Rock-Ola

ROCH-OLA

Jukeboxes

Company History

The Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. was founded in 1927 by the innovative and energetic David Colin (Cullen) Rockola, who was born in Virden in Manitoba, Canada, on the 23rd January 1897 as son of an immigrant White Russian blacksmith, George Adam Rockola (1857-1941). When he was 14 years old his mother Sarah Sanderson - then divorced from his father - died, and David Colin Rockola left home to work as a bellhop at the Baldwin Hotel. Three years later aged 17 David C. Rockola sets up a small cigar store at the New Laurel Hotel, and only a few years later, in 1917, aged 20 he was registered as proprietor of the Avenue Billard Parlor at 108 Woodward Avenue in Detroit. After 1919 the young David C. Rockola moved on to Chicago, Illinois, to work some time as a inspector for the slot machine manufacturer Ode D. Jennings & Co.. In 1923 he started working as a mechanic at the vending machine factory owned by William E. Keeney, but soon David C. Rockola started to produce his first Penny gumball machines, and in this way he started in the American coin-op business. Also he started a dealership in Penny-scales, a very popular novelty at the time, and he soon started making them as well as selling them. Then in 1927 the Rock-Ola Scale Co. (Rock-Ola Mfg. Corp.) was founded to manufacture patented Low-Boy scales, pinball machines, and other trade stimulators and games. Like most of the innovative people in the coin-op business David Colin Rockola also felt the hard times of the Depression, and he had to persuade his financial backers to continue the manufacturing of trade stimulators and games. During these hard times in the early 1930s David C. Rockola met the engineer Paul H. Smyth Jr., who invented a novel, reliable automatic record changer. The original patents filed in 1928 and 1931 were at the time owned by the three brothers Alfred G., Harold S., and Arnold E. Ristau, who produced small Ristaucrat coin-operated phonographs in the early 1930s, but the hard times forced them to sell out the patent rights to David C. Rockola. A new, refined patented version of the automatic record changer filed in July 1934 then formed the basis of the first Rock-Ola Model A coinop 12-selection phonograph introduced in January 1935. At this time there was a legal conflict between Rudolph Wurlitzer Co. and Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. over who had the prior patent on the multi-selector apparatus on coin-operated phonographs,. Both firms sued the other for patent infringement, Smyth vs. Wilcox, and the court decision was unfavorable to Wurlitzer, so Rock-Ola continued using the Smyth-mechanism. The cabinet of this first model A was apparently designed by David Kochole, who was a close associate of David C. Rockola in those days. Some work on the Smyth-mechanism increased the selection to 20 by 1937, and this number stayed the same throughout the Golden Age of coin-op phonographs. One of the 12-selection Rock-Ola models hit the newspaper headlines, as it was delivered to the decks of the luxury liner Queen Mary on her maiden voyage from New York in 1936. Soon the idea of changing colours in the cabinet forced most of the manufacturers to use big areas of cast resin, Catalin plastics, in the cabinets, and Rock-Ola used this feature in the models Standard 20 and DeLuxe 20 of 1939 and the year after in all Master 20 and Super 20 Luxury Lightup models. In connection with designer names of this period it is interesting that David C. Rockola assigned all design patents with his own name to the company, although it is known that David Kochole had a very big influence on the cabinet design. A small table-top model named Rock-Ola CM-39 with matching pedestal designed by Arthur Nagel was also produced in 1939, and another table-top model named Rock-Ola 1409 alias JR-12 came out in 1941 to compete with the Paul M. Fuller designed table-top models marketed by The Rudolph Wurlitzer Co..

David C. Rockola was naturalized as American citizen on the 29th September, 1937, and he was married to the secretary Margaret E. Rockola (\$25th September, 1906, † 14th June, 2003). They had two sons, Donald Charles (\$21st February, 1930, † 2nd March, 2017) and David Robert. (\$26th April, 1934, † 20th November, 2008).

