

Basic Detail Report



Melodeon

Date

1849 ca.

Primary Maker

George A. Prince & Co.

Description

Compass C to c3 (four octaves). Ivory-covered naturals, ebony sharps. The instrument is constructed on the suction principle. Connected with a single pedal resting on the floor are exhaust and reservoir bellows with a common board between them. Behind the single set of reeds immediately under the keyboard is a swell shutter connected to a pedal attached to the front left leg. The

normally visible parts of the case are veneered in rosewood. The front and back legs at each end are formed into an upside-down lyre, attached to the bottom of the case with wing bolts. Pitch at A = 443 With the instrument came a letter to Mr. Fox from Olive M. Duntley, Randolph, N.Y., 12 June 1981, mentioning the instrument. According to a note written on the letter by Mrs. Fox, Mr. Fox is thought to have purchased the instrument from Miss Duntley. Also with the instrument is a letter by Elisabete I. Payne, dated October 2nd [1853], the year in pencil in a later hand. The letter mentions that "Olive says she shall not get a dress at present as she has bought Mr Ostroms melodian she will want what money she has for taking lessons". A comparison of the handwriting suggests that Olive M. Duntley wrote both the year 1853 and a note in ball-point pen at the bottom of the letter, "Original date of melodian was 1832". A sticker on the back of the frame in which the letter was mounted indicates that the framing was done in Manhasset, New York. A Google search shows that there is an Olive Duntley Florist in Manhasset, whose website (<http://www.oliveduntleyflorist.com/aboutus.html>, accessed 27 December 2007) states that it has been in business for "over 50 years." An article by Michael Winerup, "Suburban Memo: Feeling the Aftershocks Far From Ground Zero," New York Times, 23 September 2001, mentions Lillian Orofino as the owner of Olive Duntley Florist in Manhasset. It seems likely that Olive Duntley, founder of the florist business, inherited the melodeon, which had belonged to an ancestor named Olive, and took it with her from Manhasset when she sold the business in Manhasset (Long Island) and moved several hundred miles west to Randolph. By comparison with signed instruments, especially one in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Koster catalogue, pp. 284-288) but also NMM 5082, the present instrument can firmly be attributed to Prince and Company. The original label with the maker's name and the serial number would have been pasted to the rib of the reservoir and must have been covered over when the bellows were repaired. NMM 13533 is the same model as the Boston MFA example - only the legs are different. NMM 13533 cannot have been made in 1832, as stated in Miss Duntley's note: this type of suction-action reed organ was patented by Jeremiah

Carhart in 1846 and an article in the Western Literary Messenger of 21 August 1847 (facsimile in Koster catalogue, p. 287) states that Prince began manufacturing it “during the past year.” The Boston MFA example, serial number 3344, was probably made in 1847. It also bears the number 629 written in pencil, analogous to the number 7527 on NMM 13533. These might be the cumulative production numbers of this particular model, which would suggest that NMM 13533 was made a few years after the MFA instrument. If NMM were made five years later, in 1852, the production rate would have been about 1400 instruments a year. This is more or less consistent with the total production of 40,000 that Prince and Co. advertised in 1866 and 1868 (as reported by Gellerman, p. 193). The date 1832 given by Miss Duntley might be the result of the actual date of 1852 having been misremembered as it was passed down in her family’s oral history. On NMM 13533 the number 22 is probably the number within a batch of perhaps 25 instruments; 1023 probably a batch or production number of the component on which it was written.

Dimensions

The box without the lid and legs is 736 mm long, 352 wide, 140 high; 715 high with legs and lid. Three-octave measure of the keyboard 485mm.