



Chapter 2

SEARCHING FOR THE VIOLIN MAKER

Sol Roach, 1856-1933, was a multi talented eccentric who, throughout his life, did many things and did them well. He was a sharpshooter, a prodigious hunter and fisherman, an outdoor guide, a gunsmith, a maker of fishing tackle, a main street merchant selling bicycles and guns, a locksmith, and a maker and repairer of violins. That was just while he lived in Windber. Census records indicate that earlier in life he was also working in sawmills and as a coal miner. Research has led to even more possibilities but there is too little evidence to as yet support them. He did all of this, in addition to raising a family of five children of his own, plus one of the children of his son Wilbur, after the death of his wife.

My principle interest is the making of violins. The primary questions that have to be asked are: When did he start making violins and when did he stop? How or from whom did he learn to make violins? How many violins did he make? Did he make other stringed instruments in addition to violins? Hard facts are hard to come by so the process of discovering them is as interesting as the facts themselves.

The period of the 1890's was of particular interest because it was thought to be the period where he was learning gunsmithing and violin making. There is no record of where Sol learned either of these skills. It seems though, that gunsmithing and gun building were to some degree a tradition in the family. There is an 1873 letter to Sol's father Robert from Robert's brother Samuel regarding a gun that Samuel had made for him. Correspondence indicates other references to guns made by Samuel. Samuel is buried at Brisbin southwest of Philipsburg, Clearfield County. The 1880 Census shows the Robert Roaches (Sol's father) living at North Houtzdale. Brisbin is just to the north of modern Houtzdale.

There is the possibility that violin making was a tradition on the Jones side of the family. Sol's grandfather was married to Rebecca Jones at Wilton, Maine. Sol's father Robert described some of the Jones relatives during a 1910 visit to Windber. One in particular was Kalup Jones and Bros., who were musicians, violinists and bucket makers.

Contact with the family line of Sol's brother Charles Roach was established during the summer of 2010. Charles' granddaughter, Barbara Park of Veradale, Washington, said that her grandfather had been an expert woodworker in addition to being a carpenter (as well as Justice of the Peace) citing a church that he built in Houtzdale, Pennsylvania. She said that family lore stated that Charles had made a violin on which he applied decorative inlay. No one knows if the violin really exists or who would have it. The example below illustrates his talent on an inlaid chest made as a graduation present for his daughter, Barbara's mother.

In January of 2011 a violin was spotted for sale on E-bay that was made by a John H. Roach. The instrument was made in 1958 and was number 5 by the maker. Charles second child was a John H. Roach, born in 1894. Barbara had no knowledge about his being a violin maker but remembered seeing him at Charles funeral in 1956. He would have been 62 years old in 1958 and could have been the John H. Roach that made this violin.



These unrelated pieces of information could lead one to conclude that there may have been a family tradition of violin making. Woodworking, however, was known as a family skill.

When Sol arrives at Windber in 1898 (**The Windber Story; A 20th Century Model Pennsylvania Coal Town**, Paul Frank Alcamo, Windber, Pa. 1983) he becomes one of Windber's first businessmen with a newly constructed store on the main street, Graham Ave. He is running a gun and bicycle shop and hiring out as a hunting guide. There is no mention of violins as yet. However, while he is in Punxsutawney during the 1890's he is only 17 miles from two known violin makers. These two violin makers were located in Brookville, just 17 miles northwest of Punxsutawney and both were also well known gunsmiths. According to modern indices these are the only two "known" violin makers anywhere in that part of Pennsylvania in that time period. They were Henry Bonnet and Daniel Long. Long is listed in the **Directory of American Violin Makers** and Bonnet is not, but is well known in the area. Long and Bonnet were both about 20 years older than Sol. According to Russell Harriger's previously mentioned book **Long Rifles of Pennsylvania**, by 1895 Bonnet was no longer listing himself as a gunsmith and was concentrating on the making of violins. The services and goods sold in Sol's Windber shop by the 1910's is nearly identical to that advertised in Bonnets shop in Brookville years before: guns, bicycles, violins and fishing tackle. The similarities between these men and their businesses can hardly be coincidental. However, I have been unable to directly connect these men. A further mystery emerges concerning where Bonnet and Long learned violin making. Neither left Jefferson and Clarion counties for any period of time in their adult lives. Their gun smithing mentors are well known but it's not known from whom they learned to make violins. There is the possibility of an additional maker somewhere in the region who remains unknown.

