
“A Respectable Inhabitant of This City”

John Geib and Sons, Organ Builders & Piano Forte Manufacturers

Thomas Strange

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Preface

John Lawrence Geib is an often-cited but poorly known builder of keyboard instruments during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although historians and organologists have noted his patent for an escapement mechanism used on early English square pianos after 1787, little else has been said about him and much of that has now proven to be incomplete or untrue. Following the digitization of much historical data, including a letter written by Geib to Benjamin Franklin and correspondence with a potential client in NY, as well as numerous newspaper notices and examination of extant instruments, a better understanding of the business and esthetics of John Geib and his sons is now possible. From his early years in London during the 1770s through his immigration to New York and continuing well into the nineteenth century, Geib and three of his four sons were important individuals in the growth of the piano industry in London and subsequently in America.

This collected information allows the reader to draw a more complete and historically correct picture of Geib and to place him in perspective with the other builders operating at the time. New details about his efforts, including his principal invention – the escapement mechanism – and the nature of his business from his early years in London to his death in 1818 have been brought forward. Continued work to follow the family’s subsequent prosperity in New York making pianos and organs until the last of the Geib family faded from business near the end of the nineteenth century is carefully outlined from original sources. Numerous illustrations help the reader understand the operation of the instruments and the evolving design of John Geib and his son’s keyboard instruments. It is hoped that the reader will leave with not only a firm understanding of the life of this important instrument making family, but of the times they were adapting to, and with a sketch of the technological and musical developments that spurred them on.



Chapter 1

John Geib in London (with contributions by Jenny Nex)¹

Nearly every history of the early piano includes a short mention of John Geib (1744–1818), duly acknowledging his contribution to the development of the square piano action with his ‘grasshopper’ or hammer escapement device.² It was to remain a fixture in square piano design into the nineteenth century. Little more is usually said of him. The time has come to put a face on this man who was so active in keyboard development at a critical phase in the acceptance of pianos into Western culture. This book represents the first attempt to sketch a full biography of John Geib’s early life in London (c1775 – 1797) and his second career in the United States following his immigration, and the activities of his sons as the business thrived under a second and even third generation of Geibs.

One cannot overestimate the importance of the development of the square piano in London, nor the subsequent improvement to its touch by use of a hammer escapement, to the growth of the piano’s popularity. The basic design of the square piano, clearly derived from the layout of the clavichord, was introduced in 1766 by Johannes Zumpe,³ among whose close friends was Johann Christian Bach, then serving as Queen Charlotte’s music master.⁴ The Queen’s interest in all things musical had taken hold of the imagination of the aristocracy and ensured early adoption of whichever musical instruments were then in vogue at court.⁵ Zumpe’s first pianos were quite small at about 49 inches long and 18 inches deep, and possessed a small but nicely musical sound, which obviously charmed the early listeners. J.C. Bach would perform the first public concert on one in 1767 and from the number that have survived and the rapidity with which others took up building the instrument, it was clearly a success from the very beginning. Johannes Pohlman and Jacob Kirkman took up the design by at least 1769, with Christopher Ganer, Adam Beyer, Frederick Beck, and others following closely behind in the early 1770s. The first notice of a piano for sale in America occurred in 1770, imported from London⁶. Piano production continued to increase each year during the 1770s even without a trade route to America as a result of the Revolutionary War and following the peace in 1783 it increased rapidly though the 1780s.

¹ Much of the material from chapter 1 was developed for the article ‘*John Geib Beyond: The Footnote*’, *Eighteenth Century Music*, vol. 7, issue 1, 2010

² The date of Geib’s death is correctly given as 1818. However, according to Gildersleeve the inscription on Geib’s tomb reads: ‘Sacred to the memory of John Geib, who departed this life Oct. 30, 1819 in the 75th year of his age. A native of Staudernheim, Germany, and for many years a respectable inhabitant of this city.’ Alger C. Gildersleeve, *John Geib and His Seven Children* (Far Rockaway: no publisher, 1945; reprinted Salem, MA: Higginson Genealogical Books, 1987), 9. The inscription was reportedly lost in the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001. It was probably in poor shape when transcribed by Gildersleeve in the 1940s, or perhaps simply there was a transcription error.

³ Richard Maunder, ‘*The Earliest English Square Piano?*’, *The Galpin Society Journal* 62 (1989), 77–84.

⁴ Michael Cole, ‘*The Pianoforte in the Classical Era*’ (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 61.

⁵ In an advertisement announcing his move from Hanover Square to Cavendish Square, Zumpe described himself as ‘Inventor of the small Piano Forte, and Maker to her Majesty and the Royal Family’. *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London) 15711 (Monday, 21 June 1779), 3. The British Library Newspaper Collections, available through Gale Digital Collections, British Newspapers 1600–1900 <<http://www.gale.cengage.com/DigitalCollections/>> (5 August 2009). Hereafter Gale.

⁶ *New-York Gazette, and Weekly Mercury* (New York, New York), Monday, September 17, 1770 Issue: 986 Page: 3



Figure 1, 1766 Zumpe square piano, picture courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg.

The action of these first pianos is now called the English single action. It consists of a sole leather or wooden button covered with a single layer of buff leather, secured on the top end of a stiff brass wire which is screwed into the upper surface of the tail of each key. As the key is depressed the button travels upward until it connects with the flat bottom of the hammer shank near the hinge point, and the mechanical advantage results in the hammer being thrown up at the string. With the key fully depressed the hammer requires enough room to fall back from the string without ‘blocking’ or pressing against the string and damping the note. With the single action, there can be a certain amount of ‘lost motion’ (distance travelled by the key before the hammer is set into motion).

In a typical English single action that is well set up, the lost motion may be approximately twenty to thirty per cent of the total distance the key travels. Even with this disadvantage the instrument is not difficult to play, and sales of early square pianos kept builders busy.⁷ However, the effort for the performer to produce a complete range of dynamic shading on a single-action piano is challenging and requires development of techniques that may be specific to the particular square piano the artist is playing at the time. If the jack were made to activate the hammer immediately when the key is depressed but then to move out of the way to prevent blocking, the responsiveness of the action would improve dramatically.

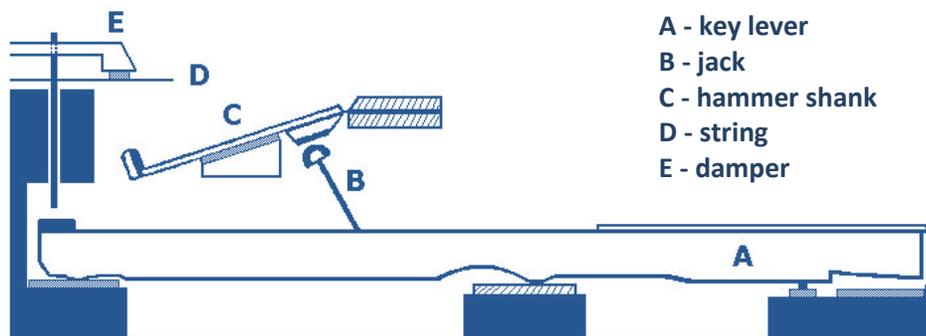


Figure 2, English single action

⁷ Cole, *Pianoforte in the Classical Era*, 52, 69.

John Geib's first contribution to the piano juggernaut was the invention and introduction of a spring-activated jack, hinged at the key lever and acting on an intermediate lever under the hammer. When set in motion, the end of the jack 'hops' off the lever butt with the key depressed, allowing the lever and the hammer to return to the rest point and thus preventing blocking. A piano so equipped is playable with controlled dynamics by even the most inexperienced student, and the rapid and finally universal adoption of the escapement, or English double action, is a testament to its usefulness. The pre-eminence of the piano was solidly established, and the harpsichord was quickly marginalized and then abandoned by the end of the century. There are few examples of such a rapid general adoption of a musical instrument like the piano, and equally rapid adoption of an improvement to the same. As the piano was priced in reach of even an average middle-class family, it led the explosive wave of domestic music-making across England and Europe in the late eighteenth century.

Attempts to part the curtain of obscurity surrounding Geib are thwarted by the loss of key evidence. The bankruptcy of Longman & Broderip in May 1795, a devastating fire in 1807 at the Tottenham Court Road premises under their successor Clementi & Company and subsequent fires in 1851, when the business was known as Collard and Collard, and in 1964, when it operated under the name Chappell, have wiped clean almost all records of the principal firm for which Geib built most of his instruments. As a hard-working expatriate craftsman in London, Geib had little need to document his work extensively, and we are left with only a few tantalizing scraps from which to reconstruct his early life. However, recent examinations of extant instruments and those documents that survive serve to shine enough light on Geib's life and work that we can hope to summon him from the footnotes and establish him as a builder of consequence in his own right.

While in London, Geib remained a major builder, hovering in the background and allowing Thomas Culliford to occupy the higher public profile, with Longman & Broderip to act as the primary marketing and sales voice. On their arrival in America, John Geib Sr. began advertising on his own, and these notices are available to us now. There was also personal correspondence that has survived, and physical examination of the piano and organs which can form a body of tangible evidence as to what Geib, along with his son John Jr., and later sons Adam and William was building and marketing. On assembling this information, a reasonably clear picture of this important piano maker comes into view and gives us insight into how the early builders rode the economic and physical challenges of their day. During a time when sudden bankruptcy could bring an immediate end to a builder's career and few family dynasties were established, the Geib family was in operation from the mid-1770s until sometime after 1870 for a full century of activity, an unusually long tenure. With many examples of their pianos still extant, Geib and his sons form a fascinating study.

Understanding the pianos that Geib was creating require us to gain some appreciation for the other builders during his time, the technical pressures that were in place to drive piano development, and the music they were required to reproduce. For that reason, sections of this book have been prepared to help the reader understand the environment that Geib was working in, and how the firm overcame, or failed to overcome them.



Figure 3, John Geib by John Wesley Jarvis, oil on canvas (76.2 × 63.5 cm), no date. Collection of The New York Historical Society, Acc. no. 1967.33. Used by permission

Johannes Lorenz Geib was born 27 February 1744 in Staudernheim, a municipality in what is now Bad Kreuznach in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate.⁸ He was the youngest of sixteen children (ten boys and six girls) born to Johann Adam Geib, whose second wife, Sophia Emmerich, was John's mother. His father was Schultheiss, the head of the municipality, responsible for tax collection and local government services. The Geibs were part of an extended clan of farmers and merchants in and around Staudernheim, and at least one other branch of the family would form an established firm of bell casters trading over the continent.⁹

Johann Lorenz and his next older brother, Johann Georg Geib, both went into the organ building trade and probably hoped to elevate themselves above the agrarian lifestyle of the village. Johann Georg remained in the Rhineland-Palatinate.¹⁰ Although he associated early in his career with the prominent Stumm family of builders, he appears to have operated independently as well. Several organs built by Johann Georg under his own name are still extant in France and Germany.¹¹

Johann Lorenz apparently spent his twenties in the Rhineland-Palatinate building organs and probably clavichords – organ builders often listed both items under their names, possibly with his brother. The date of his departure for London has until now been unknown, but an extraordinary letter that Geib wrote on 25 March 1783 to Benjamin Franklin casts useful light on Geib's early years. Geib sought a letter of introduction that he might use in immigrating to America. In this letter, he refers to his past just enough to allow some speculation about his training and his emigration to London. The letter below is offered unedited: spelling and grammar are Geib's own.

To The Right Honourable / F Frankling / Ambassador of America / at / Paris

London march 25th 1783.

Honourable Sir

I hope your honour will Excuss my Lieberty of Sending the Folowing. Ten years ago, I left my Nativ Country the Palatinate of the Reihn, in Germany, with indent to go to America, but while on a Eight years Trable in Germany and France, I heard of the great Arts in London, So I resolved to Stay a few years, for to improuve if possible in my arts, but while in that time the ware Brock out, also Oblidge to postbon my Jurney, and now all thoss Calamiteis at a end, and that in Favour of America, Wich Gives me the more encouragment, for to wish to be a member of Soch a happy Country, but while men in Genral are a frait to throst a stranger with a Capital work, Therefor I

⁸ Gildersleeve, *John Geib*, 7, 9.

⁹ Johann Christian Dressler, '*Das Geschlecht der Staudernheimer Geib in Bukowina*', in *Bukowina: Heimat von Gestern*, ed. Erwin Massier, Josef Talsky and B. C. Grigorowicz, second edition (Karlsruhe: Arbeitskreis Bukowina Heimatbuch, 1956), no page number.

¹⁰ For an image of an organ by Johann Georg Geib see the image at Partenheim evangelische Kirche <http://lenz-musik.de/Orgeln_im_Dekanat_Ingelheim/Orgel_Partenheim/orgel_partenheim.html> (10 August 2009).

¹¹ John Nisbet and Jürgen Rodeland, '*An Introduction to the Organbuilding Tradition of the Middle Rhine*', Organfocus.com <http://organfocus.com/members/oberlinger/middle_rhine.php3> (10 August 2009).

take the Lieberly, to Beg your honours Protection, and Recommatation, while I ame able to Shew and prouve any Gentelman your honour Should pleass to Send for inquiring, wat I have performt in this part of the world, wich I look opon but little, but enough to give Sadsifaction to every body. I found out Sence in London, that it takes op a long while before a man is Knowing in a Strange Country, without Recommendation, and happens often, that the best Artist are lost for vand of it, therefore I ame most a frait to unter take Soch a jurney with out it.

I take the lieberly to inform your honour, that ame acquindet with mainy a genius peopel in Germany, wich by the first Notice would folow me for my part, I have been Broad op a Or-gonbuilder; Harpsicord; grand and little Pianoforte maker, and made the Same Sence in London. Pedal Harps Imade on my own account, Sence hier with Great Sadsifaction, Eightteen Month ago I invendet a Flute with Sixty pipes, with a Stopd in treble with therty pipes, unter a little Pianoforte, with great Sadsifaction, and cane harly been Seen, without a person Knows Some thing of it. I do not account on this as eny thing worth while, but only wish for a opportunety to Shew my Selfes by eny thin of more Consequince. I cane prouve in the mean while Some Capitel houses in London, wich hade Severele time order for to Sent me to St. Petersburg, and I refews it on account of my former unter takeing, I Should be very happy to hear that them few Lines mat with a Favorable Reception. Sir I have the Honour to be your most humble Servant

J. Geib No. 23. upper mary Le bone Street the Corner of gorge Street ¹²

Importantly the letter establishes a date around 1773 for his departure from Staudernheim. As this letter is intended to impress Franklin sufficiently to obtain his recommendation and introduction to parties in America, some of its details of Geib's life at this time are probably exaggerated. However, his comments concerning the importance of recommendations and a good reputation later proved to be true. In a lengthy advertisement placed in *The Evening Post* in 1805, Geib discussed the damage that sneer and insinuation can do to a maker's career. He defended his skills and status by describing himself as the 'inventor of the first patent pianofortes in England ... sold in the name of Longman and Broderip' and includes a letter of recommendation from Abbe Vogler, then the Director of the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm and described at length in a chapter 4 of this book.¹³

By stating that he had travelled for eight years in Germany and France, Geib likely wanted to present himself as an independent gentleman. It is far more likely that he came to London by way of France and the journey was relatively short. A London made square piano bearing Geib's name on the name board and dated 1777 establishes him as living in the city by that date, and

¹² The letter is transcribed in full at The Franklin Papers at Yale <<http://franklinpapers.org/franklin/framedVolumes.jsp?tocvol=39>>, ed. Ellen R. Cohn et al. (15 August 2009). We thank Ellen Cohn of Yale University for providing a copy of this letter, courtesy of the American Philosophical Society, and for discussions on its interpretation..

¹³ *The Evening Post* (New York) 1103 (7 June 1805), 2. The authors are grateful to Michael Kassler for bringing this advertisement to their attention.

probably at least a year earlier if he were to have set up some form of shop. Whether or not he actually intended to travel to America, he states that he was in London and delayed his plans when war broke out in 1775/76. Thus he was in London as a resident by the mid-1770s. His description of being ‘brought up an organ builder’ is consistent with his opportunities as a young man and may suggest some family connection to such a business, though this is not established.

The letter is in a neat hand with relatively well-formed words, as might be expected from a man of means educated in Germany. His mastery of the English language was not mature and would only improve slightly later in his life, as later letters written in America are similar. Benjamin Franklin was the best-known American in Europe at the time, so writing to him in Paris would have seemed natural. That the letter is addressed to ‘F Frankling’ shows that Geib had a vague ‘phonetic’ idea of who Franklin was. The papers of the day would have carried the name spelled correctly and with the correct first initial. Franklin is not known to have responded to the letter, but he kept it among his papers.

Other information about the state of the piano industry at the time of Geib’s early career can be learned from this letter. The reference to St Petersburg implies that builders were being actively sought to promote a piano industry in Russia. Eight European artisans ultimately established themselves there between 1800 and 1810, and the industry there would grow substantially in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ A builder already in St Petersburg at the time of this letter, Johann Gabrahn, will be treated in more detail later in this chapter.

Geib’s description of the piano and organ combination, the ‘organized piano’, was of an instrument in vogue with both builders and the moneyed classes, and which he would later claim to have invented, though he made no effort to take out a patent to protect this invention if he was responsible. Prices ran from two to two and a half times those of a simple piano.¹⁵ Geib’s claim to have ‘invented’ them in mid-1781 must be taken in the context of surviving Zumpe pianos that were also organized and date to 1774 and 1778.¹⁶ It may well be that Geib independently conceived of adding an organ to a square piano but he was unlikely to have been the first to ever do so. In any case organized keyboard combinations with harpsichords are well known prior to the 1780s.

There are no known extant harpsichords or grand pianos by Geib, but an advertisement in *The World* of 1794 lists ‘three organized pianofortes, four grand pianofortes, two portable grand pianos and ten square pianos of various kinds’, indicating that at least some grand pianos were produced.¹⁷ On his establishment in London, Geib anglicized his name to John Lawrence Geib, the form that he would use for the rest of his life. On his letter of denization of 11 February 1792 he wrote his name as Johannes Geib, giving no middle name.¹⁸

¹⁴ Anne Swartz, ‘Technological Muses: Piano Builders in Russia, 1810–1881’, *Cahiers du monde russe* 43/1 (2002), 119–138.

¹⁵ Darcy Kuronen, ‘Where is the Princess’s Piano?’ *Newsletter of the American Musical Instrument Society* 35/1 (2006), 10, 11.

¹⁶ Terence Charlston ‘A Chronological Checklist of Claviorgans and References to Claviorgans’, *RCO Journal* 3 (New Series), 2009, pp. 24–41

¹⁷ *The World* (London) 2341 (Saturday, 28 June 1794), 4. Accessed through The British Library newspaper collections, available through Gale (April 2009).

¹⁸ The catalogue record for this item can be viewed at The National Archives online, UK, c97/1. <<http://nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/displaycataloguedetails.asp?CATLN=7&CATID=-541604>> (May 2008–August 2009). Denization was a process by which foreigners received certain rights of English citizens, including the right to hold land. It preceded processes of naturalization.

Several myths that have evolved about Geib's start in London are worth addressing. Warwick Cole has successfully dismissed the notion of 'Twelve Apostles', a supposed group of builders who arrived together from Germany to teach the British the art of piano building.¹⁹ The tale apparently originated in Edward Rimbault's history of the piano, written in 1860. As Rimbault wrote:

'At length, about the year 1760, many ingenious German mechanics left their country and came to England in search of employment as pianoforte-makers; this gave the instrument its first impetus. A party of twelve travelled hither in one company, and obtained, from this circumstance, the appellation of the 'twelve apostles'.'²⁰

Rimbault advanced many other theories and conjectures that would later be reprinted repeatedly as fact. Curiously, he does not immediately list Geib among the twelve apostles and in fact names no one specifically. Later historians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would seize on populating this list with possible candidates, including Geib, as either members or apprentices. The reality is that only Zumpe somewhat fits the timeline, and the other builders arrived over the following fourteen years.²¹ In any case Geib arrived on the scene after the square piano was well established, and extant early examples by him bear few innovations until 1786.

Another myth is that Geib went to work for Burkat Shudi. Michael Cole has uncovered enough of the inner workings of the Broadwood–Shudi firm to dispel this notion as well.²² Donald Boalch was the first to mention such a connection,²³ but on careful examination his references fail to link Geib to Shudi in any way. Broadwood never mentions Geib in any correspondence, and the 1777 piano establishes Geib as an early independent maker well before Broadwood made his first piano. All evidence points to Geib's arrival in London with means enough to be self-sufficient, beginning as an independent builder and selling into such markets and firms as presented themselves.

Although John Geib did not come from a family of instrument makers per se, he did instill the tradition into his own family. He married Rebecca Shrimpton on 20 August 1779.²⁴ Gildersleeve states that John and Rebecca would go on to have ten children, all born in London, of which eight²⁵ would survive to adulthood. The twin boys John Jr and Adam were born in 1780, George in 1782, Elizabeth in 1787, Mary Ann in 1790, Rebecca in 1792, William in 1793 and Sophia in 1794. The four boys all played a role in the keyboard instrument business in America following their immigration in 1797. It is also possible that Geib's daughters contributed to the

¹⁹ Warwick H. Cole, '*The Early Piano in Britain Reconsidered*', *Early Music* 14/4 (1986), 563–566.

²⁰ Edward F. Rimbault, '*The Pianoforte, Its Origin, Progress, and Construction*', (London: Robert Cocks, 1860), 131.

²¹ A more detailed discussion of the biographies of those whose names have been included among the mythical twelve apostles can be found in Michael Cole, '*The Twelve Apostles? An Inquiry into the Origins of the English Pianoforte*', *Early Keyboard Journal* 18 (2000), 9–52.

²² Michael Cole, '*Broadwood Square Pianos: Their Historical Context and Technical Development*', (Cheltenham: Tatchley, 2005), 14–15.

²³ Donald Boalch, '*Makers of the Harpsichord and Clavichord, 1440–1840*', (London: George Donald, 1956), 34.

²⁴ Gildersleeve, *John Geib*, 7.

²⁵ Gildersleeve was unaware of one girl, Rebecca, who died in 1814 and is mentioned later in this book.

business in some way. Although there is at present no evidence with respect to Geib, the wives and daughters of other instrument builders in London at this time are known to have assisted with the household economy in one way or another. Their roles included keeping accounts, making the delicate parts of organs and adding the overspun windings to piano strings.²⁶



Figure 4, Rebecca Geib, anonymous watercolour miniature on ivory (painted area, 10.2 × 7.9 cm), 1787. Cincinnati Art Museum, Acc. no. 1990.1853. Used by permission

A miniature of Rebecca made in 1787 with the infant Elizabeth is useful in establishing Geib's social standing at the time. Rebecca's portrait is done by a sophisticated but formally untrained artist and is an example of good-quality primitive art. Rebecca is dressed in the cap and gown of a solid middle-class lady and the chair is reportedly London made.²⁷ Such a miniature would have cost about £3 at the time, a luxury that a respectable merchant might have had made for his lady. It suggests that at this point Geib had reached a middling level of income but was by

²⁶ For an examination of the surviving evidence concerning women's roles in firms making musical instruments see Jenny Nex, *'Women in the Musical Instrument Trade in London, 1750–1810'*, in *Instrumental Music and the Industrial Revolution: International Conference Proceedings, Cremona, 1–3 July 2006*, ed. Roberto Illiano and Luca Sala (Bologna: Ut Orpheus, forthcoming [2009]).

²⁷ Julie Aronson and Marjorie Weiseman, *'Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum'*, (New Haven and London: Yale University, 2006), 164.

no means rich. It may have coincided with a significant improvement in the family finances thanks to the patent of 1786, to be discussed below.

At some point in the late 1770s or early 1780s Geib began his long and lucrative association with Longman & Broderip, the firm that emerged from Longman, Lukey & Broderip after Charles Lukey died in July 1776 at the relatively young age of 36.²⁸ The emergence of the firm as a distributor of instruments made under their name gave builders like Geib a clear set of options. One could build under one's own name or use the superior marketing and distributing power of a firm like Longman & Broderip to sell instruments across the continent. While the firm of Longman & Broderip owed its prosperity in part to the twenty to thirty per cent margin that it collected on the selling price,²⁹ a builder would have offset this loss through greater sales and lower cost of materials, thanks to the firm's superior connections and bulk buying power. A builder might have enjoyed nearly equal profits whether he built under his own name or that of Longman & Broderip.

In the 'putting-out system', a cover firm bought the raw materials and supplied them to independent builders, who would then be paid for their labour on the finished instrument.³⁰ Christopher Ganer, another prominent builder in the late 1770s, is well known to have built both under his own name and for Longman & Broderip, given a number of extant instruments with his signature and a Longman & Broderip inscription.³¹ Although no business relationship has been detected between Ganer and Geib, they were both German, lived within blocks of each other at times, obtained letters of denization together on the same day and were undoubtedly acquainted and likely friends. In any case, Geib would have had knowledge of opportunities as they came up.

As a transcript from the records of the Old Bailey in London makes clear, Geib attained semi-independence through the 'putting-out system'.³² In 1785, one Edward Johnson was tried for stealing silk from Geib. The transcript provides a window on Geib's view of his craft and his relationship to Longman. An excerpt is given below:

535. EDWARD JOHNSON was indicted for feloniously stealing, on the 28th of April last, fifty nine yards and a half of green silk, called Persian, value 50 s. the property of John Geib, privately in his shop.
JOHN GEIB sworn.

²⁸ Will of Charles Lukey, The National Archives (TNA): Public Records Office (PRO) PROB 10/2721, J-P, signed in February 1774 with a codicil dated 17 October 1775 and proven on 2 May 1777. Lukey's christening took place in Cornwall in 1740 and, assuming he was christened soon after his birth, he would have been thirty-six at the time of his death. International Genealogical Index, Cornwall, consulted at the Guildhall Library, London: 'Lukey, Charles of Charles Lukey & Grace christened 5 Nov 1740 Falmouth'.

²⁹ The figures assume that the discount given to high volume distributors was the equivalent of that given by Broadwood. Cole, *Broadwood Square Pianos*, 56.

³⁰ Jenny Nex and Lance Whitehead, '*Musical Instrument Making in Georgian London, 1753–1809: Evidence from the Proceedings of the Old Bailey and the Middlesex Sessions of the Peace*', *Eighteenth-Century Music* 2/2 (2005), 257. For further information about the 'putting-out system' see J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History 1550–1760* (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), 144.

³¹ The authors wish to thank Graham Gadd for providing information concerning these instruments (personal correspondence).

³² Proceedings of the Old Bailey <<http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>> (June to October 2008), reference number t17850511-14.

I am a mathematical instrument maker, I use green silk in my business, in the inside of my instruments, for my Piano fortes.

Do you keep an open shop? - No, I work for Mr. Longman and Co. Cheapside.

Then you do not sell green silk? - No, Sir.

Then you never sell green silk in your shop, or any thing of that sort? - I sell none at all.

How did you lose it? - I do not know, it was stole away privately from me, on the 29th of April, I had fifty-nine yards and a half.

And later in the trial:

CHARLES DRAKE sworn.

We serve Longman and Broderip with this silk that the prosecutor owns, it is the last piece we sold them, it was No. 29,999, this is a piece on the same stick that we served Longman and Broderip with; I have every reason to suppose it to be the same silk, but I cannot say.

Court to Geib. Did you receive that silk from Longman and Broderip? - Yes.

Do they furnish you with materials for making instruments? - Yes.

Then you are paid only for the workmanship? - Yes.

They sent in this piece of silk? - Yes.

As can be seen, John Geib was obtaining his materials directly from Longman & Broderip for the specific purpose of making instruments for them.

While his employment with Longman & Broderip might seem to imply that he was a simple journeyman labourer, this does not appear to be the case. His self-description as a mathematical instrument maker, not a musical instrument maker, suggests that he felt a certain need to emphasize his station. The term was not common among builders. Moreover, he consistently listed 'organ builder' as his trade on other official documents but although at least one church organ was known to have been commissioned and built during Geib's London period,³³ such activities would not have competed with the gross revenue from the grand and square pianos he was making. An article appearing in *The World* in 1794 and listing musical instruments made by Geib also lists a reflecting telescope.³⁴ Geib seems to have been reluctant simply to list himself among the ranks of those who cobbled away at 'tinker's kettles', as Voltaire described the square piano at the time,³⁵ though his claim to be a mathematical instrument maker is probably justified. He had good reason to think well of his achievements, for he approached his craft imaginatively. In 1786 Geib obtained patent number 1571 for

'An Intire New Improvement upon the Musical Instruments called the Pianoforte and Harpsichord, by which the same will become Perfect and Compleat Instruments of their Kind,

³³ John Ogasapian, '*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*', (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), 28-32.

³⁴ *The World* (London) 2341 (Saturday, 28 June 1794), 4. Accessed through Gale (April 2009).

³⁵ Voltaire reportedly remarked, 'Compared to the magnificent harpsichord, the piano forte is but a tinker's kettle, an iron mongers instrument'. Edwin M. Good, '*Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos*', second edition (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 65.

which hath never before been Discovered, and by which the same can be more Easily Tuned and Played upon, and which Improvement extends to each of such Instruments Equally alike.’

This remarkable patent actually covers three ideas: the introduction of a toothed buff stop to mute one of two strings in the compass, the escapement mechanism for which Geib would become known and, finally, the introduction of a harpsichord register into the grand piano, complete with plucking jacks.

The buff stop was already known and being used for some years prior to this patent, which does *not* cover a buff stop, as is often stated, but a very different type of una-corda feature. Geib gave this stop a dentil mould profile that allowed it, once engaged, to mute completely one of the two strings assigned to each note (one pad mutes the upper string of one pair and the lower string of another, so only 30 pads needed), to facilitate tuning and to create a new timbre by allowing one string to sound while the partially muted string provided only overtones. The relatively few examples of this found on surviving instruments today would indicate that, although Geib was optimistic, others found it less helpful or not to their liking. The harpsichord addition was intended to make the piano more flexible, yet no surviving English grand pianos have this feature.

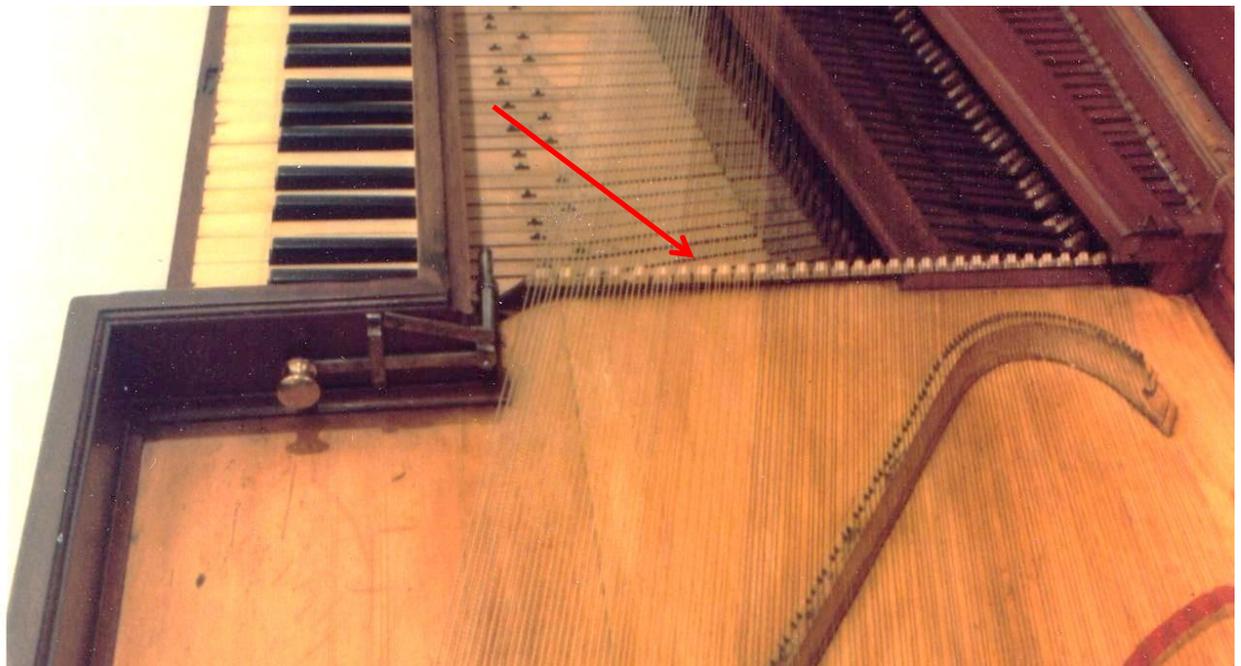


Figure 5, showing the hand lever to activate the ‘dentil mould’ una-corda feature on a 1786 Geib piano. When the lever knob is raised, the buff leather mutes one string of two pairs. Photo courtesy of Mr. David Hunt

However, the escapement was an important development and, following some simplification, it remained in use until English square pianos were no longer produced. Drawings and description are given in Appendix 1. It is important to note that Cristofori’s action, developed some eighty years earlier, worked according to a similar principle, but it is probable that neither Geib

nor the several cabinet heads who reviewed the patent had any knowledge of the earlier work.³⁶ In any case it was easily seen as a significant advance in the touch of the square piano, and, when brought to the attention of James Longman, the rights were quickly bought up and just as quickly implemented into the high quality pianos sold exclusively through Longman & Broderip's distribution network.³⁷

The patent application came at a time in which Geib's career and connections seem to have been growing. In November 1786 Geib took on an apprentice, Thomas Bates, for a term of seven years at a fee of £5.³⁸ As the usual rate for an apprentice to a well-established keyboard builder was between £25 and £50, this would represent a generous offer to young Bates. Probably the lad was known to the Geib family and this was as much a social as a business contract. A firm listing themselves on the nameboard and run under the name of Bates & Co. in 1793 (all known specimens date to that year) however is likely to be another individual. A Thomas Bates, organ builder, is known from the early 19th century but the connection is not established.

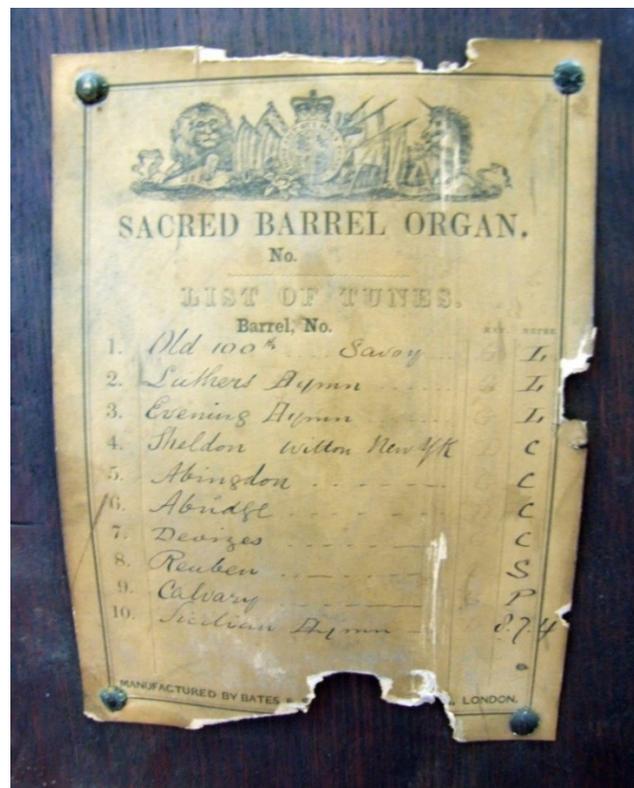


Figure 6, Bates and Son, Barrel Organ selection notice

³⁶ According to Clinkscale, Maffei first reported Cristofori's invention, the *gravicembalo col piano e forte*, in 1711. The earliest surviving example dates from 1720 and is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Martha Novak Clinkscale, *Makers of the Piano 1700–1820*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 80.

³⁷ Cole, *Pianoforte in the Classical Era*, 101–104.

³⁸ Paul Banks, Lance Whitehead and Jenny Nex, Royal College of Music, Centre for Performance History, London Music Trades 1750–1800 Person Records database <<http://lmt.rcm.ac.uk/search/Apprentice.aspx>> (6 August 2009), TNA: PRO IR 1/33 folio 65.



Figure 7, name board, John Geib square piano, 1777, Richard Reason, Piano Auctions, used by permission

Review of Instruments from Geib's London Period

A review of extant instruments around the world shows six known square pianos built and signed or stamped by Geib during his London period, nicely spanning most of his time in the city. The earliest is from 1777, a square piano on a trestle stand.³⁹ The dimensions of this piano and the style of build are nearly identical to those of the later square pianos of Zumpe and Buntebart then in vogue. Christopher Ganer was building square pianos at this time as well, and again, there is little difference among them. Even the cosmetic design varies little. If Geib were already building for Longman & Broderip, drawings and actual instruments to copy would have been readily available. Outside houses were used for lettering and decorating the name boards, with the builders supplying name and other information as desired.⁴⁰ Geib notably fails to list his address (6 Portland Street), though Zumpe had begun to do this with his first instruments and other

³⁹ This piano appeared in a Piano Auctions Ltd (London) auction in September 2005 and later sold to Professor Richard John.

⁴⁰ This practice is widely acknowledged to have been common among makers, but it has been difficult to find references in the historical record that would prove this beyond a doubt.

builders had followed suit.⁴¹ It was quite common for builders to use their dwellings or to build small spaces connected or adjacent to them into workshops, but possibly Geib had no permanent workshop of his own and used the workshops of others early on. This situation would change in his later years in London.



Figure 8, John Geib square piano. 1777, full view, courtesy of Prof. Richard John

An instrument built for Longman & Broderip surfaced in early 2008, signed by Geib and dated 1785. It is now in the Carolina Clavier Collection. As the signature is under the sound board, it is possible that other early Longman & Broderips that have not been thoroughly examined may be by Geib as well. A composite photograph of the signature can be found in Figure 9.⁴² The words ‘John Geib Feacit London 1785’ are written in a large and flowing hand with capitals exceeding five centimetres in height. Although Geib had been in London for about ten years, he still started to sign his first name as Johann but rounds off the ‘a’ and leaves ‘John’ with an ‘a’ leading into the ‘n’. The word *Fecit* is misspelled with an ‘a’ added. As this signature can be seen only when an electric light is inserted into the space, we must assume that the act of signing an instrument was a matter of some pride.

⁴¹ Geib’s address appears in an advertisement in *The Morning Post and Daily Advertiser* (London) 1658 (Thursday, 12 February 1778), 4. Accessed through Gale (April 2009).

⁴² The collage resulted from a need to insert a micro-camera into the mouse hole at close quarters, and then to assemble the resulting images to form a whole.



Figure 9, John Geib's signature, pencil inscription, 1785 piano. A known signature by Geib from 1785 is inset, lower left corner.

The 1785 square piano is built along the lines of a standard issue Longman & Broderip of the time, with the English single action similar to the improved Zumpe type, bi-chord throughout, five octaves from F^1 to f^3 , and a fancily veneered case and name board inlay. Restoration revealed only a few anomalous departures from the usual construction. The hammer hinges are numbered in Geib's hand, as are the usual wrest pin notes. The bridge, however, is also marked using the system of tonic sol-fa in the key of B major (B is denoted by a capital D for doh), from the lowest bass to the top of the treble. While this marking appears to be Geib's own and is in an ink very similar to the wrest pin marks, Geib does not appear to have marked later instruments in a similar fashion.



Figure 10, 1785 Longman & Broderip piano signed by John Geib, Tom Strange, Carolina Clavier Collection



Figure 11, name board for 1785 piano above. This is among the last name boards done up in ink on a wood name plaque, before the more familiar enamel oval cartouche became standard for Longman & Broderip.

A later instrument made for Longman & Broderip and documented by John Watson has a scalloped edged stamp with ‘J Geib / Londini’ in small letters on the wrest plank at the top of the treble pins.⁴³ This stamp can easily be seen.



Figure 12, “J, Geib / Londini” on wrest plank of piano L&B, SN 3801, courtesy John Watson

The probable date of this instrument, around 1796, coincides with the time that Longman and Broderip spent in Fleet Prison for bankruptcy. Although many primary and secondary sources incorrectly date the Longman & Broderip bankruptcy to 1798 or 1800, Jenny Nex and Lance Whitehead have shown that proceedings started as early as 23 May 1795. By November of that same year both partners were in prison, under whose jurisdiction they would remain for the better part of a year while the affairs of their rather vast business were sorted out.⁴⁴

The two known surviving instruments built under Geib’s name from the 1790s both have the double action, with the extra half octave in the treble, and a characteristic wide cantilever to the treble bridge to allow room for the top treble hammers to miss the soundboard while keeping the strings short, an obvious workaround to the William Southwell patent of 1794⁴⁵ who placed the additional half octave in such a way that the hammer come up through a slot cut in the sound

⁴³ This piano is owned by the National Parks Service, Manhattan Sites, New York, catalogue number 1413.

⁴⁴ Jenny Nex and Lance Whitehead, *Musical Instrument Making in Georgian London*, 251–271.

⁴⁵ See section on piano making in London, chapter two of this book.

board. Geib sharply cranks the key levers and lets the bridge cant over to produce the correct string length.



Figure 13, 5.5 octave square piano by John Geib, SN 3265, c1795. Private collection, UK



Figure 14, plan view of 5.5 octave square piano by John Geib, c1795



Figure 15, detail of cantilevered bridge from plan view in figure 14



Figure 16, Longman & Clementi 5.5 octave piano 1799, with William Southwell patented additional keyboard with hammers that strike through a slot in the sound board. Carolina Clavier Collection

In 1792 Geib brought out his second and last patent in London, number 1866, for a combination clavichord and piano which comprised two keyboards, the lower devoted to the piano action and the upper to a clavichord. This hybrid did not capture much attention, however. Not

only was the clavichord never very popular among British keyboard enthusiasts, but such a combination has little use in the repertoire from any period. It is presumed that the ability to create an ultra-pianissimo was the aim of this invention, but unlike the popular double action, this was a solution looking for a problem that did not exist.

A Possible Precedent to the Geib Double Action

There is a most remarkable organized piano at the Palace of Paul 1, Pavlovsk St Petersburg that has been carefully examined by Laurence Libin⁴⁶. This astonishing instrument is perhaps among the most richly decorated and conceived ever to be made, with mother of pearl covered naturals against tortoise shell accidentals, and elaborate marquetry throughout the casework. It has a maker's inscription on the soundboard 'Gabrahn / St Petersburg, Ano 1783', the 3 done in pencil like a violin label. It features an English double action with a somewhat advanced approach to the problem, like we see after the Geib patent had been in use for a couple of years but turned around to make assembly simpler (and adjustment tougher). Gabrahn apparently originated from Danzig, now modern Gdansk, and between 1772 and 1775 he migrated to St Petersburg where he appears in newspaper advertisements by 1775. He remained in St Petersburg for the rest of his life, coming to the attention of Clementi in 1803 while he was in St Petersburg, and who was impressed enough by his skill to offer him a job in London at his factory, which Gabrahn declined due to his advanced age.⁴⁷

The double action dating to 1783 is problematic of course. The piano has been cleaned (thoroughly), restored at a point in the past distant enough such that both brass and iron strings are broken now, but not so long ago that the brass has turned brown. Heavy dust on the bellows of the organ shows that it was not always so immaculate throughout. A pencilled-in date is easily changed, the provenance as reported by Libin is built around the date rather than otherwise, and while there is no doubt that the exquisite craftsmanship and materials choices we see were by a master for a palace, it is curious that a German/Polish builder from Gdansk suddenly not only started building English actions, but double ones at that. However, there is nothing that completely dismisses the date.

- The piano is 1.814 meters long, very large and on a plan that is like one of the large clavichords but deeper.
- the keyboard is cut with wide D tails, common in London by 1780s but uncommon though not unknown in German/Polish pianos, with makers Johann Marty (Konigsberg), Ignacy Skurski (Sandomierz), and Friedrich Kirchberg (Tilsit) using that approach. Konigsberg is only about 60 miles from Gdansk by boat.
- the stichmass (3 octave measurement) is 468 mm, small even for German keyboards but not by much (many are known at 470), but very small for English that are typically nearer to 490 mm.

⁴⁶ Laurence Libin "*Johann Gabrahn's Organized Piano in Context*", *Litterae Organi: Essays in Honor of Barbara Owen*, Ogasapian et al., OHS Press, 2005

⁴⁷ Michael Kassler "*The Music Trade in Georgian England*", David Rowland 'Clementi's Music Business'. page 153: 'In 1803 Clementi met the German organ builder Johann Gabrahn in St Petersburg and invited him to work for the company in London, but Gabrahn offered the excuse of being too old'.

- The balance rail is glued to the bottom boards in a typical German construction method.
- The lever dampers are fitted with brass springs like Dutch/French builders, it has front guided key levers, with three hand stops for damper/buff/una corda stops, the una corda stop actuated from the left key well. The una corda is engaged by bringing the action slightly forward, which was used only very rarely in London pianos of any time. It is quite different than the una corda that Geib described in the patent.
- The labelling of the notes at the tuning pins and layout of the pins is in a typically German style using 'H' for b natural.
- Hammers have a fixed check at the rear to prevent hammer bounce
- Exquisite materials are used throughout with a choice soundboard selection that speaks of lots of money to spend and a costal port to get things to.

The easy conclusion is that the piano was built by a German/Polish trained craftsman. Gabrahn is such a fellow and is very likely to have been the maker as claimed. Clementi was obviously very impressed by this man's skill and creativity. The uncommon element is to have a piano with an English action made by a German craftsman while still outside of London, Holland, or France. There are many squares made by German makers with a simplified flip mechanic usually without escapement, but even with escapement in some better examples. The escapement presents like the more developed form of Geib from 1788 onward, though the adjustment screw placement is reversed from the London approach.

Without the inscription on the soundboard we would say that this was made outside of London but influenced by having seen an English double action piano after perhaps 1788. The inscription is not without potential issues, as the all-important last digit is in pencil. Taken at face value we have a square piano with the first example of an escapement that has sprung up from a maker who would have no prior experience making English actions, fully developed, and also as it turns out, having the earliest known free reed organ attached. It is also the sole piano still extant by this builder and other examples do not exist to compare. Until more information can come forward we must leave it as a mystery. Possibly the need for an escapement mechanism was simply 'in the air' at the time, or Geib, who had been in contact with officials in St Petersburg at this same time may have learned of or communicated something to individuals there.

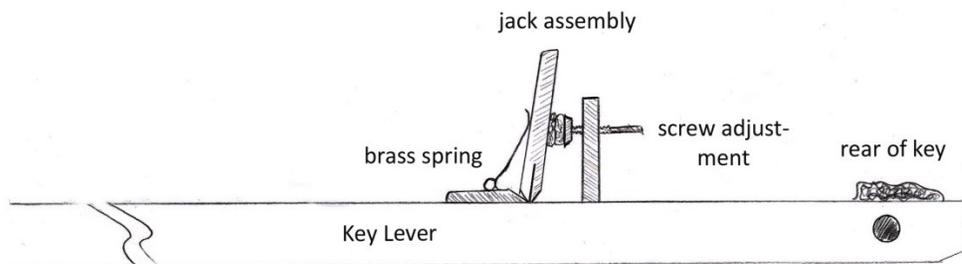


Figure 17, sketch of Gabrahn key lever with action. Compare this to Figure 29.

An Estimate of the size of Geib's Business

The size of Geib's business can be estimated from a few data points, such as surviving instruments, advertisements and public notices he printed, probable shop size based on the Sun Insurance Company records and, finally, the apparent state of his finances on his arrival in the United States. In a newspaper notice appearing in *The Spectator* (New York) on 19 March 1800 Geib declares his having manufactured 4,910 pianos, 400 organized pianos, and 'church and chamber organs in proportion' while in London.⁴⁸ The claim seems on first reading to be highly exaggerated, for the number of pianos alone approximates Longman & Broderip's total output of the instruments. His intention was to convince potential buyers of organs that he was equipped and experienced enough to handle a large work load. It is not unlikely however that Geib functioned as the chief supervisor of the piano making for many years, possibly from nearly the beginning of Longman & Broderip's manufacturing.

Thomas Culliford and Company has already been shown to have been a large builder for Longman & Broderip in London during this period.⁴⁹ Culliford was working on the premises of Longman & Broderip from at least 1779, and, through a series of moves and changes in partnership, he had expanded the operation so as to become one of the principal instrument builders in London by 1786. In attempting to estimate the size and capacity of a particular builder, it is sometimes useful to examine the amount for which the builder insured his property and stock-in-trade. While not all builders took out fire insurance policies, enough did so that comparing the amount of the policy to the number of extant instruments gives a reasonable proportional relationship.⁵⁰

Ongoing research into the records of the Sun Fire Office reveals insurance policies issued to Geib and Goldsworth (then a partner in the firm) from 1791 for £3,000 covering their collective stock and goods in trust as well as Geib's personal holdings.⁵¹

⁴⁸ John Geib, *The Spectator* (New York), 19 March 1800. As quoted and discussed in John Ogasapian, '*Organ Building in New York City: 1700–1900*', (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), 24.

⁴⁹ Jenny Nex, '*Culliford and Company: Keyboard Instrument Makers in Georgian London*', *Early Keyboard Journal* 22 (2004), 7–48.

⁵⁰ Lance Whitehead and Jenny Nex, '*Keyboard Instrument Building in London and the Sun Insurance Records, 1775–87*', *Early Music* 30/1 (2002), 5–25.

⁵¹ The authors are grateful to Dr Lance Whitehead for this information.

