p. 8.

⁷¹The Evening Outlook, Wednesday, September 4, 1956 (clipping, page cropped).

⁷²The Evening Outlook, September 4, 1956.

⁷³Twelve-inch transcription disc of a telephone conversation between Vincent and an unidentified advertising executive, circa, 1940.

⁷⁴Transcription disc, as above.

⁷⁵The Evening Outlook, November 4, 1960, p. 21.

⁷⁶Notebook of materials pertaining to projected Brentwood Productions film on Theodore Roosevelt. This book includes shot lists, script excerpts, addresses of contacts, carbons of letters, and a fourteen page "log" of Vincent's trip to New York City in June and July of 1960.

⁷⁷New York trip log, p. 1.

⁷⁸New York trip log, p. 4.

⁷⁹New York log, p. 8..

⁸⁰New York log, p. 3.

⁸¹Letter from Robert Vincent to Bob Burroughs, June 26, 1960.

⁸²Letter from Robert Vincent to Viola Vincent, June 25, 1960.

⁸³Letter from Vincent to Vincent, June 25, 1960.

⁸⁴New York log, p. 13. Since Vincent's mother had signed over the rights of her stories to him before her death, there was a financial stake in producing film properties from her work.

⁸⁵Letter from Vincent to Burroughs, June 26, 1960.

⁸⁶New York log, p. 14.

⁸⁷New York log, p. 15.

⁸⁸The Brentwood Productions version of the Roosevelt film was not completed. In 1973, Vincent produced a completed fifteen-minute T. R. film in a projected series called Bob Vincent's Almanac. Technical assistance for this film was provided by Bill Blanchard of the Lansing Community College cinema program.

Chapter IX

¹Robert Vincent, "Voices," Yale University, Library Gazette, Volume 17 (January, 1943), 48-51.

²Vincent, Volume 17, p. 50.

³Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to Robert Vincent, December 5, 1961.

⁴Chapin, December 5, 1961.

⁵Chapin, December 5, 1961.

⁶Letter from Herb Bergman to Robert Vincent, October 16, 1961.

⁷Bergman, October 16, 1961.

⁸Bergman, October 16, 1961.

⁹Letter from Robert Vincent to Herb Bergman, November 10, 1961.

¹⁰Vincent, November 10, 1961.

¹¹Vincent, November 10, 1961.

¹²Vincent, November 10, 1961.

¹³Letter from Robert Vincent to Dr. Robert Vosper,
December 17, 1961.

¹⁴Vincent, December 17, 1961.

¹⁵Vincent, December 17, 1961.

¹⁶Vincent, December 17, 1961.

¹⁷Vincent, December 17, 1961.

In this respect, Vincent was repeating ideas that he had worked out as early as the Voices of Yesterday series in the 1930's. He tended to "recycle" concepts which were of value to him.

¹⁸Vincent, December 17, 1961.

¹⁹Vincent, December 17, 1961.

²⁰Vincent, December 17, 1961.

²¹Interview with Dr. Richard Chapin, April 21, 1988.

²²Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to Robert Vincent,
December 5, 1961.

²³Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to Robert Vincent,
January 8, 1962.

²⁴Chapin, January 8, 1962.

²⁵Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to Robert Vincent,
January 23, 1962.

²⁶Chapin, January 23, 1962.

²⁷Letter from Robert Vincent to Dr. Richard Chapin,
February 2, 1962.

²⁸Vincent, February 2, 1962.

²⁹Letter from Robert Vincent to Dr. Richard Chapin,
February 28, 1962.

³⁰Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to Robert Vincent,
February 20, 1962.

³¹Vincent, February 28, 1962.

³²Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to Robert Vincent, April 17, 1962.

³³Letter from Robert Vincent to Dr. Richard Chapin, April 20, 1962.

³⁴Chapin interview, April 21, 1988.

³⁵Letter from Jack Breslin to Robert Vincent, April 27, 1962.

³⁶Letter from Robert Vincent to Viola Vincent, May 13, 1962.

³⁷Vincent, May 13, 1962.

³⁸The State Journal, May 20, 1962.

³⁹Letter from Robert Vincent to Viola Vincent, May 25, 1962.

⁴⁰Vincent, May 25, 1962.

⁴¹Vincent, May 25, 1962.

