

# *Music in New Jersey, 1655-1860*

A Study of Musical Activity and Musicians  
in New Jersey from Its First Settlement to  
the Civil War

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Pilcher's total production for the year comprised thirteen organs with a value of \$9,000. This number unquestionably represents retail value; Pilcher used no middlemen but sold directly to the customer. His factory, therefore, earned \$3,300, probably not including the proprietor's income—an excellent performance. The average price of Pilcher's instruments—a rather high \$629.30—indicates either that he had inflated his earnings or that he specialized in large, institutional organs. The latter conclusion could account for his limited retail advertising. The *Newark Daily Advertiser* provided a description of one institutional instrument in a review of a concert given in Newark's First Presbyterian Church on December 25, 1850 (NDA 12/3,26):

the new organ which was opened on the occasion of the concert . . . appeared to equal the highest expectations and reflects credit on Mr. Pilcher, the builder. The case is a beautiful design, ornamented in the French style, with white and gold. Its height is 20 feet, width of front 15 feet. The whole organ comprises 22 stops of which 2 are pedals, and 7 in the swell, extending the full compass of the organ. The number of pipes is 1,081. The largest diapason pipe is 16 feet—extending to triple C—and the largest metal pipe, 11 feet in length.

#### *The Pirssons*

Between 1830 and 1846 Alexander T. and James Pirsson followed musical professions in New York City.<sup>14</sup> Alexander was at various times an organist, music teacher, and Professor of Music (1830-39; 1844-46); James manufactured pianos (1830-46) and eventually became the principal of an important company bearing his name. During Alexander's absence from New York (1840-44) he unsuccessfully attempted to organize a piano manufactory in Newark at 204 Broad Street. In the Newark Directory (1840/41) he entered a display advertisement with the following copy:

A. T. Pirsson Piano Forte Manufacturer, and Teacher of the Piano and Organ, 204 Broad Street. Keeps constantly on hand very superior pianos of different prices, which he warrants to purchasers, and will keep them in tune one year gratis. House 16 Commerce St.

The same notice appeared in the 1843/44 direc-

tory, but with Pirsson's new address, 6 New Street. In 1850 Theodore LaFoy, Newark musical instrument dealer, advertised two of Pirsson's pianos: a seven-octave instrument at a cost of \$275, and a six and one-half octave instrument at a cost of \$250 (NDA 4/23). Alexander was not to make a significant contribution to American piano building, as did his brother. Although he advertised aggressively in Newark newspapers, his major effort focused on the sale of pianos and music and on building a student following. Notices in which he described himself as a piano builder did not appear with any consistency, and he probably met with little success in this field.

#### *Peloubet of Bloomfield*

According to Reverend Francis Peloubet, family chronicler, Guy Chabrier (fl. 1298), Chevalier of the King, Seneschal of Perigord and Quercy, founded the line from which Louis Michel François de Chabrier de Peloubet descended.<sup>15</sup> Louis Michel's father, Louis Alexander, fought with the king's army during the French Revolution. He was tried and sentenced to death by a revolutionary tribunal, but he escaped from prison with the aid of friends and fled to Germany, where he learned to make flutes, fifes, and clarinets. In October 1803 Louis Alexander emigrated to New York City, where he married in 1805. His son, Louis Michel François, later known as Chabrier, was born in Philadelphia, February 22, 1806. Louis's family moved through the Hudson Valley, residing in Athens, Hudson, and Catskill, New York, but Chabrier had returned to New York City by 1829, during which year he married (see Plate 45). Although no documentation confirms it, he undoubtedly learned the woodwind maker's trade from his father, who advertised in the *Albany (N.Y.) Argus* as "musical instrument maker" from November 26, 1810, to May 28, 1811.

Chabrier continued his business in New York until 1836, when he transferred his family to Bloomfield, New Jersey.<sup>16</sup> Peloubet's first plant, in "Pierson's Mill," 3 Myrtle Court, served him until 1842, when he relocated at 86 Orange.<sup>17</sup> After a fire destroyed this facility (1869), he built two new factory buildings on Orange Street.<sup>18</sup>

In 1840 Peloubet owned real estate valued at \$600.<sup>19</sup> According to the 1850 Census, he had accrued \$3,000 capital in his "musical instrument factory," where he was using \$800 worth of wood,

Duncklee, a prime outlet for **Peloubet**, sold an assortment of "Peloubet's melodeons, with the Improved Tone that everyone admires who hears them" (NDA, 5/4/1854). Again, on July 24, 1854 (NDA), **Peloubet** invited "all to try single and double sets of reeds, two registers, \$50-200." Peloubet's instruments were available in New York City at the sales rooms of H. Warren, in the Chickering establishment; in Newark at Duncklee's store; in Boston through J. C. Bates, 129 Washington Street.

