

HISTORY OF THE PLAYER

McTAMMANY



There have been only 1000 copies printed
of this work and the plates destroyed.

This book is number

190

(Signed)

John M. McTammany

John McTammany was one of the originators of the player piano, and called himself ‘the inventor of the player.’ He published two books, ‘The history of the player’ in 1913 describing his life and inventions and ‘The technical history of the player’ in 1915 looking at player patents. These books are rare, and information from the first does not appear in the standard histories of the player piano. The second book repeated sections of the first, and was reprinted by the Vestal Press in the 1970s, so this information is better known. Most history books do not even refer to the existence of ‘The history of the player.’ A copy of the book has recently been located, and this article provides a rare opportunity to consider the information it presents.

McTammany was most unusual, if not unique, in publishing first hand recollections as a key player in the early mechanical music business. He was clearly a great inventor (and litigator), but distinctly unsuccessful in business. Alfred Dolge’s failed business led to him writing his well-known ‘Pianos and their makers,’ but Dolge lacked a mechanical music background and fell out with McTammany over the contents of the player section. This seems to have convinced McTammany of the need to tell his story in order to put the record straight. Although ‘The history of the player’ does not mention Dolge, the later ‘Technical history of the player’ points out his perceived mistakes in some detail.

McTammany wrote his memoirs of a life in the world of mechanical music while confined to hospital for three months in 1913, convinced he was dying. Later that year the memoirs were privately published by McTammany as the book ‘The history of the player’. The print run of 1000 copies was donated to the McTammany Testimonial Fund Committee by the Musical Courier Extra “In order to show the appreciation ... for the work that John McTammany has done, not only as the inventor of the player piano, but in advancing its interests, and especially in his efforts to clear the atmosphere as regards patents pertaining to the player piano.” Each copy was numbered

and signed by McTammany.

The copy at hand contains a 'received' stamp dated June 1st 1914, and the signature of Henry Kieselhorst, a piano dealer in St. Louis. The inference is that it was sent to the business rather than purchased privately. If this book was indeed sent to subscribers to the Testimonial Fund, it would perhaps explain why so few seem to have survived. The recipients were perhaps not greatly interested in its contents if they purchased it as an act of charity. This was a great time for the industry – the Duo-Art and Ampico had just been launched, the 88-note piano roll was just a few years old, and these 40 year old recollections of squabbles about table-top probably seemed insignificant.

History seems to have marked McTammany as being one of those egotistical types who claim everybody else's work for themselves, and the standard books on mechanical music are distinctly ambivalent about the man and his work. However, his own writings come over rather differently.

He makes the effort to describe what he invented, how it compared to others' work, and why his ideas were, in his view, the key invention which gave him the right to claim to be the inventor of the 'player' – incidentally, his own words never refer to inventing the 'player piano', in this book at least, although the introduction by William Geppert (editor of the Musical Courier Extra) does. The given facts seem to be reasonably accurate in themselves, as far as other sources confirm them. Naturally, McTammany offers a particular interpretation of the facts to support his claims, but seems to work from a firm factual base, arguing about the relative value of different contributions. His view balances other interpretations and is therefore valuable in itself. In some areas he clarifies points where interpretation from external observation has been rather difficult.

The chronology of the book is not always clear, mainly due to repetition and reinforcement of key points, but also with some omissions. The following precis aims to retain the meaning and intent of McTammany's words, but with a clearer and more linear approach. Passages in quote marks are taken directly from the book, and are presented in context. Much of the linking material paraphrases McTammany's words. Information not obtained from the book is contained in square brackets.

McTammany's 'History of the player'

The birth of an idea

[Although he doesn't say so, McTammany was born in Glasgow in 1845, and emigrated to America in 1857 or 1862 (according to which source to believe), settling with his father who had emigrated in 1847. The book therefore starts when he is 18 years old.]

Before the Civil War McTammany worked for a firm making agricultural implements in Uniontown, Ohio, and he became very interested with the mechanisms of the early reapers they were making – and convinced that he could improve them greatly. Nearby towns Canton and Akron were "hotbeds of reaperdom" and he knew several of the inventors of the machines, but they resented his suggestions, which redoubled his efforts in experimentation. He was just about to embark in the reaper business with his own machine when the war broke out, in 1863.

He first joined the local militia, the Uniontown Home Guards, taking the place of his father who was out of the state. When this company was disbanded he joined the 115th Ohio Volunteer Infantry, which was assigned the guarding of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. It was here that he was seriously injured, and ended up in hospital in Nashville. When discharged in 1865, he realised he was no longer strong enough to participate in the reaper business, and besides that his inventions had been superseded. He decided to turn from his primary career as mechanic and inventor to his secondary love, music. He served a term at the Western Academy of Music, and started teaching and playing the organ in Akron, Ohio. However, his love of machinery soon reasserted itself.

While in hospital in Nashville, when allowed out he frequented a pawn shop which possessed a number of broken musical instruments. He soon undertook to mend them, and when a lady brought in a music box he agreed to repair it. While doing so, he realised it could be made to play just as well by depressions in the barrel as by the pins it was fitted with, if the mechanism was altered somewhat. This idea progressed to having a perforated jacket round the cylinder, and so on to using a perforated sheet of paper to operate the mechanism. On discharge from hospital he continued experimentation, and by 1866 had sufficient ideas to commit them to paper. He realised at this time that he would need perforated sheets of paper for his new device, and did not know where to obtain them – so he would have to make them himself, for which he undertook another term at the Western Normal Academy to learn something about composition and harmony.

