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**Title:** How the Piano Came to Be

**Author:** Ellye Howell Glover

**Release Date:** July 1, 2009 [EBook #29280]

**Language:** English

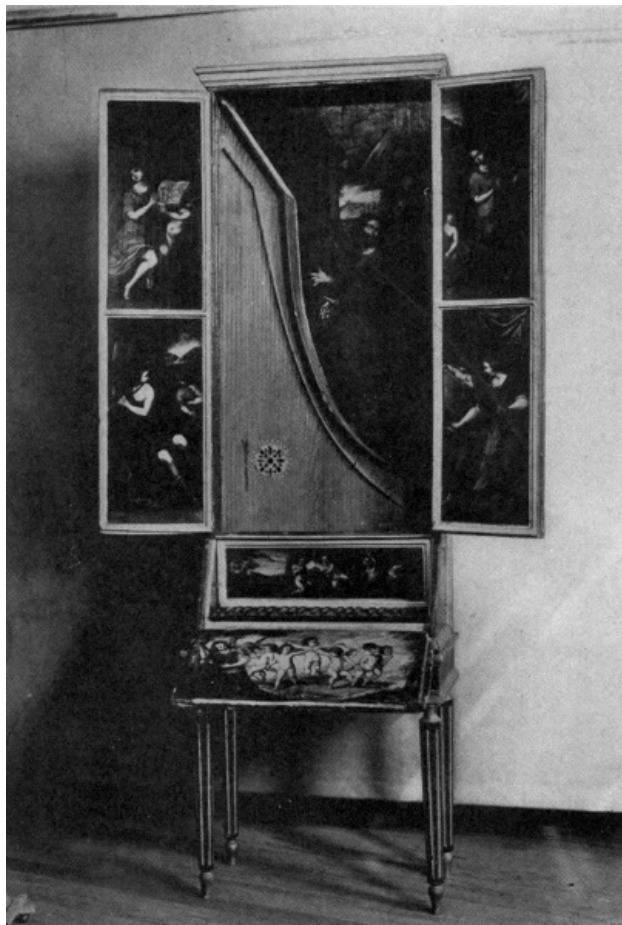
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## HOW THE PIANO CAME TO BE

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UPRIGHT HARPSICHORD  
(From the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City)

# HOW THE PIANO CAME TO BE

BY  
ELLYE HOWELL GLOVER

ILLUSTRATED



CHICAGO  
BROWNE & HOWELL COMPANY  
1913

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PUBLISHED, OCTOBER, 1913

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THE PLIMPTON PRESS  
NORWOOD MASS U.S.A

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## HOW THE PIANO CAME TO BE

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### *How the Piano Came To Be*

FROM the dried sinews stretched across the shell of a dead tortoise to the concert-grand piano of the present day is a far flight. Yet to this primitive source, it is said, may be traced the evolution of the stringed instrument which reached its culmination in the piano. The latter has been aptly called "the household orchestra," and in tracing its origin one must go far back into the annals of the past. If we accept the Bible as history, and it is the greatest of all histories, the stringed instrument is of very ancient date. It is recorded that the ambassadors who came to the court of Saul played upon their *nebels*, and that David, the sweet singer of Israel, wooed the king from his sadness by singing to his harp. We must go back to the civilization of ancient Egypt, more than five hundred years before that morning nearly two thousand years ago when, it is written, the angelic choir chanted above the historic manger the glorious message, "Peace on earth, good will to men," and the morning stars sang together.

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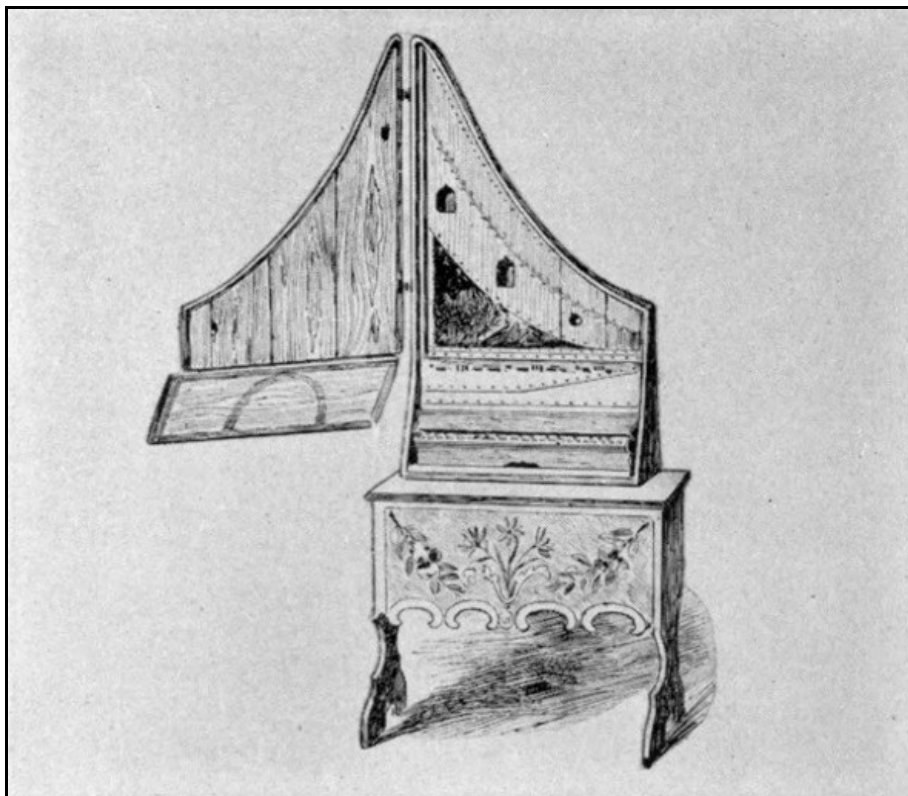
In the olden times the Greeks laid claim to everything which bespoke culture and progress. The pages of ancient history record no other one thing so persistently as "the glory that was Greece." And so they tell of the time when—