Insurance Policy No 579036, Guildhall Library (London) Ms 11936/373, pages unnumbered

[8 Jan^y 1791]

579036	John Geib at N ^o 6 in Southampton Place New Road \ & John Goldsworth Musical Instrument makers On their \ Utensils Stock & Goods in Trust in their Workshops & Warehouses in Longmans Timber Yard opposite the Chapel in Tottenham \ Court Road Brick not exceeding three thousand pounds — \	
£3.15.		
Xmas 1791	H Watts N Pearse C Bewicke	
Griffin		£3000 Duty £2.5.

Insurance Policy No 579037, Guildhall Library (London) Ms 11936/373, pages unnumbered

[8 Jan^y 1791]

579037	John Geib at N ^o 6 in Southampton Place New Road \ Musical Instrument Maker - On his household goods in his \ now dwelling House Brick situated as aforesaid not exceeding \ three hundred pounds — \	
10/	Wearing Apparel therein only not exceeding Two hundred pounds \	
Xmas 1791	N Pearse R Darrell W Hamilton	
Griffin	{see Somers Town}	300 200 Duty 7/6

Insurance Policy No 580005, Guildhall Library (London) Ms 11936/373, pages unnumbered

[5th Feb^r 1791]

580005	John Geib at N ^o 6 Southampton Place near the Turnpike \ in the New Road Islington Musical Instrument Maker On his \ dwelling House & Four Houses adjoining Brick N ^o 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 Private not \ exceeding Five hundred pounds on each — \	
£3-	On his five Coach Houses behind each House, in equal proportion not \ exceeding Five hundred pounds — \	
Lday 1792	J H Langston W T Astell H Watts	
£3.8.9	{see Somers Town}	2500 500 Duty £2.5. £2.11.6
Griffin		

Geib insured his essential business holdings for £3,000, his household goods for £500, his house and four other residences for £2,500 and, finally, the coach houses for an additional £500. This combines for a total insured value of £6,500. By contrast, John Broadwood, the most prominent individual competitor, insured his holdings for £5,000 total. Thomas Culliford and Company's policy of 1786 totals only £2,600 among the four partners. This level of insurance that Geib was paying for, nearly three times that of Culliford & Co., would not have been bought without good reason, and signals that by the early 1790s Geib's level of business had likely eclipsed even that of Culliford.

How many pianos did Geib produce in London then? From his arrival in London until the early 1780s Geib probably operated as a master builder with a journeyman joiner or two providing assistance for a fee. By 1787, however, he was in partnership with John Goldsworth, and the association lasted until 1793, when an announcement appeared in *The London Gazette* stating that from 30 March the business based on Tottenham Court Road would be run by John Geib on his own.⁵²

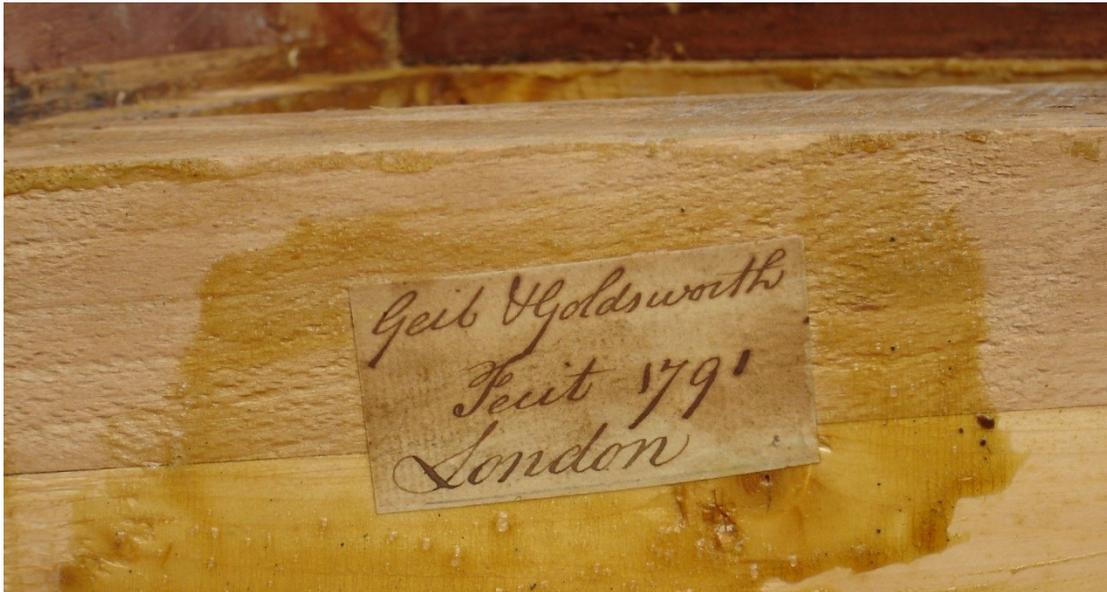


Figure 18, label found inside Geib and Goldsworth square piano, 1791. Photo by Michael Cole.

Goldsworth had been in partnership with Thomas Culliford, William Rolfe and Thomas Bradford, and Culliford is reported to have bought Goldsworth out in 1787 for slightly over £1,100.⁵³ As Culliford and company had just signed a contract in 1786 with Longman & Broderip to build instruments for a guaranteed rate of £5,000 per year (an equivalent of some 300 square pianos per year), partnership with Geib must have held enough attraction for him to make the switch. It is possible that Goldsworth concluded the value of this partnership was at a peak

⁵² Whitehead and Nex, *'Keyboard Instrument Building in London'*, 5–25. *The London Gazette* 13516 (2 April 1793), 5 <www.gazettes-online.co.uk> (18 August 2009).

⁵³ Nex, *'Culliford and Company'*, 7–48.

and decided to cash out in favour of continued profitability with Geib. In any case, surviving instruments, together with documentary evidence found in a legal disagreement between Longman & Broderip and Culliford & Co., indicate that Geib and Goldsworth continued to sell through Longman & Broderip, and, considering the size of the insurance policy, we are left to conclude that they were producing something on the order of several hundred pianos per annum at the height of their business.⁵⁴

Given these estimates, it is possible to assume that Geib's figure of over 5,000 pianos made during his time in London, while possibly exaggerated, is not out of the realm of possibility. It should be pointed out that Geib opened his own 'large Warehouse' at 27 London Street, off Tottenham Court Road, in 1793, from where he sold various types of pianos and organs. Interestingly, his advertisement in *The Times* notes that 'Attendance [is] given at the Warehouse, from 11 to 3 o'clock in the afternoon', giving us a glimpse into the working day of Geib's business.⁵⁵ Geib also posted notices in the London newspaper *The Morning Chronicle* in 1794 to inform the reader that he had 'Manufactured within these ten years three thousand piano fortes, about one hundred grand piano fortes, two hundred and upwards organized ditto, and sundry church and chamber organs, amongst which is that celebrated Stafford Organ, on which the celebrated Abbe Vogler, performed three years past, three days to a numerous audience'.⁵⁶ The piano illustrated in figures 13-15 and serial number 3265 from circa 1795 would at least indicate that Geib was assigning serial numbers in line with his claims. As we will see in later chapters, when he came to America he began numbering pianos where he left off in London and was never known for exaggerating numbers while in New York. We must take him at his word; Geib was in charge of the largest piano making operation in London in the eighteenth century until Broadwood eclipsed him in the late 1790s.

Geib's approach to the piano was not particularly distinctive in any way, with one possible exception. The carving of the bridge ends is a matter of some art and style, and makers tended to carve their bridges the same way throughout their career, and to convey this 'signature' to their apprentices and shop workers, such that bridges take on a uniformity in their look under a particular maker. Examining pianos known to have been made by Geib, we can see that particularly in the bass, Geib while in London employed an approach to the bass end that lifts the end of the soundboard as a slight cantilever, with a distinctive conical bore to the flared end, as shown in figure 19. Some L&B pianos have a bass end of the bridge that is cut rather more simply, without the bore. This indicates a different shop tradition, but no maker known quite fits the style seen here. When Geib set up in New York City to make pianos about 1802, the bridge end was much simplified, possibly at the initiative of his son John Jr. Nothing in this short diversion on construction conclusively ties Geib to a given subset of pianos, and we are left with his word that in some way (that was at least meaningful to him), he bore a responsibility for having manufactured most of the pianos for Longman & Broderip while the firm was trading under that name.

⁵⁴ TNA: PRO E112/1771/5631, Longman, Broderip & their assignees vs Culliford, Rolfe & Barrow, filed 5th November 1795. Culliford & Co claimed that Geib & Goldsworth imitated any improvements they made to their pianos and sold the instruments on to Longman & Broderip.

⁵⁵ *The Times* (London) 2839 (Friday, 22 November 1793), 1, accessed through Gale (August 2009).

⁵⁶ *The Morning Chronicle* (London), Wednesday, 29 January 1794, issue 7695, 4. Accessed through Gale (April 2009).

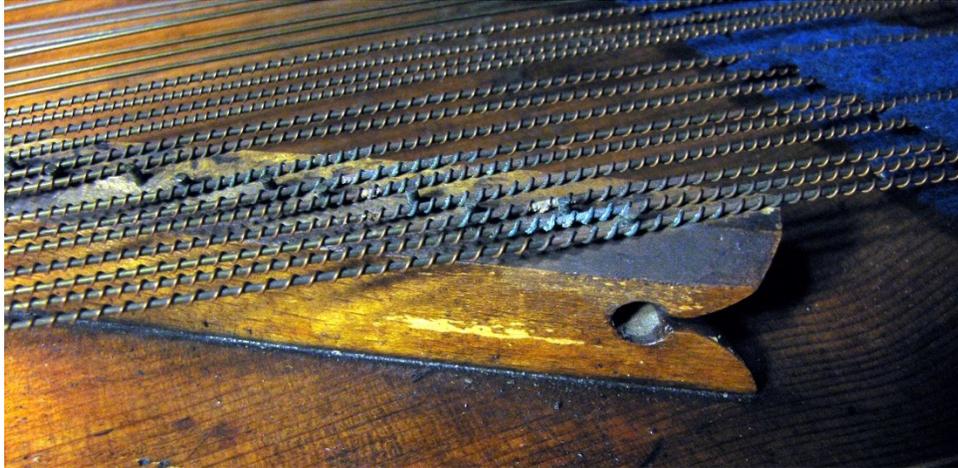


Figure 19, bass end of 1785 square piano bridge by John Geib, Carolina Clavier Collection



Figure 20, Longman & Broderip, Geib and Goldsworth, circa 1791, photo by Tim Harding



Figure 21, bass end of Longman & Broderip piano, circa 1791, SN 1926, without the conical bore. CCC

Unlike Culliford, Geib is not known to have been under contractual agreement to sell only to Longman & Broderip and could have sold to the public as opportunities permitted. Some square pianos were fitted with the organ addition (for which Geib's firm would have earned more for extra labour), and at least one church organ and other chamber organs were built, with the case of the St Mary's, Stafford organ surviving. The St Mary's organ dates to 1790 when John Geib installed it at a cost of £820. It was rebuilt in 1844 by John Banfield, and then Hill, Norman & Beard in 1974.⁵⁷



Figure 22, case of the great organ at St Mary, Stafford, UK. Photo Tom Strange

⁵⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_Mary's_Church,_Stafford accessed Jan 16, 2017



Figure 23, detail of the gilded angels on the St Mary organ, photo Tom Strange

It is also possible to estimate John Geib's income. One must remember that Geib entered into a further partnership with Ludwig Leukfeld, which lasted until February 1796, when Longman & Broderip were in the midst of their bankruptcy proceedings. The effects of this bankruptcy, coupled with the general recession and economic uncertainty resulting from the war with France, were keenly felt among instrument builders by 1796.⁵⁸ Indeed, a preliminary search of *The London Gazette*, where all businesses were required to announce insolvencies, bankruptcies or changes in their formal management arrangements, has shown that between 1751 and 1770 four musical instrument makers were declared bankrupt or imprisoned for debt. For the two decades between 1771 and 1790 this rose to fourteen and the figure more than doubled, to thirty, between 1791 and 1810.⁵⁹ Leukfeld is listed in the London city directory from 1790 to his death in 1810 and an article in *The Morning Chronicle* describes him as 'well known as one of the most eminent pianoforte-makers'.⁶⁰ Several instruments with his name are recorded. He was also supplying instruments to other firms and dealers who placed their names conspicuously on his pianos, so that it is necessary to also count some of those made for George Astor and Broderip and Wilkinson.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Paul Banks, Lance Whitehead and Jenny Nex, Royal College of Music, Centre for Performance History, London Music Trades 1750–1800 Person Records database. <<http://lmt.rcm.ac.uk/search/Apprentice.aspx>> (6 August 2009).

⁵⁹ *The London Gazette* 9020–17664 (Tuesday, 1 January 1751, to Saturday, 30 December 1820) <www.gazettes-online.co.uk> (May 2007 – August 2009).

⁶⁰ *The Morning Chronicle* (London) 13007 (Wednesday, 16 January 1811), 4. Accessed through Gale April 2009).

⁶¹ Indeed, as reported by Bozarth and Debenham, Leukfeld signed a seven-year agreement with Broderip & Wilkinson in 1801 to supply them exclusively with pianos at the rate of three per week. Leukfeld was not to make pianos for anyone else without their written agreement; they, in turn, would purchase these instruments from no other maker. The surviving evidence for this arrangement is found in a court case between the two parties which indicates that neither Leukfeld nor Broderip & Wilkinson was able to fulfil their obligations. The lawsuit and presumably the agreement closed with no further demands on either side. Interestingly, Leukfeld lists the sales he made of pianos to individuals and firms other than Broderip & Wilkinson, which amounted to thirty-

To calculate the possible income from a square piano, one can use Rosamond Harding's breakdown of the cost of a Broadwood cottage grand piano as a point of departure (see Appendix 2).⁶² If one calculates the approximate quantities of material needed for a small square piano, and if one assumes equivalent prices, it is possible to estimate the cost of material for a square piano at about £6. An invoice from Longman & Broderip dated 1792 places a value for a standard five-octave square piano without additional keys at £21, with a five per cent discount, leaving the cost at £20. Assuming that Longman & Broderip marked the cost of the instrument up about twenty-five per cent for profit, this would leave £10 for the builder.⁶³

This same conclusion can be reached by approaching the figure published by Harding from a different perspective. Harding shows that in 1828 the total cost to Broadwood for making a six and a half octave upright grand piano with columns was £70 3s 5d, while the sale price of such an instrument in the same year was 90 guineas (£94 10s). These figures include both materials and labour. The result is a thirty-five per cent profit at the point of sale. This is equivalent to Longman & Broderip's paying £5 for materials, £10 for labour and adding thirty-five per cent, making a sale price of between £20 and £21.⁶⁴ Given an output of 150–200 pianos per year at the height of operation, the shop might be expected to bring in over £2,000 per annum.⁶⁵ While much of this income was needed to pay workers, the business was bringing in several hundred pounds for each partner annually. By way of comparison, at the beginning of their partnership Broderip earned about £136 per year while Longman, with a three-quarter share in the business, drew over £409 each year.⁶⁶ This compares favourably with regular tradesmen, who earned about £40; army officers, up to about £100; and lawyers, who earned about £200. The more successful manufacturers and tradesmen in London are reported to have earned between £200 and £600 per year.⁶⁷

The Sun Fire Insurance policy for Geib's home included above lists four additional adjacent houses, making up the block of houses from Nos 2-6 Southampton Place. As these were full

three in 1802, fifty-one in 1803, ninety-eight in 1804 and one hundred and thirty-seven in 1805. Banks, Whitehead and Nex, London Music Trades 1750–1800 Person Records database, TNA: PRO C13/2415/7, 1806. See George S. Bozarth and Margaret Debenham, 'Piano Wars: The Legal Machinations of London Pianoforte Makers, 1795–1806', *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 42 (2009), 75–79 and appendix 6. For a more complete view of Leukfield's operation see Michael Kasse, "The Music Trade in Georgian England", chapter 2 "Broderip & Wilkinson", pg. 102-105

⁶² Rosamond E. M. Harding, *The Piano-Forte, Its History Traced to the Great Exhibition of 1851*, revised edition (London: Heckscher, 1978), 394–396.

⁶³ This figure is suggested by Michael Cole based on the mark-up on square pianos by Broadwood. Cole, *Broadwood Square Pianos*, 56.

⁶⁴ Harding, *The Piano-Forte*, 395–396

⁶⁵ The estimation: 150 pianos per year at £10 each paid by Longman & Broderip would have yielded Geib £1,500. An additional fifty pianos per year sold into other shops or under Geib's name would have added no less than £500 to his income. At least two organs were known to have been built in London and these were sold for about £300 each, of which about a half or two thirds was profit. Averaged over the twelve years between 1785 and 1797, these calculations yield £25–£30 per year. Pedal harps and sheet music were obviously sold as well.

⁶⁶ Banks, Whitehead and Nex, London Music Trades 1750–1800 Person Records database, TNA: PRO C12/178/48, Smith v Longman, 1791.

⁶⁷ Liza Picard, *Dr Johnson's London*, (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), 55. These figures are based on Joseph Massie's statistics of average family incomes, compiled in 1759.

houses with individual carriage houses in the rear, they were almost certainly rental properties whose income would have augmented that of the principle business.

In addition, James Longman paid Geib for the patent of the double action shortly after it was issued.⁶⁸ It was a seminal moment for Longman & Broderip. While piano sales were beginning to boom in any case, the advantage of touch on the Longman & Broderip instruments elevated them beyond the commonplace. No records of this transaction between Geib and Longman remain, so the amount paid to Geib is hard to judge. It is likely that Longman bought the rights up front (as opposed to paying out a royalty per piano, as Southwell negotiated in 1794 with John Longman), and we are left to speculate on an amount, but it was probably in excess of £200, given what we now can surmise of Geib's business size. Indeed, when Longman made a similar arrangement with William Southwell in 1794, Southwell was contracted to receive £100 in a lump sum with subsequent payments of half a guinea (10s 6d) for each instrument sold that included the patented features.⁶⁹

There are other indications of Geib's relative wealth. In his brief genealogy, Alger Gildersleeve states that the youngest daughter Sophia recalled a great pile of golden guineas on the table in London, and he goes on to suggest that \$25,000 (around £5,000 at the exchange rate of the time) was invested in land between Vesey and Canal streets in Manhattan in the years following Geib's establishment in New York. The tax record for ward five of Manhattan described by Gildersleeve shows a property in Geib's name that exactly fits this description at Leonard and Gardner streets: a house and shop plus two lots, with a total taxable value of \$2,700.⁷⁰ Family lore may have inflated the \$2,500 to \$25,000, but evidence of the remaining investment would turn up when the family sold the land in 1814/15. It is clear from the earliest records of his business in New York that he was established on North Street (now the easternmost end of Houston Street) in the Bowery from 1798 until 1805, when the entire family moved to Leonard Street, with no other tax records in the Geib name for other land in the lower Manhattan area.⁷¹

As to instruments built under his own name or mark, another incident recorded at the Old Bailey appears to shed some light. On 19 February 1796 one John Bates removed a used but almost new square piano from Longman's warehouse and proceeded to sell it to a Mr Turner. David Davis was superintendent of the warehouse and had reported the loss of a square piano which was subsequently discovered at Turner's house in Bond Street. Davis was questioned as to whether it could have been sold from the warehouse, to which he responded 'I don't recollect selling one for these three months; it is what we call a short two stop; a shorter instrument than we generally make, and one stop less; we only make them for orders'. When Mr Gurney asked of Davis 'Is that piano forte of the make of Longman and Broderip?', he replied '*It is; there was originally a number upon it; there is part of it now remaining; it appears to me to be a seven*', and when asked to '*Look at that piano-forte, and see if it is made by Gib. [sic]*', Davis confirmed

⁶⁸ Cole, '*Pianoforte in the Classical Era*', 101–104.

⁶⁹ Banks, Whitehead and Nex, London Music Trades 1750–1800 Person Records database, TNA: PRO C13/29/34, 1802. This transaction is discussed in detail in Bozarth and Debenham, '*Piano Wars*', 59.

⁷⁰ New York City Department of Records, Municipal Archives, Assessed Valuation Record, Ward 5, New York, 1808, 49. We thank Kenneth Cobb of the Municipal Archives, New York, for conducting the tax search and providing a copy of the record.

⁷¹ Mabel Almy Howe, '*Music Publishers in New York City before 1850*', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 21/9 (1917)

'Yes, it is'.⁷² Figure 13 shows a similar instrument that we have already referred to and Geib's stamp visible on the wrest plank. After the collapse of Longman & Broderip, Geib would have been free to continue making and selling instruments under his own name, as he was well established and had no other competing obligations.

Geib was an above average, enterprising and entrepreneurial craftsman in late eighteenth-century London offering a well-defined product and taking advantage of such opportunities as might arise, including selling on his own. After the collapse of Longman & Broderip, business conditions for pianos makers in London less favourable. William Rolfe bought out the partnership with Thomas Culliford and Charles Barrow Sept. 29, 1797⁷³ and began selling under his own name, while Culliford and Barrow became bankrupt 13 November 1798. For Geib, against all this uncertainty, the allure of America must have been irresistible. Geib sailed for the United States in August 1797 with plans to establish an organ-building enterprise in the New World and was never to return to London.

Appendix to Chapter 1

The drawings for Geib's patent number 1571 were redone by Malby and Sons and printed in 1856 during the modernization of the patent office, and only these reproductions exist. It is reported that copperplates of original patents exist in collections and archives, but patent 1571 has not surfaced to date. The prints of 1856 are in generally poor condition and attempts to reduce them to a size suitable for publication results in unreadable lettering in places. For clarity they have been redrawn here with computer assistance into a scaled drawing. Pains have been taken to reproduce the original as far as possible, but details such as the style of shading of course differ from the 1856 version. It is not known how many liberties were taken when the drawings were remade, but comparisons of existing copperplates to their redrawn counterparts by the author would suggest some degree of variability between draftsmen. The reader should note that the drawing of the escapement at the top of Figure 25 represents the jack and intermediate lever only. As in the original illustration, the hammer itself is not shown.

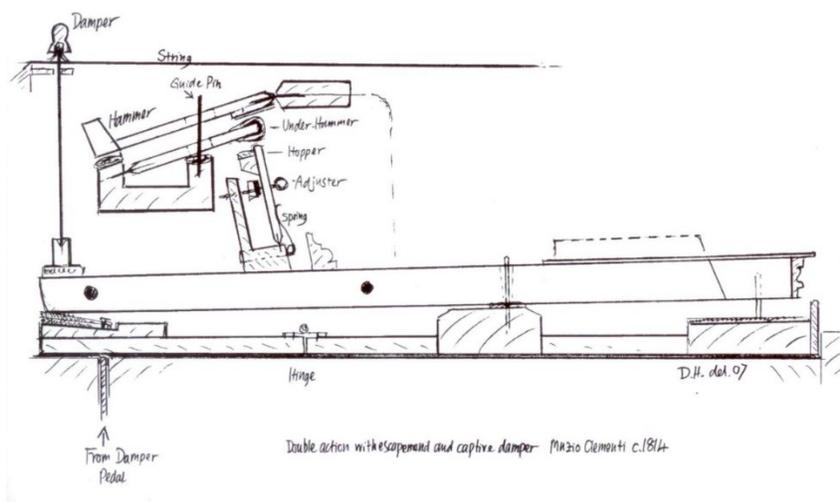
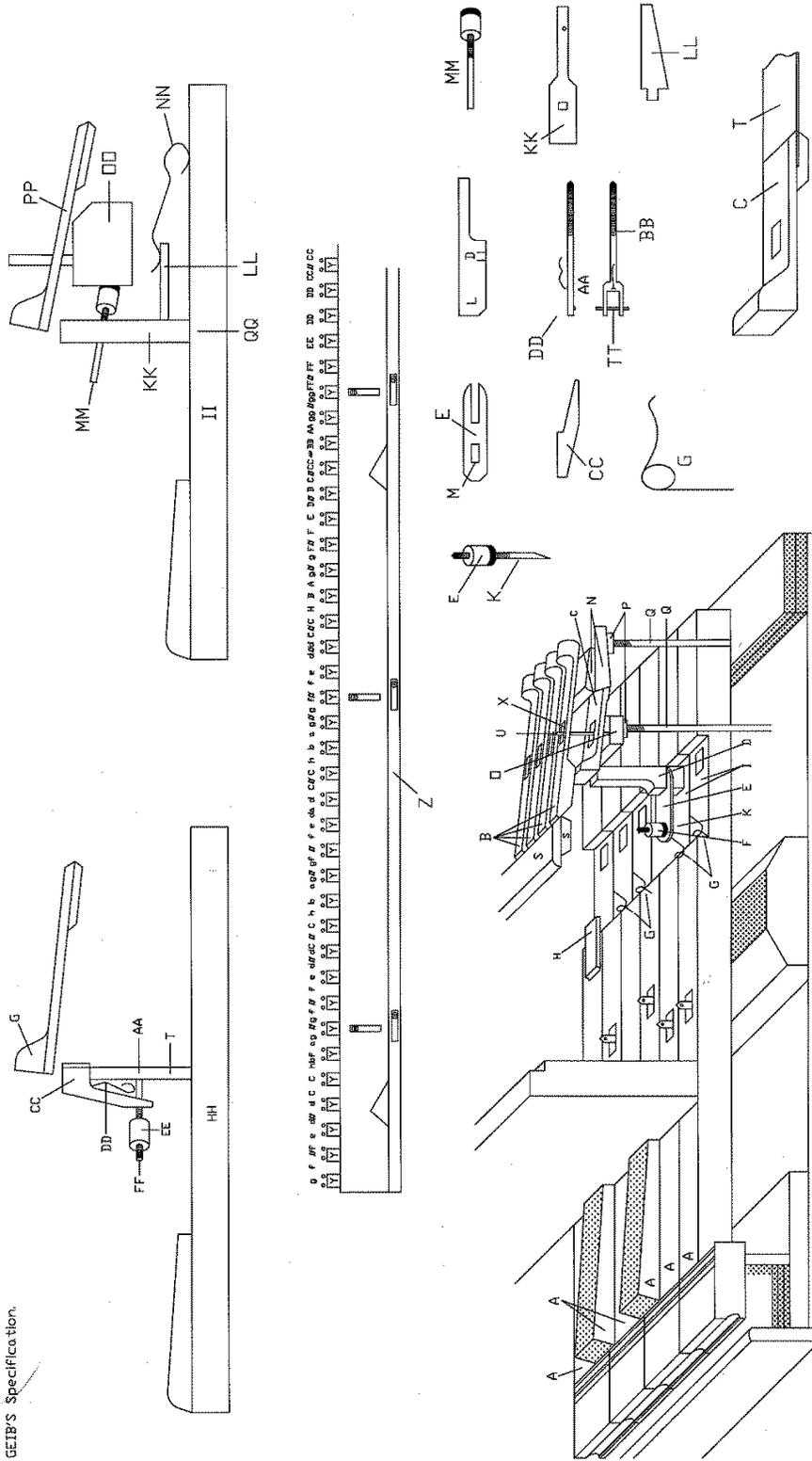


Figure 24, Geib double action as used by Clementi & Co. after 1799, drawing by David Hackett

⁷² Proceedings of the Old Bailey <<http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/>> (June to October 2008), reference number t17960406-85.

⁷³ London Gazette, 21 Oct. 1797, issue 14057

A.D. 1786, Nov 9 No. 1571
 GEIB'S Specification



A Plan of the new Improvement upon the Piano Forte

Figure 25, re-drawn by Troy McCurry from Malby & Sons plate

The written description of the patent reads as follows:

In this Plan [Figure 25] there are only six keys each of which are respectively mark'd A. But in the Instrument itself there may be sixty one keys and which may be increased or decreased at pleasure and the new improvement will be serviceable in all such keys.

B. B. B. B. & B. are Hammers which are usually made in these kinds of Instruments. C. D. E. F. G. G. G. G. H. I. I. I. I. I. I. K. L. M. N. N. O. P. P. Q. Q. and X. are different examples of the new Improvement. C. is a little lever which lies under each Hammer, the shape whereof is shewn in the Plan. U. is a Brass Pin which goes through the hole marked X. in the Hammers and through the hole in the aforesaid Lever. O. is a little Bar where such Lever rests upon and goes across the keys from the treble to the bass, the whereof is shewn in the Plan. N. & N. are two small Bars which also go across the keys from the treble to the bass and where the Hammers rest upon the shape whereof is also shewn in the plan. Q. & Q. are brass or Iron Pillars cut with a screw on each end, the bottoms whereof are screwed into the Key frame and the tops whereof are screwed into the aforesaid Bars mark'd O. N. & N. for the purpose of regulating them in a proper Line with the Brass nuts marked P. and P.

D. and E. is the Jack which is fastened with a bit of Iron wire to the size marked L. in the holes of the Keys and which are respectively mark'd I.

G. G. G. & G. are Springs made of wire to move the Jack backwards and forwards in its motions. F. is a round little button made of Sole Leather with a Brass pin through the middle of it (the shape of which pin is marked K.) and it is screwed on the top and knocked through a little hole mark'd M. into the keys for the purpose of regulating the Jack. In turning this Leather it regulates the Jack. H. is a little cap the shape whereof is also shewn in the plan and it is glued upon the keys over the aforesaid Springs for the purpose of preserving them from injury.

T. is the little bit of Skin one end whereof is glued into one end of the aforesaid Lever, and the other end thereof is glued upon one end of the aforesaid Bars marked N. and N. and such Skin is cover'd with the other of such last mentioned Bars and it is screwed down in different parts thereof.

R. is another part of the new Improvement and is a buff stop screwed to the end of the Belly board across under the Strings in the treble – Each of the places mark'd Y. is a square little bit of Buff Leather glued on the top of such Buff stop under each two strings. Z. is a part of the said Buff Stop and in moving such part towards the front it lifts up such Buff Stop and brings the Leathers mark'd Y. close to the Strings which stop the sound of one string in each note for the more easy Tuning and playing upon the instrument.

H. H. is a key which presents itself with a Jack upon a different principle and A. A. C. C. D. D. E. E. F. F. and G. G. represent such principle. A. A. is a piece of Wood or Brass which is cut with a screw on the bottom and screws in all the keys. C. C. is a

small bit of Wood the shape whereof is shewn in the Plan and it may be called a Tongue it is fixed on the top of A. A. with a little pin the Shape whereof is also shewn in the plan.

D. D. is a little spring which moves C. C. backwards and forwards in its actions. E. E. is a round little Button made of Sole Leather – F. F. is a Brass or Iron wire which goes through the middle of E. E. and also through one end of C. C. into A. A. where it is fastened in order to turn the button E. E. backwards and forwards and which regulates C. C. to its proper place. G. G. Is a leaver of the same shape as that of C. C. before mentioned.

A. A. C. C. D. D. E. E. F. F. and G. G. represent the side view only of the aforesaid principle and A. A. B. B. and D. D. represent the front view thereof. A. A. shews how the Spring mark'd D. D. is fastened and how it is cut with the screw and T. T. shews the thickness of C. C.

I. I. is another Key which also presents itself with another Jack upon different principles and K. K. L. L. M. M. N. N. O. O. P. P. and Q. Q. represent such last mentioned principle and the said last mentioned principle shews itself by side and front views. K. K. is an upright Jack and is made of wood, brass or iron. L. L. is a little bit of wood and is tenant to the back of K. K. for the Spring mark'd N. N. to rest upon.

N. N. the Spring is made of Brass or Iron Wire and acts upon L. L. as before mentioned in order to Bring K. K. backwards and forwards in its motions. M. M. is a piece of round wire and goes across K. K. on the end of which is also a round little button made of Sole Leather which rests against a bar mark'd O. O. and such Bar goes across the keys from the treble to the bass and in turning M. M. back either to the left or right it regulates K. K. into its proper place. Q. Q. is a place where a pin is put across the keys through K. K.

P. P. is a lever like C. C. as before mentioned and is also fastened with a bit of skin as before also mentioned.

*In this Plan [figure 26] there are only Five Keys which are respectively mark'd **A.** but in the instrument itself they may be sixty one keys and which may increased or decreased at pleasure. The new improvement will be serviceable in all such keys. **B. C. D. E. F. G. H. I. K. N. O. and P.** are different parts of the new Improvement.*

***B.** is the hammer. **C.** is the Lever. **D.** and **E.** is the Jack. **F.** is a round little button made of Sole Leather and **G.** is a spring made of wire to move the Jack backwards and forwards in its motions all of which are the same as described upon the upper part thereof. **H.** is a pin which goes across the keys in the Jack and the Jack is loose in that pin in order that it may have its own motion. **I.** is a socket to keep the Jack in a perpendicular line. **K.** is an under Bar which goes across the key from the treble to the bass the shape whereof is shewn in the plan. **Q.** is a brass pin which goes through the aforesaid Hammer and also through a hole in the aforesaid Lever into the aforesaid Bar mark'd **K.** through the holes mark'd **R.** and **R.** in the same manner as described on the upper part thereof. **P.** is two Bars where the aforesaid Hammer is hinged on with a bit of thin Leather and goes across the keys from the treble to the bass. **N.** is the rest piece. **O.** is a piece of iron which goes across under the rest piece to strengthen it. **L.** is a harpsichord Jack and **M.** is a damper and the several shapes of the said several particulars are shewn in the plan.*

At least two pianos and probably many more were made under the above patent for Longman & Broderip in 1787. They use the mechanisms in Plan 1 very nearly as drawn and is shown in Figures 27 & 28. It can be readily seen that this is a fairly difficult way to accomplish the task of mounting a moving jack, involving a complex mortise in the key lever itself and two moving hinges. About a year after this design came out a modified approach was apparently adopted, and it was this modified action that would become nearly universal. No mortise is needed in the key lever body, the two wire hinges are reduced to a single vellum strip and, no longer needing a relief cut, the escapement is simply glued to the solid top of the key-lever.

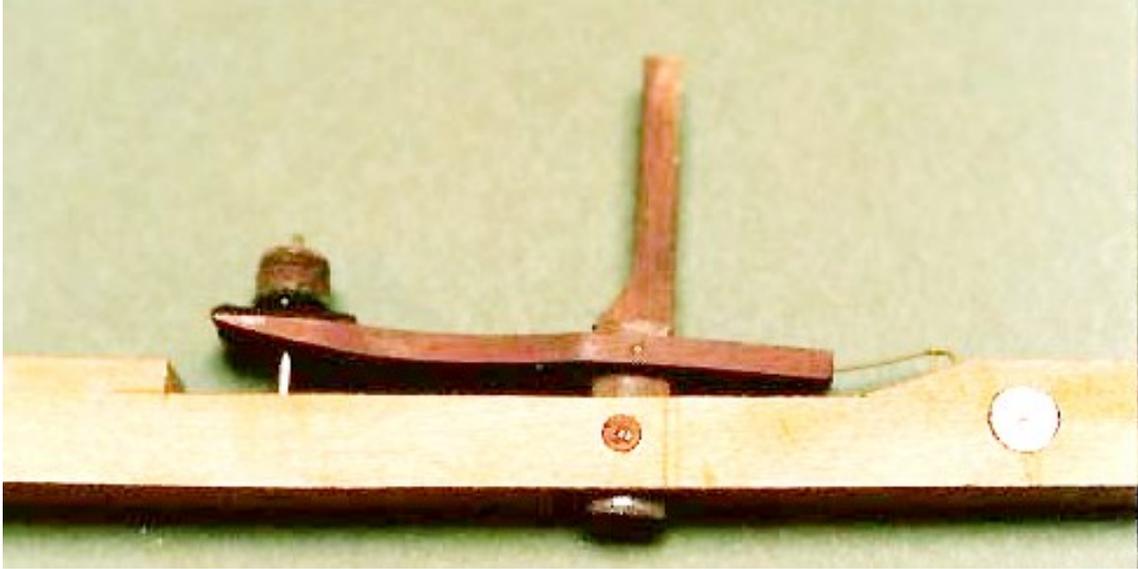


Figure 27, embodiment of the Geib double action jack as shown in the main drawing (figure 25 & 26) on a Longman & Broderip piano circa 1787, photo David Hunt



Figure 28, alternate jack arrangement as shown in the patent drawing figure 25, upper left section. Photo Robert and Andy Durand

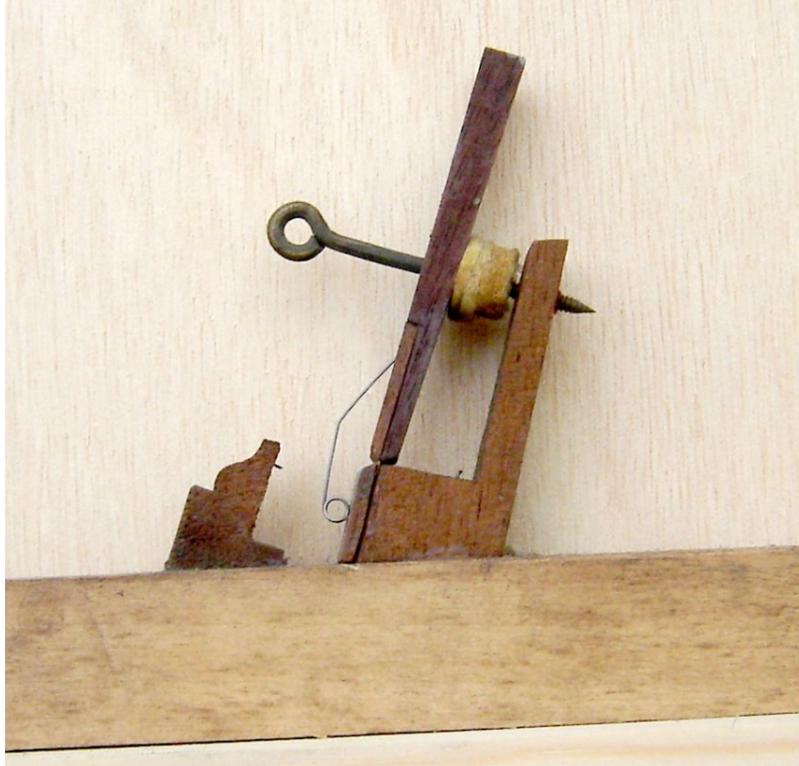


Figure 29, Longman & Broderip piano, circa 1790 configuration. Carolina Clavier Collection

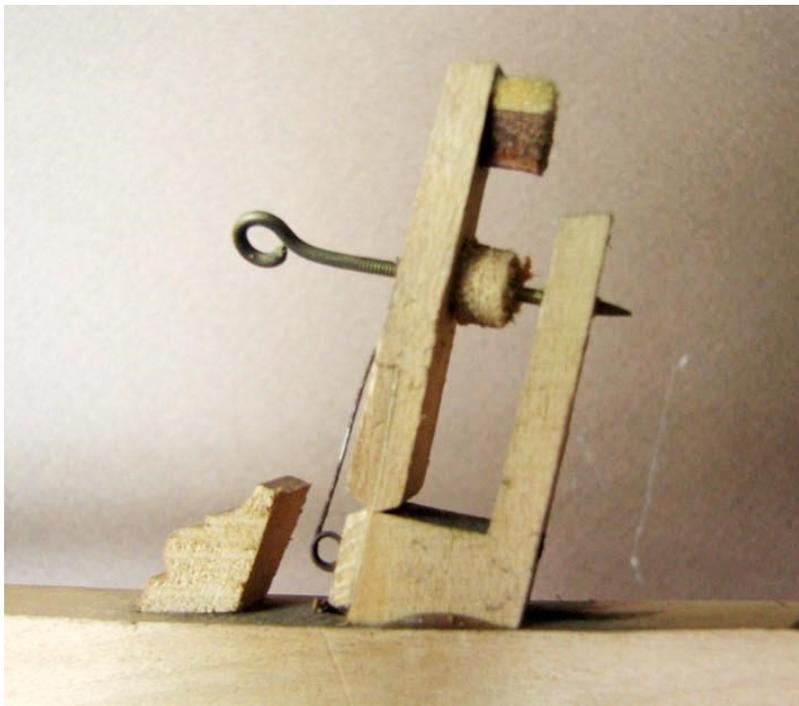


Figure 30, Longman & Clementi, 1799 configuration. Pianos with a configuration based on this final design would remain in use until after 1850 in America and formed the basis of all actions made by the Geib firm for square pianos. Carolina Clavier Collection

Appendix to Chapter 1, no. 2

	£	s	d
9 feet of 1 inch mahogany at 1s, 3d per foot (case)		11	3
5 feet of 1.5 inch oak* at 5d per foot (case spine)	2	1	
12 feet of ½ inch mahogany at 9d per foot (lid)	9	0	
3 feet of 1.5 inch mahogany at 1s, 9d per foot (stand)	5	3	
6 feet of 1.25 inch mahogany at 1s, 6d per foot (stand)	9	0	
24 feet of 1.5 inch pine at 4d per foot (base)		8	0
5 feet of 2 inch pine at 5d per foot. (brace and sides)		2	1
3 feet of 1.5 inch deal at 3 1/2 d per foot (core)	0	11	
3 feet of 2 inch beech at 8d per foot.		2	0
3 leaves of belly wood at 1s, 4d per leaf	4	0	
12 feet of mahogany veneer at 8d per foot		8	0
3 feet of lime wood veneer at 7d per foot	1	9	
Bed screws			4
Ivory for piano keys		16	0
Set of sharps and cloth	3	0	
Leather and cloth for hammers	16	0	
Hammer frames	3	0	
Key Frame		3	3
Brass and screws		5	6
Strings		6	0
Wrest pins		6	0
Key pins		2	0
Bridge pins, brass and iron		4	3
Glue and etc		2	0
Hardware and etc		10	0
Total	6	7	8

Quantities are given in board-feet, or 12 inch x 12 inch x 1 inch. As the exact quantity of each item cannot be determined with any precision, these figures can only provide an approximation of the material cost of a fortepiano.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Harding, *The Piano-Forte*, 395–396

Chapter 2

A Short Survey of Piano Making in London 1766 -1800



Figure 31, Zumpe square piano, 1766, Andrew Garlick Collection

The era of the piano was ushered into the world in a meaningful way during the 1760s, when the introduction of the square piano began to take the concept of such an instrument from the academic and obscure to a common household item, played by fashionable young ladies and gentlemen, and in need of an inexhaustible source of music suitable for the instrument and the amateur. From accounts of the period including Charles Burney:

“...all the harpsichord makers tried their mechanical powers at piano-fortes; but their first attempts were always on the large size, till Zumpe, a German who had worked under Tschudi, constructed small piano-fortes of the shape and size of the virginal, of which the tone was very sweet, and the touch, with a little use, equal to any degree of rapidity. These, from their low price, and the convenience of their form, as well as their power of expression, suddenly grew into such favor, that there was scarcely a house in the kingdom where a keyed instrument has ever had admission, but was supplied with one of Zumpe’s piano-fortes for which there was nearly as much call in France as in England. In short, he could not make them fast enough to gratify the craving public. Pohlman, whose instruments were very inferior in tone, fabricated an almost infinite number for such as Zumpe was unable to supply”⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Rees (ed.) *Cyclopaedia* s.v. ‘Harpsichord’

While Burney's encomium for Zumpe and poor review for Pohlman were subjective and probably not always true, it was clear that Zumpe had hit on a major innovation. Zumpe may have already been acquainted with J.C. Bach, who had arrived to be the music master of young queen Charlotte, when he was selling English guitars to the royal court. In any case he would soon meet and partner with Gabriel Buntebart who had been a close associate of Bach at the royal court in Mecklenburg from which both had come, and Buntebart became Zumpe's partner by 1768, and may have been involved with the piano from the beginning.

Zumpe broke with a tradition among keyboard makers with his first pianos of 1766 – he placed not only his name and the city but his business address (Princes Street, Hanover Square) on the name board. This was unprecedented, and as Michael Cole points out in his splendid work⁷⁶, it served as Zumpe's only form of advertisement for the fourteen years he produced pianos. Every major maker and most minor makers followed suite with this tradition, allowing us to trace the movements of makers and their manufacturing locations in London.



Figure 32, late Zumpe square piano, Tom Strange, Carolina Clavier Collection

While it is convenient to think of John Zumpe as some magical genius who brought the piano forward in such a convincing way that it immediately sprang to life in London, this is not really the case. The concept of the piano was clearly 'in the air' and between 1740 and 1767 Roger Plenius (1696–1774) and Frederick Neubauer (ca.1705? – 74) enjoyed some level of success building, as Burney claimed, 'always on the large size'. However, a third builder, in a minor

⁷⁶ Michael Cole, *The Pianoforte in the Classical Era*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pg. 60 - 63

way, and with at least one instrument extant, was Herman Bernard Vietor.⁷⁷ Vietor was an organist who struggled to improve his position and make a living, mostly as an organist at St George's Lutheran Church, Allie Street, Whitechapel since at least 1764, but had entered on instrument making by 1766 with a notice in the Public Advertiser:

“...now finished two of his invented Musical Instruments call'd COELESTIN de AMOUR, (or as others will call it, Piano ex Forte), with two Stops and four Variations in a small Compass, which are reckoned to be the sweetest Instruments at this Time, and will stand longer in Ton[sic] than any other...”⁷⁸

In 1768 Vietor further posts a notice that:

“To the virtuess (sic) and admirers of music. To be disposed of at reasonable prices. A fine toned upright harpsichord of four stops in mahogany case with four front doors. A neat and well toned perfect David's Harp with seven pedals. A strong double bass with wheel machines of four strings. A tenor of Jacobus Stainer and two Cremonian of Nicolaus Amaticy, (Nicolaus Amati) of 1664 and 1675. To be seen at Organist Vietor's in Porter-Street, Newport Market, St. Ann's Soho, who continues to sell Forte Pianos in different sizes and constructions of which he is the sole inventor, and has had the honour to sell a great many of them within these seven years to the great part of the Nobility and gentry in these kingdoms”.⁷⁹

What we have is Vietor essentially describing an early square piano at least contemporary with Zumpe and possibly anticipating him, perhaps having such an instrument as early as 1761. It is incredibly fortunate that one of these instruments has survived, in relatively good original condition, and was examined at length by Graham Walker who purchased it at auction in 2008. The piano features two sets of hammers per string, bare wood and covered, activated from a stop in front. Although it is possible to dismiss the effort as exhibiting poor craftsmanship and design with the form of a possibly awkward looking piano, noting the odd pair of brass stops protruding from the front of the case and a c2 scale at 14 inches (much longer than the more conventional 12 inches used later)⁸⁰, Walker's evaluation of the effort is more generous:

“If newspaper advertisements are to be believed, Vietor designed this instrument in 1761 or just before and it does bring together a set of ideas that in a different form was the foundation for the square piano. It is probably unfair to make comparison with post Zumpe instruments and it needs to be seen as an instrument of its time. The tonal quality was very pleasant and therefore its performance does not seem to be impaired by a c2 scale that does not match later instruments. In terms of build quality, it has survived since 1767 in-tact. Early 18th century instruments are not as refined as they are in the latter part of the century reflecting the change from a craft trade to manufacturing process in a more scientific age. The Vietor fits with this craft trade but this does not

⁷⁷ Michael Cole, Margaret Debenham *'Pioneer Piano Makers in London, 1737-74: Newly Discovered Documentary Sources'*, Pages 55-86 | Published online: 23 Apr 2013. This paper is an excellent treatment of these earliest piano experimentations in London and was invaluable for this short section.

⁷⁸ *Public Advertiser* (9826), 2 May, 1766. The author acknowledges Margaret Debenham for bringing this notice forward.

⁷⁹ *Public Advertiser*, 1, Feb, 1768. The author acknowledges Graham Walker for bringing this notice forward.

⁸⁰ Cole, Debenham *'Pioneer Piano Makers in London, 1737-74'* pg. 23

necessarily make it an inferior instrument. Some criticism of the instrument may be due, but the instrument should not be dismissed.⁸¹

While the inscription is clearly done by an amateur and there are elements of the instrument that would meet with refinement in the hands of later builders, it obviously had some level of success. A c2 scale of 14 inches is often to be found in harpsichords, and Vietor was clearly comfortable with their design, building them in London and later in America, where he immigrated in September 1774.⁸²



Figure 33, H.B. Vietor square piano, photo courtesy of Richard Reason, Piano Auctions Ltd.

⁸¹ Private communication with Graham Walker 10/24/2012

⁸² *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 8 Feb., 1775



Figure 34, Vietor name board.

It is not the intent of this section to argue the merits or demerits of any one builder but to create an appreciation for the musical atmosphere that was prevalent in London in the second half of the eighteenth century, where there seemed the anticipation of the piano at every turn. Zumpe's connection to Queen Charlotte and the rapid adoption of the piano by the court, his documented business dealings with the famous Johann Christian Bach, and a low price point and easy placement in chambers were likely the triggers for the square piano's sudden rise in popularity.

Among the early makers were Johannes Pohlman, mentioned by Burney, who made pianos very much along the lines that Zumpe had established, and shown below.



Figure 35, Johannes Pohlman, 1770, photo Albert Bill



Figure 36, Johannes Pohlman, 1770, photo Albert Bill

Other builders came on the scene very early, taking up the occupation of piano maker by the early 1770s were Christopher Ganer, Adam Beyer, Frederick Beck, and George Garcka, along with lesser builders who are known today perhaps by a single surviving instrument, such as William Glover, Haltzbaur (no first name given), and Peter Jaderblom. Ganer and Beyer were gifted craftsmen and their instruments have survived in numbers that defy the usual attrition rate that leaves about 2 - 4% of any builder's pianos surviving to the time of the writing.



Figure 37, Adam Beyer square piano, 1779, photo courtesy Richard Reason, Piano Auctions Ltd.



Figure 38, Adam Beyer square piano, 1779, photo courtesy Richard Reason, Piano Auctions Ltd.

