

*Journal of the  
American Musical  
Instrument Society*

VOLUME VIII • 1982



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# George Catlin, Hartford Musical Instrument Maker

## *Part 1*

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GEORGE CATLIN (1778–1852) was the first important American maker of woodwind musical instruments. The variety and quality of the products of his shop in Hartford, Connecticut (1799–ca. 1815) were unsurpassed by any American maker of that time and compared well with European instruments. Virtually all of the next generation of American-born woodwind makers felt his influence either directly or through his apprentices and associates. Catlin was one of only a handful of Americans ever to make oboes and bassoons; and he designed and introduced a unique bass clarinet that was more successful than any produced in Europe up until that time.

The period of Catlin's career was one of enormous change in music and in musical instruments. Haydn was still composing in 1800, but by 1850 Wagner had completed his first three operas and was demanding a fluency in all keys, possible only on woodwinds with recent improvements. It was during this period that wind instruments took on their present form and acquired the mechanisms and keys in use to this day. Unfortunately, Catlin was unable to keep up with these rapid developments, and his brilliant early promise in Hartford was unfulfilled in the later years at Philadelphia (ca. 1816–1852).

Only four American woodwind makers are known earlier than Catlin. Gottlieb Wolhaupter advertised German flutes, hautboys, oboes, clareonets, flageolets, bassoons, and fifes in *The New York Gazette* in 1761.<sup>1</sup> Jacob Anthony (1736–1804) came from Germany to Philadelphia about 1764,<sup>2</sup> and first he, and then his son, ran a musical-instrument making business that continued until 1811.<sup>3</sup> Two flutes by this

1. Quoted in Rita S. Gottesman, *The Arts and Crafts in New York*, vol. 1, 1726–1776 (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1936), pp. 367–68.

2. Obituary of Jacob Anthony, *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, January 5, 1805.

3. *The Philadelphia Directory, City & County Register* (Philadelphia: James Robinson, 1811), p. 20.

firm are in the Dayton C. Miller Collection at the Library of Congress. There is also similar evidence of early woodwind making in Boston, where William Callender appears in the city directories first as an ivory turner in 1789 and after 1796 as a musical instrument maker. A fife of his is found in the collection of the Lexington, Massachusetts, Historical Society.

In the first couple of decades after 1800, a few more makers began business in the United States, including Louis Peloubet and John Meacham in Albany; William Whiteley in Utica, New York; Allyn Bacon in Philadelphia; and Edward Riley, John Firth, and William Hall in New York City. All of these, at least until the 1820s, evidently ran small shops that produced mostly flutes, fifes, and clarinets.

It is with a great deal of surprise, then, that one considers the surviving instruments and documentation of the business of George Catlin. Not until the twentieth century was his production of bassoons exceeded by any other American maker, and his bass clarinets were a unique contribution to the history of that instrument. He was known in Hartford as "the ingenious George Catlin"<sup>4</sup> for the wide variety of musical, mathematical, and measuring instruments he made.

Many will think of the Philadelphia artist by the same name who is well known for his paintings of American Indians; but as far as can be determined, the two George Catlins were not closely related. The painter had relatives in Litchfield, Connecticut (about twenty-seven miles west of Hartford) and attended law school there in 1817, but no relationships with the instrument maker's family in Hartford and nearby Wethersfield have been discovered. The painter and the instrument maker may have known each other when both had shops on Walnut Street in Philadelphia between 1820 and 1825, but no evidence of their acquaintance exists.

Unlike most of the earliest American instrument makers, George Catlin was not an immigrant. His family had lived in New England for five generations. Catlin's father, Benjamin, was described by the historian Henry R. Stiles as a "pretty lively soldier and seaman."<sup>5</sup> Before the Revolution he was employed by Samuel Boardman of Wethersfield, Connecticut, and married to Anna Deming. He enlisted in the army on May 9, 1775, and on June 19 of the same year he wrote to Boardman

4. Advertisement by Charles Mather, Jr., in the *Connecticut Courant*, April 13, 1803, p. 3, col. 4.

5. Henry R. Stiles, *History of Ancient Wethersfield* (New York: Grafton Press, 1904), 2: 204.

a letter, now well known, describing the unpleasantness around Bunker Hill. Benjamin Catlin was discharged on September 9, 1775, but joined Benedict Arnold's ill-fated expedition to Quebec as quartermaster later that same year. He was taken prisoner December 31, 1775, and exchanged January 10, 1777.<sup>6</sup> In no time at all he was at it again, this time at sea, for another letter was written to Samuel Boardman in July of 1777 from the frigate *Trumbull*, one of Arnold's hastily built fleet in Lake Champlain.<sup>7</sup> Benjamin is thought to have been a warrant officer or an officer in the Marine Corps this time. By 1778 he was living in Saybrook, Connecticut (near the mouth of the Connecticut River on Long Island Sound) with his family and is known to have owned one-fourth interest in the schooner *Rosemary*. Benjamin's wife died in 1781, and he died a year later. Besides George, then four years old, they left a daughter, Honor, age eleven. Charlotte Goldthwaite, a genealogist quoted by Henry R. Stiles, ends her entry about the Catlin family by saying "but what became of these children I do not know."<sup>8</sup> She might have been amused if she had known that the old warrior's son made musical instruments with as much vigor as his father fought the British.

