2018
LaGuardia and Wagner Archives Calendar

The Piano Makers Working at Steinway

LaGuardia Community College
Steinway & Sons
ABOUT THE ART CASE PIANOS

The first art case piano was made in 1855 by Steinway. Between 1855 and 1930, Steinway produced over 200 "fancy pianos" for special customers in the United States and Europe. Customers included the Goulds, Fricks, and Rothschilds.

Art case pianos were custom-designed to suit particular clients. The designs were not always made into pianos.

Cover: Louis XV art case piano, c. 1901
Below: Grecian art case piano, c. 1910
There’s something magical about a piano – the shiny ebony case, the “ivory” keys, and the gorgeous sounds that can come from it. For the people who build the Steinway piano, it is a labor of skill, artistry and commitment. This calendar tells their story.

The founders of Steinway & Sons, then called Steinweg, came to New York from Germany in 1850. They had been piano makers in the old country, but America was particularly good to this immigrant family; within seven years they had built an immense piano factory on Park Avenue at 53rd Street. With the technical genius of one son, Theodore, and the marketing skills of another, William, Steinway & Sons prospered.

The Steinway piano garnered so much prestige that Europeans became interested in buying this American product. In 1880, one Steinway brother returned to Germany to set up a factory in Hamburg to meet this demand, while the family built another factory in Queens to expand production for American customers.

The twentieth century brought more prosperity; Steinway never sold more pianos than in the 1920s. With its handsome profits, Steinway erected a magnificent new hall on West 57th Street, down the street from Carnegie Hall.

But the century also brought the Great Depression of the 1930s and war. Twice the United States went to war with Germany, and Steinway, as an American company with a factory in Germany, found itself on both sides of the conflict. During World War II, the Hamburg plant was expropriated by the Germans, who made it part of their war machine. The New York factory was enlisted as part of the American effort – making gliders and olive drab G.I. pianos.

Steinway & Sons survived all this and remained in the family of the founder until 1972. Steinway pianos are still being made in a modern plant at the century-old location in Queens where the family made its fortune and thousands of workers – many of them immigrants – earned their living. Today, when so many products are no longer “Made in the U.S.A.,” the Steinway piano endures as a symbol of American ingenuity and craftsmanship. This calendar salutes the men and women whose skills made that extraordinary accomplishment possible.
Steinway factory at 19th Avenue and 37th Street, Astoria, Queens, 1888.
Dear Steinway Friend,

Please enjoy this beautiful keepsake calendar celebrating the history and legacy of Steinway & Sons, one of the greatest American success stories.

Founded in 1853 in New York City, the company began as a tiny venture in a Manhattan loft, a labor of love undertaken by German immigrant Henry E. Steinway and his sons. Then, as now, the mission of the company was to “build the finest piano possible.” More than 164 years later, Steinway’s uncompromised quest for perfection has never wavered. Our pianos are still handcrafted at our New York factory using the time-honored techniques and processes that have been passed down through generations of skilled craftspeople.

In the fabric of American history, Steinway & Sons has been more than a maker of pianos; Steinway has been an integral thread in our cultural and social legacies. From the production of wooden gliders and “Victory Vertical” pianos during WWII to the sponsorship of Van Cliburn’s history-making Moscow performance, which helped to diffuse Cold War tensions, Steinway & Sons has been behind the scenes of unforgettable American touchstones.

Much of the information and many of the images featured in this calendar are available to us because of the long-standing relationship between Steinway & Sons and The LaGuardia and Wagner Archives at LaGuardia Community College/CUNY. The LaGuardia Archives, representing the largest repository of Steinway materials in the world, has been a vital steward of Steinway’s heritage for more than thirty years.

I am very proud to be a part of this incredible company. I hope you, like me, thrill with the celebration of music, fine craftsmanship, and noble American history contained in these calendar pages.

Sincerely,

Ron Losby, CEO
Steinway Musical Instruments

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Dear Friends of LaGuardia and Wagner Archives,

It’s with great pleasure that I welcome you to the 2018 LaGuardia and Wagner Archives calendar: The Piano Makers – Working at Steinway.