We do not know the exact year that Geib came to London but by the time his first dated piano is known to exist in 1777 there were over two dozen organ, harpsichord and piano makers in the city, making it a Mecca for instrument builders.⁸³ Geib's letter to Franklin about being brought up and organ builder would be reflected in his first years in America where he concentrated on organ building as a profession, so it is likely that he intended to do this on coming to London. In fact he was successful in building at least two large organs in England as discussed, but he found the bread and butter activity of making pianos more financially rewarding.

The Seven Years War between Austria and Prussia had global consequences that crossed Europe and Colonial America. The war began in North America and India in 1754 with the European powers struggling for colonial supremacy. In Europe, Maria Theresa of Austria had undertaken intense diplomatic efforts to forge an alliance against Prussia with the goal of wresting the lost province of Silesia from the Prussian grasp. Frederick II of Prussia invaded Saxony in 1756 and Bohemia in 1757. However, he had to retire from Bohemia after the defeat of Kolin. Prussians were now on the defensive against Austrians in Silesia, Franco-Imperials in Saxony and Russians in East Prussia. Frederick II saved Prussia by two brilliant victories at Rossbach and Leuthen. Meanwhile France had successfully invaded Hanover but was soon pushed back to the Rhine.⁸⁴

⁸³ *Mortimer's Universal Directory*, 1763 pgs. 50-51 lists 17 instrument makers for that year, and the advent of the piano and the many builders who took it up added nearly a dozen more to this company, with the sudden increase giving rise to the myth of the 12 apostles.

⁸⁴ http://www.kronoskaf.com/syw/index.php?title=Main_Page accessed 1/17/17

Aligned with Austria

Austria-Hungary
France
Holy Roman Empire
Russia
Saxony
Spain
Sweden

Aligned with Prussia

Brunswick-Luneburg (Hanover)
Great Britain
Portugal
Prussia

This foment, which lasted until 1763, was highly disruptive to trade, and luxuries like musical instruments were particularly sensitive to this sort of disruption. It is no wonder then that German builders from either side of the conflict might choose to immigrate to a more peaceful and economically powerful capital like London, even without a command of the language or useful contacts. The Germans formed a sort of community within London, where they clearly knew each other and often worked with some level of cooperation.⁸⁵ While Adam Beyer is unlikely to have been from Germany, the others including Zumpe, Buntebart, Vietor, Pohlman, Garcka, Beck, Ganer and Geib certainly were.

While the times and the demand may well have brought forward an instrument that we now recognize as a piano, it is ironic that for English style pianos, the immigration of German craftsmen to the city was a huge boost. This rapid London adoption strongly influenced France and subsequently Italy, creating a demand not only for instruments but music to play on them. While Vienna would become a center of piano manufacturing during the relatively quieter times following the Seven Years War, it was eclipsed on all fronts by the output of pianos by London manufacturers, which essentially created the model for the modern piano to come. Unlike the free trade and manufacturing opportunities available in London and later America, most other cities in Europe had rigid Guild systems, regulating who could make what, how many, and how innovation could be incorporated, limiting the manufacture and development until well into the nineteenth century.

We can see from a possible Vietor piano prototype through Zumpe and going forward that the London square piano was under a state of constant ‘improvement’ from the time it was brought forward until it was abandoned in England in the 1870s, and arrived at a final state of manufacturing excellence in America about that same time.⁸⁶ We can watch Zumpe’s five octave piano grow over the fourteen years he was involved in building them:

⁸⁵ Michael Cole has shown that Beyer was unlikely to have been himself from Germany ‘<http://squarepianos.com/beyer2.html>, accessed 1/17/2017’. Along with Gabriel Buntebart, Frederick Beck was selected for a jury at the Old Bailey which was composed of six ‘German’ and six English members.

⁸⁶ Colm O’Leary acquired a Collard & Collard piano that dates to the early 1870s, long after Broadwood made their last square piano in 1866. In America, the square piano became more or less standard apart from carvings and gilding by 1870.

Year	Length (mm)	Width (mm)
1766	1228	450
1769	1269	457
1773	1447	500
1778	1459	515

By the end of the eighteenth century a square piano would have grown to ~1625 mm length, the active soundboard area nearly doubled, with heavier hammers and thicker strings, and the introduction of Geib’s double action that together created a more responsive and lively piano experience, possibly at the expense of a certain soft, sweet tone that was prized in the beginning. The inventor and innovator William Southwell added extra keys to the treble, expanding the compass to 5.5 octaves, ‘Sonovents’⁸⁷ cut openings into the name board and right rear corner to allow the sound to come forward, and developed wire guided dampers that worked quietly and reliably with no obvious difference in touch, and provided effective damping.

The upright piano was seeking its first expression as the eighteenth century closed out, with many starts and a gradual adoption that caught the imagination of family music lovers in the second half of the nineteenth century. Grand pianos were thought of as professional instruments for professional musicians or at least trophy instruments for the wealthy, and while they were made in some quantity, they rarely exceeded ten percent of the manufacturing volume of any one maker, and usually less until the nineteenth century was well along.

With all the building activity going on in London, trade with America was on the increase, and with a new world to explore and an increasingly competitive and fragmented competitive landscape in London, John Geib decided to realize his ambition of going to America and join a wave of new makers headed for one of the larger cities and intent on creating their fortune. Geib had apparently made inquiries regarding Philadelphia at first, but settled on New York City as we will see where he became one of the earliest and longest lasting piano makers in America.



⁸⁷ In his patent of 1794 and on notices placed on pianos, Southwell used the term Sonovent to describe the sound openings in his pianos. These were later usually referred to a simply fret cut openings.

Chapter 3

John Geib in America, Organ Builder, 1797 - 1802



Figure 39, 1809 square piano, John Geib & Son, photo courtesy of Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

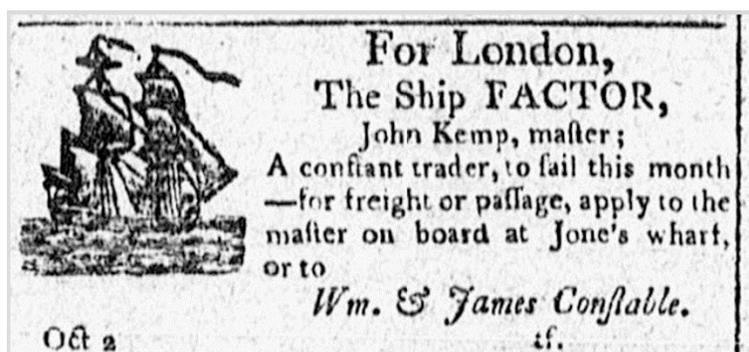
In Chapter 1⁸⁸ the activities of John Geib Sr. during his London period were closely explored, including a reproduction and discussion of his important patent for a piano action and an examination of his surprisingly large business activity and influence. The chapter ended its chronology as Geib was about to immigrate to America, leading us to now explore his activities, and those of his family on their arrival in New York. Once in America we can complete this story, which concerns the early establishment of an organ trade and the first example of a piano industry in America beyond the individual craftsman. The earliest American keyboard craftsmen during the last quarter of the 18th century were often London trained (Thomas Dodds, Thomas Western, Charles Albrecht, etc.) and began by imitating London made harpsichords and pianos, followed by escalating innovation in design and manufacturing scale in the early 19th century that would eclipse the London trade by the third quarter of that century, and dominate world production in the early 20th Century. Geib's company, in its many incarnations, was routinely mentioned or honored as being among the top three firms in America from 1800 to 1840, along with (variously) Gibson and Davis, DuBois and Stodart, (R&W Nunns), Babcock, and Chickering.

⁸⁸ Based on Thomas Strange with Jenny Nex 'John Geib: Beyond The Footnote', *Eighteenth Century Music*, vol. 7, issue 1, 2010

However, the firm was far enough out of mind by the end of the 19th century that various corruptions of their history entered the record as fact and have only slowly been corrected since the 1970s.

As much as possible, original sources have been reexamined and the newspaper records rescanned for additional evidence, which is now more forthcoming thanks to digital review techniques. This material has been organized against the background of American history to try to bring forward a more detailed picture of the Geib family activity and allow the reader some appreciation of the struggle in early America to create and supply a need for keyboards that had previously come almost exclusively from overseas.

Arrival in America



As stated in Chapter 1, Geib married Rebecca Shrimpton in 1779 in London⁸⁹ and they quickly proceeded to create a large family, with twin sons John Jr. and Adam born in 1780, George in 1782, Elizabeth in 1787, Mary Ann in 1790, Rebecca⁹⁰ in 1792, William in 1793, and Sophia Augusta in 1794. The four boys all played a role in the keyboard instrument business in America following their immigration to America. John Geib Sr. was an educated man who struggled to learn English, making his otherwise neatly written letters seem childish in print, but his circle of friends, acquaintances and church life was heavily weighted towards the German speaking community where he felt more at ease, even if it limited his language skills where English was the dominant form of communication. Based on their interests and surviving writings, he gave his children a liberal and well-rounded education as well, including music lessons for at least three of his sons that allowed them to contribute to early American music and in some cases perform technically difficult concerts with some facility. There is no recorded evidence that John Geib Sr. could play beyond that required to build and tune an instrument, and John Geib Jr. followed him in this regard. Adam, George and William however would all either teach extensively or publish their own works while in America.

The revolution in France and subsequent hostilities with Great Britain caused conditions to deteriorate in London for those businesses that traded extensively with France and the Continent, such as Longman and Broderip did, and the highly leveraged and possibly larcenous business practices of James Longman in particular finally caught up with him in 1795, ending in a

⁸⁹ Alger C. Gildersleeve, *John Geib and His Seven Children*, Far Rockaway: no publisher, 1945; reprinted Salem, MA: Higginson Genealogical Books, 1987), pg 7

⁹⁰ Gildersleeve appeared not to know about Rebecca who dies a young woman in 1814 at age 22

year spent in debtors' prison for Longman and his partner Frances Fane Broderip, and the complete reorganization of the business⁹¹. The opportunities in America were a welcome relief to the legal churning in London, and since Geib was predisposed to immigrating to America already, as he told Franklin in the 1783 letter, he dissolved his partnership with Augustus Leukfeld amicably in 1796, sent letters ahead to potential clients advertising his organ building ability and a desire to engage in work on arrival⁹², and prepared to sail to America.

Gildersleeve stated that Geib came to America aboard the ship *Factor*⁹³, sailing out on July 24th, 1797. John Ogasapian wrote that he landed in Philadelphia⁹⁴ first, but it is not clear where this comes from, as his nearest reference to this statement is silent on the subject. In any case it is incorrect. There were two ships named 'Factor' carrying goods and passengers at the time, both with their homeport in New York, and of these only one, a 300-ton, 10-gun ship under command of Captain John Kemp⁹⁵ was active and met the time line nicely⁹⁶. The journey was not without risk; John Kemp had acquired some celebrity earlier in the year when an open letter addressed to him by Captain D. Sherry of the Ship *Oneida* and dated June 16, 1797, regarding an act of piracy by French privateers and atrocities inflicted by them on American seamen, was picked up by all the major American newspapers and widely distributed⁹⁷, adding to the rising tide of hard feelings against the French in America.

The *Factor* was to have left the port by July 15th, but the usual delays pushed the departure out⁹⁸. Since it was reported that they carried London newspapers from as late as August 2nd⁹⁹, and that the voyage took 33 days, it is clear that they did leave before August 9th¹⁰⁰. The *Factor* arrived in New York at Jones Wharf on September 11, 1797¹⁰¹. Geib no doubt busied himself in getting housing (settling initially on First Street and officially listed there from 1798-1800, though he has moved to Bowery Road by at least September 25 1799¹⁰²), preparing shop space, and encouraging local church leaders towards a contract for a large church organ. It was clearly his intent on arriving in America to return to his roots and engage primarily in organ building, which was his first love. At a cost of \$2000-\$5000 dollars each, these offered the potential to provide a comfortable living and considerable public recognition. Geib was not at all shy in providing details of his activities to the press and lived a far more open life than his early competitors. Even while still in London, the advertisements of Geib are among the few open doors

⁹¹ George S Bozarth and Margaret Debenham, *'Piano Wars: The Legal Machinations of London Pianoforte Makers', 1795-1806*, *Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle* 42 (2009),75-79 & Appendix 6

⁹² Laurence Libin, *'American Musical Instruments in the Metropolitan Museum of Art'*, W.W. Norton, NY/London, 1985, pg 173

⁹³ Alger C. Gildersleeve, *'John Geib and His Seven Children'*, (Far Rockaway: no publisher, 1945; reprinted Salem, MA: Higginson Genealogical Books, 1987), pg. 7

⁹⁴ John Ogasapian, *'Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900'*, (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 22.

⁹⁵ Greg H. Williams, *'The French Assault on American Shipping, 1793-1813: A History and Comprehensive Record of Merchant Marine Losses'*, McFarland, Mar 4, 2010, pg. 138

⁹⁶ Newspaper notices for 1795 do show the *Factor* making port in Philadelphia for two crossings, while it was chartered in place of the ship *Pigon*, with Ezra Bowen, Captain, but ended after the ship was sold in January 1796 to pay for back wages. John Kemp took over command in March, 1796.

⁹⁷ *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, Wednesday, September 27, 1797. In his letter, Sherry concludes "...you are very fortunate not to fall in with any of these French robbers, for so soon as you had, so sure France would have been your fate" speaking on the topic of kidnappings and impressments of American sailors. This would culminate in the 'half war' as President John Adams described it that resulted in the creation of the Alien and Sedition act which permanently harmed his presidential legacy.

⁹⁸ *Federal Gazette* (Baltimore MD) August 29, 1797

⁹⁹ *New Jersey Journal*, September 13, 1797

¹⁰⁰ *City Gazette* (Charleston SC) September 23, 1797, reports from New York

¹⁰¹ *Minerva* (New York, NY) Sept. 25, 1797

¹⁰² *NY Gazette* Sept. 26, 1799

into how a gentleman builder conducted his business. In America, he opened a floodgate of public notices and advertisements.

John Geib Sr. arrived in New York a wealthy man if accounts in Gildersleeve¹⁰³ are to be believed, and his land holdings and activities do indeed suggest this was true. If the reputed amount of \$25,000 invested in land is correct, and evidence will come forward suggesting this was the case, he was very well off indeed. Gildersleeve recalled the youngest daughter Sophia having remembered a great pile of golden Guineas on the table in London. This will be critical in understanding how he could build his business so quickly and provides additional insight into the motivation of subsequent events. By January of 1798 John's son Adam was engaged to perform in New York on Tuesday, Feb 13, 1798, at a subscription concert which was planned to be the first of several (though general lack of interest limited it to this one), introducing part of the Oratorio of Handel's Messiah. Geib performed a duet with Miss Moller, daughter of the concert organizer, on a grand piano forte, the music listed in the program as a 'full piece'¹⁰⁴.

Within the documentation of slightly later organs, Geib Sr. typically quoted about 10 months to complete a large church organ. These were indeed large instruments, about 9 ½ -12 feet wide, 15 - 18 feet tall and perhaps 5 - 7 feet deep¹⁰⁵. From this, with the new organ for the Lutheran Church on William and corner of Frankfort Street nearly finished in his notice of December 27, 1798, one can conclude that by the previous February he had landed this first commission. Geib writes:

"John Geib, Organ Builder, Grand and Small Pianoforte Maker (from London) Most Respectfully informs the amateurs of music and the public in general that the Organ, he is about building for the Lutheran Church (as above) is nearly finished, and will be opened the beginning of next month, when it will be exhibited to view, for a few days; by the indulgence of the trustees of said church, for the benefit of the builder, and to shew the public what can be done in this part of the world, as nothing belonging to it has been imported from any foreign country.

The builder flatters himself that the fullness and melodiousness of its tone, together with the neatness and durability of the work, and particular new movement, which renders the touch so easy as to be playable by a child, cannot be excelled. The plain elegance of the outside of the case, will appear corresponding with the inward work. The framer will, for a few days, display the powers of this work with an intent, by this view, to lead amateurs of this country to a judgment, how, taking this Organ for a pattern, which has but 800 pipes – on the same scale, harmony might be increased by 600 pipes and upwards, and some of which 37 feet in length. The builder does not think himself only satisfied in the business, but would wish to meet with the approbation of connoisseurs. Notice will be given in a few days of the time appointed for the opening of the Organ with the name of an eminent performer: Dec: 27"¹⁰⁶

This notice gives us the expected pride of workmanship for which most builders boasted, but more importantly his focus on use of American materials, despite the fact that ivory and ebony from Africa and Asia, and mahogany from Cuba were almost certainly elements, and not native to America. His point is that this is not a pre-built instrument somehow parading as American, but a true American piece of work. Suspicion ran deeply against American craftsmanship at

¹⁰³ Alger C. Gildersleeve, '*John Geib and His Seven Children*', (Far Rockaway: no publisher, 1945; reprinted Salem, MA: Higginson Genealogical Books, 1987), pg. 7

¹⁰⁴ *Commercial Advertiser*, Jan. 31, 1798

¹⁰⁵ *New-England Palladium* (Boston MA) Dec 23, 1803

¹⁰⁶ *Greenleaf's New Daily Advertiser*, Saturday December 29, 1798

this time, and Geib could easily have focused on his London experience and use of traditional English materials to enhance acceptability. Rather, he is building and promoting his accomplishment as a fierce patriot, while taking advantage of a new raw materials market. His description of the action as being easy must be taken for what it is, as no written record of the functionality of this particular organ exists, but other organs by him were (occasionally) later criticized for being difficult to play, as will be seen. Geib left a listing of the stops and dimension of this organ in an early letter to David Vinton in Providence Rhode Island, and this is given in discussion of that instrument later. The organ was completed by January 8 1799¹⁰⁷ as promised, and performed on by Mr. Frederick Rausch and Mr. John Christopher Moller,¹⁰⁸ presumably the same Moller who was organizing the earlier concerts.

The report of an organ built by Geib in 1798 for North church and appearing in Thomas Hutchinson's *American Musical Directory*¹⁰⁹ has been convincingly discounted by Ogasapian¹¹⁰ and a recent review of newspaper notices makes it clear there was never such an instrument. Geib began advertising for Journeymen or joiners by at least December of 1799¹¹¹ and had probably been hiring men almost at once, given the amount of work involved in erecting a large church organ. He continued this tactic of adding about two men at a time throughout his early period, as:

“Wanted, Two Journeymen Cabinet Makers, They must be the best workmen, of an industrious and good character, with natural genius – No objection to teach them the art of organ building, or Piano-Forte making, provided the terms can be made agreeable. None need apply but natives, and those of the above qualifications – apply to Geib & Co. / Organ-Builders, Bowery-lane, July 22”¹¹²

It is curious that he wanted natives of America, not being one himself, but clearly, he had concerns regarding other immigrants who had recently come to America, possibly stealing certain know-how and setting up quickly on their own as competition. His terms of agreeing to teach keyboard building was not dissimilar to taking on an apprentice, as Geib knew he was unlikely to find experienced journeymen in the keyboard building tradition in early New York, so the ploy may have been simply to get cheap, eager labor, rather than deal with experienced and thus more expensive immigrant labor. He would drop this request for native-only help in later notices.

The counting house of Goodeve and Brown was collocated with Geib in September of 1799¹¹³, presumably paying rent to him. They advertised as dealers in soaps and candles, even offering 60 days credit on quantity. Geib was an efficient businessman and not above having a side business paying into the company. As it was, no additional orders for large church organs materialized in 1799, so Geib moved towards other means of income. Certainly, as the organ building progressed, Geib was turning an eye towards the piano again, starting apparently with his specialty, the organized piano. These consisted of a conventional square piano, where by engaging a lever, a small one-pipe per key organ could be played with the piano when desired.

¹⁰⁷ Rita Susswein Gottesman ‘*The Arts And Crafts In New York 1777-1799*’, The New York Historical Society, 1954, pg. 362-363

¹⁰⁸ John Ogasapian, ‘*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*’ (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 22

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Hutchinson, ‘*American Musical Directory, New York*’, 1861, pg 231

¹¹⁰ John Ogasapian, ‘*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*’, (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 23.

¹¹¹ Rita Susswein Gottesman, ‘*The Arts And Crafts In New York 1777-1799*’, The New York Historical Society, 1954, pg. 362

¹¹² *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, NY) , July 25, 1800, pg 2

¹¹³ *NY Gazette* , Sept. 26, 1799

They had been somewhat popular as a novelty instrument in London, though with a sales volume at about 10% of pianos. They were relatively expensive though, at least doubling the price of the instrument, but probably at higher margins for the builder. Evidence of this early work towards a piano tradition in America can be seen in the announcement of the receipt of contract for the Christ Church organ:

“J. Geib & Co. Most respectfully inform the friends and amateurs of Music, and the public in general, that they have now on hand a very elegant Organ for Christ Church in this city; therefore hope it will not discourage ladies and gentlemen to come forward with their orders, by thinking they could not manufacture more than one Organ at a time. They have the pleasure to inform them that the more the better. Three or four church organs, besides small work, are more easy to manufacture than only one; as it enables them to put a number of hands to work, and leave every man on the same particular kind of employment, and also enables them to complete their orders the sooner than if otherwise. This is the plan on which they carried out their manufactory in London, by which means they were enabled to finish from eight to ten piano fortes every week, besides church and chamber organs, the number of which are, pianofortes grand and small 4910, organized about 400, church and chamber organs in proportion. They have now, exclusive of the organ for Christ church, three capital Organized Piano Fortes on hand, and which will be entirely on a new plan, that nothing of the kind shall excel. And they will, with much pleasure, submit them when finished to the trial of impartial Judges. They recommend to their friends, who have not seen the organ they have built for the German Lutheran church, the corner of Frankford and William streets, to hear and see it, as they are positive no connoisseur of the arts and sciences will repent it. It has been finished in the city of New York without the importation of one single article for the purpose, and they intend to follow the same plan because the produce of this country is more fit for the purpose than anything imported from the old, as the climate on this continent is more proper for the manufacture of musical instruments than the old, which is in some parts a continual m[o]isture and damp. On the other hand the climate of America is a dry clear air, and all the work manufactured where materials of a changing nature are used (particularly wood and glue) is certainly more durable than any of that kind from another continent where the climate so much differs. For the proof of this they refer to the organ built, before mentioned, which has been now fifteen months finished, and not the least alteration taken place, though it stands in one of the lowest parts of the town. They also most humbly inform their friends how far their art extends, the performance of which they warrant, Viz, Church Organs to any value above a thousand dollars, Chamber Organs also, Church and Chambers Organs to play with barrels and fingers, which will be very convenient, and can be used by persons who have no knowledge of music, Organized Piano Fortes, Grand and patent small pianos, common action ditto; Pedal Harps, &etc.

If any gentleman purchases an instrument of theirs, and should wish to exchange it for a more valuable one, and communicates their intention within six months, the full value will be allowed, deducting the hire, and allowing for damage if any done. March 13 [1800]”¹¹⁴

Much can be gleaned from this notice. Geib’s decided preference for American materials is evident again, this time calling out wood and glue, which are indeed of a changing nature. With his chief competition coming from London, he was also employing his own sharp advertising techniques, making the London pianos seem vulnerable. He had already lined up three organized pianos that will finish shortly, but only mentioned standard types as possibilities at this time. His figures for the number of pianos built while in London once again tallies to the output of Longman& Broderip up through 1797, where the serial numbers for the first series (5 octave

¹¹⁴ *Mercantile Advertiser*, Friday March 14, 1800

pianos, with and without the double action) total to about 4200, and the second series (5.5 octave using the William Southwell patent) to about 700¹¹⁵.

His specificity as to the number of grand and small pianos at 4910 has a ring of authenticity about it, given that the other numbers are at best, estimates. Grand pianos never produced high volume sales at Longman & Broderip, and allowing for these into the estimate, minus the small square pianos made by Ganer and others, his figure is believable if his shop was the principal producer for Longman & Broderip. An output of 8 to 10 pianos a week was high for any London manufacturing house at that time, and probably represented a capability more than an actual average. If one assumes an average build time of 10 man-weeks/piano, it indicates that Geib was comfortable with a shop of perhaps 60-80 men, large for the time, and virtually unknown in America then. The assertion that Geib was the first to bring the keyboard making trade to industrial proportions is at least borne out by his intent, as he is describing exactly this approach.

In the New York Historical Society's "Organ Scrapbook", in the 1800-1801 time period Trinity Parish found it necessary to have two organs built, one for St Paul's Chapel, Broadway, and the other for St George's Chapel, Beekman Street.¹¹⁶ As Geib spends some time in his notice encouraging the reader to think him capable of building upwards of four large organs at once, it is possible that the notice was timed to sway the organ committee to ordering both from his shop. In any event the church scrapbook article¹¹⁷ (dating from about 1870 and so to be taken broadly as to exact dates) indicated that the decision was made to award the St George's organ to Geib, and the St Paul's organ to George Pike England, a builder in London, though Geib would make the ornamental outer case. It is this case that survives today, the only evidence left in America of Geib's large church organ making endeavors. The scrapbook concludes that it was always the general opinion that the imported one was the best instrument, but this comment must be taken in the context of an 1870 perspective on early 19th century comments.

¹¹⁵ Personal communication with David Hunt; www.fortepiano.co.uk accessed March 19,2013

¹¹⁶ John Ogasapian, '*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*', (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 25.

¹¹⁷ John Ogasapian, '*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*', (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 25.



Figure 40, Organ Case by Geib in St Paul's Chapel, photo courtesy of St Paul's Church, NY, NY. A campaign to enlarge the organ after Geib is visible in the photograph at top.

From a study of the usage of terms the reader is advised that regarding pianos, 'Patent' when applied to a piano description, referred to the Geib double action that he introduced late in 1786, 'common action' refers to the English single action as introduced by Zumpe in 1766, 'New Patent' is the William Southwell improvements (an additional half octave with hammers popping up through the treble soundboard, often with scrollwork covered vents in the name board and right rear interior corner, and the wire guided 'Irish' dampers¹¹⁸. These terms were applied to pianos long after official patent rights expired or were not in enforcement. Plain pianos were just that, with minimal stringing decoration on the case and four, square corners, but 'Fancy' and 'Elegant' will become something altogether different.

¹¹⁸ John Watson, *Changing Keys; Keyboard Instruments for America 1700-1830*, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Scarecrow Press, 2013, pg 70

By October of 1800 Geib & Co, had several plain, patent, and common Piano-Fortes finished and for sale:

“Their superiority in tone, solidity of workmanship and construction, is such that they will stand any climate, and worth the attention of Ladies and Gentlemen.”

And later,

“Of the number of instruments they have made and warranted not one was returned. J. Geib was the first person who made organized Piano-Fortes in London, and for his improvement on Piano-Fortes he has at different times received two Patents from the King of England. Good allowance for Cash. Organbuilders and Piano-Forte Manufacturers, Bowery Road, Oct. 15”¹¹⁹

Improvement in tuning stability was something that everyone in the business tried to address at one time or the other. In particular were pianos destined for the West Indies, where constant heat and humidity caused them to fall apart, but the American South was similar, and summers in Connecticut and Pennsylvania can be very muggy as well. Less dramatic than falling apart are the rapid changes in tuning from humidity shifts, and with only wood to form the support structure, the early piano was particularly sensitive to humidity.

A November notice by P[eter] Erben, Organist, George Street (and whose son Henry would go on to become a major organ builder in New York in his own right), to sell the smaller chamber organ now displaced by Geib’s larger one, mentioned that if a congregation bought it and wished to have a larger one built by Geib & Co. within a few years’ time, they would take the smaller one back and deduct a reasonable allowance for use¹²⁰. Geib began trading in used organs displaced as congregations upgraded to larger instruments (hopefully his) as in the notice of 1801:

“Organ / To Be Sold, a very capital well-toned ORGAN, only imported these few years, manufactured in London, and as good as any can be manufactured to this day. It consists in Great Organ of the following stops, viz, Stop Diapason, principal and fifteenth in swell, Op Diapason and Hautboy, and a well-constructed Instrument for a gentleman’s Hall or a small Chapel. Enquire of _____

J. Geib & Co. / Organ-Builders, Bowery-Road (May 11 1m) N.B. Two Cabinet Makers, ne Joiners Wanted. They must be the best workmen, and as such will meet with good encouragement and constant employ. Enquire at above”¹²¹

By September of 1801 the Christ Church organ was nearing completion and a notice was given that it would be exhibited on the 16th:

“J. Geib & Co. Organ-Builders, Respectfully inform their friends and the public, that by permission of the Trustees of Christ Church, on Thursday the 11th last, a variety of pieces will be performed on the Organ they have just finished there, a full catalogue of which will be delivered to the hearers in Church. – The performance, conducted by Dr. [George K.] Jackson, will begin precisely at three o’clock, P.M. and the tickets of admission may be obtained gratis, from either of the following

¹¹⁹ *Commercial Advertiser* (NY), Thursday October 16, 1800

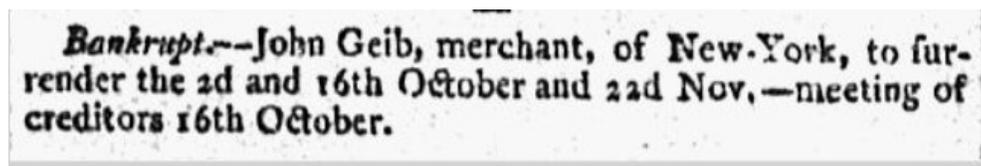
¹²⁰ *Commercial Advertiser* (NY), Friday November 14, 1800

¹²¹ *Mercantiel Advertiser* (NY), June 4 1801

gentlemen: Wm. Post, J. Poll, Geo. Warner, John Brown, Abm. Bogert, Geo. Dominick, Wm. Ashley, Wm. Vermily, Wm. Newton, A. R. Miller, Oliver Goodwin, Ward no 3, and of the Minister at No 47 Partition street _____ Sept 16”¹²²

It was a larger organ than the one for the Lutheran church, some 11 feet wide, 17 feet high, and 7 feet deep, described as “Several stops are remarkably fine, and, upon the whole, the instrument is a good one, giving very general satisfaction”¹²³. Given that the St Georges Church organ and the organ case for St Paul’s Chapel were completed late in 1802, one can assume Geib already had the contracts in hand by late 1801. Things were going well for Geib despite not getting contracts for both organs. During this time, John Geib had been in correspondence with David Vinton who was heading the search committee for a new organ for the Benevolent Congregational Church of Providence, Rhode Island, and this episode would mark a watershed event for Geib and his sons.

The Providence Organ and the Bankruptcy



Bankrupt.--John Geib, merchant, of New-York, to surrender the 2d and 16th October and 22d Nov,—meeting of creditors 16th October.

Early in the first half of 1802 the organ committee of the Benevolent Congregational Church of Providence, Rhode Island empowered the committee chairman David Vinton, to engage to find and retain a builder for an organ for the church.

“We, the subscribers, believing it to be the wish of everyone who frequents public worship (whether influenced by Piety, Ostentation or Pleasure), that the “Concord of Sweet Sounds” make a part of their devotional Exercises – Do agree to have an Elegant Organ in order that the insufficiency of Singing alone may be obviated, and that the music, necessary on the Lord’s Day, may be no longer dependent on Caprice.”¹²⁴

Vinton engaged with Geib Sr., exchanging notes and inviting him to view an organ by John Avery in the First Church in Salem Massachusetts. Geib claimed not to have seen the organ before, but begged off from a trip, as he expected to complete his Organ for St George’s Chapel by late summer. Despite protestations conveyed from the committee through Vinton that a fine but inexpensive organ could be built, Geib successfully argued that the quality correlated closely to the cost, a fair point, and on June 29th, 1802, a first contract was initially agreed to:

“One large elegant, well finished, good toned organ – the case to be of the best mahogany to measure eighteen feet high, twelve feet wide, and five feet deep, with three towers front gilt ornaments & pipes as usual. – with two pedal movements, likewise two pair of bellows, with one full sett of

¹²² *American Citizen* (New York, NY), Sept. 16, 1801

¹²³ John Ogasapian, ‘*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*’, (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 24.

¹²⁴ Joyce Ellen Mangler, ‘*Some Letters from Mr. John Geib of New York*’, reprinted from *The Tracker* 2:1 (Jan, 1958)

keys from GG up to F in alto long octaves & one sett in the swell from Fiddle G to F in alt—with a spring of communication annexed to unite the Great Organ & Swell”¹²⁵

The payments were to begin as soon as the contract was signed, but there was a delay, and when another unlikely legal issue combined with the payment delay, the result was to financially overwhelm Geib Sr.

Geib often writes to his intended in the third person, writing their name in place of simply saying “you”, and his errors and phonetic vernacular are used as found. Where needed, translation assistance is given in square brackets. One must follow the train of historical records, with the sub textural ‘legal’ problem highlighted in **bold**, to understand what additional issues were surfacing during the bankruptcy of John Geib Sr., wherein certainly the name, and probably the management of the company would be altered forever.

“New York June 6th 1802

Mr. Vinton / Sir

Your letter of the 22nd of May has been handed to me by Mr. Paff and I made inquiring in the post office after yours of May 6th but could not find a letter directed to me, till at last, I went to the Captain Mr. Anthony [Avery] and he del[ivered] me a letter of May 24th in the same haure, a gentlemen met me in the street, told me their was a letter advertised in the Post Office belongin to me; I went re[trieve] the same been yours of May 6th – in all those letter, Mr Vinton had the politeness to invite me to com directly with Mr. Anthony to Providence, which at present is impossible – as been about the erection of that large Organ for St Georges, and which will be intirely finished in 6 weeks, and my absence would Delay the work very much – therefor hope, my not been present by the Contract, will not Cause a Delay – Mr. Anthony had the Goodness to go with me to Church, and he will give you a good aicaunt of what he seen –

Mr. Vinton had also the goodness to observe to me, whate he seen at Salem – and that the Organ cost only 341 pounds Sterling, with a deal case; painted, no annulet; and add the Expenses of Paking; fright; insurance; Duty; and till it is put up, will cost them 2000 dollars – and upwards, and then run the Risk, if a good one – well if not – no indepenting on my good work – and flatter myselfes, that I think to be capable of building an organ with Mr. Avery of London, or a Monser Clico of Paris, and a few more in Europe, and beside responsible for every thing build of manufactured by me. – Considering all advantages – the building as Organ consisting in such a number of different articules, in the country where it is to stand, and to be used, must certainly have the perseverance in durability, and a few dollar cannot been a oject to a Society of gentlemen, - a friend of mine seen the Organ at Salem and speak but slightly about it – and I think, I could build one for the same whate that Cost, an the same plane – Sin heir follow a description of the organs I have build for this city, which will be a quiet to the gentlemen to fram the Contract.

German Luthern Church

1. OpDiapasson throughaute from treble GG to F in alt –
2. Stopdiapason do-do-do
3. Principal - do-do-do
4. 12th do &c
5. 15th do &c

¹²⁵ John Ogasapian, ‘*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*’, (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 27.

6. Tiers do &c
7. Cornet treble
8. Sesq bass 3 rankes
9. Trumpet – throughaute as befor

Swell from middle G

1. Opd or Dulciana
2. Stopd
3. Principal
4. Hautbois

Two pair of bellowes, an elegant best mahogany case, gild front and ornaments – 9² by 15 feet. Duple && in front, and a set of keys in great organ, and one set from fiddle G in Swell – a trimland – the cost 1000 in this place

Christ Church Organ

1. Opdiapasson throughoute from duple GG to F in alt
2. Stopd Do-Do-Do
3. Principal Do &c
4. 12th Do &c
5. 15th Do &c
6. Tiers Do &c
7. Cornet treble
8. Sesq. Bass 3 rankes
9. Trumpett throughaute as befor

Choir & Swell –

1. Stopdiapasson in choir. Bass
2. Flute throughaute
3. 15th - Do

Stopdiapasson Treble Swell

4. Dulciana – Swell
5. Princ – Swell
6. Vaschumana – Swell [Vox Humana]

15 Stopes

Two Pair of bellowes, with an elegant mahogany case, gild front ornaments, 10 by 15 feet – Duple && (begings) in front. one Sett of keys for Great organ – one set for choir & swell the cost 1200 [£]

I thought it proper to send the plane for both, them organs and which ever you bleas to take, must be inserted in the agreement to be singe by you gentlemen and sent to me for the same, the cash to be paid as followes. the first payment 200 pounds and evert two months after 150 till I have rec 950£ then the rest of 250 to be paid in May next, when the Organ finished; that is to say, if you should choose the plane of Christ Church organ and if that of the German Lutheran Church, you may devite the payment, and leave only 200 pounds when finished to be paid, this is the plane I have built all the organs heir, and also the same in Europe - / I wish Mr. Vinton all the success required in his undertaking and I shall spare no pains to make amends in the goodness of my work, and am / Sir / with all respect / your most Hble serv / J Geib

be so ablidging as to let Mr. Anthony bring the Contract to my Hause for Evecution and let it be rote in the firm of J. Geib & Co – for my son is sing the same - / N.B. I have a[t] present not time to make a drawing of your organ, or else I would but I engage to forfeite anything if not the same as any one bleas to choose.”

~

Mr Vinton / New York July 19th 1802

A Considerable time is elapsed since over agreement was to be returned, and not hearing of Mr. Vinton neither, I thought proper to inquire the reason, we have begun your Organ before you went away, but there is no certainty before the agreement is closed, **the matter I speak with you about, Respecting my law suit, I have settled with the parties by paying by instalments, and if it had happened other wise, no hurdle would have been to your Society, as my Son would have Had the Management of the Whole.** I beg the favour of an answer by return of post same

J Geib

NB the carver wishes also to know if Mr. Vinton, been in earnest, about the figures then the wood must be prepared also –

~

Mr. Vinton / New York Aug. 10th, 1802

I received your letter of July 22nd but you could not mention the time when the contract would be ready, neither the payment of the first instalment, nevertheless we kept on working to have the Organ done agreeable to the time mentioned, but as the beginning of an Organ is always the worst expense, and necessarily requires to have every thing prepared, though the greatest part are [bought?], and some is wanted yet, hope therefore you will not longer delay your first payment, for if the season will slip over, and I will in consequence not be able to finish the organ agreeable to promise.

Sir / I am / your most humble Servt / J Geib

Beg the favour of an answer by return of post, and not by the packet

~

Mr. Vinton / New York Aug 28th 1802

Having enquired yours of July 19th, and in which I begged the favour of an answer, but having not received any, therefore hope you will have the goodness to send me a few lines very soon –

The Organ case is very near ready to be put up, all the wood for the pipes is cut out, the sounding board half furnished beside other things belonging to the Organ but not hearing of you in due time put a damp to the whole, and a speedy answer will be favourable received by / your Most Humble Servt J Geib & Co.

~

Providence Sept 6th 1802

Mr. John Geib

Sir I have now before me yours of the 28th August and am very happy to hear you have progressed so far in the Organ intended for our Society – I am likewise extremely sorry that we have not been able to forward you the first installment as we anticipated – the gentlemen Committee chosen for the purpose of collecting the cash & notes of the subscribers have not yet completed their task – in consequence of some subscribers being absent & others, delaying business – but however tomorrow

they are determined to close the subscriptions, we have nearly 500 Dolls, in cash collected & the remainder in notes payable at bank – the amt of the Organ – I believe we should have remitted you the five hundred dollars this mail, had not there have been a report here that Mr. John Geib Organ Builder & of New York had failed. This alarm was given by 2 or 3 Gentlemen from the City who were here on a visit at Commencement last week – Govener Bowen & a number of our Society have call'd on me & gave the above information – **of which I told them I was apprised of by you, in New York before the Contract was written, I related (the) story to them which you gave me in the Church respecting this unjust demand you have against you from Longman & Broderip of London – this story appears so Honest in you – before we had finished our agreement – has great weight in our opinions of your good intentions** – And for my own part Sir, I told the Gentlemen of our Society that I should be willing to advance you the whole amt on my own acct but as it is best for us to proceed sure & safe. I am requested to inform you that we will forward you any advancement necessary to progress the Organ if you will give some good security in your place for the faithful performance of the Contract (& if you cannot) after you have received a certificate from your Creditors then you will be on safe ground again – You will please let me know your pleasure, & in the mean time we will make all the readiness requisite.

Believe me Sir, I have the strongest regard for you & your (distorted) good intentions, & faithfull performance of our contract. But as we are agents for the whole Society it is highly necessary that they should feel satisfied – which no doubt you will be able to do in your next letter. Yours D. Vinton

~

Mr Vinton / New York Sept 21st 1802

Sir / We Reieved your favours of the 6th Instant, and ame glad to hear your so far Progreest in subscription towards the payment of the Organ, and the work therof has not been stoped by us yet, **Nevertheless, it would have been a great advantage to us, if Mr V. hade favoured us with a line of their intention a month ago, as other Regulation might have been adopted inconsequence, however, careful we ackted to keep Mr Vintan, and oure selves fram Plame [ourselves from blame], then my son bought every thing belorigin to the Organ in his name, and if the cash had been sent, would also have kept the whole in his possession, that nothing as we and awer [our] friends thought could have hinderest [hindered us], neather Stoped the Progress of the work, then by Organs the first Expenses are in genrall the Worst – What you had the goodness to Mention in your Letter, only happened this week, and my friends Pramitted to seen me have aute [out] of the hands of them Swintlers, L & B & Co;, as there is no other help, my son carries an the Business an as ussel, and I think, you might sent your 500 Dollar down with aute Riskt, as we are Reather shard [rather short] in cash, in canisquince of the befear Mentiond, then Severel more articals are Neceisery, to be Bought before Winter Sets in, and for your Safty, you can sent the cash in the Bank, and to be paid by fifty dollars Weekly, till further order, I also must by the favour for to write new agreements, and sent them, for my Son to Singh himselfes [sign himself], and through [throw] the others away, or Destray them – the Organ for the chaple is not finished yet, incansiquince of the Carpenters, Painters, Whitewasher have been in the church. To make things as near thy can laak Like the Organ, which hinders me agreat Deal, and only this day, I have begun agin tho the church is not finished and will not be finished this fourteen days – Sir I must beg the favure by the next post to let me know how fair your approbation meeds with my Request,**

I am / Sir / with all Respect / Your Hble Servt / J Geib

~

Providence Oct 8th 1802

Mr. John Geib / Sir Since your favour of the 21st instant we have continued to transcribe the old agreements and have your name out as you are in difficulty at present, the Gentlemen Committee, think it the most prudent method to make the agreements with your Son which will make no difference to you as it reflects the pecuniary part of the business – we have therefore forwarded two written agreements the same as the old ones, Which you will Find with Eben[ezer] Burrill Esq, merchant, murray Wharf New York, he has rec[eived] orders from the committee to compleat the contract with your Son John Geib Junr, The advance fifty Dolls pr week as specified in the agreement – **I wish you all the success in the Organ that can possibly attend you may speedily be relieved from the trouble you have rec[eived] from L & B & Co,** is the sincere wish of y[our] Friend / David Vinton

~

D. Vinton Esq 6 Providence

New York Oct 15th 1802

Mr. Vinton

It is three Weeks since my Father answered your favour of Sept 6th and I have expected a few lines in Return, as they did not come I thought proper to inform you that I was Oblige'd to lay your work by – and should take it as a great favour to be informed of your intentions for the futer as their has been application made to ~~me~~ us for Business of some Consiquence from South Carolina and as also from Norfolk in Virginia, therefore your answer would be favourably Received by / your Most Hbl / Servent / John Geib Jun

NB Be particular and have the agreement alter'd as I claimed the unfinished work of your Organ as my own”

A new contract was prepared dated October 10th, 1802, of which John Jr. was probably unaware when writing above, but which apparently was brought to him just after he had posted his letter of the 15th. In this final contract was an organ disposed much as had been previously discussed for Christ Church, but of somewhat greater size, 18 feet high, 12 feet wide, and 5 feet deep, and for a contracted price of \$2500, the first \$500 to be paid at \$50/week to commence on the 10th Oct. or whenever the organ was begun (again) \$500 on the 10th of January at \$50/week, \$500 on the 10th April as before, \$500 the 10th July, and \$500 on the 10th October 1803 when the organ shall be erected in Providence. Everything is in the name of John Geib Junior, including warranties and etc. From a financial standpoint the whole organ is the responsibility of John Jr. Ebenezer Burrill is now acting as the agent with Vinton:

“Received New York October 12th 1802 of Mr Wiliam Blodget sum four hundred Dollars to paid in advance to Mr John Geib on Account of an Organ to be built for the Congregational Church in Providence / E Burrill

New York 31st Dec, 1802 / Mr David Vinton

Sir, Your favour covering bills for \$500 came safe to hand – the bill for the largest sum is acceptable – the other of Evans is not as we cannot find this person in the City as yet – Mr.

Geib complains that the money is not advanced agreeable to stipulation. I have paid him \$100 this day on acct of your bill he informs me he can have the Organ completed before May if your Committee wish it & will advance in proportion / A long indisposition has prevented my viewing the work but he informs it is more than one third finished – I shall call on him soon& advise you accordingly – I am Sir / Your Most Obedient Servant E. Burrill

~

New York Feb 28th 1803 / Mr. Vinton / Sir

I take the liberty to write to you, and beg the favoure of sending me the Depth of your gallery, which I never had befor, as we are about fining the Bellowess, therefor I should be glad to know, how fair we can go back. I hope we shall have the Organ done in time, if the payment are made Regular - / We have three hands Manufacturing Pianofortes withaute which we could not Build church organs, then two Trades are highly Necessesery for a living, Therefor I have been a thinking that in your Place might be a chance to Sell one or two Occationely, and we allow 10 (percent) Cammisson if Mr. Vinton had an opportunety to Sell my amangst his friends should be glad to Send then, then we must now Strach aure Connection, wherever we can, we Manufactur four different Sorts of P.F. – one at 200 Dol[lars] * 100 * 160 * 140 and ensuer for the goodness - / Sir / I am / your Hbl Servt / J Geib

NB the chapel of St Paules org^s are Both finished and that in St Paules is one of the best that can be Build in England – but Mr. Vinton, it is no more like mine then chalk is Like chees: mine is Warth four times the Value, in Work and Tone – you will hear a little more of it by & by.

~

New York Sept 25th 1803 / Mr. Burril / Sir

Your absence as agent for aure friends in Providence but us behindhand in aure Work incassquince of one Hundret Dollars Ive yet on the 2000. and by inquiring at Mr. Robinsan, I took the liberty to write to Mr. Burril for to find them one hundret Dollars as Soon as possible to Mr. Robinsan that I might Re[ceived] it – or elss it will Delay the Work Conssederably – I rote to Mr. Vinton last week for to send me two Hundret Dollars and as you will hear of them gentlemen befor they send it, so you can show them my letter, for to send me only one Hundret – Detucting the Hundret I have to Rec[eived] of you- I wauld not have traublet Mr. B if I did not Know that Parrish Busnes mauve Slow –

I am your Hbl Servt / J Geib

~

Newport 30 Sep 1803 / James Burrill Jun Esq / Sir

On my arrival here I found a line from Mr. Geib Which I now enclose it seems he has Called on Mr. Robinson & Taken up Money on my acct. if you have not forwarded the money wish you to retain it in your hands as he only asks for \$100 & not make a final settlement with him till you have a statement of his Acct with me / Son in haste yours / affect E Burrill “

In the end Geib received \$2300 that is documented, and probably the remaining \$200 at some point after completion of the organ December 5th, 1803.

Despite the obvious intentions of the church to commission an organ, they were not prepared to go forward from a financial standpoint as Geib Sr. had expected, though in truth if Vinton is to be believed, the delay would not have been more than perhaps six weeks or so, had not the firm's failure loomed into view. Geib on the other hand, seemed to have leaped to the task, incurring up-front costs that were significant.

The key 'legal issue' information is within the portions in **bold**. The entire story of Longman & Broderip engaging Geib in any kind of legal action is problematic. L&B itself entered bankruptcy in May of 1795, it took almost all of 1796 to organize the remains of the business, and when James Longman and Francis Fane Broderip emerged from debtor's prison in late 1796, the firm as a legal entity had ceased to exist. Through 1797 the creditors petitioned to sell Longman & Broderip in whole or in part, and it was reorganized as Longman, Clementi & Co. in Nov. 1798 at 26 Cheapside and Tottenham-Court. Broderip took 13 Haymarket with a new partner, Charles Wilkinson Jr. John Longman, the brother of James Longman, was made the head of Longman, Clementi & Co., with James continuing to participate, and traded under that name until June of 1800 when John left and it became simply Clementi & Co..

Geib's old partner, Augustus Leukfeld, was then building for Broderip and his new partner Wilkinson, though that relationship would strain a bit in time. Thorough research of the legal records of L&B, L&C, and Clementi & Co. has been conducted and at no point has the name of Geib come up after about 1796, when a simple legal case was tried in London, where a piano that had been made by Geib was stolen from the warehouse¹²⁶. The firm of Longman and Broderip had not been an ongoing entity for five years when Geib Sr. is telling his story.

But did John Geib Sr. know this? In all ways he comes across as a well-meaning craftsman, deep into his work, and unsophisticated in the ways of the world. There would have been no value or secret motive to him telling this story to Vinton as he obviously did during the initial negotiations, unless he thought there was really something going on in his business. He made it clear his son is handling all this, which was somehow resolved with him making installments to settle this supposed lawsuit. This is the reason he lays in front of Vinton, unhappily coupled with delays in the expected advance payment, that he is concerned for the business. Geib had arrived in New York as a wealthy man, and was now in trouble over cash flow that at most, given he was finishing one organ (St George's) and the case for another, should have been easily absorbable. It is possible that James Longman, still in London and desperate for cash in the face of mounting debt, engaged an agent or lawyer to contact Geib for the purpose of pressing some spurious claim, and that Geib did not engage his own legal counsel to represent him, and brush such a claim away.