Unfortunately nothing is known about how George Catlin learned the trade of musical instrument making. After his father's death he lived with his maternal grandfather, Josiah Deming, in Wethersfield, Connecticut. When Deming died in 1786, an uncle, John Gillett of Torrington, Connecticut (near Litchfield), was appointed his guardian. In 1793 Gillett and George Catlin appeared before probate court to renew this guardianship.<sup>9</sup> No information has been found about Catlin's activities from 1794 until 1799. It seems very likely, however, that he served some sort of apprenticeship in musical instrument making or at least in wood turning or cabinet making. The style of Catlin's instruments is English rather than German or French, but a search of the records of English turners' and joiners' companies of 1783-1799 and London city directories failed to turn up any evidence of apprenticeship or residence there. William Callender of Boston is a possibility as a teacher, except that he began making musical instruments only in 1796 and is not known to have produced anything like the variety of

6. *Ibid.*, 1: 449-52.

7. *Ibid.*, 1: 505.

8. *Ibid.*, 2: 205.

9. Records of the Probate Court, Hartford District, Town of Wethersfield, Estate of George Catlin, no. 1148, 1786, 1793.

instruments offered by Catlin in 1800. A son of the Gilletts four years younger than Catlin became a cabinet maker, but a search through early Torrington history for tradesmen or businesses related to woodworking turned up references only to merchants, tanners, blacksmiths, a gristmill, a potash manufactory, sawmills, cider presses, and brandy stills. Catlin's guardian was largely a farmer and, like many others in the area, had a cider press and brandy still. He is not known to have engaged in woodworking beyond farm-related tasks. The only Torrington resident who may have exerted some influence on Catlin toward a musical-instrument making career was the Rev. Alexander Gillett (1749–1826), pastor of First Church, Torrington, from 1792. Gillett, possibly a relative of Catlin's guardian, was a graduate of Yale University, a composer of poetry and music, and an avid amateur player of the bass viol.<sup>10</sup> The strongest possibility is that Catlin worked with an as yet unknown English craftsman somewhere in the area.

The ages of Catlin's two children in the 1810 census indicate that he married Sarah Spencer about 1799. Their first child was a daughter called Sarah and the second a son burdened with the musical but awkward name of George Frederick Handel Catlin.

If an active musical-instrument making business was to develop in the United States one might expect to find it first among the more music-loving immigrants such as the Moravians in Pennsylvania, rather than the descendants of the Puritans in New England. Nevertheless, during the 1790s and early 1800s, Hartford, Connecticut, indulged in secular musical entertainment on a fairly regular basis. As is pointed out by Percy A. Scholes<sup>11</sup> and others, the Puritans may have objected to the use of musical instruments in their church services, but outside the church, instrumental music was enjoyed without disfavor.

In the 1790s, Hartford had at least three merchants offering musical instruments, music books, strings, reeds, and other accessories for sale. The *Connecticut Courant* carried an advertisement on July 21, 1794, for Samuel Gibson, a grocer who also had for sale "Violins, Clarinets, Hautboys, Flutes & Fifes, Books, Reeds and Strings." On November 7, 1796, Solomon Porter offered in the same newspaper "a variety of musical instruments suitable for bands, concerts, or private amusement with reeds, strings & books of instruction, sundry small collections of the

10. Rev. Samuel Orcutt, *History of Torrington, Connecticut* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1878), pp. 65–68, 451–58.

11. Percy A. Scholes, *The Puritans and Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 33–57.

latest & most approved music & songs now in use in the theatre." Some encouragement must have been received, for the next year on September 4 Porter advertised in the same newspaper:

Musical instruments this day rec'd directly from the manufacturer in London & for sale at a small advance.

Tipt & Plain flutes do. do. hautboys, B & C clarionets, bassoons & violins, reeds, books & strings for above instruments, violon-cello or bass viol strings of superior quality.

In 1798, and again in 1800 and 1805, Aaron Chapin, who dealt mainly in watches and furniture, advertised "sundry bass viols complete for use, pitchpipes, fifes. . . ."