The model line of the years 1941-1942 from the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. at the former Gulbransen piano factory on 800 North Kedzie Avenue, Chicago, shows some of the most remarkable cabinet designs of the Golden Age, the ToneColumn series, which in fact represented big combined remote control and speaker units. The today well-known, rather famous representative of the series was the Rock-Ola Spectravox 1801/1802 with a dial instead of push buttons. All ToneColumn models with selector unit could be used in connection with the newly introduced Playmaster hide-away mechanism. During the war year 1942 before the factory production stopped the models Rock-Ola Commando, Premier 1413, and President 1414 with top speaker unit made by the American Jensen company, were made in limited numbers. They were a natural continuation of the ToneColumn principle, but they now had a mechanism and amplifier in the lower part of the cabinet. The Rock-Ola Commando was the basic model built in two variations, the common one using glass panels and the other using Catalin plastics, and the Premier 1413 and President 1414 were only made in very limited numbers. Caused by war restrictions the series had glass pilastre, and maybe due to the size and the fact that they did not look like ordinary jukeboxes with push buttons they were never considered a real success among operators. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note from the indication of the design patents as sound reproducing apparatus that they were not meant for built-in mechanisms in the first place. The following production obviously went in another direction, and it is also confusing that David C. Rockola a few years later used the same indication sound reproducing apparatus for two design patents for the Rock-Ola 1420 series.

In 1941 there were at least five totally unknown design patents by David C. Rockola for ToneColumn auxiliary speakers without selector units, but they were most probably never produced. The Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. had after that, like the

other three big companies in the coin-op phonograph business, a period of three or four war years where no new models were produced in large numbers. In the 1940s several music ordering systems were used around in America, for example the Rock-Ola Mystic Music and the Jennings Telephone Music first known as Magic Music in Columbus in Ohio, which included a central station serving up to 30 locations, and this type of machines and system was continued by the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. during the war years to stay in the coin-op business while the company manufactured various products for the armed forces, but abandoned after the war. In the year 1946 only normal type phonographs were marketed with the Rock-Ola name on them.

In the period 1946-1948 the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. produced three cabinet types: the Rock-Ola 1422, the 1426, and finally the 1428 also named Magic-Glo, and there are in fact three design patents related to this series all officially made by David C. Rockola, although David Kochole probably still had an influence. Two of them can be related directly to the models Rock-Ola 1422 and 1428, but the last of the three relates to details on both the 1422 and the 1426. In the design patents David C. Rockola refers as one of very few jukebox designers to old designs for radios, vending machines, and automobile head lights etc., in which he had found details of interest. In 1949 David C. Rockola bought the remains of The John Gabel Manufacturing Co., and the Golden Age of jukeboxes was coming to an end.

Then, starting the new era, the new record format developed by RCA and Seeburg had to be taken into consideration, and just like the other major companies in the business The Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. was compelled to follow in Seeburg's footsteps and finally made the decision to go full steam into 45's in 1953 with the exclusively 45rpm models Rock-Ola 1438 Comet-Fireball. The jukebox industry and the record companies went hand in hand on this and in 1954 a total of not less than 200 million 45's were sold in America. In the early 1950s about 60 million records were used annually by the jukebox operators.

During the same period in the early Silver Age after a difficult start with the models 1432 Rocket, 1434 Super Rocket, and 1436 Fireball, the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. really tried to compete with the Seeburg Corp., and introduced the models, 1442 and 1446, that looked very much like the Seeburg models. They were not design patented, and the same was the case with the following nice models 1448, 1452 and 1454, which were all produced with minor changes until 1956. The three models were together with the later Tempo-series the high points amongst Rock-Ola's output during the Silver Age. After the 1954-56 models came the non-patented models 1455-S and 1458, and then in 1959 came the new David C. Rockola design patented cabinet for the wall-mounted model 1464. Late in October, 1959, actually at the same time as the design patent for the wall-mounted model, came also a full phonograph patent including cabinet design for the Tempo-series, the models 1468 through 1485. The full patent was filed by David C. Rockola, Ralph Petri, and

Howard Sifferle, and of course assigned to the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. before it was granted in March, 1963, just like other functional patents filed by David C. Rockola and employees at the factory in Chicago.

American jukebox design of the 1950s, and the resemblance with tail-lights and fins of the cars can be found on boxes like the Seeburg KD-200 and the Rock-Ola Temposeries. They all represented distinct features taken from American 1950s automobile culture with a lot of fins and chrome.

