



Mason & Hamlin

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It is truly amazing what can be accomplished when two determined individuals work together. Henry Mason, a pianist, and Emmons Hamlin, an engineer, joined forces in 1854, establishing Mason & Hamlin Co., and began building reed organs of notable quality. They quickly became one of the largest reed organ makers in the USA at the time. In 1881, they produced their first piano in Boston, MA. Like their production of reed organs, their focus on pianos elevated their reputation further and soon they became known as one of the most distinguished piano manufacturers in Boston and Steinway’s main competition. One of their most profound achievements was the tension resonator: a system of iron bars and turnbuckles nicknamed “the spider” that claimed to keep the case/rim from

expanding with age and retain the soundboard crown.

In 1912, Mason & Hamlin saw a great increase in funding by joining with the Cable Piano Co. In 1922, Cable, along with Mason & Hamlin, Chickering, and Knabe, were purchased by the American Piano Co. In 1930, American Piano was struggling financially and sold M & H to Aeolian, but the two companies ended up merging in 1932 because they both faced the same dilemma. All production was moved to the Aeolian factory in Rochester, NY. In 1959, Aeolian fused with Winter & Co., kept the name Aeolian, and allowed the quality of Mason & Hamlin pianos to decline dramatically. M & H pianos were made by Aeolian until 1985 when the company filed for bankruptcy.



Sohmer moved in to retain the company in 1985 and was able to purchase the M & H assets. Sohmer sold the M & H blueprints and name to Bernard Greer in 1989 who had also just purchased Falcone Piano Co. Production was later moved exclusively to Haverhill, MA and done correctly. The factory used original scale designs and patterns from the golden era of M & H pianos: 1881-1932. The company suffered again in 1995 and was sold to the Burgett brothers, owners of the after-market player system PianoDisc.

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In 2004, Mason & Hamlin revived the name Wessell, Nickel & Gross, a manufacturer of many American piano actions in the early 1900s. This revival was not just in name, but a major groundbreaking upgrade to piano actions worldwide. Instead of producing pianos with wooden actions, WNG started building piano actions with carbon fiber composite parts. The parts are claimed to be ten times stronger than wood, significantly more consistent from piece to piece, and do not experience humidity changes. There is controversy that these parts do not improve the piano because the sound of wood is unique and contributes a specific quality to piano sound and is more enjoyable than the sounds made by carbon fiber parts. I'll let you be the judge.

A most curious situation occurred recently when Mason & Hamlin began expanding again and selling pianos internationally. In China, patents, trademarks, and company names are first come first serve and the government there does not investigate where they originated from. Because of this, an individual in China was able to register the M & H name before the company even expanded to China. When Mason & Hamlin wanted to register in China, they found they could not and were held at ransom by this Chinese individual for an 8-figure sum in USD. They refused to pay the ransom and registered as Henry Mason pianos instead. It's funny how this was by no means a deterrent to doing business in China. In 2020 M & H introduced two new models of pianos made by Pearl River in China.

The classic M & H pianos are some of my favorite pianos because of their big bass sound and thick case design; so much so, in fact, I named my two cats after the company.

*Both grand piano photos from masonhamlin.com