

# Washtenaw Historical Society

## News

December 1973

CHRISTMAS PARTY --- December 13th at  
Ann Arbor Federal Savings --- Liberty at Division Streets  
Santa suggests that each bring an inexpensive gift to ex-  
change and please indicate whether for female or male!



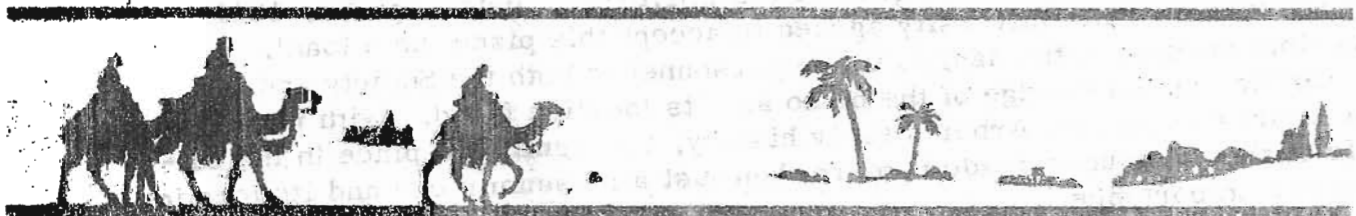
First meeting of 1974 will be January 24th at the Ann Arbor  
Federal Savings --- Liberty at Division Streets --- Frank  
Wilhelme will speak about Judge Dexter.

February 28. Speaker: Professor Cleland Wylie  
Subject: Ann Arbor in Railroading

Board meetings: Tuesday, December 11th at 4:15 at the Kempf House.  
also, January 8, 1974 -- same time and place.

If you wish information about meetings of other historical groups in the county,  
here are people you may call:

Dexter: Mrs. J. McAllister -- telephone 426-4507  
Milan: Warren Hale -- telephone 439-1226  
Saline: Mrs. J. H. Moser -- telephone 429-4135  
Ypsilanti: Museum -- telephone 482-4990



"A happy Christmas to my friend  
And countless blessings without end."

(This greeting and others used in this issue  
were found in an 1888 scrapbook.)



### THE CHAPIN PIANO

The piano known as the "Chapin Piano" has an interesting history. Among the papers of Miss Lucy Chapin in the Michigan Historical Collections, University of Michigan is a paper entitled "Some Early Homes of Ann Arbor, Michigan" written by Cornelia Corseilus and illustrated by Lucy E. Chapin.

"On the northwest corner of Liberty and Ashley streets stands a house that is probably the oldest building in town now in existence. Mrs. Hannah Gibbs Clark, a native of Connecticut, came to Ann Arbor in May, 1827, with her son Edward and her daughter, Lucy Ann (afterwards the wife of Hon. James Kingsley). There were very few houses so she rented part of this house until she could secure a home of her own. Miss Clark, recently from boarding school in New Haven, Conn., owned a piano that was brought with the rest of their possessions by ox team from Detroit. The driver, John Anderson, wanted to know what made thunder every time he went over a stone. This piano was the first one west of Detroit and was made by John Kearsing and Son, Bowery Lane, N. Y. Sometimes when Miss Clark played, the Indians would lurk around the door and windows and some would dance on the strip of bare floor at the edge of the room that the carpet was not wide enough to cover. The piano is now owned by Mrs. Charles A. Chapin, the granddaughter of Miss Clark."

Herbert Bartlett in a letter to Dr. Robert A. Warner, Curator of the Stearns Collection, University of Michigan School of Music carries on the story:

"After further investigation we have definitely identified the small Kearsing piano in the Stearns Collection as the one bequeathed to the Washtenaw Historical Society by Miss Lucy Chapin.

"Miss Lucy Chapin, eventual heir of its original owner, Lucy Kingsley (nee Clark), bequeathed it to the Washtenaw Historical Society upon her death in 1940. (Ref. Washtenaw County Probate Court, File No. 31486.)