None of the jukebox cabinets from the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. were design patented in the 1960s and 1970s. It seems strange because there were so many models produced. It seems that the major manufacturers, including Rock-Ola, were slightly behind the current design trends in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It was obvious, however, that the cabinet design was considered an important component of the complete product when sound transmission really was a factor. Plastic, that had been at first a novelty, was in the 1960s a necessary component material, but jukeboxes were moved a lot from one location to the other, and literally had to be built to withstand the beating they were constantly subjected to during transport.

At the Rock-Ola company production never stopped although the cabinets became very discreet, designed to blend into the background rather than be the focus of attention. During the 1960s, through the 1970s, and into the 1980s the company produced a lot of models. The 418 Rhapsody II of 1964 was the last one of the era with visible mechanism through the front glass. After that came the following models, all with the new Mech-O-Matic mechanism: 426 Grand Prix, 429 Starlet, 431 Coronado, 433 GP/Imperial, 434 Concerto, 435 Princess Deluxe, 436 Centura, 437 Ultra, and the 441 Deluxe Compact plus a few modified models with different numbers. In the 1970s Rock-Ola produced the styles 442 of 1970 through 471 of 1976, and then the Sybaris and Mystic models in 1978. Those two models had similar to some of the Wurlitzer models rather psychedelic colour décor on the front. It is interesting to note here that Donald Charles Rockola, the son of David C. Rockola, developed and filed the patent for the special 506 Tri-Vue Wallbox in 1972. Donald C. Rockola also developed a few other, important jukebox cabinet details for the Rock-Ola company during the 1970s and 1980s. The last two patents by Donald C. Rockola (and Shuja Haque) for an album cover display kit for the model 498 of 1989 to make it a 45rpm/compact-disc combination machine, and a compact-disc holding mechanism for the new model 2000 of 1990, were both filed for patent in 1989, when the Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. moved into the compact-disc jukebox era. In the period from 1978 until the mid 1980s the following jukeboxes had been produced by the Rock-Ola company: Max 477, Techna 480, Vista 488, Super Sound 490, and finally the Encore 494 in 1987. In 1986-1987 the company even tried with something new old stuff, namely the exciting, vintage look of the Wurlitzer 1050. The original model made in 1973 was not design patented, and it is obvious today that both Wurlitzer and Rock-Ola found no reason to protect the cabinet designs back then, as there had to be a new attraction, a new jukebox, every year with the company name on it. The Wurlitzer 1050 design was also marketed around 1979-1980 with the brand name Sonata 1050 Nostalgia by the Corporación Sonata S.A. in Mexico with a sales division in Culver City, California. The Mexican company had taken over the remains of the once mighty Wurlitzer in 1975, but the new nostalgic 100-selection jukebox was no big success. The new version of the 1050, the Rock-Ola Nostalgia 1000, with 160 selections was introduced late in the autumn of 1986 as a truly sensesational model, but the cabinet was still too heavy and did not have the elegance of the classic Wurlitzer 1015 of 1946 marketed now by several competitors on the market as a nostalgic One-More-Time model.

The Rock-Ola Manufacturing Corp. was due to a difficult financial situation taken over by Glenn Streeter and the Antique Apparatus Co. in September, 1992, shortly before David Colin Rockola died at the age of 96 years on the 26th January, 1993, and models like the Rock-Ola Bubbler Nostalgic and the retro design Wallette boxes were produced for the home market by the Antique Apparatus Co. in Torrance, California, a leading exponent of the amalgamation of vintage design and hi-tech sound since 1977. In June 2009, however, the commercial jukebox division of the Rock-Ola Mfg. Corp. / Antique Apparatus Co. was sold to AMI Entertainment Network Inc., part of the Entertainment Products Group, and the production of the commercial jukeboxes should be relocated to the new manufacturing plant in Reynosa in Mexico on the Texas-Mexico border. The nostalgic Bubbler jukebox with the Rock-Ola name will at this point still be produced by Antique Apparatus at its southern California factory. Thus, the brand name Rock-Ola still lives on, but there are no longer Rock-Ola jukeboxes manufactured in the old factory buildings in Chicago.

