

THE PIANO INDUSTRY OF CANADA

The Story of Modern Piano Making.

(By L. D. Kennedy.)

The piano industry of Canada, and its allied trades, are so bound up with the history of the company with which the writer is connected that it is impossible to speak of one without mentioning the other; and as my connection with the trade has been exclusively with the firm of Mason & Risch, my references must be particularly to their piano and its construction.

Early History.

Before the year 1877 the manufacture of pianos in Canada had practically no existence; the piano trade of Canada was done by a few importing houses who handled American pianos exclusively. The dawn of better things came, however, when several men (who up to this time had been importing exclusively) conceived the idea that a piano built by Canadians on conscientious and artistic lines, would be sure to be appreciated in this country. They immediately put their ideas into execution, and in 1877 turned out the first artistic instrument which could claim to be entirely the product of Canadian skill and enterprise.

The result was phenomenal; and the question became not "how to dispose of such pianos as was modestly put forward" but "how to fill the increasing demand." This was overcome by factory extension, replete with modern appliances and machines of our own invention.

In 1879 Mason & Risch pianos were exhibited in the Toronto exhibition for the first time, and were awarded two diplomas and a gold medal.

In 1882, to test the artistic worth of Canadian pianos, a Mason & Risch Grand was submitted to the immortal artist, Franz Liszt, and his opinion was as follows:

"The Grand piano you have forwarded me is excellent, magnificent, unequalled. Artists, judges of music and the public will be of the same opinion."

This testimony, coming from such a source, induced Mason & Risch to exhibit their pianos at the Colonial and Indian exhibition that was held in London in 1886. At that exhibition our pianos attracted universal attention, and one of the instruments was selected by Her Majesty Queen Victoria, and was placed in the King's Presence Chamber in Windsor Castle.

The trade in Canada today is composed of thirty-two factories manufacturing pianos, uprights, player pianos, and grand pianos. There are fifteen factories manufacturing actions, keys, hammers, strings, plates, cases, pins, and sounding boards. These factories are located principally in Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario. The great majority of them are located in Ontario, with Toronto as the chief centre. The piano manufacturers of Canada employ, roughly, 4,000 people, and pay out in wages over \$5,000,000 annually. The trade represents an invested capital of over \$15,000,000, the annual output being around 30,000 pianos, and is the main support of the musical instrument dealers of Canada, of which there are 402 exclusively engaged in this business. There is also a larger number of dealers retailing musical supplies, who occasionally retail pianos.

The invested capital of the piano dealers in Canada is estimated at over \$46,000,000. They give employment to 10,500 additional workers, and have an estimated annual business of approximately \$50,000,000.

The business of Mason & Risch, Ltd., was established in 1871, and the first factory employed but a few men. Today they employ 250 men at the factory, on a working capital of \$2,100,000, and turn out an average of 2,500 pianos annually, with an annual turnover of \$1,750,000. This firm operates 22 retail stores, which cover the entire Dominion of Canada,

from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast, and, in addition, a large number of independent dealers handle our instruments exclusively.

Piano Construction.

I shall not touch on case design, finish, and the details connected with the cabinet maker's department, except to say that only the finest woods and most expensive and choice veneers are used, and the varnish work or finishing is a trade in itself, and appeals to our love of the beautiful, in the graceful lines and beauty of the finish. Instead I shall deal with the inside construction of a piano, and start at the very beginning, like a good house builder, and deal first with the foundation.

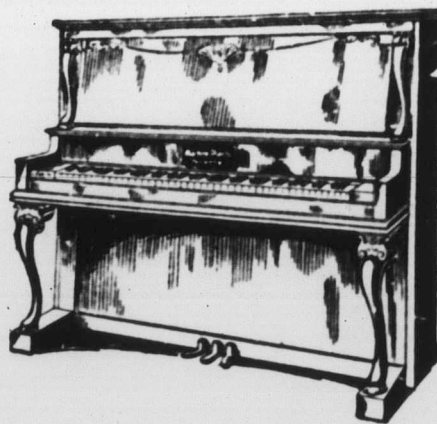
The Foundation.

The foundation is the back frame of a piano, and is so constructed as to secure the greatest degree of strength. It consists of several hard wood uprights, firmly braced together. In the top of this frame work the pin-block is solidly set, and in place of iron bolts, which have always proven unsatisfactory, in the Mason & Risch piano we have introduced a series of wood "interlocks," which firmly bind the pin-block and frame work together. The pin-block is constructed of layers of rock maple. Each layer presents a different grain surface to the adjacent layer. These layers are glued by special process.

By this construction we secure a pin-block that is equal to any strain that may be brought to bear upon it, and which will neither buckle, warp nor crack.

This might seem a trifling matter on first thought, but it is really of vital importance to the life and wearing quality

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