Notices of concerts, however, appeared less frequently in the Hartford papers than advertisements for instruments. Oscar Sonneck has already published programs from July 27, 1795, and August 25, 1796, put on in Hartford by the Old American Company, a New England theatrical group.<sup>12</sup> Instruments specifically mentioned in these programs include clarinet, harp, French horn, and violin.

On January 20, 1803, two advertisements appeared in the *American Mercury* offering lessons on "violin, violono, violoncello, viol da gamba, viola, or German flute," proposing that concerts be organized and offering music for dances and balls. One was placed by William Slade (violin and violoncello only), a violinist from New York who proposed to move his family permanently to Hartford, and the other was by Uri K. Hill, musician and composer of Northampton, Massachusetts, who made a similar proposal. The response could not have been overwhelming, for Slade is not heard of again, and Hill remained in Northampton. Hill's son, Ureli, is remembered as an early conductor as well as a founder and first president of the New York Philharmonic Society.

The population of Hartford County was 4,090 in 1790 and 5,347 in 1800. As Connecticut's leading city, Hartford served as a center for trade and culture for a large area (figs. 1, 2, and 3). For a town of its size the newspapers record a fairly energetic amount of musical activity and musical merchandise for sale.

George Catlin is first mentioned in a directory of Hartford citizens compiled for 1799. The nature of his business is more fully documented by an advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant*, June 23, 1800.

12. Oscar G. Sonneck, *Concert Life in Early America* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1907), pp. 322, 323.

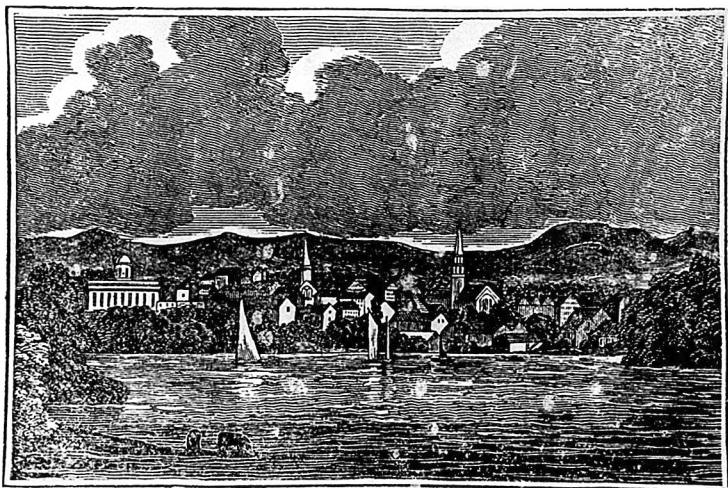


FIGURE 1. Early nineteenth-century Hartford. From G. Mullen, ed., *A Book of the United States* (Hartford: Sumner, 1839), p. 296. Photograph courtesy of the Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford.

#### George Catlin

At the head of Prison Street makes almost every kind of musical instrument now in use, such as pianofortes, harpsichords, violoncellos, guitars, bassoons, clarinets & hautboys of different keys, tenor clarinets, flutes of various kinds, fifes, reeds, etc. etc. Those who favor him with their custom may depend on having their work well done & warranted. A generous allowance to good customers.

Catlin is also known to have built a pipe organ in 1801. The history of the Protestant Episcopal Parish of Christ Church, Hartford, records the following:

The organ was the first in Hartford and for several years the only one in this part of the state. It was built by George Catlin at his shop lately standing near the first milestone on the Windsor road. It was but a small affair, not more than five or six feet wide. On the front was a large spread eagle, through the shield on whose breast the pipes appeared.

The Vestry voted on December 13, 1801:

That two dollars pr. week be paid to Mr. George Catlin for the use of the organ on condition he provide an organist, who shall play on the same to

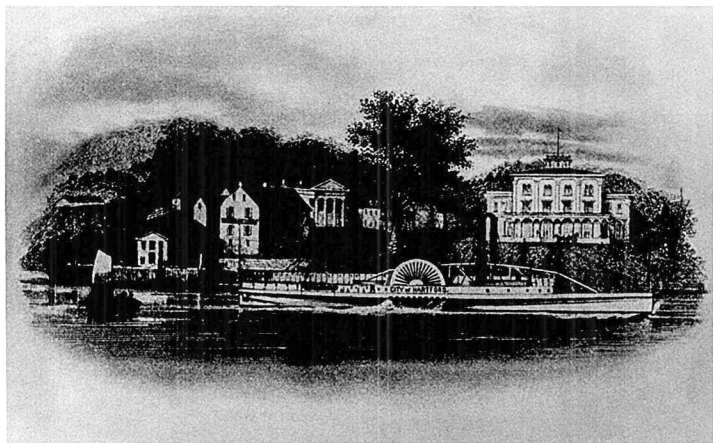


FIGURE 2. The Hartford waterfront, 1824. From John Alden Brett, ed., *1635–1935: Connecticut Yesterday and Today* (Hartford: Rovett, 1935), p. 127.