The firm grew appreciably during the decade 1850-60. Peloubet's son, Jarvis (b. 1823), joined him in the family business and by 1860 the elder **Peloubet** was worth \$5,000 in personal property and \$2,000 in real estate, and the capital in his company had grown to \$9,000 (New Jersey Census). His yearly profit too had increased after he began manufacturing melodeons. Approximate computation of his 1860 profit is as follows:

Lumber consumed, 15,000 feet, in the value of	\$ 675
Other articles consumed in the value of	1,600
Labor (193 × 12)	2,316*
	<u>\$4,591</u>

\*This figure does not include proprietor's compensation.

During 1860 **Peloubet** produced ninety melodeons, the value of which was \$8,000. His profit, therefore, before overhead and proprietor's income, was \$3,409. The average price of his instruments, \$88.88, reflects the manufacture of small instruments for home use, rather than that of large, institutional organs.<sup>21</sup>

Despite his having manufactured melodeons and reed organs for thirty-one years, only three surviving **Peloubet** instruments have been lo-

#### Public Library, Bloomfield, New Jersey

metal, and ivory per annum in order to produce instruments in the value of \$3,500; his average monthly labor expense for four male workers was \$144. Peloubet's operation produced a modest yearly profit in 1850.

Labor (144 × 12)	\$1,728*
Raw material	800
Total expense (excluding overhead)	<u>2,528</u>

\*It is not known if this sum includes the proprietor's income. Peloubet's profit, before overhead, was only \$972.

Authorities (Sachs and Marcuse) have incorrectly credited the Estey Organ Company of Brattleboro, Vermont, with the introduction of the melodeon, or American organ, to this country in 1856. The original American patent for an exhaust bellows, characteristic of the melodeon, was issued to A. M. Peaseley in 1818.<sup>20</sup> Manufacturing began in earnest around mid-century, and in 1849 the **Peloubet** firm began the production of melodeons and reed organs; advertisements for them appeared in Newark newspapers during the 1850s and 1860s. For example, on April 4, 1854 (NDA), George Duncklee, Newark music merchant, advertised "C. Peloubet's melodeons with his late improvement [?] on Carhart's reeds which has overcome the unpleasant reedy tone so objectionable in this class of instrument."

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**PLATE 46. Melodeon by Chabrier Peloubet. Courtesy of the Bloomfield Historical Society, Bloomfield, New Jersey**

cated. Two are in the museum of the Bloomfield Historical Society (see Plate 46), and one is in private hands. An instrument alleged to have been in the Caldwell, New Jersey, home of President Grover Cleveland has dropped from sight. The two Bloomfield instruments give evidence of careful workmanship and good intonation and tone. Only three of Peloubet's clarinets have been located, but his flutes have fared better. Nineteen are known to have survived: two in the Smithsonian Institution; six in the Dayton C. Miller **Flute** Collection of the Library of Congress (see Plate 47); two in the Greenfield Village and Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan; one in the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments, University of Michigan; one in the Yale University Collection of Musical Instruments; and seven in possession of private collectors and performers. They range in complexity from a boxwood, one-key, E-flat instrument with brass keys and ivory rings (Miller Collection Catalogue #79) to an eight-key, cocus instrument in C with silver fittings and an ivory head (Miller Collection Catalogue #1556).<sup>22</sup> Peloubet entered three German flutes and one piccolo in the Fifth Exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association in Boston (1847). The award committee offered the following judgment of them:

These instruments were exceedingly well made, in good tune, and very easy to be filled, answering promptly and readily to the most rapid fingering. The tone was clear and fine, particularly on the lower notes.<sup>23</sup>

Dating Peloubet's flutes and clarinets with certainty presents problems that appear to be insurmountable at this time. None of the three clarinets bears a date. Of the nineteen surviving flutes, eleven have Peloubet's numbers, which may or may not be serial. None carries a date. At some location, usually on the foot joint, all of the instruments are stamped "C. Peloubet New York [City]," hereafter "CPNY." All but five of them carry the additional information "Factory Bloomfield N J," hereafter "Bl." Table 7 contains a summary of information pertinent to dating the instruments.