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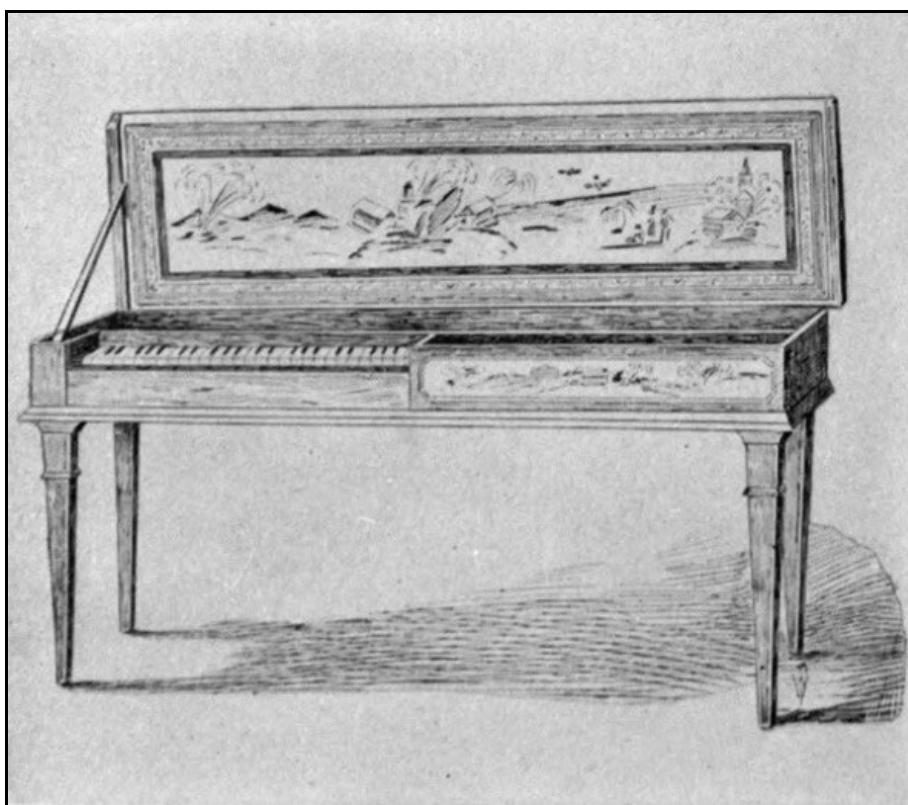
"Music, heavenly maid, was  
young,  
And yet in ancient Greece she  
sung!"

It is now generally conceded, however, that it was not in Greece but in ancient Egypt that art, music, and the sciences in general were born. That the Egyptians had stringed instruments is unquestionable. Away back in the year 525 B.C. Cambyses subdued the land. He overthrew the temples in the ruins of which have been found the records of musical instruments dating from the very earliest times. But the priests who guarded the temples were slain, and every vestige of what might have helped to determine the origin of the stringed instrument, out of which, later, the piano was evolved, as well as the names of those who wrought and endeavored to construct instruments which would give forth music, was forever lost.

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CLAVICYTHERIUM OR UPRIGHT SPINET



CLAVICHORD

For lack of written authority, then, one must turn back to tradition for light upon the origin of the piano. Tradition says that Ham, or one of his sons, led the first colony into Egypt. In fact there is a legend that Noah himself once dwelt there and some historians have identified him with the great deity of the Egyptians, Osiris. To Hermes, or Mercury, the secretary of Osiris, is ascribed the invention of the first stringed instrument. The story is that Hermes was walking one day along the banks of the Nile. It was just after one of the great inundations. The Nile had overflowed its banks and the land had been submerged. But now the water had subsided, and as Hermes walked along the shore, his foot struck accidentally against the shell of a dead tortoise. Across the inside of the shell the dried sinews were tightly stretched. Hermes picked it up and touched the sinews with his fingers. He was amazed to hear the sweet tones which the picking of the strings produced. He set to work to make a musical instrument, using the shell of a tortoise for the body and placing strings across it. In substantiation of this legend we find in examining the lyre of the ancient Greeks that almost every one was ornamented with a tortoise. We find also

in the records of the Hindus, the Chinese, the Persians, and the Hebrews that these people had stringed musical instruments at a very early date and that the most common among them was the lyre in its various modifications.

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The famous sepulcher of Rameses III is elaborately ornamented with harps. Specimens of this instrument have been found also in excavations made in comparatively recent years. In 1823 Sir J. G. Wilkinson discovered in an old Egyptian tomb a harp which, despite the fact that three thousand years had gone by since it had been put to sleep beside its royal master, was in an excellent state of preservation. The strings were of cat-gut and were in marvelously good condition. The custom which the Egyptians had of portraying their daily life upon their city walls, their temples, and tombs has been of incalculable value to the antiquarians in search of authentic information. From the pictures which ornament these temples and tombs we have learned that the harp and the lyre were the favorite instruments of the Egyptians, and these carvings alone furnish indisputable proof of their use by these people.

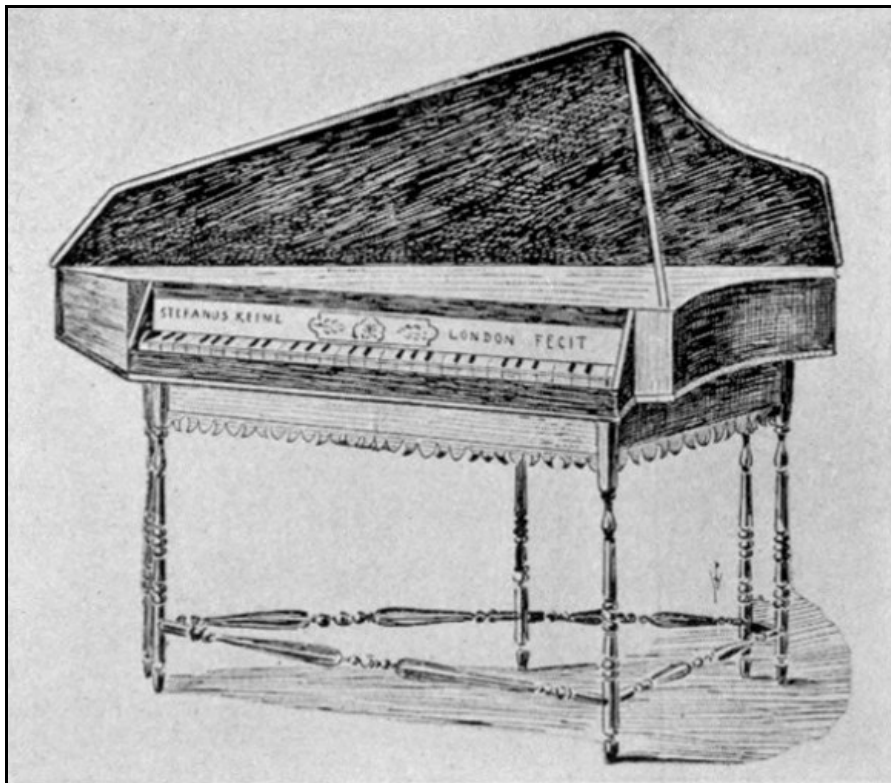
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But all the research which man, thus far, has been able to make has not revealed just who it was that first discovered music in a lifeless instrument. This fact will always be deeply veiled in mystery. All attempts to unravel the threads have failed. None knows yet just who they were who first