On the other hand, the character of John Geib Jr. takes on a definite note of suspicion. He is far more polished than his father; probably well up on how things work, and with a superior command of the language and the ability to easily mix with other New Yorkers. The last that John Geib Sr. saw of James Longman and Francis Broderip, they were back in their respective

¹²⁶ George S. Bozarth and Margaret Debenham. '*Piano Wars: The Legal Machinations of London Pianoforte Makers, 1795-1806*', in Royal Musical Association Research Chronicle Vol. 42 (2009). London: Royal Musical Association, pp 45-108. ISSN 1472-3808.

shops. Thomas Culliford had handled all the legal wrangling with them over their failure to order promised pianos and pay for them, which had precipitated the L&B bankruptcy, and Geib had suffered silently through this lean period. To him these two men were the villains, such that family lore would have held them this way. If John Jr. wanted a convenient ‘scarecrow’ to put up, he needed to look no further than his father’s old nemesis in London. A story about them returning to make a claim over some imagined infraction (even possibly presenting a letter from James Longman as suggested), and the need to handle it for his father, might have been an easy sell. Longman & Broderip were never called L&B & Co. as Geib writes and the firm in 1802 was Clementi & Co. If Longman, Clementi & Co. or the later firm ever leveraged Geib for money, the records have failed to show it.

Perhaps at first it was just about moving money from one part of the family to another, but then the opportunity had arrived. John Jr. had turned 21 a year earlier, but unlike Broadwood, who changed the firm name to Broadwood and Son promptly when James Broadwood came of age, John Geib Sr. had made no such move.

Bankruptcy laws had been changed by the Federal Act of 1800, but at this time they still favored the creditor to the complete expense of the debtor. You could not declare yourself bankrupt, but if you were under duress from several creditors for debts exceeding \$1000 total, you could pay or persuade two friendly creditors to petition for bankruptcy, and so begin a process whereby perhaps you could obtain more favorable terms from all of your creditors, or have the debt forgiven. It would also put the full weight of the court onto your own debtors to pay up (which would be of no help here, as the Providence contract is switched to the unencumbered John Jr.). For John Jr., it could be a way to convince your father to put the company essentially into your hands, on the excuse of protecting the family business. You just need a friendly creditor or two who can make the petition.

“Notice / Whereas a commission of Bankruptcy hath been issued by the Judge of the District Court of the United States for the New-York District, against / John Geib, / Of the city of New-York, Organ-builder and Trader, and he being declared a Bankrupt, Is hereby required to surrender himself to the Commissioners in the said Commission named, on the second and sixteenth day of October next, and also on the second day of November next, at 5 o’clock in the afternoon each day, at the office of the Commissioners of Bankruptcy, at no. 32 Wilham-street, In the city of New-York; And on said sixteenth day of October next the creditors of the said Bankrupt are requested to appear and prove their debts, and choose an Assignee, or Assignees of the said Bankrupt’s estate and effects. / By Order of the Commissioners, / John Ferguson, Secretary / Aug 21”¹²⁷

The assignees chosen were John Lemaire (a sometimes trader in organs, but listed his profession as carver and gilder), John Norman (Merchant at nearby no. 22 Fly Market trading in groceries and slaves) and a Christian Hyle (unknown). Of these, Lemaire was a particular friend of John Jr. and stood for him at his US naturalization application in 1804. Lemaire was also the likely carver mentioned by Geib in early correspondence with Vinton and was surely a friendly assignee to the Geib family in any case.

The notice of bankruptcy ran in the papers daily from late August through October, no doubt to the intense chagrin of Geib Sr. who was always sensitive to bad press, even while he struggled to get the St George’s Church organ finished, delayed by work on the church itself.

¹²⁷ *Republican Watch-Tower* (NY), Oct 2, 1802

The last reading was November 2nd, and then Geib obtains a discharge (at least 2/3 of the creditors agree that at least 2/3 of the financial obligations have been met) on Nov 11th:

“Notice is hereby given, that a certificate of discharge, of / John Geib,will be allowed by the Honorable John Sloss Hobart, esq,unless cause is shown against it, by filing exceptions.....on or before the seventeenth day of November...dated the eleventh day of November, 1802”¹²⁸

The bankruptcy had lasted less than three months in total. Of the 7 other bankrupts declared at this same time, two fled the city, two successfully concluded their proceedings in 1803, two dissolved their partnership and the liable partner conveniently died immediately afterward (suicide?) and one, a John Watson, dry goods merchant, concluded his process in about the same time as Geib. All in all, the timing is suspicious, as the order for wood was probably not placed before the end of June 1802, and by August 21 a petition for bankruptcy was already being pressed in the papers. Even in old New York, 60 days credit was a common occurrence. It is odd that just as an alleged legal suit is draining cash from the business, Geib is caught up in the ‘Regulation’ as he called it, though all his ‘friends’ were there to see him out of the hands of those ‘swintlers’ L&B.

The bankruptcy affair was concluded the next July 19th to declare a dividend or distribution to John Geib’s estate and effects¹²⁹. From a financial point of view, even though the payments continued slightly delinquent from the congregational church in Providence, there were no more serious financial bumps in the road for the Geibs. David Vinton took Geib up on the offer to sell pianos from his shop in Providence (Number 7, Market Square) with notices running through 1804, and was apparently successful¹³⁰.

Geib treated Vinton like an old friend and showed evident pride in the new organ once it was finished. The reports that the bankruptcy ended when Geib demanded payment is false; in the whole proceeding he treated Vinton and the congregation as a family father might, never doing more than mildly warning of delays due to lack of payment, then rambling on about the whitewashers and etc. in St George’s Chapel delaying him there as well. The only cool tone was from John Jr., who somehow absorbed all the work that had been done (Geib Sr. speaks of nearly completing the Providence organ case early on) into some other use (the St Paul’s organ case?) to start again fresh once the new contract and advance payment was received. By all accounts the organ was a success. For a time, there was even contemplation of another such organ by Geib in the Baptist Church in Providence but this never materialized.¹³¹ In June of 1814 both church and organ in Providence were destroyed by fire.

¹²⁸ *Daily Advertiser* (NY), November 11, 1802

¹²⁹ *American Citizen* (NY), July 20, 1803

¹³⁰ *Providence Gazette*, February 4, 1804 (and forward through the year)

¹³¹ *New England Palladium* (Boston MA), December 23, 1803

Chapter 4

Geib & Son, 1802 - 1814



Even before the last of the legal matters were settled over the bankruptcy, Geib Sr. and Jr. were back to business, but not as much business as usual. The firm would now be called ‘John Geib & Son’. The St George’s Chapel organ was completed in November and December of 1802, and work began on the Providence organ as noted. The St George’s Chapel organ was his largest yet, with 3 manuals and costing a reported \$5000.¹³² The first glimpse of the third son, George, occurred in 1803, when he announced that he was selling pianos in Alexandria VA:

“G. Geib / Most respectfully informs his friends and the public in general, that he has lately received an elegant assortment of Piano Fortes, which he flatters himself cannot be surpassed, if equaled, by any in this town. And he hopes the terms of sale he intends offering the public, will induce those ladies and gentlemen to purchase who would wish to favor him with their patronage. -----
N.B He will warrant them for twelve months. For terms apply at Mrs. Wilson’s boarding house, King street, Alexandria. May 2 [1803]”¹³³

This is the beginning of George’s ‘orbiting’ relationship with the family business. Some sources have stated that George never had much to do with the business, others that he was their best salesman, and certainly his role will be seen to change frequently, but he was never far away for long, and remained in or around New York, just rarely engaged in direct activities with his father and brothers. George was in Alexandria for only a short stay, probably no longer than it

¹³² *Repertory* (Boston MA), June 17, 1808

¹³³ *Alexandria Advertiser* (VA), May 2, 1803

took to sell the pianos he had offered, which is gleaned from a notice of letters awaiting retrieval from the post in Elizabethtown Maryland (Jan. 4, 1804)¹³⁴ and Alexandria VA dated July 1st, 1804¹³⁵.

Early signs of John Geib Sr. selling outside of New York are not infrequently found. A Boston notice in 1804 (no month or day given) is reported to have been made to the effect:

“John Geib, organ and piano builder, merchandise to be seen at 15 State street, but orders received in New York”¹³⁶.

While the author of “Musical Interludes in Boston” who reports this notice goes on to construct an elaborate and inaccurate early biography of Geib based in Boston, the real nature of his business there was far less organized. Assuming the notice is correct; it simply reflects a tangential business adventure similar to the Alexandria effort, where Geib was taking advantage of recent local celebrity of the new organ in Rhode Island to promote his business. Scanning through the Boston business directories from the first decade of the 19th century shows that many businesses used the 15 State Street address, and Geib was not there long enough to be listed in any of the directories. Geib Sr. made real headway in Boston by 1808, selling pianos through Gottlieb Graupner’s music store, located at No. 6 Franklin Place, and who was deeply integrated into the Boston music scene:

“Geib’s Piano Fortes. / G. Graupner. / Musik and musical instrument Warehouse, No. 6 Franklin Place / Has just received per the Little Joe, from New York, an assortment of Piano Fortes, which he will sell at the Manufacturer’s prices – The public are invited to call and view the above, which are offered as a specimen of the excellent workmanship of J Geib and Son, of New York, from whom a constant supply will be regularly received. Oct. 6 [1808].¹³⁷

Offerings in Boston and Alexandria coincided with John Jr. and his brother Adam removing the piano manufacturing part of the business to No. 40 Barclay¹³⁸ in New York in 1804, and in April to the upper east side of Manhattan in 1805, known as Mount Vernon, Broadway¹³⁹, where their father joined them, apparently retaining a shop space on Leonard Street in 1805. This afforded them more space in a less congested part of town to do business and continued the new order where John Geib Jr. distanced himself from Geib Sr. and his organ building concerns.

It should be noted that Adam never showed keen interest in the building aspect of the instruments, and as early as late 1801 had himself listed for the 1802 directory as a teacher, the address at 132 Chatham in 1802, and 152 Chatham in 1803. Throughout his life Adam was the teacher and storefront operator and is never mentioned in the Providence letters by Geib Sr. Gildersleeve described him from family recollection as the smaller of the two twins, and before he was actually an old man, accounts of him invariably refer to him as ‘Old Adam Geib’, by which he was apparently known. The portrait that emerges is that of a devoted brother, minutes younger by age but always deferential to John Sr. and Jr. and of a studious nature. John Jr. looks the part

¹³⁴ *Maryland Herald* (Elizabethtown), January 4, 1804

¹³⁵ *Alexandria Expositor* (Alexandria, VA), Friday, July 6, 1804

¹³⁶ H. Earle Johnson, ‘*MUSICAL INTERLUDES IN BOSTON 1795-1830*’, Columbia University Press, New York, 1943, pg 281

¹³⁷ *Repertory* (Boston MA), Oct 7, 1808

¹³⁸ Virginia Larkin Redway, ‘*Music Directory of Early New York City*’, The New York Public Library, 1941, pg 38

¹³⁹ *New York Evening Post*, April 10, 1805

of the eldest son in his portrait by Jarvis (Figure 113A). Adam never appears to have sat for a portrait, or at least any that were made are now lost.

Adam was at 380 Pearl Street by 1804, a near address to the Howe family at 320 Pearl Street. William Howe had been an apprentice to Thomas Dodds, probably while still in London, and had traveled to America to take up the trade of organ and keyboard builder, and made extra money repairing and tuning, as well as selling all manner of music related goods from his shop on Pearl Street, which had been Dodd's shop previous to 1798. He died in 1799 and left behind a Widow, Sarah, and at least two children, the eldest of which is supposed to have been a daughter, Margaret. This remains unconfirmed, but in 1806 Adam Geib married a Margaret Howe. Sarah Terrett (late Howe) advertised late arrivals from London of elegant patent pianos from \$100 to \$400, through 1803¹⁴⁰, and it can be assumed there was more than a little correspondence in the early years with the Geib family, but no hard connection has been found. In 1807 Sarah (now Douglass) informed the public that she had for sale, for her children, a finger organ made by William Howe, an organized piano by Geib, and many other articles, the remainder of the stock of the Music Store, 320 Pearl Street.¹⁴¹

The Earliest American Geib Pianos and their Competition:

The earliest surviving Geib piano made in America is in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC, ID# MI*315691 and bears the serial number 5155 (Figures 41, 42). It is rather conventional, following of the model of the pianos he was making for Longman and Broderip before leaving London, with the common or English single action, and lever over-dampers, that are actuated by wooden stickers coming up through the spine and returned by baleen springs and gravity. This was the least expensive sort of piano to make, and could sell for about \$100, based on Geib's letter to Vinton about his range of pianos. The address on the name board, Bowery Road, would put it in the time period of 1802/03. It is likely, given Geib senior's penchant for German exactness, to have begun numbering his American pianos at 4911, the next number after the 4910 he claimed to have made while in London. From the chart in Appendix 2, Geib was making perhaps 50-60 pianos a year, and he could have gotten to 5155 between 1800 and 1805, with a probable date of 1804.

¹⁴⁰ Rita Susswein Gottesman, *'The Arts And Crafts In New York 1800-1804'*, The New York Historical Society, 1965, pg. 332

¹⁴¹ *Mercantile Advertiser* (NY), July 27, 1807



Figure 41, 'John Geib & Son / Bowry (sic) Road / New York' piano SN. 5155, used by permission NMAH



Figure 42, top view of SN 5155 showing lever over-dampers, used by permission NMAH

In late 1801 or early 1802 Thomas Gibson and Morgan Davis arrived in New York after working for piano builders in London. It is possible they were known to Geib though no correspondence is documented. They were eager to establish themselves of course and were very well acquainted with the improvements to the damper system (called the Irish damper, since Southwell was based in Dublin) which were indeed superior to the older lever over-damper system that Geib was fond of. They gave notice on setting up shop in New York:

“Gibson & Davis. – To the Ladies and Gentlemen, Gibson & Davis lately arrived in this country, after several years’ experience in the Piano Forte Business in the best manufactories in London, and having been established upwards of two [years] previous to coming here, have acquired such knowledge through adopted and steady perseverance in the upright and horizontal grand; likewise, square Piano-Fortes, as they flatter themselves will do them credit, and meet the unprejudiced mind approbation. Complicated are the imperfections in instruments in general; there need not much explanation to be understood by those who have the practice of playing on them, the touch being already connected with the tone, with several other things to constitute a good instrument, which is rare to be found in the common spring dampers [lever over-dampers with baleen springs]. If the springs are strong enough to damp the instant it lays so great a stress upon the tail of the key, which causes a drag on the touch, and checks the hammer of its full force, consequently the instrument loses its power. So complicated is the damper, that some part or other is frequently misplaced, either by damping the contrary string or no string at all, by some part sticking fast or not rising before the hammer strikes the string, &c. The instrument standing in tune is another valuable object which is well known to the performer, as the pull of the strings has much strength, and is required to stand the resistance, therefore the strength of the instrument relies principally on the bottom and back of the case. In the common way (spring dampers) the backs are very thin, likewise cut for the dampers to act, which cannot possibly stand the strings, so that you may ever be tuning and your instrument never in tune. To obviate the above complicated difficulties, they manufacture instruments on a plan with several improvements much approved by Mssrs Clementie (sic) and Latoure, and the most accomplished professors in London, well known by the name of the Irish Patent. As being in a free country, and having the plans of all the approved patents shall ever study to improve. The backs of their instruments are of considerable thickness, and not being cut for the damper, adds greatly to the strength. Likewise the dampers, secure from harm, either by removing from place to place, or in any other way, and renders the touch easy and light, &c. They are happy to say they have instruments on the above plan of the most brilliant and powerful tone, at no. 58 Warren-street where they continue to manufacture”¹⁴²



Figure 43, Gibson & Davis square piano, circa 1808

¹⁴² *Mercantile Advertiser* (NY), March 25, 1802 a truncated version of the notice continues through to Dec. 30 1802



Figure 44, interior of Gibson & Davis piano circa 1808

The claim of Gibson & Davis about lever over-dampers affecting the touch and being susceptible to damping the wrong string is true. However, their claims of structural stability are specious; the dimensions and materials of instruments built to either plan are trivially different. That they are openly stealing the patented design owned by Southwell and used by Clementi & Co., and Broderip and Wilkinson in London, by the legal theory of having come to America, might have struck Geib as improper. The advertisement put Geib on notice that a competitor had arrived though and proved a useful catalyst for Geib to improve his designs and styling. Gibson and Davis pianos matched the Geib instruments through this first decade for elegance and functionality. More importantly, the use of the Southwell damper system became universal, along with Southwell's other important contributions, the extra keys (an extra half octave in the treble bringing the scale from FF to c4 for 5 ½ octaves) and scroll cut decorative sound vents in the name board and right rear corner.

In 1802 Congress revised the Naturalization law from the stricter requirement of 3 years advance notice to apply for citizenship and a 14-year residency, imposed during the crisis with France in 1798, to a more reasonable 3 year notice and 5 year residency. As Geib had now met this lesser requirement, the patriotic John Geib Sr. and Jr. went to the Court of Common Pleas in New York on April 23, 1804 and petitioned for citizenship, with John Lemarie (one of the bankruptcy trustees) standing as witness for John Jr., and Robert Degrove (a hat store merchant) for John Sr.. Both Geibs list 'Organ Builder' as their occupation, and former nationality as English. Whether there was an irregularity in the giving of advance notice or some other problem, they repeated this exercise in September 1806, this time with Adam Geib standing as witness for both. Only Adam gives his occupation this time; Professor, Music, but John Sr. now lists his nationality as German. All the children 21 years old and younger, as well as John's wife Rebecca were granted citizenship with John Sr. No record for Adam has surfaced though, and perhaps his role in the business did not require it as much, or he may have taken care of this separately and such records are missing. George and the younger children were covered though, if the 1804 papers were valid for them.

David Tannenberg had been engaged to build a new church organ for the Central Moravian Church in Bethlehem Pennsylvania but died suddenly May 19th 1804.¹⁴³ Geib was subsequently engaged to build the organ which he completed in March of 1806. Orders for organs in New York had come to a standstill though, and the competition for organs and pianos had warmed, such that by 1805 the Geibs were stinging from real or imagined slights to their work. This prompted John Sr. (and likely written with substantial help from his son John Jr. who may in fact be sole author) to post the following lengthy notice, which he ran from May 28th through July 6th of 1805:

“Musical Instruments / John Geib and Son / Organ Builders, organized piano-fortes and Patent piano forte makers / Respectfully inform their friends and the public that they now carry their said business in partnership, at Mount Vernon, in the west division of the large white house lately occupied by Mr. Corry, where they will be happy to receive and execute all orders in their line. / N.B. All sorts of keyed instruments repaired on the shortest notice and in the most satisfactory manner. Adam Geib also tunes instruments with dispatch.

To The Public.

John Geib, the elder, thinks that he owes it in justice to himself on this occasion to travel a little out of the path on an ordinary advertisement and hopes the public, when they have read this address, will make due allowance, and find a sufficient apology for him in treatment he has long experienced from the interested and malevolent.

There’s a set of people in this country, who are employed, on commission, as agents, by persons abroad to put off their instruments, who make it a constant practice to decry in various ways all work manufactured here. Sometimes this is done in an open declaration that no instruments made here are to be compared in point of tone with those imported; Sometimes the injury is done with equal effect by a sneer of insinuation, but the most unfair and the most shameful because the most cunning and the least liable to detection, is to tell the customer who asks their opinion, that though the instruments made, when new, be as good both in tone, workmanship and appearance as those imported yet that they won’t stand usage, that in the course of a little time they fail in every essential particular. Thus, though the unfair attempt at imposition would have been detected perhaps by the ear and the eye, yet this method of undervaluing instruments, relating only to a future day the purchaser has no means of knowing whether they tell the truth or falsehood. The subscriber asserts that the materials for musical instruments are to be had in this country as good as in London, because in fact every thing of consequence is as much imported there as here: and as the London climate is damper than this of course it is less favorable to the instrument. He has no hesitation in saying that instruments made here, will stand the test of time, both to beauty and durability, as well as those made in any part of the world. As to the workmanship, it would be insulting to the public to endeavor to shew that the same man who makes good instruments in London will make equally good instruments here. The subscriber was the inventor of the first patent piano-fortes in England, for which a patent was obtained by him though the instruments were sold in the name of Longman and Broderip, Cheapside, London.

He has been a constant observer of every real or supposed improvement since, and he thinks it not too much to say that the instruments made in his shop under his direction or that of his son, are equal in all respects to the best instruments that ever were or can be imported. And if besides the tone the purchaser will incur the expense of an ornamented case, he may have one as highly finished and as elegantly polished & inlaid as the most costly of those imported with the name Clementi or any other name. The subscriber has been particularly injured in his department of church organ

¹⁴³ John Ogasapian, *‘Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900’*, (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 28.

building by the same sort of people. Sometimes they say his work is not equal to imported manufacture, and sometimes when they feel a little too conscience bound to say this, or perhaps are confronted by someone who knows better, they admit his church organs to be decent indeed but then they add an organ can be imported from London in one quarter the time it can be built here. He has in one instance that has come to his knowledge lost the chance of building two church organs by this same misrepresentation. The crafty agent for another agent who keeps a music store in London, received in consequence of this management, an order for two organs from London and a promise of ten per cent for his troubles, and also another ten per cent for his principal in London, who was to procure the organ of the makers. It is now more than two years since this arrangement, but no organ has yet arrived. This is one case out of many that might be mentioned.

The subscriber has, since he arrived in this country, erected four church organs, three for this city; the first for the Lutheran church; the second for Christ's Church; and the third for St George Chapel. The fourth is to be seen and heard in the new Presbyterian Church in Providence. The subscriber has no fears in submitting either of these organs to the impartial examination of judges in comparison with any other organ either here or in any part of the world, and he asserts with confidence that taking together size, tone, and workmanship they are at least equal if not superior to any instrument that ever was made.

Considering the illiberal treatment he has met with, the subscriber thinks it cannot be thought indecorous in him to make public the certificates he holds from those whose taste and science are above all question, and whose respectability secures them from all suspicion of impartiality.

The first is from the famous Abbé Vogler, Director of the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, and who is known throughout Europe as the first organist of his time. The original is in my hands and may be seen by any person desirous of inspecting it

The opinion of Abbé Vogler of a large Organ built by John Geib, in London.

“I the undersigned certify herewith, that I have played the Organ built by Mr. John Geib, at the Royal Musical Manufactory, Tottenham Court Road. For St Mary's Church, Stafford, three different times, to a numerous and respectable company of amateurs, with great satisfaction to them as well as to myself; and have also often before, as well as within that time, examined all the stops in the said organ separately, and found everything belonging to it executed in so masterly and workmanlike a manner, that I can with safety acknowledge the said Organ to be the best, in every respect whatsoever, I ever played before; and for the encouragement of the said Artist, and the esteem I have for the science I think it incumbent to give him, The said John Geib any approbation in writing, signed and sealed with my signet, in the presence of Messrs Salaman and Horn”.

Abbé Vogler, / Director of the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, Sweden / John Peter Salaman, / Charles Frederick Horn, - Witnesses, / London, June 15, 1790

The Abbé Vogler frequently travels, by permission of the King of Sweden, and makes it a point to try all organs of any celebrity which he meets with; consequently no man has greater opportunities of forming a fair and correct opinion. Mr. Salaman is a German, and the first performer on the violin that has appeared in London for these thirty years. Mr. Horn is a teacher of piano forte to the royal family and successor to Mr. Bach. These gentlemen, though they sign as witnesses, thereby mean to be understood as entirely assenting to the opinion of Abbe Vogler.

“We the underwritten committee for obtaining an organ for the first Congregational Church in this town, do hereby certify, that we contracted with Mr. John Geib for an Organ, all which the said John Geib has duly fulfilled in all respects to our entire satisfaction; and we can recommend him to any church or society as being an ingenious workman, and a complete artist in the art of Organ

building. In corroboration of this certificate, the public are referred for a specimen of his abilities of the afore mention Organ, now erected in the first Congressional Church in Providence, and which may be viewed at any time by application to the said committee –

J Burill, Jun / Jabez Boman / Tho. Webb - Committee

A. Troop / William Wilkenson / J.W. Bridgham / David Vinton / Providence, January 3, 1804

The last is from a gentleman of this city, a connoisseur, but whose name I do not feel myself at present at liberty to publish. Its authenticity, however, is capable of being placed beyond doubt, by an exhibition of the original which is now in my hands –

“I have heard your Organ and was very much pleased with it; it has a grand bass and every way answers my expectations. I have also heard St Pauls; the tones are clear and slender, but there is a deficiency in the bass. If the Bass had been richer, the effect of the instrument had been greater. It would not do justice to Handel’s Grand Hallelujah for want of bass. It is a good instrument with the exception I have now mentioned, and to most people perhaps appears perfect. I have no prejudices on my mind upon the subject, but confess that I prefer your organ much to the other; I know yours is faithfully done, and of the very best materials, and it is but carrying money out of the country to import Organs, so long as Mr. Geib build Organs as those in New York, especially that in St George’s Chapel. I wish success to your business &c.”

The subscriber has been often importuned by his friends to avail himself of these valuable complimentary marks of esteem for his work, but has hitherto declined from a desire not appear vain or forward, but the underhanded treatment he continues to experience has at length worn out his patience and determined him to address himself to the public.

He is now engaged in building a large Church Organ for a society of Gentlemen in Pennsylvania, which though not containing numerous stops he ventures to pronounce an organ of the first value. It possess two full sets of keys for the fingers and one set of keys for the feet with separate pipes, the longest 16 feet; this is customary and much esteemed in Germany, and is called a pedal; and the organist faces the congregation in the act of playing. The case is plain but as to the inside work he offers this organ as a specimen of his best manufacture.

J. Geib will be happy to contract with any gentleman for an organ, nor will the one on hand interfere as it will be an advantage to have more than one on hand at a time, but he must absolutely decline doing business through the medium of agents or any other self-interested persons; he has never yet fed a man for his good opinion, nor never will. His work must shew for itself, and he fears not to rest altogether on the language his instruments will speak for him. His Organs are warranted to be of the best materials and the best workmanship, and his Piano Fortes, if they do not stand usage equal to any that are imported, may be returned and exchanged at any time. This it is hoped will be an answer to all carping and cavilling and misrepresentations in the future. John Geib / May 28”
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¹⁴⁴ *New York Evening Post*, May 28, 1805



Figure 45, Georg Joseph Vogler, “Abbé Vogler“, Anonymous

Clearly Geib Sr. had become exasperated with the cut throat competitive nature of early New York. Speaking the language imperfectly himself and probably keeping his hand to his work, he had become the subject of innuendo and libel. This seemed particularly felt in the organ building work, as he states, but he took the care to address his piano forte business as well. “If you buy one and don’t like it” he told his readers, “you can return and exchange it”. He did not call out Clementi as one of the injurers, but his pianos would have been constantly compared against that London maker as they share a common heritage and are built much along the same plan. He or his son had probably remained up to date on Clementi pianos, possibly through correspondence with his old partner Augustus Leukfeld, still in London and supplying Broderip and Wilkinson under a large contract.¹⁴⁵ He may also have been importing a few pianos at this early date, but none are listed in the notices of that time. In any case, an examination of his pianos today from that time does confirm that he was current on the London building tradition. Indeed, the pine for London piano bass boards came from Scotland and northern Europe, mahogany from the

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Debenham, ‘*131 Cheapside, The Longman Connection*’, 2011, www.debenham.org.uk/personal/131_Cheapside_The_Longman_Connection_13-03-2011.pdf

West Indies, and other tropical woods from all over the British Empire. Geib is correct; there was nothing about London manufacture that excelled the American effort besides snobbery.

Geib was still smarting about not getting both organ contracts, and his impartial witness who made the claim regarding a weak bass in the G. P. England organ at least gives that organ some credit otherwise, and so improves the chance that their opinion was founded on a real deficiency. That Geib made the case for this organ and it remains the only extant example in America is pure irony. The case of the organ at St Mary, Stafford, referenced in the letter as the example played by Abbé Vogler, is also extant today, and these are all that are documented.

Georg Joseph Vogler, also known as Abbé Vogler (June 15, 1749 – May 6, 1814), was a German composer, organist, teacher and theorist. A notice on June 12, 1790, in London stated that he would play an additional concert at the Manufactory of Longman and Broderip at Tottenham-court Road¹⁴⁶. During his London performances, his most popular pieces were a fugue on themes from the Hallelujah Chorus, composed after a visit to the Handel festival at Westminster Abbey, and A Musical Picture for the Organ, by Knecht, containing the imitation of a storm.¹⁴⁷

Thus, Vogler was in London and at Geib's shop at the time Geib claims. While Geib could be touchy and inclined to whine over slights, even while using the somewhat inflated language of his time, he was a reliable source of information, and this is useful in deciding what will be believed of his history as seen through the lens of the press notices he gave us. Someone is editing his notices heavily; perhaps John Jr. is rewriting them at this point, for Geib senior's English is never so polished as when he appears in the notices. This long letter would be his last however, and after it ran its course the notices from Geib and Son were distinctly business-like or even terse.

A large concert was arranged for April 15th, 1806, by Mrs. Jones, to be held at the City Assembly rooms, Hotel, under the direction of Mr. Hewitt. George Geib had returned to New York and had composed a 'French Air with Watchkie's variations' for the piano and flute, announced to be performed by Mr. and Miss Riley. Later in the program George played Steibelt's Sonata on Piano Forte, with violin accompaniment by Mr Wilson. It was an extensive program and the appearance of multiple performances by Dr. Jackson, who was frequently called on to give the demonstration concerts on Geib's new organs, gave it importance.¹⁴⁸ A notice appearing the day before the concert was to take place directed attention to several particular performances, including:

"Mr. Gautiers clarinet, which is said to be unequaled in all of Europe; the concerto of Mr. Wilson, and the sonata of young Mr. Geib on the piano forte, (as if for a trial of skill) Mr. Hewitt's and Mr. Gentil's charming violins – these form a singular and rich attraction."¹⁴⁹

This notice had George performing publicly some five years before he is usually picked up in even careful histories, though he will make a much larger presence in years to come. George must have done well enough to convince the family that he deserved further education; about this time, he sailed back to London (and perhaps time on the Continent), to study with such masters as he could engage with on keyboard pedagogy, toward the proposal of returning and

¹⁴⁶ *The World*, London, June 12, 1790

¹⁴⁷ Chisholm, Hugh, ed. (1911). '*Vogler, Georg Joseph*'. Encyclopædia Britannica (11th ed.). Cambridge University Press.

¹⁴⁸ *Morning Chronicle* (NY), April 11, 1806

¹⁴⁹ *Morning Chronicle* (NY), April 14, 1806

making his mark on New York as a first rate music Professor. As he is completely absent from the record of newspaper notices and City Directory until late in 1810, it is probable that he started this journey in late 1806 or early 1807.

In October of 1806 a brief incident gives us more of a view into Geib's activities. A notice dated Oct 31, 1806 details the resolution of a dispute that arose from the capture of the ship Nancy, Mr Olcott, Master, and bound for Havana carrying assorted merchandise including the goods (probably pianos) of John Geib and Son, that was taken by the privateer ship Favorite, R. Barnett, Commander, and brought to New Providence. The captured goods were taken as prizes, but the affair was brought before the Court of Vice Admiralty, where his Honor, Henry Moreton Dyer, sole Judge, found for the claimants (including Geib) to restore their property. Geib was obviously engaged in selling into the West Indies, meaning that the scale of the business was continuing to expand.¹⁵⁰

1807 found Geib & Son engaged in building the only other organ they would erect in New England, for the North Church, Salem Massachusetts, to be completed in June of 1808. Henry K. Oliver described the Salem organ in 1873 as "Good (but only that) for its day, its tones were not smooth nor agreeable, and its un-facilities would greatly trouble a modern organist."¹⁵¹ This stands in contrast to notices posted at the time of completion:

"John Geib and Son, organ-builders, New York, have just completed a very splendid and elegant organ which is now erected at Salem in Dr. Barnard's House of Worship. Those who possess any knowledge of the mechanism of the grand instrument of musick, can determine wherein the chief excellence of his work exists." / "We are happy that Mr. Geib has erected in Salem a monument to his name, and we congratulate the society on their taste and good judgment which introduced it."¹⁵²

Much of the rest of the notice decried the local preference for unaccompanied hymn singing (psalmody) which gives enough local color to make us think the notice was not prepared solely by Geib himself. The truth about his organs probably lies somewhere in between, but as his were often the first large organs in a community, and so the first replaced or lost to fire and weather, our only access to his work is through the reports of others, often made after years of use and changes. All taken together, the picture of Geib's efforts in organ building is that he was building competent instruments to plans that were then a bit dated, with a list of stops and effects that were nowise remarkable for their time, but that seemed to meet the expectations of the congregations as delivered. The Salem organ would be nearly his last, with one more in New York to come. But the legacy for which the firm would be remembered as more than a footnote in organology was just gearing up.

Adam Geib announced that he was setting up a school to teach music in late 1807:

"MUSIC TAUGHT UPON A NEW SYSTEM / Adam Geib, teacher on the Piano Forte, respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of New York, that he shall in future not only teach his pupils the vocal and instrumental parts of Music, but likewise that of tuning their own instruments – This he thinks must be of the highest consideration, particularly to those Ladies who reside in the

¹⁵⁰ Poulson's American Daily Advertiser (Philadelphia PA), January 16, 1807

¹⁵¹ John Ogasapian, *Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*, (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 29.

¹⁵² *Repertory* (Boston MA), June 17, 1808

country during the summer months, and who are often prevented from the enjoyment of the most pleasing amusement for the want of a knowledge in the art of tuning.”¹⁵³

The number of instruments and their increasing use out of town had caught up with the ability to have competent tuners to address their needs. Whether Adam was successful at teaching his students to tune their instruments is not known, but it importantly put him on the track of official independence, and towards teachings and then trading in musical merchandise. Even while running his store in the later years, he would continue to list himself as teacher or professor of music, and would be fondly remembered in such ephemera as “A Little Girl’s Diary in Old New York.”¹⁵⁴ The company had been known as Geib & Son, in the singular, since the bankruptcy crisis, so this appearance by Adam on his own is not surprising, but it should not be read as any kind of a split with his brother or father. He was teaching out of his house at 13 Leonard Street and starting a new family, and prospective students could apply at J & M Paff’s, or at John Geib & Son, Leonard Street, near Broadway (a short walk from Adam’s house).

About this time someone seemed to have made off with the plans for the New Dutch Church Organ (the Salem organ), which Geib Sr. did not immediately discover to be missing, but in August 1809 he gave a notice of \$10 reward for information to recover these plans, which had disappeared some two years earlier.¹⁵⁵ On its own it is an unimportant detail, but as a portrait of Geib, one can see that the firm remained dependent on certain important plans and jigs that were difficult to duplicate. The appearance of the notice corresponds with the time Geib received the contract to build the organ for Grace Church, Broadway and Rector Street, his last in the city. In the Trinity Church Vestry minutes for January 11, 1810 is found:

“Upon application of the Corporation of Grace Church in this City, requesting as the last Favor that they should solicit that this Corporation would pay for the organ now building for that Church, the Board resolved to comply with the Request and that a Sum not exceeding five thousand Dollars be appropriated for the purpose.”¹⁵⁶

The organ was completed in the last half of 1810. In 1811 Geib bid on the organ for St John’s Chapel, Varick Street, between Beech and Laight, a new church then under construction. The \$6,000 contract was awarded to John Lowe and his apprentice Thomas Hall, of Philadelphia. That organ was a great success, and Hall remained on in New York to establish a very successful organ building business, training the next generation of organ builders in the city.¹⁵⁷ Geib Sr. would build a few small chamber organs in his remaining years, but no other large church organs would come from his shop.

Geib’s tirade against foreign imports was answered in part when hostilities with Great Britain and France caused President Jefferson to press Congress to enact the Embargo Act on December 22nd, 1807, which slowed the import of most foreign goods including pianos and organs. Though the act was in force for only 15 months and did far more harm than good to the

¹⁵³ *New York Evening Post*, October 7, 1807

¹⁵⁴ Catherine Elizabeth Havens, ‘*Diary of a Little Girl in Old New York*’, 2nd edition (1920)

¹⁵⁵ *New York Evening Post*, August 12, 1809

¹⁵⁶ William Rhinelander Stewart, ‘*Grace Church and Old New York, New York*’, Dutton 1924, pg 65

¹⁵⁷ John Ogasapian, ‘*Organ Building in New York City: 1700-1900*’, (Braintree: The Organ Literature Foundation, 1977), pg 32-37. The organ was completed in 1813 but on the way from Philadelphia to New York, the ship was seized by the H.M.S. Plantagenet (a result of the British blockade) and the organ held for \$2000 ransom, which was paid November 25th 1813. Lowe had traveled to New York to try to help with the situation but died on arrival, leaving the ransom payment and the work of erecting the organ to his young apprentice Thomas Hall, who launched his career in NY.

general economy, it caused the first wave of pro-American sentiment towards goods manufactured at home, including pianos. Alone it might not have been sufficient to cool the American taste for London made goods, but continued hostilities on the seas strongly depressed trade, and in particular friction with Great Britain erupted into war in June of 1812. For New York City, the greatest problem from that war was dealing with the uncertainty and shipping restrictions.

Blockades were threatened, invasions rumored, and certainly the doubling of tariffs on imported goods on July 1, 1812 meant that non-essential imported goods like pianos were out of reach. The war officially ended on December 24th, 1814, ushering in the ‘Era of Good Feelings’ towards Great Britain, but by then the domestic American piano manufacturing industry had become accepted and sized to meet demand, and American pianos stood side by side with their British and French counterparts as equals. American designs for furniture and pianos made between 1807 and 1815 became distinctly different from the somber English case goods, and new designs were taken up by Geib as well. At the end of 1806 John Geib and Son made the following announcement:

“John Geib & Son, respectfully inform the public, and the lovers of the arts, that they have just constructed a Forte Piano on a new plan, it having four pedals – 1st the harp; 2d the Bassoon; 3d the Full Chorus; 4th, the Swell – to which they invite the curious and ingenious, hoping it will meet their approbation. / They have also on hand a Best elegant Forte Piano, which in point of tone and workmanship, they flatter themselves is equal, at least, to any one in the city. Dec 29 (1806)”¹⁵⁸

The harp pedal pressed a buff leather strip into the strings near the nut (also called the buff stop), the bassoon pressed a thin wooden strip fitted with a loop of stiff paper down to the strings such that the paper pressed on the tenor and bass strings to give a distinct buzzing sound, the full chorus is simply the dampers lifted off, and the swell is a rod that lifts the right hand short lid flap up, allowing the sound to suddenly increase as the cover lifts away. Three pedal pianos with buff, dampers and swell are represented by the example in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NY (Figure 46) but the author is unaware of any having the bassoon stop so early as this. In fact, the bassoon stop is not known in any other American pianos that were not made on the Viennese model, which was a piano quite distinct and apart from the pianos made in New York at this time. Geib might have been aware of the use of this bassoon stop occasionally employed on German grand pianos made about then, and this was possibly an experiment.

The second part of the note might well refer to a very different plan however, a piano design that was both remarkable and unknown before. About this time the decoration of the pianos changed and brightened to what John Watson, in “Changing Keys” astutely refers to as the “New York Style”¹⁵⁹. Research into period furniture design reveals this to be an adaptation of the Federal Style, making use of contrasting wood veneers and gilt, with the highly competent inlay and joinery of European craftsmen. Even the most straightforward four-square piano took on a special attraction.

¹⁵⁸ *New York Evening Post*, December 30, 1806

¹⁵⁹ John Watson, ‘*Changing Keys; Keyboard Instruments for America 1700-1830*’, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Scarecrow Press, 2013, pg 73

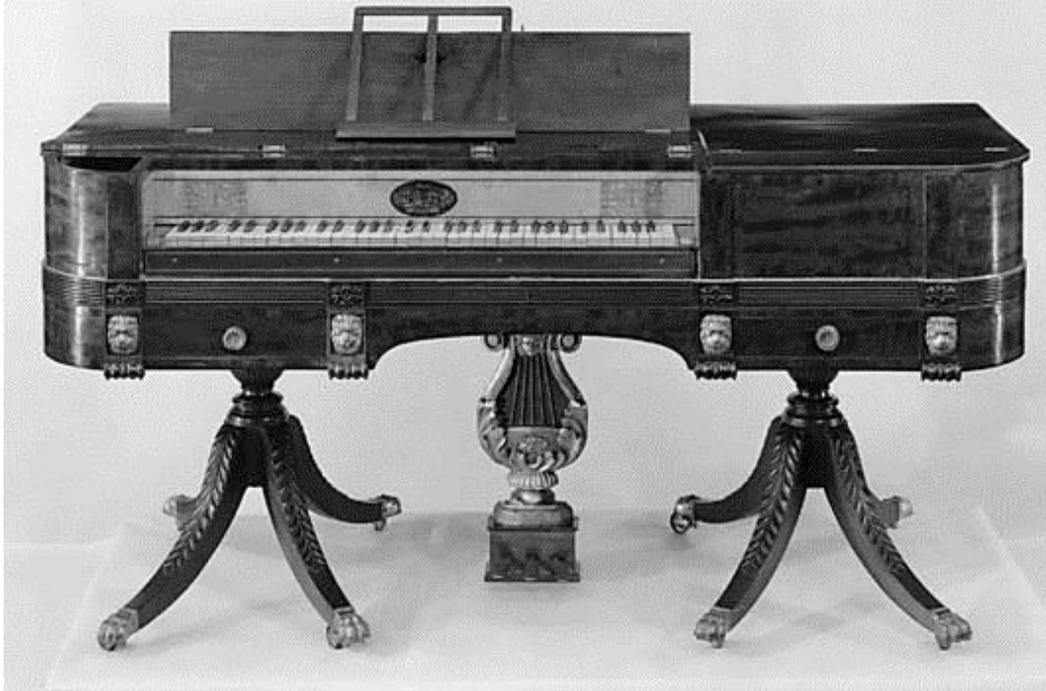


Figure 46, Geib & Son, NY, SN 5414, by permission of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

Additionally, before this, all square pianos were in fact rectangular, having four 90-degree corners. Around 1802 a new design suddenly appears in London, where the front corners are dramatically rounded, having a radius from the point where the keys meet the name board (on the left) and curving around to the side, symmetrical on both ends. This was called “circular, circular ends, or Oval Sideboard” in London, and “round end” in America. Both Geib & Son, and Gibson & Davis in New York built these, and in the UK, examples by Stodart, George Dettmer, Augustus Leukfeld, Borrowman, Charles Dierkes, and following the death of Leukfeld in December 1810, his successor, Holmyard. In the UK, the central figure in this design mystery is George Dettmer, who built the design extensively, and is known to have built for Stodart, Leukfeld and Holmyard. Dettmer was also the builder most interested in piano designs, innovating against a background of distinct uniformity from the great shops of Clementi and Broadwood, where perhaps one example of a wide circular cornered piano from either is known to be extant. A Dettmer with round corners and dated to 1802 is extant. It was a design that seemed to particularly catch on in New York and dated examples of Geib instruments suggest that the design was first brought forward by them about 1806.

As examples of the pianos makers art, these instruments, with their combination of ornament and detail combined with restraint and unbroken surfaces of outstanding veneer, are among the most beautiful keyboards ever built. Even now they are show stoppers, and as such, these instruments exist today in much greater numbers than their actual numbers when built would suggest. Examples are in many of the great and lesser museums and museum estates in America, and rarely come up for auction. Geib and Son had a winner, and no list of pianos in a first-rate merchant’s store going forward would be complete without a fair representation of this ‘Best Elegant’ piano (with Grecian Legs) among the lot.

Two pianos as above have come down to us in particularly good states of preservation and deserve a little analysis. Dated pianos by Geib are rare, as with most pianos from the 19th C, as the tradition of putting the date year on keyboard instruments passed from fashion between 1796 and 1809. A piano by Geib, now at the American Museum in Bath, UK, comes with both provenance and date that are conclusive. Eliza Ann Ferris received the piano for her 18th birthday in 1809, documented by family records that accompanied the piano to England with the family, and indeed, on the elaborate name placard pasted under the dust board is found 'June 1809' neatly written in pencil at the top by the shop foreman, as below.



Figure 47, Company notice appearing on the bottom of the shade of a Geib piano, SN 5455, dated 1809. Photo courtesy of Katherine Hebert, American Museum, Bath, processing by John Watson, CWF

A summary of such well documented pianos from various dates has led to the creation of a possible serial number schematic presented in Appendix 2. This piano, and a near twin now on loan from The College of William and Mary to the collection at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, present us with a clear picture of Geib's crowning achievement, his 'round cornered, elegant best' piano. Retailing for some \$425 dollars on carved Grecian legs, it combines classical and New York style elements into a spectacular unified whole. At close inspection the runs of

string inlay outline every contrasting wood inlay and draw the eye to the curly figure in the body of the name board. Every surface is jewel-like, and from a distance, pulls together to make a whole that is beyond anything seen to date.

Geib was no stranger to fancy inlay work; a piano by Geib Sr. and in the author's possession is one of Longman and Broderip's 'Fancy' styles and built by Geib Sr. In its day it featured contrasting purple heart, satinwood, and crotch mahogany with double and triple inlay strings as borders. While time has oxidized the purple heart to a fine brown, and the yellow of the satinwood to a deep gold, it still offers much for the eye to enjoy.

However, these New York pianos are at another level of sophistication entirely. Inside, the 'shade' (also called a dust board) is a deep green with hand painted miniature roses around the perimeter (executed for the Ferris piano, but missing in the CWF example, though a note underneath the shade instructed them to be painted in).



Figure 48, Geib & Son, NY, SN 5360, ca. 1808 with detail of inlay, used by permission CWF



Figure 49, Top view of Geib & Son, NY, showing wide radius corners, used by permission CWF



Figure 50, Geib & Son showing full instrument with internal 'shade' board, used by permission CWF

The fret work in the name board has been reduced in thickness to a few millimeters, thin gilded leather substituting for silk, and the frets cut to give a classical lyre, such that the curly maple contrasting against the gold leaps out at the observer. The Ferris piano retains its pedal lyre, which was also gilded, giving the effect of light below the piano, rather than some dark mechanics. Pedals in early six-legged pianos were often removed, or left off after a piano was moved, due to the difficulty of players with long legs accessing the pedal, and perhaps general disuse for the type of music often being played.

The contrasting dark mahogany panels in both instruments provide the needed contrast to make the highlights glow. They would have been the fanciest pieces of case goods in the house yet retain enough restraint to keep from spoiling the effect. They also marked the pinnacle of Geib's piano design. While Geib continued to produce fancy examples from time to time, the need for increased size pushed these pianos into the realm of gaudy, simply from the effect of scale.

Stamped inside the cheek edge that mates with the name board of the CWF piano is "D. Thomas", who was Daniel Thomas. If Thomas followed the tradition of the London piano makers, this stamp would indicate that he was the principal workman responsible for completing this piano. His employer John Geib Sr. left several pianos made for Longman & Broderip with the name 'Geib' stamped in discrete places within the instrument. Daniel Thomas was listed in the City Directory in 1816 as a cabinet maker, then the next year and all following years as piano-forte maker, located at 87 Warren, and by 1831 also at 89 Warren, indicating the further expansion of his business. He was listed until 1835,¹⁶⁰ and several pianos by Thomas are extant. Many employees stayed with the Geib firm for decades while in America. It must have been a fair place to work, and given the craftsmanship of what can be examined today, they represented the best wood-working and technical piano design craft possible at the time.

Clementi pianos had the damper lifting wires screwed into the key lever tails by a flexible leather coupling, so that the weight of the falling key lever acted to hold the damping cloth to the string and silently and quickly damp the note. The action frame is hinged near the rear, such that pressing on the pedal to raise the dampers lifts the tail of the key levers, which drop slightly in front at each depression. Extraction of the action requires unscrewing each damper, careful work that consumes much time. The Geib solution was to shape the key lever tails into a 'C' shaped clasp, and to then screw the damper wires to a separate hinged damper lever. This separate damper lever system was possibly pioneered by Broadwood, as seen in one of their pianos dated 1803. The action still puts the same weight on the dampers, but the action can be withdrawn and returned in a few minutes, over and over.

Later piano design from other makers simply weighted the levers to aid the damping, at the expense of touch weight, but Geib would use this 'C' shaped clasp well into the 1830s. This resulted in a somewhat lighter touch for Geib pianos compared to all others, throughout the first quarter of the century. They continued to use Geib Sr.'s double action as it had been developed by 1787 for most extant specimens, only reluctantly switching to other improvements as the market demanded. Pianos from at least as late as 1854, by the Baltimore firm of Newman and Brother, would use the Geib double action, and in England the period of use ran to the 1860s.

¹⁶⁰ Virginia Larkin Redway, *Music Directory of Early New York City*, The New York Public Library, 1941, pg 79



Figure 51, action of Geib piano with damper levers and ‘C’ tail, used by permission CWF

Geib brought two of these ‘Best Elegant’ pianos with him to his lodgings at Mrs. Very in Salem MA in June of 1808, when he was completing his organ there and arranging for the opening recital¹⁶¹. He now had pianos for sale in New York, Salem, Boston, the West Indies, and probably Philadelphia and Baltimore, judging by slightly later notices that have survived. By September of 1810 Geib was advertising for 6 Journeymen Cabinet-Makers at a time – *“the best of workmen; ingenious, sober and industrious”*¹⁶².