* * * * *

David Colin Rockola, 1897-1993

Gert Almind, 10-23-2010

Jukeboxes, 78rpm Era

Year	Model	Records	Selections	Speed
1935	Model A, Multi-Selector	12	12	78
1936	Model B, Regular	12	12	78
1936	Night Club	12	12	78
1937	IMP-16 Imperial	16	16	78
1937	IMP-20 Imperial	20	20	78
1937	RK-12 Rhythm King	12	12	78
1937	RK-16 Rhythm King	16	16	78
1937	RM-12 Rhythm Master	12	12	78
1937	RM-16 Rhythm Master	16	16	78
1938	ABM-16 Ambassador	16	16	78
1938	MH-20 Monarch	20	20	78
1938	WR-20 Windsor	20	20	78
1939	CM-39 Counter Luxury Lightup	12	12	78
1939	DE-20 DeLuxe Luxury Lightup	20	20	78
1939	ST-39 Standard Luxury Lightup	20	20	78
1940	JR-40 Junior Luxury Lightup	12	12	78
1940-1941	1401 Master Walnut Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup			
1940-1941	1402 Master Walnut Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup with adapter			
1940-1941	1403 Master Rockolite Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup			
1940-1941	1404 Master Rockolite Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup with adapter			
1940-1941	1405 Super Walnut Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup			
1940-1941	1406 Super Walnut Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup with adapter			
1940-1941	1407 Super Rockolite Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup			
1940-1941	1408 Super Rockolite Luxury	20	20	78
	Lightup with adapter			
1941	1409 Junior Console	12	12	78
1941	1410 Junior with wall speaker	12	12	78
1941	1411 Playmaster Hide-Away	12	12	78
1941	3701 Master Walnut Mystic	20	20	78
	Music single channel			

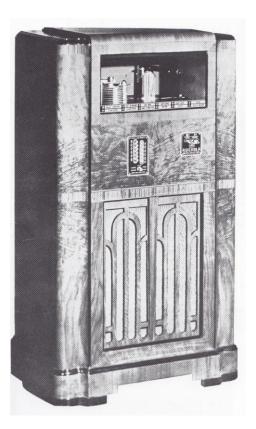
1941	3702 Super Walnut Mystic	20	20	78
	Music single channel			
1941	3703 Master Rockolite Mystic	20	20	78
	Music single channel			
1941	3704 Super Rockolite Mystic	20	20	78
	Music single channel			
1941	3705 Master Walnut Mystic	20	20	78
	Music double channel			
1941	3706 Super Walnut Mystic	20	20	78
	Music double channel			
1941	3707 Master Rockolite Mystic	20	20	78
	Music double channel			
1941	3708 Super Rockolite Mystic	20	20	78
	Music double channel			
1942	1413 Premier	20	20	78
1942	1414 President	20	20	78
1942	1415 Commando	20	20	78
1942	1416 Commando	20	20	78
1942	1417 Commando	20	20	78
1942	1418 Commando	20	20	78
1942	1420 Commando	20	20	78
1946	1422 The Phonograph of Tomorrow	20	20	78
1947	1426 The Phonograph That Sells Music	20	20	78
1948	1428 Magic-Glo	20	20	78
1950-1951	1432 Rocket	25	50	78/45
1952	1434 Super Rocket	25	50	78/45

