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News

Museum receives 145-year-old piano

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By Erica McClain, Hillsdale Daily News

HILLSDALE — A 145-year-old piano has returned to the Grosvenor House Museum in Jonesville after a two-year absence.

The piano, made by Chickering and Sons, spent its vacation being rebuilt and restored by James Reeder, of Reeder Pianos Inc., in Lansing.

Brian Corbett, president of the Grosvenor House Museum Association, said when the group purchased the homestead in 1977, the instrument came with it.

However, over the years, the piano suffered with age. On its underside, the instrument's soundboard was beginning to fall apart from stress, and the pitch sagged a step flat from being in tune.

Reeder said restoring the instrument was an exciting process due to its age.

"A tradition for building pianos had not really been developed yet," he said. "Every piano built was different."

Reeder explained that the 9-foot-long piano was built the opposite way most modern pianos are constructed, from the inside out. He said the original manufacturer never had any notion that someone would want to rebuild it someday.

When the piano was built in 1865, it was the beginning of the keyboard era, and the construction process was not fully developed until the latter part of that century, Reeder said.

The Lansing-area restoration company was able to save the majority of the piano's parts, including its ebony and ivory keys and its veneer finish. Reeder said the restorers had to slowly steam the veneer off the wood and reapply it when they finished rebuilding.

At an unveiling several Jonesville area residents visited the Grosvenor House and noted the piano's unique sound — bright and rapid. Some of the guests, including Tom Marshall, grew up playing on the Chickering instrument and were delighted by the newfound ease and speed of its keys as they played.

Reeder said the sound was very distinct to the piano's age, during a time when a bright sound was more desirable than a lot of volume.

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