Steinway & Sons is the oldest functioning Queens-based manufacturer, having establishing its piano factory in Astoria in 1870 at a time when Queens was lightly populated. Steinway quickly constructed street railways and housing that helped develop northwest Queens. Its rich history extends even further, back to 1853, when the German-born immigrant Henry E. Steinway launched Steinway & Sons on Walker Street in Lower Manhattan only three years after arriving in this country.

The LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, under the leadership of Dr. Richard K. Lieberman, has housed the bountiful archives of Steinway & Sons for over thirty years. This remarkable collection of documents and photographs records the history of the piano business and its employees from 1853 to the present. Researchers from around the world have come to the Archives to learn about topics ranging from the technical aspects of building a Steinway to genealogical questions about family members who worked for the company a century ago.

Throughout the calendar you’ll find a variety of historic images: Steinway’s custom-designed art case pianos, men cleaning the piano’s iron plates and women pinning together the piano’s action parts, Steinway family members playing croquet on its mansion’s front lawn, and workers and their families enjoying their free time at festive gatherings.

When Steinway & Sons opened its doors more than 160 years ago, it provided a path for its mostly German-speaking immigrant labor to achieve a measure of stability in a new country. LaGuardia Community College is proud to educate first-generation students, many of whom come from low-income families earning less than $25,000 per year. Many of these students are also immigrants or second-generation residents striving for a foothold in a new country by preparing for a career in science, technology, engineering or math much as the Steinway family did in 1853.

Sincerely,

Gail Mellow
President, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

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Ron Losby, CEO, Steinway Musical Instruments

Gail O. Mellow, President,
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY
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This calendar has incorporated much of the 1991 LaGuardia and Wagner Archives calendar, The Piano Makers: Working at Steinway and would like to acknowledge those who prepared it.

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PHOTO CREDITS
All photos are part of the Steinway & Sons Collection, housed at the LaGuardia and Wagner Archives, LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

Above: Louis XIV art case piano, 1900
Below: Rustic art case piano, 1902
DEDICATION – HENRY Z. STEINWAY

Henry Z. Steinway was the great grandson of the founder of Steinway & Sons. He followed in the footsteps of his father Theodore and grandfather, William, and became president of Steinway & Sons in 1955. He led the piano company until its sale to CBS in 1972 and then turned his attention to preserving the history of his family’s business, or as he put it, their “ancient history.” Henry arranged and annotated most of the Steinway collection and his tireless efforts before his death in 2008 have made publications like this possible. Because of his commitment and his immeasurable generosity, we are honored to dedicate this 2018 calendar to Henry Z. Steinway, piano maker and historian.
Sunday dinner for the Steinways meant inviting a few select friends from the wealthy German-American community to their country house in Queens for a grand lunch, a lawn game like tennis or croquet, and coffee and cakes in the late afternoon. Pictured here playing croquet with the Steinways are F.A.O. Schwarz and his daughter, Ida. Schwarz, in the full beard and top hat, was the celebrated dealer in toys whose retail store “Schwarz, Toy Bazar” was located on Union Square, down the street from Steinway Hall. Also in the scene are Charlie and Fred Steinway, the future presidents of the company.

The Steinway mansion in Astoria was a healthful retreat from the summer heat and the periodic epidemics of diseases like cholera that plagued Manhattan.
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<th>Date</th>
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<td>1718</td>
<td>Charles G. Steinway, son of Henry E. Steinway, born in Seesen, Germany.</td>
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<td>1866</td>
<td>C.F. Theodore Steinway joins Steinway &amp; Sons partnership.</td>
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<td>1868</td>
<td>LaGuardia Community College founded.</td>
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<td>1863</td>
<td>Henry E. Steinway, Sr. becomes a U.S. citizen.</td>
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<td>1863</td>
<td>William Steinway and his family in Queens, 1884.</td>
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By 1860 the Steinway family had made their fortune in America. They built an immense piano factory uptown on 53rd Street and Fourth Avenue (now Park Avenue) and bought land near the factory for their private residence and for real estate speculation. The documents pictured here are excerpts from the “Abstract of Title” to land that the founder, Henry Steinway, and his son, William, bought on the southeast corner of 53rd Street and Fourth Avenue.