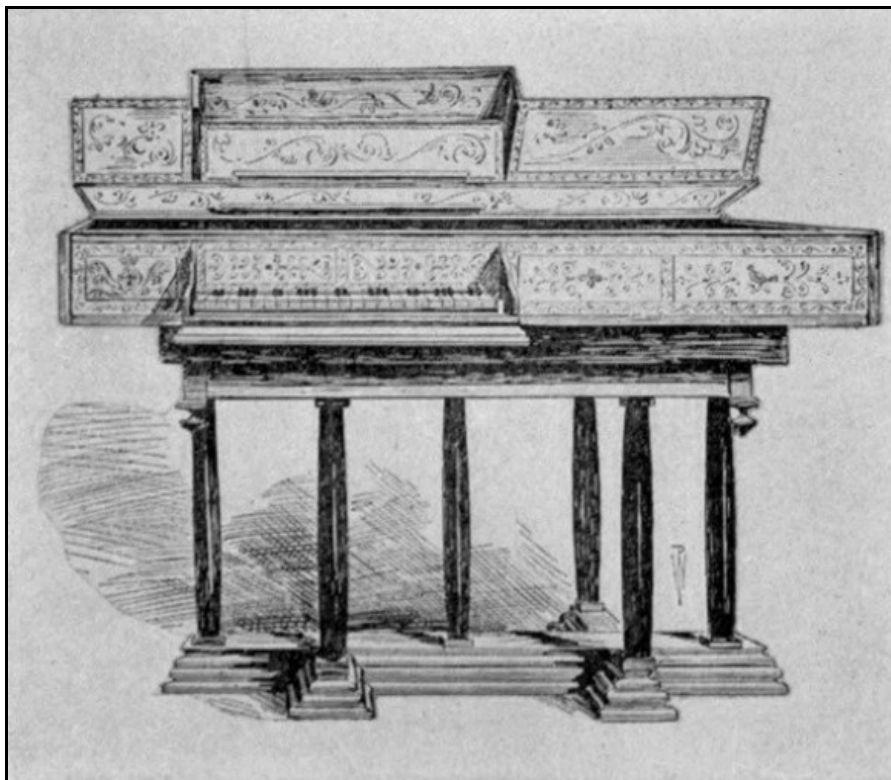
"Struck the chorded shell,  
And, wondering, on their faces fell  
To worship the celestial sounds.  
Less than a God they thought there  
scarce could dwell  
Within the hollow of that shell  
That spoke so sweetly and so well."

Just how many strings Hermes had on his tortoise-shell instrument is a much disputed question. Some say there were but three and that they represented the three seasons—spring, summer, and winter—into which it was the custom of the Greeks to divide their year. Some authorities claim that the strings numbered four. Others say there were seven. No one knows. The Greek harp was played by picking the strings with the fingers or with a plectrum. The latter was a small piece of bone or metal, held in the fingers, with which the strings were snapped. Sometimes a short piece of wood was used to strike the strings.

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SPINET

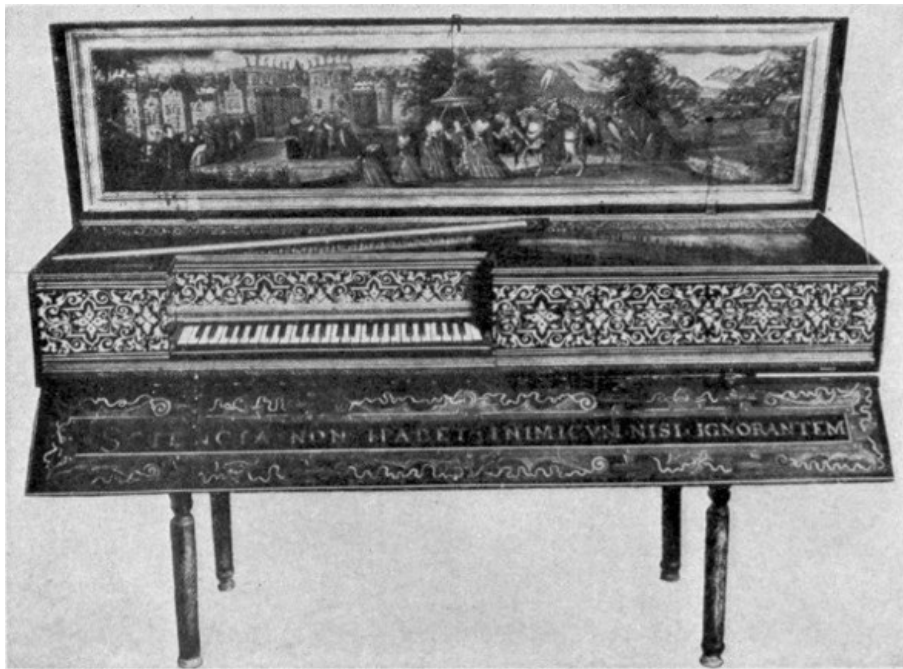


QUEEN ELIZABETH'S VIRGINAL

A step forward in the evolution of the stringed instrument was made during the Middle Ages when the psaltery became popular. It consisted of a box with strings across it, and records for us the first attempt at a sounding board. This was followed by the dulcimer, which closely resembled it but was somewhat larger. A plectrum was used to play them both. [17]

A very good idea of the psaltery and dulcimer may be obtained from the xylophone. This instrument has bars of wood or metal which are struck with a wooden mallet. The keyboard was invented in the eleventh century. It was applied first to an instrument called a clavier and later to the organ. The first stringed instrument to which this new device was applied was the clavicytherium, or keyed cithara. It had a box with a cover and strings of cat-gut, arranged in the form of a half triangle. It was made to sound by means of a quill plectrum attached in a rude way to the end of the keys. This was the progress the piano of today had made in the thirteenth century. [18]

Next in order of development comes the monochord, clarichord, or clavichord, the latter being the name by which it is generally known. As it was the instrument most used during the six centuries which followed, it is worthy of close study. In shape it much resembled a small square piano without frame or legs. The strings were of brass, struck by a wedge made of the same metal which was called a tangent. It was capable of soft tones only, but they were very sweet and melancholy. The elder Bach loved this instrument. He did not take kindly to the piano which was about to supplant his beloved clavichord. One regrets that he could not have lived to have seen it perfected. In playing the music written by Bach we must remember that he wrote entirely for the clavichord. The instrument he used was, without doubt, the product of Italy, as during this time the Italians led all Europe in the arts. At a later period the clavichord was copied by the Germans and Belgians. It was used by them for centuries on account of its simple construction and low price. Mozart always carried one with him as part of his baggage when traveling. The virginal, spinet, and harpsichord followed the clavichord in rapid succession, considering that the last named instrument had been in favor for such a long time, with seemingly no attempt at improvement. All of these three instruments had strings of brass, with quill plectra attached to pieces of wood. These were called "jacks"—a name still used today in making up the action of the piano. [19] [20]



DOUBLE SPINET OR VIRGINAL MADE BY LUDOVICUS GROVELUS FLANDERS, 1600

The virginal and spinet were almost identical with each other, but the harpsichord was larger and occasionally was built with two keyboards. There are several explanations as to why the virginal was so called. One is that it got its name from its association with hymns to the Virgin. Another is that it was thus called in honor of Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen. We may accept whichever theory best suits us, but history records that both Elizabeth and Mary of Scotland were proficient in its use and that it was the favorite instrument of Henry VIII. Items for repairs and for instruction in playing the virginal appear frequently in the royal expense book, showing conclusively that His Majesty was not unmindful of such accomplishments. Four octaves was the range of these old instruments, from the second added line below in the bass to the second added line above in the treble. There was but one string to each note, and one can well understand why a writer of that period describes the tone as "a *scratch* with a *sound* at the end of it." Queen Elizabeth's virginal is still preserved at Worcestershire. It is a most elaborate creation, having a cedar case ornately covered with crimson velvet and lined with yellow silk. Its weight is only twenty-four pounds. Gold plate covers the front. Thirty of its fifty keys are of ebony with tips of gold. The semitone keys are inlaid with silver, ivory, and various woods, each key being composed of two hundred and fifty pieces. The royal arms are emblazoned upon the case. The Queen's virginal instruction book is also carefully kept, one of the many silent records of the accomplishments of this gifted and brilliant woman.

