In this country, A = 440 c/s has been accepted as standard pitch since 1925. Initially, this value was agreed upon by the Music Industries Chamber of Commerce as a useful compromise among the various pitches chosen arbitrarily by different musical groups. In 1936 the same pitch standard was adopted by the American Standards Association giving it the status of an industrial standard. Three years later the International Federation of the National Standardizing Associations(ISA) [1] sponsored a conference in London. France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, and Italy sent delegates, and the United States and Switzerland sent official messages. Six of the seven countries independently proposed A = 440 as the standard and the conference adopted it unanimously. The same standard was again endorsed by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 1953; and was accepted as an ISO Recommendation in 1955.

The National Bureau of Standards maintains the A = 440 standard as the one on which general agreement has been reached. The musical merits of any particular standard are, of course, outside its province.

Earlier Pitch Standards

Previous standards of pitch [2] were defined in terms of the frequency of a particular tuning fork or bar, or the length of a specified vibrating air column (organ pipe). Since the sound frequencies generated by these devices vary with the surrounding temperature, it is necessary to specify the temperature at which comparisons with these standards should be made.

In 1859 the "Diapason Normal" was defined in terms of a standard tuning fork deposited by the French Government at the Paris Conservatory of Music. The vibration frequency of this fork was stated to be 435 c/s when measured at the then standard laboratory temperature of 15°C. When R. Koenig (1880) made a careful determination of the frequency, it proved to be 435.45 c/s at 15°C and to have a thermal coefficient of -0.0486 c/s per degree