the acceptance of the Vestry on each whole Sunday and on publick days, which sum is to be in full compensation for the organist and the use of the organ, and the same shall be paid from the contributions in the church.<sup>13</sup>

For a young man of twenty-three, orphaned when he was four, George Catlin had made an auspicious beginning. The organ for Christ Church would be quite enough for a young man, but the range of instruments described in his advertisement in addition to the pipe organ is most impressive. One of the most unusual instruments included is the tenor clarinet. Clarinet history records the invention of the first tenor clarinet, the basset horn, about 1770 in Passau, Germany. This instrument became popular in Austria, Hungary, and southern Germany during the next twenty or thirty years, but was not heard in England until 1789 and was not in popular use there until after 1820. Other alto or tenor clarinets without the chest or box of the basset horn appeared later, 1808 being the first substantial evidence of their existence mentioned by Rendall.<sup>14</sup> That George Catlin of Hartford, Connecticut,

13. *Contributions to the History of Christ Church, Hartford* (Hartford: Belknap & Warfield, 1895), 2: 57; 4: 171.

14. F. Geoffrey Rendall, *The Clarinet*, 3d ed. (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1971), pp. 126, 131–36.



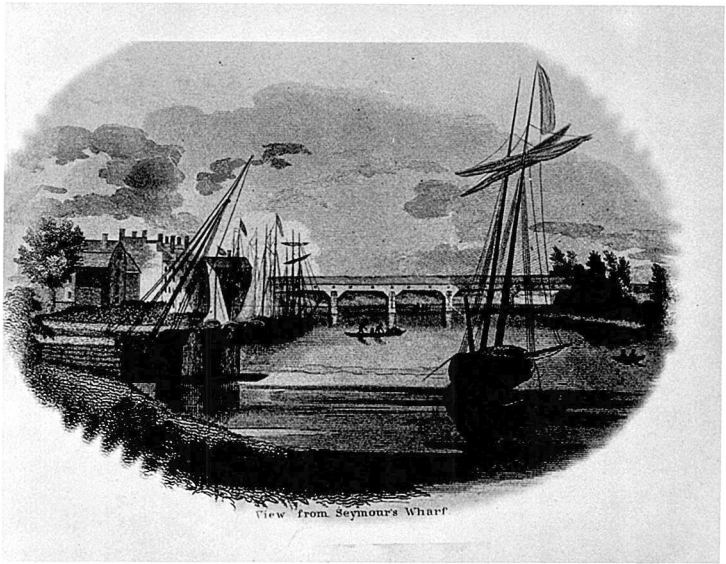


FIGURE 3. Illustration of the Hartford riverfront from an 1824 map surveyed and published by D. St. John and N. Goodwin. Photograph courtesy of the Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford.

should be advertising tenor clarinets in 1800 is surprising indeed!

The story of George Catlin's career in Hartford is best told by the sources themselves—advertisements placed in the Hartford newspapers, deeds, church records, and, best of all, the musical instruments.

The arrangements about the organ in Christ Church were evidently not entirely satisfactory, as Catlin continued to try to sell it. Probably by the time he paid an organist, little was left of the two dollars per week the church paid him. Business appears to have been good, however, for Catlin's next advertisement, which appeared in the *Connecticut Courant* of January 4, 1802, included a notice seeking a helper:

For Sale  
A Good ton'd organ

Standing in the Episcopal Church in Hartford. . . . Also piano fortes organized in the neatest manner very reasonably; beside almost every kind of musical instrument now in use made by the subscriber 30 per cent cheaper

than imported. He returns his sincere thanks for the encouragement he has received in the manufacture of musical instruments and hopes through the experience he has had in that business to give ample satisfaction to all those who may think so favorably of American manufactures as to favor him with their custom.

George Catlin

Said Catlin wants a journeyman well experienced in the above business to whom good encouragement will be given.

Both in this advertisement and in the one to follow, the inevitable comparison of his products with similar European goods appears. An interesting change occurs, however, for in the 1802 advertisement he offers his instruments "30 per cent cheaper than imported" and appeals to "those who may think so favorably of American manufactures" as to buy his instruments. In the following advertisement, which appeared for several weeks in the *American Mercury* beginning April 14, 1803, and in the *Connecticut Courant* on April 13, 1803, his instruments "have received the highest encomiums of the most able performers" and are "proved to be second to none of European manufacture," although they are made of "the best imported materials." (Charles Mather, Jr., evidently was marketing the instruments for Catlin, and this may account for some of the change in character. Catlin wrote as the modest craftsman; Mather comes across as the bold salesman.)

