COUNTRY PIANO TUNER: HIS STUPID SONG

by

HOWARD N. CHASE

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FOREWORD

Today's commonplace becomes tomorrow's subject for research. When Robert Frost wrote his "Two Tramps in Mud Time" and mentioned water standing in the wheel ruts and hoof prints, perhaps he did not realize how soon this might need to be interpreted to a generation familiar only with hauling everything with trucks and tractors. Or, more likely, he could foresee the changes and wanted to record the norm of his own period.

Just so with any of the older skills: they are accepted with little thought by people familiar with the craftsman and his product, the serviceman and the mechanism he keeps functioning satisfactorily. Then, some day, the public blinks its eyes open and looks around, amazed that there is no one to do these things any more. The craftsman's product goes from a commodity to a collector's item; the mechanism is subject to planned obsolescence and periodic replacement. Hence it may be of some value to record bits of one tradesman's life and times, in case someone in the next century might wonder just how the thing was done before the trade became completely mechanized.
WHY IS A PIANO TUNER?

You may have wondered casually how a piano tuner comes into being -- why anyone should wish to spend his working days in solitude but not in silence, listening for sounds that other people do not recognize, flitting about the countryside working a day here and there, never punching a time clock nor getting into line for paid vacations and fringe benefits. In my case it stems from having lived my early years on land now classified as sub-marginal and working a living from it so zestfully that I came rather tardily to realize that we were on the losing side as our small agriculture and its prospects dwindled. Except on the economic side, this was as good as being unencumbered by a classification. Agriculture is an ordered way of life, as unhurried as the coming of the seasons -- especially spring -- but hereabouts it has had to give way to patterns of living yielding a more adequate cash income in return for one's efforts.

So come with me for an occasional day; find out what makes me tick; come home with me at the end of the day and find out in just what sort of igloo I doff my mukluks.

In southwestern New Hampshire there is an area bounded by Mount Monadnock on the west, and following somewhat the northerly windings of the Contoocook River, in which I ply my trade. If there is a mile of straight road therein, or at least a mile that is both straight and level, I haven't found it. The sudden turns, revealing outlooks towards mountains, lakes, villages, and farmsteads, point to the ingenuity of early roadbuilders in adapting their efforts to a stubborn terrain. Perched boulders, so common in this area of glacial drift, and outcrops of ledge where the backbone of New Hampshire shows through the thin hide, often determined the course of the older roads and gave them the charm of unexpectedness that is so regrettably lacking in this fill-in-blast-through era.

The country is here; we may as we'll enjoy it. Once largely cleared for agriculture, it has mostly reverted to woodland. Hayfield, where I clipped around the rocks with a scythe, and raked after the loads of hay with a ullrake to glean the scatterings, now supports a growth of trees big enough for timber. So I have a store of things to muse on as I drive through the countryside, see boundary walls in deep woods, and know that this was once pasture or hayfield where neighbors paused at the end of a furrow or a mown swath to visit over the wall, exchange the latest hearsay, and speculate about the weather. I remember distinctly the gnarled neighbor who "worked out" for his livelihood. He would straighten up from his labors from time to time and opine, "Workin' acout for three dollars a day is a slow way t' git rich."

It was in this locale that I reached the conclusion that laboring in New Hampshire farming and orcharding offered little but callouses, also that the more rangy individuals have a huge mechanical advantage in doing physical labor, so I set about finding a way to make my head save my heels, and hit upon piano tuning.
Although not formally trained in music, I had always felt a response to it. There were few resident tuners for some distance around, and those who came into the vicinity to work were mostly mature men. In 1935 a friend, Barton Bachelder, introduced me to Edgar M. Quint of Concord, New Hampshire. Bart told me beforehand, "If Quint likes you, he'll do anything for you, but if not, you'll want to keep out of his way." He accepted me as a pupil, started me off on an autoharp, then graduated me to a piano after a few sessions. Sparing of praise like the typical New England Yankee, Quint did allow that I must have practiced at home what he gave me at each lesson, as he observed that I came back next time with the point pretty well learned.

In any form of instruction one may take, whatever one makes his own is modified by his acuteness or lack of the same, and bettered or worsened by the grade of ideals he tries to adhere to, whether in the quality of workmanship he applies to his job, or in dealing with people, which is part of everyone's job. I often think of a story told by my old friend John G. Herrick, long one of New Hampshire's leading craftsmen: There was a self-made man who got prosperous enough to send his son to college. When the son entered the business world he went right ahead, and a friend remarked to the father, "Your son is getting to be a bigger man than you are."

"Why shouldn't he be?" the father replied. "He's standing on my shoulders." Mr. Herrick told me this as an admonition against trying foolish experiments in violin-making which had been tried before, summarizing his advice by adding: "So start in where someone else left off; don't go over the same ground again."

After Quint turned me loose to do commercial work, I did some free jobs for my neighbors, then worked at half price for a while. It was my innocent assumption that people who owned pianos would want to have them tuned. I was in for a jolt. Upon approaching one house where I knew there was a musician in the family, I met a severe-looking man in the yard, and asked, "Do you have a piano in the house, and if so would you care to have it tuned?" He glared at me as if I had uttered some unpardonable insult or had desecrated the tomb of his ancestors and replied savagely, "No, I am glad to say we have not. We are free from that nuisance:" I mumbled a weak "Thank you" and retreated. Later, I learned that the man was a lawyer who specialized in bill collecting, and had the reputation of being the most obnoxious collector in the city where he plied his trade. A natural.

There is also the lifelong influence of one's parents which has a tempering effect on any kind of instruction. My mother had adroit ways of dealing with people, always directed toward improving the object of her ministrations. When young and impudent, full of untested theories, I would openly criticize the judgment or deeds of my parents. Mother would say placidly, "If your parents have not always done as well or as wisely as they might have done, then it is your privilege to do better. Each generation should be an improvement upon the preceding one, otherwise there would be no progress for the race." This reply, couched in wisdom and forbearance, has outlasted the effect of several applications of "oil of birch" by the paternal hand, however well deserved the latter may have been at the time. This sort of precept and example laid the foundations for an attitude of mind indispensable to the independent tradesman -- that of being responsible for one's acts, and of looking first within one's own thinking when things go awry.
YOU ARE AND YOU AREN'T

Many people assume that a piano tuner must be a musician, or at least an amateur pianist; neither is necessarily true. Probably it helps to have some musical tendency and interest, as this would further an incentive for learning the trade, but it can be learned from a mainly mechanical approach, and the tuner who is not super-sensitive musically is apt to stand up better than the highly sensitive one. A degree of hardened insensitivity is an asset in this work, coupled with a greater awareness of the exacting requirements of correct tuning than may be possessed by even some skilled performers on the piano.

So, once you become a tuner, you are not a universal admirer of pianos -- except as to the idea of a piano -- but neither are you a connoisseur of them, except in specific instances. There are, in fact, few pianos that I would play on for pleasure. Having tuned hundreds of makes, and many individual instruments of some makes, I could scarcely give an unqualified endorsement of any particular name. But despite my dim view of piano merit, I seldom find one that lacks any redeeming features. We must bear in mind that some pianos had little pedigree at their outset. An old gentleman in a customer's family gave me this informative account:

"There used to be a fellow in New York who made what he called a piano -- we called it a tin can -- which he sold wholesale for $1000 a dozen. Then there was a dealer in Boston who used to peddle them out for around $350 apiece, mostly to poor people, of course. When, after some years, this same dealer was taken for $20,000 on an investment swindle, I, for one, was not sorry."

So some pianos never had much "family pride" to "be denied, and set aside, and mortified," and when called upon to do my best on some old crate with a green-painted harp, warped, cross-grained action parts, a snarly treble that resists any effort to bring out a blend, and a bass that is a masterpiece of graduated thuds, I award a none-too-respectful salute to the arch-conspirators mentioned above. I can also see why Quint didn't believe in spending much over 45 minutes at tuning a piano; many of them are incapable of responding to more than cursory treatment.

A piano tuner is an accessory before the fact of music, bearing about the same relation to the performance of music that a kitchen helper bears to attending a banquet. So, as I go about the country peeling musical potatoes, sauteing octaves and fifths, hoping that this or that old specimen may simmer a long time in its own non-existent gravy before I see it again, I often think as I pocket my fee, "You've got the best of it, boy; be thankful that you don't have to live with it and listen to it right along."
Chameleon-like, I agree with the householder who inquires, "Isn't this still a pretty good old piano?", knowing that she will not likely ever get another one anyway. Or I give a little nudge to the person of means who is teetering on the brink of buying a better piano by stating, "Certainly, as good a pianist as you are deserves a better piano." And I mean it in both cases.

You are

a skilled mechanic;

an assuager of musical grief;

a diplomat and euphemist who can soften the blow of bad news.

You are not

a miracle worker;

invariably a yes-man;

a rejuvenator of the definitely passe.

You are variously viewed as

a slick operator who obtains easy money from gullible householders for no substantial reason or service;

a scavenger who flits around the edges of music picking up a living like a sea-gull;

an ever-available minute-man who can come on a moment's notice before a dance to correct a neglected piano;

a fiendish stickler who pounds a single note to drive unwilling listeners to distraction.

So, yes and no; you are and you aren't, by turns.
WORKING INTO THE TRADE

For some years I believed I could tune only two or three days a week. This was probably true at that early stage of experience. I helped Brother Steve at mason work, did general carpentry, cut firewood and logs, tended my garden, repaired and refinished furniture, made and repaired violins, to fill in between tuning jobs.

When I got stuck with a trade problem I would go back to Quint for advice. He would set me straight most generously. At one of these visits he amused himself by pawing over my meager kit of tools -- most of them obtained from my mother's kitchen drawer or from the workbench in the shed -- and commented, "Your stuff looks more like an old tuner's kit than a beginner's, Chase. The beginner gen'ally gets loaded up with a lot of stuff he doesn't need, but the old tuner doesn't have any tools that are worth much, and you haven't." He also told me, "You'll need some key ivories. You can get 'em off some old piano somebody has dumped."

"Why, don't people save the ones that come off?"

"Not very often. I was tunin' in a house one time where there was a kid who had made a cribbage board inlaid with piano ivory. I asked him where he got it, and he said, 'Off different pianos around where I've been,' so that's where some of it went."

It took a while to skim off enough odd dollars to build up a normal kit, but it is knowing how to get results with the equipment at hand that counts, rather than owning a lot of boughten gadgets.

In time, the number of piano tuners who came into the area to work decreased, so by the simple process of survival more work came my way. When World War II was over and I had a car of my own again, I could work at nothing else on any regular basis. Auctioneer Chet Dutton used me for general work at his sales for several seasons, a day or two each week. The folksly atmosphere of auctions was a good switch from my solitary trade, but this could not go on for long, as the demand for tuning increased, so that by the early 1950's I had to quit all part-time work.

Adaptability and resourcefulness, developed through these varied occupations, have stood me in good stead ever since. A service trade such as mine requires an automobile, which makes it possible to cover a larger territory than was ever possible for a tuner at an earlier period. I found time between pianos to build a frame house on land I owned in Hancock, starting with a 14' x 20' building bought in Bennington, and moved onto my land. It had served by turns as barber shop, express office, and dwelling, in its former location. Using lumber cut during several winters, and windows and doors bought at auctions, I added to this structure. So, "Kozyhome" came into existence.
My mother had departed peacefully from this scene in 1942. Daisy and I joined forces in 1946. After locating at "Kozyhome" in '48, it was Daisy who served as my buffer in dealing with the piano-owning public, waited supper many times, and went tuning with me for a day now and then. This led to my getting into a six-year part-time project, of which more will follow.
IV

BALANCE

There may be some who like their job so well, or are so good at it, that they never feel the need of a change, but most of us find a change refreshing and necessary, and in that case it behooves us to see that we have the means to balance an exacting occupation with a relaxing hobby, a busy, complicated public life with simplicity in our home life. Daisy and I have taken this into account since first moving to "Kozyhome," just within the borders of Hancock. For a good while we took pride in a lawn and perennial borders, but these did not prove as relaxing as we could have wished, so we were being prepared for the next move. We hit upon the working vacation: I would start out for a day's work, in mild weather, with Daisy and a picnic lunch, when the work agreed upon promised to be at an attractive place, and in this way we saw some choice spots.

