

The Buckeye Backcheck

Newsletter of the Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

Volume 45 Issue 4 December 2020



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Chapter Meeting Minutes November 17, 2020

The meeting was hosted online by Kim Hoessly

Attendance:

David Chadwick, Chris Purdy, Ron Kenreich, Andrew Kovalski, Walter Bagnall, Kim Hoessly, Mark Ritchie, and guest Morgan Sieg.

Treasurer's Report:

\$1,939.66

Old Business:

In the October meeting, Andrew Kovalski was nominated and elected as the Secretary and is now functioning in that position. There was no Buckeye Backcheck last month due to the transition from previous secretary Chris Burget.

Sincere thanks to Chris Burget for all of his work for the Chapter as secretary, newsletter editor and webmaster for many years!

New Business:

Mark Ritchie reports that Thomas Ruff, a long time member of the Columbus Chapter of the PTG passed away on November 19, 2020.

Butts & Flanges

Walter Bagnall's son-in-law's father is a piano tuner and he is not doing much work anymore. He has three old grands - some are really rough looking, but he wants to give them away to somebody. They are free to anyone that wants them, but they are down near Lancaster. Pictures of two of these pianos have already been sent to the chapter, and the third one will be sent out soon.

Andrew Kovalski showed a picture of a found pedal mechanism repair which was made with about 10 bridle straps glued to each other, to repair where a pin may have been missing. Mark Ritchie carries a couple of extra balance rail pins with him to replace these. Kim also recommends screws that come with key cover handles to do the job.

Ron Kenreich tuned a piano for a tall client whose legs do not fit between the bench and the keyboard. Mark Ritchie laughingly suggests cutting a bit off of the legs of the bench, but it is rather the knees-to-foot length which needs extra space.

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The A.B. Chase Piano Mark Ritchie

The A. B. Chase Organ Company was founded 1875 by either Alvin or Allen B. Chase at 16 W. Main St. Norwalk, OH. Chase was a civil war veteran who joined an Ohio regiment at an age younger than the legal 18. From 1875 to 1885 the company was mainly a producer of reed organs. From some of the brochures I looked at they were of high quality and some costing over \$500.00 with moderate cases in the \$80.00-\$100.00 range. There was one large organ containing a rank of pipes I presume for church use. The organ production appears to have diminished around 1885. Research indicates that Chase was chronically ill and died in 1877. He never saw a piano come out of his factory.

In 1877 Calvin Whitney took over the company with a motto that “no material was too good, and no skilled labor too expensive if it improved the instrument “. He prided himself that it took two years to hand build a piano, with no mass production. It was reported that all the soundboard material was northern spruce from Maine, Vermont and the Adirondacks. Music Trade magazine reported that Whitney was an expert on wood.

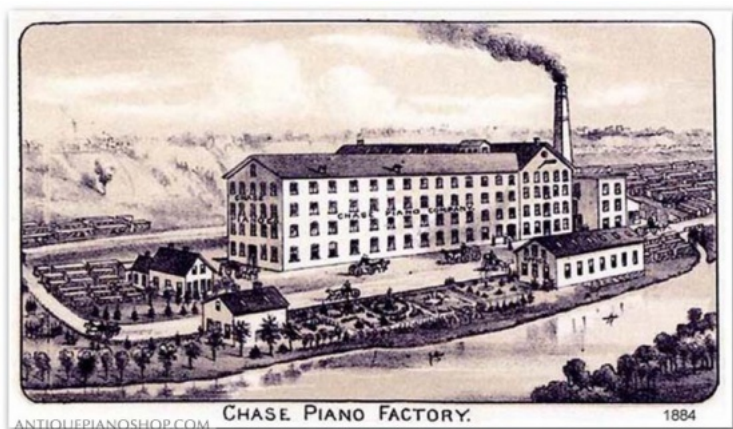
A white A. B. Chase piano was installed in the parlor of the White House during the presidency of William McKinley. They also produced player pianos including the Aristano player grand around 1905. President Warren G. Harding also owned an A.B. Chase electric player piano.