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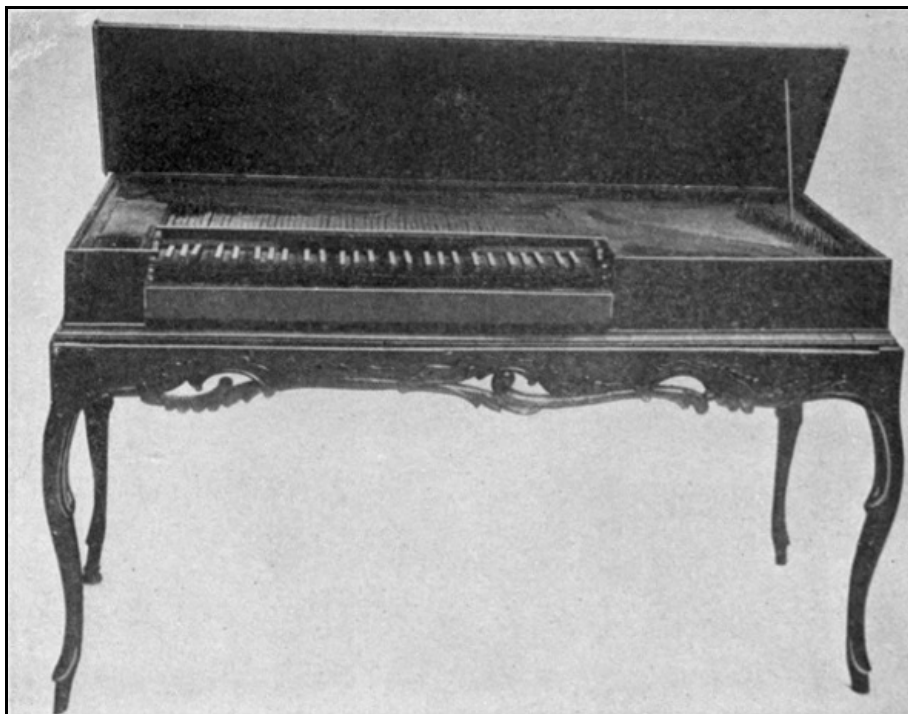
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The instrument which belonged, once upon a time, to Mary Queen of Scots was not quite so gorgeous. Its case was of oak inlaid with cedar, but it was ornamented with gold and had rare paintings on the case. It was customary to employ the best artists to decorate these instruments, as this greatly enhanced their value. There is a story that Salvatore Rosa, on a wager, made his almost valueless harpsichord worth a thousand scudi by painting a landscape with figures upon the lid.

In July of the year 1701 the London *Post* had an article relating to virginals which reads: "This week a most curious pair of virginals, reckoned to be the finest in England, was shipped off for the Grand Seigneur's seraglio."

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Old Pepys, in his diary, gives a description of the great fire in London which occurred in 1666, in which he says: "The river was full of lighters and boats, taking in goods, *good* goods swimming in the water; and only I observed that hardly one lighter or boat but that there was a pair of virginals on it." The word "pair" as it is used then had no more meaning than when we now say "a pair of scissors." This extract shows that the instrument must have been almost as commonly used as the piano of our day. In Shakespeare's time it was customary to have a virginal in a barber shop for the entertainment of customers, probably to beguile the weary moments while they waited for the barber to say "next."



CLAVICHORD MADE BY JOHN CHRISTOPHER JESSE, GERMANY, 1765

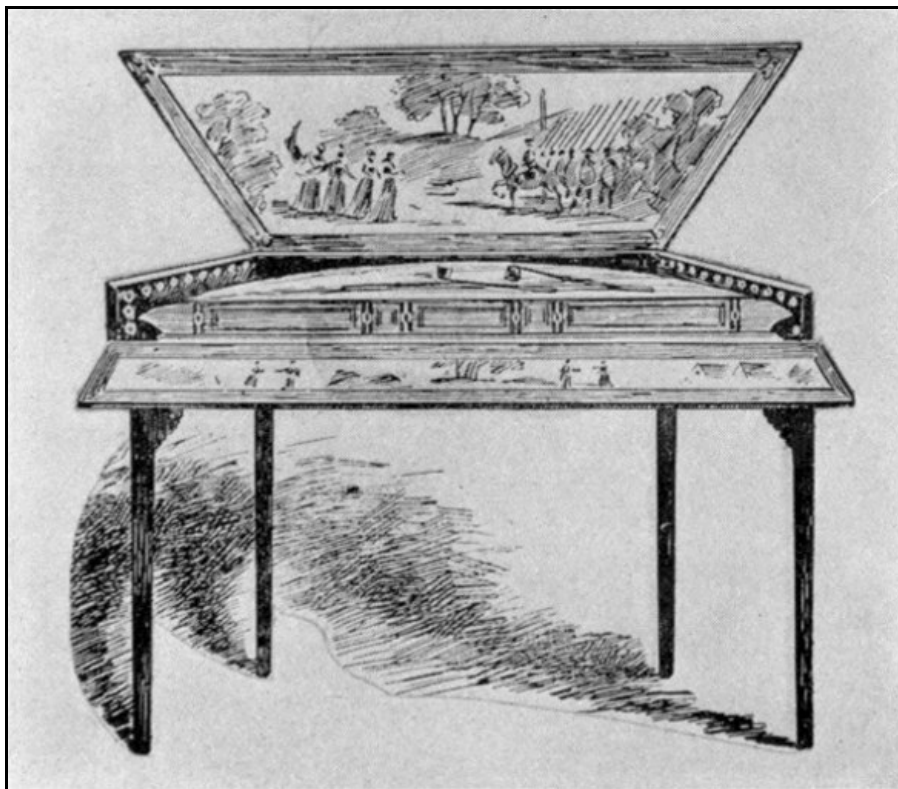
In shape the spinet resembled the harp placed horizontally in the framework. A very good example may be seen at the South Kensington Museum in London. It was made by Rossi, a celebrated manufacturer. The Metropolitan Museum in New York has rare specimens of the harp which were given by the late Mr. Drexel, of Philadelphia, who purchased them in Europe. There are two theories as to the origin of the name "spinet." One is, that it was taken from Spinetti, a Venetian who invented the oblong form of the case. The other is that the strings were made to vibrate by the points of a quill, and that the word "spinet" came from thorn or point. [25]