In this locality with its goodly share of people with artistic talent and wealth there are many premises of distinction. One quest led along a lane beside an apple orchard and into woods where the roadway terminated in a gravelled parking spot, then along a footpath and bridge that spanned the outlet of a tiny pond to a log cabin scarcely visible among the trees. I was admitted to the rustic living room containing the piano. Two trees had been left growing, the floor and roof having been built around them. The maple had died, but the spruce continued to grow, so the roof boards and floor boards had to be cut away from time to time, and the rubber watershed adjusted accordingly. A writer-composer. People around Temple called it "the shack in the woods with a Fifth Avenue bathroom."

Another call led me up the "east mountain road" from Peterborough, which reaches a good elevation along Pack Monadnock Mountain, then a gravel driveway led up another mile or so by switchbacks to a brow affording a splendid prospect, where a roomy modern dwelling stood out in the best spot for view. My objective, however, was a stone lodge back among the trees. Of native rock, and with a roof framed of peeled spruce logs from the surrounding growth, this massive structure had been built for a member of the Bass family some fifty years earlier. The large main room, furnished for comfort, was a lesson in restraint. Over the piano a wild boar's head, a real old tusker, glowered and bristled at me. Several carved masks from far away places hung in the plain wall spaces. Windows were deeply recessed, making ample window seats. At one end of the room was a fireplace of suitable proportions; at the opposite end a tastefully designed stairway led to a balcony and an arched doorway, giving access to living quarters in a wing. Across the back a screened porch overlooked a blue lake, a pure gem, unlike the sky color which any body of clear water assumes on a fair day. Over most of its area of three or four acres the tree-clad slopes of the mountain were reflected, the varied greens of the mixed growth combining with the blue cast of the water to bring out a feeling of enchantment. The owner told me, "Fish starve in this water. We learned that the lake could be fertilized to make food for fish, but that would spoil the blue color, so we decided to keep it this way, and buy our fish."
A farmstead atop a ridge in Webster afforded sweeping views in several directions -- a quiet, peaceful spot where one could love to live, away from most noises except those originating on the place. Here the emphasis was on dairy cattle: some were being trucked away to be exhibited at Hopkinton Fair the day I was there. The house had once been painted, but had been subjected to much weathering. I was conducted through the kitchen, a meandering, filled-up room that served for cooking, eating, washing and, at the moment, as a center for various food processing and pickling operations. On through the lengthy living room to the room beyond, where the ruddy housewife, Mrs. Phelps, helped me clear off the piano, then returned to her preserving.

You don't find a place like this very often. Old or home-made pictures on the walls, class and graduation photos on the mantel, an open fireplace, also a wood-burning stove -- shoved back into a corner for the summer -- braided rugs (one not finished, with a tail of unsewn braid), furniture that had been long lived with. I got busy with some repairs while absorbing the atmosphere. The aroma of an old New Hampshire farmhouse is unmistakable: pleasant cooking fragrances blend with an old chimney smell and a dash of the barn and dairy to produce something I remember from childhood.

After a while Mrs. Phelps came through and inquired, "How is it? It hasn't been tuned for nine years."

"Not in frightfully bad tune, for one that has stood so long. The fact that you have just stove heat would favor its staying in tune; central heat dries out a piano so it goes out faster."

"Thank goodness there's some use in our freezin' to death!"

As I was leaving, I mentioned enjoying the views. It does no harm to appreciate something at a customer's home, and to say so. At this, Mrs. Phelps was pleased, and said, "You can keep right down this road and get back into town another way. My old home where I was brought up is out at the end of this ridge. The buildings are gone, just a camp there now, but we keep the land. Go that way if you want to see a good view." I did so, and the view was delightful.

How many people do you find today living in the same neighborhood where they grew up, and obviously liking it? Little could anyone foresee that before many years that old house would get one final grim warming in a fire that would prove fatal to this grand, capable woman.

* * * * *

On some of these jaunts Daisy came in for kindly attention; people took pity on her as she sat in the car reading. One hot day in Weare she was treated to sherbert and cookies while I worked, a gesture that was not extended to me, but then, I was hired, while Daisy was dooryard company, sort of.

I would caution any beginning piano tuner not to take his wife to the more charming spots: women get ideas that way, and the next thing you know the working vacation will occur at home, working out ideas picked up here and there, and you will still be doing the work. The difference between the outlook of
husband and wife is one of the fascinating aspects of human behavior which merits a lifetime of close attention. After Daisy and I had been married for a couple of months, we made a move in the same neighborhood, and Jim Dechert, who had been married for some years, was the good neighbor with a suitable vehicle who helped me move our furnishings. I remarked, "When a couple move into a different house, the man looks at the condition of the sills and the storm sash, while the woman thinks first of the drapes and the color scheme." Jim smiled knowingly and said, "You'll find it that way throughout life."
PEOPLE

I didn't work at my trade very long before I found that human interest furnished the principal variety of its several aspects. You don't have to agree with everybody, but that is no reason for disagreeing disagreeably. Some people do not strike me as admirable, but most of those can furnish some interest, even if they are remarkable only for cantankerousness. I don't have to live with the ornery ones, and my casual encounters furnish a bit of wry humor. It evens up. How do I know just what impression I make on other people?

Some months after tuning for Mrs. Frederick S. Converse, the widow of a Boston composer, who was then living in Hancock, I received a card in her strong handwriting, inviting me to call on her, as she was getting ready to move, and she wished to give me some of the violin maker's equipment her husband had used as a hobby. I did so, and the interview turned into a luncheon engagement and a talk of substantial content. Mature, undeniably testy on some issues, this grand woman nevertheless radiated general benevolence and good humor. Things came out on a wide range of subjects.

"When my husband decided to become a composer, we went to Germany with two children, and had another while we were there. I knew no German, so I had quite a time to get along and make my wants known. I thought the Bavarian cow might not be very clean, so I thought it would be a good idea to boil the milk for the baby. So I took an English-German dictionary, found a word for 'boil,' and tried to get the point across to the woman who worked for us, but without success. Later, after I had learned a little German, I discovered that I had used the German word for the kind of 'boil' one might have on the neck. No wonder the woman didn't understand!"

"My husband composed many beautiful things. They will be rediscovered sometime. A certain conductor would never play any of them. Someone we knew used to put up money every time this conductor used his things, but my husband wouldn't do that, although he could easily have done so. He used to say to me, 'Oh Emma, I can't endure that couple; they are so Hebraic.' But he had been commissioned to arrange 'The Star-Spangled Banner' for Symphony during an earlier conductorship, so that conductor used some of my husband's music every time Symphony played the anthem, as that arrangement is still used.

"Mr. Converse was a big, hearty man, as you can see from his portrait, and his students loved him. Mason and Hamlin used to supply him with a new piano to use every year, as they said his playing improved so much. Toward the end of his lifetime his left hand became paralyzed, and during that period he wrote a beautiful piano piece for the left hand alone.

"We lost our only son in early childhood. After his death, I had a great desire to sculpture his head, so I started in. I decided to work it up to life
size; it is easier to model that way than at reduced size. My daughter was
studying at the Museum School at the time, so every once in a while I would say
to her, 'Bring me another pound of plasticene when you come home tonight.' At
last the day came when I stood back and said, 'There it is.' I had kept a little
cap the child had worn, so I thought to try it on the head. It just fitted."

She showed me this significant piece of work, a sensitive, lovely thing --
a sweet-looking little boy with a half-smiling expression. "I had it cast in
bronze, but that is not so good; the highlights come in the wrong places." I
agreed to this, seeing the two compared.

"I also did some sculpture for our Episcopal National Cathedral in Wash-
ington. Here is my conception of St. Paul teaching the Corinthians." This small
figure, seated on a simple bench, had a hand raised as if he were expounding a
text, and conveyed a great sense of authority. She brought out another figure,
an aged man starting up from a sitting position with an expression of rapt
wonderment. "This is my conception of St. John receiving the Revelation. My
little granddaughter gave me the best compliment I ever received on this work.
She looked at it a little while, then said, 'I like him, Grammy, he's nice -- but
Grammy, that man looks as if he had been seeing things!"

"I am going to present you with a copy of my book on wine making. Some years
ago a hospital needed to raise some money, and I tried to think what I could do
that would earn anything for the purpose. I was reminded that I could make good
wine. My husband did not care for hard liquor, but he had come to like the wines
while we were in Europe, so I learned how they were made. We grew a lot of grapes
on our place in Westwood. So I wrote this book, and its sale brought in over a
thousand dollars for the hospital."

I accepted the thin volume with thanks. This has amused people who know me,
but the bunch of grapes pictured on the cover is attractive, and I appreciated
her work for a humane cause.

During the luncheon we talked of music and musical people. Some mention
was made of Ethelbert Nevin.

"My husband used to be nauseated at the mere mention of Nevin's music." I
greenly asked why. She fairly spat "Saccharine!" by way of reply.

Luncheon over, she directed the chauffeur to take me home with the violin
things of considerable value that she had given me, despite gasoline rationing
that was in force at the time.
VI

SOUR NOTES

"Music, when soft voices die,
Vibrates in the memory..."

So wrote Shelley. I have heard a lot that I prefer to forget; the voices were not soft, and memory is happier without them. After Quint had me pretty well along in my course of lessons, he remarked, "I'll tell you one thing now that I wouldn't have told you at the start, Chase. There are a good many pianos you used to enjoy that you won't enjoy any longer." True. The tuner hears what other people do not, and the other people should know when they are well off.

The accomplished composer-pianist John LaMontaine told me that he once started to learn tuning, but that he got to listening for the "best" while playing the piano, and it confused him seriously until he left off the tuning effort.

In talking on violin making, I contrast the violin with the guitar, which is equipped with frets along its neck which largely determine pitch and positions, while the violinist must do his fretting mentally. The piano tuner works with a temperament, but must not be temperamental.

The man of the house, a mechanic in another field, looked on while I was tuning the family piano and remarked scornfully, "Aw, it's nothin' but a harp in a box." Add a mechanism to strike the strings, and you just about have it. Its pitch and tuning alter minutely or conspicuously in response to changes in temperature and humidity, its sounding board is subject to unwise cracks, it is the lying-in ward of the moth family, furnishes snug harbor for sundry rodents, receives as great a variety of junk as a town dump, and is the repository for a motley array of chattels.

Often the old upright piano is the only high place in the room, so it catches everything that should be out of reach of small children: the clock (that usually doesn't run), vases and bric-a-brac, piggy banks, jewelry, pill boxes and souvenirs from fairs and Niagara, besides the photos, metronome, and music that are standard equipment. Special monies and valentines are often slid under the scarf.

I recommend one thing to people who are looking for an upright piano: get one with a single-board top, not a top hinged in the center, then when you spill a vase of flowers or a bottle of pop, it will run off the edges instead of leaking through the hinge to drip on the action and loosen the glue.

