**Dedham Historical Society & Museum Trivia – Q&A - 01.14.22**

**Question:**Was William H. Ivers Dedham’s Music Man?  Who was William H. Ivers and what was his significance in Dedham?
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**Answer:**

**Insert Directory Ad Image:** Caption: William H. Ivers Directory Ad, *Directory for Dedham, Hyde Park and Canton* (1874).

In June, 1872, a concert was performed in Memorial Hall.  The concert has significance because the piano used during the performance was crafted by William H. Ivers (1822-1908), a Dedham resident.

Prior to building pianofortes, Ivers began his career as a cabinetmaker. (Pianoforte, generally, refers to instruments made before 1830. They differ from modern pianos in appearance, touch, and tone due, in part, to low string tensions, absence of iron framing, and use of wooden or leather-covered hammers.  Today, piano hammers are covered in compressed felt.)  For twenty-five years, he was employed by Jonas Chickering, a piano manufacturer in Boston. During his tenure, Ivers made himself familiar with every aspect of the work including making the piano casings, the sounding-boards, the keys, the stringing, and fine tuning each instrument.

In 1872, Ivers with his son, William H. Ivers, Jr., began manufacturing pianos in a rented space on High Street in the Square. The company had great success and, in 1878, Ivers, Sr. built his own factory at the corner of Bryant Street and Eastern Avenue across from the train depot.  The business in Dedham grew and included large warehouses in Boston. Unfortunately, Ivers found himself in financial trouble in the summer of 1880 and the business failed. According to a *Dedham Transcript* article, August 28, 1880, “At a meeting of his (Ivers) creditors . . . an inventory of his property was submitted, his house on Highland Street being estimated at $1700, Manufactory, $5600, pianos at salesrooms to the value of $3150, and stock at Dedham, $3379.52.  The sum indebtedness is $15,049.27, but how much his property will bring above the mortgages is uncertain . . . In the meantime, the business at the factory has been suspended*.”* A follow-up article on September 4, 1880, added to Ivers troubles. “His books were found in a muddled condition, showing a lack of integrity or intelligence on the part of the person who kept them.  After a consultation, it was voted to accept eight cents on a dollar, which will relieve Mr. Ivers from bankruptcy*.*” (The Dedham building was eventually purchased by Dr. John H. Harrington and in 1882, under Harrington’s ownership, the building had both a grocery store and apothecary as tenants.  In 1883, a sign hung on the Bryant Street side of the building that read “Harrington’s Family Hotel.”)

Ivers was quick to rebound, however, and in November of 1880, he and Handel Pond, an organ tuner living in Winchester, became partners in the Ivers and Pond Piano Manufacturing Company in Boston. (As a craftsman of pianos, Ivers was renowned and we assume Pond had business sense making the partnership successful.) The company produced square, upright, grand, and player pianos.  At one point, they had received an order for 100 pianos from the Boston Conservatory and were endorsed by more than 600 leading musical and educational institutions. Ivers remained president of the company until he resigned in 1897 leaving Pond to take over the position.  After Pond’s death, his sons headed the company.

William Henry Ivers passed away on February 2, 1908 in his home at the age of eighty-five.

**Extra credit**:
The piano is the descendant of which instrument?
The piano is the descendant of the Spinnet – a large triangular box containing forty-nine strings of catgut and wire, played with quills.

Research and images from the collection at Dedham Historical Society & Museum; *Dedham Transcript* Issues, 1880; online resources; *Directory of Dedham, Hyde Park and Canton* (1874).

Information about the DHSM is available at [www.dedhamhistorical.org](http://www.dedhamhistorical.org). For questions and comments regarding our weekly trivia, please call 781.326.1385 or email, Info@dedhamhistorical.org. If you enjoy learning about Dedham’s history, consider supporting our efforts. To **Become a member and *Belong To Something Lasting***, visit [www.dedhamhistorical.org](http://www.dedhamhistorical.org).

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