“People knew I was experimenting, of course, and that my experiments related in some way to the piano and organ, but that I was attempting to invent an instrument that any one could play was something known only by my family, my workmen and myself. It was, furthermore, something that I did not mean others would find out. But sooner or later my plans were bound to be divulged, and when that time came I knew I would have trouble, and to spare, for if it had been announced that I was attempting to invent perpetual motion, instead of the player, it could not have aroused more ridicule and contempt, upon the part of the musical fraternity, than did the discovery that I was ‘engaged in the development of a piano upon which a country clodhopper could play a Beethoven Sonata,’ as they were wont to express it.”

The experimental years

An employee of McTammany’s, one Alpheus Lowmiller, “seeing the possibilities lying in an instrument governed by a perforated sheet, got a swelled head” and in early 1871 published his ideas about such instruments in the Steubenville Gazette, claiming to be the inventor of the device. Warned of this, McTammany replied via the pages of the Carrollton County Chronicle that the invention was his and that Lowmiller was a fraud – this being the first reference in public to McTammany’s invention of an instrument working from a perforated sheet. Lowmiller, “not faring well in his newspaper efforts, ventured into the courts, and that was mistake No. 2. It resulted in his undoing, for when that man left the witness stand, it was as a convicted felon, to go before another court, where he signed an affidavit to the effect that I was the original inventor of the player mechanism, and that in testifying against me, he had borne false witness and that he had been induced to do so by a prominent organ manufacturer of New York.” This was to be very useful to McTammany: “That affidavit in support of my claims, and a good many more documents of a similar character, are on file in the United States Patent Office, in Washington, and are accessible to anyone desiring to verify my statements. And if I could get some of these latter day aspirants for player fame before the courts they would be apt to pass out, shorn of their glory, just as he other fellow did.”

During these years McTammany moved round in Ohio – Carrollton, Germano, Akron, doing most development in the latter at the jewellery store of E. Abbey and, between 1872 and 1874, at Straub’s organ factory. He taught music and played the organ to earn a living. When his health broke down, he had to go to his wife’s family, who ranched in Emporia and Wichita, Kansas. “I kept on with my experiments and finally concluded that if I had sufficient money I could now complete a player that would overcome most, if not all the objections, of the pin-cylinder organ.” He approached I. D. Fox in Emporia, who was a Mason and Hamlin agent. Mason and Hamlin requested a working model, and, it being next to impossible to construct such a thing in “wild and woolly” Kansas at the time, McTammany went to St. Louis. Arriving there late in 1875 “with about \$500 in my pocket,” he put up at the Western Hotel on 4th Street, a pre-war venue for a certain Ulysses. S. Grant when he drove in from his farm in Illinois. “I entered the establishment of Boyer and Swain, general jobbers and machinists on Fourth Street, and under that roof three players were built, the last of which is described as follows by St. Louis Sunday Journal of July 9th 1876:”

“In this age of wonders, people have come to look composedly upon anything supposed impossible. But now comes a stunner, an eye-opener in music, and is nothing more or less than an organ, a common reed organ, on

which one who has never played an organ, nor ever learned the difference between a gamut and a cleft, who even is not sharp enough to know a flat or is too flat to know a sharp, but can work pedals, can play any tune. This organ is the product, not only of extraordinary genius, but of 10 long years of study and experiment on the part of the inventor, John McTammany of New York. Not only can any tune be played by simply blowing the bellows, but by the moving of a slide a piece may be transposed to sharps or flats at pleasure, while any kind of time or key may be arranged for the organ. Although attached to the organ it does not use any of the reeds or keys, consequently an arrangement can be played to the music of the automatic organ. This organ is so constructed as to attach to the common organ in most cases without changing the style of the case. The inventor, Mr. McTammany, is a young man, by occupation a music teacher, from Akron, Ohio. He came to this city some months since, to secure the aid of organ manufacturers in perfecting the organ, and through Messrs. Story & Camp, who are the agents of the Estey organ, the manufacturers of that organ furnished Mr. McTammany with means to perfect the model, and so satisfactory are its workings that the organ has ordered an organ at once for the Centennial. The Automatic is at the rooms of Messrs. Storey & Camp, 914 Olive Street. We have seen the organ and heard it play and can see no reason why the success of this wonderful invention is not certain. The advantages accruing are patent at a glance, putting music into every home without the tedium and expense of learning to play, and Messrs. Estey and Co. Have shown keen foresight in securing it for their celebrated organs.”

The Estey order mentioned in the article was for the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, to be held later that year. Precise details of this time are not given, but by inference the original Mason and Hamlin contact described in the previous paragraph was never followed up. Likewise, the Estey order for Philadelphia never materialised either, as is described later. Before following the personal odyssey, though, some description of the actual invention is needed.

The first player?

This instrument was an internal player, connected to the organ mechanism, playing from rolls using a mechanical reading device. As McTammany says, “Thus it will be seen that, while the instrument was a pretty crude looking affair, compared with the well designed and highly-finished modern player, yet crude and homely, as I admit it was, nevertheless it contained all the essential elements and performed all the important functions of the modern player, and clearly anticipated and foreshadowed the perfected product of the present day.”

He carefully uses the term “player” for his invention throughout this book, not “player piano”. His claim on the latter is implicit but never taken further than the following: “The following definition has been approved by many of the leading player manufacturers of the country, including Wilcox & White, the Simplex Company, Thomas Danquard, and a score of others, of equal prominence:

“What is implied by the terms, inner, or inside player, or player piano, is a musical instrument consisting of a casing, two actions and a series of sounding devices within the casing, one of said actions to be operated manually, the other designed to be operated mechanically by means of a perforated sheet on rolls; a wind, spring or other motor for feeding the sheet and winding the rolls, a bellows and mechanism put in motion by it for actuating the sounding devices of the automatic action; foot pedals or power for driving the motor, and means for controlling the tempo and varying the expression.