Now I'm going to let you in on a trade secret, a list of things that can be dropped or dripped into pianos and still have (most of) the keys work:

blankets of linty dirt, which keep the keys from clattering after the felt has been eaten away;
chocolate ice cream (dries to a tacky brown puddle);
pink candle wax -- drizzled between keys, it hardens
into pink wafers like wintergreen mints;
family pictures not seen by owner for 20 years;
roll of Life Savers and other dusty candies;
books and sheet music;
circles and cards from game of lotto;
chocolates that deliquesced and stuck keys together;
coins and toy money; $1 bill;
lottery tickets; firecrackers;
always thumb tacks, pencils, bobby pins;
Ceres' wheat, in Grange piano (moved in by mice,
which left only the chaff);
food crumbs, sandwich crusts, candy papers, apple
cores -- a sort of clandestine litterbugging;
letters, picture post cards;
mouse nests, sometimes occupied;
clarinet mouthpiece cap, reeds, joint wax;
mica, Christmas "snow", tree ornaments;
alphabet building blocks;
OPA red-and-blue-point tokens;
dog bone;
toy balloons;
dried laurel and other bouquet material;
ash tray rubbish, spilled tobacco, new wrapped cigars;
sand, garden soil, cherry stones, peach pits;
keys, knitting needles, crochet hooks, needles, pins;
dog biscuits, moved in by mice;
feathers moul ted by parakeet;
paring & table knives, salt & pepper shakers;
crucifixes, charms, costume jewelry;
marbles (wonderfully effective on sounding boards
of grands and squares);
five bottles of beer;
an immense clipping from someone's big toe.

Elizabeth Gilley informed me upon my arrival, "There is gravel inside my
grand piano. I was potting bulbs on it, and some got spilled." I could not
remove the gravel until I could pull out the action, and I couldn't pull out the
action until the gravel was removed. I was reminded of a law that was passed in
the early days of the American West to the effect that where parallel railroad
tracks existed, when two trains approached each other travelling in opposite
directions, both were to come to a stop, and neither was to start until the other
had gone. In this piano, some of the hammers were blocked up against the strings,
and it took some probing to wiggle things around and correct the trouble. Up to
now, the owner has potted her bulbs elsewhere.

There is also the collection behind the average upright, seldom disturbed by
the tuner unless something rattles against the sounding board. I lost a tool be-
hind one piano, and the man of the house helped me pull out the piano and re-
cover the tool, so we also picked up books, papers, and the dried palms from
several Palm Sundays. Then he said, "Never mind the dirt," and we shoved the
piano back to the wall.

A fastidious woman was so shocked at the (normal) dirt inside her piano that
she insisted upon having it vacuum-cleaned. She said my clothes were too good for
such a job, so she brought in a choice of two pairs of bib overalls. I chose the
pair nearer my size, and started the cleaning. Just then the customer's daughter
came home, and I learned that I was wearing her overalls.

When something rattled behind a piano, I told the woman I would have to pull
it out and investigate. Her husband spoke from upstairs, where he was ill in bed.
In a moment she came down laughing and explained, "He has a bag of old coins hid-
den in back of the piano. He would never tell the rest of us where he kept them,
but now he can't help himself." I moved the piano out from the wall, she took a
heavy little sack from against the sounding board, and the rattle was eliminated.

Many people, intending to compliment a pianist, say, "He sure can make that
old pianino TALK!" To my mind this is as poor a compliment as to say of a smart
dog, "He knows more'n half the men." Mere people can talk. Why not leave the
piano to its own special field of sounding like a piano?

There must be something that appeals to people about the idea of a piano, for,
despite the thoughtless abuse they heap on the poor old things, people still like
pianos, use them, and have them tuned once in a while.
VII

AT THE MACDOWELL COLONY

My introduction to the MacDowell Colony occurred in the late 1930's when Mrs. MacDowell was still active as the manager of that remarkable institution. I had heard that she was in need of a tuner, and applied for a tryout. She directed me, by letter, to correct certain studio pianos, which I did, and came out of the encounter with confidence somewhat shaken. With only three or four years of intermittent tuning behind me, I was still having trouble with the top octave, and those old studio pianos had been "composed on too long by too many people," as a Colonist put it; they were tough enough to challenge the skill of a more seasoned tuner.

Later, Mrs. MacDowell gave me an appointment, and we discussed the tuning. I felt immediately that I was in the presence of a very distinguished person, but an approachable and understanding one. She encouraged me to keep on, to do the very best work of which I was capable, and especially to practice on the top octave, assuring me that years of experience may be required to gain proficiency in that area. I came away from her presence feeling that I certainly should keep trying. A short time after this, she arranged to have me work on a piano that had been willed to the Colony by a Mrs. Souther, described by Mary Beider, Mrs. MacDowell's cook, as "a beautiful player." As Mrs. MacDowell and I rode to the Kirby Studio in my Model A Ford, she told me of some of her garden flowers. At the Star Studio, she had me stop so that she could greet some visitors, then as we started along, she resumed the conversation at the very point where she had broken it off. She saw to it that we came to an agreement on a price for the work, explaining in her most ingratiating manner, "I should never question the matter of price if we had plenty of money, but you see this is an altruistic thing, and we're always in debt."

She told me of her working day, a very full schedule, with time set aside for correspondence, for interviews, for the affairs of the Colony and of the Association -- "Too much for an old woman, but then, I do it."

"This Colony, for the most part, was not built up by people of great wealth," she said. "It has been the working people who have built it up. I am living in Peterborough every summer, and I haven't been inside a Dublin house for ten years."

Point is added to her remark by a story told by an old Peterborough resident. When Mrs. MacDowell was founding the Colony as a memorial to her husband, she secured an appointment with a noted New York financier whom she had met socially, and told him of her plan, apparently hoping to secure some backing for the effort. He heard of her dream, told her that he had always admired her and her late husband, whose work he appreciated, and stated that he would set up a fund of $1,000,000 from which she could have the income for life if she would give up that crazy idea. She backed away with the composure of a true lady, and
went out to found her Colony single-handed.

Years after my first encounter, I was called to the Colony when a change of tuners was needed. Being by then more experienced, and much thicker-skinned, I was able to do acceptable work. I was shown around by George Hemphill, who had worked around the Colony a long time. If I had any feeling of awe about the place or the people, George's comments dispelled it. In showing me the locations of the several piano studios, and most of the seven miles of roads within the Colony grounds, he chatted amiably about former occupants of the studios.

"The joker who was in here last year used to adjust the chain on his bike, then come in and play the piano." Evidence of this remained on the keys...."The jasper who had this one last year used to flog the piano. He would dash across the room and come down on those keys with a great haymaker swing. We had to do some work in here, so we moved him to another studio where there is a concert grand in a small room to see if it wouldn't cure him. After a week of it he came out punch-drunken, but still flogging the piano. But they're not all that way. Some of 'em are the moony type -- they sit there and barely stroke the keys, and you can hardly hear 'em."

A friend of my neighbor's was touring the Colony with a small party, seeing the few parts of it that are open to visitors. As the dinner hour approached, the party reached Colony Hall, which houses the dining room. They asked a kitchen worker if they could buy a dinner there. "Oh, no," she replied, motioning toward the dining room, "these is all geniuses." One might assent to this with some reservations. Once when I was looking for George Hemphill, I saw him talking with a Colonist in front of the women's dormitory; he often did errands for these people. She handed him some folding money, and he came down the walk grinning broadly. Then the Colonist called after him, "I think it's called 'Johnny Walker.'"

I mentioned this incident to George years afterward, and he told me, "When I tried to give her back her change she said, 'Be off with you, or I'll tear the arm off of you and best you to death with the stump.'" So there are manifestly ways, short of arduous labor, of working up a perspiration, and this, according to Thomas A. Edison, constitutes ninety-eight per cent of genius.

* * * * *

The rather austere Watson Studio was used for some portion of almost every season, from 1921 until shortly before her passing, by Mrs. H. H. A. Beach. Here she composed during the mornings, being one of the earliest of the Colonists to have breakfast and get to work. She might invite a friend from another studio to come and visit over their basket lunches, "Then she would play just one piece for you and turn you out," as playwright Esther Willard Bates later recalled. During the afternoons, Mrs. Beach practiced, but she would not waste time just practicing on the piano. She propped a book up on the music rack and read while practicing Bach and the technical studies she had learned during childhood. In this way she read all the novels of Henry James, and much else. In this same studio she wrote charming descriptive pieces about the birch trees that swayed in the wind just outside the windows, and about a Peterborough chipmunk.
For many years an old black Steinway stood in the Watson Studio, wherein occurred a little tragedy which Mrs. Beach might have memorialized in a piano piece, had she known of it, but the matter is left to my prosy pen. I had noticed mouse nibblings on the end keys and on the inner edge of the lid. When I had occasion to pull out the action, I found, in back of the treble hammers, about two quarts of flossy material, laboriously filched from some pillow or mattress, and in the midst of it, the desiccated remains of a mouse. He had enjoyed during a summer the run of the studio and the pick of crumbs left from lunches, but when the piano was closed for the winter he was shut inside, and had starved and expired. From his tragic demise I deduce two conclusions:

(1) That an appetite for the aesthetic does not provide sufficient sustenance to sustain animate existence, and,

(2) That an instrument built to withstand the onslaughts of concert pianists will not surrender to the application of one mousepower.

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At various times I asked George Hempill about some former Colonist. Upon mentioning the name of a pianist whose recordings I had enjoyed, he told me, "He sort of got washed out of this place. He is rated pretty well around New York. I guess he made too much of a social thing of it here -- took too much of the other Colonists' time -- one of those smart fellows like some we have had here. Most of these composers plug away all day long. Not all of them are talented the way Copland is; he composes just two hours a day -- has a system and keeps to it."

In the serious purposes of the Colony there is little room for the sightseer and casual caller, but occasionally some Colonist is kind enough to show his studio to visitors. I was working in a piano studio when the occupant brought in a party of guests. A woman asked, "What do you do?" He replied, "I am a composer -- the most modern music." "Oh," she said, "in other worlds, you do music."

After his working day was over, George Barati, then conductor of the Honolulu Symphony, who was working at composition in the Sprague-Smith Studio, graciously invited our party into the studio when Daisy and I were showing a friend a little of the Colony. Our friend had travelled rather widely, and she and Mr. Barati conversed about places in Germany that they both knew. He told us he had been in several cities in Germany, since the close of World War II, conducting concerts, Darmstadt and Cobentz being two of the places, and at those concerts many of the younger generation of Germans heard Mendelssohn's music for the first time. One of the blights fostered by the Nazi cultural purge.

At various times Mrs. MacDowell had work to discuss with me, and on each occasion she said something memorable. At one such call, she came downstairs without assistance, except that a woman went ahead of her. She greeted me in her usual hearty voice. "Good morning, Mr. Chase. Don't you think I do pretty well for a woman ninety years old who had a broken hip last year?" I agreed. She inquired about the condition of the studio pianos, and asked for a list of recom-
mendations for their upkeep, explaining, "This modern music is hard on a piano. The piano in the Kirby Studio was pretty good, but we have had composers in there who have beaten it down, young Foss, for one. In scoring their music they get onto an instrumental part of a few notes and just pound it over and over."

A few years later, when I had another interview with this remarkable woman, she opened the conversation by saying, "You will excuse me for not recognizing you. I can make out the outlines of a person's face, but just as if I were seeing them through a whole tub of water." She spoke of discussing repair of pianos with Mrs. Howe. "She is one of our directors, and a very fine person. She is also a very good musician. Well, I used to be a pretty good musician myself, if I do say so. Mrs. Howe will be able to decide what the pianos need; she is not like most of the people who come here; she is wealthy and influential."

I mentioned that the pianos had rusted more in the studios with ceilings than in those without, the latter having a better circulation of air. "I know that," she said, "I never favored having ceilings in the studios I had to do with building, but some of the later ones have ceilings, as some thought they would be cooler in summer. Perhaps I was stupid."

"I don't believe you were ever stupid."

"We talked with Mr. Steinway about leaving the pianos in the unheated studios. He said any amount of cold wouldn't hurt them, but that it is a sudden change from cold to hot that is bad for them."