There is more coincidental evidence that Sol, Bonnet and Long might have known each other. According to Harriger's book, a newspaper account from 1920 says that Daniel Long "...felt that he must beat the famous gunmakers of the day in building a target rifle which should outshoot in distance and accuracy any gun yet produced". "Having constructed the greatest gun of his day, our genius turned his wonderful brain to the manufacture of violins...." As a professional hunter and trapper Sol would also have known of the legendary Long family "...portrayed by numerous historians as the greatest subsistence hunters in western Pennsylvania." One of Long's brothers, William, was known as the legendary "King Hunter". Long's uncle, William McCullough, with whom Long grew up, was also a gunsmith, teaching the skill to Daniel and was also a famous hunter and marksman in the area. Sol was at one time Pennsylvania state marksmanship champion in rifle shooting. According to his grandson John Roach his accuracy as a shooter was legendary and that he would typically use a squirrel round like the 25-20 to take deer using one shot. The Punxsutawney newspaper of 1890 writes of Sol in a shooting competition at the fairgrounds, an event that was advertised in advance. In 1894 that same paper calls Sol the "*champion sportsman of this county*" for his hunting prowess. Competitive hunters and shooters living so close together would surely have known of each other but the evidence is only circumstantial.

Sol's obituary states that he studied violin making for 10 years before he made his first violin. It does not indicate with whom he studied or how he went about it. Being employed by a coal company or running his own business would probably have precluded an apprenticeship in a luthier's shop. According to Harriger's book and the testimony of a direct relative of Henry Bonnet's, Bonnet never had an apprentice in his shop. As of 2006 the earliest example of Sol's work that we knew of was from 1907. However his trade in Windber listed in 1900 does not mention violins, where by 1915 it is plainly pictured on his shop window. The 1907 violin is well made and does not look like a first effort, which it later proved not to be. The builders tag on the inside of the violin is commercially printed and says that it is made of wood from 1720. The 1720 is crossed out in pen and 1650 is written next to it. This would indicate that he was making violins prior to 1907 with wood from the 1700's with the confidence of having commercially printed tags made up. However in 1907 he had available to him wood from the 1600's, which he duly noted. That puts the beginning of his violin making sometime prior to 1907. The fact that it does not appear on his shop window in 1900 or is not mentioned as a trade only means that he hadn't advanced to where he was confident in his craft or that it simply wasn't called for in a newly opened coal mining town, which had to have a frontier flavor to it at that time.



Sol Roach in front of his shop at 1103 Graham Ave. in Windber about 1915. The first shop and home were the next building to the left at 1101 Graham Ave. (Below) Margaret and John S. Roach, Sol's grandchildren, on the porch in front of the shop in 1913.

My January 2007 trip to Pennsylvania for the purpose of trying to connect Sol with Bonnet and Long and to try to find more original Roach violins in the Johnstown area unearthed 12 additional violins plus the 8 already known. The earliest that I found as of that date is a 1903 violin and it was in the possession of Joseph Nemanich, a professional musician in Johnstown (not a violinist). The builders tag is commercially printed and says "Made by Sol E.



Roach", "The wood used in the construction of this instrument was sawed in 1792." Although the top board is in rough condition, perhaps due to sun weathering the finish and some damage to one of the F holes, the rest of the violin is in good condition and plays well. It is not a first effort.

Another surprise emerged on this trip. Edward Surkosky of the Windber Museum produced a full-page ad for Sol's shop from a 1917 city directory. The ad stated that Sol used Guarnerius, Amati and Strad patterns. It outlined his prices and that he did a lot of graduating and repair work. It also listed two professionals using his violins. The most intriguing sentence though, talked of his experience. "Sweet, brilliant, far-carrying voice-like tone, result of 40 years experience of tuning and graduating new and old violins." The previous assumption had been that, given what we knew of his life and whereabouts, he should have been learning the craft during the 1890's while in the Punxsutawney area. His teachers could well have been Bonnet or Long. However, 40 years experience puts his work with violins back to 1877! This begins to predate what we know about Bonnet and Long.