⁴²Mort Weisinger, "Listen! Mark Twain Speaking," The Saturday Evening Post (from clipping), page unknown.

The title of this article refers to a controversial recording in Vincent's collection alleged to be the voice of Mark Twain. Later, the voice was identified as that of actor William Gillette.

Weisinger, later the editor of Superman comics, was a long-time friend of Vincent's.

⁴³Chapin interview, April 21, 1988.

⁴⁴Letter from Robert Vincent to Viola Vincent, June 8, 1962.

⁴⁵Vincent, June 8, 1962.

⁴⁶Letter from Dr. Gordon L. Thomas to Dr. Richard Chapin, May 25, 1962.

⁴⁷Vincent, June 8, 1962.

⁴⁸Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁴⁹Letter from Don Dick to Dr. Richard Chapin, May 30, 1962.

⁵⁰Interview with Dr. Maurice Crane, August, 1986.

⁵¹The State Journal, May 23, 1962, p. A-5.

⁵²The Detroit News, November 3, 1963 (clipping), page unknown.

⁵³Barry Furlong, "Sound Scholarship," Time, February 7, 1964, p. 4950.

⁵⁴"Sounds of History," The New York Times Magazine, March 22, 1964 (reprint), pages unknown.

⁵⁵Furlong, p. 50.

⁵⁶Time, February 7, p. 50.

⁵⁷Letter from Robert E. Carp to G. Robert Vincent, April 23, 1964.

⁵⁸Letter from G. Robert Vincent to Robert E. Carp, April 28, 1964.

⁵⁹Letter from Clarence "Biggie" Munn to Jack Lescoulie, October 29, 1963.

⁶⁰Western Union Telegram from Judy Crichton of I've Got a Secret staff to G. Robert Vincent, April 16, 1964.

The telegram confirms the date of April 20 for Vincent's appearance.

⁶¹The date of this course offering is determined by the dates on term papers saved by Vincent from the course. The paper of Carol Congdon is dated December 8, 1964.

⁶²Letter from Carl Wood to Dr. Richard Chapin, undated.

⁶³G. Robert Vincent, "The Sound of History," Library Journal, Volume 90 (October 15, 1965), p. 4282-4290.

⁶⁴Vincent, Volume 90, p. 4290.

⁶⁵Vincent, Volume 90, p. 4289.

⁶⁶Interview with Dr. Richard Chapin, April 21, 1988.

⁶⁷Vincent, Volume 90, p. 4290.

⁶⁸Patience and Fortitude, "A National Voice Library release," 1964.

⁶⁹Letter from Tom K. Phares to G. Robert Vincent, November 23, 1964.

Phares was the Assistant Director of Public Relations for Westinghouse Electric Company. He indicates in the letter that the World's Fair Time Capsule was to be distributed to radio stations.

⁷⁰Vincent produced thirty-nine episodes of Spin Back the Years in its original run. Later, in 1972, Vincent offered a series of twenty-four programs to public radio stations. A complete listing and description of the twenty-four programs is included in an advertising booklet that Vincent had printed to send to interested program directors.

⁷¹Barb Jones, "WMSB airs voices of past eras," The State News, February 4, 1969.

⁷²These "audio vignettes" are described in a booklet produced by the Instructional Media Center at Michigan State University.

⁷³Vincent collected the "History in Sound" columns in his scrapbook on the history of the Voice Library. They are not dated.

⁷⁴Letter from Henry Hicks, A.B.C. News, to G. Robert Vincent, February 25, 1965.

⁷⁵Letter from Harold Lake to G. Robert Vincent, January 30, 1965.

⁷⁶Notation and photograph by G. Robert Vincent on K.D.K.A. trip in National Voice Library scrapbook, p. 106.

⁷⁷Interview with Viola Vincent, April 8, 1988.

⁷⁸Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

⁷⁹Vincent interview.

⁸⁰Interview with Dr. Richard Chapin, April 21, 1988.

⁸¹Chapin interview.

⁸²Interview with Dr. Maurice Crane, August, 1986.

⁸³Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to G. Robert Vincent, December 29, 1970.

⁸⁴Letter from Robert Vincent to National Personnel Records Center, December 2, 1970.

⁸⁵Crane interview.