George Geib returned from England and posted a notice dated October 24, 1810, that *“he was lately arrived and proposes teaching music after the most finished style of the first masters in Europe, composition, thoro’-bass, a new system of fingering, singing, and the German flute. He also accompanies his scholars to enable them to become good timeists”*.¹⁶³ This notice appeared daily until December, when he thanked his friends and patrons for their liberal encouragement and further expanded his plans to open an *“Academia Musicale in a very elegant and spacious room, in the manufactory of John Geib & Son, the corner of Church and Sugarloaf Streets”*. Tuition was \$20/quarter or \$1.00/lesson, and one could leave commands at the manufactory above or the second address at Leonard Street & Broadway¹⁶⁴. George had a bent for flowery expressions such as ‘Academia Musicale’, and pompous beginnings that quickly seemed

¹⁶¹ *Salem Gazette* (MA), June 03, 1808

¹⁶² *Mercantile Advertiser* (NY), September 25, 1810

¹⁶³ *New York Evening Post*, November 09, 1810

¹⁶⁴ *New York Gazette*, December 07, 1810

to fade away, and within the year he had relocated his 'Musical Academy to Mr. Kellogg's Seminary, No. 53 John Street'.

By the middle of 1812 he left the city again, but during 1811 he participated in at least three large concerts, for Mr Perosser on April 18th, Mr Nicolas on April 25th, and Mr Duffy on October 22nd, playing piano concertos where he had composed the orchestra parts. He billed himself as 'George Geib Junior' for all of these, an odd appellation, and it leaves us to wonder just why. Perhaps he was eager to make the connection to his well-known father. He dropped this practice after 1811. The programs were much like other programs of the time, a collection of short concertos, art songs, and duets, most featuring one each of the instruments normally in vogue.^{165 166} He had some success with publishing his first song "Angels Weep With Pity" and selling it through Joseph Willson through April 1812, but George was never in one place long and appears next in Kentucky in 1813.

Geib & Son completed an expansion of the new manufactory on Church and Sugarloaf Street, in March of 1811¹⁶⁷, optimistic for a bright domestic future. Geib's daughter Mary Ann was married on May 13th, 1811 to John Wallis, a young attorney from a very important family, and this would be an important marriage for the Geibs. The Wallis' were among the first families in New York, and he played a senior role in the lives of the Geibs as executor and counselor for the coming decades. In late 1810, Paff's music store advertised Clementi (with all the partners also listed as though they were separate instrument makers) along with Astor, and Goulding & Co. (Goulding, Phipps, D'Almaine), but the hour of the import was brief and closing quickly. The declaration of War by Congress in June of 1812 between the United States and Great Britain brought importation to a close for a time, but also created great risk for shipping goods, including pianos, between port cities. Throughout 1812, and continuing with a regular monotony through 1814, Geib & Son gave the same form notice:

"J Geib & Son, respectfully inform their friends, and the public in general, that they continue to manufacture Piano-Fortes and Organs of every description – Their present stock consists of a variety of Piano-Fortes of the newest fashion and most choice tones, Chamber Organs large enough for small churches, Organized Piano-Fortes and Barrel Organs, all of which they warrant good, and offer for sale upon very reasonable terms at their manufactories, corner of Sugar-Loaf and Church streets, and No. 95 Leonard street."¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *New York evening Post*, April 16, 1811

¹⁶⁶ *New York Gazette*, October 21, 1811

¹⁶⁷ *New York Evening Post*, April 17, 1811

¹⁶⁸ *Mercantile Advertiser* (NY), December 03, 1812



Figure 52, John Geib & Son, circa 1806, used by permission



Figure 53, John Geib & Son, SN 5515, circa 1810, Carolina Clavier Collection. "to be ornamented in the new style No 1" in pencil on back of name board



Figure 54, John Geib & Son, SN 5515, circa 1810, key levers for natural & accidental



Figure 55, John Geib & Son, SN 5515, circa 1810, key levers in action frame



Figure 56, John Geib & Son, SN 5515, circa 1810, 'Grecian' legs trestle stand.



Figure 57, John Geib & Son, SN 5515, circa 1810, dampers and hammers



Figure 58, John Geib & Son, SN 5515, circa 1810, detail from name board painting with firefly on stem



Figure 59, pedal box for Geib SN 5515 piano; the left pedal raises the dampers, the right pedal raises the right lid flap. Originally this box had a silk or mirror backed lyre attached, but this was removed at an early time.

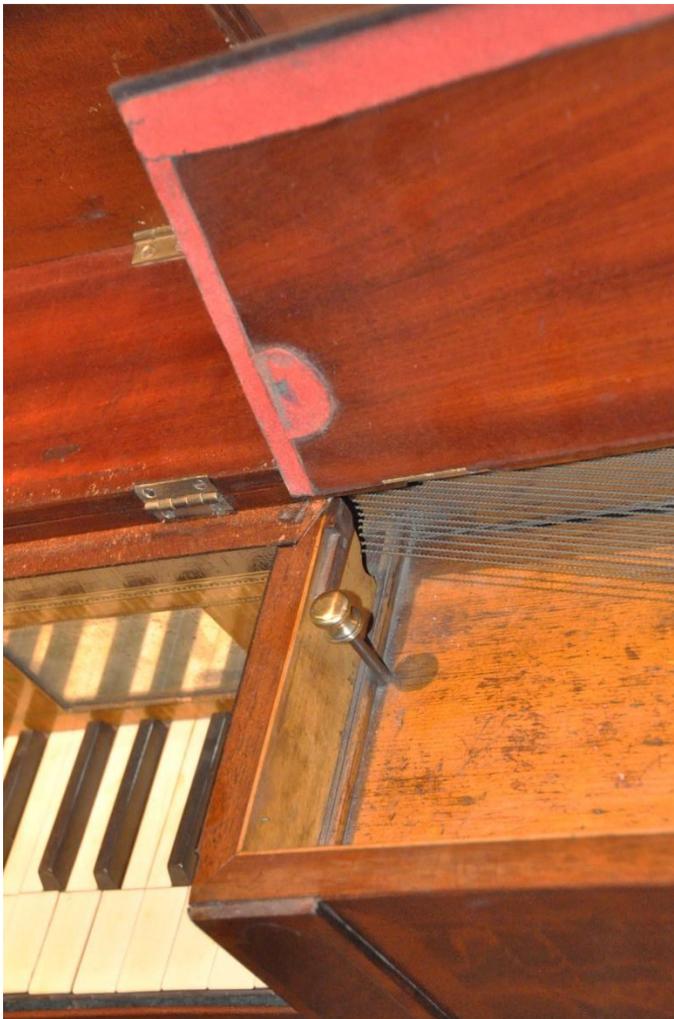


Figure 60, right lid flap and actuator arm (brass button on top) of Geib 5515.

On depressing the right pedal, the arm rises and lifts the lid flap, acting as a sound swell so that the music volume suddenly increases. When lowered gently it is silent; a sudden release of the pedal causes the lid flap (shown partially opened here) to drop and give a sharp report, useful for gun effects! While London made pianos had abandoned this feature in the late 18th C, Geib would continue using it until the mid-teens.



Figure 61, Geib 5515, lowest bass note (FF), the lowest natural key is about 30% wider at the head than standard naturals, with a sliver of ivory or sometimes mahogany in place, to close the gap produced by the action frame and improve the symmetrical look (picture on right is the top c4 key) of the keyboard. Geib began this practice on their better pianos about 1805, and Gibson & Davis were known to use it as well. John Kearsing did not use it with any regularity, but one elaborate piano from 1826 does use this wide FF key lever. John Goodman was building in the Lexington/Frankfurt KY area after Geib were selling there, and adopted this for the one extant piano we can examine today. It is likely a case of having one of Geib's pianos as a model.



Figure 62, after about 1810 Geib began coupling the main fallboard to the lid with a brass rod, first curved, then a simple straight bar, to hold the fallboard open for a music desk. Piano tuners and technicians, and possibly Geib as well, had been adding a rotating bracket to the lids (see right hand picture, Geib SN5360) to accomplish this for several years (always leaving a bad rub mark on the lid!) before Geib and Gibson & Davis made this feature standard on their better models.

Some observations on the Name Board Cartouche.

The uniformity of the calligraphy featured on London made instruments by any one maker was so well established that it was clear that not only did makers continue to use their same local calligrapher for their name boards over the years, but that many of their competitors may have used the same calligrapher. While the basic gothic script font was employed for both harpsichords and pianos in London, the free style flow of the embellishments was characteristic and although calligraphers were trained in basic approaches, personal style can often be detected in the ends of swirls and letter embellishment. The three name boards below were made within a year of each other and from the same part of London, and the uniformity is notable, but Kirkman and Beck, who worked near each other, is nearly identical.



Figure 63, The piano name boards are, from top to bottom,

1. J. & A. Kirkman, 1777
2. F. Beck, 1778
3. J. Zumpe, 1778

It is therefore not surprising that Geib made use of outside calligraphers when it came to adding the name cartouche to his pianos. Longman & Broderip had switched to the oval enamel plaque in 1785 and almost all L&B pianos found after that date bear this type of cartouche, with the lettering in a far less ornate serif style, shown in figure 64, and below.



Figure 64, Longman & Broderip piano, SN 2132, circa 1792.

Clementi, on acquiring L&B in 1798, continued this tradition for a short while, but preferred something more decorative and by 1804 had begun to use a painted dark ground with the name in gold bearing ink.



Figure 65, Muzio Clementi 7 Co piano, 1804

Geib, on setting up in New York, began searching for the best expedient for his name board cartouches. With Clementi pianos coming into New York as a major competitor, and his experience with the former company, Geib used a very similar cartouche scheme. Very early and plain pianos, made to sell at the \$100 level as indicated in his notices, were professionally lettered on the name board itself without any additional inlay or background, slightly nicer ones got more elaborate treatment.



Figure 66, John Geib & Son, circa 1804, courtesy of the Piano Technicians Guild



Figure 67, John Geib & Son, Bowry (sic) Road, SN 5155. The calligraphy is much like the figure above.



Figure 68, John Kearsing & Son, 1804, note the design similarity to figure 67



Figure 69, John Geib Piano, SN 5304, circa 1806

By 1806 the name boards had acquired a certain uniformity, featuring a black or dark mauve background with the name and city in gold, the rim decorated with semitransparent ‘pearls’ in pale rose or green, with highlight glints reflecting back as though they were bubbles, similar to George Astor pianos which were ubiquitous in New York City at the time. In 1804/05, George Gilfert set up to make pianos for his own music shop in New York from his 13 Maiden Lane address, close to where Geib would settle slightly later. Gilfert employed John Kearsing & Son who had arrived in New York in 1804, and whose piano making firm would grow to rival Geib in the coming years.¹⁶⁹



Figure 70, George Gilfert piano, made by Kearsing & Son, circa 1806.

¹⁶⁹ George Gilfert was a music and musical instrument seller in New York from at least 1788 and began importing pianos in 1794 (*Diary* [NY], Nov. 11, 1794). In 1804 he opened a ‘Piano Warehouse’ at 13 Maiden Lane and began to sell patent piano fortes (*Morning Chronicle* [NY] July 6, 1804), implying they were of his own make. Gilfert died Dec. 1814 and the business was not continued, and his later years saw little or no advertising activity after 1808. A careful comparison of four Gilfert pianos with contemporary Kearsing pianos made in New York at the time reveals Kearsing to be the obvious maker, with many small details identical. The Kearsings straggled into America in waves - John Sr. (1743/44 – 1815) came with William (1779 – ca 1848) and possibly George (1776 - ?) first in Dec. 1802, followed by John Jr. (1787 - ?) in Oct 1803 and then Thomas (1774 - ?) in Nov 1806, as recorded in the Alien registration of July 1812. All of them were apparently practical piano builders, and had lived on St John Street, Clerkenwell, London, in the heart of the piano making district in London. They were all working together until about 1810 when John Jr. and Thomas split off, leaving William and John Sr. together as Kearsing and Son. John Sr. made his will in 1813 listing Thomas, William and John Jr. as witnesses, but George was not around. The George Kearsing that became a prominent vendor of gilding materials and foil was a grandson, born in 1799 while still in London. Following John Sr.’s death in June 1815, William continued until 1818 then left for London, where he had his own house selling pianos back into America and also the UK. He returned about 1838 and wound up his life in Richmond VA. Because John Jr. continued as ‘John Kearsing’ without the Jr., he has been confused with the father.

‘Era of Good Feelings’ and the Lexington Experiment.



The numerical evidence, based on serial numbers, is that business was very slow during the period of 1811-1816, perhaps 20 - 25 pianos/year but not more. Peter Karthaus of Baltimore had two elegant Piano-Fortes by Geib & Son in February, 1812¹⁷⁰, and Dufief's of Philadelphia advertised three similar pianos in May¹⁷¹, but these were the last new ones seen in these cities' notices until 1815. The safe route to new markets seemed to lie in the West, by land, and this is the direction George Geib undertook in early 1813. George married Mary Smythe (Smith?) in the last part of 1812 or very early 1813, a girl from New York City but otherwise of indifferent family connections. Gildersleeve wrote of Geib family lands in Kentucky, but the travels of George and his wife give no hint that anything like this was waiting for them.¹⁷²

Life remained busy for the Geibs as the war progressed; Richard Wolfe indicated that Adam Geib acquired the engraved sheet music plates of a minor music publisher, John Appel, when Appel went out of business in 1813, towards an entry into the music publishing business, and this may be true, though the rest of the history Wolfe gives for the Geibs is woefully incorrect.¹⁷³ In New York city the youngest son, William, made his public debut with a voluntary on the Organ to benefit the Orphan Asylum on May 5th, 1813.¹⁷⁴

Meanwhile, from a notice he gave, George arrived in Lexington Kentucky before April 8th, 1813. Lexington was a prosperous and rapidly growing city, without any specialty music store as yet. When John Mellish wrote of Lexington in 1810-1811 he described it thus;

“Around Lexington the country is truly beautiful, and the improvements...exhibit a pleasing picture of the progress of society. Here are finely cultivated fields, rich gardens and elegant mansions, for the most part built of brick. The streets of Lexington are airy and wide at right angles to each other,

¹⁷⁰ *American and Commercial Advertiser* (Baltimore, MD), February 27, 1812

¹⁷¹ *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), May 18, 1812

¹⁷² Alger C. Gildersleeve, '*John Geib and His Seven Children*', (Far Rockaway: no publisher, 1945; reprinted Salem, MA: Higginson Genealogical Books, 1987), pg. 15, 19

¹⁷³ Richard J. Wolfe, '*Early American Music Engraving and Printing*', University of Illinois Press, 1980, Pg 55, 56

¹⁷⁴ *New York Gazette*, April 29, 1813

the houses are mostly of brick and as far as the town extends, it is not less handsome than Philadelphia / it now contains 4327 inhabitants / three newspapers are published in the town / a number of valuable manufactories are established / and there are four good taverns and about 30 retail stores and two book stores.”¹⁷⁵

Geib settled next to J. Postlethwait’s tavern, one of the four mentioned by Mellish, and the musical center of the city, an elegant two-story building with thirty six rooms on the south-east corner of Main and Limestone.¹⁷⁶ It was a most propitious place to begin, at the heart of the cultural city center. His first notice of April 8, 1813 gave:

“For Sale / At J Postlethwait’s tavern, an elegant patent Piano Forte with drawers and eeded and mounted legs of the latest fashion, manufactured by John Geib and Son, New York, Price 320 dollars. / Another elegant Patent round cornered piano forte with reeded legs, without drawers, by the same maker, Price 320 dollars / Imported by George Geib, who will attend any time for 9 to 1 in the morning, to show the Piano Fortes to any Ladies or Gentlemen who may honor him with a call.”¹⁷⁷

This notice was followed up in June with an announcement of additional pianos just received, manufactured by John Geib Jr. ‘one of them has an Octagon front, of a kind much admired’. / Apply at J. & G. Geib’s Music Store, on Main Street. W. Geib’.¹⁷⁸ The notice, coming from William, indicated he had joined George briefly. Throughout this period from now on, notices referred to John Geib Jr. or Geib & Son as the maker and George as his partner. William was traveling between Philadelphia, New York, and Lexington. By August, Geib named his operation a Music Store and Seminary, and had added music, piano wire, and veneer selections for makers, along with playing cards and fancy goods.¹⁷⁹ At his music store’s height in 1814, George gave the following notice which bears repeating:

“George Geib’s / Wholesale and Retail / Music Store / Removed from Poplar row to the brick building on Main street, adjoining Frazer’s corner, & next door above John S Snead’s store. He returns his thanks to the public for the very distinguished liberality with which they have supported his Music Store and Seminary, since his residence in this place. He has now on hand a stock of musical instruments of every description equal to any store of the kind in the union – all which he offers for sale at the Philadelphia prices with cost of carriage. His piano Fortes are manufactured by John Geib and Son, who have made upwards of 5000, in Europe and America. The Piano Fortes will be warranted equal in tone and very superior in workmanship to any imported from Europe. / Piano Fortes as follow:

Eight Grecian Legged three string patent

Six do do two stringed, round corned patent

Six do do two stringed, square corned patent

Four do do two stringed, plain patent

Military instruments of every description for Bands, Drums, Fifes, &c. A very great and general collection of the most fashionable songs, waltzes, marches, cotillions, dances &c of the celebrated

¹⁷⁵ John Mellish, *‘Travels in the United States; Performed 1806-1811, corrections and improvements till 1815’*. Berwick; Printed and Published by William Lothead, High Street, Glasgow

¹⁷⁶ Joy Carden, *‘Music in Lexington Before 1840’*, Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1980, pg 35

¹⁷⁷ *Kentucky Gazette*, April 08, 1813

¹⁷⁸ *Western Monitor*, June 06, 1813

¹⁷⁹ *Kentucky Gazette*, August 02, 1813

composers. Music for full Orchestra, Quintettes, Quartettes, Trios, Duos, Solos, &c. for all instruments of music – with every composition of merit to be had in the union, with a very great selection of Flute and Violin music. Progressive lessons and instruction books for all instruments, Roman, German and English fiddle strings, and Piano Forte wire. Paris manufactured Fancy Paper for Rooms, Velvet, Satin, and Muslin with elegant bordering for same. Pictures – Historical, Naval, Religious, Sporting, and Domestic. Playing cards of every quality. The discount given in Philadelphia will be given to wholesale purchasers and musicians. Lexington June 13, 1814”¹⁸⁰

No triple strung pianos by Geib are known to survive, and these must surely have been the costliest. ‘Grecian Legged’ might have meant the pedestal stands with curved legs as seen in the Met. Museum example and the round corners have already been discussed. From the published notices, it seemed that George was making a success out of the Lexington attempt, but something confounded his business plans (possibly the dissolution of partnership between John Sr. and John Jr. at this time, to distribute the holdings) and on April 1st, 1815 he announced the closing of the J. & G. Geib’s music store and sale of all goods at prime cost including the piano fortes, drums, flutes and etc.¹⁸¹

This is followed on May 28th by an announcement of a new business by George just to teach young ladies music, but that applications can be made to the location of his former music store on Main Street¹⁸². However, almost at once he gave notice he was leaving and his house was put up for rent, ‘*possession can be given June 23rd*’.¹⁸³ Then on June 15th, William Geib sent notice that new pianos had arrived from New York and were for sale at J. & G. Geib’s Music Store on Main Street, but no specific mention is made of George at all.¹⁸⁴ It would seem William was sent to Lexington to take care of business for his brother. Why the sudden shift is hard to understand, as other stores, and slightly later, other music stores, were doing quite well, based on how long they appear in notices. George was nothing if not quixotic, so these impulsive moves may simply be part of his story, but this marks the last time George was directly involved in a business venture with any of the brothers. Even when George was in reduced circumstances over the next two decades he remained distinct and apart from the others.

In the last half of 1815 or early in 1816 George’s first son, George Henry (Harry) Geib was born. Gildersleeve states he was born in Lexington, and others quote a date of 1818, but both may be in error. It seems George disappeared from Lexington before the new pianos could be sold, the Lexington papers carry no further notices of Geib pianos for sale anywhere, and he only reappears when his wife Mary’s death was reported in Nashville Tennessee on March 11, 1816, age 22.¹⁸⁵ Young women dying in childbirth was so prevalent at the time that perhaps the birth of George H. was involved. In any case George was left a single father with an infant and did the only responsible thing which was to return to New Jersey to his parent’s house, where he reemerges later.

¹⁸⁰ *Kentucky Gazette*, July 4, 1814

¹⁸¹ *Kentucky Gazette*, April 24 1815

¹⁸² *Western Monitor*, June 30, 1815

¹⁸³ *Western Monitor*, June 16, 1815

¹⁸⁴ *Western Monitor*, July 28, 1815

¹⁸⁵ *Commercial Advertiser* (NY), April 8, 1816

Chapter 5

The Piano in Early America, 1775 - 1800



Figure 71, Charles Taus piano, 1794, Carolina Clavier Collection

Piano making in America began as early as March of 1775, when Johann Michael Behrent (d. 1780), placed a notice in the Pennsylvania Packet:

J O H N B E H R E N T,
JOINER and INSTRUMENT MAKER, living in
Third-street continued, in Campington, direct-
ly opposite Coates's Burying-ground,
HAS just finished for sale, an extraordinary
fine instrument, by the name of PIANO FORTE,
of Mahogany, in the manner of an harpsichord,
with hammers, and several changes: He intends
to dispose of it on very reasonable terms; and be-
ing a master in such sort of work, and a new be-
ginner in this country, he requests all lovers of
music to favour him with their custom, and they
shall not only be honestly served, but their favours
gratefully acknowledged, by their humble servant,
J O H N B E H R E N T.

Figure 72, Behrent's notice, Pennsylvania Packet, March 13, 1775

The notice ran through March, and Behrent disappeared thereafter, likely a business casualty of The Revolutionary War which was about to commence in earnest, and who was dead by 1780. Through the war there was understandably no movement of immigrants from London to

America, but following the peace in 1783, James Juhan, who had recently moved to Philadelphia, advertised:

“James Juhan, lately arrived in the city with his family, informs the public, that he makes the great North American forte pianos, the mechanical part of them being entirely of his own invention, and so simple that it is the easiest thing in the world to keep them in order and to tune them.”
186

Several important makers/sellers arrived in America over the next few years; Thomas Dodds and Charles Albrecht in 1785, Charles Taws in 1786, Archibald Whaites in 1784, and Thomas Western in 1794. **Thomas Dodds** settled in New York (spelled Dobbs in his first notice) and announced that he had “Arrived in the last ship from London, Organ Builder, Harpsichord and Piano Forte Maker”.¹⁸⁷ He later partnered from 1791-1794 with Christian Claus(e) who arrived in NY about 1788. (Groce lists the partnership through 1793, but they advertised together through 1794) building pianos in New York, one of which survives. Dodds disappeared from the city records in 1799. The lack of an FF# was not so much a function of economy as a building tradition the stretched back to early English harpsichords. It is infrequently used, and leaving it off creates symmetry around the keyboard that is appealing. London makers often left it off until the 1780s.



Figure 73, piano by Dodds & Claus, NY, c. 1791. The signature ‘7 Whaitte’ is inscribed in pencil on the bottom of the case, referring to Dodd’s apprentice, Archibald Whaites, used by permission Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

¹⁸⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), Wednesday, June 25, 1783 Page: 3

¹⁸⁷ *Independent Journal: or, General Advertiser* (NY), Aug. 13, 1785

Archibald Whites immigrated to New York in 1784¹⁸⁸ and from 1786¹⁸⁹ worked as an apprentice to Thomas Dodds before he began building pianos alone and then in partnership with George Charters in 1792.¹⁹⁰ Several pianos survive to give us some insight into their construction. They are built along the lines of Longman & Broderip with single action and lever dampers, and it is not known if later pianos might have changed to the wire guided dampers and double action of Geib. The partnership between Whites and Charters was dissolved March 5, 1805 with Whites continuing alone.¹⁹¹ From notices beginning in 1799 until the dissolution it is clear that Whites and Charters were importing pianos from London as well as continuing to make their own. Whites died August 14, 1815.¹⁹²



Figure 74, piano by Whites and Charters, circa 1800

Thomas Western had met with at least some success as a piano maker in London in the early 1790s before coming to New York, with at least two pianos extant from his London period and one from New York. The London pianos are inscribed as shown in Figure 75 below.

¹⁸⁸ Laurence Libin, *American Musical Instruments in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, W.W Norton & Co., 1985, pg 163

¹⁸⁹ *The Diary; or Loudon's Register*, Sept 22, 1792

¹⁹⁰ Nancy Groce, *"Musical Instrument Makers Of New York"*, Pendragon Press, 1991 pg. 171-172

¹⁹¹ *Daily Advertiser* (NY), Mar 6, 1805

¹⁹² *Evening Post* (NY) Aug. 15, 1815



Figure 75 name board for piano, 'Thomas Western Patent Piano Forte / Maker near Westminster Bridge London'

The reference to a patent has Western copying the first embodiment of the double action as developed by Geib, the patent then owned and in force by Longman & Broderip. It may well have been this patent infringement and a possible subsequent litigation warning that drove Western to New York, but he arrived by December 23rd, 1793 with the notice:

"Thomas Western from London...just arrived in this city, and intends to establish here a manufactory of Piano Fortes, on the same extensive scale as he carried it on in London; he likewise will repair, regulate, and tune, and take old instruments in exchange. He has imported with him a large assortment of Piano Fortes, from his manufactory in London, which will be ready for inspection and sale on Monday the 23rd instant at his house, no. 11 Great-Dock street."¹⁹³

Western moved frequently and continued to build pianos through 1799, working as a dry goods merchant from 1800 to 1814, and then again building pianos with his son Thomas Jr. until his probable death in 1819

¹⁹³ *Daily Advertiser* (NY), Dec. 23, 1793, vol. IX, Issue 2762, pg. 2



Figure 76, T. Western piano action showing levers for early type of double action.

Philadelphia was the center of musical arts and fashion in America until the close of the eighteenth century, and it is not surprising then that most makers finally settled there prior to 1800. **Charles Albrecht** (b. Germany, 1759 or 1760 – d. Philadelphia, June 28, 1848), and spelled Albright in the Directories, was a well-known builder in Philadelphia in the late 18th and first quarter of the 19th century. Lisa Minardi writes:

“Charles Albrecht (born c. 1760 most likely in Electoral Palatinate; died June 28, 1848, in Montgomeryville, PA) was one of the most important musical instrument makers in early America. He immigrated to Philadelphia in the mid-1780s, was married in 1787 to Mary Fox, and by 1789 went into business as a piano maker. During the 1790s, his brother, George Albrecht, assisted him in the trade. Through numerous advertisements and more than twenty surviving examples of his work, Charles Albrecht can be documented as a highly competent immigrant entrepreneur. His business thrived for nearly thirty years in a very competitive market, as more instrument makers settled in Philadelphia and imported pianos became increasingly common. By 1825, Albrecht had earned sufficient wealth to retire from the instrument-making business and became a leisured gentleman. Although he had no children of his own, he left generous bequests to numerous family members upon his death in 1848.¹⁹⁴

Much of Charles Albrecht’s background remains obscure, including his exact date of birth. He emigrated from Europe in the mid-1780s and may have been the “Jno Carl Allbrink” (as the ship captain spelled it) who arrived in Philadelphia on the *Hamburg* on October 11, 1785.¹⁹⁵ On June 17, 1787, Albrecht married the widow Mary Fox (1752–1837) at St. Michael's and Zion Lutheran Church in Philadelphia.¹⁹⁶ She was eight years older than Charles and had two children from her

¹⁹⁴ Lisa Minardi, *Philadelphia, Furniture, and the Pennsylvania Germans: A Reevaluation*, in *American Furniture*, ed. Luke Beckerdite (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England for the Chipstone Foundation, 2013), 249-72.

¹⁹⁵ Ralph Beaver Strassburger and William John Hinke, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers: A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia from 1727 to 1808*, 3 vols. (Norristown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Society, 1934), 3: 12. Also on the ship were Julius Augustus Albrecht, Maria Elizabeth Albrecht, and Henry Vinsalous (Wenceslaus) “Allbrink.” This may not be Albrecht the piano maker, as his obituary in 1848 described him as “for seven years a resident of Montgomery township, Montgomery county, for fifty-eight years, a citizen of Philadelphia,” which would put his arrival about 1783. *North American and United States Gazette*, Philadelphia, June 30, 1848, Early American Newspapers Database (hereafter EAND). The obituary may also not be accurate, however, as tax lists show him living in Montgomery Township for only four years although he owned the property for seven.

¹⁹⁶ Robert L. Hess, trans. and F. Edward Wright, ed., *18th Century Records of the German Lutheran Church at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (St. Michael's and Zion)*, 5 vols., on Pennsylvania German Church Records cd-rom, 4:1011 (hereafter SM&Z). Mary Albrecht’s obituary gives her age as 85 when she died on July 7, 1837, which would put her birth in 1752; Poulson’s *American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, July 12, 1837, EAND.

first marriage but none with Charles. Her first husband, John Fox/Fuchs (1746–1780), was a cabinetmaker and left a sizeable estate when he died, including lumber worth £80, two “Carpenter or Joiners Benches,” a “Chest & Joiners Tools” valued at £800, and “Sundries in the Shop,” probably unfinished furniture, worth £200.¹⁹⁷ Among his household furnishings were a “Low Case of Walnut Drawers,” a high case of drawers and dressing table, mahogany stand, eight-day clock, tea table, silver spoons, a globe, and a fiddle. The entire estate was valued at £5,960.10.0. No evidence of these items being sold after John Fox’s death has been found, thus when Charles Albrecht married Mary Fox, he likely gained access to her late husband’s workshop and tools in addition to a well-furnished home”¹⁹⁸

In early 1791, Charles Albrecht was offering a ‘*Double Key’d Harpsichord / Also a Piano Forte Harpsichord*’ from 128 Vine Street¹⁹⁹. By 1794 he was at 95 Vine St. where he lived and worked for many years. In 1795 he was joined by his brother George (b. Germany ~1747 or 1748 – d. Newhaven, CT, Jan. 16, 1821), who was the first definite builder in Baltimore for which a positive record remains. They gave notice in March 1796

“Charles Albrecht / Musical Instrument Maker / Informs his friends and the public that he and his brother George Albrecht still continue to carry on business in the above line, at their shop in Vine St, No. 95.”²⁰⁰

There was something unsettled about the business in Philadelphia at this time, as the 1797 City Directory (essentially for 1796) lists George Albright as ‘cabinet maker’ at 95 Vine St. but does not list Charles. In the next notice from Charles in November 1797 he announced, “*that he has commenced business again, and makes in the newest stile, all kinds of Forte Piano’s and Harpsichords which he will warrant to be good –.*” Charles reappeared in the 1798 City Directory and remained listed to the end of his career. His well-made pianos were built along the plan of John Broadwood & Son, with tuning pins in the rear and brass underdampers through his early period.

¹⁹⁷ Will of John Fox, written June 31, 1779, proved May 2, 1780. Inventory of John Fox, taken May 17, 1780. Winterthur Library, Downs Collection, Philadelphia will book 1780, no. 282. The inventory does not indicate if these sums were in British Pounds Sterling or Pennsylvania Pounds Sterling. In 1780, £80 in British Pounds Sterling would be worth approximately \$14,275 in 2014\$. In Pennsylvania Pounds Sterling, the value would be worth approximately \$4,900 in 2014 dollars. Currency conversions based on John J. McCusker, “How Much Is that in Real Money? A Historical Price Index for Use as a Deflator of Money Values in the Economy of the United States,” reprinted from Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society 101 no. 2 (October 1991): 297-373, here 333; and Samuel H. Williamson, “Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to Present,” Measuring Worth, <http://www.measuringworth.com> (accessed November 2015).

¹⁹⁸ Charles Albrecht (ca. 1760-1848) <http://www.immigrantentrepreneurship.org/entry.php?rec=273> accessed 1/18/2017

¹⁹⁹ *Dunlaps American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, Mar. 26, 1791

²⁰⁰ *Claypool’s American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, April 7, 1796



Figure 77, Charles Albrecht piano, 1789, used by permission The Historical Society of Pennsylvania Collection

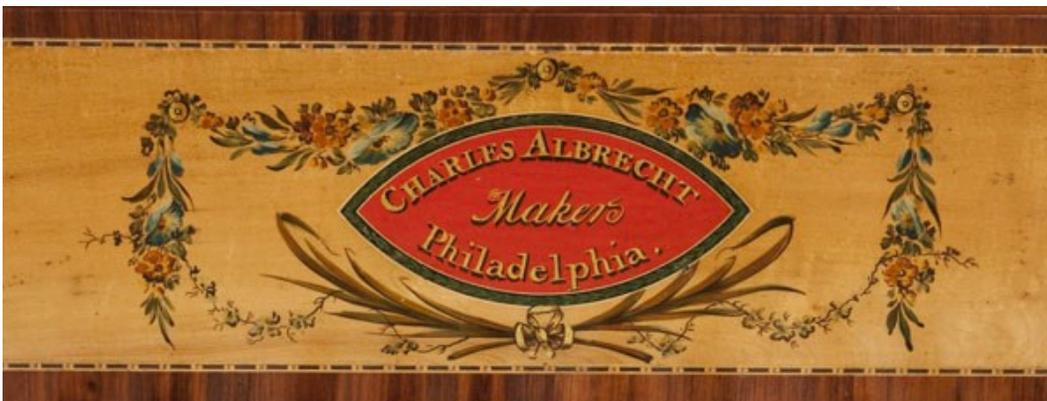


Figure 78, name board of Charles Albrecht piano, 1800-1805, by permission Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

George Albrecht on the other hand had moved to Baltimore to seek his fortune so perhaps there was some disagreement between the brothers. He appeared in August of 1798 at the '5th house on the left hand in North Liberty-street' as "George Albrecht / Piano Forte Maker, / From Philadelphia, / Turns(sic) Piano Fortes, Harpsichords, and Spinets, by the quarter or single time. N.B. The above instruments carefully and properly repaired." By October 17 he announced, "For Sale, A new Piano Forte / Made in this city by the subscriber – George Albrecht." George continued to post advertisements in Baltimore but like his brother Charles he primarily sold imported pianos from London, and in May 1802 he lists;

"Several Patent Piano Fortes, Amongst which are, pianos with six and a half Octave, invented for double hands. The whole elegantly finished."

A six and a half octave piano was by no means common in 1802, and if true must constitute among the earliest recorded appearances of this compass. This is the last run of notices from George Albrecht in Baltimore however and he disappears after 1802. No pianos by George Albrecht are known to survive, but a number of pianos by Charles Albrecht do exist, and the record shows that he built on both the English and German plans. It is logical to conclude that George was facile at both types as well, and with his German heritage and the demographic in Baltimore, it is likely he was building German plan pianos on a small scale.

Charles Taws (alternately Tawse, Tawes, b.1743 – d.1836) was from Aberdeen, Scotland and came to New York City in May of 1786, announcing that he had arrived with the intent to ‘*make and sell finger and barrel organs, and to tune and repair spinnets (sic), harpsichords, pianofortes, and guitars*’ from No. 68 Fair-Street²⁰¹. Something about NY City quickly failed to appeal to him however, for within a little over six weeks he was in Philadelphia in early July 1786 and advertising for the same duties, adding that “*he has been bred to the business of organ building, under the best manner.*”²⁰² Through 1786 and 1787 he was advertising regularly, and spelling his last name ‘Tawse’, but by October 1789 he had switched to the spelling ‘Tawes’. He dropped the ‘e’ in his notices sometime after late May 1794 and shortened the name to Taws, which he would retain afterwards.

Notices by Taws from 1787 to 1789 fail to make it clear exactly when he began making pianos in particular, but certainly his notice of November 1790 leaves no doubt;

“He has now on hand, of his own manufacture, a few elegant and well toned Piano Fortes, with the latest improvements from London patterns, which he will sell as low as can be imported, and warranted good.”²⁰³

The London pattern he refers to is that of Broadwood, and the frequency of notices by importers of Broadwood pianos into America would have insured that Taws had such pianos to study. Given this, it might seem likely that Taws would simply copy a Broadwood, but in a side by side comparison with Broadwood pianos contemporary to the 1794 Taws, it is clear that this is not the case. While Taws made use of the spine for the tuning pins, and the use of brass underdampers as with Broadwood, the dimensions of the case and concept of the action are his own. In fact, given the variation in length and width recorded for extant Taws pianos between 1791 and 1794, it would seem that Taws approached every piano as something of a ‘new creation’ rather than the more factory-like pianos made by Broadwood at the time.²⁰⁴

Charles Taws counted among his clients George Washington and family, whose account books record several payments to Taws for tunings and repair to the Washington family instruments that would have been well beyond the going price for a simple tuning²⁰⁵. According to the

²⁰¹ *Daily Advertiser* (NY, NY), May 23, 1786, Vol. II, Issue 386, pg. 3

²⁰² *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia PA), July 7, 1786, Issue 2316, pg. 3

²⁰³ *Pennsylvania Mercury and Universal Advertiser* (Philadelphia) Nov. 23, 1790, issue 630, pg. 1. The earliest dated pianos by Taws in the Clinkscale database date to 1791, one of which is numbered 7, such that a start date of mid-1790 would be understandable.

²⁰⁴ Small variations do exist in period Broadwoods, the author has been able to study four 1787 Broadwood squares closely, but much can be accounted for by variations in wood shrinkage for all of these. The Taws pianos display much greater variation in size.

²⁰⁵ Helen May Talley Taws, ‘*Charles Taws, Musical Instrument Maker, His career, His Progeny and Some of His Descendants*’ Philadelphia, 1986, pg. 4. They record \$17.00 for ‘tuning’ Miss N. Custis’ piano in 1794, and \$16.00 for repair in 1796. The going rate for a tuning at this time was usually about 50 cents, based on contemporary notices.

provenance recorded with the 1794 Taws piano referenced here, it was made for the prominent American scientific instrument maker and first Director of the US Mint, David Rittenhouse. Rittenhouse held weekly Wednesday dinner parties at his house for many of the Philadelphia founding fathers such as Thomas Jefferson, Francis Hopkinson, Pierre Eugene du Simitiere and others. Jefferson wrote that he would rather attend one of these meetings "than spend a whole week in Paris."²⁰⁶

Taws used the simpler styling employed by Broadwood for the outer case, much in keeping with the late 18th century American aesthetic of 'plain and simple'. He did add the use of an oval inlay in the name board and bulls eye inlay the two inside cheeks. A distinctive wide diagonal stringing inlay is used around the bottom, but otherwise Taws used the simple stringing decoration scheme of Broadwood at the time with holly and stained fruitwood lines.



Figure 79, Charles Taws piano, 1794, photo by John Watson

The similarities end there however. Taws approach to the keyboard balance points, carved key lever bottoms, and hammer design are his own. On removing the action, the number '23' was prominent on various sections of the action frame and case interior, written in a red carpenter's crayon, and clearly written before the action cloth and other materials were applied, so there is every reason to think this is the serial number for this piano.

²⁰⁶ Keim, Kevin; Keim, Peter (2007), *'A Grand Old Flag. A History of the United States through Its Flags'*. New York, New York: Dorling Kindersley Ltd. ISBN 978-0-7566-2847-5.

Another Taws piano (Smithsonian Institution, CEP 3360) whose date is now rubbed out, is numbered 22. Taws apparently left off making pianos after 1794, and his notices from 1796 forward consist exclusively of London made pianos from the major firms of the time. He may have made no more than perhaps two dozen pianos in total over the roughly four years he was building them, and the fact that 11 survive is a remarkable testament to their appeal. After 1794 Taws frequently advertised as having Broadwood and Longman & Broderip, later Clementi & Co., pianos for sale, and deriding any local maker's work, in particular Thomas Loud Sr., as 'home made pianos' of little worth.



Figure 80, left cheek featuring the distinctive bulls eye inlay, photo John Watson

With the action removed, another revelation presented itself. The inside right section featured something written and on disassembly we could then read 'Elizabeth / Tawes / her Bord (sic)' in a homemade ink that is also used to number the key lever ends. Charles Taws married Elizabeth Butcher (b. 1770 – d. 1869) in 1788 when he was 45 and she was 18. The appearance of the wife and children in helping to make overspun wire and other light duties such as cutting and applying silk to interior surfaces has been discussed for the small piano shops in London, but this inscription and subsequent marks would indicate that Elizabeth was possibly a fully engaged journeyman at the bench by 1794. It is not impossible that this was also merely a playful act of husband and wife but given that she was raising three small children and Charles was something of the flinty Scotsman, it is far more likely that she was simply busy at work for the family. The use of UV light brings the signature into sharp relief in figure 79.

The piano was fitted with a pedal for the dampers along the lines of Broadwood but without the bespoke brass hinges and fittings, replying on wood dowels instead, and signed along the main bar inside 'Mils (or perhaps Miss) Willson' in the same ink that Elizabeth had used.

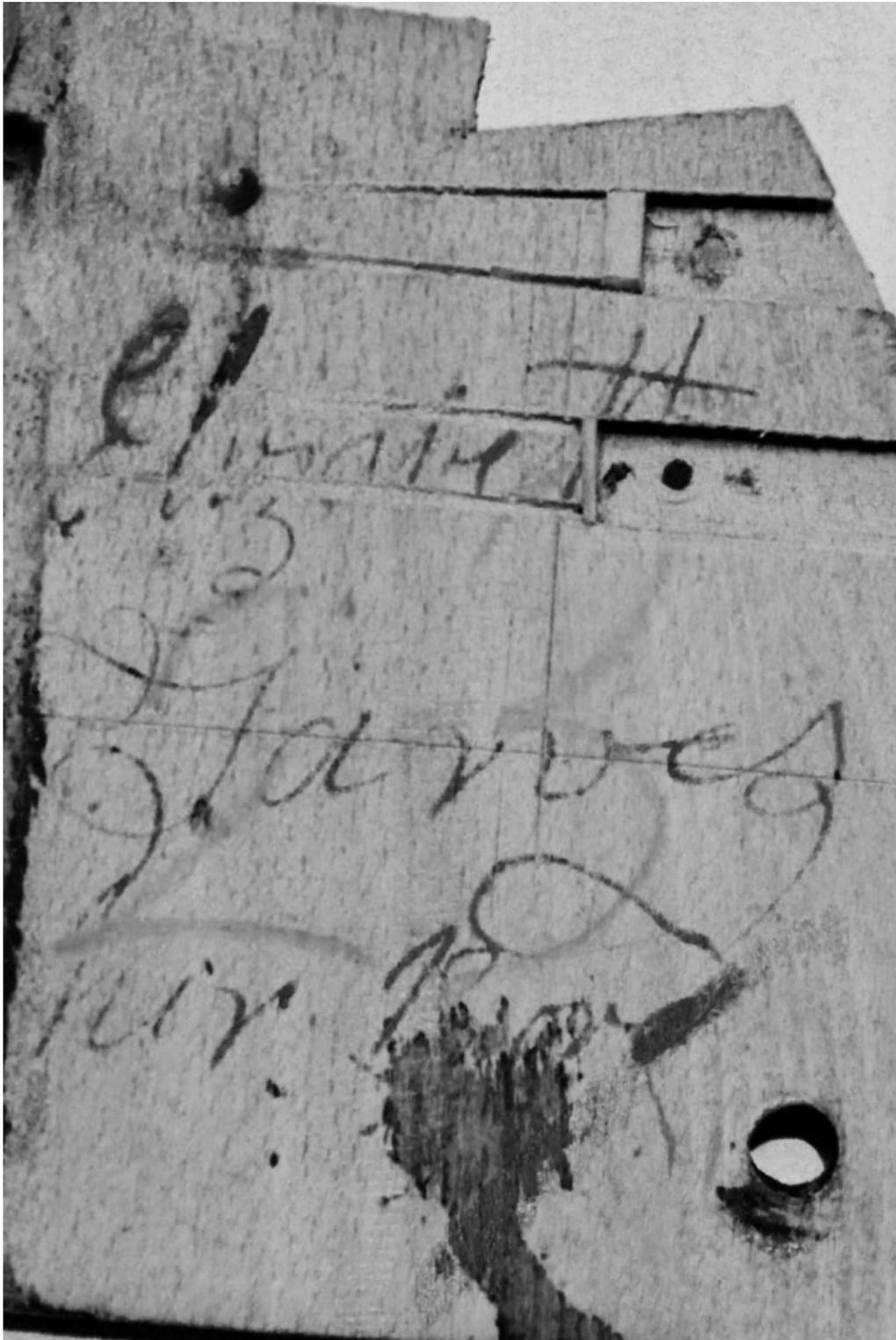


Figure 81, 'Elizabeth / Tawes / her Bord'



Figure 82, Charles Taws soundboard ribbing; the ribs are relieved where they cross the bridge

Charles Trute (Trutt, Truit) was active in London as a piano maker between 1780 and 1789, at 26 Wardour Street Soho until 1782, and 7 Broad street until 1789, such that he was among the earlier makers in the city.²⁰⁷ At some point between 1790 & 1794 he and his cousin, Trute Weidberg came to America via Jamaica and set up a harpsichord and piano shop at 25, Filbert Street, Philadelphia. The partners moved to Brandywine Hundred, DE by July 1794 and in 1799, Trute obtained a license to keep a tavern, known as the Swan Inn, on Philadelphia Pike, which he operated until his death, continuing to make pianos on his own from Weidberg's death in 1803 until his own in 1807. His pianos were always well made with a distinctive curve to the trestle stand front frame, and several from London and America survive.



Figure 83, Charles Trute piano, 'Trute & Weidberg Makers / Philadelphia' on name board

²⁰⁷ Martha Clinkscale *'Makers of the Piano 1700-1820'*, pg 301

John Harper came to Philadelphia from London in late 1796, setting up shop at No. 167 Arch Street. He styled his business;

“Musical Instrument Manufactory / Harper / Harpsichord, grand, portable grand, side board, and square piano forte maker from London. – Piano Fortes made in the newest and most approved plans, with pedals, patents(sic) swell and French harp-stop – twenty percent cheaper.”²⁰⁸

The portable grand is an interesting variant of the English grand piano that combines elements of square and grand pianos in one instrument, with leather-hinged hammers on a fixed rail, the whole piano disposed as a bichord, with overwound bass strings, and a foreshortened and more shallow case, reducing the weight and hence providing the name ‘portable grand’. These are known to have been made in London by Davison & Redpath on their own and for the music sellers Longman & Broderip in the late 1780s and early 1790s, but the style was not generally taken up by others.²⁰⁹

It is possible that Harper was associated with Davison & Redpath at some point while in London. The ‘sideboard’ style piano is intriguing, and Harper would place a decided emphasis on this style going forward in his advertisements. In December 1798 he informed his friends and the public the he had “*READY FOR SALE, A FEW OF HIS NEW INVENTED AND MUCH ADMIRERD SIDE BOARD PIANO FORTES, WITH PEDALS, PATENT SWELL, SONOPHANTS, AND FRENCH HARP STOP for NEATNESS OF TOUCH and BRILLIANCY OF TONE he flatters himself cannot be exceeded by ANY IMPORTED of which a single trial will convince the amateur.*”²¹⁰ What is meant by ‘side board’ piano is a subject of some debate, but it is offered as a distinct item from a simple square piano forte. Longman & Broderip had offered pianos built into side boards, commodes and dressing tables in 1786, but this is generally understood as being something of a marriage between these two articles.²¹¹ Harper may have had in mind a piano with cabinets installed below the left and right sides, as seen in this late 18th C example by William Bent of Boston.



Figure 84, Piano by William Bent, Boston, circa 1797, undated photo

²⁰⁸ *Claypool's American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, February 9, 1797, issue 5567, pg. 4

²⁰⁹ The National Music Museum in Vermillion SD has a good working model made under the Davison and Redpath name, and a private collector in the UK has one made for Longman and Broderip that the author has inspected.

²¹⁰ *Aurora General Advertiser*, Philadelphia, December 12, 1798, issue 2424, pg. 3

²¹¹ *The Public Advertiser*, London, UK, February 4, 1786, issue 16131, pg. 1



Figure 85, George Dettmer & Son, dated 1802 on name board



Figure 86, Baltimore sideboard circa 1795, collection of the author

He may, however, have meant something else that was quite distinct. A form of square piano became popular, particularly in America, in the first decade of the 19th century known as the ‘Oval Sideboard’ in London where George Dettmer built a surprisingly large number of them from as early as 1802, and Augustus Leukfeld built and advertised them before 1810, and also known as ‘circular cornered’ in the UK and ‘round cornered’ in America, with extant examples by John Geib & Son and Gibson & Davis of NY among many others. These were distinctive designs with wide radius front corners and drawers, very much like the popular sideboards made in Baltimore at the time. Later pianos in the 1820s had ‘round corners’ of a much smaller radius but these early round corners form a commanding element of the whole design.

The notice also introduces an element from another London builder that is specific to the Irish builder William Southwell. The term ‘Sonophant’ is a variant of ‘Sonovent’, the term used by Southwell to describe the silk backed, scroll cut sound vents in the name board and rear corner of the square piano, and created to allow sound to exit the piano with the lid closed, as was usually the case.²¹² Southwell used the term in the patent, but it was not generally taken up as a term by other builders, although the invention became ubiquitous in early 19th century square pianos. Southwell was a prolific inventor and introduced several improvements into the piano including the wire guided damper, extended treble half octave with separate keyboard, and Sonovents.

He also built pianos into demi-lune tables and created the upright square piano and recumbent piano. He favored natural keys with their heads made longer than the usual ~41mm long head of the time (Southwell’s were nearly as long as modern pianos) and built keyboards without the low FF# key, which results in a symmetrical looking keyboard. Two pianos by Harper in Philadelphia are extant at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington DC, and both have elements borrowed specifically from the Southwell tradition including the long naturals, the hitch pins disposed along the rear as with the Southwell tradition and lacking the FF# which is in place on almost every other piano from the late 18th century. These are plain pianos without the ‘Sonophant’ and designed for an easy sale. It would seem though that Harper was well acquainted with Southwell’s building tradition and his patent on the Sonovent and may have worked for him in London after 1794 before coming to America, or perhaps even in Dublin, Ireland prior to that.

