



## In Memoriam

Miss Florence E. Argy  
February, 1989

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Marsha Smith; High School-Jeffrey Leonard; Higher Education-Wayne Abercrombie; Past District Chairpersons-Dennis Brown & Denise Taggart. 371 ballots cast.

**President:** All-Eastern Conference-around 400 MMEA members; Special meeting of Executive Board at 2:00 P.M. in Andover High School. All-Member meeting at 4:00 P.M. M/S/P hotel and meal expenses of President and Executive Secretary at All-State.

**Certification Committee:** No report.

**Districts:** M/S/P to accept all four reports. M/S/P ad hoc committee to draw up policy statement regarding programming for festival choruses.

**Tie Breaking:** We need to adopt a policy.

**Government Relations:** No report.

**Music News:** Reappointment at next meeting.

**Affiliated Organizations:** Not present.

**New Business:** Legislative travesty perpetrated on Council on Arts and Humanities. McDonald's support of WLC.

Adjournment at 8:05 P.M.

### SPECIAL MEETING

March 31, 1989

**President William Seymour** convened the meeting at 2:00 P.M. at Andover High School.

**Executive Secretary-Treasurer Search:** M/S/P to accept report. Priorities in choosing candidates were organizational and business management skills, experience with computer. Music and music education qualifications were desirable but secondary.

**Paid Positions:** M/S/P to appoint Burt Cowgill as new Executive Secretary-Treasurer for '89-'90 at \$14,000 salary.

**Mass Music News:** M/S/P to reappoint Tony Di Gioro Editor for '89-'90. Salary report at May 1st meeting.

**Other Business:** Appreciation to Lorne Ford and Search Committee. ■

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC IN BOSTON PART IV: CHICKERING'S VICTORY OF THE IRONCLADS

Harrison Gradwell Slater

There was no expert in Ipswich to repair the piano that once belonged to Princess Amelia, daughter of George III. Instead, the cabinet maker's apprentice was called. Seventy years later, Napoleon III awarded the Imperial Cross to the enterprise begun by this apprentice cabinet builder of New Hampshire.

Chickering's first piano with a one-piece cast iron frame was patented in 1837. It was the beginning of an era in which the American style would sweep the piano manufacturing industry, winning exhibitions for excellence throughout the world. The one-piece cast iron frame became the basis for virtually all piano construction, and Chickering's practical application of this principle to the grand piano in 1840 was a major advance in musical history.

Jonas Chickering continued making innovations in piano construction. He patented a method for overstringing the piano that required less frequent tuning, and created a more resonant bass.

Chickering improved on Alpheus Babcock's 1825 patented invention of the cast-iron frame for the square piano, by extending the cast-iron frame the full length of the piano, and including the pin bridge and damper socket rail in the frame itself. Because of a technicality, his patent application was rejected in 1837, but was instead granted three years later. It was, however, Chickering's application of these principles to the grand piano which distinguishes him as a pathfinder in the history of piano making. The grand piano at the time had a much smaller market in American than the square. Chickering's first grand piano with a one-piece cast iron frame became the basis of piano construction for the 19th and 20th centuries.

Babcock's partner, Captain John MacKay, took on the young Chickering as partner when Babcock relocated to Philadelphia. MacKay provided the financial backing and knowledge necessary to make the production of Chickering pianos a large-scale operation. MacKay's last voyage, in 1841, for Rio de Janeiro, was to end in tragedy, as not a trace was ever found of him or his ship. His unique abilities as a businessman started Chickering on the road to international success. After Jonas purchased MacKay's interest in the firm, he continued the energetic marketing strategies that brought Chickering pianos to every known market of the day.

A turning point came in the history of the Chickering firm in 1851. During the Crystal Palace Exhibition, the Chickering grand on display won highest honors. The Boston piano manufacturer with the iron frame had suddenly attracted the attention and admiration of the world. Other piano makers were reluctant to follow this new direction, until 1855, when Steinway

demonstrated in New York that Chickering's two innovations could yield the necessary volume and desirable tone. The victory of Chickering's ironclads was confirmed.

The following year, 1852, Chickering's fortunes took a different turn. His entire factory, valued at a quarter of a million dollars, burned to the ground, including Chickering's collection of paintings and testimonials by artists. Within a year, Chickering was immersed in a mammoth project for a new factory, dubbed "Chickering's Folly" because it was second only to the U.S. Capitol in size. The enormous physical and emotional pressure of rebuilding proved too much for Chickering. Before the plans were completed, Chickering died unexpectedly.

The excellence of the Chickering name was continued through his sons, who were honored with a gold medal at the Paris Exposition of 1867. In addition, Napoleon III decided to award the *Legion d'honneur* for excellence to Chickering, a unique honor in the annals of piano manufacturing. Chickering grands continued to be endorsed by the greatest pianists of the period. When Edvard Greig visited Franz Liszt in Weimar, he wrote enthusiastically that he had played on Liszt's beautiful American grand, a Chickering. And it was during Grieg's second visit that a famous episode took place: Liszt read Grieg's Piano Concerto perfectly at sight, afterwards encouraging the young composer to continue composing.

The famous American pianist and composer, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, played exclusively on Chickering's. A description of a concert in San Francisco in 1865 gives us a glimpse into this colorful period in American history. Gottschalk and nine pianists, each one playing a separate instrument, performed the Soldiers' Chorus from *Faust* and the Pilgrims' March from *Tannhaeuser*. The great theater was soon reverberating with the sound of yelling, the stamping of feet, and the clang of silver dollars as they hit the strings of ten Chickering grands.

The world premiere of the Tchaikovsky *Bb Piano Concerto* did not take place in Moscow, but in Boston, played by Hans von Buelow on a Chickering grand. Other great artists who endorsed Chickering's included Saint-Saens, Gounod, Busoni, von Dohnanyi, and the greatest singer of her day, Jenny Lind, who was accompanied on the Chickering at her concerts.

Chickering pianos, no longer made since 1982, are in museums and instrument collections all over the world. Today they are a testimony to an American innovator and his revolution in piano making. ■