In tone the spinet was usually a fifth higher than that of the harpsichord, which came into favor during the eighteenth century. The latter was almost exactly like our grand piano, only very much smaller. To Italy has been accorded the honor of its origin, also, away back in the fifteenth century. It was not commonly used, however, until about 1702. A harpsichord on exhibition at the South Kensington Museum in London bears the date of 1521. A step towards the present-day construction of the piano is shown by the fact that there were always two wire strings to each note and sometimes three or four, and that it had a keyboard covering five octaves. It was like an organ in that it had register stops and sometimes a double keyboard. [26]

Hans Ruckers, of Antwerp, was the most celebrated maker of the harpsichord in those days. One of his best specimens belongs to the Drexel collection in New York. Handel delighted in his Ruckers harpsichord and gave it preference over all others, which is adequate proof of its superiority. It was his pleasure to play upon it long after his failing eyesight forbade the use of notes. He had to improvise entirely, but was so expert that the orchestra with whom he played was often diverted by his wonderful accompaniments. This partiality was resented by the soloists and one of them told Handel that if he ever played him such a trick while he was singing, he would jump down on his harpsichord and smash it. This amused Handel immensely and he exclaimed, "You vill jump, vill you? Varey well, sare. Be so kind und tell me ven you vill jump, und I vill advertise it in der bills." We are told that every key of Handel's instrument was hollowed like the bowl of a spoon, so incessant was his practice. One very lovely harpsichord still in existence has its history veiled in mystery, but the supposition is that it once belonged to Marie Antoinette. [27]

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DULCIMER

Clementi had one of the last harpsichords made. The date upon the case was 1802. Beethoven's famous "Moonlight Sonata" was written for either harpsichord or piano. It was published in 1802. Hummel played on the harpsichord as late as 1805, but it had to give way, though most reluctantly, to the new invention called the pianoforte. Just how slow the public was in accepting the innovation and improvement upon the instruments mentioned, the following quotation from a folio gotten out by Thomas Mace, who was one of the clerks of Trinity College, at the University of Cambridge, testifies. He was pleased to call his booklet "Musick's Monument," and it was printed in 1676 in London.

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He scorned the new invention but warmly upheld the lute and viol. He explained that the lute was once considered difficult to play because it had too few strings, only ten to fourteen, while at the time of his writing it had sixteen to twenty-six. He makes the statement that he never spent more than a shilling a quarter for strings. The care of a lute he describes quaintly:

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"And that you may know how to shelter your lute in the worst of ill weathers (which is moist) you shall do well, ever when you lay it by in the day time, to put It into a Bed that is constantly used, between the Rug and Blanket, but never between the Sheets, because, they may be moist. This is the most absolute and best place to keep It in always, by which doing, you will find many Great Conveniences. Therefore, a Bed will secure from all these inconveniences and keep your Glew as Hard as Glass and all safe and sure; only to be excepted, that no Person be so inconsiderate as to Tumble down upon the Bed whilst the lute is there, for I have known several Good lutes spoiled with such a Trick."

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Again we are indebted to Italy for the invention and name of the pianoforte. It is a strange fact that, entirely unknown to one another, three men were working out the same principle—namely, the hammer action—at the same time. Marius in France, Schroeter in Germany, and Bartolomeo Christofori (often called Christofali) in Italy worked secretly and simultaneously, and for a long time it was undecided to whom the honor really belonged. A careful examination of all records, however, establishes beyond a doubt the priority of Christofori's claim. The hammer action was what all previous instruments lacked, and it seems strange that it took nearly two thousand years for this principle to be discovered and applied. Many times the inventors appeared to be almost upon it. They worked all around it, but the idea seemed illusive and they never grasped it.

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CHRISTOFORI PIANO FROM THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK CITY

At this point it might be well to enumerate in order the instruments which preceded the piano, if only to fasten them clearly in memory: the lyre and harp of the ancients; the dulcimer, played by means of the plectra and to which, as the hand could use but one plectrum, there was a keyboard added to use all the fingers, thus moving the plectra faster; the clavichord, with tangents of brass to strike the strings; the virginal and the spinet, in reality the same; the harpsichord, with its crow quills to half rub, half strike the strings, still far away from the hammer action of the present-day piano. It seems almost unaccountable that the manufacturers who so greatly improved the mechanism of the harpsichord at this stage failed to discover the hammer action. But at last, after the quest of centuries, the quill, thorn, and ivory were discarded and a small hammer struck the string, giving a clear, precise, but delicate tone hitherto unheard. The "scratch with a sound at the end" was gone forever. The harpsichord had been changed into an instrument of percussion, and it only remained for man to perfect that primitive creation into the superb piano of today.

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Although Italy gave the invention to the world, it remained for northern Europe and England to take up the idea and improve it. Christofori solved three important problems: first, the construction of thicker strings to withstand the hammer action; second, a way to compensate for the weakness caused by the opening in the tuning-pin block; third, the mechanical control of the rebound of the hammer from the strings, so that the hammer should not block against the latter and prevent vibration.

The first Christofori instrument was brought out in 1709. Marius did not come forth with his claim until 1716, and Schroeter not until the next year. The name "pianoforte" is traced clearly to the year 1598 and is said to have been originated by an Italian named Paliarino. In some of his manuscripts he mentions an instrument called *piano e forte*. The English put in a claim for a monk living in Rome who had made an instrument resembling Christofori's in 1711 and had brought it to England, where it created a profound sensation. This may have been true, but England did little to develop even the harpsichord until long after Continental makers had achieved marked success in the business. In 1760 German workmen to the number of twelve went to London. They were known as the Twelve Apostles, and it is their descendants who became identified with the successful development of the piano down to the present time.

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Very few of the first Christofori pianos have been preserved. One, in excellent repair, is in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Two are in Florence, dated 1720 and 1726. They show, beyond a doubt, that he had anticipated the plan of escapement and hammer checking. Like many other pioneer inventors, this man died in comparative poverty. Schroeter, the German claimant, became a famous maker of instruments. He succeeded in improving the piano to a large extent. But his life was made miserable fighting the claims of other manufacturers who sprang up and immediately went into business. Marius met the same fate, being driven to distraction by competitors, some of whom turned out instruments far superior to his.

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England did not accomplish much before the middle of the eighteenth century. Up to 1760 all pianos were made in what is known as the "grand" form. Then a German in the employ of the Tschudi's, famous makers of harpsichords, invented the familiar "square" style. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the most noted European makers were the Steins, Stodart, Broadwood,

Pleyel, Erard, and Silberman. Pleyel was distinguished not only for his fine instruments, but for the fact that he was the twenty-fourth child born to his mother after she married Martin Pleyel. She died soon after his birth, whereupon his father took unto himself another wife and had fourteen more children, making a family of thirty-eight, thirty-five of whom lived and prospered. Pleyel was chapel master of Strasburg Cathedral. He was the author of some fine hymns and other compositions which we know and love today. He lived in Paris, manufactured splendid pianos, and was, before his death, proprietor of one of the largest establishments in Europe.

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To show against what prejudice the piano had to struggle as compared to the harpsichord (and even the clavichord), we quote from a musical critic in Leipzig who said:

"The clavichord stands highest of all instruments, and although on account of its nature it is excluded from the concert hall, it is the companion of the recluse. The latter says to himself: 'Here I can produce the feelings of my heart, can shade fully, drive away care, and melt away a tone through all its swellings,'" This critic says further:

[39]

"The piano is so deficient in its shadings and minor attractions, it is adapted only for concerts and chamber music." This dissertation closes as follows: "In order to judge a virtuoso, one must listen to him while at the clavichord, not while at the piano or harpsichord."