It's not known when Bonnet began to make his violins. Bonnet had a gun shop in Clarion, Pa, just west of Brookville, until about 1885, when he moved back to Brookville. While in Clarion he was also running a planing mill. While at the Jefferson County Historical Center in Brookville I had an opportunity to play, measure, and photograph Long violin No. 14 of 1894. The museum owns No.4 dated 1892. It now appears that Sol was involved with repair and graduation prior to Bonnet and Long making violins. Sol's obituary states that he studied violin making for 10 years before he made his first violin, a normal period of apprenticeship. That would put his first original violin in the late 1880's. If so, one could speculate that Sol could even qualify as the mystery man of Jefferson County and have been involved in teaching Bonnet and Long.

Since a hard factual connection between Sol, Henry Bonnet and Daniel Long has thus far eluded me a look at their violins might be useful for comparison with Sol's work. What similarities might there be?

When the general features of a Long violin are compared to the Roach violins pictured in chapter 8, it is apparent that there are few similarities. The pattern used by Long has not been seen in Sol's work. Other obvious features like the size of the "F" holes are also not found in Sol's work. Long might be said to be more eccentric than Sol in that one of the violins that I have seen was rigged to be played both right and left handed. Dimensions of a Long violin may be found in Appendix 1 at the end of the book.

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Both Professors are Using My Violins

SOL E. ROACH

Windber, Penna.

WINDBER XVI.



Two Daniel Long violins. Far left is #14 made in 1894 and at right is #4 made in 1892. No. 14 is owned by the McCullough family of Brookville and #4 is owned by the Jefferson County Historical Center in Brookville.



In what can be seen of a Bonnet violin there are far more similarities with Sol's work than dissimilarities. Unfortunately a view of the entire instrument is not available. However, the general pattern, shape and size of "F" holes are more reminiscent of Sol's work. If Sol had been working with or in communication with either of these men on the subject of violin making I would have to conclude that it would probably be Bonnet. As mentioned earlier, a newspaper ad from the 1910's advertised the same wares that were handled by Bonnet: guns, bicycles, violins and fishing tackle.

It is still unclear just where Sol lived through the 1880's. The 1880 census has him in Morrisdale Mines, Clearfield County as a coal miner. That would hardly allow time or energy for violin making. However, his son Wilbur was born in Anita, north of Punxsutawney, Jefferson County just two years later in 1882. By Sol's own words in the 1900 Windber Era article, as he would have provided the information to the paper, he was in Morrisdale until 1889 where family information says he was involved with running a hotel. It is clear that Roach violins would appear in the Johnstown area after 1898 and a 1903 had turned up as the earliest example there. Violins from earlier than that would probably not appear in the Johnstown area and a search in the Punxsutawney or Morrisdale area had not yet been done. The question of where Sol learned the craft still remained unanswered.

If Sol was engaged in the making of violins prior to coming to Windber, then it is reasonable to assume that there might still be some of his violins in the Punxsutawney area just as there were in the Johnstown area? The results of the newspaper search of the Jefferson County/Punxsutawney area referenced in Chapter 1 found that there were no replies! No violins in the Punxsutawney area could be a strong indication that he wasn't making them as yet. Perhaps this was the 10 year period of learning spoken of in his obituary. As evidence that he was repairing and re-graduating while in Jefferson County though, Harold Wilson, a string repair technician from Johnstown has a commercial instrument that was re-graduated by Sol in 1897, a year before he moved to Windber.

The next indicator that he was seriously engaged in the violin repair business as soon as he arrived at Windber also came that summer. My cousin Nancy Davis of Ann Arbor, Michigan found a violin for sale on E-Bay that was offered as a Sol Roach original violin. It was fairly clear that it wasn't, but outside of the repair tag in the violin there was no other maker shown. It was a smaller violin and some of the features had a crude look to them. None of the construction characteristics were similar to Sol's. The main feature that caught her interest was the tag. It was a commercially printed tag that was placed on the inside of the violin under the left "F" hole, where the makers tag is normally found. It showed Sol's name and the address was Windber, Pa. The printed date at the bottom of the tag was 1899! There was also a hand written date of 1902, probably the actual date of the repair. He was engaged in the violin repair business almost immediately upon arrival in Windber. But, when did he actually start making them?