Musical Instruments . . . in Military sets or single, plain and trumpet stop'd bassoons, tenorons, clarinets and hautboys, ivory tip'd and plain with brass and silver trimmings—flutes, fifes & c. made of the best Turkey box—also most kinds of stringed instruments—violins and bass viols, a great variety, that have received the highest encomiums of the most able performers. Those who wish to purchase church or house organs that perform by keys or crank, or the common organized, or grand pianofortes may be supplied on short notice with such as are examined and proved to be second to none of European manufacture—Also implements for playing, strings, reeds & c. Likewise on hand a church organ and pianofortes of most beautiful tones, to be had on reasonable terms if applied for soon. The above are manufactured by the ingenious George Catlin of the best imported materials, and sold at the factory price.

Charles Mather Jr.

The only explanation of "plain and trumpet stop'd bassoons" that seems plausible is that possibly Catlin made bassoons with a brass bell section as well as the usual bell of wood. Although no metal-bell bassoons have been found, there are both metal-bell and wood-bell bass

clarinets by Catlin. Tenoroons are small bassoons at a pitch usually a fourth higher than the common bassoon. Again, no examples by Catlin are known, but there is evidence that they were used in the area around Hartford. One of only three scores known to call for the little bassoon was written by Uriah K. Hill in 1807 at nearby Northampton, Massachusetts<sup>15</sup> (fig. 4). The collection by Timothy Olmstead containing this work is mentioned in Catlin's advertisement of September 23, 1807.

Catlin also continued to make mathematical and measuring instruments. The following advertisement appeared in the *Connecticut Courant* of February 20, 1805:

George Catlin

At his musical instrument manufactory opposite the bank, has, and will keep on hand, for sale, a general assortment of musical instruments of various kinds viz: bassoons; tenorvoons [tenoroons?]; clarinets; hautboys; flutes of various kinds; fifes; violoncellos; tenor viols; violins; with reeds, fittings, & c.

Gauging rods; wantage do. callipers & c. Likewise may be had organs of different descriptions, with or without barrels; pianofortes organized. Those who wish to possess this beautiful addition may be gratified with a sample of the kind at the above place.

N.B. for sale on very reasonable terms a good toned organ suitable for a small church.

The above instruments are made of the very best of Turkey box, and will be warranted a reasonable time. The long experience he has had in the above business, he flatters himself, will enable him to give general satisfaction, to those who may favor him with their custom. Repairing of instruments done at the above place.

In many of these advertisements Catlin offers "pianofortes organized in the neatest manner" and "common organized, or grand pianofortes organized" and describes this as a "beautiful addition." During the late 1700s and early 1800s it was not uncommon to have a small pipe organ attachment made for a piano. This is undoubtedly what Catlin is referring to. He also advertised "church or house organs that perform by keys or crank" and organs "with or without barrels." Barrel organs operated by bellows and a pinned barrel turned by a crank were also in common use at this time. Six or eight hymn tunes could be pinned on one barrel and would suffice to accompany singing in church. A

15. For the other two examples, see H. Jean Hedlung, "Ensemble Music for Small Bassoons," *Galpin Society Journal* 11 (1958): 78.

## Gov. Sullivan's March.

BY U. K. HILL.

FIGURE 4. "Gov. Sullivan's March" by Uriah K. Hill. Photograph courtesy of the Library of Congress.

crank pumped the bellows and turned the barrel. As the barrel turned, pins and staples on its surface raised and lowered levers which opened and closed valves to play the organ. The following description of such an instrument comes from a sermon delivered on the arrival of a new organ at a Connecticut church in 1807.

This organ is of that kind which is called a barrel or hand organ; but of uncommonly large size: its largest pipe is twelve feet in length: it has ten stops, two of them of reed pipes. . . . any person, with but a moderate acquaintance [*sic*] with musick, may perform on this organ; and thus the whole expense of an organist is saved.<sup>16</sup>

One wonders if Catlin's production of barrel organs was not related to his experience of having to provide an organist every week for the 1801 Christ Church organ.

16. William Lyman, *The Design and Benefits of Instrumental Musick Considered in a Sermon Delivered at Lebanon Goshen May 7, 1807, on the Occasion of Having an Organ Introduced as an Aid in the Worship and Melody of God's House* (New London: Ebenezer P. Cadt, 1807), p. 16.

Catlin's next advertisement from the *Connecticut Courant* appeared on September 23, 1807:

#### Instrumental Music

George Catlin informs his friends and all lovers of music that he has received a publication of a great variety of marches suitable for military bands compiled and composed by the celebrated T. Olmstead, beautifully printed on fine paper, price 75¢, containing 40 pieces of music of various keys.