“It has been charged that the instrument, constructed and exhibited by me in St. Louis, in the Spring of 1876, was an organ – not a piano – which is true. But I could just as readily, and easily, have applied the player mechanism to the piano, and as a matter of fact I did so apply it, later.” The upright piano in America was not well established, and organ sales far exceeded pianos at the time. The organ industry was also not as prejudiced as the piano one, he claims. In any case, “Thus it will be seen, that the advent of the player dates from the spring of 1876 and that prior to this time nothing of the kind was known, either to the Patent Office of the United States to those

of Europe.”

“If the authorities agree upon any one thing, more than another, it is that the year 1876 was the year that witnessed the beginning of the player industry, and the question arises, ‘what came to pass at such a time to warrant such a statement?’ In reply, I direct the reader’s attention to Appleton’s encyclopaedia of 1885, which, in discussing the history of the player, observed as follows: ‘Until the year 1876 no great degree of success had been attained by instruments employing perforated sheets. But it would appear that the opportunity afforded skilled mechanics and inventors to gather at the Centennial Exposition [in Philadelphia] and obtain a knowledge of and a comparison with one another’s works and ideas, was to become the starting point of a new era of progress.’” [However, later passages suggest that McTammany did not exhibit at Philadelphia.]

The French Method

Naturally, other claims were made as to who was the inventor of the player. It is interesting to see what McTammany has to say of these, and why, while being well aware of them, he dismissed them as being the inventors of the player. “Notwithstanding the foregoing facts, certain candidates for player fame, unable to substantiate their own claims, have undertaken to rob me of mine by attempting to bestow the honor of the player’s invention upon the Frenchmen... Forneaux [and] Thibouville Lamy... [and] to Justinian Morse, an Englishman. ... Now, while several attempts had been made by Englishmen, Scotchmen, Frenchmen and Americans to construct a musical instrument, operatable by a perforated device of one kind or another, between the years 1865 and 1875, or even earlier, yet the only thing that ever was invented, manufactured and sold, was the so-called pianista, which was patented by Forneaux, a Frenchman, in 1863, and subsequently improved and put on the market several years later by the firm of Thibouville Lamy. But that was simply a keyboard attachment which actuated a portion of the piano scale, somewhat similar to the cabinet piano players manufactured and in vogue in this country several years ago but now practically obsolete.”

Of the Pianista, as exhibited at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, the conclusion is that “while a few of them were made and sold, yet in the very nature of things, it could not have been a success as it possessed all the disadvantages of a barrel organ with none of its merits; that is, it operated by turning a hand crank, instead of using foot pedals.”

[However, McTammany returns several times to the Pianista and consistently attacks it. He quite obviously considered it the only real competitor for his ideas, and acknowledges that it came first. By basing claims for his player as being the use of foot pedals, a paper roll, and an interior mechanism, he marginalised the Pianista which was a hand-cranked pushup device which used a pinned barrel. History agrees in as much as the successful player piano clearly contains no elements of the pianista but all those of McTammany.]

An intriguing diagnosis of the early player industry is then given: “Subsequently the Americans got carried away with the idea of a keyboard attachment, when the French invention was dragged forth from its previous obscurity, its mechanism and some of its operative parts copied and introduced into the American cabinet player, which never would have had a footing in America but for the prejudice of the piano manufacturers who regarded their pianos as too sacred to be debauched by the introduction of the player mechanism within the precincts of their precious pianos. This lasted by a few years, when it was discarded and they returned to the interior method – the McTammany idea – the French method being totally discarded.” [The book was written just as the pushup piano player device finally vanished from the market.]

From St. Louis to Boston

Following his demonstration instrument in St. Louis, McTammany tried to interest piano and organ manufacturers in introducing player mechanisms in their instruments. Visiting New York, the names of Needham (organs),

Steinway and Weber (pianos) and Paillard (music boxes) are mentioned. None were interested. Neither were the Boston manufacturers. Finally, Colonel Fuller, general manager, superintendent and mechanical expert of J. Estey and Co. visited St. Louis and examined the prototype. This had used an organ unadapted for the player mechanism, so was obviously fairly rough. Fuller directed that McTammany should have his choice of organ from the warehouse, and authorised Story and Camp to advance him some money to construct an instrument for the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, as long as arrangements between McTammany and Estey could be agreed. However, Estey's did not take the matter up and it was dropped. [Which therefore suggests that McTammany did not produce an instrument for Philadelphia.]

McTammany travelled east to search for capital, ending up in a garret in Tremont Street in Boston above Russell Brothers' music store, "and it was there in that garret in the fall of 1876 that the player industry was born. I doubt if any business was ever started on a less pretentious scale, without a dollar in my pocket, without credit, without a friend or even an acquaintance." Lack of capital prevented him constructing a full-scale instrument such as had been exhibited in St. Louis, so he reduced it from the 48 note 'Automatic Organ' to the 16 note 'organette'. This also had to dispense with the internal mechanism, and used the paper roll as a travelling valve.