Remote Selector Units, 78rpm Era

Year	Model	Selections
1938	Playboy Remote Selective Speaker	20
1940-1941	1501 Dial-A-Tune Wallbox (for other than Playmaster)	20
1940-1941	1502 Dial-A-Tune Barbox (for other than Playmaster)	20
1940-1941	1503 Dial-A-Tune Wallbox (for Playmaster equipment)	20
1940-1941	1504 Dial-A-Tune Barbox (for Playmaster equipment)	20
1941	1511 Dial-A-Tune Wallbox (for pre-1941equipment)	20
1941	1512 Dial-A-Tune Barbox (for pre-1941 equipment)	20
1941	1513 Dial-A-Tune Wallbox (multi-coin, pre-1941 equip)	20
1941-1943	1514 Dial-A-Tune Barbox (multi-coin, pre-1941 equip)	20
1941	1515 Dial-A-Tune Wallbox	20
	(President, Premier, and Playmaster)	
1941-1943	1516 Dial-A-Tune Barbox	20
	(multi-coin, President, Premier, and Playmaster)	
1941	1523 Dial-A-Tune Wallbox (pre-1941 equipment only)	20
1941	1524 Dial-A-Tune Barbox (pre-1941 equipment only)	20
1941-1943	1525 Dial-A-Tune Wallbox	20
	(multi-coin, President, Premier, and Playmaster)	
1941-1943	1526 Dial-A-Tune Barbox	20
	(multi-coin, President, Premier, and Playmaster)	
1941	3801 Mystic Music Wallbox/Barbox	-
1941	1801 Spectravox ToneColumn selective speaker	20
10.11	(for pre-1941 equipment)	• •
1941	1802 Spectravox ToneColumn selective speaker	20
1941	(for Playmaster)	20
1941	1803 Glamour ToneColumn selective speaker (<i>for pre-1941 equipment</i>)	20
1941	1804 Glamour ToneColumn selective speaker	20
1741	(for Playmaster)	20
1948-1949	1530 Wallbox, 30-wire	20
1950	1536 Wallbox, 23-wire	20
1952	1538 Wallbox	20
1952	1542 Universal Wallbox, 3-wire	50

Auxiliary Speakers, 78rpm Era

Year	Model
1939-1940	Wall Speaker
1941	1601 Rockolite Wall Speaker
1941	1602 Organ Type Speaker
1941	1805 Universal ToneColumn
1941	1806 Organ ToneColumn
1941	1807 Modern ToneColumn
1946-1948	1603 Wall Speaker
1946	1604 Tone-O-Lier
1946-1948	1606 Tonette Wall Speaker
1948	1607 Tonette Wall Speaker
1948	1608 Tone-O-Lier Speaker
1952-1953	1611 Super Tonette Speaker



Rock-Ola 12-play Multi-Selector Model A

1935

Jukeboxes, 45rpm Era

Year	Model	Records	Selections	Speed
1952	1436 Fireball 120	60	120	45/78
1953	1438 Comet Fireball	60	120	45
1954	1442 Hi-Fi 50	25	50	45
1954	1446 Comet Fireball Hi-Fi	60	120	45
1955-1956	1448 Hi-Fi 120	60	120	45
1955-1957	1452 Hi-Fi 50	25	50	45
1956-1957	1454	60	120	45
1957	1455	100	200	45
1958	1458	60	120	45
1958	1462, 50-sel.	25	50	45
1958	1464, 120 sel. Wallbox	60	120	45
1958	1465	100	200	45
1959	1468 Tempo I, 120	60	120	45
1959	1475 Tempo I, 200	100	200	45
1960	1478 Tempo II, 120	60	120	45
1960	1485 Tempo II, 200	100	200	45
1960	1484, 100 sel. Wallbox	50	100	45/33
1961	1488 Regis, 120	60	120	45/33
1961	1495 Regis, 200	100	200	45/33
1962	1493 Princess	50	100	45/33
1962	1494, 100-sel. Wallbox	50	100	45/33
1962	1496 Empress, 120	60	120	45/33
1962	1497 Empress, 200	100	200	45/33
1962	403, 100-sel. Wallbox	50	100	45/33
1963	404 Capri 100 Monaural	50	100	45/33
1963	404S Capri 100 Stereo	50	100	45/33
1963	408 Rhapsody 160	80	160	45/33
1964	414 Capri II Monaural	50	100	45/33
1964	418 Rhapsody II	80	160	45/33
1964-1965	424 Princess Royal	50	100	45/33
1964	425 Grand Prix	80	160	45/33
1965	426 Grand Prix II	80	160	45/33
1965	429 Starlet	50	100	45/33
1966	430, 100-sel. Wallbox	50	100	45/33
1966-1967	431 Coronado	50	100	45/33
1966-1967	432 Grand Prix 160	80	160	45/33