In 1800 John Harper’s relative (probably brother) William (d. Baltimore, Oct. 1816) joined him in Philadelphia as a musical instrument maker, but not at the same address. The working relationship between these two men is difficult to understand but based on their movements, it seems that John was uncomfortable with William being around him, yet William followed where John went. John Harper sold a sideboard piano into Baltimore in January 1801 and possibly due to a very positive response, moved there himself by May to Light St., using the same name he had given his business in Philadelphia, and stating “*He will shortly have some of his much-admired patent Side-Board Piano-Fortes*”.²¹³ William then joined him in Baltimore within a few months and the firm was known as Harper & Co., No. 3 Light-Street, by December 1801, when they indicated an apprentice was wanted.²¹⁴ In January they were offering fancy cabinet furniture as well, at reduced prices, along with offers to tune and repair as usual.²¹⁵ By May 1803

²¹² Margaret Debenham, “*William Southwell (1736/7–1825): Anglo–Irish Musical Instrument Inventor and Maker – an extraordinary life*” 2013, pg. 11, published by Debenham on the family website

²¹³ *Federal Gazette*, Baltimore, May 21, 1801, vol. 14, issue 2337, pg. 3

²¹⁴ *American*, Baltimore, December 11, 1801, vol. 5, issue 760, pg. 1

²¹⁵ *Republican*, Baltimore, January 26, 1802, vol. 1, issue 22, pg. 3

the two had split, with William styled as “*William Harper. Patant Sideboard and Plain Piano Forte Maker*”²¹⁶, while John kept the old name and relocated to No. 58, Cumberland row, listing the same piano types as always.²¹⁷

John Harper left Baltimore for South Carolina in 1804, arriving first in Columbia SC where he conducted real estate transactions²¹⁸ and then at No. 65 Meeting Street, Charleston where he established a musical instrument dealership and manufactory by mid-1807.²¹⁹ He was selling his patent sideboard pianos and cautioning debtors to pay up or he would place his accounts into the hands of the law by 1810.²²⁰ This made John Harper a piano building pioneer in South Carolina as well, and he continued in Charleston until at least 1814, after which he disappears from the Directory and newspaper ads. William Harper continued on in Baltimore but in a smaller way of business until October 1816 when he died. His estate was sold including “*tools, work benches, unfinished piano fortes, one organ and cuttings of different sorts of woods.*”²²¹ The life dates for John Harper have not been found. With their London background, it is presumed the Harpers were building along the conventional English plan, and the two extant Harper pianos confirm this.

The piano making and marketing in early America can be seen from the above examples from 1775 to ~1800 as the creation of an artisanal trained craftsman, made in low volumes of perhaps four to eight per year, and sold as they were made at the house or shop of the maker, usually the same address. Geib, and almost immediately Gibson & Davis, took a larger scale approach, creating piano factories for their manufacturing, and targeting volumes of fifty to one hundred pianos per year, a factor of ten over the individual craftsman approach. This factory scale manufacturing was already taking hold around the world in the nineteenth century, and while individuals often started up new manufacturing, it was now often with an eye towards scaling up and success, as opposed to staying small as a lifestyle type business.

²¹⁶ *Republican, Baltimore*, May 20, 1803, vol. 2, issue 137, pg. 3

²¹⁷ *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, Baltimore, December 23, 1803, pg. 2

²¹⁸ *City Gazette*, Charleston May 29, 1805, vol. 24, issue 5533, pg. 1

²¹⁹ *Oracle, Charleston*, Nov 14, 1807 vol. 1, issue 129, pg. 4

²²⁰ *Charleston Courier*, February 1, 1810, vol. 9, issue 2187, pg. 2

²²¹ *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, Baltimore, October 11, 1816, vol. 34, issues 5405 pg. 3

Chapter 6

John Jr. and Adam Geib, 1814 – 1818



1814 began under the continuing cloud of war and the steady but subdued notices that Geib & Son continued to make Piano Fortes, thus keeping the public reminded that they were still in business. By May 12th, J & H Meacham, who became a major piano firm in Albany a decade or so later, announced that they had received 4 pianos from Geib and Son, 3 by Kearsing and Son, 3 of Broadwood and Sons from London, and 2 from a factory in Boston (unnamed) prices from 200 to 450 dollars.²²² From what is known of the instruments Geib was making, it is assumed that at least a few of the most expensive pianos were from his shop. The Lexington initiative was then at its best promise, but a family tragedy was looming:

“DIED / At Newark, (N.J.) on the 13th July, Miss Rebecca Geib, 3d daughter of John Geib Esq. aged 20, (after a lingering illness)²²³. The death of this lovely and amiable young lady, is, to her surviving relatives and friends, one of the most afflicting dispensations of an all-wise and merciful Providence. Possessed of virtue, youth, beauty, and every blessing that could render life desirable, in the bloom of life and happiness, death, sable harbinger of woe, appeared and claimed his mournful right; and snatched his unresisting, tender victim from the embraces of her affectionate and sorrowing family. / Death call'd her long before her hour; It called her tender soul, by break of bliss

²²² *Albany Gazette* (Albany NY), May 12, 1814

²²³ New York newspapers added this refinement. She was actually age 22 however.

/ from the first blossom, from the buds of joy; those few, our noxious fate unblasted leaves / In this inclement clime of human life”²²⁴

The death notice was carried in the papers of Baltimore, all of New York and New Jersey, Philadelphia, Boston, and others. By all measure her death struck a profound blow to the family, and the length of the notices and wide distribution stands in sharp contrast to the terse notices that would follow of the parents and other family members. The loss of their daughter can be taken as the precipitating event for the actions that followed immediately. John Sr., now 70, resolved to quit the business and live his last days with Mrs. Geib at their Newark, New Jersey home. On August 17 Geib Sr. announced:

“Organized Piano Forte / J Geib respectfully informs the ladies and gentlemen in general, that he has only one more of his best organized piano fortes; and as it will be the last he ever means to build, he offers it to the public, for cash, ten percent below the usual price. It can be seen at their piano manufactory, Sugar-Loaf street. Aug. 17 (1814)”²²⁵

In December, William Geib undertook to sell an extensive holding of land in Pennsylvania – 21,200 acres on the Lackawanna, Lehigh, Bear Creek, Spring Brook, Roaring Brook; 14,000 acres on Tankharneck Creek; 4500 acres on Buttermilk Falls, and 7500 acres lying opposite the Lackawanna²²⁶. All totaled, this 39,700 acres were worth a fortune at perhaps \$4.00 and up per acre. It is hard to see how this could have all been Geib family land, but the address to call at is No.55 Sugar Loaf, and it seems presumptuous that Jacob Bretz, who in time would be William’s father in law, would have Geib act as his agent in New York without also listing such lands in Philadelphia himself. Bretz is regularly in the Philadelphia papers, but not in connection with land sales. William did not list himself as an agent for anyone, so the conclusion is that on retirement, John Sr. is selling his land holdings in Pennsylvania, the long-rumored land holdings that Gildersleeve mistakenly identified as being in Kentucky. The notice does not appear after December, so it is assumed that William was successful, since later events would have surfaced this resource again if it had still existed.

On May 1st, 1815, the following announcement was made:

“No.9 Maiden-lane / John Geib Jr. respectfully informs the public that the business heretofore conducted by him under the firm of John Geib & Son, will be continued by him in his own name. Since the peace he has again entered largely into the manufacturing of PIANO-FORTES and hopes that a continuation of his exertions will entitle him to their former encouragement. Before the war he was favored with the custom of many merchants, who sent his pianos to various parts of the United States and the West Indies. He has the pleasure to inform those gentlemen that, from the extensive variety of his assortment, he will be able to supply any order at a short notice. His Piano-Fortes are warranted one year; and if purchased in this city, he will tune six months gratis. Any lady or gentleman wishing to favor him with their custom, or to see his work, will please to call at Adam Geib’s new establishment Maiden-lane, near Broadway, or at the manufacture Sugar-Loaf street. May 1 (1815)”²²⁷

That the Geibs did not choose to carry on the business under the trade name of ‘Geib & Son’, as with ‘Broadwood & Sons’, ‘Dettmer and Son’, and later famously ‘Steinway and Sons’,

²²⁴ *Boston Commercial Gazette* (Boston MA), August 1, 1814

²²⁵ *New York Evening Post*, September 09, 1814

²²⁶ *New York Evening Post*, December 27, 1814

²²⁷ *New York Evening Post*, May 01, 1815

would indicate that John Jr. felt that ‘Geib & Son’ had no special value. The war had hurt business, and things were just starting to improve. Adam had announced the opening of a school and store at 9 Maiden Lane in March of 1815²²⁸, and he would now be selling his brothers pianos built under John Junior’s name only. Several pianos remain in existence so marked, but John and Adam were inseparable, so it was only a matter of time before this informal partnership was formalized. By May of 1816 all notices listed John and Adam Geib and Co., which coincides with their leaving No.9 for the more spacious and well-located No. 23 Maiden Lane. This would be the address that the Geibs were known for, and they occupied it under one banner or the other until 1843. In the May 18, 1816 notice they list as having:

“a large assortment of grand and small piano-fortes made by Geib of New York, and Broadwood, Astor, Clementi and others of London, and they solicit the custom of their friends in New York, and the Southern and Western merchants, and engage to give perfect satisfaction”.²²⁹

At last American pianos could stand on par with the best pianos from London, and Geib would be particularly keen to keep the best London makes, including Clementi, Broadwood, Stodart, in constant stock. There was no more concern about superiority, and one could choose simply based on taste. This lasted until 1828, when certain federal tariffs closed the door to London pianos for all but the most affluent and particular of buyers. Along with the pianos, the Geibs were also publishing American music and importing European music as printed by Clementi.



Figure 87, name board, John Geib Jr. square piano, 1815

²²⁸ *New York Gazette*, March 28, 1815

²²⁹ *New York Evening Post*, May 23 1816



Figure 88, John Geib Jr. square piano, circa 1816, photo courtesy Freeman’s Auction



Figure 89, name board for John Geib Jr. square piano, ~1816 with floral painting, photo courtesy Freeman’s Auction

John Geib Sr. settled into a sort of retirement as ‘First Citizen’ of his Newark community; his first act chairing the township hearing into adopting a new name, at which time they settled on “The Village of Lodi”, J. Geib, Moderator.²³⁰ On May 20, 1815 the youngest daughter Sophia Augusta Geib married William S Darling in New York, another favorable marriage for the Geib’s. Following the loss of his wife Mary in March of 1816, George gave notice in September that he was in Newark and would attend students on the road between Newark and Elizabeth-Town, with an address to notify him at Mrs. Johnson’s, Marker street, Newark.²³¹ Obviously he

²³⁰ *New York Evening Post*, July 5, 1815

²³¹ *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark NJ), Sept 24, 1816

had enlisted the family to help with the infant George H, and he was intent on writing up the material for a new method of teaching keyboard, of which he intimated in August of 1817.²³² This new plan would form the foundation of his efforts for the next decade, scattered though they might be.

Adam Geib secured the rights to print the third edition of “The Star Spangled Banner” in November of 1817; it was the first printing in New York and sold very well.²³³



Figure 90, Star Spangled Banner, printed by Geib & Co. 1817

²³² *New England Palladium*, August 29, 1817

²³³ Laurence Libin, *American Musical Instruments in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, W.W. Norton, NY/London, 1985, pg. 173



Figure 91, J & A Geib piano, SN 5964, circa 1822(?), with green shade and flower border, photo by Dorn Stewart

**J & A GEIB
& Co's**
 WHOLESALE & RETAIL MUSIC STORE
 Maiden Lane
 No. 23
 New York

ADVERTISEMENT.

JOHN & ADAM, GEIB, & CO respectfully inform the inhabitants of **NEW-YORK**, that they have constantly on hand, at their **PIANO-FORTE WAREHOUSE,** and **WHOLESALE, and RETAIL MUSIC STORE, No. 23 Maiden Lane,** a large and handsome assortment of Music, and Musical Instruments. As they import direct from London, Paris, and Germany, they have it in their power to deal in wholesale, upon very liberal terms. They receive **PIANO FORTES** of every description, by the quantity, from the Manufactories, of Broadwood, and Sons; Clementi, and Co; Astor, and... Horwood; and Stodart, and others of London; and Erard of Paris; in addition to... which the **PIANO FORTES** of **JOHN GEIB Junr,** Manufactured in this City; which are well known for their excellent tone and workmanship, and unequal'd durability in Southern Climates. **PEDAL HARPS,** of Erard, Stumpf and others; **Guitars;** *6.* **Violins,** by the box, and single; *7.* *8.* They continue to manufacture **ORGANS,** of every kind; some of which, the modern Organized Piano Fortes, are perhaps superior in elegance, to any piece of musical furniture yet constructed. The newest and best music constantly on hand, by the quantity, or piece. Piano Fortes hired out by the month, and Piano Fortes, and other Instruments repaired, tuned, and stored. Also... music Engraved, and Printed in the handsomest style.

Figure 92, notice 'J & A Geib' attached to underside of shade of SN 5964 above. The notice may have been left over from an earlier time, or more likely, the SN stamp was meant to read 5694 and the year is 1818. Photo by Dorn Stewart

With printed music, the Geibs were also selling flutes and other easily made musical instruments, commissioned from local craftsmen in much the way Longman and Broderip had done twenty-five years earlier in London.



Figure 93, a one keyed flute in C by Geib & Co. used by permission National Music Museum



Figure 94, detail from above

They were also not above selling fancy clocks, with one specifically advertised in July, 1817;

“An Elegant Musical Time Piece / John and Adam Geib & Co. have the pleasure to inform the Ladies and Gentlemen of this City, that they have lately received a very superb Musical Clock, manufactured in Paris, which plays a large variety of the best music, set on six barrels, and is united with a first rate time piece. It is perhaps, superior to anything of the kind imported into the U.S. being valued at thirteen hundred dollars; and is offered for sale at that price, or will be exhibited to any Lady or Gentleman who will honor the firm above with a call, at their Piano-Forte Warehouse, and wholesale and retail Music Store, No. 23 Maiden-lane. / Jy 3”²³⁴

Through the first half of 1817 the company appeared as J & A Geib, but in July it changed to Geib & Co. (presumably meaning William was then playing a significant role), and finally to J. A. & W. Geib in early 1818. Correspondence exchanged with John Parker, a music dealer in Boston, used the name ‘John and Adam Geib’ for the company up to at least December 8th, 1817, but by January 30th it was clearly ‘J. A. & W Geib’, and possibly the name changed with the turn of the year, 1818. An Oct. 1817 Geib & Co. notice advertised “*just received per ship Venus, from London, an assortment of Clement[i]’s best Piano fortes, some of which are*

²³⁴ *New York Evening Post*, July 31, 1817

*solid and secured with iron bolts, expressly ordered for the Southern climate / Oct 27 [1817]”.*²³⁵

In the February 5 notice featuring the new company name, one finds:

“J. A. & W. Geib offer for sale at the Piano Forte Warehouse and wholesale and retail Music Store, No. 23 Maiden-lane, a general assortment of Piano Fortes of their own manufacture, made of the best and most seasoned materials, and warranted – Also

Broadwood’s Grand and Small Piano Forte

Clementi’s do do

Astor’s do do

Erard’s Piano Fortes

Pleyel’s Piano Fortes

Harps of different prices

Harmonicas

Guitars, Spanish and English

Mandolins Spanish and English

Violins by the box, dozen, or single

Violoncellos, Tenors, and Boy’s Violins

Patent six key’d Kent Bugles

Concert Horns, Trumpets, Bugles

Huntsmen’s Horns

Serpents, Clarions, and Bassonns

Flutes, Clarinets, and Hautboys

Flageolets and Flute Canes

Ladies’ and Military Tamborines

Bass, Side, and Toy Drums

Fifes, Cymbols and Triangles

Piano Forte Covers, Music Benches &c. &c.

J & W Geib have the pleasure to inform the public that they continue to manufacture organs, and are ready to contract for Organs of any dimensions, both church and chamber; have now on hand, one Church Organ for Havana; two Chamber Organs, and, two very elegant organized Piano Fortes, to cost \$1000 each, which are nearly finished, & will be worthy the notice of those ladies and gentlemen who wish to purchase such an instrument. Piano Fortes hired out, tuned and repaired – Piano Forte taught at their Music School or at the Pupil’s house. Feb 5 (1818)”²³⁶

Clearly, they carried a large inventory of instruments. The notice made clear that John and William were the builders, and Adam was running the store. As to \$1000 organized piano fortes, it is hoped that an example might turn up in time, for this must have been quite a piece of case goods. It should be noted that an erroneous notice is reported in the book “Duncan Phyfe and the English Regency” and picked up by others, to the effect that in 1815, John Jr. was in some form of partnership with Duncan Phyfe, and stated that John Geib Jr., a maker of piano actions, could be found at Duncan Phyfe’s cabinet shop.²³⁷ Michael Brown discounted this theory in his Ph.D. thesis and proposed a possible way that the information was misread to create this confusion.²³⁸ A recent check for all years confirms that this notice never existed. More importantly, it was never necessary. Phyfe’s shop on Partition Street was about ten blocks down

²³⁵ *Mercantile Advertiser*, February 06, 1818

²³⁶ *Mercantile Advertiser*, Feb 09, 1818

²³⁷ Nancy McClelland, *‘Duncan Phyfe and The English Regency’*, Dover Publications, June 1980 (originally published 1939)

²³⁸ Michael Kevin Brown, *‘Duncan Phyfe’*, master’s thesis, University of Delaware, 1978, pg 55-56

from Geib's operations in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and it would have not been difficult to know what the other was doing in any case. Journeymen moved easily between shops, and skilled journeymen and carvers could reproduce a style from having simply seen an example. The work was costly, and only certain shops who could command high prices could afford the labor and make a profit. For his part Phyfe never mentioned piano production. It is well known in the 20th and 21st C how difficult it is to determine for a certainty that a given piece of case goods is in fact the work of Phyfe. Few pieces are signed or carry competent provenance. One can assume that all piano cases are contemporary copies of the style, but not by the hand of Phyfe.

The notice above returns us to the making of organs, of which little had been heard for several years. This may have been prompted by an enigmatic notice from Geib senior himself in Newark in the fall of 1817:

"J. Geib Senr. Organ Builder, formerly of New-York, but now near Newark, (N.J.) informs his friends and the public in general, that he will be glad to receive orders in his former line, and they may depend on being served as well as they formerly were. All letters, post paid, will be attended to."²³⁹

Nothing was said of the New York firm being involved, and any effort to regard this notice as simply 'scaring up business' for the son's firm is subdued by the unfolding of events one year hence.

Notices in the paper were curiously full of errors with regard to the new name of the firm, with 'J, H, & W Geib; H & W Geib; and occasionally H, A, & W Geib', but the reader who scans back through these notices should be aware that this is simply printer error. Many notices were designed to run for a month to three months at a time, and rarely did the brothers go back and fix an errant H that would creep in. It was Geib's Music Store in the end, and the rest was unimportant.

George appeared in January 1818 to announce that he was teaching to his new plan, "*Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, at the house, the hours from 12:00 to 3:00. No. 20 Wall-street, first floor upstairs, back room*".²⁴⁰ He was also still teaching in the Newark area, but this apparently became too burdensome or unprofitable, for on August 9, 1818 he announced:

"G. Geib to his Pupils / Regretting the indispensable necessity of discontinuing teaching in Newark, I return unfeigned thanks to my friends for their confidence in, and support of, my new system since its establishment. / After their superogatory offer to add a moiety to my terms of tuition, I am sorry to assert, that the expense to me resulting solely from attending here, and the loss of time which prevents me attending elsewhere, were I to accept their proposal, my future prospects would be very much injured if not totally ruined. / I can conscientiously affirm, that I have used every exertion to forward the improvement of my Pupils; and with grateful feelings, I am sensible of the generous reward of my friends for my services, who, I most sincerely hope will attach no blame to my conduct, but allow me to enjoy a continuation of their favours and good wishes towards / Theirs respectfully / George Geib / August 9, 1818"²⁴¹

²³⁹ *New York Evening Post*, Aug. 29, 1817

²⁴⁰ *New York Evening Post*, January 16, 1818

²⁴¹ *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark, NY), Aug. 25, 1818, pg. 1

On October 30, 1818, John Geib Senior died in Newark:

“Saturday October 31st / Died / Yesterday at his late residence near Newark, N.J. Mr. John Geib, Senr, in the 75th year of his age. His friends and those of his family are particularly invited to attend his funeral, on Sunday afternoon, at 4 o’clock, from the residence of John Geib, Jun, corner of Franklin and Church streets.”²⁴²

The life dates of John Geib Senior have been confounded by the assertion by Gildersleeve that his grave marker reads 1819, which has been taken as authoritative by several researchers, including this author in his previous work on Geib. The newspaper dates are numerous and conclusive however, and the statement ‘in the 75th year of his age’ may have been misinterpreted when an actual marker was erected, possibly some years after his death. The marker is now illegible and cannot be consulted. As to Geib senior’s estate, he curiously named Adam and his son in law John Wallis as executors, not John Jr. Had the Longman & Broderip affair been exposed? The notice posted by Adam and J. Wallis read:

“Public Vendue at Newark NJ / To be sold at public vendue, on Wednesday, 9th Dec, inst, at 10 o’clock, A.M. at the late residence of John Geib, Esq deceased situated at Barbados Neck, near Newark Bridge, a quantity of Household furniture, cabinet makers’ and organ builders’ tools, some unfinished organs, &c; a fine pair of Oxen, an excellent carriage horse, a Cow and a Calf, Hogs, Poultry, a one horse Carriage, Chair, Wagon, Plough, a quantity of Corn, Oats, Rye, Hay, Cider, Current Wine, Elder Wine, Cider Spirits, and various other articles. Terms made known at the sale. / D[ecember]7 / Adam Geib / John Wallis – Adm’rs”²⁴³



Figure 95, Rebecca Shrimpton Geib, by John Wesley Jarvis, circa 1815. (76.2 x 63.5 cm) Collection of The New York Historical Society, used by Permission

²⁴² *Mercantile Advertiser*, October 31, 1818

²⁴³ *New York Gazette*, December 12, 1818

Geib Sr. was clearly about the business of continuing to make organs, with his tools now put up for sale, as well as some unfinished organs, so he was involved in his trade up to his last days. That he did this with his sons in strong business just across the river would indicate that perhaps a certain distance had sprung up between them. The funeral was at John Jr's house as he had the nicest home, but in all other ways he is disconnected from business affairs with his father. John senior's widow, Rebecca, went to live with Mary Ann and William Darling. The inventory of household goods would indicate that Geib kept a small farm, and the listing of wines and cider brings to mind the tales of Johannes Zumpe in his retirement, entertaining friends with a good glass at any occasion.



Figure 96, the John Geib organ at St. Mary's Church, Stafford, UK, photo courtesy of St Mary's Church

Chapter 7

The Growing Sonority of Pianos in the Early Nineteenth Century ²⁴⁴

As the world came towards the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century, a trend in the piano business towards a more soaring sound and brightness of tone was gaining momentum. Six octave square pianos began to become the norm, and between 1815 and 1825 the five and a half octave compass would disappear. More importantly, string tension began to rise dramatically, towards a piano that possessed a sound quite different than its predecessors. In order to accommodate this tension, important improvements would be needed to allow the case to resist the tension of the strings, and the strings to become sufficiently excited and the vibrations communicated to the ear. Even the subsequent damping of the string received attention.

Increasing string tension was not a new trend; from 1766 when the first commercially viable square piano was introduced, until 1800 we see the diameter of the entire string compass shift up about 0.15 mm diameter, or three wire gauges, with the earliest piano wire gauges at about 0.33 mm in the extreme treble, to 0.44 for the same note in a piano from 1800.²⁴⁵ Although this increased the tension on the case, the rather thick case bottoms of scots pine at perhaps 2 ¾ inches was sufficient to resist the string tension reasonably well, with some pianos coming to us today having little or no case warping. The resonance of a string is closely dependent on the diameter, length and tension, until the string becomes so thick that it becomes badly inharmonic due to the length to diameter ratio.²⁴⁶

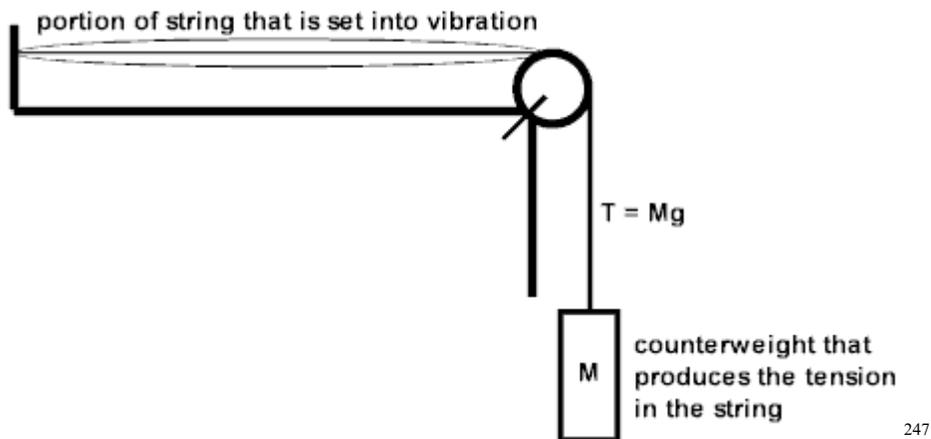


Figure 97, schematic of a resonant string

²⁴⁴ Much of the material for this chapter was edited for *“Facing South; Keyboard Instruments in the Early Carolinas”*, Clemson Press, 2018. The original material is presented here.

²⁴⁵ Malcom Rose & David Law, *“A Handbook of Historical Stringing Practices, 1617-1856”*, 1991 pub. Rose & Law

²⁴⁶ Nicholas J. Giordano, *“Physics of the Piano”*, 2010, Oxford Press

²⁴⁷ http://dev.physicslab.org/Document.aspx?doctype=3&filename=WavesSound_WavesAlongStrings.xml accessed January 27, 2017

In figure 97 above, we can see a string brought to tension over a cylinder by applying a mass acted on by gravity. In a practical piano, the mass is replaced with a tuning pin that can hold against the torsional pull of the string and the cylinder replaced with a bridge and soundboard. With this diagram in mind we can derive the tension as:

$$T = (F^2 L^2 \rho \pi D^2) / 9.81$$

Where

- T is tension in kilograms (force)
- F is the frequency in cycles per second
- L is the string length
- D is the string diameter in meters
- P is the density of the string material in kg per cubic meter
- 9.81 is used to convert the resulting answer in newtons into kilogram (force)

This mathematical treatment is useful for the reader to see what is important in the production of sound from a wire. A string will begin to resonate at any tension, but the quality of the sound can be shown with the simplest empirical experiment to be dramatically influenced by the tension we draw the wire up to. Loosening a tuning pin to slack and beginning to draw a wire up as we pluck or hammer it, the sound will begin as a muddy fundamental following the relationship:

$$F = \sqrt{(9.81 T) / (D^2 L^2 \rho \pi)}$$

As the tension rises, the sound becomes clearer and brighter, reaching a maximum response in both fundamental and harmonics just before the string goes into plastic deformation, elongates, and breaks. Depending on the material of the string, which includes density, metallurgy and inherent strength, the string will exhibit more subtle but tangible sound properties that may produce an excellent or rather poor balance of fundamental and harmonic frequencies. For long strings, there is an even more subtle effect of length and diameter on the resulting sound, which becomes more pronounced as the string becomes increasingly shorter.

Early piano builders used iron wire in the treble and tenor sections, transitioning to plain brass, with a higher density (ρ) in the upper bass, and a loose over winding of silvered copper over brass in the last half to full octave²⁴⁸. About 1810 the loose overspun was tightened to a close spun winding with no space between the turns to increase the mass of the string. The diameters and tensions were chosen to bring the wire to within about a major third of breaking, and

²⁴⁸ Clavichord makers used overspun wire before pianos came into being. The early grand piano could accommodate brass strings that were long enough and thick enough that overspun was not employed. The shorter scaling of square pianos (and clavichords) necessitated a string that was shorter, and so required a material denser than existed, so by adding the overspun to the wire the effective mass was increased without increasing the actual diameter. Later grand pianos turned to overspun in response to ever lower bass notes, increasing tension beyond the capability of brass, and shorter scaling for small instruments.

sometimes a bit closer than that. This produced a sound that was as clear and bright as the materials would allow at the time. The case was designed to take the level of tension required by a set of strings using such a scaling with the objective no doubt of making an instrument that would last approximately the lifetime of the owner or a few tens of years. That so many early pianos are still with us would not likely have been at the front of their thinking.

The majority of iron wire was imported from Germany (often advertised as ‘best Berlin wire’ or similar), formulated by a process that was high in phosphorus, and known at the time under the general heading of ‘wrought iron.’ This iron gains its strength from the higher phosphorus content (~0.15%) and very low to no carbon. A modern wire that returns to this process has recently been documented commercialized with the excellent work of Stephen Birkett.²⁴⁹ In a successful iron wire alloy, carbon and phosphorus are mutually exclusive, and any carbon in a phosphorous bearing iron will be very brittle. In England during the mid to late 1820s, the Webster & Horsfall firm of Birmingham²⁵⁰ began to alter the chemistry of the iron and produce an iron that was low in phosphorus and higher in carbon and manganese, creating the first true steel. The improvement set up a competition with makers in Germany such that over the course of the nineteenth century, the breaking strength of an example 0.40 mm wire increased from ~12 kg to ~36 kg. Coupled with improved uniformity of diameter and quantity of production, the modern music wire was born.

As we said earlier, the brightness and response of any given wire improves as it approaches the breaking point. As wire strength began to increase in the 1830s, scalings were modified to accommodate the increased tension. But before this dramatic material improvement could occur, other elements in piano construction were already well in motion. Aside from the property of the wire itself, the size of the soundboard, the ribbing and construction it uses to transmit that sound across the surface, and the coupling of the bridge to the wire, were all in flux.

From 1800 to roughly 1820, the only real change in pianos was the universal adoption of the improvements of William Southwell and John Geib that we have discussed, followed by an additional half octave in the treble bringing the compass to six full octaves. To accomplish this, the scale of the treble was adjusted to increase the string diameter of the highest treble notes to 0.44 and then to as high as 0.50 mm. This was by no means some sort of universal adoption, with different makers using their own ideas of string length and diameter as they saw fit. An early challenge for makers using thicker treble strings was failure of the hitch pin and hitch pin rail, which seems to have been the prompt for Samuel Herve to introduce the first iron string plate into Broadwood square pianos in 1821, and which was universally adopted by that firm from the mid-1820s onward.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Stephen Birkett & Paul Poletti “*Reproduction of Authentic Historical Soft Iron Wire for Musical Instruments*”, <http://forte-pianos.com/iron%20wire.pdf> accessed Jan 27, 2017

²⁵⁰ John Horsfall, “*The Iron Masters of Penns*”, Roundwood Press, 1971

²⁵¹ *A Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1879 vol 2, pg 720

Soundboards and actions however were close replicas of each other, with changes in soundboard thickness and ribbing to produce whatever the maker saw as important. In the early 1820s however, this began to change, both in America and London. Jean Beckers was building square pianos with a soundboard that ran the full length of the interior cavity as early as 1822, and Stewart and Chickering in Boston were experimenting with a similar design²⁵², such that Stewart was able to introduce it to Clementi, Collard & Collard on his return to London in 1827.



Figure 98, Beckers square piano, Paris, 1822, courtesy of Stanley Weiss & Co.

While simply increasing the soundboard size can have an important influence on lower frequency response, it is not a panacea. Heavier strings require heavier hammers to excite them, and leather-hinged hammers without a back check for the hammer head will quickly result in hammers that are unwieldy and bounce back at the string, while putting so much strain on the hinge that it may fail during the normal course of a piano's lifetime. Before failure, the hammer can develop accuracy of striking-point challenges that reduce the sonority and make the action unreliable.

In America, William Geib was not a rapid adopter of these improvement trends, choosing to build steady and reliable pianos of six octaves through the 1820s until 1831. However, Stewart & Chickering, along with Alpheus Babcock in Boston, and Robert & William Nunns in New York, as they began their careers, saw a reason to innovate in every way possible. The Stewart

²⁵² Marlowe Sigal Collection, square piano, Stewart & Chickering, cat. 1993.01, 1826, Boston, MA

and Chickering partnership produced a number of important innovations, which Stewart patented on returning to London, (patent 5475) and dated March 22nd, 1827²⁵³. Several critical inventions are actually captured by Stewart & Chickering, some of which could not be patented, but they include the use of the full length soundboard, an action more closely resembling the English grand piano action that was developed by Petzold and Pape with axel guided hammers that dispensed with leather hinges, the introduction of back checks for the hammers to prevent bounce, and the return loop stringing with an iron string plate, and modified wire guided dampers that moves the wire backwards and introduces a cantilever of the damper head over to the string, to allow the room needed for the back check to work freely.

The return loop stringing is a method that improves the speed of stringing of pianos, but that has larger ramifications. From the beginning, the attachment of the wire to the tuning pin made use of what is described as the ‘hand wrap’ method, wherein enough wire is sacrificed to allow a lead wire that then wraps around the upper part of the pin and then close spirals down to a point where it can exit the tuning pin surface and head for the nut or bridge pin at a suitable angle to ensure the wire is snugly against that pin. Practically, this takes about 10 inches of wire, and the connection to the pin is only acceptable if the wrap remains under some tension.



Figure 99, William Geib Piano SN6714, 1830, hand wrapped tuning pins

With the introduction of the loop return stringing, a hole drilled in the tuning pin provides a solid connection of the wire to the pin even if the wire is left slack, which occurs during such a stringing approach. The necessity of an iron string plate is more acute; the tension from two strings around a single hitch pin would be hard to accommodate with a pin driven into wood.

With drilled tuning pins, three or four turns are sufficient to anchor the string to the pin without slipping, so each pin requires roughly 2.5 inches of wire, a significant savings over the compass of the piano.

²⁵³ *“Patents of Invention Part 1”*, London, 1835



Figure 100, R&W Nunns, 1830, drilled tuning pins

Relocating the tuning pins to the rear of the instrument was dictated when the compass grew to 6 or more octaves. Simply put, the need to strike the lowest FF key lever in the far left while manipulating the tuning hammer in the far right meant that for an average sized man, the job would be impractical. With tuning pins somewhat following the key being tuned the reach was not too severe. Later, as the depth of the piano increased, lever style tuning hammers became important.

Iron entered the piano in a small way from the earliest English grand pianos that made use of three or more iron ‘gap spacers’ where the hammers rise to strike the string between the wrest plank and the belly rail of the piano. By the late 1790s Broadwood was incorporating at least one iron bar in the treble of their 5.5 octave pianos to counteract the tension from the extra half octave, which became a full six octaves in the early nineteenth century. This bar however was concealed inside the case.

The earliest iron string plates were simple affairs without any additional iron brace and simply bridging the gap normally occupied formerly by the tuning pins, and later by the hitch pins. As a seat for the hitch pins, the string plate could arc out over the sound board and reduce the length of non-speaking strings, saving material cost and preventing unwanted resonances. By screwing the string plate securely into the cabinet carcass, the robustness of the piano was enhanced.



Figure 101, Geib SN 6714, 1830, hitch pins without iron plate



Figure 102, Geib SN 6770, 1831, with early iron string plate, showing screws to secure the plate.



Figure 103, Geib SN 6770 with decorative strips over screws shown in Figure 102



Figure 104, R&W Nunns, SN 757, 1829, showing reinforcement brace in treble.

The full iron frame is often discussed but rarely encountered in square pianos until well into the 1840s. In the 1820s and early 30s the idea of adding iron into pianos was ‘in the air’, driven by the desire for ever heavier strings and wooden cases that were insufficient to manage the stress. There was a poor understanding of why pianos went out of tune, and no lack of ideas on how to remedy the problem. Empirically noting that pianos went out of tune rapidly by the approach of warm moist air or cold dry air, temperature was thought to be a leading cause of tuning disruption, and if the frame could be made to compensate for this change, the piano would hold tune longer.

James Thom and William Allen of the firm of William Stodart invented a superstructure of brass and iron ‘compensating’ tubes for grand pianos to withstand the changes in climate. While the theory was flawed (the principle cause of pianos to go out of tune is the absorption and release of moisture in the case and soundboard, not changes in the temperature of the strings) it worked since the tubes did in fact help stabilize the case. It was a little unsightly though, and it was not a panacea. But it produced much useful speculation on what might really work.



Figure 107, William Stodart grand piano with ‘compensating frame’, circa 1830, photo by Kenneth Mobbs

The full iron frame in square pianos had a difficult beginning; unlike the iron string plate which was rapidly adopted, the idea of fully encompassing the string scale was thought to impart a ‘metallic’ sound to the piano. Alpheus Babcock brought out a patent in December 1825 for a

full iron frame following the arc of the string scale, but only three pianos seem to have survived from circa 1837, over ten years after the patent. Many Babcock-built pianos are found after the patent without this feature, and it was coolly received at the time, regardless of its ultimate importance.

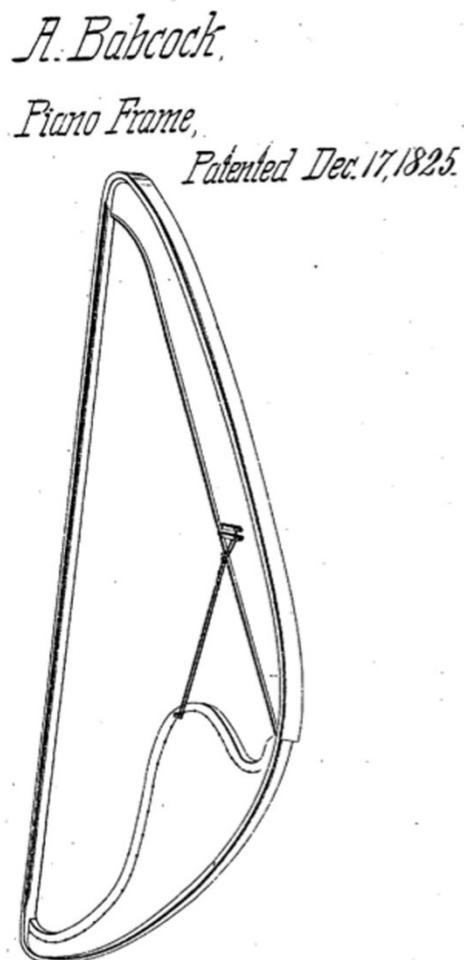


Figure 108, patent for Babcock iron frame of Dec. 17, 1825, and a piano employing this frame made in Philadelphia, circa 1835, for the firm of William Swift. Photo of piano used by permission NMAH.

In July of 1833, Thomas Loud Jr. advertised for a square piano with full iron frame in Philadelphia, probably having seen Babcock's at the time, which resulted in a war of words in the papers, with Babcock reminding the public in general and Loud in particular that he owned the patent, still in force.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁴ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 30, 1833, pg. 1. Babcock states 'Having noticed an advertisement of Mr. Thomas Loud's (late of the firm Loud & Brothers) annexed to which is a note N.B saying Iron Framed Piano Fortes manufactured only to order; I deem it advisable to inform the public that no person can make them without first purchasing the patent right of me... which may be seen at Mr. William Swift's Piano Forte Warehouse.' Babcock concludes ' N.B Where may be found a large assortment of the above pianos...the Iron Frame Piano are warranted to stand any climate'.

Loud shrugged him off, claiming the iron frame was well known in England and Europe, and that he only made such pianos to order and that the use of iron caused ‘a decided injury to the tone’.²⁵⁵ A flurry of articles then appeared in the paper for and against the use of iron, but the principle of its advantage was starting to take hold. On his return to Boston and to the firm of Chickering in 1837, Babcock was apparently at last successful in realizing the invention of the full iron frame, which Chickering obtained patent rights for in 1840 and 1843.



Figure 109, Chickering square piano, 1843 with first full iron frame, photo Clark Panaccione

With their superior manufacturing and marketing position, Chickering was able to successfully defend their patent for the full term of 14 years, such that the other large firms in the US such as Nunn and Clark were left to add tubes and other devices until 1854 when the patent cleared for square pianos. These full iron framed pianos, with far heavier strings and larger hammers, bridges and soundboards, blew everything else away, and ushered in the beginning of the modern piano sound as we know it today.



Figure 110, R. Nunn Clark & Co., 1851, with reinforcing ‘strut (red tube) in front

²⁵⁵ Edwin M. Good, *“Giraffes, Black Dragons, and other Pianos”*, second edition, Stanford University Press

Robert & William Nunns also introduced the rack mounted, axel guided over damper. This allowed for a silent and large damping surface against the string with very little added weight on the key levers. The effective weight was divided by the pivot arm and the key, but once released the full weight of the damper fell on the string. Almost every square piano in America would eventually be equipped with these dampers, and the ability to damp a stronger string vibration was also key to increased sonority through the 1840s.



Figure 111, R Nunns & Clark SN 2015, 1834, showing damper rack.

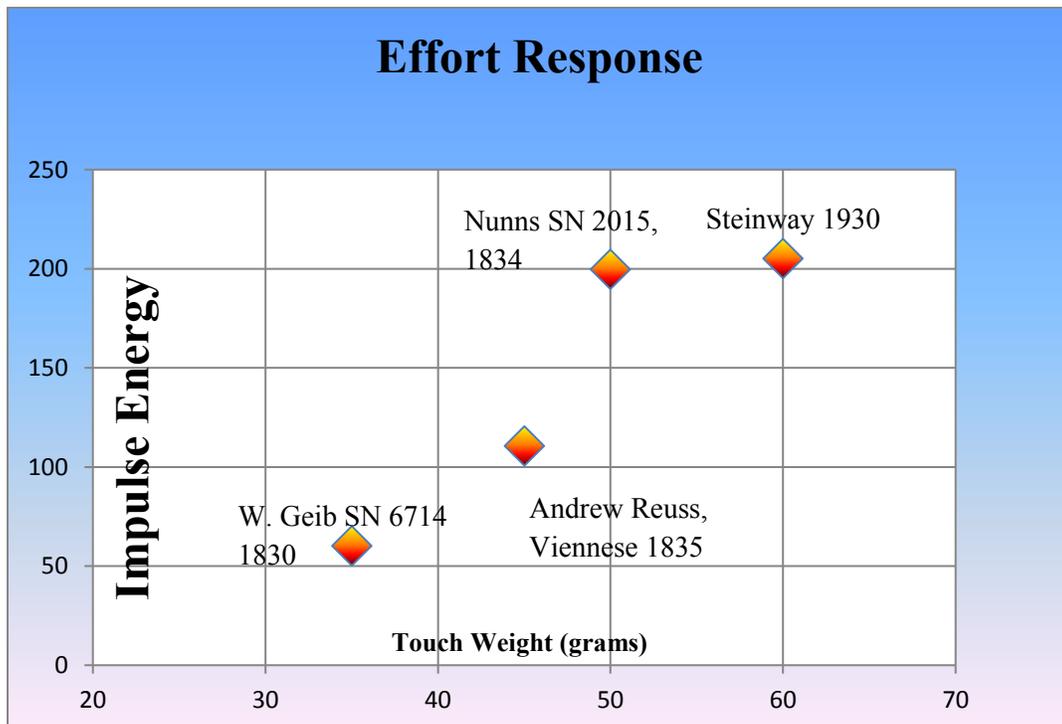


Figure 112, Piano response for various makes of pianos.

Chapter 8

J. A. & W. Geib



Figure 113A, John Geib Jr., (76.2 x 63.5 cm); 113B, Margaret Geib, ca. 1819, (76.2 x 63.5 cm), both- John Wesley Jarvis, by permission NYHS

In October of 1817, John Jr. had secured a patent for certain improvements to the frame and action of an upright piano, the second patent granted in New York. The exact nature of this patent now lies in some obscurity; the patent offices burned in December 1836 along with all patents issued to that date, and as patents were originally unnumbered, this was addressed by assigning patents issued prior to 1837 with the suffix X, now known as X patents. John's patent was given the number 2849X, 'Improvement on the piano forte', Oct. 03, 1817. Only about 2000 of the 10,000 documents in the building were recovered, and patent holders were asked to send copies in if they desired, which was done for many patents still in force. As the patent of John Jr. had already expired (a 14-year window) there was no reason to bring it forward and it is lost today. No Geib upright piano from that immediate period is known to survive.

George Geib brought out his own patent, 3128X, of August 30, 1819 "Teaching music by means of a dumb instrument", in conjunction with his grand book of pedagogy;

"G. Geib's Patent Analytical and Grammatical System of Teaching the Science of the Composition of Music In All Its Branches; and the Practice of the Piano Forte, by the Rules of Construction, Depending on the Principles of Composition: Made Clear and Simple to Juvenile Capacities With a View to Render the Acquirement of a Profound Knowledge of Music Easy, Sure, & Speedy to all Learners", December, 1818 and published by J. Ridley in N.Y."

J. & A. & W. GEIB,
IMPORTERS AND MANUFACTURERS
OF
PIANO FORTES, &c.
AND
PUBLISHERS OF MUSIC,
AT THEIR
PIANO FORTE WAREHOUSE,
AND
WHOLESALE AND RETAIL
MUSIC STORE,
N^o. 23 MAIDEN-LANE,
NEW-YORK.

A large and elegant assortment of GRAND, CABINET, and SMALL PIANO FORTES, from the best London Manufactories, together with those of their own make, will afford at all times a very extensive choice to their customers.

FLUTES, CLARINETS, FLAGEOLETS, and all other small Instruments, manufactured as above, which are warranted equal to any imported, and are afforded, wholesale, at much lower prices.

VIOLINS, by the box or dozen, together with every variety of musical merchandise by the quantity.

Messrs. GEIBS' *MUSIC SCHOOL* continues open, as above, for instruction on the Piano Forte and Tuning.

Piano Fortes and Harps hired out by the Month.

Piano Fortes and Organs, &c. tuned at the shortest notice.

. All kinds of Musical Instruments repaired.

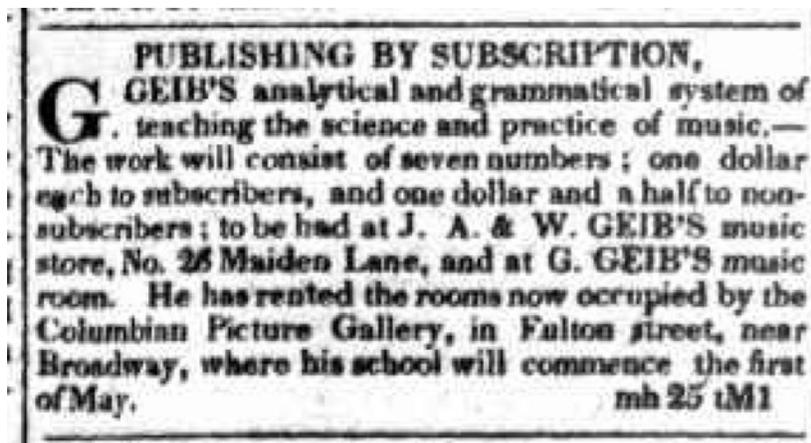
Figure 114, notice from underneath the dust board (shade) of a J. A. & W. square piano

This was to be George's magnum opus, a crowning achievement. He persuaded two pianists recently arrived from France, Denis Etienne and Charles Thibault, to offer up a lengthy notice in March of 1819 that congratulates George on bringing forward a system that can shorten the time required to become a proficient on the keyboard from fifteen to twenty years, to perhaps two or three years, and in fact, they mean to take lessons themselves! High praise from concert musicians, and these two gentlemen were hardly local hacks; they would participate in the serious New York musical scene for the next 40 years or so, including the early performances of the just created New York Philharmonic. George then entered a reply, attached to subsequent notices

that continued to run with Etienne & Thibault's praise, where he ostensibly proffered to give a modest reply, but quickly reverted to his habit of supreme self-praise.

“Desirous of ushering my system of teaching into public notice, without exposing its merits, when bursting from embryo, to the blighting breath of suspicion, I invited Messrs. Etienne, Thibault, and Ostenella, to visit my school; they did me the favour to call, and, after examining its foundations only, they expressed their greatest approbation, and, also, a wish to have my treatise, when completed. It is now published for the whole world's perusal; and by me all criticisms will be received with peculiar pleasure; but, for my respectability, and the profession, I shall treat with contempt all envious, malicious, scurrilous abuse.”²⁵⁶

He went on to enumerate all his training and anticipated publications to come. He tried publishing this system in both serial subscription, and as a complete book. He took out space at 146 Fulton, went about posting for classes to commence, and kept up a steady stream of newspaper notices. A perusal of the text from a modern perspective shows his system to be based principally on repetitive practice of scales and intervals on a silent keyboard, to allow the student to become proficient at the motions without regard for the sound, which would be developed later. Composition was reduced to a series of mathematical formula, functional, if yielding only uninspired thirds and fifths throughout. If it was popular at the time, the popularity could not have been long, and contemporary reviews were not kind. In promoting “Burrows' Musical Primer” at a cost of \$0.75 in 1829, the publisher, James Loring, lamented the lack of good pedagogical books; “those of Kollman and Callcott we believe, are nearly or quite out of print. Geib ought never to have been printed.”²⁵⁷



William Dubois had begun appearing in a serious way in June of 1817 as a music publisher, but also sold all forms of piano and other musical instruments. He partnered with William Stodart November 1st, 1821²⁵⁸ and by 1824, they had Robert and William Nunns working for them, to build pianos. This firm would be the single most serious competitor in the city to the

²⁵⁶ *New York Evening Post*, March 19, 1819

²⁵⁷ *Boston Recorder*, November 11, 1829

²⁵⁸ *New York Evening Post*, November 7, 1821

Geibs in the 1820s, but in the spirit of cooperation, their names appear together frequently supporting concerts and selling tickets or underwriting charity events. However, the economic headwinds began to blow in a negative way again as the panic of 1819 swept over the country, brought on by public debt, a shift in US banking practices, and the cost of the Louisiana Purchase. The panic signaled the start of the country's first depression, and once again luxury goods sales, such as musical instruments, were postponed or canceled. This downturn would last until 1823 and was reflected in notices from the Geib & Co. as the economy slowed.