Charles F. Tretbar, an employee of Steinway & Sons, is named with his wife, Helen, as seller. They were being used by Henry and William to buy the land for the wealthy Steinways in order to keep the price down. The Tretbars paid $6,875 on May 1, 1868 and sold it to Henry and William seventeen days later for the same price.

The document on the right records the inclusion of C.F. Theodore and Albert, son of Henry, as joint tenants on the property with Henry and William. Their wives, Julia and Regina, are excluded. Henry Steinway signed this document two days before he signed his will, evidently putting his affairs in order. He died six weeks later, on February 7, 1871.
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**February 1889:** William Steinway forms the Astoria Homestead Co. to buy and sell Queens real estate.

**February 1871:** Henry E. Steinway, Sr. dies in New York City.

**February 1880:** Steinway & Sons varnishers lead a company-wide strike for higher wages after their pay is cut during the recent depression.

**February 1797:** Henry E. Steinway, founder of Steinway & Sons, born Heinrich Engelhard Steinweg in Wobhausen, Germany.

**February 1899:** Steinway factory at 53rd Street and Park Avenue, 1890.
Nahum Stetson, seen here in the 1890s, began as a salesman and rose quickly in the ranks to become head of sales and marketing. In this lofty position, Stetson needed a lavish office to entertain Steinway dealers. Although Steinway dealers were independent merchants who often sold other, less expensive pianos, along with the Steinway, they were the company’s lifeline, its crucial connection to its customers throughout the world.

Nahum is seated at his desk which was, at that time, the last word in office furnishings. When he opened his desk door, Stetson’s dealer files were at his elbow. To his left is a picture of an “art case” piano, an extraordinary piano with original engraving or painting. Stetson helped establish the department that created these pianos at Steinway & Sons, some of which are on the front and back of this calendar.

Above Stetson’s desk is a large picture of his boss, the president of the company, William Steinway. The souvenirs on the fireplace mantle are gifts from Steinway dealers, which he had to display in case one of them visited again.
Detail of the above picture of Nahum Stetson’s office, showing an art case grand piano.


1853: Steinway & Sons partnership formed, with its first factory at 85 Varick Street.

1836: Henry E. Steinway, Sr. dies in New York City.

1871: Henry E. Steinway, Sr. dies in New York City.

1880: Pianoforte Manufacturers’ Society begins a city-wide lockout when Steinway & Sons workers refuse to end a strike.

1879: Richard Wagner writes: “I miss my Steinway grand as one misses a beloved wife.”

1886: Sohmer Piano Co. announces purchase of land for a factory in Astoria, Queens.

1853: Charles G. Steinway, son of Henry E. Steinway, dies in Braunschweig, Germany.

1880: Steinway & Sons lockout ends with minimum 10% wage increases, a victory for the workers.

1827: Henry E. Steinway, Jr. born in Seesen, Germany.
This is a 1908 photograph of Steinway’s foundry, where the “harps,” the iron plates that hold the piano strings in place, were cast. The laborers cleaned up the plates after they were cast in the foundry. Although this was dirty, unhealthy work, the lumber carriers (known as “the yard crews”) coveted this job because it was indoors and warm.

The man in front is holding an abrasive cloth to rub the seven-foot long grand plate at his bench. To his left is an upright plate. The team of seven workers rubbed down more than 1,600 plates that year. Many of these men died young, probably of black lung disease.

The completed plate then went to another department in the factory to be drilled and finished in gold before going on to the bellymen department to be placed into the piano.
**April 1916:** Steinway & Sons completes its 175,000th piano.

**1839:** Astoria incorporated as a village.

**1923:** Steinway Hall, 109-111 East 14th Street (near Irving Place), is sold.

**1861:** First written Steinway & Sons partnership agreement created.

**1865:** Steinway & Sons completes its 10,000th piano and ships to Capt. Jas. Hall in Peru.

**1972:** Steinway shareholders approve sale of Steinway & Sons to CBS.
The engine room provided central power for the entire Steinway factory. A large Corliss engine, shown here in 1908, fueled by coal, turned metal line shafts that ran the length of each floor in the factory. Leather belts were attached to the spinning shaft to power all the machinery, even the elevator.