* * * * *

The time came when Mrs. MacDowell had to give up her post as Colony manager, and everyone was glad that she could have a few summers at Hillcrest free from the cares of that demanding work.

A Colony manager for a short time was a former Colonist whose qualifications for the job were that, "She understands artistic people." This was the standard explanation; I heard it on all sides. Anyone holding that position following Mrs. MacDowell was bound to be overshadowed by her stature, but this person was of a type that caused practical people in the locality to grin and shake their heads. She usually appeared in classical-looking robes, her hair drawn into a little bun over each ear, and with a manner suggesting extreme boredom. I once had a necessary interview with this manager, and felt that I was being scarcely tolerated throughout. A lady Colonist appeared at the door, whereupon the manager rushed forward to deliver a theatrical kiss. After seating the caller in the adjoining room she returned, but not to resume our talk, for, like Emily Dickinson's soul, she had closed

"...the valves of her attention
Like stone."

That was one time I did not have to be hit over the head with a baseball bat. I walked out.
WE BUILD AGAIN

As I said earlier, a wife gets ideas by seeing the more attractive homes and locations around the country. Never underestimate the power of a wife, the principal polishing agent in that gentle but ceaseless process of attrition by which the rough corners of a man are rounded off and he is shaped into a husband. As Daisy and I took a working vacation at the MacDowell Colony occasionally over a period of years, she grew to admire the several substantial stone studios which stand in woodland glades in that large tract set aside for the use of producing workers in the arts. This did not result in any decrees, but just in wishfulness that came out in such seemingly mild statements as, "It would be nice if we could have a stone house sometime." This is the gentle part. The repetition of this or a similar softly voiced desire -- never uttered often enough to alert one to rear his defenses against it -- is part of the ceaseless process of attrition. Now I couldn't imagine that an undesigning and devoted wife would bide her time and voice her wish only when communication between us was particularly cordial and the mood expansive; it just happened that way. Getting a new idea accepted involves a technique somewhat like changing a horse's feed. You mix a handful of the new grain with his regular ration, next time two handfuls, reducing the old kind by the same amount. After a while he is converted to the new feed altogether, and by then he likes it. An abrupt change would have resulted, like as not, in rejection or some sort of upset. There was no upset at "Kozyhome." After the idea of a stone house had been made sufficiently familiar, I just walked willingly into the stall and was halted before I knew it. The day came when I said in the most casual manner, "We've got that knoll up in the woods with the makings of a good view, and plenty of stones nearby. Let's start in." By that offhand remark I got myself into an engrossing six-year project.

A couple of years after we had moved into "Kozyhome," I bought an adjoining tract of woodland from a neighbor's widow -- "78 acres, more or less" -- which had some road frontage, extended along the railroad for a plump half mile, and bounded my original 12-acre tract along one side and across one end, an ell-shaped piece that included three knolls, an overgrown meadow, trout brook, three small swales, deer and rabbit swamp.

Between the "Kozyhome" lot and this adjoining tract was a double stone wall. The early farmers, hauling stones off their fields year after year, often built such walls, facing up the sides with fairly good laying stone, and filling in between with small cobbles and odd-shaped pieces, to a considerable width and height, so it served as both rockpile and boundary, and in our day makes an excellent source of material for stone work.

Daisy and I walked the short distance to the top of the knoll and looked over the spot. The cutting of timber had opened up a partial view of Crotched Mt. and the pond that is part of the Contoocook River. We knew that further cutting would improve the outlook. Working at odd moments, we cleared away gray
birch scrub and brush, then, after laying out our ground plan, I started digging trenches and laying footings. By hiring a truck for short periods we got rocks and sand hauled, dumping these materials within the area measured off, so that the surface around the outside was not disturbed. After raking the surface and digging away leaf mould and a thin layer of loam, which we used to fill hollows nearby, the subsoil proved to be gravelly, most of it suitable for mixing mortar, so it was not necessary to haul in much except stones that first summer. I just kept digging a trench about 2 feet wide and of a suitable depth around the marked area, and filling it with stone and mortar until the footing extended all the way around. Stonework is best done at a leisurely rate; I got our house up to the surface of the ground that summer. It required small quantities of cement and water at any one time, and these I got up to the site by hand or wheelbarrow.

What is a vacation? To us it is something we do that we enjoy, a change from our regular occupations, something that balances the very controlled motions of an exacting trade with a freer use of the larger muscles and motions. If it is laborious, all the better. People do their hardest work in the name of sport. My brother Steve used to tell his helpers at mason work, "Make a game of it." Daisy and I did just that. After a day of tuning it was more relaxing to stroll out after supper and utilize the long daylight to work on that project than to drive away in the car and do something conventional. Daisy would appear, along toward dusk, maybe with a glass of lemonade and a cookie, but chiefly to pick up mortar scraps and stone chips that fell on the outside. She was the zealous picker-up all through the job, and the only woman I know who started housekeeping before the foundation was completed.

Our site slopes away in all directions, is partially shaded by pines and mixed growth, and we observed early in the effort that it was a delightful spot at any time of day, and one that could be improved by our own efforts at small expense. The pageant of growth unfolded before us with day-to-day change, from the first cheery red bloom on the maples in early spring to the last golden leaves twinkling on the poplars in the wan sunlight of late autumn. The more intimate changes in the foreground and undergrowth were also a delight. A few warm days in May would bring the Canadian Mayflower foliage spearing its way up through the carpet of needles in tightly rolled points that spread into tender green leaves, soon to bear foamy blooms. Ferns and bracken pushed up their scrolls. We observed a different variety of birdlife in the grove than we had seen at "Kozyhome" a short distance away. Towhees and wood thrushes were plentiful, and, over the river, fish hawks and great blue herons.

We were in the grasp of something that fascinated us -- which was being loved into existence.
IX

TO TUNE OR NOT TO TUNE

There is nothing harder to come by in any field of work than good judgment, and nothing more needed. In passing judgment on pianos, their value, and whether they are worth tuning or not, one has to consider many factors not bearing directly on their musical merit. Would it be feasible to move one piano out and move another in? Sometimes the house has been remodelled so that the piano will not go around the existing corners. Not everyone is as fortunate in such a case as the people whose apartment opened onto a barn scaffold: they just rolled the piano cut onto the scaffold, rigged a rope sling, and let it down two stories with the hayfork mechanism. Didn't hurt it a bit.

Sometimes the people need to be sized up rather than the piano. If they are not conspicuously musical, and the piano will be used mainly for recreational strumming, a specimen that would not gladden a musician's heart may serve the purpose.

Let me rant a bit against the notion that anything is good enough for a child to start lessons on. Mechanically and financially, this may hold true, but not musically. Somewhere I acquired a fixed idea that the development of musical talent is the principal reason for starting piano lessons. The piano ought at least to be in recognizable tune, so I have struggled with some stubborn hand-me-downs because I knew that if I didn't put them into a semblance of good tune, little Susie or Willie would have to thump on them just the same.

I know one couple who threaten faithfully to have their piano tuned if their child ever starts lessons. This is a right idea, but they are thinking of tuning as a long-term investment, like adding a fireplace or having a well drilled, rather than as a matter of upkeep. I sat through several chorus rehearsals in the residence of these good folks and listened philosophically to the pleasant jangle of that piano, reflecting that at least I knew how it could be fixed, which does not hold true of people who sing out of tune. There is no known tool that can sharpen the tones from the human throat or wrench up the mental processes that determine pitch, but who knows how many people sing off pitch through having adjusted unconsciously to a piano badly out of tune?

Mrs. Mildred Porter of Hillsboro used to give me a list of her pupils' families where tuning was needed. At one house I came across as chaotic-sounding a piano as ever came under my hammer. Mrs. Porter told me later that the next time the girl who used the piano came for her lesson, she was almost in tears and said, "It doesn't sound like my piano any more." That was years ago, so probably by now it has returned to her established norm. Tragic. She must have had a musical sense, for she noticed the difference, but it had been turned awry before I could save the situation. I seriously believe this sort of wrong start could lead to frustration later in life.
Take 1.1 for 1, 1.9 for 2, 3½ for 3, and so on, setting up a whole set of falsified values, then use them in working out problems, calling the process arithmetic, and you will not be any farther from mathematical truth than you are from musical truth when you try to make music on a piano badly out of tune.

It is, however, a tribute to persistence to see how some children keep on with lessons despite pianistic handicaps. One little girl practiced faithfully for over a year on a piano that had a silent note in the middle octave. Then, her parents decided that she really meant business, and had the piano tuned and the note repaired.

While tuning a piano that had needed it for a long time, the young lad who played on it came in, so I asked him, "How many years have you been taking lessons?" "Five," he replied. "What! On this piano?" I queried, not concealing my shock. "Why," said the boy, completely unaware, "was it out of tune?"

"Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed your leaves, nor ever bid the spring adieu."

After completing one tuning that was greatly needed, my efforts drew forth a most gratifying comment. The trained musician who used the piano came in, struck some chords, and said, "Ah, now the dissonances are harmonic."
TRADESMAN'S DELIGHT -- AND DIGNITY

The hunter setting forth for the day tests the tension of his bow with a surge of energy and a tingle of expectation; the woodchopper gingerly runs his thumb along the edge of his axe and feels its keenness with satisfaction; the carpenter starting his job looks over approvingly the tools in his chest, which he has made keen and bright to accomplish their purpose; the piano tuner, starting out, reaches behind the car seat and touches his tool kit. Everyone with a skill feels a sense of exhilaration in the fact that he can do his particular job creditably, that it is in demand, that he is trained and equipped for it. Maybe this feeling of gladness and adequacy is on the wane in human experience; if so, I'm glad to live while its afterglow lingers. It supplies an incentive to carry on, over and above the dollars earned, and which is likely to last a lot longer.

Coupled with the tradesman's delight and a just estimate of one's worth is a sense of the dignity of one's occupation. My late friend and neighbor Leonard S. Rankin, a craftsman and enamelist of distinction, told me, "I left my former location and came to New Hampshire because here I find more appreciation of the individual craftsmen and his product. Where I used to live, if you had a product that was selling well, people thought you were crazy if you didn't hire twenty men and make it by the thousand, but the kind of thing I like to make is too individual to be mass-produced, and too distinctive to find a wholesale market."

A just estimate of one's worth should be constant, but there are highly variable factors involved in the reaction of others. A surprisingly large number of my customers have assumed that a tuner is one who settled on mechanics after flunking out at the keyboard. I can only say that if you think tuning is a pushover or a second-rate skill, try it. Some people have a gadfly genius; after some harmless buzzing about, they implant the barb. A professional in the music field once told me, "Howard, I've often thought you ought to be doing something better than tuning pianos. Most of the piano tuners I've known worked in a machine shop, and did tuning on the side to earn extra money." Upon hearing me quote this remark, a perceptive boy offered this soothing balm: "He's that way, but you have carved out your own unique life."

Another unwarranted assumption, usually on the part of someone who has a job for me once in several years, is that I am just sitting at home waiting for their job to come along. It fairly burns Daisy up when someone telephones right in the middle of a working day and is amazed to find that I am not right there ready to jump at their beck and call.

Then there are those who marvel that anyone can work at tuning full time; they are rating everyone else by their own casual interest in the piano. So a tuner has to know where his feet are placed, and why, and not get either elated or depressed over the views of people who have never given the subject any serious thought.
In the parish hall of the Deering Center Church I had to tune an 1886 upright that had not been tuned for five years. The minister's wife, who played quite well, ran over the piano later in the day and found one note high in the treble that had gone flat, and told me about it in a nice way. I was glad to go back and yank it up again, informing her during our conversation, "The same thing could be said of a job of piano tuning that has been said of literary style, namely, that it is not a total absence of faults, but the presence of conspicuous virtues, that makes the effort commendable."