Sol's story and some pictures of him as well as pictures of the three violins that I possess have been on Dwight Newton's web site, (MEWZIK.com) since 2006. In February of 2008 a gentleman named Ken Husk of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, near Pittsburgh, contacted him after seeing the story and said that he had a Roach violin. Dwight put him in contact with me. Ken had a violin made in 1900! It had a commercially printed makers tag that specified "Made By". Sometimes one good answer begets more questions. In the lower left hand corner of the tag were the hand written letters "NY". Often Sol would abbreviate the month next to the date that the violin was made such as "Jany 1928". This inscription was on the opposite side of the tag and I could justify no abbreviation for a month as "NY". This does not appear on any of the other violins I have seen. It is not on the 1903's tag. The abbreviation could mean New York, but like most everything else, its just speculation.

The questions aren't answered yet but at least we have an original violin made in Windber very soon upon arrival there. We don't know what part of 1898 he came to Windber. It would make sense that his first priority would be building his house and commercial building and getting the business up and running. Then he would have time to work at his hobby. If he came early in 1898 there would be time in that year to get settled. If he came late in the year, then a good part of 1899 would be spent getting his home and business affairs settled. Now that he had a shop in his business he would be ready to undertake his first violin. The 1900 could well be one of his first efforts. The "NY" on its tag is intriguing.

On the inside of the 1907 violin made for his grandson Selman Morgan he wrote that in 1914 he was "...making 6 violins to send to New York to the violin maker academy for exhibition and sale which I am a member". A short article in the Johnstown Tribune from February 26, 1914 confirms that, "Sol Roach, the violinist and woodworker of this place, is working on six violins which he will send to New York as part of a display of homemade instruments to be set up by the American Academy of Violin Makers."

I contacted the Violinmakers Society of America in Oswego, New York but learned that they are a relatively new organization being founded in 1973. They kindly put out my inquiry to several of their members who are interested in history. They received a thoughtful reply from luthier David Bromberg of Wilmington, Delaware. Bromberg responded that he was not aware of a violin making academy in New York at that time or anywhere in the U.S.A. He did say that, "*There was, however, the Bretch School of Violin Making, based, I think, in Oswego, New York. Believe it or not, this was a mail order school of violin making. You sent them the money, and they sent you wood and instructions for the first steps. When you completed these, you sent the package back. You would receive the package again with further instructions, and, I imagine criticism.*"

In the fall of 2007 Nancy Davis took her mother's 1925 Roach violin to Ann Arbor luthier David Brownell for some work. She asked him what he thought the 1914 Academy of Violin Makers in NY might be. Brownell felt pretty sure that it would have something to do with George Gemunder.

The Gemunder brothers, August and George, were born in Germany and came to the United States in the mid 1840's. Both were violin makers. George, who settled in Astoria, New York, specialized in making exact copies of the great Cremonese masters and has been thought of as "America's greatest maker". He was especially successful in the model, finish and varnishing of his instruments. One of his most valuable discoveries was how to acquire results by means of natural woods. Many makers at that time were chemically treating wood to get the sound of old wood. His brother August also ended up in New York. He too made copies of the old masters but eventually, on a musician's recommendation, made them according to his own ideas. The result was violins that resembled the old models in tone but surpassed them in power. Both brothers had sons who became violin makers. In addition to making outstanding professional instruments, the family established a retail firm known as Gemunder and Sons to provide instruments for the burgeoning home music market of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Inexpensive instruments were needed for that market which they produced for that purpose.

What might be Sol's connection to the Gemunders? The 1914 entry in the 1907 violin states that he had made nearly 200 violins by this time. Since his daughter stated in his obituary that his original output from the beginning to the end of his career was about 50 violins and that 1914 was at the halfway point in this career we must assume that he considered his re-graduating work to be a part of his total body of work. The 1917 Windber City Directory ad also states that he had 40 years experience with repair and regraduation. Where would all of these regraduated violins be sold? In 2008 we find his regrad work all over the Middle Atlantic states. All from a little shop by an obscure maker in a small coal town in Pennsylvania? An arrangement with a firm like Gemunder's would assure distribution for his work. The Gemunder and Sons connection is tantalizing but there is no concrete evidence to confirm it. Again, it is just speculation.

In order to find violin makers in a given locality we turn to standard references like **The Violin Makers of the United States: Biographical Documentation of the Violin and Bow Makers who have worked in the United States** by Thomas J. Wenberg, 1986, Mt. Hood Publishing, Mt. Hood, Oregon, and other such indices that list known makers. The key words here however, are "Known Makers". The Wenberg publication lists Daniel Long but doesn't list Henry Bonnet. Kentucky Organologist Dwight Newton's computerized list showed both Long and Bonnet as Brookville violin makers. When Dwight made a search of Pennsylvania violin makers from 1870 to 1930 he showed no entries for either Punxsutawney or Johnstown. However, key-word searches of old newspapers that are now available on the internet have turned up at least two makers in Johnstown that were contemporaries of Sol while he lived in Windber just a few miles away.