TABLE 7  
(fl.=flute; cl.=clarinet)

<i>Peloubet No.</i>	<i>Owner</i>	<i>Stampings</i>
216	private "F-1"	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.; P. H. Taylor Approved; Atwills Music Saloon
252	Stearns	(fl.) CPNY,—; P. H. Taylor Approved Pattern
315	Miller	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.; P. H. Taylor Approved
375	private "F-2"	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
607	Yale	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
761	Ford	(fl.) CPNY,—
862	Miller	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
1183	private "L"	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
1222	private "P"	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
1227	private "A"	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
1249	Smithsonian	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	Smithsonian	(fl.) CPNY,—
—	Miller	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	Miller	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	Miller	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	Miller	(fl.) CPNY,—[Miller No 798]
—	private "S"	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	private "RB"	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	Ford	(fl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	Ford	(cl.) CPNY, Bl.
—	private "B"	(cl.) CPNY,—
—	private "C"	(cl.) CPNY, Bl.

The following information applies to the interpretation of Table 7:

Peloubet had a business facility in New York City between 1829 and 1836, but there is no known record of his having had one in New Jersey at that time.

In 1836 he left New York and moved to Bloomfield, New Jersey. After this date there is no known record of his maintaining a facility in New York City.

"P[atrick] H. Taylor, Teacher of Music" resided in New York City between 1826 and 1834 (*Longworth's*).

Joseph F. Atwill had a music saloon (Store and possibly rehearsal rooms) in New York City between 1833 and 1837 (*Longworth's*).

Therefore:

Peloubet numbers 216, 252, and 315 probably date from between 1829, the year that Peloubet arrived in New York, and 1834, the end of Taylor's New York residency.

Peloubet numbers higher than 315 probably indicate a date after 1834, the end of Taylor's

PLATE 47. Flutes by Chabrier **Peloubet**

**Upper: Flute** in C; 8 keys, rosewood with silver keys and ivory rings; 668 mm.; No. 891, Dayton C. Miller Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

**Lower: Flute** in C; 8 keys, grenadilla with silver keys; 676 mm.; No. 66.199, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

New York residency, but only if the instruments are lacking the Taylor stamp.

**Peloubet** number 216 probably dates from 1833 or 1834, the only two years coincident with Atwill's and Taylor's New York residencies.

**Peloubet** numbers 252 and 761, as well as Miller number 798, probably date from before 1836, for they carry only the stamping "CPNY" and not the "Bl" stamping.

But two inconsistencies plague the dating process. **Peloubet** left New York City for Bloomfield in 1836, yet all but three of his surviving flutes and one clarinet carry both the New York and Bloomfield stamps. Possibly he wished to maintain the prestige of a New York address; possibly he utilized the services of a New York sales agent, now unknown to us. Furthermore, two instruments (number 216 and 315) are stamped "Bl," meaning after 1836 and "P. H. Taylor . . .," who was not in New York after 1834 (nor was he in Bloomfield). Was **Peloubet's** use of Taylor's endorsement unauthorized? For the present both inconsistencies must remain unreconciled.

Joseph **Peloubet**, who prepared the *Family Records*, tells us that Chabrier's reception in Bloomfield was cool, but during his years there he became one of the community's most respected and affluent citizens and a leader of the Bloomfield Presbyterian Church. His work in the field of temperance received much attention and he was an early advocate of the abolitionist movement. On June 15, 1844, he was cited by *The New Jersey Freeman*, an abolitionist newspaper, as an individual who helped "the cause of liberty by acting as an agent for this paper."

*The New-Jersey Jardine*

In 1832 the firm of Bridgeland and (John) Jardine began manufacturing pianos in New York City at 451 Broadway. John Jardine, the company's piano maker, was the uncle of the Edward Jardine who later became the head of the well-known firm Jardine and Sons, organ builders. According to Daniel Spillane (1890), John, at the age of twenty-seven, was considered a master technician, and in 1833 he exhibited for the first time in America a "square piano having 'the bass strings crossing over the treble,'" two years before this technique was to be employed in a European instrument.<sup>24</sup> But after 1838 John disappeared from public trade notice, a surprising development in the light of the successful start that his firm had made. Spillane, either unaware of the Jardine family history, or attempting to be kind, hedges on this issue, claiming that John "maintained a transient connection with piano making." John's brother, George, carried the family tradition forward and became a prominent piano maker in New York City. But where did the promising John Jardine finish the career that was truncated abruptly in New York around 1838, and why did he leave his potential unfilled?

For about fourteen years the record of John's activities is unclear. In 1850, however, his name was taken in the New Jersey census, and the records indicate that he had lived in Jersey City, with his wife, Harriet (b. 1813) and three children, for approximately fifteen years. At that time (1850) he was forty-six years old and was listed as insane. Apparently this affliction precluded his supporting Harriet and their children by his craft; his wife maintained a "fancy store" at the address given for the family. His efforts could not have been on a significant scale; they were not noted in the 1860 Industrial Census, and he did not advertise in Newark or Jersey City between