* * * * *

I find it easy to tolerate youngsters, whose lack of conventional perspective is refreshing, as is also the bluntness resulting from it. A pert preschool boy, Kevin Pettee, supplied me with a ready-made sub-title for this opus. As I was tuning his mother's piano, every little while he would ask, with growing impatience, "How long are you going to play that song?" I could give him only half-answers, so unsatisfactory to a child, until he reached a point of foot-stamping exasperation and exclaimed, "You play a stupid song!"
COLONY ROSTERS

The names of creative workers who have been benefited by the MacDowell Colony's nearly ideal working conditions make a long list which includes a noteworthy share of the important producing writers, composers, poets, sculptors, and painters in America. Reading the names of occupants of each studio through the years is fascinating and revealing. A pine board is provided for this purpose, and each worker records his name, usually his occupation, and the year. Some studios date back to the early 'teens and 'twenties, and several boards full of names bear significant testimony to the value of this unique institution in our cultural life.

In addition to the better known arts represented, a number of less common occupations are to be noted: theologian, historian, music historian, folk musician, wood carver, "wood chopper," "a crashing amateur" (a composer), translator, "pretzel bender," "Fraud," and even "a weaver of garlands," whether poetic or floral not stated.

Certain studios are suited to having pianos. A writer who was put into such a studio complained after a few days that the piano dominated the studio and hindered his work. The working force removed the piano for the remainder of his stay. Some studios are adapted to the needs of "mud-flingers -- sculptors and casters," as George Hemphill put it, or specially suitable for painters. There are twenty-odd studios, all have certain features in common, most are separated enough to be quiet, each is individual in some respects.

Here is a list copied from the Monday Music Club Studio boards as faithfully as possible in view of present legibility:

Monday Music Club Studio

1914

Agnes Crimmings  Playwright  1914
Henry F. Gilbert  Composer  1915
Arthur Nevin   "  1916
Carl Venth   "  1916
Lewis Mikaars   "  1918
Rossetter Cole   "  1918
Ethel Glenn Hier  "  1918
Charles S. Skilton  "  1919
Wintter Watts  "  1920
Arthur Nevin   "  1916
"   "  1917
"   "  1921
Mabel W. Daniels  "  1921
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title and Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rossetter G. Cole</td>
<td>Composer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethel Glenn Hier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arthur Nevin</td>
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<td>Margaret Starr McLain</td>
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<td>Lazar Saminsky</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethel M. Kelley</td>
<td>Writer</td>
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<td>Helen W. Dyckman</td>
<td>Composer</td>
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<td>Roy Harris</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Margaret Starr McLain</td>
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<tr>
<td>Louise Ayres Garnett</td>
<td>Composer &amp; Writer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Powell Weaver</td>
<td>Composer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frances Marion Ralston</td>
<td>Composer &amp; Writer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rossetter Cole</td>
<td>Composer</td>
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<td>Powell Weaver</td>
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<td>Edith Merrielees</td>
<td>Writer</td>
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<td>Mabel W. Daniels</td>
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<td>Raymond Vickers</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mary Howe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethel Glenn Hier</td>
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<td>Carl Buchman</td>
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<td>Robert W. Manton</td>
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<td>Charles Haubiel</td>
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<td>Susannah W. Armstrong</td>
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<td>Henry Woodward</td>
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<td>Dorothy James</td>
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<td>Jacques Pi Rois</td>
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<td>Charles Wakefield Cadman</td>
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<td>Sol Cohen</td>
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<td>Marion Bauer</td>
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<td>Spencer Norton</td>
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<td>Walter Jenkins</td>
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<td>Harold Morris</td>
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<td>Susannah Armstrong Coleman</td>
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<td>Edwin J. Stringham</td>
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<td>Edith Orr</td>
<td>Writer</td>
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<td>Katherine Dunlap</td>
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<td>Hazel Gertrude Kinsella</td>
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<td>Felix Roderick Labunski</td>
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<td>Louise Talma</td>
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<td>Esther Willard Bates</td>
<td>Writer</td>
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<td>Lukas Foss</td>
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<td>Gardner Read</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laura Williams</td>
<td>Writer</td>
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<td>Bentz Plagemann</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td>Roland Sleich</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td>George Barati</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alice Dixon Bond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alfred Kreyborg</td>
<td>Poet</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clara Greuning Stillman</td>
<td>Writer</td>
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<td>J----- Clarke</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<td>Boris Todrin</td>
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Jane Mayhall  Writer  1949
Mary Colum  "  1950
Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant  "  1950
Elizabeth (Etnier H-ll)  "  1950
Madeleine Goss  "  1950
Vladimir Ussachevsky  Composer  1951
Elaine Gottlieb  Writer  1951
Amy Bonner  "  1951
Jean Gould  "  1952
Doris Davis  "  1952
Madeleine Goss  "  1952
Norman Vogel  Composer  1953
Howard Moss  Writer  1953
Neil Weiss  Poet  1953
Esther Williamson Ballou  Composer  1954
Mark Bucci  "  1954
Russell Smith  "  1955
Lester Trimble  "  1955
Henrietta Buckmaster  Writer  1955
Robert Campbell  Song Writer  1955
Margaret Mackay  Writer  1955-56
Ruth Anderson  Composer-flutist  1956
Violet Archer  Composer  1956
Lachlan MacDonald  Writer  1956
Madeleine Goss  "  1956
Ernst Toch  Composer  1956
Marjorie Fischer  Writer  1956-7
Adria Locke Langley  "  1957
August Kagow  Poet  1957
Michiko Toyama  Composer  1957
Ralph Shapey  "  1957
Tom Doremus  (signed in paint)  1957
John Berry  Writer  1958
Adria Locke Langley  "  1958

This is a representative studio. The Colony adapted this and some other studios for year-round use about 1955. The boards at the Watson Studio contain such names as Mrs. H.H.A. Beach, Ernst Bacon, and Gail Kubik among composers. Elinor Wylie and Lizette Woodworth Reese among the poets, Modest Altschuler, conductor, and many others.

In one studio I saw the signature of Robert Haven Schauffler, whose writings contain a gem to the effect that although the instrument is properly the piano-forte, fortissi are more plentiful than pianists.

In the Sorosis Studio, a talented young woman signed herself as "composer and musicologist." The next occupant was a mature man, well established in the field of musical composition, who signed himself as "composer only." Later, another composer, who knew the young woman's family, told me that this follow-up had caused her endless embarrassment. I mentioned the matter, up to this point, to still another composer, who explained, "There is a traditional antagonism between the composer and the musicologist or critic. The composer is apt to regard
the musicologist as a sort of musical eunuch -- one who talks about music, but can't do."

In the Wood Studio, built in 1913, the first Colonist to sign his name was Fred Ballard, Playwright, 1914, placed a respectful distance below the heading. Through the years, the board got filled with names all the way to the bottom, then along came Oscar Williams in June, 1943, who squeezed his name in between that of Fred Ballard and the heading, with the parenthetical comment "30 years later there is still room at the top," which will no doubt hold equally true after sixty years, or ninety.
THE WALLS APPEAR

Come spring, 1955, it didn't take much nudging by Daisy to get me to start building up the principal walls. A real stone mason prefers not to work against a form; his work should stand on its own merit. Being essentially artistic rather than mechanical, a better result is obtainable by developing a feeling for the character of each stone. One with a true flat surface can be laid to a line, but one with a rounded contour looks better when laid to crowd the line a little, averaging the effect of the roundness. Finding enough squarish stones to lay up the outside corners and window and door openings is something of a challenge, as so many of our native rocks are roundish, or are nondescript, with no commendable shape. Normally, you use the best stones to face up the outside surface that will show, and use up the rough and odd pieces laying up the back. Turning the stones over from time to time reveals surfaces and shapes that you can use, which you never knew existed from the first viewing. Avoiding stones that will streak iron rust down the finished wall is a study; some are rust-stained that do not have an iron content, but add pleasing variety of color to the general result.

Another aspect of stone work that requires foresight is to maintain a build, always leaving a top surface that can be added to successfully and kept uniform in width. Keeping the corners a little higher than the middle of a wall area, and the face higher than the back, is helpful. Anyone might wonder where enough suitable corners could be found. We picked them up gradually, brought a few choice ones from public beaches we visited on the New Hampshire seacoast, found a few where road construction was being carried on, kept a sharp eye for discarded gravel rock cast up on the banks of country roads. I knew where there were two handsome square corners tumbled down in a worked-out gravel pit on the roadside. The trouble was that every time I stopped the car there and admired them, a pack of mongrel dogs came yapping from a tarpaper camp nearby, affronting my dignity. But patience pays off; a day came when both people and dogs were away, and those rocks were elevated from the status of roadside rubble to that of building material in a unique effort.

Daisy took a great fancy to a stone on the beach that sparkled in the sun, so we brought it home early in our operation; it was a prime illustration of the difference in the man's and the woman's viewpoints -- the woman likes a stone that is pretty, the man, one that is good to build with. So on her inspection tours the question often was, "When are you going to use my stone?" This went on until the front wall was half built, then in a fit of desperation I propped up the roly-poly thing with some stone chips, threw a little mortar around the base, and backed away, scarcely daring to breathe for a couple of days. It is still in place.

Through the years, we had saved odd-colored stones on the wall at "Kozyhome" for no planned purpose, but now we looked them over critically for building material. Daisy showed good judgment in picking specimens for the facade. Stone
work never progresses at a spectacular rate, so I had time that summer to pick up useful material as I drove around the country. I would often bring home a few stones of some merit, push them up the knoll in the wheelbarrow, then go up after supper, mix a little mortar, and lay them. Some ledge containing flecks of salmon-colored mineral was blasted out in making the spillway for the MacDowell Dam. I worked in several of these fragments, also a flat green stone I found in the road ditch near Hillsboro Upper Village one rainy day.

By early fall the longest parallel walls of the structure had been built up full height, with bolts set along the top for securing the plate.

After working much of your time on things that will have to be done over again sometime, there is deep satisfaction in turning to work of a permanent nature. I found out just how durable stone work can be when I had to make holes in the wall or footing for electric cables and water pipe. I did not have a clear idea of this need or of its location when the wall was laid; it would have been so much easier to leave openings when the walls were being laid. Hindsight costs dear.

My brother Stephen, who did mason work as a business, did not admit for a long time that he had noticed my building effort. At the end of the year after I had built the longest walls, he presented me with a calendar advertising his trade, and I said, "That's a pretty good calendar for anyone to get who does his own mason work." He looked a trifle foxy, but said nothing. The following spring, when he came to see me about another matter, I asked him to walk up and look over my stone job, so he trudged up the knoll with me, looked at the stone-work approvingly, then admitted, "I've been watchin' all winter t' see if 'twas goin' t' stay up."

When the Hancock selectmen were making their rounds to assess property on April 1st after my effort had risen above ground level, Ernest Adams, a very practical man, asked me, "What d'ye want to build a stone house for, anyway, Chase?" "Well, I'll tell ye, Ern, it won't need paintin'." He put on a look of incredulous pity for anyone who would go to all that work just to save a paint job.

About this time, when the new domicile was at an early but sturdy stage of growth, Daisy and I started thinking about a name for it. We thought of and discarded a variety of names that were somewhat descriptive of the location, the view, or the surrounding woodland, most of which could be seen on name signs all around the country. We wanted something unique or at least unusual, but descriptive and applicable. Not so easy. Over several years, we almost reached a stalemate of proposal and reaction. I would put on a bright, expectant look upon arriving home from work and say, "I've thought of just the right name." Daisy would show mild interest, and I would announce "GATHERED ROCKS." Then she would wear a deprecating expression, best managed as a wifely reaction, which said plainer than words, "You can't be serious."
COLONY TIDBITS

Miss Fannie Charles Dillon, composer-pianist, a lady of the old school, told of an encounter with another Colonist:

"At a gathering of Colonists I was seated next to a young composer, and he started in with, 'What kind of stuff do you write?' I was a little taken aback, and replied, 'I am not sure that I am capable of evaluating my own work. What kind of stuff do you write?' He went on, 'My teacher says no woman can write any music worth listening to. As for myself, the whole field of musical composition was in a chaotic state from the time of Johann Sebastian Bach until I took over.'