The 1876 press release for the McTammany Automatic Organ (issued sometime after October) states much of what has been covered above, including the standard comments about the Pianista and some other competing inventions. The instrument is described thus: "The 'Automatic' is an organ of itself without a keyboard, differing from the Hand Organ, Music Box and Orchestreen in that it has no crank, barrel or spiked cylinder, neither is it limited to a certain number of tunes, nor does it possess their mechanical effect, but on the contrary is capable of great expression. It is cased similar to the ordinary parlor organ, having pedals, by the use of which the instrument is operated."

The press release continues: "In fact this instrument is not only organ but performer also, and will play an unlimited number of compositions in any time or key within the register of the instrument and can have one or more sets of reeds, or can be attached to the common organ. The speed is regulated by the motion of the foot pedals, while the tone is increased or diminished by the use of a knee-swell. As there can be no abstract effects produced upon any organ it is apparent that the expression of the instrument is entirely under the control of the performer or it could be arranged automatically, but 'as great minds differ,' no two interpret a piece alike, it was thought best to put the expression at the will of the performer."

The instruments listed as on offer at this time were:

Automatic Organette, four octave, single reed: \$100

Automatic Organette, four octave, two sets of reeds: \$125

Automatic Organ, with keyboard, five octave, single reed: \$175

Automatic Organ, with keyboard and transposing attachment: \$200

Automatic Organ, with two sets of reeds, Manual, dynamic and transposing attachments, in handsome cases: \$225

A second press release describes the mechanism in more detail: "Music from this organ is produced by passing a ribbon of perforated cardboard over a set of pintles, which represent the nearest approach to a keyboard found in the instrument. Whenever a pindle passes through a slot in the ribbon, wind is admitted to a corresponding reed which at once sounds, and the tone is prolonged while the pindle is in the slot. By this means harmony may be produced indefinitely, or as full as a compass of the reeds may admit, it being obvious that if desired, twenty reeds may be made to sound at one and the same time, all contributing an element to the chord. This ribbon is perforated by a machine especially adapted to the purpose, and the cost of the music will be but trifling, much lower than the ordinary sheet music of the depots. Any tune or selection desired can be at once made to order, and thus the repertoire of anyone owning a McTammany Organ is limited only by his means or inclinations."

This second release, in contrast to the first, describes the roll speed as independent of the operation of the foot pedals, and appears to describe a wind motor. This release also describes the keyboard as an extra, costing \$50.

[However, some of the descriptions are confused by McTammany's words of 1913 accompanying these 1870s notices. He describes the organette as having 16 notes, albeit not of a chromatic scale, so the press release's "four octaves" is questionable. Also, he describes how he had to "dispense with the costly and complicated intervening mechanism and use the paper as a valve direct: that is, air went direct through the paper and into the reed" – which directly counters the description in the second notice.]

The fight for patents

In 1876, when he filed his 'caveat' in relation to the player, McTammany claims not to have been aware of any other devices operated by a perforated device. By 1879, when the value of the player became obvious and litigation started, he filed a patent covering the entire art. At this point there were just 35 patents. The application revealed the existence of the experiments of Morse, Seytre, Pain, Pape and Forneaux. "But not one of these ever showed a player or in the remotest way contemplated or suggested or even conceived the modern American player. And if anyone ever thought or imagined such a thing as an interior or inside player, nothing has yet been produced to establish the fact and the interior player mechanism stands forth today as it has for over forty years as the invention of the writer, John McTammany. And for that period I have openly, publicly, through the press, in the patent office and the courts by letter challenged anyone to meet me on the issue. But no one has ever accepted my challenge."

The caveat of 1876 gave him two years to apply for a patent. However, due to financial difficulties, he found himself unable to afford the cost of filing the patent. "In other words, I had been found guilty of being too poor to protect myself." The patents covering ten years work were declared public property. "If that had been all I might have smothered my disappointment and congratulated myself that things were no worse. But what I did find was that others having seen my drawings and inventions in my tour of the piano and organ factories of the country had taken out patents covering my inventions and were threatening to close me up and prevent me from duplicating the instrument invented and publicly exhibited by me years before in St. Louis." He therefore filed a broad patent covering all his ideas, and interferences were duly found between it and the pirated ideas. The contesting of the ideas resulting in him being declared the original and prior inventor, and that others had obtained their patents "surreptitiously".

A number of decisions by the Commissioner of Patents in favour of McTammany allowed him to continue to manufacture his own inventions. His opponents therefore next moved to prevent him making the music to play on them, claiming that it infringed on copyrighted music. He was willing to pay a royalty, but the publishers refused such offers (this predating any acts covering mechanical copyright). They lost the case, which went to the supreme court of the United States.

McTammany and Munroe

Business went well, and McTammany was occupying three buildings in Cambridgeport, Mass., manufacturing "organettes, automatic organs, melodeons, and music." Material such as reeds and reed boards came from Worcester, Mass., a major centre for musical instrument supplies, and eventually the business moved there.

At this time, the two leading concerns in the perforated music business were McTammany and the Mechanical Organette Company, later to become the Aeolian Company of Pianola fame. Organettes were manufactured by the Munroe Organ Reed Company of Worcester. When McTammany's patents were finally issued, he brought suite against Munroe. Munroe admitted infringing his patents, and offered to recognise his claims and pay a

royalty on them.

Munroe was the largest manufacturer of perforated musical instruments in the country, making instruments for many resellers such as the Mechanical Organette Company and Merritt Gally. They had much capital and plant, and McTammany decided to accept their royalty offer, paying him per instrument and per foot of music sold. Subsequently he agreed to stop making instruments himself and devoted himself to development of the player. The early 1880s found him inventing lines such as a direct mechanical banjo, an electric banjo with reed attachment, and applying the pneumatic player to the Hallet & Cumston piano. Munroe being aware of his work, it offered him a job in charge of their experimental department. "This brought William D. Parker, Frank Stone, W.F. Ewell and the writer – four of the ablest men in the player industry at that time – under the same roof."