Musical instruments of almost every description now in use may be had ready made, or will be made on short notice according to order and warranted good. Reeds, strings, & every other apparatus suitable for all kinds of instruments, constantly on hand for sale, of the best quality. Just received a quantity of genuine violin strings, highly recommended.

G. Catlin informs his customers that he has removed from Prison Street to opposite Messrs. Ward & Bartholomew, near the bridge.

A short notice followed on December 7, 1808:

#### George Catlin

Earnestly requests all those whose notes or accounts have been standing an unreasonable length of time that it is absolutely necessary that they should be settled without further notice or delay.

Catlin's final advertisement in the *Connecticut Courant*, October 17, 1810, is curious:

#### Chestnuts

Wanted 5 or 6 barrels of well dried chestnuts delivered at my house in the north end of the city, by the first of November, for which the market price in cash will be paid by George Catlin.

Old residents of Hartford say that barrels were not always as large as we think of them today and that a sauce or relish was often made from chestnuts. Catlin was evidently preparing for a long Connecticut winter.

Evidence begins to appear in 1807 that Catlin had helpers or apprentices. In July of that year he sold his Prison Street shop to John Meacham, Jr. (1785–1844)<sup>17</sup> and moved to a new location on Main Street, "opposite Messrs. Ward & Bartholomew, near the bridge" (figs. 5 and 6). In May of 1808 he and Meacham, together with Uzal Miner (1785–1822), Eli Gilman, and William Corning, purchased property on

17. Hartford County deed records, 1807, 26: 315.

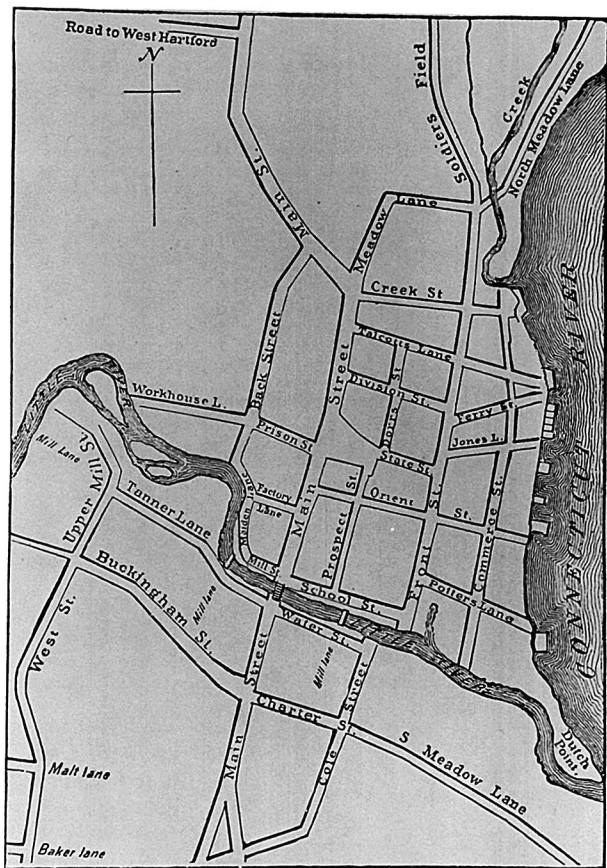


FIGURE 5. Map of Hartford, 1800. From George E. Wright, *Crossing the Connecticut* (Hartford: Smith-Linley, 1908), p. 15. Catlin's shops were at the head of Prison Street and on Main Street, 40–60 rods south of the courthouse square. Main Street was also the Windsor Road. Photograph courtesy of the Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford.

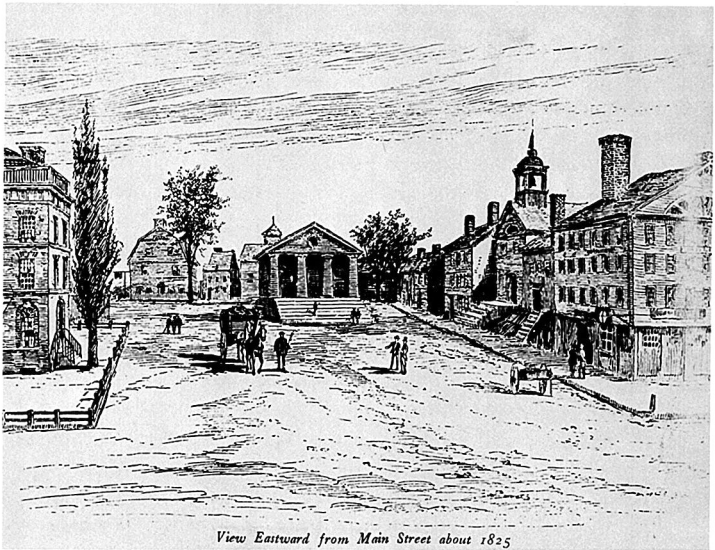


FIGURE 6. Probably Hartford's main square and courthouse. From Brett, 1635–1935: *Connecticut Yesterday and Today*, p. 96. Catlin's Prison Street shop would be approximately opposite the area shown here, and his Main Street shop would be 40–60 rods to the right. Photograph courtesy of the Watkinson Library, Trinity College, Hartford.