"At another gathering, this same young man played the piano for us; he played some classical sonatas, played them well, and we enjoyed hearing them. Then he started playing his own stuff -- cacophony -- they don't like the word, but that's what it is, and people began to leave, a few at a time. Now shouldn't you think that he would have suspected something?"

* * * * *

While working on the piano in the Colony library, I overheard two music professors chatting about Bach's manuscripts. One gem came out, delivered in mincing exact diction: "One thing I especially admire in his work is that despite all his apparent complexity, he still maintains an essential strophic simplicity." I wanted to sit gaping in the sun after that.

* * * * *

Two lesser Colony sparrows were twittering around the edges of preparations for Marian MacDowell Day in 1952, much like hopeful but frustrated mosquitoes outside a screened window. There was some talk of Thornton Wilder, who was to introduce the evening program: "Just think of it," one said in a completely italicized tone of voice tinged with exasperation, "that man has written only six books, and he's world famous!" Mr. Wilder's stature among Colonists is monumental, not only because of his outstanding work, but also on account of apt sallies such as this: A seasoned Colonist told me that a very assured young person, a newcomer, asked Mr. Wilder a question that was not a good question on the subject in hand, or not well put. Mr. W. smiled and replied, "I'll see you in class."

* * * * *

A Colonist of many summers who was serving as librarian one season told me that a course of indoctrination for newcomers might well be instituted. Toward the close of that season, a man who had been in residence all summer came to this librarian and inquired, "Say, just what did MacDowell do? What was his line?"

* * * * *

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Composer-pianist James Reistrup made this comment on performances: "I go out and play for an audience, and they applaud me, but I feel I should share the applause with Chopin, or whoever wrote the music, with the people who built the piano, and with the man who tuned it."

***

A composer long known to me, Richard Winslow, the father of an active family, ran across me on the Colony grounds during his first stay there. I asked how he liked the place. "Oh, wonderful, after you get used to the eternal solitude."

***

While doing some repairs on a studio piano, the affable musician who was using the place was glad to engage in a bit of conversation. We mentioned several contemporary and recent composers, and this man's comments on them were stimulating. I chanced to refer to Enesco, and his reaction was, "Oh, I know his works are popular orchestral pieces -- the Roumanian Rhapsody and all that, but he is a derivative composer." This was delivered in a tone that should have withered Enesco or anyone else who got within range. I thought to myself that there might be some slight lack of originality on the part of parrots who strut along in the half-steps of Schonberg or plain Berg.

***

Lee Hoiby, working at opera composition, told me, "I find that I have to be cautious about mentioning my teacher, Menotti, around here, as these fellows dismiss him by saying he is 'traditional,' but it is not so easy to dismiss the fact that an all-Menotti program was performed recently at Lewisohn Stadium."

Mr. Hoiby went on to say, "A great many people misjudge what goes on here at the Colony because they do not understand how a creative talent works. They see someone just lying around thinking and reading for most of his stay here, and conclude that he is loafing. After completing a work, one is likely to feel drained for a while. He may have worked intensely up to the point of completion, then he feels the need of relaxing; he needs a period of storing up ideas before his next creative effort, but this is an aspect of creative work that most people outside the artistic fields do not understand."
At Sacred Heart School in Greenville, I worked during the tenure of several sisters who taught the piano to the children of the parish, beginning with a sweet-faced little nun who did not hold up very well under the rigors of the contemplative life. It was a neatly organized system. I would be given a list of families whose pianos needed tuning, a child would ride along with me at the close of the school session to point out where the parties lived. The sister would occasionally coach me in regard to some family: "Dey haven' got much, so be as reas'-nable as you can." But I observed that even these "poor" families had a television before Daisy and I had one, and a fair show of other features of modernity.

The sisters varied in the degree to which they had been able to shut the world out of their lives. One who was generally crisp and businesslike did relax the Rule long enough to sit and visit with me about music for half an hour after I had finished the tuning, obviously enjoyed doing so, and probably obtained a supply of fresh thoughts to fill in the spaces between rosaries.

The ultimate in benevolence was manifested by kindly, mature Sister St. Jeanne D'Arc, a teaching nun for over fifty years, who showed me how much two of her beginners had learned of the fundamentals of musical notation in a few weeks. These little girls, grinning shyly, answered every question correctly. "At first they were just bebbies -- they would cry when the sister looked at them, but now they don't cry any more." She beamed upon them and patted them affectionately. I could see how they had blossomed in the warmth of her love. After the children had been dismissed she said, "Teaching the children is my life. When I get too old to teach, I want to die and go to heaven." I felt she had already experienced much of heaven.

At another time this sister told me, "I was questioning the children about the catechism, and when I asked, 'What state must I be in, in order to enter heaven?' (correct answer: A state of grace) one child replied 'The state of Massachusetts.' When the mother of our order comes to visit, I shall tell her of this, then I shall ask, 'How do you think I shall ever get to heaven up here in New Hampshire?""

The last time I saw Sister St. Jeanne she told me, "I think I may be transferred next fall. Several times when our mother has visited she has made little remarks, such as that there is a certain parish where there is no music program, and at another time that it is better to have an experienced nun to start a music program, and that she would not put a young nun in charge of teaching the music in a school where music was to be taught for the first time."

"Sister," I said, "you have become very skillful at reading between the lines." She smiled in pleased agreement. After she had paid me, she said, a little wistfully, "I hope we may meet again."
Although a friend who had lived in Japan observed that a Japanese is likely to select one of his choicest possessions to give to a friend, while an American looks over his things to see what he doesn't need, when making a gift, I have found that most people like to share, even when the recipient is an acquaintance as a piano tuner.

A young girl, stirring something in a mixing bowl and looking very domestic in her cute little apron, came in to watch me work. She was making gingerbread. Later, as I was leaving, she presented me with a foil-wrapped package, explaining, "Some hot gingerbread for you and your wife." It stayed warm, too, and we enjoyed it.

Customers have shared thinnings of iris and other perennials, even an offset of a choice lilac, and thriving clumps of these remain as a reminder of their giving. A woman in Hillsboro, responding to my interest in her garden, asked, "Do you have any arabis?" I did not, so she opened a new packet of seed and shared generously. For years after her passing, areas of this low-growing plant straggled among my haphazard borders and sent up, in early spring, their many stems of bloom which, like all white flowers, are especially lovely in moonlight.

Countess de Pierrefeu, essentially a mystic, presented me with a slim volume of her privately printed verse, in which I found several things that I admire very much.

Glasses of jelly or jam have come our way, and now and then a squash or other garden produce. Besides things to take home, spontaneous offers of snacks have often been welcome. A tall, friendly boy, Tommy Sargent, came in to watch me tune. He was gnawing a large drumstick. "Want some -- cold turkey?" he asked, between bites, "Can have -- a sanwich." I showed interest, and his mother proceeded to produce the item, with extras. I recall Charlotte Derby's ginger-nut sundae that was delectable......also Beckman Pool's angel cake with thick butter frosting -- veritably, a culinary gilded lily.

Several hot-day treats in the form of lemonade and the like have cooled the tuner's gullet. One sizzling August day the son of a writer came forward with an offer of "rum and anything, anything at all, to cool you down." I replied, "No, thank you, but some cold water would be very welcome." "Oh, water," he said absently, as if I had mentioned something as far from his experience as the valleys of the moon. Just then some guests arrived for dinner, an opera singer, her mama, sister and husband, a retired service officer. The young man got busy supplying their preferences for rum-and-whatever, and I never did get the water.

I cannot begin to recall how many pets I have declined to accept -- cats, kittens, puppies. My standard reply to such offers is, "We've been through all

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that with pets and livestock. As it is now, we can lock the door and go, but pets are a care." Nobody seems to have any surplus fat capons, turkeys, spring lambs, or anything else our taboos would not bar our gobbling up.

When tuning for the wife of the noted artist, C.W. Anderson, at their summer home in Mason, I always enjoy such of his works as are displayed about the house, as well as Mrs. Anderson's sculpture. During a stay in Florida, she had arranged some sea shells, corals, bits of coconut husk and other flotsam on the beach, then told her husband, "Now all you have to do is to paint them." He did so, his first effort in still life, and the results were exquisite, delicate and subtle in coloring. Two of these paintings of different groupings of subject matter, were hung in their home. I admired them frankly. "Do you know," Mr. A. said, "some people walk through this house without even seeing those pictures." As I was leaving, Mrs. Anderson asked her husband, "Don't you suppose Mr. Chase would like one of your prints?" He soon brought in a lithograph of a New England lane with overarching elms, explaining, "I made the drawing 30 years ago, but put it onto stone only recently. One of the trees has been removed." I rate this print as the most distinguished item acquired in the line of duty.

In addition to the tangible things I have taken away with me, inside or out, many intangibles are indelibly recorded in memory, especially ideas gleaned from books and pictures, also remarks. Taking a tip from Mrs. H.H.A. Beach and her reading-practicing habit, and from Tallarico, who has been observed practicing on the mute clavier, reading a detective story, and listening to a ball game on the radio simultaneously, I have found it possible to do a bit of reading in the many good books that are within reach of some pianos. In this way I read a smattering of "Aristocrats of the Garden" and "More Aristocrats of the Garden" by Ernest H. ("Chinese") Wilson, one of which volumes contains, along with its main subject, the best brief description of autumn foliage in New England that has come to my attention; it succeeds in being both scientific and rhapsodic.

Above each of two successive pianos I worked on, in two towns, was a picture of just ocean, moderately agitated, in daylight; one was a pastel, the other an oil, and nothing had been done to the sky in either to divert attention from the elemental force represented in the sea. This I regard as one of my most memorable observations, in the great strength of the subject, in simplicity of treatment, in the sequence in which I saw these pictures, and in the fact that I have scarcely seen the like at any time since.

Professor Elting E. Morison, who edited the Theodore Roosevelt letters, was a customer of mine shortly after Sagamore Hill at Oyster Bay, Long Island, was opened to the public. I asked him if it were worth seeing. He replied in the affirmative, adding, "It's a good period piece; it gives an insight into the way those people thought and lived. Every man of wealth of that period who was really a man hunted big game, and the Roosevelts were conspicuously men. The place is full of heads and hides and horns of critters.... The house had only one bathroom. With adults, children, and servants in the house, I can't imagine how they got up in the morning."
XVI

JOHN KIRKPATRICK

When arrangements were being made for Marian MacDowell Day in August, 1952, John Kirkpatrick was Mrs. MacDowell's choice among pianists as a performer of some of her husband's works. He came to the Colony to talk with her, and to express his preference among the available pianos, about a week before the occasion. Tall, spare, and kindly, he proved to be one of the most helpful people who have entered my experience. He decided to use the seven-foot Steinway then in the Colony library, and directed me in voicing it to his liking. "The tone is now pinched, but I want a mouldable tone," was his comment. I set about reshaping and needling the hammers while he moved about the premises, coming in from time to time to test the results, always with pleasant comments. The thing to avoid in a job of this sort is overdoing it, so I proceeded with caution. He would try the tone for blend, and at one trial sketched a staff and indicated on it the notes he would have a little softer. After we had reached satisfaction in this matter, he threw the sketch into the fireplace, saying with a sly smile, "I had better dispose of this before some composer takes it for a new scale."