Munroe now felt able to shake off the dominance of the Mechanical Organette Company, whose orders ran to thousands of instruments a month. Around this time a patent interference arose between Robert Pain of the Organette Company, Frank Stone of Munroe, and Merritt Gally of New York. James Morgan, president of the Mechanical Organette Company, decided to ally with Munroe against Gally. However, McTammany thought that Munroe and Mechanical Organette companies together would beat Gally, and then the Mechanical Organette Company would be strong enough to beat Munroe (and hence McTammany himself) in turn. He decided to stop this.

[The fight itself was obviously very important to him, because he spends 20 pages of his book describing it in detail. It is a fascinating picture of the rampantly egocentric individuals who went on to create the mature mechanical music industry. The following sections give only a bare summary.]

McTammany vs. Gally

The players in this were well known to each other, and little love was lost: "I had no admiration for Gally any more than I had for Morgan; nor did the Munroe Company have any for Gally. The company had had business relations with him but they were unsatisfactory and had anyone else but Morgan been at the head of the Organette Company we would gladly have cooperated with him to eliminate Gally. I had fought Morgan for years; the Munroe Company was also antagonistic to him."

They knew they could not approach Gally directly because he was "vain, egotistical and conceited." They had to make Gally approach Munroe for help. The case was in court, and Gally, after being questioned by Morgan's counsel for several hours, was breaking down. McTammany figured the best approach was through one of Merritt Gally's brothers, who he considered more reasonable. McTammany drew up a draft agreement. He pulled back in his cross-examination of Gally, to the distress of his Munroe bosses Frank Stone and Charles Fisher, who had not been told of this plan. This was all with the intention of being seen as favourable to Gally, who was approached that night by his brother asking why he did not seek agreement with Munroe. After much discussion Gally and McTammany met, and Gally denounced Morgan. Gally then produced his idea of an agreement, which McTammany refused to sign. "Had I signed that agreement the Munroe Company might as well have put on their hats and passed out from under their own roof, for, as a matter of fact, it covered everything. I fully made up my mind, however, that I had Gally at my mercy and all that remained for me to do was to stand by my guns, and I stood."

McTammany knew that the agreement Gally undertook to produce would "be like the handle on a jug – all on one side and in his interest." He decided to force the McTammany agreement, unchanged, on Gally instead. So he let Gally have another day's roasting on the stand, and that night didn't even read Gally's draft when it was presented. Gally followed him, and insisted on reading the McTammany proposals, which he then declared he would never sign.

“The agreement I had prepared was liberal and fair, and he was satisfied with the royalty he was to receive; in fact, I accorded him the same terms that I was myself receiving. But my name as inventor appeared on all instruments manufactured by the Munroe Organ Reed Company. The new agreement put both our names on the goods. He wanted my name to be erased and only his to appear. Furthermore, he wanted all subsequent agreements entered into by the company to be submitted to him for approval before he would sign. He wanted all contemplated changes or improvements in the instruments to be submitted to him for his approval, and liberty to enter the works of the company at any time and access to the books, which were to be opened for his inspection and a hundred and one other arbitrary and onerous provisions and conditions. Not one of these concessions appeared in the agreement drawn by me and I positively and emphatically declined to incorporate them within it.”

“Gally made a very poor witness and conducted himself in such a manner during the trial that his own counsel had repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the case. Gally regarded people with suspicion; seemed to think that every question put to him was a trap, so he would frame his replies in such a manner that he could back out of any testimony given, which led to Capt. Bartlett, his own counsel, to observe to Mr. Brown [Morgan’s counsel] and myself, one day after adjournment, and by way of illustrating Gally’s methods: ‘Oh God, if there be a God, save my soul, if I have a soul, from hell, if there is a hell.’ Just so ambiguous was Gally in giving his testimony.”

Gally insisted that the president of Munroe, Charles Fisher, be called to New York. However, he knew Fisher would only come if McTammany requested, in order to witness signature of the agreement. Gally therefore agreed to sign if Fisher came, and he was duly summoned.

Frank Stone was Munroe’s factory superintendent, and was in charge of production of the Gally line of instruments. He dealt with Gally when he visited the factory, on which occasions Gally found fault with everything. Consequently Stone greatly disliked Gally, and was looking forward to meeting him in court. McTammany had produced a line of questions to put to Gally, but knew with the game he was playing he couldn’t afford to antagonise Gally by putting them. He instead handed them to Morgan’s counsel. This annoyed Stone, who complained to Charles Fisher about McTammany’s handling of the case.

The reason Fisher came to New York was to reconcile McTammany and Stone, not to meet Gally. He was pleased to find out the real state of affairs. “I showed him the agreement I had drawn up for Gally to sign. Then I showed him the letter signed by Gally conditionally agreeing to sign the instrument, and he saw that all he had to do was to decline to modify the instrument and Gally would be compelled to sign it, as it was, or violate his word as indicated in his letter. In other words, Fisher saw we had Gally and the best thing for him to do was to notify him that under no circumstance would he interfere.” Consequently, when Gally presented another agreement of his own, Fisher told him the policy of the Munroe Company was never again to sign any agreement drawn up by Merritt Gally. With that, Fisher took the train back to Worcester. Gally was forced to sign, but even after coming to do so it took him two hours before he actually signed.