From the Bedford Gazette of June 24, 1904 we read that: "*J.J. Hull, of Morrellville, (a neighborhood of Johnstown) a well known violin maker and repairer, will leave in the next few days for Bedford, where he will spend a month with friends. From there he will go to Wilkes Barre, where he will locate permanently, engaging in the violin business-Johnstown Democrat.*"

The following was discovered in an obituary for 68 year old Mrs. Rebecca Overdorff in The Indiana, Pennsylvania Gazette of November 16, 1914. "*Mrs. Overdorff was born in 1846... had resided in Johnstown since 1871. Her husband, a violin maker and a veteran...died about four years ago.*" Mr. Overdorff's first name is not given.

Johnstown was a boomtown with its own thriving arts community and there could well have been others working with the craft. If there were two violin makers in a town the size of Brookville there could well have been makers in Punxsutawney too but their names have not yet surfaced.

What also has to be considered is that Sol, Bonnet and Long didn't have teachers. All three were gunsmiths in the days when guns were manufactured from scratch. These men were skilled in metal and machine work as well as woodworking. They were all multi-talented eccentrics who dabbled in many things and even advertised as "mister fix-its". Bonnet and Long were both locally described as geniuses. There were publications available that outlined in detail, to include fold out patterns, the steps involved in making a violin. One example is Edward Heron-Allen's **Violin Making: As it was and is**, first published in 1885. It is possible that they learned on their own.

It is unclear just how many violins Sol actually made. The material provided by his children for his obituary states that he had made about 50 original violins with about 15

being sold. However, by his own hand inside the 1907 violin, Sol states that as of 1914 he had made “close to 200” violins and that would be the midpoint of his career as a luthier. A telephone discussion with a Johnstown area repairman about Roach violins he has repaired indicated that Sol was known for his ability to graduate instruments. Two of the three Roach violins in the Windber Museum appear to be such instruments. These instruments appear to be massed produced violins and clearly show the stamp of the original maker but also have one of Sol’s tags glued inside under the “F” hole. Sol may have generalized and considered these instruments as a part of his work.

The obituary states that he had a collection of stringed instruments “containing many masterpieces”. According to his grandson John S. Roach, who was away at college at the time of Sol’s death, this collection, along with an extensive collection of antique firearms, was sold off by the family at the time of Sol’s death. They retained little or nothing although many of the violins have now begun to turn up among relatives. As of 2011 a total of 26 original violins have been located. This would account for about one half of his supposed original output.

It is recorded in **The Windber Story: a 20th Century Model Pennsylvania Coal Town** (pg 290) that Sol made violins for Henry Ford. This assertion cannot be confirmed at this time. However, his obituary states that he was a friend of many men high in Pennsylvania politics and as a hunting and fishing guide, had escorted many “distinguished personages”. His friendship with Buffalo Bill could also have been his introduction to Henry Ford. He may also have made the connection through lumberman E. V. Babcock.

Babcock held the timber rights to a vast area of western Pennsylvania and had a large tract of land east of Windber that bordered Clear Shade Creek. It has been postulated by people from the Windber Museum and the Coal Heritage Museum that Sol could have been employed by Babcock as a guide to assure that his guests at the family’s Ogletown lodge east of Windber would be sure to catch a fish or shoot game. Babcock also maintained a herd of buffalo on the property for sporting purposes. Thomas Edison and Henry Ford were famous campers and had a compound together at Ft. Myers, Florida. Nearby was a compound owned by E.V. Babcock. Babcock’s company provided the wood used in the spokes of the early Ford automobiles. On the assumption that they knew each other as captains of American industry, Ford could have found his way to Windber as a guest of Babcock. Sol could have been introduced to Ford as a hunting or fishing guide or as a square dance fiddler. Ford had a passion for square dancing and Babcock could have thrown a square dance in his honor. Sol was a fiddler and could have been there to provide the music. Ford was a collector of all things Americana and was known to offer to purchase violins on the spur of the moment from fiddlers he liked. Ford couldn’t fail to learn that Sol was a violin maker and true to form, would have offered to buy one. This is all just glorious speculation. There are no Roach violins at the Edison/Ford Museum compound at Ft. Myers and a search has not yet been made at the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. No newspaper articles have been unearthed in the Johnstown area indicating that Ford was present or connected with Sol.