The foreman, Mr. E. Jaegerman, standing with a bowler hat, was responsible for keeping the big engine running. One of his assistants was a “beltman,” whose entire job was fixing the moving belts, which snapped all the time. A bell would ring alerting him to the floor where a belt had broken. The beltman either clamped the old belt back together or put on a new one.

Although the Corliss engine predated the advent of electricity, some machines that ran off a line shaft have been electrified and were still used at Steinway & Sons in the late twentieth century.
1856: Steinway & Sons begins written record of the business in the Partners’ Inventory Book.

1857: First patent awarded to Henry Steinway, Jr. of Steinway & Sons, for a grand piano action.

1891: Carnegie Hall opens.

1872: Steinway & Sons workers join general strike for an 8 hour work day and higher wages. At the time, the average U.S. work day was 11 hours (though federal employees worked 8 hours).

1876: Steinway & Sons is incorporated with William as President and Treasurer; the 15,000 shares of common stock are valued at $1.5 million.

1877: Albert Steinway, son of Henry E. Steinway, dies in New York City.

1878: Steinway & Sons workers join general strike for an 8 hour work day and higher wages. At the time, the average U.S. work day was 11 hours (though federal employees worked 8 hours).

1884: LaGuardia Archives chartered by CUNY Board of Trustees.

1885: Steinway & Sons begins written record of the business in the Partners’ Inventory Book.

1886: Steinway & Sons begins written record of the business in the Partners’ Inventory Book.

1891: Carnegie Hall opens.

1894: Steinway & Sons begins written record of the business in the Partners’ Inventory Book.

1909: Steinway & Sons 53rd Street factory is sold for $650,000; all factory operations now take place in Queens.

1920: Steinway & Sons begins written record of the business in the Partners’ Inventory Book.

1931: Steinway & Sons begins written record of the business in the Partners’ Inventory Book.
During the 1880s, Steinway & Sons built a new factory in Queens. As William Steinway recalled, “We sought a place outside the city...to escape the machinations of the anarchists and socialists...who were continually breeding discontent among our workmen, and inciting them to strike...”

In this picture are some of the first buildings on the new Queens site. The four-story building to the right was where the piano cases that held the plate and strings were assembled. All Steinway pianos started here: the case, the plates, the keys, and the action (all moving parts). In the 1880s this factory supplied parts for the 53rd Street plant in Manhattan.

Steinway & Sons is still in Queens and still manufacturing pianos in these buildings.
1840: Albert Steinway, son of Henry E. Steinway, born in Seesen, Germany.
1872: Striking Steinway & Sons workers return to work with 10% wage increase, but continue to toil a 10-hour day.

1916: Steinway & Sons purchases property at 109 West 57th Street (across from Carnegie Hall) for new Steinway Hall, which would open in 1925.

1850: Steinway family arrives in New York on steamer “Helene Sloman” from Bremen.


1872: Steinway & Sons sells its 25,000th piano, the first with a duplex scale, to Grand Duke Alexander of Russia.

1880: C.F. Theodore Steinway founds Hamburg factory, reestablishing company presence in Europe.

1890: Thomas Edison writes to Steinway & Sons: “I have decided to keep your grand piano. Please send bill with lowest price.”
German-Americans enjoyed concerts, athletic contests, picnics, and beer-drinking. During lunch, after work, and on weekends, Steinway workers gathered at local beer gardens to mingle with friends and family, and lift a few mugs. One of the problems at the piano factory was that workers would go out “to have a few” and not return to work for the rest of the day. Even during the work day the apprentices in the factory were sent out to bring back “growlers,” pails of beer for the craftsmen.

For many German-Americans, beer was an important part of socializing. But during the nineteenth century and into the twentieth their fondness for beer led to cultural conflict with more rigid temperance advocates, who frowned on alcohol consumption and disapproved of the saloons and beer gardens. For the Steinway workers and family, pictured here in 1925, not even prohibition was going to stop their good times and companionship.
1935: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Wagner Labor Relations Act, guaranteeing workers the right to organize and bargain collectively.

1870: William Steinway makes his first purchase in Queens, the 35-acre Luyster farm.

1875: Steinway & Sons registers its lyre logo as a trademark.