⁸⁶Letter from Dr. Richard Chapin to Robert Vincent, April 23, 1973.

⁸⁷Interview with G. Robert Vincent, Spring, 1985.

Vincent showed me a video cassette of the program which is dated "11-9-71."

⁸⁸Letter from Tom Kenny to Robert Vincent, November 12, 1971.

⁸⁹This is Vincent's own notation in his Voice Library scrapbook.

⁹⁰Crane interview, August 1985.

Dr. Chapin offered to change the name of the National Voice Library to the G. Robert Vincent Voice Library in his letter of April 23, 1973. Vincent, according to his wife, never liked the new name. On the door of his studio in his East Lansing home, Vincent placed a National Voice Library sign. He had stationary printed with his home address listed as The National Voice Library.

⁹¹Letter from Robert Vincent to Dr. Richard Chapin, October 21, 1971.

⁹²Sue Nichols, "Maurice Crane: Finding the Good Gigs in Life," The State Journal, June 28, 1987, p. 8J.

⁹³Viola Vincent Interview, April 8, 1988.

⁹⁴Vincent's books included his mother's extensive library. His own tastes ran to biography and social history. The large number of self-help books in the collection include volumes on real-estate, investments, hypnotism, medicine, and writing. Vincent's favorite novelist was John Dos Passos. The collection includes several well-worn early editions of the American writer's work. Vincent told me once that Dos Passos' novels reminded him of his youthful days in New York City. Vincent's interest in the "camera-eye" technique was evident in his documentary film-making and may have derived from Dos Passos' use of the concept in his fiction.

⁹⁵Don Kemp was involved in engineering Spin Back the Years at W.M.S.B. television. In 1981, Kemp engineered my series Jazz Archives at W.K.A.R. radio. Vincent, Kemp, and I held an interview session at Vincent's home in February of 1981.

⁹⁶ Vincent was impressed at my obtaining a grant because he had always been thwarted in his attempts to get such funding at the National Voice Library.

⁹⁷ Vincent worked fast and grew impatient waiting for me to arrive at our weekly recording sessions. Thus, he devised the plan for recording the script in separate segments. This plan also gave him more control over editing since he could splice and "mix" the voice tracks to his own aesthetic tastes. Inevitably, Vincent's ideas of pacing and timing were correct.

⁹⁸ Vincent's main objection to the Mercer program was my inclusion of a recording of Glenn Wallich's talking about the founding of Capitol Records with his partner Johnny Mercer. Vincent thought that the segment "dragged." Later, I discovered that Vincent resented Wallich's for some reason, probably in connection with the financial arrangements for Hark the Years, a Capitol production.

⁹⁹ Chapin interview, April 21, 1988.

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The following bibliography lists, first, the books that were cited in the above study. Next, the primary sources from the private collection of G. Robert Vincent are listed. These include letters, articles, and newspaper references. Finally, there is a listing of unpublished manuscript materials, scrapbooks, and recordings from the Vincent collection which were used in the study. A listing of interviews conducted in the study is also provided.

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Maxwell Perkins to Robert Vincent, November 5, 1917.

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late 1917.

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1918.

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Scrapbooks

In his later years Robert Vincent assembled several scrapbooks of memorabilia from his life. These included pictures, documents, newspaper clippings, and ephemera. A second series of scrapbooks, begun in the 1930's, contained written texts by Vincent.

There are seven scrapbooks in the first series which covers each major phase of Vincent's life. The second series, with texts, contains three books. They are entitled as follows:

"Spin Back the Years: Book One, The Boy Editor"

"Book Two: The First World War"

"Book Three: Return to Peace, A Chronicle of the Twenties"

Vincent also assembled a bound volume on the history of the National Voice Library from 1962 to 1973.

Recordings

Adventures with Admiral Byrd, sixteen-inch transcription discs of programs produced by G. Robert Vincent for Harry L. Goodman Productions, circa 1941.

Musical By-lines, cassettes of twenty-six programs containing historical recordings and anecdotes by G. Robert Vincent, produced by Douglas Collar for the Satellite Program Development Fund, 1982.

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Voices of Yesterday, sixteen-inch transcription discs of programs produced by G. Robert Vincent for Harry L. Goodman Productions, 1939.

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