"Lacking facilities to properly care for it, the Society arranged with the University to store it for them. We have copies of correspondence in our files with Herbert Watkins, Asst. Secretary of the University, dated April 4, 1941 and before, whereby the University agreed to accept this piano 'as a loan'.

"As time passed, with changes in the personnel of both the Society and the Stearns Collection, knowledge of the piano and its location faded. With renewed interest in preserving Ann Arbor's early history, its significant place in the cultural life of the community made it more than just a museum piece and its location assumed new importance."

Dr. Warner in a letter to Mrs. Proctor says in part: "As you know, it (the piano) does not look very handsome at the moment." Referring to the restoration of the piano he says, "... This is something we could not afford to do at the present or in the near foreseeable future, for there are many more instruments that are more valuable as far as the history of musical instruments is concerned."

"The square piano was popular all through the nineteenth century. The finest pianos were, then as now, the grand pianos. But the typical piano for the American home was the square piano and many of these were made of very beautiful wood and are typical both of furniture design and the taste of the average American family. Nevertheless, they never did represent in this shape the very finest of pianos. They are still relatively numerous, but I am sure that their number is diminishing.

"The problem of restoration is extremely difficult. As you have found out, even the exterior restoration is expensive if it is done professionally, and in speaking about Mr. Everett's reservations about the use of the Society money, it could very well be the sort of thing that fine amateur workmen could do. That is, if members of your Society were willing to put in the time and effort necessary to restore a beautiful finish to the exterior of this piano, it would obviously look much better and, of course, this would save a great deal of money in your coffers. As I believe you already know, the restoration of the interior is extremely difficult. Piano technicians are rare creatures and replacement parts are impossible or practically impossible for instruments of this sort. Consequently, putting such a piano in playing condition would practically require rebuilding such a piano and no one that I know of who has the skill to do this would be willing to put that much time in making a nineteenth century square."

Professor Leigh Anderson, who has done some fine work in restoring furniture, is at work restoring the exterior. Frank Kaspar, who has had years of experience in restoring musical instruments, will act as consultant in restoring the musical part of the piano. There are two people who are interested in doing the work but they have not as yet committed themselves.

The Society will be deeply indebted to all these people for the restoration. It will, on their part, be indeed a labor of love. When they have completed their work, a brass plaque will be placed on the piano bearing the following inscription:

The Lucy Clark Kingsley piano, first piano brought west of Detroit, May 1827. Property of the Washtenaw Historical Society through will of Miss Lucy E. Chapin, November 1940.

The piano will then be returned to the Stearns Collection to await, hopefully, that day when the Washtenaw Historical Society will have its own museum and both the Chapin piano and the Allmendinger organ can come to rest among other artifacts recalling the earliest days of Washtenaw County history.

"The flowers are slain by wintry rime  
But friendship blooms at Christmas time."

THE ALLMENDINGER ORGAN

Demaris Cash of the Treasure Mart came into possession of an Allmendinger Organ recently. She was showing it to two prospective customers, Mr. and Mrs. Smith. Mr. Smith is on the faculty of Eastern Michigan University in the Music Department. Mrs. Proctor happened into the Treasure Mart at that moment and exclaimed, "Oh! we want that for our museum." Mrs. Cash promptly tore up the price tag and replied, "You now have it."

Mr. and Mrs. Smith are storing it and making sure it is in working condition.

Our thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Cash for their gift of the organ and to Mr. and Mrs. Smith for their gift of loving care of the organ.

Next month we will cover the story of the Allmendinger Organ Factory and something about this remarkable family.

"May Flowers o'er blossom everywhere  
Thy path through this and every year."

Masters in This Hall

The verses of this Christmas carol were composed by the English poet William Morris around 1860. Its music, a traditional French air, embodies the vigorous rhythms of 15th Century carols sung in colorful processions to church.

Masters in this Hall, Hear ye news to-day Brought from o-ver sea  
and e-ver I you pray: No-well! No-well! No-well! No-well sing we clear! Hol-pen  
No-well! No-well! No-well! No-well sing we loud! God so-  
are all folk on earth, Born is God's Son so dear:  
day bath poor folk raised, And cast a-down the proud.