1966	433 Grand Prix Imperial	80	160	45/33
1967	434 Concerto	50	100	45/33
1967-1968	435 Princess DeLuxe	50	100	45/33
1967-1968	436 Centura	50	100	45/33
1967-1968	437 Ultra	80	160	45/33
1968-1969	440 Psychedelic	80	160	45/33
1968-1969	441 DeLuxe	50	100	45/33
1969	442	80	160	45/33
1969-1970	443	50	100	45/33
1970-1971	444	80	160	45/33
1970-1971	445	50	100	45/33
1970-1971	446 Low Boy	80	160	45/33
1971	449 Luxury Compact	50	100	45/33
1971-1972	448 Musical Mint	80	160	45/33
1972	447 Console	80	160	45/33
1973	450	80	160	45/33
1972-1973	451	50	100	45
1973	452 Console DeLuxe	80	160	45
1974	453	50	100	45
1973-1974	454	80	160	45
1975	456 Console DeLuxe	80	160	45
1975	459	50	100	45
1975-1976	460	80	160	45
1975-1976	461 Princess	50	100	45
1976	462	50	100	45
1976	463	50	100	45
1975-1976	464	80	160	45
1977	467 New Princess	50	100	45
1977	468 Console	80	160	45
1977	469	50	100	45
1977	470	80	160	45
1977	471 Princess	50	100	45
1978	473 Sybaris 100	50	100	45
1978	474 Sybaris 160	80	160	45
1978-1979	478 Mystic	80	160	45
1979	477 Max	80	160	45
1979-1980	476 Grand Salon II Console	80	160	45
1980	477 Max I	80	160	45
1980	480 Techna	80	160	45
1980-1981	484	80	160	45

1981	483	80	160	45
1981-1982	481 Max II	80	160	45
1982	488 Sunrise Blue	80	160	45
1982	488-1 Sunset Gold	80	160	45
1983	488-2 Vista Sunrise Blue	80	160	45
1983	488-3 Vista Sunset Gold	80	160	45
1984	490 Supersound I	100	200	45
1985-1986	490-1 Supersound II Horizon Blue	100	200	45
1985-1986	490-2 Supersound II Earthtone	100	200	45
1987	Nostalgia 1000 (WurliTzer 1050)	80	160	45
1987	494-1 Encore Sky Blue	100	200	45
1987	494-2 Encore Desert Sun	100	200	45
1988	496-1 Signature Sea View	-	-	45
1988	496-2 Signature Earthtone	-	-	45
1989	498 CDX	-	-	45/CD

Year	Model	Selections
1952	Fireball Wallbox	120
1954	1550 Top Twenty Wallbox	20
1954-1957	1546 Comet 120 Wallbox	120
1954-1958	1548 50-sel. Wallbox	50
1958-1962	1555 120/200-sel. Wallbox	120/200
1961-1962	1554 100-sel. Wallbox	100
1962	1564 100-sel. Wallbox	100
1963	1558 160-sel. Wallbox	160
1964	1578 160-sel. Wallbox	160
1964	1584 160-sel. Wallbox	160
1964-1967	500 Phonette Wallbox	160
1964-1967	501 Phonette Wallbox	100
1967-1969	503 Phonette Wallbox	160
1967-1969	504 Phonette Wallbox	100
1970	505 Phonette Wallbox	160/200
1972-	506 Phonette Wallbox	100/160
1973-1985	507 Tri-Vue Digital Wallbox	160
1981-1985	508 Full-Vue Digital Wallbox	160

Remote Selector Units, 45rpm Era

Auxiliary Speakers, 45rpm Era

Model
Super Tonette Speaker
1615 Standard Speaker
1616 DeLuxe Speaker
1617 Hi-Fi Wall Speaker
1620 Stereo-Twins Speakers
1621 Wall Speaker
1622 Stereo-Twins Speakers
1623 Stereo Hi-Fi Speaker
1622-P DeLuxe Stereo-Twins
1623-P Stereo-Twins Junior
1624 DeLuxe Stereo-Twins
1627 Stereo-Twins Junior
1628 Stereo-Twins
1629 Stereo-Twins Junior
1631 Stereo-Twins Junior
1634 DeLuxe Stereo-Twins
1639 Ceiling Speaker
1639 Ceiling Speaker Box
1635 Wall Speaker, 8-inch
1636 DeLuxe Wall Speaker, 8-inch
1637 Corner Speaker, 8-inch
1638 Ceiling Speaker
2300 DeLuxe Wall Speaker



Rockola grave monument at the Memorial Park Cemetery, Skokie, Illinois.

Photo by Berry C. Bell, 2014