1870: William Steinway buys Pike Mansion and 80 acres in Astoria, Queens for $127,000.

1914: The Triborough Bridge opens, linking Queens, the Bronx, and Manhattan.

1863: Riots against the Civil War military draft erupt in New York City. Draft rioters appear before Steinway & Sons' 53rd Street factory, but are turned away with gifts of money.

1863: Fifth Regiment is housed in the basement of Steinway & Sons factory; draft riots continue.

1863: Arrival of more militia regiments puts an end to New York City draft riots.

1872: William Steinway contracts to build a foundry and sawmill in Astoria to shield his workers from Manhattan radicalism.

1867: Steinway & Sons is awarded First Grand Gold Medal of Honor at the Exposition Universelle, Paris.

Steinway worker Louis Berger and his sons Henry and Louis, Jr., posing for a photograph at North Beach Amusement Park, c. 1925.
Once the factory was built in Queens, William Steinway set about to found a village for his workers. He planned streets, water lines, transportation, and houses. To educate the children of the community, he provided a kindergarten and a library and paid part of the teachers’ salaries. An instructor, Mrs. Von Pose, taught German to the children three times a week. Many German-Americans like William Steinway wanted to preserve the German language. Fred Drasche, a retired Steinway worker, still remembers when he had to stand up and say “guten morgen Fraulein Von Pose.”

Pictured here is the 1911 Steinway Kindergarten class. This was a private school for children in the community for the year before they started public school. The boy in the back in the sailor suit is Charles Roeckell, whose father started at Steinway in 1884 as an apprentice key fitter. Eventually, Charlie emulated his father and his uncle, and went to work for Steinway & Sons, too.
### August

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**5** HEROSHIMA DAY

**12** 1935: President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the Social Security Act, providing for old-age pensions and unemployment insurance.

**19** WOMEN'S EQUALITY DAY

**26** 1860: Grand opening of Steinway & Sons Pianoforte Manufactory at 53rd Street and 4th (now Park) Avenue. Factory cost $150,000 to build.

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### September

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**V-J DAY**

**FEAST OF THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY** (BEGIN AT SUNDOWN)

**INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE REMEMBRANCE OF THE SLAVE TRADE AND ITS ABOLUTION**

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**HIROSHIMA DAY**

**EID AL-ADHA (FEAST OF SACRIFICE)** (BEGIN AT SUNDOWN)

**RAKSHA BANDHAN (HINDU OBSERVANCE)**
After New York State passed child labor laws in 1913, women replaced young boys in the Action Department at Steinway & Sons. The action consists of the moving parts of the piano that transfer the pressure of the finger on the key to the hammer that hits the string.

Women were typically assigned to the lesser paid, subordinate jobs. The woman pictured here in 1922 was pinning two action parts together. Henry Miller, to the right, mounted her work onto a frame, making sure it sat straight. His salary for that year was $1,771. Miller was a longtime employee and an early union supporter and official. He went to work at Steinway & Sons in 1907, at the age of 15 in the Action Department, and stayed until the day he retired.

This room was called “the chicken coop,” perhaps because of its low ceiling, or perhaps because women worked here. It had the only ladies’ room in the factory.
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**SEPTEMBER**

- **2** Labor Day
- **9** Grandparents Day
- **10** First Day of Rosh Hashanah
- **11** World Trade Center Remembrance Day
- **12** 1868: William Steinway makes an unsuccessful attempt to form an independent Steinway & Sons workers' association and avoid involvement with unions.
- **13** 1882: LaGuardia Archives is founded.
- **14** 1903: Steinway & Sons sends its 100,000th piano to President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House.
- **15** 1903: Steinway & Sons sends its 100,000th piano to President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House.

**AUGUST 2018**

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**OCTOBER 2018**

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A Family Affair

In the history of Steinway workers, several families stand out as unique contributors to the company's fame. Spanish immigrant Juan Ayuso, a master craftsman, carves the first White House piano in 1903 for President Theodore Roosevelt. One son, Severo, follows in his footsteps and in 1938 carves the second White House piano for President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Each of these pianos is a work of art. Another son, Eugene, becomes Art Director and Designer for Steinway & Sons.