To illustrate the novelty of the piano in the year 1767, we find on an old English play bill of the Covent Garden Theater a certain Miss Brickler advertised to sing a favorite song from "Judith," accompanied by Mr. Dibdin on "a new instrument" called the pianoforte. This was at the intermission after the first act of "The Beggars" opera.

[40]

After Mozart became acquainted with the piano, he gave his preference to those made by Stein, of Augsburg. Afterwards, however, he transferred his affection to those made by Anton Walter, of Vienna. His "grand," which was but five octaves, with white sharps and black naturals, is now in the Mozarteum at Salzburg.



PIANO MADE BY MATTHÄUS ANDREAS STEIN VIENNA, EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

Silberman, the German maker, was finally successful in interesting King Frederick of Prussia in his new instrument to the extent of persuading him to purchase outright all he had finished. There were some fifteen of these, which were placed in the rooms at the palace. This demonstrates the King's love for music. He was a flute player of considerable ability. One of the court musicians was Carl Philip Emanuel Bach, son of the great master, and King Frederick had expressed a desire to hear the elder Bach play upon the new invention. For some time old Sebastian was obstinate and tartly declined all invitations. His son at last cajoled him into acceding to the King's wishes. He arrived most unexpectedly and excited the King to such an extent that he rushed out exclaiming: "Gentlemen, old Bach has come."

[41]

During the performance he stood behind the musician's chair muttering in an undertone: "Only one Bach, only one Bach." The King requested the improvisation of a fugue in six parts, which the master did to the astonishment of all present. But for the new instrument Bach had little use. He complimented Silberman on his production, but he found fault with the unequal tones. He said

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the high notes were too weak, that it was too hard to play. Of course this greatly displeased the maker. For a long time he was very angry. But his better judgment came to the rescue and at a later date he succeeded in producing an instrument to which the master gave his approval. Bach, however, was never convinced that any instrument was equal to his beloved clavichord.

It will be of interest to women to know that Maria Anna Stein, daughter of Johann Andreas Stein, the piano maker, was a most successful business woman, carrying on the manufacturing of instruments. This she continued after her marriage to Herr Streicher. She was a person of rare refinement and a warm friend of Beethoven, whom she greatly admired. She was privileged to make his last years more comfortable than any he had previously experienced. Good servants were provided to look after his bodily needs and she always had one of her best pianos at his disposal. In a letter to "Nanette," as she was called, he wrote: "Perhaps you do not know that though I have not always had one of your pianos, since 1809 I have invariably preferred them."

[43]

As late as 1882 there was a grand piano at Windsor Castle which bore the name of Nanette Stein, Maker. It belonged to Queen Victoria.

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Clementi may be considered the first legitimate writer for the piano. All the great masters, including Scarlatti, Handel, Bach, and Haydn (in his first compositions), were written for the clavichord. So when listening to the classics they have left for us, we must remember the limitations of the instruments upon which they played and for which they wrote. Probably no one has realized this fact more keenly than the late Mr. Morris Steinert, of New Haven, Conn. He spent the best years of his life (to say nothing of his fortune) in collecting the rare and valuable instruments which he presented to Yale College.

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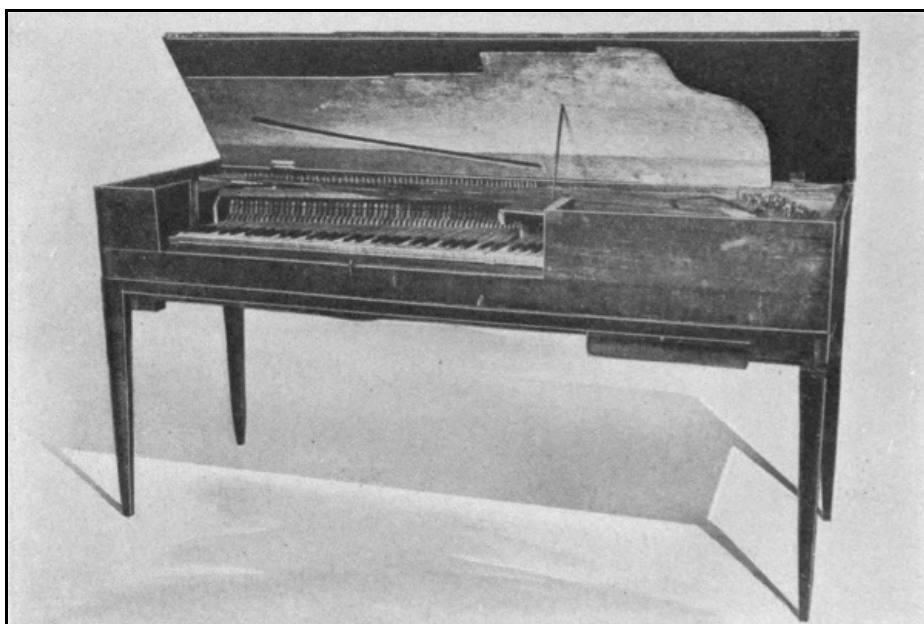
Mr. Steinert not only searched for these treasures all over Europe, but he had them restored and played upon them, thus giving to the world the long-forgotten sounds and showing, by the only method possible, just how the great masters played. During the World's Fair the Steinert collection was in the Manufacturers' Building, the center of attraction for music lovers. His experiences were most interesting in obtaining some of the rarest specimens. For instance, a harpsichord with the date 1710 on its case was found broken and dust-covered in an attic in Vienna. It had two keyboards, tortoise-shell naturals and ivory sharps. It had eight stops, one imitating the lute and one the flute. The sounding board was elaborately painted with flowers and other decorative symbols, while the inside lid was ornate with strictly Japanese art.

[46]

The dearly loved "Nanette Stein" piano, Beethoven's much prized possession, is in Mr. Steinert's collection. America is the home of many priceless pianos. In this same group we find an instrument once belonging to Napoleon Bonaparte. To be correct, it is a harpsichord, and it was given to a French sergeant when the fallen monarch was banished to St. Helena. The Frenchman came to America and gave the harpsichord to Simon Bates, of Scituate Harbor Light, Mass., from whose heirs Mr. Steinert purchased it. Claviers, dulcimers, spinets, and harpsichords, belonging once upon a time to Bach, Haydn, and Mozart, are in this famous collection.