One report I read said the Chase Company was credited with the tri-bridge system design, and sold the design to Steinway, Mason & Hamlin, Sohmer and Baldwin in 1900. I am not so sure of that. Although my career I have heard the A.B. Chase grands called the Ohio Steinway, and that there may have been some connection to Steinway. I have found no evidence of that. From my experience I never thought the grands to be superior to the uprights. The grand pianos produced however did bear a close resemblance to a Steinway in design.

Charles Wickham took control of the company in 1909. The company was absorbed into United Piano Corporation in 1920. Lester took over United Piano Corporation and then merged with The American Piano Company. Piano production in the Norwalk factory ceased in 1922. Following that American Piano Company merged with one of the largest piano conglomerates in history, Aeolian- American Corp. The A.B Chase name stayed in use until Aeolian-American filed for bankruptcy in 1985. There were some cheap stencil spinets I remember seeing in the 1970's & 80's with the A.B. Chase name from Aeolian. Seems like a crime.

I think Dongbei, China has control of the name currently but I have not seen one.

- Mark Ritchie, RPT



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Case Study - Jim Maneri's A.B. Chase Upright

During the meeting, the chapter examined an 1899 A.B. Chase owned by Columbus musician Jim Maneri through a video sent by him to the chapter. Jim had been looking for an AB Chase for a long time. When he found and acquired the piano in question, he called Mark Ritchie immediately to look at it. The hammers had 4-5 mm grooves in it, but Mark did the key frame, key bushing, leveled the keys, regulated it, and shaped the hammers up, and they turned out well. Mark reports that the instrument had original strings, no broken butt plates; he turned a few bass strings, and generally cleaned it up. If you don't know Jim Maneri, he's a Columbus music stalwart. He was the musical director for the traveling troop of Hamilton, but now he is teaching. He has been involved in the jazz scene in Columbus, taught at Ft. Hayes, and is a great musician, a funny guy, and a yo-yo expert.

Below is a transcript of Jim's video, watched as a chapter during the meeting:

Hi there it's me, Jim Maneri! I'm here with the 1899 AB Chase. You turned me onto this piano and it's lived up to your promises - the Stradivarius of pianos! Here's a bit about it. The short strike pedal brings the whole action up and it makes all the difference in the world when you are playing quietly. Then, it's big and full! I used to think, I just want to play this cluster chord here - see how beautiful and clear each note is. If I move down here, I can hear every one of those notes - I can't do that on a contemporary NY Steinway! It's extraordinary. I can change the strike in the middle of a run, which gives me all these different colors to play. And it's got all the power one needs - power with clarity! And the bass is not muddy, it rumbles. It's very - clear as a bell, every note. Thank you for your help!



At the time this video was made, it had had one fairly substantial pitch correction and a tuning. A catcher had broken and needed repaired, but you could expect less from a 120 year-old piano! Kim Hoessly recommends the buckskin from PianoForte Supply in British Columbia for replacement. He has good backcheck felt for uprights, as well. They're usually pretty hard. Kim reports that if she is replacing the buckskins, she usually replaces the backcheck felts.

The Columbus Public Schools had a bunch of AB Chase Uprights, and Mark purchased four of them. Jim found another one, and it was Tim Clark's. Christopher Purdy had a client with an AB Chase and traded it in for a new Hamilton. Chris asked, since these were amazing pianos 120 years ago but there is such little market value in them, where do you draw the line on recommending a customer rebuild, instead of replace? Mark Ritchie points to a Weber on his webpage - it needed a lot, but it was an important family heirloom. For the family, the money wasn't the important part. Kim suggests that sometimes you can tell by the keys. If the keys have the extra key shoes or the hardwood insert in the back, the rest of the piano is probably pretty good, too.



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Columbus Chapter of the Piano Technicians Guild

- Officers -

President	David Chadwick, RPT
Vice-President	Chris Purdy, RPT
Treasurer	Ron Kenreich
Secretary	Andrew Kovaleski
Imm. Past Pres.	Mitch Staples, RPT

Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, January 19
7:30pm

**Meeting will be hosted
online by Kim Hoessly**

**Link to join meeting
in Zoom will be
emailed prior to the
meeting**

Disclaimer:

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