Shortly before noon, a basket lunch was brought for Mr. K., which evoked his ready appreciation. At a good point in our operations, we took a break, I produced my rations, and we repaired to the garden at the rear.

In some instances eating is a social function; in others primarily a physiological necessity. Here, it was a convenient peg on which to hang a basket of talk. I learned a lot. Not that Mr. K. was consciously instructing, but as mint gives out a fragrance upon being lightly brushed, or the sun emits rays by its very nature, some people who are full of a subject share ideas.

I asked if he played the harpsichord.

"Just enough so that I am frequently mistaken for Ralph Kirkpatrick, who is the harpsichordist. I have been complimented on my marriage, and he on my editions. We get together once in a while and exchange the latest confusions."

By commenting on things I had observed at the Colony, I touched off some comments about composers: "Composers have always been inclined to use the piano like an anvil. Beethoven's neighbors complained about the noise he made. Someone has said, 'There has arisen among us in the last fifty years a distressing musical phenomenon, namely, the composer who is incapable of performing his own works.' I wish I could quote chapter and verse on that one; I could use it in my classes."

All this was interspersed with appreciative comments on the basket lunch -- "Tomato soup, bless their hearts," and the like, but always back to music.

"We talk about the history of music, but what we actually know of the
subject is only the near edge of it." His remarks revealed an especially rich philosophy, as well as knowledge.

Later, Mr. Kirkpatrick came in while I was tuning, and remarked, "I see you listen for the beats, while my listening is trained in a different direction, the relation of notes to other notes."

On Marian MacDowell Day, August 15, 1952, the piano was moved to an outdoor platform adjoining the porch at Hillcrest. I corrected it there, and at Mrs. MacDowell's request, Mr. Kirkpatrick played the "A. D. MDCCX" so that Olin Downes might hear it. Mr. Downes commented on the richness of the MacDowell harmonies. Mrs. MacDowell then told of the circumstances that led Herman Hagedorn to write the words of the hymn that was made from a portion of this piano piece.

I by-passed the afternoon program at Hillcrest, and the piano was moved to the Peterborough Golf Club for the evening program. I corrected it during the progress of a banquet, in order to finish on time.

Thornton Wilder introduced Mr. Kirkpatrick, who then played a substantial MacDowell program with devotion and artistry. His selections included the Sonata Eroica, all of the Woodland Sketches, and three each of the Sea Pieces and New England Idylls. It was a distinct privilege to hear these meritorious works performed by a recording artist of such rank, and with such sensitive musicianship. The audience was enthusiastic; for many of those present, this was no doubt an introduction to some of the less frequently heard MacDowell works. Afterward, I asked Mrs. Kirkpatrick to convey my thanks to her husband, both for the music and for being so appreciative of my efforts. She smiled charmingly and said, "He's always that way."
That which is termed absolute pitch -- the ability to recognize and name a note upon hearing it played, or to identify the key-signature of a musical composition -- is often more variable than the term would indicate. Concert pianist Theodore Lettvin told me, "Absolute pitch is the pitch of the living room piano."

An excellent pianist and teacher called me to work on two pianos that were previously unfamiliar to me; one she had had for years; the other, somewhat out of condition, she had just obtained in order to be equipped for playing duos. "I have perfect pitch," she said, "and my McPhail is tuned to 440. I should like to have this Knabe brought up to agree with it." I was able to get the Knabe up to standard pitch by exercising reasonable care. When I began to work on the McPhail, I found that although some previous tuner had written "440" on the harp near the tuning pins, the piano was pitched at the old 435 International Pitch. Upon starting to raise it to 440, which it resisted stubbornly, I snapped a wire in the middle octave, which indicated to me that it had not been above the 435 pitch for a long time, so I decided to leave it there, for safety's sake. After replacing the wire and completing the tuning, I had to go back and let the Knabe down to 435, for fun, to pay for my rashness. Since then I have relied more closely on tuning forks. This customer, however, can invariably name the note I am working on as I tune, but one's sense of pitch needs only to be accurate within less than a quarter-tone in order to recognize C from C#, or the like. The difference of five cycles per second at A had not been detected in this instance.

In order to demonstrate absolute or perfect pitch in the strict sense, one ought to be able independently to tune a string or reed to A440, or to some other note in the same relative scale. The ability to pitch a song unaccompanied is highly useful and admirable, but the vibrato of most human voices, wavering well nigh a half tone on a given pitch, especially when singing fortissimo, would rule this out as an accurate method of proving the possession of the talent.

The MacDowell Colony called me back in midsummer to correct a piano that was being used by an able composer. The piano had been kept for years in heated rooms, and after being moved into an unheated stone studio, it underwent a process of sharpening in pitch, due to swelling of its wooden parts with atmospheric dampness, which lasted for five years. I had lowered the pitch to 440 by a quarter-tone on two occasions, and by smaller amounts at other tunings. The composer asked me, "Wasn't the pitch above 440?" I replied that it was, and explained the cause. "I couldn't believe that my ear had dropped that much just in coming up here from New York," she remarked. Bravo! I thought, here is a musician who really hears the pitch. Still, a year or two later when I returned to correct the same piano for the same composer, her question about the status of the pitch indicated that even she could be mistaken.

Most orchestras in the U.S.A. use the 440 A. Boston Symphony, however,
uses a 444 A, said to have been adopted during the conductorship of Karl Muck. If absolute pitch, possessed by many outstanding performers, were all that the term implies, why do not the many noted soloists who perform on variable-pitch instruments with this orchestra adhere doggedly to the 440 pitch they more frequently use? When Joseph Szigeti appeared as soloist with the Boston Symphony at the December 31st, 1954, and January 1st, 1955, pair of concerts, the broadcast of the performance reached the hinterlands, and his playing sounded in perfect tune with the orchestra. This artist conformed to the higher pitch, and other performers do so continually.

A classic example of uncompromising correctness was the playing of the great chamber music performer, Dr. Joseph Joachim. In playing works with piano accompaniment, he would not accommodate his pitch to the temperament of the piano, but played the perfect scales and intervals which are possible on the violin. He was criticised for playing out of tune, by those who did not understand the purity of his style, while actually the piano, to the extent of the acoustical falseshord involved in its temperament, was out of tune with Dr. Joachim's playing.

A sense of perfect pitch may be a doubtful asset in a child. A fine violinist of my acquaintance has a son who refused to take up instrumental study because his natural musical sense was so sensitive that he could not endure unskilled playing, even his own. This parent wanted the lad to take a violin and sit in with the school orchestra, but he said, "Mother, I wouldn't be found dead in that orchestra. Those kids don't play in tune." A correct sense of pitch which develops along with music study is a safer asset.

From these observations I conclude that a sense of relative pitch is of greater value than the so-called absolute pitch. I have heard of a singer who possessed absolute pitch to such an extent that if she were called upon to sing at a pitch slightly different from the prevailing standard, she would feel frustrated and could not perform. She never became famous. The ordinary musician has to adjust his pitch to a number of non-standard pitches -- pianos which have been allowed to settle far below any standard, organs built for the 435 A, and even organs built for an old concert pitch that was nearly a quarter-tone above the present standard. This is why a good sense of relative pitch is indispensable, even when it necessitates, from an absolute point of view, what a customer of mine calls "singing in the cracks" (between the piano keys).

When John Kirkpatrick of the Cornell University Music Department played two programs of MacDowell's works at Peterborough in August, 1952, he mentioned that he had been brought up on the 435 pitch, hence the 440 pitch, to use his own words, "always seems to me a bit strained," but he did not refer to this as a drawback in performing.

Composer John LaMontaine told me he considers absolute pitch a matter of musical memory, and this I consider a just definition.

In "Violin Making As It Is and Was" by the English writer Ed. Heron-Allen, there is a comment to the effect that the pitch has been raised about a half-tone from the time of Stradivari to our day. If this be accurate information, then all musical compositions of that period are now being played at a higher pitch than the original, although the key designations remain the same. Presuming
that Johann Sebastian Bach possessed "absolute pitch," imagine his consternation if he could hear his G minor prelude played in what would sound to him like G# minor, and so on throughout his monumental volume of works.
It may indicate laziness, but it is convenient to have in stock some standard answers to questions that are frequently asked.

"You must have good hearing. Do you tune by ear?"

"Just normal hearing, but trained in this special direction. The ear is a necessary link in the chain of coordinated effort required. It is essential to recognize what is heard, to know the meaning of it, and to be able to do what is necessary about it."

"Do you have to take a course to learn this work?"

"One has to be taught by someone. It's like arithmetic; one learns the easy rules first, applies them to working out problems, then goes on to the more advanced rules and their application."

"Do you play as well as tune the piano?"

"I hope I tune it better than I play it, otherwise I doubt that anyone would hire me."

"How many pianos do you tune a day?" (This, from the mathematically minded.)

"That depends on how long the jobs are, how far I travel, and how late I work." (No satisfaction.)

"How often should a piano be tuned?"

"As often as it needs tuning, which varies with the mechanical condition, the demands or awareness of the player, and the atmosphere in which the piano is kept. Changes in humidity and temperature affect the tuning. I may as well admit that, for the average listener, a greater margin of tolerance exists between correct tune and what he recognizes as out-of-tune, than is the case with the tuner. Apparently some tuners lean rather heavily on this margin of tolerance in order to shorten their working time per piano. Miss Augusta Schwenker of Henniker remarked to me, 'I like to hear you tune. You go at it systematically, just the way my old tuner in New York used to do. I have had tuners who just skipped around, and I was not pleased with their work.' This points to the fact that a great many people feel a sense of rightness about a piano in tune who are unable to analyze the situation. Performing musicians are not always sensitive to the condition of the tuning, while some non-performers are acutely aware of even a single note that is wrong. In general, people without any particular musical training are more responsive to tone quality than to the condition of the tuning, hence a piano with a hard, metallic tone, but in tune, does not please such people.
as much as one with a pleasant, mellow tone, out of tune."

"Why do you bother with those high notes? We never use them."

"Because neglecting the high notes would be a bad habit for a tuner to get into. Also, those high notes, in proper tune, enrich the tone of the rest of the piano, by sympathetic vibration, more than you realize. A customer of mine had a good grand which had had its treble tuned unpleasantly sharp by some previous tuner in whom she had confidence. I had a hard time to convince her that it ought to be done differently, but after I had gotten it into proper tune and she had used it a while, she admitted that the instrument had gained in resonance."

"How many makes of pianos are there?"

"Over 7,000, according to a reference book. I kept a record until I got above 250 names, then discontinued, and that was years ago. There were never as many makers at any one period as there are names of pianos, as most of the big factories produce several name-brands. Then there is the practice of stencilling the name of a piano dealer on the nameboard of a stock piano, and quite often this name was also cast on a small plate and attached to the harp in such a way as to appear as part of the original casting, to further the impression that 'Bill Jones & Son' actually made pianos."

"Do you do this kind of work all the time? I didn't suppose there would be enough pianos out here in the country to keep a tuner busy."

"I haven't done any other kind of paying work for some years. If all the pianos in existence were kept in tune and repair, there would not be anywhere near enough tuners to meet the demand. As it is, I work in forty or fifty towns during an average year, spreading myself over a larger area as time goes on. Everything today is on an area basis, and geared to transportation, in such a service trade as this. But it isn't all take-home pay; in the long run, about thirty cents out of every dollar I earn goes into the automobile."

"What do you use to stick on ivories?"

"Odd as it may seem, I use key cement. One family piano I worked on gave evidence that several kinds of adhesives had been used, unsuccessfully, to stick on the ivories. Some of the key heads were sliding around on a tan substance that was still unhardened andropy. I said to a young girl in the family, 'I guess everything has been tried to fasten these ivories on, and the last thing was vanilla pudding.' She looked utterly serious and replied, 'Well, 'twasn't.'"