[47]

Besides the instruments of bygone days, Mr. Steinert has been able to get original manuscripts, worth their weight in gold. It is a fascinating character study to examine the scores of the old masters and note the difference in style and method. For many years this man made arduous tours with his instruments, giving lectures and illustrating them with actual performance of the music on the instrument for which it was composed. His only compensation was that he felt he was furthering the true spirit of art and music in this the country of his adoption. In his personal reminiscences published some years ago he says:

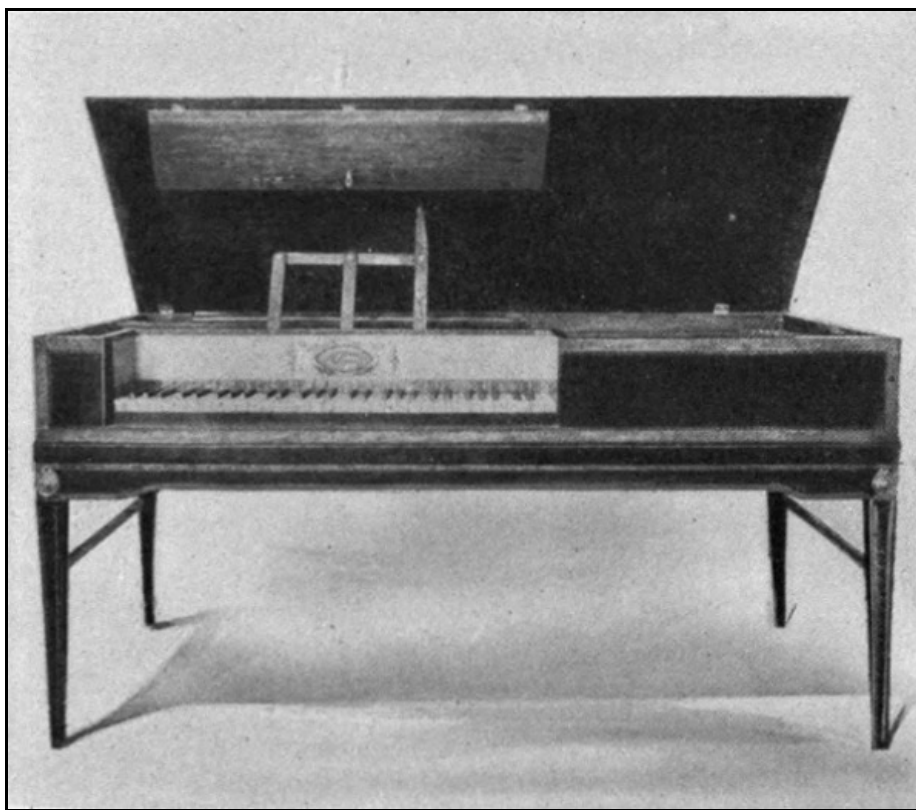


PIANO MADE BY BENJAMIN CREHORE, BOSTON CIR. 1800

"How dealers in pianos of this day must envy the manufacturers of the good old times when they remember that then the would-be purchaser had to look up the maker and court his pleasure. He had to sign a written contract, the terms of which sound droll enough to us. The time limit for construction was from six to twelve months and the payments were, generally, so much cash, so many casks of wine, a certain amount of corn, wheat, and potatoes, while geese, chickens, and turkeys constituted some of the articles used in payment. Even a few cords of wood would be acceptable in making up the balance. When the piano was completed, ready for delivery at the home of the impatient purchaser, a general festival took place. The maker was the hero of the hour. He was accompanied by his craftsmen, and apprentices if he had any, and they followed the gaily decorated wagon and horses which bore the precious burden to its new home. A band of music headed the procession and the maker was borne aloft on the shoulders of his assistants. Musicians, organists, school masters, and other dignitaries marched in the rear. At the place of destination the procession was received with joyous shouts of welcome. The minister said a prayer and blessed the instrument and its maker. Then the mayor or burgomaster delivered an address, dwelling at length upon the importance of the event to the whole community, stating that the coming of the new musical instrument would raise the standing of the place in the eyes of the surrounding countryside. Speeches followed by the school master, doctor, druggist, and other officials. The mannechor of the village rendered songs, and amid the strains from the band the piano was moved into place. A banquet and dance closed the happy occasion."

[48]  
[49]  
[50]

In those days the manufacturer had to make each article by hand that went into a piano, which is the reason it took so long to finish the instrument.



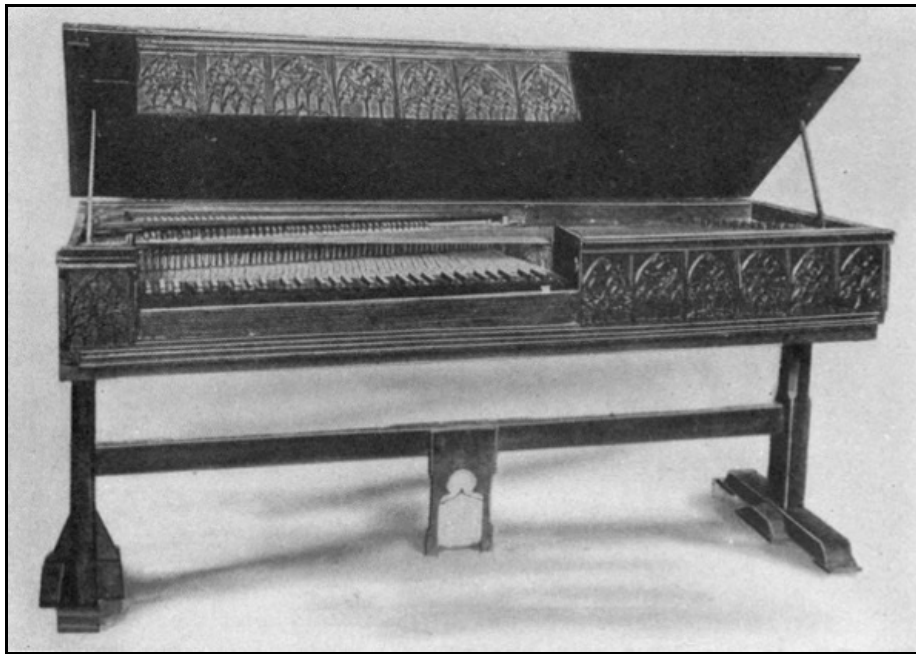
PIANO MADE BY CHARLES ALBRECHT, PHILADELPHIA

If the early records are reliable, the history of the piano in this country begins at Philadelphia. In 1775 John Behrend, a German or Swede, built an instrument in the Quaker city, and up to 1855 it continued to be the center of trade in musical instruments. When we consider how much the piano has contributed to the happiness of mankind and to the promotion of art and culture, the honor conceded to the Pennsylvania city is by no means a small one. The first spinets and virginals made on this side of the water were undoubtedly of Philadelphia manufacture. This was in the year 1742. Along with its musical progress it is said that the first hand or barrel organs were made there, and of the latter some one says: "They are the curse and plague of the modern high class individual." A Scotchman, who settled in Philadelphia near the end of 1785, was the maker of the hand-organ.

[51]

To show that the town was progressive in all kinds of instruments, we find that the historical society of Philadelphia has records of the first organ built there in 1737 by one Mathew Zimmerman. Local historians claim it to be the first one built in America. John Clark built one at Salem, Mass., in 1743, for the Episcopal church at that place. This puts Massachusetts well to the front in early musical history. Zimmerman's will, probated the same year he finished the organ, bequeaths it to his nephew and expresses the hope that he would learn to play upon it, adding, "If not, it can be sold, owing to its being so much of a curiosity."