Despite all this, McTammany respected Gally. Gally was better off with Munroe than against them, as had been the case with McTammany some years before. Despite this, “Gally never was and never could be happy, except when he was unhappy. Yet he was a bright man, a man of genius. His mechanical judgement was almost infallible and he had the eye of the artist. Whatever he fashioned became a thing of beauty and a joy forever. Furthermore, in his money matters and in his business dealings he was strictly honorable and even liberal, and from the time he joined the Munroe Company he was always loyal. Vanity was the rock upon which he split with the Munroe Company. The result was that he did not fare well. Although living today, his circumstances are not very satisfactory.”

McTammany vs. Morgan

Now that Gally was taken into the Munroe camp, it was time to deal with James H. Morgan and the Mechanical

OrguINETTE Company. McTammany informed Mr. Brown, Morgan's counsel, about what had happened. "Mr. Brown would have to notify Morgan that John McTammany had beaten him and I rather think he dreaded it." Munroe had no designs on the OrguINETTE Company other than a desire to continue as they had been, "namely, the exclusive manufacture of the Mechanical OrguINETTE Company's product, but on less harsh and onerous terms."

However, Brown knew of Morgan's antipathy to McTammany. "I was always willing to recognize Morgan as an equal, but not as a superior. I was willing to work with him, but that did not suit Morgan. Now the situation, as it must have appeared to Morgan, at the time was this: The Munroe Company controlled enough patents to give it the right to enter the field and sell direct to the trade in competition with the Mechanical OrguINETTE Company which had before enjoyed a practical monopoly; that they had the finest plant and equipment in the world, and last but not least they had associated with them McTammany, Gally, Parker, Stone and Ewell, the five men who at that time stood at the very pinnacle of the industry. Furthermore, the Munroe Company in entering into a deal with me, had compelled the Mechanical OrguINETTE Company to indirectly pay me a royalty on every instrument they sold, and caused them to recognise me as the pioneer inventor of the player mechanism; that every instrument must bear the name of McTammany, and the name to Morgan was like a red rag to a bull. In fact, it was a case of too much McTammany so far as Morgan was concerned."

"But it did not fall to the lot of Mr. Brown to break the disagreeable news of the Munroe-Gally deal to Morgan. In some way he heard of it before Brown did, and immediately took a Broadway car for Brown's office. I had got through with my interview with Mr. Brown and gone down the stairs and was standing on the opposite side of the road waiting for a car to take me up town, when I saw Morgan jump off a downtown car opposite Brown's door, but in stepping off he did so in front of a team and got knocked down and the team went clear over him. But he picked himself up in the rear of the wagon and was not seriously hurt. I had run across the street, when I had seen what happened, to render him assistance if necessary, being confident he must have suffered injury, but when our eyes met, I never saw a madder man. James H. Morgan had brains, and he had ability, and in many ways was a very able man, although he was entirely lacking in tact and discretion. Furthermore, he never placed implicit confidence in anyone, not even his best friend. First it was McTammany he antagonised, then Gally, then Needham, then Hammond, then the Munroe Company, and I could name many others. And there is not a thing he ever achieved by fighting that could not have been brought about by peaceful and honourable methods, and have realised his objectives much quicker and at one tenth the cost to his company."

Munroe was now in a strong position. For years, they had invested in plant to build the OrguINETTE range, running to several thousand instruments per month, but had no assurance that the work would not be taken away from them at a whim of Morgan's. Now, they were independent of Morgan. They refused to accept any form of paper he issued in payment for goods. Most businessmen would have tried to calm things down, but not Morgan. Therefore Munroe set to to market instruments on their own behalf. This, for the first time, forced Morgan to Worcester – previously he had always sent William B. Tremaine instead. His visit was to no avail, except to convince Munroe to go ahead.

On the road again

McTammany was now coerced to act as Munroe's salesman. "Now that the company had broken with the Mechanical OrguINETTE Company it needed a practical man to dispose of its products. And there was no one in sight but myself. I did not want the job. I was more than satisfied with the position I held at the head of the experimental department." William D. Parker took charge of the experimental department under McTammany's direction, and McTammany became general sales agent. He was to have a license of any patent taken out by Parker or acquired by Munroe.

Morgan had been told at his fruitless visit to Worcester that he could either compromise with Munroe, or buy them out. He refused to compromise, but did not control enough capital to buy them out. Over the course of

several months he tried to raise the funds. In the meantime, McTammany was selling the Munroe goods, and “fast outstripping the Mechanical Organette Company when something happened that brought the Munroe Company up with a short turn, staggered it and gave it a setback from which it never recovered.”

What happened was the development of a machine which used rubberised cloth for its bellows. Up to this point, instruments had used split sheepskin as the most suitable substance on the market. However, it was not particularly satisfactory, being porous. The rubber cloth instrument used the new material for its primary pneumatics, and being airtight and very flexible it made the instrument excel anything previously seen. McTammany was delivered a demonstration model while out on the road, in Boston. He was visiting Gately & Co, a large dealer, and decided that if they were to take this wonderful new instrument they would have to take at least 10,000 instruments, with a cash advance. They finally agreed to 8,500, with paper up front for the whole order. Inspired by this, McTammany extended his sales trip and sold a large quantity of this model, until the Munroe requested him to return home as they could not meet the demand.

“I had never taken the instrument apart to determine the reason for its superiority over our previous product, for I had been assured it did not differ essentially from our early instruments except for some slight regulation adjustment and relation of parts. And even if I had examined it I might not have discovered that it was bad. If I had, I would not have sold it. The firm frequently got up styles that I did not like; those I would not sell. On the other hand I would boost and push an instrument they did not like. This may have been prejudice pure and simple on both sides, but the trade knew me; knew I would not handle an instrument I did not have faith in. So when I went before the jobbers I always succeeded in getting generous orders.”