"Don't you get tired of listening to pianos?"

"I don't get tired of eating with some degree of regularity, and tuning pianos supplies the means to do so. But seriously, the hardest thing about the trade is getting mentally fortified so that the sameness doesn't get you down."

Quite often I point out to a young person who asks such a question that one has to see some worthwhile objective, beyond his earnings, that furnishes an incentive -- the practice of a skill, the meeting of a need -- and this enables
one to live down the humdrum aspects. This is part of growing up. One high school boy listened thoughtfully to this pinch of philosophy and said, "Thank you." I thought there was some hope for him.
A WINTER INTERLUDE

Even though tunng gets to be practically second nature, so that a casual conversation, or reading, can be carried on simultaneously, I sometimes tell people it’s like the Scotchmen’s book. This Scot was living in a boarding house, and he had mentioned to the other fellows there that he read 20 pages in a book before he retired for the night. These rascals got into his room every day for a week and set his bookmark back 20 pages, then asked him how he liked his book. He replied, “Weel, ’tis a verra guld book, but there’s a sairdin’ amount o’ r-r-repetition to it.”

When the weather turned too cold for mason work, Daisy’s next gentle hint began to be heard: “It don’t seem as if it would take very much cutting to improve the view from the knoll.” So I started putting in some time in the woodlot with this purpose in mind. There were four or five white pines suitable for saw logs obstructing the view, and a few smaller hardwoods. I needed to cut firewood somewhere, and accomplishing dual objectives in one operation suits the Yankee temperament. On an occasional spare-time day it was most welcome to exchange the buzz of a cracked sounding board for the snore of my one-man crosscut saw, the methodical thumping up and down the keyboard by half steps for the bark of the axe puncturing the winter stillness with a rude staccato. Little traffic passed on the highway nearby. Aside from my own noise, the scream of a blue jay, the churr of a scolding red squirrel, the distant baying of Will Curtis’ foxhounds, chinkadees introducing themselves with cheerful insistence, were all sounds that fitted the scene. Little accents in the soothing poiltice of silence that envelops one in the winter woodland. I felt a kinsman with the earlier Chases who settled along the Ashuelot River north of Keene, one of whom got this sad laconic entry in the family record: “Killed by a tree.” The sounds of nature, coming down to our time from great antiquity, promote a sense of continuity with the past, greatly needed in a world where the rate of change accelerates with every turn of the wheel. But you never achieve, for long, a return to the past, even in fancy. I could look up almost any time and see the vapor trail of a jet laid across the sky, the plane itself being beyond hearing.

Working solo in the woods, I found I did well to clean up each tree before starting on another; I would cut the trunk into saw logs, salvage the top and limbs for firewood, stack the brush for burning at a safe time. Then, if snow fell, I could make a fresh start next time. There was no hurry; I was having my winter vacation, piecemeal. I knew that I could get my neighbor, Forrest Lowe, to saw my logs at his mill, come spring, even though most operators would not bother with such a little jab. Thank the Lord for neighbors, in the old sense of helpful people who live nearby.

On going up over the knoll on the way to Kozy home after tree cutting, I never needed to look back; I would get a progress report shortly. Daisy would get into her winter togs and plod up the knoll, then come back and administer a
pat and a prod something like this: "Yes, cutting that big pine helped a lot. I can begin to see the tower on Crotched Mountain, but just beyond where the pine was, there are some little switches that stick up into the sky. It would be nice if..."

"Yes, woman, on my next free day, but I want you to realize that those 'little switches' are the tops of maples fifty feet tall."
A DAY WITH BILLY

A renovation job that required most of a day served to get me pretty well acquainted with Billy Eve, then about five. His mother, busy at the telephone switchboard, told me to put him out if he bothered, but he was just interested, asked some reasonable questions, and watched. I was much more of a pest at a similar age -- an area in which most grownups have a surprisingly short memory -- so we got along famously.

Part way through the work, I had the piano action removed and standing on the floor, safe enough if left alone, but at this point Billy's mother came in. She took a backward step and knocked the action over, resulting in minor damage. After she had fled the scene with profuse apologies, Billy remarked demurely, "You might have expected a little boy like me to do something like that."

At lunch time, I stopped work, and Billy asked why.

"I'm going to eat my lunch and read my paper. When I eat lunch, it's just like being in church. Everybody sits still, and nobody says a word." So Billy climbed up on the sofa and looked at a picture book all the while, with never a word. Evidently he knew about church.

I resumed work, and Billy went back into action, still harmlessly, and lasted until the tuning began, which has been known to drive more mature and philosophical people away.

Billy's family progressed to a more beautiful home, and he went away to a school where skills are emphasized and valued. Whenever I saw him thereafter, he always manifested a respectful attitude. He went on to college, became a pilot, and later, when working in his parents' home, I saw photos of Billy and his bride, to be followed, in due course, by pictures of their children.
MUSICAL ATOM-SPLITTERS

There was a small but varied gathering at the Watson Studio -- the two musical composers concerned, two other Colonists, a reporter in search of a story, a vacationing college student, and I. Some of the Colonists had their lunch baskets. The place had the atmosphere of an informal studio-laboratory, with microphones and tape recorders commandeering attention, and cables strung around in bewildering but purposeful array -- a radical change from the days when Mrs. Beach worked there with staff paper and a piano. I had been tuning there the previous week, and Vladimir Ussachevsky had said, "Otto Luening and I have asked a few people to come in at lunch time next Tuesday to hear some of our recordings. Would you like to join us then?" So there we were, seated in the motley collection of chairs that suggested donations from several attics.

Mr. Ussachevsky opened with a few remarks. "We work entirely with sounds that were originally musical tones. Mr. Luening is an excellent flutist, while I play sufficient piano. The music has been put through filters in some instances which filter out the resultant tone and leave the partials that make it up. Sometimes we put the music into a different range by halving or doubling the original speed of the tape, and so on. We have worked together for several years. It requires one who understands what we want to accomplish to operate the recorder. Equipment is expensive, and we have had to proceed slowly."

We then heard a composition of Mr. Luening's that conveyed a somber or religious mood. Flute music had been lowered in pitch to give depth to the work, normal flute tones had been recorded along with the altered parts, and the intended mood was effectively evoked. A central tonality sounded steadily throughout, with short sounds coming in periodically above and below it in pitch. I could best describe this work in terms of light. It was as if a shaft of somber gray light shone steadily on a surface, with little blips of brighter hues flashing frequently at either side of it, and one watched for and imagined things that never actually appeared.

"After building up a library of these altered sound effects," Mr. Luening explained, "the next thing is to organize them into compositions that will have meaning for the listener. It is difficult to catalog this material, as there is no existing vocabulary to use in describing what we have done to the sounds."

(More recently, I came across a young musician at the Colony who came there to work out a notation system for classifying electronically altered sounds, showing that when a need exists, someone endeavors to meet it.)

A composition of Mr. Ussachevsky's called "Sonic Contours" was played. He touched upon some of the techniques employed. It had all started out as piano music except for one passage where human voices were used. The piece opened with some normal piano music of modern dissonant character. Then came some chords
that sounded like brilliant organ stops resembling brasses. This effect had been obtained by turning on the microphone a split second after each chord was struck, then turning up the volume gradually, so that the initial percussive stroke was omitted and the natural dying-away effect was overcome, the chords being stretched out at an even level of volume. The work was embellished occasionally with pearly arpeggios and elfin-like runs. The altered human voices were like handicapped persons striving mightily to get some meaning across, but falling short of their goal. The result was a colloquy of repeated syllables at different pitches -- awh-awh-awh-awh----ib-ih-ih-ih----uh-uh-uh-uh -- and the like. There was a simple canon that had been recorded and re-recorded on itself many times over, which built up to an organized percussive jangle, then came restfully back to the single phrase. The piece ended with a continuous tone of gauzy texture that sounded on and on before it faded, suggesting the tail of a comet disappearing over the horizon -- eerie and fascinating.

These altered sounds gave one the feeling of being liberated from the limitations of conventional music. I have heard another Colonist, a composer, object to their being called music, but no one could dispute the value of such advanced studies in sound. They are capable of greatly intensifying taut situations, a wonderful vehicle for incidental sound effects for a space-ship movie. Hearing these compositions at the laboratory level was a gripping experience; I could say with Keats,

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
  When a new planet swims into his ken."

I also felt somewhat like the old farmer who for the first time saw a cow with a window installed in her side.

When, during the second winter after this demonstration, these composers brought out their "Poem in Cycles and Bells for Tape Recorder and Orchestra," which toured some of the major symphonies in the U.S.A., I swelled very slightly with pride, since it is probable that some of the component sounds in this work had originated from the old black Steinway I had tuned in the Watson Studio.
WHY PEOPLE KEEP PIANOS

Keeping a piano is with many people a matter of inertia; those so kept rarely get tuned unless a note gets out of order. They keep on jangling year after year, and my reaction is, "No hear, no suffer." This goes on indefinitely until a member of the family feels the urge to modernize, the old upright does not fit into the new decor, and someone whose children are wishful to try tickling the ivories truck it home, at which point I may see the piano for the first time, and perhaps wish it had slumbered on in its old location.

A trifle more active reason is the semi-sentiment, "We've allus had a pian-ner in the house, and I'd sorta miss it." A parent made a remark indicating about the same degree of feeling: "My folks kept a piano when I was growing up, so I want one for my kids to bang on."

There is also the visiting relative motivation. "My niece comes up from Boston on her vacations," one woman told me, "and I keep the old piano on her account. You just oughter hear her play 'The Midnight Fire Alarm' -- why, she gets all over that piano! You can hear the bells a-clangin' and the hosses gallopin' and the people screamin'!" As she told this, her eyes glowed with a fine Victorian excitement as she recalled the mounting horrors of this pianistic melo-drama.

Pardon me if I dwell on the bizarre; there are always the expected, logical reasons for keeping pianos and having them tuned. People want their children "at least to be exposed to music," as a mother explained; a person who can teach piano naturally wants to earn by this method, and may even have an interest in developing talent in the young; one who has had some piano training doesn't want it to languish altogether; "We like to have the choir meet at our house," and so on through a list of reasons which, although dully logical and proper, furnish the mainstay of the tuner's livelihood. Like the antique dealer who must of necessity keep picking up standard items, but whose sheer delight lies in the unexpected, one-of-a-kind items, so the tuner recalls with greatest relish the oddities.

One woman kept a piano for the sole reason that the D.A.R. met at her house at long intervals. She got in touch with me well in advance of the date, and wanted her piano tuned just before the event. It was always miserably out of tune, from a general-use viewpoint, but this went on for years and was satisfactory on that basis. I did not mention to this customer the still-debated point of whether or not the Daughters had taken an official stand which resulted in a concert being given before the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday, 1939, by Marian Anderson, a great musician and a great American.

I could not pass over as too ordinary for mention the fact that some people keep a piano chiefly because it belongs in a well-appointed home, and keep it in tune for similar reasons, for this has led to my seeing and enjoying a variety of
premises that I could hardly have expected to see otherwise.

One man, Charles A. Smith, clock maker, of Brattleboro, Vt., kept a piano because he liked to play old dance tunes on the fiddle, and delighted to find anyone who could play suitable chords as a piano accompaniment. He could read very little music, but had a natural musician's feeling for harmony, played in good tune himself, and appreciated a piano in decent tune.

A family who had an old square piano decided that it wasn't worthwhile to have it tuned any more, but kept it for a long time after that because, as the man of the house, a poultryman, said, "It makes a great place to keep hatching eggs."

There are those who keep a piano because they love to dust and polish. A man in my neighborhood told a friend, "My piano hasn't been tuned for seventeen years, but it has had the best of care."