On April 27th, 1819, John Jr. married Margaret Lawrence, daughter of Thomas and Deborah Bogardus Lawrence, a well to do Fishkill New York family with deep roots in New York. John was then 39, a rather late marriage compared to his brothers, and Margaret was 25. They went on to have two children, John Lawrence Geib in 1820, and Elizabeth Geib in perhaps 1822 (often given incorrectly as 1824). As John's middle name was also Lawrence, this might rightfully be John Geib III, but he is never listed as such. George in turn married Elouise Barron on November 10th, 1820, and shifted from 146 Fulton (after a fire destroyed his residence in March of 1821) to 210, then 208 Broadway, where he attempted to expand his teaching by selling music, somewhat in competition with his brothers. William married Eve Elizabeth 'Eliza' Bretz, daughter of Jacob and Eve Elizabeth Bretz of Philadelphia on May 27, 1820, with the wedding held in Philadelphia.

On March 26, 1821, J. A & W. Geib announced:

“...have for sale a large and handsome assortment of Piano Fortes, of the latest fashion, and of superior tone and workmanship, among which are many, made by Clementi & Co., and Astor & Co. of London.....also Boxwood, Rosewood, Mahogany, & Ivory. / J, A & W Geib have reduced the prices of their Pianofortes to suit the times.”²⁵⁹

The London pianos were obviously selling well enough despite the recession, as were those of their own manufacture, since their manufacturing volume begin to inflect upward during this year. All the usual miscellaneous musical instruments are listed, but the listing of materials for manufacturing pianos would suggest a new approach. The Geibs were becoming a vendor for the other makers as well.

On September 10th, 1821 John Geib Jr. died unexpectedly at his home, in the evening. The funeral was held at St Paul's Church, and the family gathered at his new Carmine St. residence. The mention of 'carriages in readiness' in the notice would suggest a large affair.²⁶⁰ Notices of his death were placed in all the major papers, and Adam and William ceased all advertising efforts for the store until July 1822.

George Geib responded to this vacuum of A. & W. Geib advertisements by publishing a series of short notices of specific items for sale at his music store, in something of a frantic rush, without the usual logic of combining items. A long notice about his school mentions that young ladies can be accommodated, music and board, for \$5.50/week.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ *New York Evening Post*, April 20, 1821

²⁶⁰ *New York Evening Post*, September 11, 1821 Elizabeth Geib, John and Margaret's daughter, has her birth date given as 1824 in several genealogical sites, but if Margaret was just then pregnant with Elizabeth she might have delivered as late as May of 1822.

²⁶¹ *New York Evening Post*, October 10, 1821

More seriously, the assets of John Jr. needed to be divided, and these were to be split three ways between the brothers Adam and William, and John Junior's widow, Margaret. In February of 1822, George announced that he had a for sale "*a stock of pianos that embraces part of the importation of Mssrs J. A. & W. Geib, and a variety of elegant instruments of their manufacturing, the stock of J. Geib, deceased.*"²⁶² He was apparently unable to successfully sell many (or any), as we find that after Margaret Geib was named Administratrix for her husband's estate, she posted notice for:

"Elegant Piano Fortes, The Stock of Music and Musical Instruments belonging to the late John Geib, deceased, (being one third of the entire stock of J. A. & W Geib, 23 Maiden-lane) is offered for sale at reduced prices. At 163 Fulton Street, Opposite St Paul's Church Yard – consisting of a general assortment of Piano Fortes [American and English]...the above articles are offered for private sale until the 15th of April next, and if not sold previous, will be sold at public auction, by order of Margaret Geib."²⁶³

The problem of course was that John Jr. owned 1/3 of the Music Store on 23 Maiden Lane, and the manufactory, on Barton Street in Greenwich, at his death. To settle matters, Adam and William removed from the 23 Maiden Lane address in late August of 1822²⁶⁴, and once the goods could be separated, and the property bought back, they reopened the store on November 2nd ²⁶⁵. The manufactory would prove somewhat more challenging, but clearly the time was coming to expand, the economy was improving, and Margaret was to have the building on Barton. William took over his brother John Jr.'s former house on Carmine in 1822, and then a series of houses, until 1827 when he took out a lease on several properties on 3rd Avenue (No. 71 – 74) that became his residence and the center of piano forte manufacturing for the next decade.



²⁶² *New York Evening Post*, February 12, 1822

²⁶³ *New York Evening Post*, March 27, 1822

²⁶⁴ *New York Evening Post*, September 10, 1822

²⁶⁵ *New York Evening Post*, January 11, 1823

Chapter 9

A. & W. Geib



For George, 1822 proved a misery. Despite his attempt to sell his deceased brother's pianos at his music store, publishing several of his compositions during the summer including 'God Save America', and giving several concerts, things were going poorly, financially. He attempted to take in boarders, and transferred the Music Store to his informal partner Leveritt H. Sage, retaining a back portion for his music school, but by September he was declared an insolvent, starting a six-month process whereby he made use of recent laws to keep debtors out of prison.²⁶⁶ He was appointed organist to St Matthews Church in early spring of 1823²⁶⁷, but the church was heavily in debt itself and was resold three years later. By September of 1823, Sage had moved the store to more manageable quarters at 214 Broadway, and George's old academy at 208 became the temporary home of "Haddock's Exhibition of Androids" consisting of mechanical clockwork men and women who were put through several interactions with the audience.²⁶⁸ Gildersleeve wrote that something of this type of activity was happening over Adam's shop in the late 1820s, consisting of an automated chess player, perhaps a remnant of Haddock's menagerie.

Adam's wife, Margaret Howe Geib, died of probable tuberculosis ('a lingering consumption' is the condition given) on April 13, 1822, with the funeral held from the shop at 23 Maiden Lane, leaving behind two sons and three daughters.²⁶⁹ At least one son and one daughter would play a significant role in the future of the company. The youngest son, William Howe Geib, was

²⁶⁶ *National Advocate* (New York NY), January 13, 1823

²⁶⁷ *New York Evening Post*, February 20, 1823

²⁶⁸ *New York Evening Post*, October 04, 1823

²⁶⁹ *New York Evening Post*, April 13, 1822

born in 1819, and would go on to run the company after his father's retirement. The youngest daughter, Mary Ann, would marry Daniel Walker, who partnered with Adam in 1829. The Walkers immigrated to America from London, arriving in New York on the ship *Cincinnati* on October 2nd, 1822. They were John Walker, age 31, trade listed as teacher, George, age 29, listed as tradesman, and Daniel, age 25 and listed as musician. The Walkers were of a quiet disposition, immediately assimilated into the New York scene, and were not listed in the directories until Daniel emerges at 23 Maiden Lane with Adam. John and George would appear much later. Daniel was a cellist and had some obvious business aptitude as well, for he appears, it seems, fully formed and equal partners with Adam in mid-1829, although he would not marry Mary Ann until 1833. It is possible and likely probable that he went to work at the Geib's establishment shortly after arriving but supporting documentation has not surfaced.

Margaret Geib engaged the firm of Robb and Mundy, music sellers on 154 Fulton Street, to sell the remaining effects of John Jr. in January 1823, consisting then of 2 elegant superior Clementi pianos, and by Geib, 1 elegant round end pillar and claw, 1 elegant round end in rose wood, 2 square end common pianos, and a quantity of flutes, Flageolets, Fifes, etc.²⁷⁰ These failed to sell at retail and were auctioned in May 1823. Apparently though, this was insufficient to settle the estate, which was in some financial arrears. The Geibs continued to manufacture in the Barton Street manufactory until sometime early in 1827, when they ceded the building over to Margaret. In early August 1827 she petitioned, with notices in all the papers, to sell the building and other real estate owned by John Jr., indicating that there was the possibility of some residual legal interest by some of the family in at least part of the estate²⁷¹. The building accidentally burned on August 14th, destroying the property of John Dunham (piano forte maker), Thomas Lawrence (carpenter) and Asa Buttman (varnisher), whose varnish pot had boiled over to start the fire. Margaret had the building insured, but the others lost all to the fire²⁷². Dunham recovered to become a long-time builder of excellent instruments. The last information from Margaret is in 1849, when the estate of John Geib is found to be delinquent in paying taxes of \$146.18.²⁷³ Her use of George Geib, then Robb & Mundy, and finally using auctioneers to sell her husband's interest in the music store, with the notice of challenge posted in the papers regarding the real estate, is striking. It is clear that at least on her part, there was a distinct distrust in Adam and William to do right by her estate, despite their clearly being in the best position, and with a steady business coming through their doors, to sell John's residual effects, but they are not involved in any of the activities described. It may well have been that relations among the brothers had become strained.

1824 was the first full year with the country out of recession, and notices from A. & W. Geib were frequent. Broadwood and Clementi pianos came in at regular intervals, to sell side by side with Geib manufactured pianos. When General Lafayette came to New York in September of 1824 he was greeted by a waltz written in his honor (one of at least 10 that were published in the various cities Lafayette visited) and published by A. & W. Geib, who themselves had built a special piano they coined the La Fayette Piano, and which could be seen at the store, though not immediately for sale.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ *New York Evening Post*, January 07, 1823

²⁷¹ *New York Evening Post*, September 03, 1827

²⁷² *New York Evening Post*, August 14, 1827

²⁷³ *Morning Courier and Examiner* (NY), September 19, 1849

²⁷⁴ *New York Evening Post*, November 08, 1824

The Marquis
DE LA FAYETTE'S
 MILITARY WALTZ,
for the
Piano Forte

New York.
 Published by A. & W. Galt.

Copy right 23 Maiden Lane. Price 25 cts
 [1822-1827]

Figure 115 The Marquis De Lafayette's Military Waltz

In July 1824 they put out a notice advertising for a person skilled in the art of Copal varnishing, in response to the loss of one A. Buttman, Raisin Street, who left to set up shop on his own with this notice:

“Copal Varnishing and Polishing / Persons wishing to have their Furniture varnished, polished, or otherwise ornamented, have now an opportunity of having it done with elegance, taste, and durability...To those person wishing to have their pianos varnished, he can say that having been a long

time employed at A. & W. Geib, and for that purpose but recently left them, they may depend upon the greatest care and attention being paid to them.”²⁷⁵

This indicated that varnishing was a specialized skill, and was in this case left to one man, whose name is now recorded. Piano production was about 90 pianos/yr through the mid-1820s, leaving a finisher to complete roughly two per week. It was of course the same Asa Buttman whose varnish pot boiled over three years later in 1827 to start the fire that burned down Margaret’s building, the old manufactory! One wonders if his complete loss following the fire may not have driven him back to his former employers.

For his part, George had secured employment at Joseph Hoxie’s Academy and at Misses Oram’s school as well, which had started in 1824. Some of these small schools came and went rapidly but a few persisted; Hoxie transferred to A and L Bixby the following year in 1825, then disappeared, while Elizabeth Oram and sisters continued for several decades. George remained in the New York City directory until 1829, a different address given each year. His concerts received good notices, but they were scarcely money makers, and now in his mid-40s there was nothing left of the keyboard ingénue.



Figure 116, A & W Geib piano, circa 1824, turned, carved and spiral reeded legs. The two inside legs and pedal leg are missing. Photo courtesy of the Antique Piano Shop

²⁷⁵ *New York Evening Post*, September 20, 1824



Figure 117, Name board of A & W Geib piano shown in figure 116

A. & W. Geib however showed all signs of prosperity and bustle. Notices for Broadwood & Sons, Clementi, Kearsing of London, and their own make now routinely included 6 octave instruments by July of 1825, and elegant cabinet pianos were included in the offerings as well, made by Clementi.²⁷⁶ In October of 1825 they listed as having just received “100 dozen violins, assorted, 5 violin cellos, 12 pair of French horns, 50 Bugles, 50 Trumpets, 50 Guitars, assorted, and a great variety of other articles”. 1200 violins implied a brisk trade, and notices in Boston, Alexandria VA, Philadelphia, and etc. show the Geibs were selling into all these cities. By June of 1826 they advertised for 6 case makers at once, the manufactory still given as the Greenwich building discussed earlier. Notices now began to speak of the pianos being sold at much reduced prices, which corresponded to strengthening competition, about which more will follow. A Washington DC Notice of April 1826 mentioned new arrivals of Geib pianos, to be sold on pleasing terms and at New York prices. A post script indicates that English Cabinet, German Grand and square pianos are procured per order.²⁷⁷ Baltimore would shortly become a center of manufacturing for square pianos built on the Viennese plan, by Joseph Newman and others, so perhaps sales were steady as far away as Washington DC.

On September 29, 1826, William lost his young son William Washington Geib, age 2 years, 8 months. The blow would be repeated almost one year later when William and Eliza lost Jacob Bretz Geib, their youngest, on September 3rd, 1827. It is impossible to know how these family tragedies actually played into decisions made by the parents, if at all. Competition was stiffening in New York among builders, and William would show that he had some new directions he wanted to go in as far as the plan on which the pianos were built, and Adam almost cer-

²⁷⁶ *New York Evening Post*, July, 14, 1825

²⁷⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington DC), April 13, 1826

tainly had a right-hand man in young Daniel Walker in the store at this point. William had obtained a house and shop on 3rd Avenue that they had moved the manufacturing to, such that he was now intimately connected to the shop and its operation. All these factors came together on December 1st, 1827:

“Dissolution of Co-Partnership – The firm of A. & W. Geib was dissolved by mutual consent on the first inst. All persons indebted to the late firm are requested to make payment to either of the subscribers, and those having demands against said firm are requested to present them to / Adam Geib, or / William Geib. / The Music business will be continued by Adam Geib at the old stand No. 23 Maiden lane, and the manufacturing department by William Geib, at his manufactory 3d Avenue, New York, 10th Dec. 1827.”²⁷⁸

After 30 years of various partnerships the manufacturing of pianos was now in William’s hands. Adam, as stated earlier, never had an interest in making keyboards, but William would create them with a flourish over the next 5 years or so. Some of the most striking examples of the Geib name are to be found in William’s pianos, made from his 3rd Ave. manufactory. The dissolution was completely amicable, as stated. Almost at once, William came out with notices of his intentions, while Adam relaxed his newspaper activities. While one finds William frequently in the news, Adam now appears ever more rarely, usually through someone else’s notice, or by selling tickets to an event.

William decided he would need a place to sell pianos from, separate from 23 Maiden Lane, which was comparatively now a rather small space. He gave Notice in March of 1828:

“Piano Fortes – The subscriber respectfully informs his friends and the public generally, that he has opened a warehouse, No 46 Exchange Place, in Mr. Lord’s elegant row of marble stores, which together with his brother’s store 23 Maiden lane, will in future be the repository for his Piano Fortes and other musical instruments made at his manufactory on the 3d Avenue. All his instruments are warranted in the most satisfactory manner, and prices are much lower than formerly. The subscriber invites the attention of his friends, and particularly those of the profession, to some Cabinet Piano Fortes lately finished, which will be warranted first rate instruments, and are out at moderate prices. The extent and convenience of the subscriber’s manufactory on 3d Avenue, cor. of 11th st. enables him to do the most ample justice to his work and at the same time sell at the lowest prices. / m22 W. GEIB”²⁷⁹

On May 19th, 1828, the US Congress passed a protective tariff (somewhat unintentionally it seems; amendments were tagged on that should have made it repugnant to all parties) that was termed the ‘Tariff of Abominations’ by the Southern states, and effectively doubled the tariffs on imported manufactured goods, including pianos. This once again limited the importation of pianos from England and Europe but gave the European builders a good reason to come to America. For those buyers who wanted a piano built on the Viennese plan for instance, the market was open for immigrants to come and start building, as with Joseph Newman and Joseph Hisky in Baltimore, and Andrew Reuss in Cincinnati, who arrived between 1828 and 1830 and began serving their German communities with good Viennese-plan pianos. For the London pianos

²⁷⁸ *New York Evening Post*, December 10th, 1827

²⁷⁹ *New York Evening Post*, March 25, 1828

though, the trade came to a near stop. Notices in America uniformly feature American made pianos after 1829, and except for the more exotic cities like New Orleans, it would remain this way permanently.

This provided a boon to American manufacturers, who rapidly expanded to meet the demand. A look at the number of manufacturing firms in business in New York alone, from 1800 to 1860, shows how dramatic the 1820s were for creating new firms. The graph below is taken from Nancy Groce’s ‘Musical Instrument Makers in New York’, excluding obvious journeymen and non-builders of pianos.

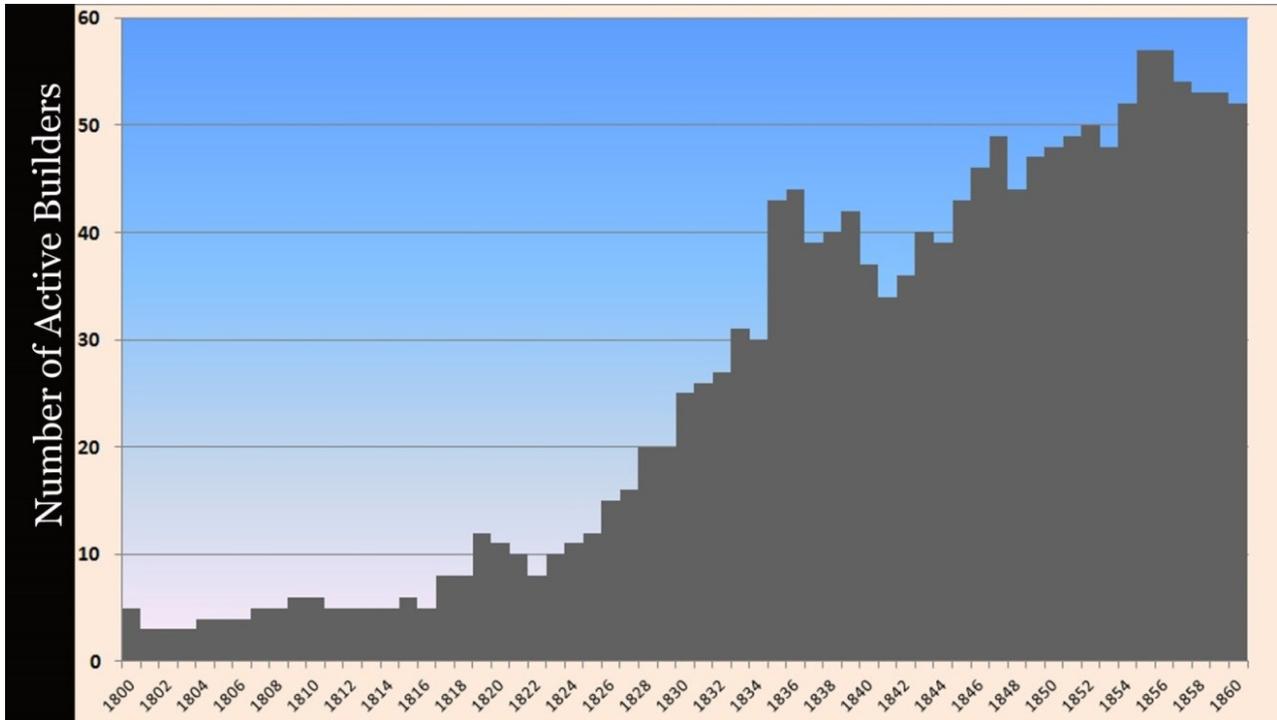


Figure 118, Number of piano builders by date in New York State (compiled from Groce)

While firms came and went, the expectation for output was climbing, and the world took notice. An editorial in the Rochester Daily advertiser of December 1829 summed it up:

“Piano Fortes. – Ten years ago, no lady that read Waverly or delighted in Byron, would have been caught playing “Love’s Young Dream” on a pianoforte of American manufacture. The thing was impossible. It was worse – it was unfashionable. Every drawing-room was adorned with a French, German, or London piano forte. The griffin’s claws and dragon’s head, on which these articles of fashionable furniture rested, sprung from the imagination of the English, or the gay French, or the philosophic German. No fashionable creature, of the year 1819, would have endangered her reputation by even thrumming “Yankee Doodle” on a piano of American manufacture. . . . Ten years ago all our musical instruments were imported from Europe: now they are all manufactured among ourselves. Ten years ago, one house in the city was in the habit of receiving 160 piano fortes a year, for the supply of their customers; now they only receive occasionally a pattern one to imitate and excel. In the city of New York there are at present twenty one piano forte manufacturers, who dispense of 800 a year to the rising generations of spinsters. One house, Messrs Dubois and Stoddard [Stodart; Robert and William Nunns are the builders] makes about 180 a year. These gentlemen have introduced many improvements to the construction of these instruments, equally

affecting their tone and beauty. The metallic plate of the English, and the sound board of the French have been fitted together, with an additional lengthening of the latter, which is the invention of the gentlemen themselves. This improvement gives a fullness in the bass, hitherto thought unattainable...Another house, Mr. Geib, manufactures probably over a hundred in the course of a year. The other twenty manufacturers make in proportion. Is it not astonishing to behold such a rapid progress in this species of manufacturing in so short a time?"²⁸⁰

William changed the location of the tuning pins to the rear of the case shortly the dissolution. This had been pioneered by Broadwood in his earliest pianos of 1780, and was part of his 1783 patent, but the real value was not realized until pianos grew to six octaves and string weight was several gauges heavier than the early square pianos. By moving the wrest pins to the rear, valuable active soundboard space was reclaimed, and the crowding of the pins at the right-hand side was alleviated, not to mention the stretch for an average sized tuning technician who must reach from the far bass to the far right hand side to tune the lowest notes! As pianos grew, the rear pin arrangement grew with them. Clementi had realized this and made the transition about 1817. Robert and William Nunns were early adopters in America, and early on they adopted the cast iron string plate as introduced by Broadwood in 1822.

Geib was not quick to follow, and even in the early 1830s, elegant Geib pianos are found with no string plate. Iron was somehow thought to hurt the sound of a piano, akin to iron plates on violins or similar, but in fact the metallic string plate solves many problems and improves the potential for sonority. As string gauge was increased to allow greater volume, the strain of hitch pins in wood becomes excessive, causing failure of the wood base. A string plate anchored into the right case wall and spine wall was very secure, and eliminated the thick oak sub-structure needed to hold pins and allowed more sound board surface. Lastly, with a plate, the unused portion of wire after the bridge can be held short, and the wire angle can fan out, relieving crowding in the treble and addressing the interference of a sound board and the treble hammers. Geib would come to this in the 1830s but was particularly slow to adopt the features of the Nunns pianos such as full-length sound boards and the adapted grand piano action introduced by Pape in France, that gave an improved response to the Nunns square piano.

An interesting cost saving measure adopted by William was the use of a full-size transfer decal for the curved nameboard. This decal has a faux rosewood background convincingly rendered, with the gilt decorative embellishments and printed name on top. It was applied over a common wood like poplar that was first treated with a deep salmon color ground. This was used for the more common piano designs, but expensive pianos continued to use real wood veneer.

By September of 1828 William had relocated his warehouse to 219 Broadway, and no longer content to offer only pianos, was now selling music and other articles, and offered a piano restoration service to bring older pianos up to modern sensibility.²⁸¹ Given the growing nature of the city and the musical scene, this probably was not a threat to Adam's business. In June of 1829, the first example of the name Geib & Walker appears, selling tickets to an upcoming concert. As stated, the firm of Geib & Walker rarely advertised themselves after 1829 and did not specifically mention pianos in the few advertisements that appear. William on the other hand remains constantly in the news. Adam was still intimately connected with William's business, so

²⁸⁰ *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, December 12, 1829

²⁸¹ *New York Evening Post*, September 26, 1828

this quiet period should be understood as simply letting William run the piano business, including sales, while he and Daniel Walker focused on the music business.

A notice from George's former employer, Joseph Hoxie, in June of 1829 indicated that George had gone to Washington Mississippi, six miles from Natchez, to start a music school, where they were seeking a young lady in New York capable of teaching music and drawing, and skilled at teaching George's piano pedagogy method in particular, to come there.²⁸² George returned to New York and the Misses Oram's school by 1830, but by December 1831 he had started his own school again, at No. 9 John Street and also on Bleeker Street. His terms were \$40/quarter at the pupils' house, but only \$20/quarter at his home at No. 9 John Street.²⁸³

He wrote a number of musical pieces at this time, including *The Balkan; A Favorite War Dance*, *The Minstrel's Return'd from the War*, and *Retour de Glorie*. These were published by George Melksham Bourne of New York and Geo. Willig, 171 Chestnut Street., Philadelphia, between 1831 and 1832. John Hill Hewett, the son of the music publisher James Hewett, wrote *The Minstrel's Return'd from the War* in 1825, which was a big hit as one of the first truly original American inspired pieces of music. The tune lives on today in the form of the familiar camping song *If You're Happy and You Know it, Clap Your Hands*. Geib produced a set of variations around it based on the English models which had served for earlier American songs but diluted the original theme. As music of the time went, George Geib's efforts were dismissed as "mediocre as the tens of thousands of similar pieces that swam forth" by a critic in *The Euterpeiad*.²⁸⁴

George's choice of G. M. Bourne of New York is interesting. Bourne was a low-price seller, using the new lithographic process and cheap engraving techniques to sell music at prices well below the competition. Few other sellers would have anything to do with what he published, but he had a special relationship with Geib & Walker to sell them his music. Perhaps it was for this reason that George chose Bourne. Finding little more success in New York than before, George moved to New Haven, Connecticut in late 1832, announcing his intention to reside in that city and teach composition, and the usual piano pedagogy, as well as tune pianos and organs, his teaching rates at \$15/quarter.²⁸⁵ By May of 1835 he was back in New York at 183 Broadway, over the drug store, but did not return to the City Directory until 1840, so possibly he was still nomadic. The Directory listed him at four different addresses between 1840 and a last posthumous notice in 1843, but he posted no more advertisements, and our last report is when he died on July 23, 1842:

"Died: / This morning, at 7 o'clock, Mr. George Geib, of consumption, in the 61st year of his age. His friends and the friends of his brother, Adam Geib, and his brothers-in-law Mr. John Wallis, and Mr. Wm S. Darling, are requested to attend the funeral, tomorrow afternoon, at 5 o'clock, from No 305 Mulberry street, near Bleacker street." ²⁸⁶

²⁸² *Commercial Advertiser* (NY), June 13, 1829

²⁸³ *Morning Courier and Examiner* (NY), December 28, 1831

²⁸⁴ Joy Carden, '*Music in Lexington Before 1840*', Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission, 1980, pg 86

²⁸⁵ *Columbian Register* (New Haven Connecticut), November 24, 1832

²⁸⁶ *New York American*, July 23, 1842

Chapter 10

William Geib



In October of 1829, the first American Institute Fair was held in New York City, to promote American manufacturing. It was well attended, and among the thousands of entries were pianos by New York manufacturers. When the winners were announced, William Geib had taken a second premium²⁸⁷:

DEPARTMENT OF PIANOS.

1st Premium—To Rob't & Wm. Nunns, of New-York, for the best upright cabinet Piano.

2d Premium—To Wm. Geib, for the best horizontal two string Piano.

3d Premium—To Robt. & Wm. Nunns, for the best Unichord Piano, a new article.

A discretionary premium to Mr. Sackmeister for the second best Unichord Piano.

The appearance of the Unichord piano as a winner in its own category brought this piano construction to the forefront. Unichords used one string per note, but at a gauge size nearly twice that of a string usually used for that note, giving a unique mallet-like sound to the piano. Since unisons could no longer go out of tune, the piano appeared to stay in tune longer, and is extremely easy to tune, thus making it attractive for remote plantation homes and other rural locations where tuners were hard to find. Nunns based their concept on the appearance of this type as designed by Ignaz Pleyel in Paris in 1827. Charles Sackmeister had designed the unichord scaling for Robert and William Nunns, so finding him listed as a discretionary premium is not surprising. Geib was quick to copy this idea:

“Piano-Fortes – Just received from the manufactory, two Unichord Piano Fortes, with Metallic Plates, which are offered to the public as a superior article. Connoisseurs are respectfully invited to examine these instruments. W. Geib, 170 Broadway, opposite Courtland st.”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ New York Spectator, October 09, 1829

²⁸⁸ New York Evening Post, July 05, 1830

William had removed his warehouse from 219 to 170 Broadway in May of 1830, giving him yet more room. He advertised:

“2 elegant Piano-fortes also with harp stop supported on French pillars, plinth and paws. Having added to the number of his workmen, W.G. hopes to be able soon to meet the increased demand for his instruments, and to exhibit a more extensive assortment than formerly. W.G. does not publish, but sells the music of all the publishers in the U. States.”²⁸⁹

Perhaps because they were so ornate and fashionable, the two pianos referred to, serial numbers 6695 and 6696 have survived²⁹⁰ and so present a fine view into the square piano at the height of William Geib’s operations.



Figure 119, William Geib ‘elegant’ model piano, SN 6695, bearing the 219 Broadway address on the name board. Columbia Museum of Art, SC

²⁸⁹ *New York Evening Post*, May 04. 1830

²⁹⁰ Piano 6695 has the year 1830 on the back of the name board. Geib moved from 219 to 170 Broadway in May of 1830, and Geib piano 6714 has this address, such that these two elaborate Geib pianos can only be the ones referred to in the notice.



Figure 120, William Geib 'elegant' model piano, SN 6696, by permission Catskill Period Piano Performance Center



Figure 121, shade (dust board) for 6696 above.

At the next American Institute Fair of October 1830, William Geib took first premium for a grand upright piano, with a premium for a two-stringed piano forte, and a note that the cabinet work of Geib's and Nunn's pianos was particularly noticed as being of superior workmanship.²⁹¹ This generated a 'spontaneous' communication to the NY Spectator:

"Piano-Fortes – Taking an interest as I do, Messrs Editors, and a pleasure too, in the success of our manufactures, not so much perhaps in regard to those branches which seem to be more directly connected with the policy or impolicy of the Tariff systems, but more those, which as objects of taste and fashion have long since been patronized by all parties – I was induced as usual, to visit the Fair; Among the numerous and elegant articles displayed, I was particularly attracted by the Piano Fortes; and should say from the extensive competition in this article, and the specimens exhibited, that the manufacture of them must nearly, if not entirely, have precluded the necessity of foreign supply. As the most triumphant victor is apt to attract the most attention, I was led to examine the Cabinet Piano Forte, made by Mr. Wm. Geib, which I understood took the first premium. [The writer goes on at some length over being surprised to find such competence in America]...I determined also to visit the manufactory, on the Third Avenue, where this Piano Forte was made, and I must say, I was equally surprised so extensive an establishment, where I suppose there must be from thirty to forty hands, employed to manufacturing Piano Fortes, with a stock of nearly a hundred instruments in hand. Every separate set of men appear to work at their respective branches, and being informed one of the men had worked twenty three years, and others ten and fifteen years in the employ, it became no matter of wonder to me, that such perfection in the instruments was attained. C." ²⁹²

Although this notice sounds suspiciously like something William commissioned, the point of having 30 to 40 workmen is useful to our understanding. The 23 year employee would have been with the firm in 1807, so among the very first. Clearly, the influence of the tariff had a direct impact on the discussion of American competence, as the availability of London competition was reduced, even as the tariff was considered a possible 'impolicy'.

While very fancy Geib pianos have survived due to their beauty as a piece of case goods, simpler pianos were made in larger numbers and some have come down to us today as excellent examples of the piano building craft. A piano from July of 1830, serial number 6714, is shown below. Even twenty-five years after their first pianos with wire dampers, the same action and damper system principle has survived, though the size has grown to accommodate a stringing schedule several gauges thicker than the Geib pianos from the early 1800s.

²⁹¹ *New York Spectator*, October 23, 1830

²⁹² *New York Spectator*, October 22, 1830



Figure 122, Geib square piano SN 6714, 1830, with 6 turned and reeded legs, turned and reeded pedal. Geib produced six legged pianos for longer than most firms, who had switched to four legs during the 1820s. Photo courtesy of Ed Swenson

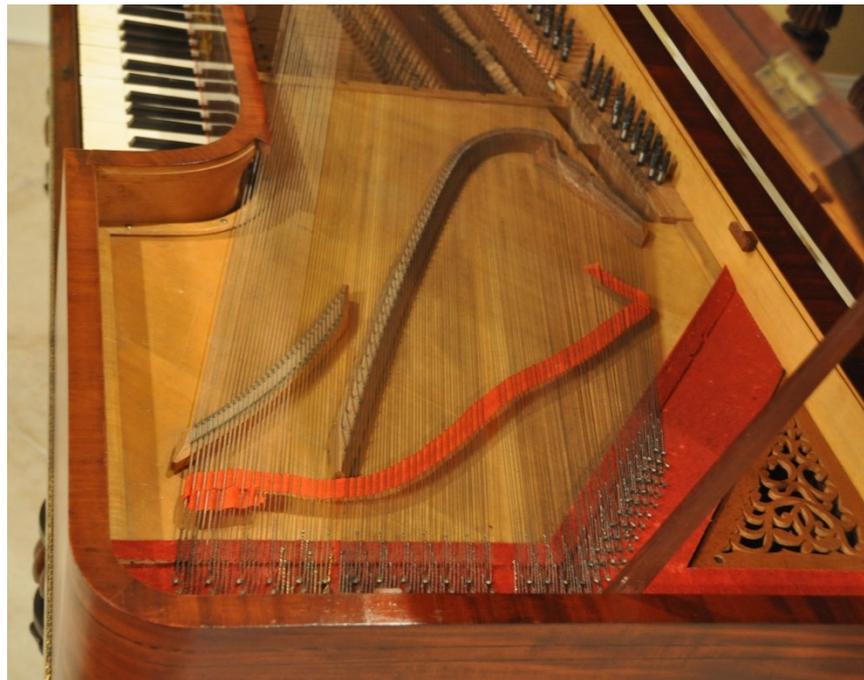


Figure 123, sound board and bridges SN 6714. Geib converted to a separate bass bridge early on, but was slow to adopt the iron string plate, which is not employed here.



Figure 124, name board for Geib 6714, 170 Broadway address. In the 1820s Geib adopted a new way of labeling pianos that used a varnish transfer of a decal to the name board, allowing a design to be created once and copied many times using techniques related to printing. This process could be used to add shaded classical flourishes to other parts of the case, and some makers covered their pianos in such decoration, though Geib remained more constrained.



Figure 125, turned and reeded 'ice cream cone' style leg, with brass collar at top.

In July of 1830 the principal music publishers met and decided to address the wide discrepancy in music prices that was injuring the market. While this would later be known as price-fixing, at the time it was simply regulation:

“Music at Reduced Prices – The subscribers, Music sellers in the City of New York, respectfully inform their friends and the public, that believing the period to have arrived when from the increasing consumption of music and the reduction of prices in general, the public reasonably expect a reduction of the price of music, they will in future sell music at 6 ½ cents per page, a reduction of from thirty to fifty percent from former prices, and confidentially hope for a continuance of that patronage heretofore enjoyed from a generous public.

Dubois & Stodart

Geib & Walker

E. Riley

Firth & Hall

James L. Hewitt

Wm. Geib

S Bromberg

New York, 3rd July, 1830”²⁹³

George Bourne was not one of the signers, and in his notices immediately following this decision, he continued to insist on his right to sell music at the best possible price and that he had a relationship with Geib & Walker such that while they must refuse to sell to him (where he would then offer music below the agreed-on price), he was selling to them, but not to others, who he claimed were out to destroy his business²⁹⁴. The introduction of lithographic printing in the late 1820s had created a way to cheaply and reasonably effectively reproduce music without the efforts of an engraver for each page. While a lithographic print is rarely as sharp and distinct as engraved plates, the demand for popular tunes at low prices made a ready market.²⁹⁵ Apparently this caused the price of engraved music to drop as well, for Bourne was advertising engraved music alongside more common types into the 1830s.

William received one more set of premiums in October 1831 for a cabinet piano and square piano, but the competition was now more regional, with Osborne and King of Albany and E.N. Shear of Philadelphia winning, as well as Dubois and Stodart.²⁹⁶ A notice from E. Johns & Co. of New Orleans and dated September 29, 1831 indicates them having just received from Leipzig a “Forte Piano styled a’ la Giraffe, with five pedals and made by Breitkopf & Hartel, three squares by them as well, while on-hand the have several by Pleyel & Co., Stein of Vienna, and several by Geib of New York upon a new and improved plan.”²⁹⁷ Geib was in competition with the world, selling in all the major cities in America, and positioned to at least maintain that business. Through 1832 this seems to hold for him, though his notices are less frequent during

²⁹³ *New York Evening Post*, July 06, 1830

²⁹⁴ *Commercial Advertiser* (NY), September 18, 1830

²⁹⁵ Richard J. Wolfe, *‘Early American Music Engraving and Printing’*, University of Illinois Press, 1980, pg 230-31

²⁹⁶ *New York Spectator*, October 21, 1831

²⁹⁷ *Abeille* (New Orleans, LA), September 29, 1831

that year. But this is the last year that William seems to have his full attention directed on his piano manufacturing craft. A newspaper notice from March of 1832 seems to hold a clue:

“...The irregular competition which prevails at present in this branch of business, has induced, a reduction of prices which will be found if any allowance is made for the superior excellence of the instruments made at this manufactory, to be as low as the prices of any Pianofortes imported or made here.”²⁹⁸

This is as close to an old-fashioned rant, such as those once written by John Geib Sr. as are to be found among these more polished notices.

On April 4th, 1833, Daniel Walker married Mary Ann Geib, Adam’s youngest daughter. Daniel was now part of the family. In Longworth’s directory, Daniel and John Geib are listed at 23 Maiden Lane, along with Adam. This is probably meant to reflect John’s participation in the manufacturing part of the business. On April 3rd, 1833, William announced that

“intending to confine his business in future to the manufacture and sale of Pianofortes, will sell his stock of sheet music, wind instruments, & etc. at a very low price... The Pianofortes now on hand, and lately from the manufactory, are of superior quality in tone, touch, and workmanship, and of the latest fashion... Among them is an elegant Grand Square Pianoforte on Grecian pillars, lately from the manufactory.”²⁹⁹

Joseph Atwill and James Hewett had formed a partnership in April 1833 as music vendors but dissolved it March 20, 1834³⁰⁰ and Joseph Atwill purchased the store and residual effects at 201 Broadway from William. However, William was not finished yet. In January of 1834 he gave notice that Piano Fortes on a new construction with ‘grand action’ (the Pleyel approach adopted much earlier by the Nunns) had arrived for examination.³⁰¹ However, by March 22nd, 1834, William gave his first notice that he had his house on 3rd Ave. for rent; 25 feet on the front, 50 feet deep, marble mantles and 16 rooms plus pantries, cellars, etc. William was clearly contemplating a change in life, and this was only hastened when in May, his youngest son Jacob Bretz (the second to have that name) died of scarlet fever at age 1 ½. Joseph Atwill specifically points out in early May of 1834 that William continued to sell his pianos specifically through Atwill³⁰², but this claim is dropped in subsequent notices.

By the end of 1834 William had all the properties on 3rd Ave up for sale. They consisted of four handsome three-story brick houses that made up the majority of the block. An event in 1835 demonstrated that William had withdrawn from the business, and Geib & Walker were left to manage things as well as they could. On Friday evening, November 6, 1835, a gang of workers from Geib and Walker assaulted a fellow worker as reported:

“More fruits of the Trades Union – In the course of our career as a public journalist, we have never had occasion to record a more wanton and disgraceful outrage than that which we are about to relate. On Friday evening, a person by the name of Thos. Browning, in the employ of Geib & Walker, pianoforte manufacturers, in passing from a house of a friend, down Hammond street to Greenwich, was attacked by a brutal and cowardly mob, consisting of some fifty fellows masked

²⁹⁸ *New York Evening Post*, March 30, 1832

²⁹⁹ *New York Evening Post*, April 03, 1833

³⁰⁰ *American* (NY), March 24, 1834

³⁰¹ *New York Evening Post*, January 17, 1834

³⁰² *American* (NY), May 07, 1834

and otherwise disguised, who, after beating and kicking the life nearly out of him, took him to a vacant lot, daubed him over with tar, emptied a bolster full of feathers on him, and then left him to his fate. A circumstance which adds to the atrocity of the act is, that the unfortunate victim was in reality not the man for whom the outrage was intended, and in order to account for the motives which induced it, we make the following statement: Messrs Geib & Walker had in their employment many years a person by the name of James Jackson, who, by industry and frugality saved a sufficient sum to purchase a small landed property in the country, to which he removed with his family. After residing there sometime, his former employers being in want of a man to whom they could confide the general superintendence of their manufactory, made him liberal offers to induce him to come to town, and accept the situation. After much entreaty, Jackson at length consented to their proposal, and came to New York with his family.

Scarcely had he entered upon the duties assigned him, when symptoms of revolt began to manifest themselves among the workmen of the establishment. They commenced by remonstrating with their employers against the continuance of Jackson in their service, and at length insisted upon his expulsion, alleging as a reason that he was not a member of the trades union. In vain did the man urge that having resided in the country he did not think it necessary to join the same, but that it was his intention immediately to become a member, and that he had never worked for a less rate than the established prices. In vain did his employers urge the excellence of his character; nothing but an instant expulsion from their service would satisfy the dictators.

Indignant at proceedings which, if submitted to, would make employers the servants of their journeymen and place them at the mercy of every refractory fellow in their establishment, they very properly determined not to submit to this dictation, and informed their workmen of their resolution on the subject.

These differences having got wind among some of the members of the trades union, they resolved upon taking the affair into their own hands; and by assailing the unoffending victim drive him from his employ and from the city. Their first act was to tar and feather, and otherwise ill use him. Fortunately for Jackson, but most unhappily for Browning, they mistook the one for the other. This villainous outrage, however, has had the precise effect anticipated by the perpetrators: Jackson, in fear of his life, intreated to be dismissed, and his employers, to appease their refractory workmen, sacrificed their independence and consented to his removal.”³⁰³

The formation and regulation of the trades unions had been developing through 1835³⁰⁴. In previous times workers were paid by the day, but with efficiencies in manufacturing in the industry the movement had been made toward paying by the piece, with a set of agreed on prices established for what a given piece was worth. It was very exact, allowing for hard or soft woods, size, embellishments, etc. Workers who agreed to make pieces at a price below the established price were known as ‘blacks’ and were held as pariahs. While the ideal was to create a fair condition of employment and not cheat workers on margins, the result could turn ugly, as above. The story was repeated in every major paper in America, and likely damaged the cause.

The Journeymen Piano Forte-makers Society responded immediately³⁰⁵, also documented in the introduction for the republished *The New York book of Prices*.³⁰⁶ They claimed that Jackson was a known ‘black’; that he had colluded to do work under the established piecework price

³⁰³ *Morning Courier* (NY), Nov 11, 1835

³⁰⁴ Laurence Libin, *The New York Book of Prices*, American Musical Instrument Society, Inc., Malden Mass, 2009, pg 34- 35

³⁰⁵ *National Trades' Union*, November 28, 1835

³⁰⁶ Laurence Libin, *The New York Book of Prices*, American Musical Instrument Society, Inc., Malden Mass, 2009, pg 35

in the past; that his agreeing to join the union was a sham and that in future troubles with management he would turn traitor, and was undeserving to work in their shop. They claimed not to know who acted in the attack, nor were they a part of a trades union, but that Browning was a 'black' as well, and had recently been expelled from the society for working under price, implying he had jolly well deserved what happened to him.

Under such troubled circumstances it is little wonder that William had lost interest in the piano trade. No doubt the stiff and 'irregular' competition, the worsening conditions on the shop floor, and perhaps Eliza's longing to return home proved too much for him. In 1835, another son was born, also named Jacob Bretz Geib, and this third attempt to preserve the Bretz name succeeded. Gildersleeve wrote that this Jacob Bretz was persuaded to drop the last name of Geib, and to be known by Bretz, at the behest of his grandfather, but as the elder Jacob died in 1842, while the child was 6 or 7 years old, it unlikely that young Jacob Bretz Geib had much say in the matter. It is far more likely that he was left with an entailed trust and changed his name to claim the trust, or some similar action.

The trade union development was put on hold when the panic of 1837 broke over the country. Two domestic policies, in particular, exacerbated an already volatile situation. The Specie Circular of 1836 mandated that western lands could be purchased only with gold and silver coin but not on credit. The circular was an executive order issued by Andrew Jackson and favored by Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri and other hard-money advocates. The intent was to curb inflation, but the circular had negative consequences. Secondly, the Deposit and Distribution Act of 1836 placed federal revenues in various banks across the country. Many of these banks were located in western regions. The effect of these two policies was to transfer specie away from the nation's main commercial centers on the East Coast. With lower monetary reserves in their vaults, major banks and financial institutions on the East Coast had to scale back their loans, which was a major cause of the panic.³⁰⁷ For the next six years the nation was in a depression or recession, the deepest and longest lasting to that date. The chart of builder numbers shows the drop in the number of builders but cannot reflect the actual loss. Fully 1/3 of the piano builders working in 1835 were gone by 1843.

Geib & Walker survived the depression, though at reduced business levels. Daniel Walker was granted a patent on June 19, 1838 for a piano wrest-pin, a method of tightening the strings similar to turning a screw to tighten the hair on a violin bow. It seemed to make a favorable impression but was not considered worth the added expense and was quickly dropped.³⁰⁸ At the Albany Fair in February 1839, Geib and Walker were awarded a 'Silver Medal', and W. & G. Barmore, the same.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ Rousseau, Peter L. (2002). '*Jacksonian Monetary Policy, Specie Flows, and the Panic of 1837*', *Journal of Economic History* 62 (2): 457–488

³⁰⁸ Daniel Spillane, '*History of the American pianoforte: its technical development, and the trade*', D. Spillane Pub, 1890, pg 160

³⁰⁹ *Daily Whig* (NY), February 05, 1839



Figure 126: Name board label for Geib and Walker square piano, ca. 1839



Figure 127, Geib and Walker square piano, circa 1837. Left rear leg not shown. The piano by design is now on four legs.

Chapter 11

William Geib, MD, and the Last of the Geib Manufacturing Firm



Figure 128, William Geib ca. 1850

William had developed an interest in homeopathic medicine at some point, and was determined to pursue it, so he left New York for Philadelphia in 1839. As his parents-in-law still lived there, it was a natural choice, though notices indicate that he had difficulty disposing of the 3rd Ave. property. There is no indication of another Geib manufactory that had opened, so presumably people were reluctant to take a house with a piano factory in the back yard!

A school for homeopathic medicine had been recently established in Philadelphia as an added attraction. Homeopathy had been founded in 1796 by Samuel Hahnemann, who believed that the underlying cause of disease were phenomena that he termed ‘miasms’, and that homeopathic remedies addressed these. The remedies are prepared by repeatedly diluting a chosen substance in alcohol or distilled water, that supposedly mimics the patient’s symptoms on the assumption that ‘like cures like’, followed by forceful striking of the bottled diluted substance on an elastic body, which was called succussion. As still practiced today, each dilution followed by ‘succussion’ is said to increase the remedy's potency. Dilution sometimes continues well past the

point where none of the original substance remains, against the supposition that the solvent has taken on the ‘shape’ of the active substance, and can effect cures without concern of poisoning.

Homeopaths select remedies by consulting reference books known as repertories, considering the totality of the patient's symptoms as well as the patient's personal traits, physical and psychological state, and life history.³¹⁰ The mechanical and intellectual aspects of homeopathy would have appealed to William, with his highly hands-on background. While the study is today largely considered a form of quackery, at the time it could be said that at its worst it did no harm, and the careful patient interrogation led to better understanding of the patient than the standard medical practice of the time which held the patient as something of an interruption in a doctor's scheduled rounds.³¹¹

William received his M.D. from Penn Medical School in 1841 and began his practice, while continuing to study. His oldest daughter Anna Maria married Richard Crocheron in November of that year. William's first publication in his new field came out in 1842 ‘An essay on homeopathy: a synopsis of the positive history and principles of the science, with the author's opinion of palliative remedies, designed principally for lay readers.’ It was quickly followed up by a series of articles, including his ‘Defense of Hahnemann’. The 3rd Ave NY property was finally disposed of in May 1843 under a Chancery sale, after many notices in the paper by Adam throughout 1842 to find a buyer.

1843 was a transitional year for Geib & Walker. Portions of the music catalog, presumably the most profitable parts, were sold to Stephen T. Gordon of Hartford CT.³¹² Daniel Walker left the firm and joined with his brother John to form J & D Walker, piano makers, with several addresses over the next few years. They had been making under this arrangement while Daniel was still Geib and Walker, as can be seen in extant pianos which bear the name Geib & Walker on the name board but are stamped J & D Walker inside. Adam retained the store at 23 Maiden Lane, continuing to sell musical merchandise.

His son William Howe Geib joined him in 1844, after which activity in the newspapers began to pick up again. They brought in Seraphines (reed organs) for the first time, and the store was constantly in the papers with notices for strings, flutes, etc. In these last years, Adam was less and less of a presence, and on September 5th, 1849, Adam Geib died after a lingering illness. His funeral was held from the No. 71, 3rd Avenue address, William's old house. Adam had obviously purchased the properties, possibly to William's benefit.