Front Street.<sup>18</sup> Catlin's business had reached its strongest point at this time, and this new purchase with other investors may have been part of a plan to open an even larger facility. Unfortunately these plans came to nothing, perhaps because of the trade embargo of 1807, which began to hurt the economy of Hartford and surrounding New England. The partners sold out in September of the same year. Although direct references to John Meacham as an apprentice of Catlin have not been found, it seems highly likely that he learned the musical-instrument making trade working in Catlin's shop. Uzal Miner, in his own words, "served a regular apprenticeship with Mr. Catlin" and took over

18. Hartford County deed records, 1808, 26: 506.

Catlin's new shop in 1811.<sup>19</sup> The other two associates, Gilman and Corning, are not heard of again. It is also possible that Allyn Bacon (1789–1864) worked with Catlin before their partnership in 1812 and that Asa Hopkins (1778–1838) of Litchfield spent time with Catlin before opening his Pennsylvania clock and musical instrument shop in 1809.<sup>20</sup> William Whiteley (1789–1871) was also born nearby in Lebanon-Goshen (about twenty-five miles from Hartford, near Willimantic) and could have worked with Catlin before starting his business in Utica, New York, about 1810.

Up until 1810, what contemporary sources there are give no hint of any of the partnerships Catlin is known to have formed. Although Charles Mather evidently retailed Catlin instruments for a time, his name was never included in the name of the firm. Also, John Meacham and Uzal Miner were never partners in the firm, even though they certainly became competent makers and shared equally in the property investment of 1808.

After 1810 two partnerships can be documented, although little is known of either. Allyn Bacon worked with Catlin at least during the year of 1812 and for a couple of years after they moved to Philadelphia. In 1812, Christ Church in Hartford procured a new organ built by Catlin and Bacon at a cost of \$500.<sup>21</sup> There is also a bassoon documented at the Smithsonian Institution and a bass clarinet at the Letchworth State Park Museum, Castile, New York, both inscribed "Catlin & Bacon, Hartford Con." Another bassoon in the collections of the Edison Institute, inscribed "Catlin, Bliss & Co., Hartford Con.," is the only evidence of the second partnership. Evidence that a William Bliss was a partner of Catlin in 1813 and 1814 has been found by Geoffrey C. Weston of Fairfield, Connecticut, who is studying Connecticut music and musicians. His documentation has not yet been published.

In some cases Catlin's influence on his apprentices, associates, and partners is discernible, in others not. The bassoons by John Meacham, for example, resemble those of Catlin very closely. William Whiteley made a wide variety of instruments just as Catlin did, but whether this was Catlin's influence and training or simply a response to a similar market demand is hard to determine. Catlin's flutes, bassoons, and bass clarinets are English in the style of their turnings, and certainly almost

19. Uzal Miner, advertisement placed in the *Connecticut Courant*, May 22, 1811, p. 3, col. 3.

20. *The Enquirer*, Richmond, Va., February 24, 1809, p. 2, col. 5.

21. *Contributions to the History of Christ Church*, 1: 63.



every American maker who followed copied the English pattern. The man most closely associated with Catlin was Uzal Miner, who continued to work in Hartford and to produce most of the same types of instruments made by Catlin. From 1811 through 1814 he placed advertisements in the *Connecticut Courant* and *American Mercury*. The following is his advertisement of September 14, 1813, from the *Connecticut Courant*.

Uzal Miner  
Musical Instrument Maker

Opposite Messrs. Ward & Bartholomew's Main St. Hartford (Conn.) has on hand and for sale very low for cash the following articles—Viz: bassoons, Catlin's patent clarions, clarinets, hautboys, different keyed flutes, C and B fifes, bass and field drums (very nice ones) bugle and hunter's horns, bass viols and violins, bassoon, clarion, clarinet, and hautboy reeds. . . .

"Catlin's patent clarions" refers to Catlin's bass clarinets. The name "clarion" is most likely derived from a combination of "clarinet" and "bassoon," since the instrument is a large clarinet with a bassoonlike lower section. Another less likely derivation is from "clarionett," a common spelling used for clarinet at that time (although not by Catlin). The diminutive term "clarionett" could have suggested the use of "clarion" for a larger instrument.