Orders were filled and notes paid. Then complaints started to arrive. The rubber cloth had failed, and the instruments stopped working. “This discovery was a crushing blow to me and a terrible setback to the Munroe Company, a stroke from which it was unable to recover.” The instruments were a total loss.

Morgan wins at last

Morgan was quick to find out about the disaster at Munroe. He had been trying to get control of the majority of the company’s stock, but not enough people would sell to him at a price he was willing to pay. Now the situation was different, no more dividends being likely on the Munroe stock. One of the people he had approached for funds was Horace Wilcox of Meriden, a millionaire, who recognised the value of the Munroe goods. He was willing to go in with Morgan if the stock could be obtained at a good price. He would then move the company to Meriden where the Wilcox and White company would have a licence on the Munroe patents. However, Morgan was not willing to accept this, because he wanted to move Munroe to his own base in New Jersey, all under his own control. Therefore, nothing had happened. Now, the situation was different, and Morgan realised that if he waited he could well miss his chance. He reached agreement with Wilcox, they bought Munroe, and moved it to Meriden. This was in the mid 1880s. At this time the Munroe Organ Reed Company was making 50,000 instruments a year.

In this manner McTammany, Gally, Parker and Stone found themselves thrown out. McTammany had never been granted the licenses to Parker’s patents as had been agreed, so went to court. “As usual the law and the lawyer’s delay came to the rescue of the opposition, and the case was prolonged for years and finally I was beaten on technicalities, and James H. Morgan beat John McTammany in 1888, after twelve years’ stress and struggle between us, during which I had invariably defeated him. But there is one thing to be taken into consideration in this connection, and that is this: In all my fighting I had stood up singly and alone.”

McTammany had some vicarious revenge, however. “It was out of the frying pan into the fire with Mr. Morgan. He had got rid of John McTammany, but henceforth the Wilcox & White Company were the thorn in the flesh of Morgan. The latter company had effected an arrangement with William D. Parker, the man to whom I had taught

the mysteries of the pneumatic system, and he proved to be an apt pupil. The pneumatic system was full developed in its own application both to pianos and organs before he left Worcester for Meriden in 1888, to take charge of the experimental department of the Wilcox & White Organ Company, and the future of automatic musical instruments operatable by perforated sheets was no longer in dispute. Upon Parker's arrival in Meriden, the Wilcox & White Company proceeded to manufacture a line of players, reed instruments at first and players later."

[Thus was born the Angelus – which was to be a serious competitor to Aeolian's Pianola for decades. This tale explains precisely why Aeolian and Wilcox & White ended up with factories on opposite sides of the road to each other in Meriden, yet then became rivals who pursued independent courses – an issue which has puzzled many.]

The final years

Morgan eventually was ousted from the Aeolian Company and tried to form an opposition concern. He approached McTammany, and tried to convince him that the litigation and controversy had all been inspired by others. McTammany didn't believe him, but spent several days in discussion, during which time he learned much of the insider's view of the affairs of previous years, which are what he relates in this extraordinary book. It therefore perhaps represents the only surviving testimony of James Morgan, as well as John McTammany.

"Mr. Morgan came out of it all with money; I did not. Consequently I am writing this final chapter of player history in the military hospital at Noroton Heights, Conn., for so the fates have decreed. Yet I am neither discouraged not unhappy."

In hospital, McTammany reviewed his past. "I had been guilty of the crimes of omission and commission. I had done the things I should not have done. I regretted that I had spent so much time in fighting in the courts, when I should have been engaged in inventing that which I had been foreordained to do. But I had not courted this litigation; in every instance it was forced upon me. Furthermore, I was sorry that I was dying with inventions on my brain that would have blessed mankind could I have lived to develop them. But never once during the three months referred to did I for a single moment regret that I had not devoted my life to money making."

The book finishes with a press quote from the Daily Advocate, Stamford, Conn. "There was something pathetic in the eviction, this week, of John McTammany from the factory he conducted for years at the south end. Mr. McTammany was in the hospital when the constable removed the Organette plant to the street to be taken in charge by the city authorities, there being no one else to take care of it. Those who are familiar with the facts of Mr. McTammany's life must realise that he deserves a place among distinguished American Inventors. He was the inventor of the first voting machine, the pneumatic tabulating system and the father of mechanical musical devices, etc."

McTammany's final words are: "there is no class of people in this country today who know so little about the writer and his work as the music trade, and what little they do know is misleading, thanks to a portion of the music trade press. Do not wonder, therefore, if I avail myself of this, the first opportunity to offer a statement as a sort of defence against the misrepresentations that have appeared for many years."

McTammany – as seen by others

The above description is based entirely on the facts that McTammany himself presented, and the interpretations he put on them, with a few editorial asides. How should we interpret this evidence? Was McTammany being entirely truthful, disingenuous, blatantly lying, or what?

The inventor of the player piano?

The claim 'inventor of the player' is specifically based on the roll-operated internal player reed organ demonstrated in June 1876 in St. Louis. McTammany claimed that earlier push-up devices were an aberration, and that the concept of the internal player was the model for the future. He also claimed that his instrument being a reed organ not a piano was a matter of scale and detail, not of concept.