[52]



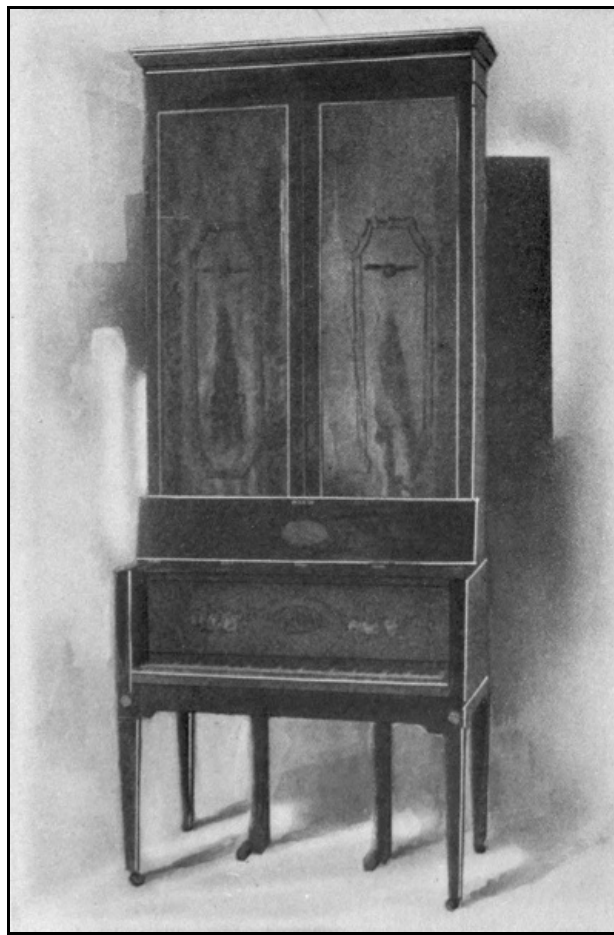
PIANO, PRIMITIVE GERMAN ACTION. EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The story of the first piano to come into this country is truly romantic and historic. The famous continental frigate "Boston," a privateer, sailed into port with a British merchant ship as a prize. The dauntless Captain Tucker was in command. The cargo was sold for the benefit of the National Treasury, and among other articles was a pianoforte of London make. [53]

It was not until after the revolutionary period that the spinet and harpsichord were superseded in this country by the piano. A newspaper of 1791 tells us that there were some twenty-seven pianos among the wealthy Boston families. All were of English make. In 1840 slow, easy-going ways crept into Philadelphia and she lost the prestige she once enjoyed of being the center of musical culture as well as of art and literature. Boston took the place and has held it ever since. Many of the distinctive features of the American piano actually originated there, such as the applying of metal in construction, which idea was first shown to be practical by Alpheus Babcock and Jonas Chickering. Then Timothy Gilbert, another Boston man, conceived the upright action which is in such general use today. There is no doubt but that Chickering was the first man who dared deviate from a prescribed method in case building. [54]

Old newspapers contain much of interest concerning these first days in the musical history of our country. In the *Boston Gazette*, published in 1770, we are told that an excellent spinet had just been completed which for goodness of workmanship and harmony of sound was esteemed by the best judges to be superior to those imported. So much for American skill and enterprise. [55]

It might be well to mention that Massachusetts is credited with making the first violins in this country. In 1789, also, there were two teachers of harp and piano in Boston, one of whom could act as tuner and repairer if occasion demanded. We find that Boston early supported a musical magazine. In 1797 Peter Van Hazen left New York for the "Hub" and there issued the first copy of his publication devoted to topics on music. He also imported sheet music direct from London. It was about 1800 when Benjamin Crehore, of Milton, Mass., built the first piano ever made in this country, and he did it in Boston. He was a skilled workman who knew how to make violins, 'cellos, guitars, drums, and flutes. Ten or twelve pianos were all he could make in one year and, to the shame of America be it recorded, he had to put the stamp of *London* or *Paris* upon them before he could make a sale, showing that our forefathers considered the foreign made article superior to those of home manufacture. All these things are changed, however; the American instrument now commands the highest price and is shipped to every part of the world. [56]



A STODART PIANO (OLD ENGLISH)

The New York newspapers of olden time contain many notices that are curious enough to us who read them over in this day and generation. For instance, we find that "Peter Goelet has just gotten in a supply of goods on the ship 'Earl of Dunmore,' and advertises that he has over three hundred articles, from masons' trowels to oil paint, skillets and books, paint-pots, guitars, fiddles, flutes and other musical instruments, as well as a large box of harpsichord wire and hammers."

[57]

This motley collection no doubt found eager customers. Another paper tells us that "Herman Zedwitz, teacher of the violin, announces to the public that he has just returned from Europe and will give a concert in the assembly rooms at the 'Sign of the Golden Spade.'" Later, in 1774, this same man evidently found that the public did not appreciate him musically, for the intervals were so long between lessons and engagements for his violin that he was forced to take up the occupation of a chimney sweep. From accounts in the paper he must have inaugurated a sort of trust, for he advertised to take contracts by the year for "dusting out the sooty interior of flues" and adds, "None but competent boys employed." Evidently musical culture in New York was temporarily at a low ebb.

[58]

In this story of the evolution of the piano we have seen how, from its primitive beginning, it has become the one splendid instrument that is capable of representing the effect of a full orchestra. Before the death of Beethoven he realized the tremendous power of the piano and displayed its resources in a manner undreamed of by Haydn. Could these old masters return today and sit at one of the splendid productions of the twentieth century they would be dumb with amazement and entirely at a loss as to how to handle the enormous range of seven and a third octaves. Best of all, the price is such that some style of modern piano is within the reach of nearly every one. Music in the home is now the rule, not the exception.

[59]

Leigh Hunt has well expressed the feeling of all piano lovers in these verses, which are full of sentiment:

[60]

Oh, friend, whom glad or gay  
we seek,  
    Heaven-holding shrine;  
I ope thee, touch thee, hear  
thee speak,  
    And peace is mine.  
No fairy casket full of bliss,  
    Outvalues thee;  
Love only, wakened with a kiss  
    More sweet may be.

To thee, when our full hearts  
o'erflow,

In griefs or joys  
Unspeakable, emotions owe  
A fitting voice.  
Mirth flees to thee, and loves  
unrest,  
And memory dear,  
And sorrow, with his tightened  
breast  
Comes for a tear.

Oh, since few joys of human  
mould,  
Thus wait us still,  
Thrice blessed be thine, thou  
gentle fold  
Of peace at will.  
No change, no sullenness, no  
cheat  
In thee we find;  
Thy saddest voice is ever sweet,  
Thine answer kind.

### **Transcriber's Note:**

The following typographical errors have been corrected:

"Stien," "Stiens," and "Stienert" have been changed to "Stein,"  
"Steins," and "Steinert" in a number of places throughout the text.

The incorrect page number in the list of illustrations for the  
Charles Albrecht piano illustration has been changed.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HOW THE PIANO CAME TO BE \*\*\*

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