Juan and Severo Ayuso, 1898.
Ayuso family, c. 1899 (back row) Maria, Theodore, Eugene, Juan, Severo; (front row) Victoria, Albert, Henry, Arthur.
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1865: J.E. Theodore Steinway arrives in New York to help run Steinway & Sons after the deaths of two of his brothers.

1876: “Steinway & Sons” is registered as a trademark.
The Steinway factory in Hamburg opened in 1880, long after Steinway & Sons was established in New York. The court yard, pictured here in 1935, seemed to be the gathering place for Steinway workers ready for a march.

During the war the Nazi government seized the factory as enemy property. At first Steinway was only allowed to sell pianos within Germany, but then Hitler used the sale of pianos as a way to bring foreign currency into Germany. The piano factory also produced beds for air raid shelters, dummy aircraft, and other war materials for Nazi Germany.

In July 1943, American bombers destroyed the factory. Theodore Steinway, then president of the company in New York, wrote to his cousin Clarissa: “Heard from British sources that our Hamburg House is pretty well shot to pieces and Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, are pretty well cleaned off the map. Well, they asked for it and they got it.”
Detail of the above photograph of Steinway's Hamburg factory, showing policemen and boys, 1935.

1872: Tenth Avenue in Astoria, Queens is renamed Steinway Avenue (later Steinway Street).

1825: C.F. Theodore Steinway, son of Henry E. Steinway, is born in Seesen, Germany.

1875: Steinway & Sons patents "Centennial Concert Grand," a forerunner of the modern concert grand piano.

1888: Violinist Fritz Kreisler makes his U.S. debut at Steinway Hall as part of the firm's artist management program, which combines publicity for the firm with service to artists.

1903: Steinway & Sons issues a $500,000 bond series to finance building of the Ditmars Avenue factory in Queens.

1901: Piano virtuoso Ignace Paderewski makes his New York debut, under Steinway management.

1855: Steinway & Sons first advertises its "gold medal" for its overstrung square grand piano, capitalizing on prize won at American Institute Fair.


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During World War II, Steinway & Sons in New York produced CG-4A troop-carrying gliders. They also manufactured coffins for cemeteries in Queens and 2,000 G.I. 40" upright pianos, painted olive drab.

The United States government gave contracts to Steinway and other woodworking factories to manufacture gliders from sketchy, often inaccurate drawings. Pictured here is one of the hundreds of women who fit the fabric on to the wood frame of the glider. At one point Steinway employed 1,200 people, mostly older men and women working in two shifts to make these planes.

Steinway & Sons and the union agreed that these war workers were not to receive seniority over the piano men who enlisted in the service. As these men came back their jobs were waiting for them.

Very few of the 1,200 glider makers continued at Steinway after the war; all the women were pushed out.
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1938: Steinway & Sons presents its 300,000th piano to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

1984: Steinway & Sons donates factory records to LaGuardia Archives.

1938: The 92nd Street ferry, linking Manhattan and Fulton Avenue, Queens, makes its final voyage.
The “lumber yard” men, pictured here in 1980, represent the present piano workers at Steinway & Sons. They unload the lumber from trucks, move it to drying stacks in the yard, then to kilns and into the factory. It is an entry level, low salaried work. But it is from this group that some of the future highly skilled workers at Steinway & Sons will be selected.

The man at the bottom is holding a “lumber rule,” a tool that is used to measure the number of board-feet of lumber and is the symbol of his trade.

This group reflects the ethnic changes in Queens: a hundred years earlier, this photo would have shown German, Hungarian and Irish workers. These days, Guyanese, African-Americans and Latinos are included.
**January 2019**

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**Patent #115,782, issued June 6, 1871 to C.F.T. Steinway, for a piano action.**
Above: Steinway officially opening a flagship showroom in Beijing, China in June 2017, combining classic heritage and innovative music technology. The new store, which includes a recital hall and recording studio, is a significant symbol of Steinway’s expansion into the Chinese market.

Left: Steinway & Sons’ new showroom in the heart of Paris (230 Boulevard Saint Germain) opened in May 2017, housing a 50-seat recital hall as well as rehearsal space for artists.

Back Cover: Chinese Chippendale art case piano, 1923.