



Audio Publishers Association

A HISTORY OF AUDIOBOOKS

1877: Thomas Edison invents the phonograph, the first machine capable of reproducing recorded sound.

1878: Edison predicts that the phonograph will be used to read books aloud to blind people, hospital patients, and people who are too busy to read to themselves.

1932: The American Foundation for the Blind establishes a studio in Grand Central Palace, New York, to record “talking books.” Its engineers develop a way to record full-length books on twelve-inch, vinylite records that play at 33½ revolutions per minute and hold approximately 15 minutes of speech per side. Test recordings include a chapter from Helen Keller’s *Midstream* and Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Raven*.

1933: Congress passes an amendment to the Pratt-Smoot Act permitting the Library of Congress’s Books for the Adult Blind project to spend up to \$10,000 on the production of recorded books.

1934: The Library of Congress’s Talking Book Service makes its first recording: Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (read by John Knight). The other initial recordings include parts of *The Bible* (the Gospels, the Psalms), patriotic documents (the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, George Washington’s Farewell Address and Valley Forge Letter to the Continental Congress, Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and First and Second Inaugural Addresses), and Shakespeare plays (*As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*). The first novel recorded is Gladys Hasty Carroll’s *As the Earth Turns*.

1936: The American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky begins producing talking books.

1948: Recording for the Blind (later renamed Learning Ally) is founded to make volunteer-produced recordings.

1952: Caedmon Records is formed in New York and is a pioneer in the audiobook industry. Its first album features Welsh poet Dylan Thomas reading *A Child’s Christmas in Wales* and several poems.

1955: Listening Library records its first title (Jules Verne’s *Around the World in Eighty Days*) and becomes one of the first companies to distribute recorded books to libraries, schools, and hospitals.

1962: The cassette tape is invented.

1966: The first full-length recording of the King James Bible made by a single voice (Alexander Scourby) is published on eight-track and cassette tapes.

1972: Public libraries begin circulating audiobooks.

1975: Books on Tape begins renting unabridged taped books in California through the mail. The company’s first title (George Plimpton’s *Paper Lion*, read by Jake Gardiner) is recorded in the owner’s living room.

1979: Recorded Books begins renting unabridged audiobooks on the East Coast. Its first title is Jack London’s *The Sea-Wolf*, narrated by Frank Muller.

1981: Publishers begin marketing audiobooks in book stores on spinner racks, countertop displays, and bookshelves.

1982: Waldenbooks installs "audio centers" in most of its 980 outlets and becomes the first major retailer to launch its own line of cassettes, Waldentapes.

1982: Compact discs enter the commercial market.

1985: Bowker's industry guide *On Cassette* lists nearly 22,000 titles produced by 250 different companies.

1985: Random House, Warner Publishing, and Simon and Schuster all open audio divisions. The initial titles include Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Gore Vidal's *Lincoln*, and John Updike's *Selected Stories* read by the authors.

1985: Audio Editions, the first audiobook catalog selling titles from multiple publishers, sends out its first issue.

1986: The Audio Publishers Association (APA) is created.

1986: The Book of the Month Club and The Literary Guild start offering audiobooks.

1987: *Publishers Weekly* starts a regular column to cover the audiobook industry.

1988: The industry guide *Words on Tape* identifies 600-800 companies producing spoken word recordings.

1992: *AudioFile Magazine* is launched.

1994: The APA establishes the term "audiobook" as the industry standard.

1994: The first websites dedicated to selling audiobooks go online.

1995: Audible and other online companies enable customers to download audiobooks directly to desktop computers.

1995: The first Audio Publishers Association Convention (APAC) takes place.

1996: The first Audies Awards ceremony for audiobooks takes place at the Chicago Hyatt Regency.

1997: Audible debuts the first digital audio player, the Audible Player, which sells for \$200 and can hold up to two hours of speech.

2003: Audible's deal with Apple marks an increase in public awareness as audiobooks became available on iTunes.

2005: Preloaded Digital Players, all-in-one audiobook format, are created.

2014: The Deyan Institute of Vocal Artistry and Technology (DIVA), the world's first school for teaching the art and technology of audiobook production, opens.

General Inquiries

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