³¹⁰ Hahnemann S (1833), *The Organon of the Healing Art* (5th ed.), aphorisms 5 and 217, ISBN 0-87983-228-2

³¹¹ Ernst, E.; Kaptchuk, TJ (1996), ‘*Homeopathy revisited*’, *Archives of Internal Medicine* 156 (19): 2162–4

³¹² William Arms Fisher, *One hundred and fifty years of music publishing in the United States an historical sketch with special reference to the pioneer publisher, 1783-1933*, Oliver Ditson company, Inc., Boston, 1933



Figure 129, Geib & Walker, circa 1839

William began writing and publishing music shortly after coming to Philadelphia, an example being “General Patterson’s Grand Parade March” of April 22, 1840, and published by George Willig, the publisher that George had used eight years earlier. Between 1840 and at least 1855 William published a number of works, including ‘Capt. Lyles Quick Step’, who was associated with General Patterson in the Mexican War of 1846. As an interesting aside, there are numerous notices of a William Geib in New York who was associated with what was then the New York Militia, and who rose through the ranks to Colonel during the teens. No definite connection has been made to connect these two men, but as no other William Geib is listed in the City Directory it seems probable that they were one and the same. This frequent fraternization with military figures, and his music dedicated to them are additional clues.

CAPT. LYLES

QUICK STEP

Composed by

W. GEIB, M.D.

And very Respectfully Dedicated to

Capt. Peter Lyle.

OF THE **NATIONAL GUARD** PHILAD.

BY

Wm Geib Jr.

(A Member of the Corps.)

As Performed by the Pennsylvania Cornet Band.

Philad^a Published by **WINNER & SHUSTER** 110 North Eighth St.

P. M. Gam. Philad.

Ent'd according to act of Congress in the Year 1855, by Winner & Shuster, in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the Eastern District of Penn^a

Figure 130, sheet music by William Geib, dedicated to his son's captain, Peter Lyle

In the late 1840s William became obsessed with the occult. It was a subject that was then gaining popularity, and William was never seen to merely dabble in things, so by the mid-1850s he was contributing to defenses and explanations of the details associated with séances and summing spirits. An exchange documented by Dr. Robert Hare, an ardent promoter of the subject, is illuminating:

“Dr. Geib says: Being subsequently in the city of New York, I visited the public circles of a Medium for automatic writing and the sounds. Being requested, as the rest had been, but without response, to ask if any of my Spirit friends were present, my interrogation was answered by three distinct raps upon the table.

Now ask who it is: a father, mother and so on;

and I was informed it was a son.

Is your sister with you

Yes.

Will you spell her name

Yes;

and it was correctly given.

Is her little son with her

Yes.

Will you spell his name

Yes;

and a name of seventeen letters was correctly spelled out by the card, the letters being indicated, when pointed to, by three raps. My Spirit son also informed me when he had died, and of what disease. It will be observed that my son’s name had not been mentioned, reserving it for a test. Three raps had replied in the affirmative to my question, when the Medium spasmodically seized a pencil, extended a sheet of paper toward me, and wrote upside down, so that I might read it as written:

We are looking forward for you to join us, when we shall be more so;

and to my perfect delight and astonishment, signed my son’s name to the communication, asking whether the name was correct.”³¹³

The name spelled out was William Washington, who was both the infant son of Anna Maria, and was also William’s 19-year-old son, who was living in New York when he died in in 1845³¹⁴. One might think that with medicine and spiritualism involving his time, William would have had no time for thoughts of pianos, but this is not entirely the case. In McElroy’s Philadelphia City Directory of 1851 appears “Geib Wm. pianos, 268 Chestnut”, and in the census of 1850 he lists himself as Piano Dealer. It was clearly difficult for him to turn away from pianos, but subsequent directory listings seem to emphasize the MD, so it can be concluded that the piano trade was a diversion in the early 1850s.

³¹³ “*Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations, Demonstrating the Existence of Spirits and Their Communion with Mortals*”, Robert Hare, M.D., Partridge & Brittan, NY, 1855

³¹⁴ *New York Tribune*, August 30, 1845

Dr. William Geib died on June 15th, 1860, in Philadelphia after a long and severe illness.³¹⁵ With this last son of John Geib Sr. gone, the future of the piano trade was left to the grandchildren in New York.

GEIB & JACKSON,
361 BROADWAY, N. Y.,
DEALERS IN
Piano Fortes & Music,
AND IMPORTERS OF
Musical Instruments and Italian and English Violin Strings.
(Piano Fortes for Hire. -c)

William Howe Geib had assumed a partnership role with his father Adam after the departure of Daniel Walker. Walker, for his part, was intimately involved with the founding of the New York Philharmonic, later to become the NY Philharmonic Orchestra. W. H. Geib immediately made his presence felt with a burst of notices to the paper of various articles for sale. This continued until the death of his father in 1849, after which he partnered with James Jackson Jr. (presumably the son of the infamous ‘black’ James Jackson of 15 years earlier) to form Geib & Jackson on 361 Broadway. Today they are better known for printed sheet music than pianos, of which no more than a handful might survive. The Clinkscale Early Piano Database does not record a single example of a piano in collections as of March 2013. Geib & Jackson are listed in the City Directory until 1858 and were selling tickets from 783 Broadway (the last directory address) in April 1860.³¹⁶ At this point it is likely that William made some changes in his life, as the Census of 1860 has him listed as ‘Farmer’ in Southfield NY (now Tuxedo). He is listed at 4 Leroy Place, in New York City through 1869, but the operational proprietor was Charles J. Betts. Betts operated the business from 1861 through 1884, though manufacturing pianos was not a priority, and again few seem to have survived. Nothing is known of the residual of Betts’ business after 1884.

J. & D. Walker was active until 1870 when Daniel died and John retired shortly thereafter.³¹⁷ The sons of Daniel, including William H. Walker, continued as Walker Brothers until 1882, when the firm sold out to R. M. Walters. Walters’ notice creates a fictional history of Geib and Walker and J. & D. Walker, established in 1792.

W. H. Walker would take on the job of managing the operation at 57 University Place, ‘The Largest Piano Establishment in New York’.³¹⁸ R. M Walters, later the Walters Piano Company, would thrive, making some 85,000 pianos, mostly uprights, between 1903 and 1929³¹⁹, including pianos for Bloomingdale Brothers, until the great depression of 1929 extinguished them for good.

³¹⁵ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), June 18, 1860

³¹⁶ *New York Tribune*, April 20, 1860

³¹⁷ Nancy Groce, *‘Musical Instrument Makers of New York’*, Pendragon Press, 1991

³¹⁸ *New York Herald*, December 24, 1882

³¹⁹ *Pierce Piano Atlas*, 10th Edition, Larry Ashley, 1991

An amusing notice appeared in the Buffalo Daily Courier, 1870, which read

“A Musical Novelty – Messrs Jewett & Mischka have now on exhibition in their piano rooms, a piano manufactured about the year 1825, by W. Geib, 3d avenue and 170 Broadway, New York, under “an improved patent.” The Instrument has preserved to it, we should think, all its original power, and it makes music very suggestive of a ‘house afire’.”³²⁰

The piano in question was made after 1829, so a mere 40 years earlier, but it was already the object of some wonder and ridicule. Histories of the Geibs in the late 19th century had Adam Geib as the progenitor, arriving in 1760, among other repeated nonsense.³²¹

Through research and reason, their story has now been brought into a more careful light, and it is hoped this work will join with the stories of the other American makers to give a historical framework to the remaining instruments, not as objects of curiosity and derision, but as authentic artifacts of the development of music in the late 18th and early 19th century. The music followed the instruments, and they in turn followed the music, such that they are inextricably bound together.

THE
Angel Friend
SACRED SONG
Composed & Respectfully Dedicated
TO
MRS. MARGARET GOUBLAY
BY
W. GEIB, M.D.
Piano. *Guitar.*
Price 25 Cts.
Printed, Published by WINNER & SHUSTER 101 North Eighth St.
P. M. Jewett, Philad.
Entered according to act of Congress for the Year 1855 by Winner & Shuster in the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the East District of Pa.

³²⁰ Buffalo Daily Courier, April 28, 1870

³²¹ Geneva Advertiser, New York, January 17, 1893

Appendix 1

Timeline for John Geib and Sons:

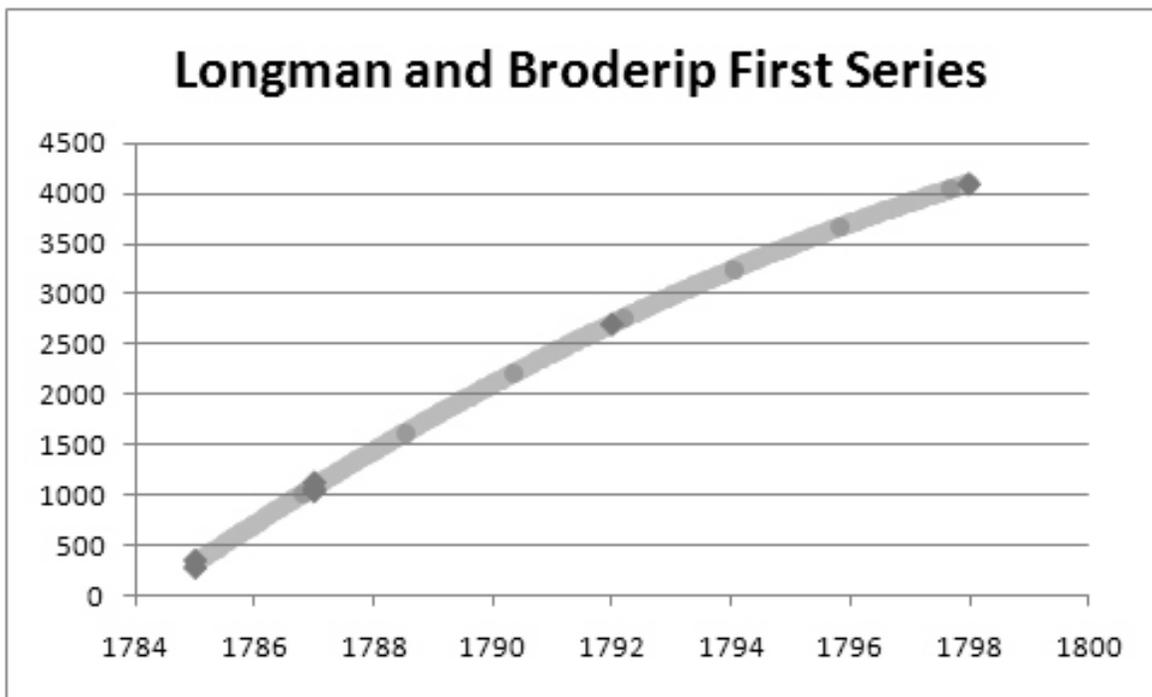
Feb. 1744	John Geib born in Staudernheim Germany
~1773	Geib immigrated to London
1777	Earliest piano extant by Geib
Sept 1779	John L. Geib married Rebecca Shrimpton
May 1780	Birth of John Jr. and Adam Geib
Mar. 1782	Birth of George Geib
Nov. 1786	Patent 1571 issued for double action
Aug 1787	Birth of Elizabeth Geib
1787-1791	Partnership with Goldsworth
Aug. 1790	Birth of Mary-Ann Geib
Feb 1792	Birth of Rebecca Geib
1792-1796	Partnership with Augustus Leukfeld
Mar. 1793	Birth of William Geib
Aug. 1794	Birth of Sophie Augusta Geib
July 1797	Family immigrated to New York / Geib and Co. formed
Aug. – Nov. 1802	Bankruptcy proceedings / Geib and Son formed
1806	First appearance of round cornered pianos
1810	George returned to NY from UK/Europe
Apr. 1813 plates from Appel	George opened the music store in Lexington KY / Adam bought engraved plates from Appel
July 1814	Rebecca Geib (daughter) died / Geib Sr. announced retirement
May 1815	John Jr. then building on his own / Adam opened Music store at 9 Maiden Lane / George Geib closed store in Lexington KY
1816	J & A Geib formed
Oct. 1817	John Jr. awarded patent for upright pianos
Jan. 1818	J, A, & W Geib formed

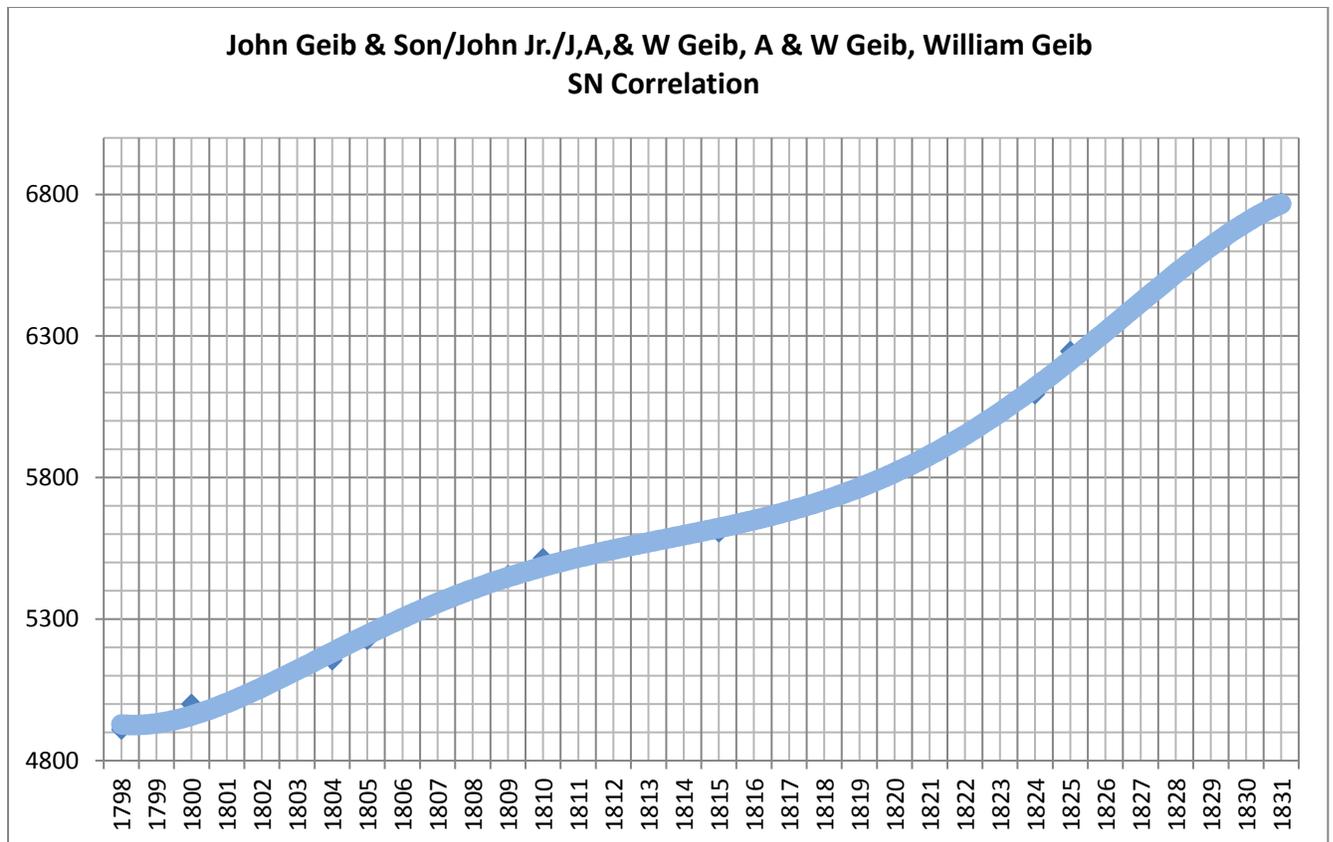
Oct. 1818	John Geib Sr. died / George published his tutorial
Apr. 1819	John Jr. married Margaret Lawrence
Aug. 1819	George Geib awarded patent for teaching with a dumb instrument
May 1820	William Geib married Eve Elizabeth Bretz
Sept 1821	John Geib Jr. died / A & W Geib formed
June 1823	Rebecca Geib (mother) died
Dec. 1827	Adam and William dissolved partnership but remained in cooperation
Spring 1829	Adam formed partnership with Daniel Walker
1829-1831 City	Wm Geib awarded premiums at each of the annual American Fairs in NY
Apr. 1833	Daniel Walker married Adam's daughter Mary Ann
1833	Elizabeth Geib died
1834	William retired from active piano building activities
June 1838	Daniel Walker awarded patent for tuning pin improvement
1839 for pianos	William relocated to Philadelphia / Geib and Walker awarded silver medal
1841	William began medical practice
July 1842	George Geib died
1843	Adam and Daniel Walker dissolved partnership. Adam's son William Howe joined him.
Sept. 1849	Adam Geib died
June 1860	William Geib died / William Howe retires to occupation of farmer
1870	Daniel Walker died, firm continued as Walker Brothers
1882	Walker Bros sold to R. M. Walters
1929	Last piano traceable back to Geib firm's roots made

Appendix 2

Serial number charts for Longman & Broderip, and Geib of New York, are at best interpolations of a few dated pianos, as neither company routinely dated their instruments in the same way that Broadwood did, nor are there porter's books or other records left behind as with Broadwood. That said, the following graphs may be used to get a close approximation of the year a given serial number was produced.

The L & B First Series refers to their 5 octave instruments with lever over-dampers, with or without the Geib improved action. Improved instruments were labeled as Patent, but otherwise numbered the same. The 5.5 octave instruments, usually with Irish dampers, are under Southwell's New Patent of 1794, and so run from 1794 to 1798, when Clementi essentially took over. One can assume that with the second series there were about 175 sold each year.





The Geib data is given to 1831, the last good date available, although pianos by William Geib were probably made in 1833, and perhaps 1834. It is expected that most 1834 pianos and later are marked Geib and Walker. From 1804 to 1809 they were building about 60 pianos per year. During the War of 1812, that number dropped to perhaps 22/year, and may have been flatter than shown here. By 1821 things were up sharply, and through the end of the decade they were building at about 90 pianos per year. Figures for the 1830-32 period should be taken as gross approximations. Spillane gives a figure of 2500 pianos made nationwide in 1829, with 800 made in NY that year.³²²

³²² Daniel Spillane, *History of the American pianoforte: its technical development, and the trade*, D. Spillane Pub, 1890, pg 84

Appendix 3

Addresses and dates for John Geib and his sons, 1798 to 1860. n.=near; h.=house ND=no data

Date	John Geib Sr	John Geib Jr	Adam Geib	George Geib	William Geib
1798	First	First	First	First	First
1799	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "
1800	Bowery cor. North	Bowery cor. North	Bowery cor. North	Bowery cor. North	Bowery cor. North
1801	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "
1802	" "	" "	132 Chatham	" "	" "
1803	" "	" "	152 Chatham	King Street, Alexandria	" "
1804	Bowery	Bowery & 40 Barclay	380 Pearl	" "	Bowery
1805	Corres Gard. Leonard & Mount Vernon	Corres Gard. Leonard & Mount Vernon	" "	Corres Gard. Leonard	Corres Gard. Leonard
1806	Leonard	Leonard n. B'way	13 Leonard	Leonard	Leonard
1807	" "	" "		London	" "
1808	" "	" "		" "	" "
1809	" "	" "	upper end Mulberry	" "	" "
1810	95 Leonard	95 Leonard	" "	" " / 95 Leonard	95 Leonard
1811	95 Leonard & 36 Sugar loaf	95 Leonard & 36 Sugar loaf	" "	95 Leonard	" "
1812	55 Sugarloaf	55 Sugarloaf	95 Leonard	55 Sugarloaf	55 Sugarloaf
1813	" "	" "	upper end Mulberry	Lexington	" "
1814	" "	" "	" "	" "	" "
1815	Barbados Neck, n. Newark	" "	9 Maiden-lane	" "	Lexington
1816	" "	23 Maiden-lane h. Franklin c. Church	23 Maiden-lane	Nashville	Philadelphia
1817	" "	" "	" "	Newark	UNKNOWN
1818	<u>Barbados Neck, n. Newark</u>	" "	" "	" "	UNKNOWN
1819		" "	" "	146 Fulton	UNKNOWN
1820		" "	" "	" "	UNKNOWN
1821		23 Maiden-lane h. <u>Carmine n. Bedford</u>	" "	210 Broadway	UNKNOWN
1822			23 Maiden-lane, h. Carmine	208 Broadway	Carmine n. Bedford
1823			23 Maiden-lane	88 White, h. 164 Broadway	" "
1824			" "	Church, and at Vandewater Street	23 Maiden-lane, h. Carmine n. Bedford
1825			" "	16 Greene	23 Maiden-lane, h. Broadway n. Fourth
1826			" "	Sixth n. 6th Avenue	23 Maiden-lane, h. Bleecker n. Herring
1827			" "	65 Dey	23 Maiden-lane, h. 3rd Avenue
1828			" "	10 Greene	3rd Ave. Eleventh
1829			" "	Natchez	219 Broadway, h. Avenue 3d n. Eleventh

1830			23 Maiden-lane, h. Mulberry n. Bleeker	119 Canal	170 Broadway, h. Ave. 3d n. Eleventh
1831			" "	9 John, h. 9 Bleeker	201 Broadway, h. Ave.
1832			" "	" "	3d n. Eleventh
1833			" "	Connecticut	" "
1834			" "	" "	" "
1835			23 Maiden-lane, h. 306 Mulberry	183 Broadway	201 Broadway, h. Av. 3d n. Twelfth
1836			" "	UNKNOWN	" "
1837			" "	UNKNOWN	" "
1838			" "	UNKNOWN	Avenue 3d n. Twelfth
1839			" "	UNKNOWN	Philadelphia
1840			" "	116 Perry	" "
1841			" "	Union sq. c. Nineteenth	" "
1842			" "	44 Vesey	Filbert n. Sch 7 th , Phil
1843			" "		271 N 7 th , Phil
1844			73 Av. 3		" "
1845			71 Av. 3		" "
1846			" "		" "
1847			" "		" "
1848			<u>71 Av. 3</u>		" "
1849					Not listed
1850					Not listed
1851					Pianos - 268 Chestnut, h. 229 N 13th
1852					
1853					229 N 13th
1854					" "
1855					ND
1856					ND
1857					ND
1858					ND
1859					321 N 11 th St
1860					" "

Appendix 4

The known Geib pianos with recorded serial numbers are listed below, extracted from the Clinkscale Early Piano Database, accessed March 20, 2013. Many other pianos are recorded incompletely and no serial number is known.

EP Number	Type	Made by	SN	Compass	Owner								
1402	Square	Geib, John & Son	5155	FF-f3	US/DC/Washington: Smithsonian Institution								
1403	Square	Geib, John & Son	5227	FF-c4	US/MA/Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston								
1	Square	Geib, John & Son	5280	FF-c4	US/NY/Greenwich: Mr & Mrs Michael London (acquired 1964)								
1404	Square	Geib, John & Son	5304	FF-c4	US/DE/Winterthur: The Henry Francis duPont Museum								
7257	Square	Geib, John & Son	5360	FF-c4	US/VA/Williamsburg: The College of William and Mary (on loan to Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)								
1400	Square	Geib, John & Son	5414	FF-c4	US/NY/New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art								
5812	Square	Geib, John & Son	5455	FF-c4	UK/England/Wessex/Bath: Claverton Manor, American Museum in Britain								
1405	Square	Geib, John & Son	5544	FF-c4	Unknown								
4349	Square	Geib, John jun.	5607	FF-c4	US/CT/New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery, Mabel Garan Collection								
1412	Square	Geib, John, jun., Adam & William	5617	FF-c4	Canada/Alberta/Calgary: National Music Centre (formerly Cantos Music Foundation)								
6903	Square	Geib, John jun.	5631	FF-c4	Canada/B.C./Kelowna: Art and Dianne Smith								
1408	Square	Geib, John, jun., Adam & William	5740	FF-c4	US/MA/Newton Center: Marlowe A. Sigal Collection								
1410	Square	Geib, John, jun., Adam & William	5756	FF-c4	US/VA/Richmond: Association for the Preservation of Va. Antiquities								
1409	Square	Geib, John, jun., Adam & William	5837	FF-c4	US/VA/Richmond: Historic Richmond Foundation, Elmira Shelton House								
1411	Square	Geib, John, jun., Adam & William	5904	FF-c4	US/NC/Raleigh: Wake County Chapter, Colonial Dames, Haywood Hall								
4350	Square	Geib, Adam & William	6095	FF-c4	US/CT/New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery								
1396	Square	Geib, Adam & William	6152	FF-c4	US/NY/New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art								
6814	Square	Geib, Adam & William	6224	FF-c4	US/NC/Raleigh/William Mann III								
6730	Square	Geib, Adam & William	6264	FF-c4	US/MD/University Park: Harvey and Sarah Moseley								
1494	Square	Geib, Adam & William	6275	FF-c4	US/NY/New York: Museum of the American Piano								
7764	Square	Geib, Adam & William	6304	FF-c4	US/GA/Savannah: The Andrew Low House								
1492	Square	Geib, Adam & William	6311	FF-c4	US/VA/Richmond: Valentine Museum								
1497	Square	Geib, Adam, & Daniel Walker	6464	FF-f4	US/NC/Henderson: Mrs Philip M. Young (Catherine)								
1503	Square	Geib, William	6662	FF-f4	US/DC/Washington: Smithsonian Institution								
1502	Square	Geib, William	6696	FF-f4	US/NY/New York: Museum of the American Piano								
1500	Square	Geib, William	6730	FF-f4	US/TX/Dallas: Dallas Museum of Art								
1501	Square	Geib, William	6770	FF-f4	US/SC/Easley: Thomas Strange								

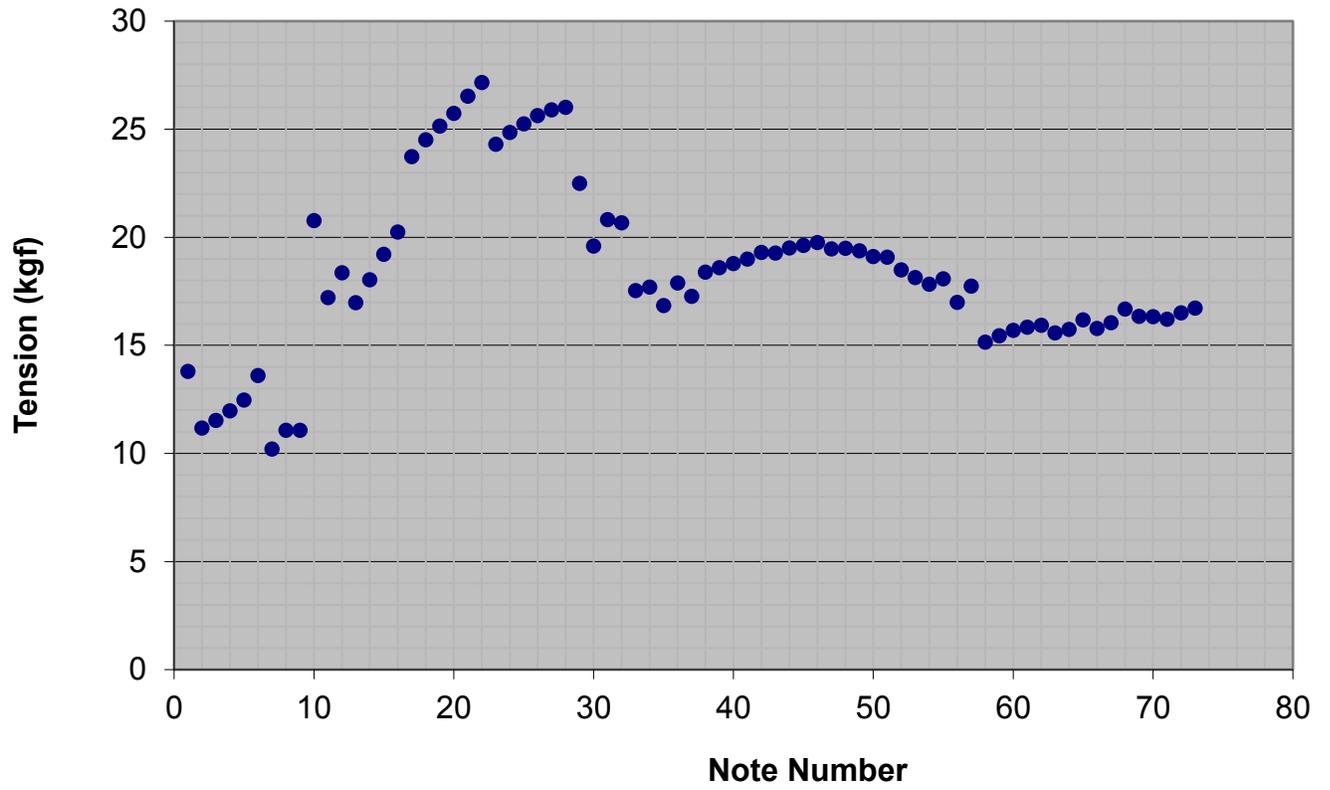
Appendix 5, Stringing schedules

Geib SN 6770, 1831

Note		Frequency A 425	Length (mm)	L (M)	Diameter (mm)	String Dia (M)	Overspun	Over spun (M)	Tension
FF	1	42.2	1435	1.435	0.686	0.000686	0.42	0.00042	13.80172
FF#	2	44.7	1415	1.415	0.737	0.000737	0.33	0.00033	11.18253
GG	3	47.3	1396	1.396	0.686	0.000686	0.33	0.00033	11.53812
GG#	4	50.1	1377	1.377	0.635	0.000635	0.33	0.00033	11.97208
AA	5	53.1	1357	1.357	0.584	0.000584	0.33	0.00033	12.48264
AA#	6	56.3	1336	1.336	0.584	0.000584	0.33	0.00033	13.60151
BB	7	59.6	1313	1.313	0.584	0.000584	0.25	0.00025	10.20489
C	8	63.2	1290	1.29	0.584	0.000584	0.25	0.00025	11.07643
C#	9	66.9	1265	1.265	0.533	0.000533	0.25	0.00025	11.08001
D	10	70.9	1238	1.238	1.041	0.001041			20.77214
D#	11	75.1	1212	1.212	0.914	0.000914			17.21962
E	12	79.6	1181	1.181	0.914	0.000914			18.3681
F	13	84.3	1153	1.153	0.85	0.00085			16.98234
F#	14	89.3	1122	1.122	0.85	0.00085			18.04565
G	15	94.7	1092	1.092	0.85	0.00085			19.22335
G#	16	100.3	1058	1.058	0.85	0.00085			20.24217
A	17	106.3	1206	1.206	0.762	0.000762			23.74199
A#	18	112.6	1157	1.157	0.762	0.000762			24.51881
B	19	119.3	1106	1.106	0.762	0.000762			25.15053
c	20	126.4	1056	1.056	0.762	0.000762			25.73819
c#	21	133.9	1012	1.012	0.762	0.000762			26.52639
d	22	141.8	967	0.967	0.762	0.000762			27.16198
d#	23	150.3	925	0.925	0.711	0.000711			24.31009
e	24	159.2	883	0.883	0.711	0.000711			24.8538
f	25	168.7	840	0.84	0.711	0.000711			25.25654
f#	26	178.7	799	0.799	0.711	0.000711			25.64058
g	27	189.3	758	0.758	0.711	0.000711			25.89553
g#	28	200.6	717	0.717	0.711	0.000711			26.01869
a	29	212.5	678	0.678	0.66	0.00066			22.4963
a#	30	225.1	621	0.621	0.635	0.000635			19.60323
b	31	238.5	604	0.604	0.635	0.000635			20.81824
c'	32	252.7	568	0.568	0.635	0.000635			20.6681
c#'	33	267.7	537	0.537	0.584	0.000584			17.53545
d'	34	283.7	509	0.509	0.584	0.000584			17.694
d#'	35	300.5	469	0.469	0.584	0.000584			16.85413
e'	36	318.4	456	0.456	0.584	0.000584			17.88741
f'	37	337.3	423	0.423	0.584	0.000584			17.27369
f#'	38	357.4	412	0.412	0.584	0.000584			18.39819

g'	39	378.6	391	0.391	0.584	0.000584	18.59458
g#'	40	401.1	371	0.371	0.584	0.000584	18.78992
a'	41	425	352	0.352	0.584	0.000584	18.99043
a#'	42	450.3	335	0.335	0.584	0.000584	19.30924
b	43	477	316	0.316	0.584	0.000584	19.27892
c''	44	505.4	300	0.3	0.584	0.000584	19.50674
c#	45	535.5	284	0.284	0.584	0.000584	19.6258
d	46	567.3	269	0.269	0.584	0.000584	19.76068
d#	47	601	252	0.252	0.584	0.000584	19.46353
e	48	636.8	238	0.238	0.584	0.000584	19.49089
f	49	674.6	224	0.224	0.584	0.000584	19.37583
f#	50	714.8	210	0.21	0.584	0.000584	19.11962
g	51	757.3	198	0.198	0.584	0.000584	19.07823
g#	52	802.3	184	0.184	0.584	0.000584	18.49187
a	53	850	172	0.172	0.584	0.000584	18.13704
a#	54	900.5	161	0.161	0.584	0.000584	17.83573
b	55	954.1	153	0.153	0.584	0.000584	18.08183
c'''	56	1011	140	0.14	0.584	0.000584	16.99926
c#	57	1071	135	0.135	0.584	0.000584	17.73855
d	58	1135	129	0.129	0.533	0.000533	15.15206
d#	59	1202	123	0.123	0.533	0.000533	15.44968
e	60	1274	117	0.117	0.533	0.000533	15.70403
f	61	1349	111	0.111	0.533	0.000533	15.84785
f#	62	1430	105	0.105	0.533	0.000533	15.93496
g	63	1515	98	0.098	0.533	0.000533	15.58037
g#	64	1605	93	0.093	0.533	0.000533	15.74767
a	65	1700	89	0.089	0.533	0.000533	16.17999
a#	66	1801	83	0.083	0.533	0.000533	15.7937
b	67	1908	79	0.079	0.533	0.000533	16.05874
c''''	68	2022	76	0.076	0.533	0.000533	16.69129
c#	69	2142	71	0.071	0.533	0.000533	16.34768
d	70	2269	67	0.067	0.533	0.000533	16.335
d#	71	2404	63	0.063	0.533	0.000533	16.21252
e	72	2547	60	0.06	0.533	0.000533	16.50672
f	73	2699	57	0.057	0.533	0.000533	16.72846

Tension calculator for Wm Geib 6770

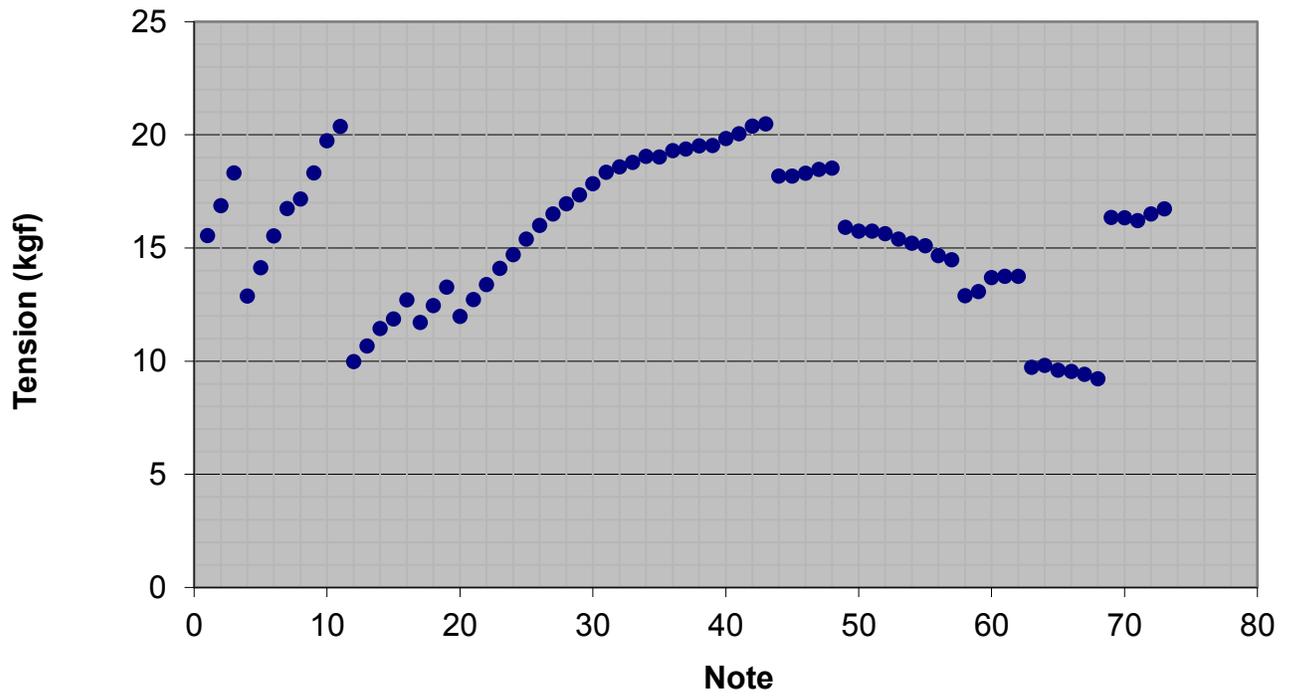


Stringing schedule Geib & Son, SN 5515, 1810

Note		Frequency A 425	Length (mm)	L (M)	Diameter (mm)	String Dia (M)	Overspun	Over spun (M)	Tension
FF	1	42.2	1420	1.42	0.74	0.00074	0.45	0.00045	15.55381
FF#	2	44.7	1396	1.396	0.74	0.00074	0.45	0.00045	16.86634
GG	3	47.3	1375	1.375	0.74	0.00074	0.45	0.00045	18.32157
GG#	4	50.1	1330	1.33	0.7	0.0007	0.35	0.00035	12.87217
AA	5	53.1	1315	1.315	0.7	0.0007	0.35	0.00035	14.13558
AA#	6	56.3	1300	1.3	0.7	0.0007	0.35	0.00035	15.53018
BB	7	59.6	1275	1.275	0.7	0.0007	0.35	0.00035	16.74117
C	8	63.2	1245	1.245	0.65	0.00065	0.35	0.00035	17.16485
C#	9	66.9	1215	1.215	0.65	0.00065	0.35	0.00035	18.31774
D	10	70.9	1190	1.19	0.65	0.00065	0.35	0.00035	19.73574
D#	11	75.1	1164	1.164	0.6	0.0006	0.35	0.00035	20.36604
E	12	79.6	1137	1.137	0.7	0.0007			9.985944
F	13	84.3	1110	1.11	0.7	0.0007			10.67439
F#	14	89.3	1085	1.085	0.7	0.0007			11.4447
G	15	94.7	1042	1.042	0.7	0.0007			11.87073
G#	16	100.3	1018	1.018	0.7	0.0007			12.70982
A	17	106.3	993	0.993	0.65	0.00065			11.71218
A#	18	112.6	967	0.967	0.65	0.00065			12.46242
B	19	119.3	942	0.942	0.65	0.00065			13.27564
c	20	126.4	915	0.915	0.6	0.0006			11.98077
c#	21	133.9	890	0.89	0.6	0.0006			12.72007
d	22	141.8	862	0.862	0.6	0.0006			13.38183
d#	23	150.3	835	0.835	0.6	0.0006			14.10715
e	24	159.2	805	0.805	0.6	0.0006			14.71046
f	25	168.7	777	0.777	0.6	0.0006			15.38936
f#	26	178.7	748	0.748	0.6	0.0006			16.00298
g	27	189.3	717	0.717	0.6	0.0006			16.50016
g#	28	200.6	686	0.686	0.6	0.0006			16.96128
a	29	212.5	655	0.655	0.6	0.0006			17.35198
a#	30	225.1	627	0.627	0.6	0.0006			17.84163
b	31	238.5	600	0.6	0.6	0.0006			18.3412
c'	32	252.7	570	0.57	0.6	0.0006			18.58269
c#'	33	267.7	541	0.541	0.6	0.0006			18.78624
d'	34	283.7	514	0.514	0.6	0.0006			19.04554
d#'	35	300.5	485	0.485	0.6	0.0006			19.02484
e'	36	318.4	461	0.461	0.6	0.0006			19.2973
f'	37	337.3	436	0.436	0.6	0.0006			19.37109
f#'	38	357.4	413	0.413	0.6	0.0006			19.51451
g'	39	378.6	390	0.39	0.6	0.0006			19.52715
g#'	40	401.1	371	0.371	0.6	0.0006			19.8336
a'	41	425	352	0.352	0.6	0.0006			20.04526
a#'	42	450.3	335	0.335	0.6	0.0006			20.38177

b	43	477	317	0.317	0.6	0.0006	20.47877
c''	44	505.4	302	0.302	0.56	0.00056	18.17634
c#	45	535.5	285	0.285	0.56	0.00056	18.17317
d	46	567.3	270	0.27	0.56	0.00056	18.30523
d#	47	601	256	0.256	0.56	0.00056	18.46932
e	48	636.8	242	0.242	0.56	0.00056	18.52929
f	49	674.6	228	0.228	0.52	0.00052	15.91531
f#	50	714.8	214	0.214	0.52	0.00052	15.74162
g	51	757.3	202	0.202	0.52	0.00052	15.74314
g#	52	802.3	190	0.19	0.52	0.00052	15.63268
a	53	850	178	0.178	0.52	0.00052	15.40035
a#	54	900.5	167	0.167	0.52	0.00052	15.21434
b	55	954.1	157	0.157	0.52	0.00052	15.09523
c'''	56	1011	146	0.146	0.52	0.00052	14.65753
c#	57	1071	137	0.137	0.52	0.00052	14.48347
d	58	1135	122	0.122	0.52	0.00052	12.89924
d#	59	1202	116	0.116	0.52	0.00052	13.07909
e	60	1274	112	0.112	0.52	0.00052	13.69707
f	61	1349	106	0.106	0.52	0.00052	13.75588
f#	62	1430	100	0.1	0.52	0.00052	13.75703
g	63	1515	96	0.096	0.43	0.00043	9.730847
g#	64	1605	91	0.091	0.43	0.00043	9.813316
a	65	1700	85	0.085	0.43	0.00043	9.60547
a#	66	1801	80	0.08	0.43	0.00043	9.549713
b	67	1908	75	0.075	0.43	0.00043	9.420244
c''''	68	2022	70	0.07	0.43	0.00043	9.215975

Tension calculator for Geib & Son 5515

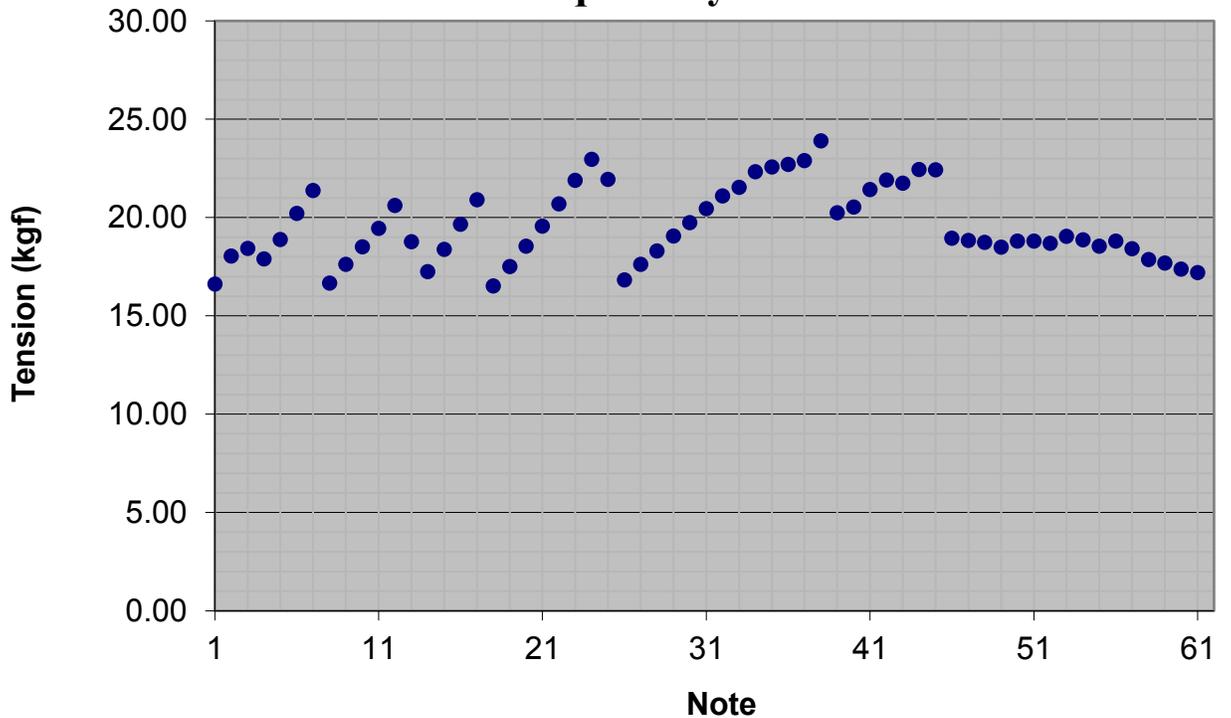


Stringing schedule L&B by Geib SN 361, 1785

Note		Fre- quency A 425	Length (mm)	L (M)	Diameter (mm)	String Dia (M)	Over- spun	Over spun (M)	Tension
FF	42.2	1405	1.405	0.7	0.0007	0.41	0.00041	16.62	
FF#	44.7	1382	1.382	0.7	0.0007	0.41	0.00041	18.04	
GG	47.3	1320	1.32	0.7	0.0007	0.41	0.00041	18.43	
GG#	50.1	1290	1.29	0.65	0.00065	0.41	0.00041	17.90	
AA	53.1	1250	1.25	0.65	0.00065	0.41	0.00041	18.89	
AA#	56.3	1220	1.22	0.65	0.00065	0.41	0.00041	20.22	
BB	59.6	1185	1.185	0.65	0.00065	0.41	0.00041	21.38	
C	63.2	1155	1.155	0.6	0.0006	0.33	0.00033	16.67	
C#	66.9	1122	1.122	0.6	0.0006	0.33	0.00033	17.63	
D	70.9	1085	1.085	0.6	0.0006	0.33	0.00033	18.52	
D#	75.1	1050	1.05	0.6	0.0006	0.33	0.00033	19.46	
E	79.6	1020	1.02	0.6	0.0006	0.33	0.00033	20.63	
F	84.3	993	0.993	0.7	0.0007			18.77	
F#	89.3	968	0.968	0.65	0.00065			17.26	
G	94.7	942	0.942	0.65	0.00065			18.38	
G#	100.3	920	0.92	0.65	0.00065			19.67	
A	106.3	895	0.895	0.65	0.00065			20.91	
A#	112.6	872	0.872	0.56	0.00056			16.53	
B	119.3	847	0.847	0.56	0.00056			17.51	
c	126.4	823	0.823	0.56	0.00056			18.55	
c#	133.9	798	0.798	0.56	0.00056			19.58	
d	141.8	775	0.775	0.56	0.00056			20.71	
d#	150.3	752	0.752	0.56	0.00056			21.90	
e	159.2	727	0.727	0.56	0.00056			22.97	
f	168.7	703	0.703	0.56	0.00056			21.95	
f#	178.7	678	0.678	0.48	0.00048			16.83	
g	189.3	655	0.655	0.48	0.00048			17.63	
g#	200.6	630	0.63	0.48	0.00048			18.31	
a	212.5	607	0.607	0.48	0.00048			19.07	
a#	225.1	583	0.583	0.48	0.00048			19.74	
b	238.5	560	0.56	0.48	0.00048			20.45	
c'	252.7	537	0.537	0.48	0.00048			21.11	
c#'	267.7	512	0.512	0.48	0.00048			21.54	
d'	283.7	492	0.492	0.48	0.00048			22.34	
d#'	300.5	467	0.467	0.48	0.00048			22.58	
e'	318.4	442	0.442	0.48	0.00048			22.71	
f'	337.3	419	0.419	0.48	0.00048			22.90	
f#'	357.4	404	0.404	0.48	0.00048			23.90	
g'	378.6	383	0.383	0.44	0.00044			20.26	
g#'	401.1	364	0.364	0.44	0.00044			20.53	
a'	425	351	0.351	0.44	0.00044			21.44	

a#'	450.3	335	0.335	0.44	0.00044	21.92
b	477	315	0.315	0.44	0.00044	21.75
c''	505.4	302	0.302	0.44	0.00044	22.44
c#	535.5	285	0.285	0.44	0.00044	22.44
d	567.3	272	0.272	0.4	0.0004	18.96
d#	601	256	0.256	0.4	0.0004	18.85
e	636.8	241	0.241	0.4	0.0004	18.75
f	674.6	226	0.226	0.4	0.0004	18.51
f#	714.8	215	0.215	0.4	0.0004	18.80
g	757.3	203	0.203	0.4	0.0004	18.82
g#	802.3	191	0.191	0.4	0.0004	18.70
a	850	182	0.182	0.4	0.0004	19.05
a#	900.5	171	0.171	0.4	0.0004	18.88
b	954.1	160	0.16	0.4	0.0004	18.55
c'''	1011	152	0.152	0.4	0.0004	18.80
c#	1071	142	0.142	0.4	0.0004	18.41
d	1135	132	0.132	0.4	0.0004	17.87
d#	1202	124	0.124	0.4	0.0004	17.69
e	1274	116	0.116	0.4	0.0004	17.39
f	1349	109	0.109	0.4	0.0004	17.21

Tension calculator for Longman and Broderip 1785 square by Geib



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