Was this idealised player ever viable from McTammany? Presumably the St. Louis instrument was real. McTammany claims he could not find money to build further large instruments, and it is reasonable to question whether the high-specification instruments listed in his 1870s press releases were ever made. The instruments he is known for are small keyboardless organettes, travelling-valve instruments which are fairly typical of the industry at that date, and do not represent his idealised player. His name as patentee appears on many other products. Observers considering his claims to be the inventor of the player based only on seeing products bearing his name could be justified in being sceptical. McTammany's attacks on earlier instruments for not being marketed and hence not significant must be judged in the light of his own production.

Another distraction was offered in 1959, when a new marker stone was put on his grave. This claimed that he was inventor of the 'player piano'. Writers unaware of the side of the story presented here would see a man who made table-top organettes but claimed to be inventor of the player piano. No wonder they don't take this claim seriously.

How should we consider McTammany's actual claim? Firstly, we would need to consider the machine produced in St. Louis in more detail, and look for precedents to it. Then comes a matter of opinion: was an internal player, roll operated, foot powered, with keyboard, the true 'player' for the future – or was the external player, barrel operated and hand-cranked, the true original and others merely developments of it?

However, it seems fair to conclude that McTammany was at the least a significant inventor, one of the key figures of the era – and if his persistence in developing ideas matched his legal and literary doggedness he must have been quite formidable.

McTammany in the history books

The received wisdom about McTammany is remarkably variable. As mentioned earlier, no books seem to have any quotes from 'The history of the player'. Earlier writers seem to have known about it, such as in William Mill Butler's entry in Scribner's 'The Dictionary of American Biography', 1933, which refers to it both by name and content. The more recent history books on the player industry quote only from the 1915 'Technical history of the player', which was reprinted in the 1970s by the Vestal Press. Intriguingly, an article from 1974 in the Akron Beacon Journal (see AMICA bulletin, July/August 1997) is firmly based on the first book, with additional details and photographs. Perhaps a copy exists in their records?

Butler's entry in Scribner's dictionary fills in the final details: "At last the inventor, although of large, robust build, broke down completely and died on Mar. 26th 1915 in the military hospital at Stamford, Conn. The city accorded him a public funeral, at which all the music was played on a grand player-piano. His remains were two years later removed from Stamford, to Canton, Ohio, where elaborate memorial day exercises in his honor were held, May 30th, 1917, in Westlawn Cemetery, and where the final interment took place near the McKinley monument." Butler's references include one to an article of his own, "Scotch prodigy's great invention" in *Presto* of August 23rd, 1917, so he presumably knew McTammany of old even if published in a 1933 book. The 1959 press cutting shown here takes this story a little further – note the reference to Butler.

Harvey Roehl's 'Player Piano Treasury', 1961 revised 1973, mentions McTammany, his two books, and his claims to be the inventor of the player piano (which we know from the above is probably not accurate). The conclusion is sensibly neutral, simply that he did a lot of work in the automatic musical instrument field.

Q. David Bower's 'Encyclopaedia of Automatic Musical Instruments' takes a particularly aggressive anti-McTammany line. He starts the section on organettes with a description of an instrument of 1861 vintage, Teste's Cartonium, preserved in Nantes. This is a keyboardless harmonium-type device operated by a perforated cardboard sheet. This is then explained as being included to "counter the claims of John McTammany" who "spent most of his later life trying in vain to prove his invention of these instruments. In a situation similar to that of the Selden Patents in the automobile industry, McTammany extracted licensing fees from several organette manufacturers. Discredited by the musical industry and ignored by Alfred Dolge in 'Pianos and their makers' [they had argued over the contents of its player section], McTammany published in 1915 'The technical history of the player', an attempt to vindicate McTammany's prior position. While present-day scholars and historians do not consider McTammany to be the father of the pneumatic mechanism, sufficient McTammany-oriented data appears in early music industry annals that mention of the situation must be included here."

The view of history Bowers presents knocks McTammany over claims he didn't quite make, on the basis of different instruments to the ones he made his claims on. As for using legal trickery to muscle in on others' inventions, Bowers doesn't seem to consider the alternative view that McTammany could actually be right! Consider how galling it must have been to have your invention stolen only to be accused of theft yourself when you got it back. Bowers appears to be presenting the musical trade's opinion of McTammany – in which case you can see why the books were published to put the McTammany view. Adopting such a partisan line and not considering McTammany's version of events seems unnecessary and rather unhelpful in a book aiming to be a definitive reference source. The suggestion that McTammany needs only be mentioned because of entries in earlier publications, but not in his own right, is surely not justified by any of the available evidence.

Arthur Ord-Hume's 'Pianola' of 1984 takes quite a different line (despite Ord-Hume's name being cited by Bowers as a supporter in his anti-McTammany piece). "The first person to make significant developments to the simple pneumatic system was John McTammany of Worcester, Massachusetts. He was a far-sighted inventor who patented a remarkable series of improvements to the paper-roll system from 1868 onwards. He applied his techniques to the manufacture of organettes but the venture was not a success. Unable to pay the renewal fees on his patents, he had to see each one taken up and successfully exploited by other companies. McTammany, whose name is almost forgotten today, did much to give us the player organ and organette as well as the player piano, yet he was to die penniless in 1915." This summary would seem to describe a different man to Bowers! It appears to be McTammany's own view as expressed in his 'Technical history of the player', which is quoted from time to time throughout 'Pianola', although not included in the Bibliography.

So, Ord-Hume quotes McTammany, Bowers quotes McTammany's enemies, and Roehl stays neutral. It seems that a rigorous assessment of McTammany is long overdue. Perhaps this article will provide an impetus for further consideration of this extraordinary era.

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