Are Roach violins played by professionals? Yes. They are. Many of the violins found so far are owned by relatives and are kept by them as family heirlooms. Those violins owned by non-family were mostly inherited through a relative that grew up in the region surrounding western Pennsylvania, most notably the the Johnstown, Pennsylvania and

Youngstown, Ohio areas. Both the family and non-family owners may have used their instruments as young people for lessons or participation in a high school orchestra.

In 2007 a 1924 Sol Roach was being used by a Johnstown, Pennsylvania musician in a professional blue grass band. In 2010 a 1903 surfaced as the primary instrument in the hands of a professional musician in the Los Angeles, California area. Information about these violins and their owners appears in Chapter 8.

There is other evidence to suggest that Sol's violins were used by professionals. His 1917 ad in the Windber directory indicates that his violins were used by Prof. Silvia Bandino, who ran a "musical studio" in Johnstown, and by Prof. Noel of Hooversville. Hooversville is a town of less than a thousand, about 10 to 12 miles south of Windber. These people were probably listed because they were the best-known teachers in the area using his instruments. Music teachers should be "in-the-know" and count as professionals since they do charge a fee, but not at the same level as a well placed professional performer.

In a 1979 interview, Sol's grandson John S. Roach said: *".....there was a fella who lived in New York City, played in the New York Metropolitan Philharmonic Orchestra. He would come to Grandpap Roach to make his violins and Grandpap would make him a violin and it would take him two or three years to make one violin. He was that meticulous about it. Each violin would be varnished, then he would sand it off and he would varnish it again, and sand it off and he would do that 20 times. So, you can imagine how long it would take. And that was what helped to put the good sound into the violins. It was the amount of sanding and the type of varnish that you put on it. Made them sound good. This fella would come from New York and get Grandpap to make him a violin. He'd take it back and use it. Somebody would say, 'Where'd you get that violn?' 'Well, I got it from Sol Roach in Pennsylvania.' 'Well, how 'bout getting me one.' So, he'd come to Pennsylvania and say 'Grandpap, I want you to make me a violin.' Grandpap would start making the violin and in a couple of years he'd come back and get it."*

John didn't say what years this story represented nor did he indicate who the person was or what position he held or who the friends might have been that requested Roach violins. The name of the orchestra is also a mystery. Sol's active years of manufacture were John's growing-up years. He graduated from high school in 1926. Is he remembering the incident from his early or high school years?

The New York Philharmonic as we know it today did not come into existence until the New York Philharmonic Society Orchestra merged with one of its major competitors, the National Symphony Orchestra, in 1928. Prior to 1928 the N.Y. Philharmonic Society Orchestra was not necessarily the best orchestra in town, There were several others in the early part of the 20th century that were serious competition, like the Brooklyn Philharmonic or conductor Walter Damrosch's Symphony Society of New York. There was also the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. Before the 1928 merger, the N.Y. Philharmonic Society orchestra often suffered from comparison with visiting orchestras from Boston or Pittsburgh.

The name of the orchestra as presented by John certainly provides all the necessary buzzwords for a top line society orchestra. He had no advanced warning of the visit and the 1979 interview, and was certainly challenging his powers of recall. Having made his

career as a teacher of physical education and athletic coach, this was conceivably something he had given no thought to for at least 50 years. Which orchestra was it? Histories of orchestras in NYC show no organizations with that combination of words. The story does have all of the right elements to indicate serious professional performers, especially the extra care being taken by the maker. Again, we have another connection to New York. Where were the six documented violins of 1914 actually going for sale in New York?

In an effort to determine if there might be a paper trail left by these New York City violins, I contacted the most reputable and long-standing string sales firms in New York City and Philadelphia to see if they had record of the sale or repair of Sol Roach violins. They had none. It is possible that these violins may never have been sold by the owner's families. Even if an instrument was a working instrument, since Sol was not a famous maker, they may have determined them to be of no value and kept them as an heirloom of their perhaps famous family member, just like Roach relatives did with their instruments. Or, they were sold privately to other professionals or ended up in student hands.