The lists of instruments offered in the advertisements of Catlin and Miner are most impressive for the time and place in which they appeared. One would be tempted to treat them as merely an indication of what the maker might be willing to attempt or what he retailed for other makers rather than instruments regularly produced, were it not for existing examples of some of the most unusual items and supporting documentation for others. It is also interesting that Catlin and Miner invariably list instruments from larger, or lowest, to highest, contrary to usual practice. The larger instruments must have been their specialty, perhaps because of the difficulty of ordering and shipping them from abroad. The following is a composite list of instruments mentioned in Catlin and Miner advertisements from 1800 to 1814:

- Pipe organs
- Pianofortes
- Pianofortes "organized" (pianos  
with an organ attachment)
- Harpsichords
- Barrel organs
- Guitars

Bass viols  
 Violoncellos  
 Violins  
 Bassoons, "plain and trumpet stop'd"  
 (with a metal bell section?)  
 Tenoroons (small bassoons)  
 Clarions (bass clarinets)  
 Tenor clarinets  
 Clarinets  
 Hautboys  
 Flutes  
 Fifes  
 Bass and field drums  
 Bugles and hunter's horns

Since pipe organs, flutes, oboes, bassoons, and clarions or bass clarinets were made, it is not hard to concede the making of barrel organs, tenoroons, tenor clarinets, clarinets, and fifes. A cello bearing Catlin's name is also known, suggesting that he made string instruments. Whether pianos, harpsichords, drums, and various brass instruments were also made or merely retailed for other makers will have to await further evidence.

Very little more is known of Catlin's activities in Hartford. Where he worked from 1811 to 1814 is unclear, unless he returned to the old Prison Street shop, since Uzal Miner occupied the Main Street shop. He did continue to work, however, for the clarion or bass clarinet was invented, a new organ was built for Christ Church in 1812, and the instruments signed "Catlin & Bacon" and "Catlin & Bliss" date from these years.

Catlin's Hartford period came to a close about 1815. What had promised to be a major center of woodwind making in the United States was probably a casualty of New England's economic difficulties during the embargo of 1807 and the war of 1812. The history of Hartford County during this period shows that wealth declined, agriculture languished, commerce began to fall off, factories suffered, and large numbers of people emigrated elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

Social life also suffered. "Dancing was approved by the clergy and greatly encouraged by popular masters. . . . Assemblies became the special feature of social life . . . at the inns and taverns where the as-

22. Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818*, 2d ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), p. 224.

semblies were held wine was served freely with the suppers. These pleasures were maintained in common with the election day ball for many years except for interruption through scarcity of money during the period of the War of 1812."<sup>23</sup>

Like many of their neighbors, the Hartford instrument makers moved away to areas of the country where economic conditions were not as severe. Only Uzal Miner remained, but no evidence of his activity after 1814 has been found. He died in 1822.

Catlin moved to Philadelphia about 1815 or 1816 and for a couple of years worked in the shop of his former partner, Allyn Bacon, at 11 South Fourth Street.<sup>24</sup> Neither did very well, as judged by the city taxes they were assessed: each paid 25 cents personal tax and 25 cents county tax on a valuation of \$0 in 1816. Bacon's fortunes improved somewhat the next year when he was required to pay 50 cents for each tax, but Catlin continued to pay the minimum 25 cents through 1818.<sup>25</sup> Bacon's advertisement in the 1818 Philadelphia directory gives an idea of his business, as well as revealing an amusing sideline.

A. Bacon  
Music Seller and Publisher  
No. 11 S. 4th St.

Has constantly on hand a general assortment of goods in his line, and is daily making additions of his own publication; together with those of New York, Boston & c. Country merchants supplied, as usual, with all kinds of instruments, as well as music at a liberal discount. Ive's patent fire machines at retail or by the quantity.

In 1818 the Philadelphia city directory shows George Catlin at his own shop on Walnut between Fourth and Fifth and lists his home at 3 Randall's Court. From 1819 to 1822 the address for his shop is given as the northeast corner of Fifth and Walnut. He was evidently not working for another music store at these addresses, for the records show that his neighbors were two attorneys, a widow, a coachmaker, a bleeder, an agent for military lands, a real estate office, a grocer, and a merchant tailor.

Evidently this was not a very successful period in Catlin's career, for

23. Charles W. Burpee, *History of Hartford County, 1633-1928* (Chicago: S. J. Clark Publishing Company, 1928), p. 243.

24. *The Philadelphia Directory, City & County Register* (Philadelphia: James Robinson, 1816), unpaginated.

25. *Philadelphia Tax Records*, Chestnut Ward, 1816, p. 447; 1817, p. 37; 1818, p. 26; and Locust Ward, 1818, p. 238.

little evidence of his activity has been found. His wife Sarah died in 1819, which could not have helped his work, especially if either of their two children still remained at home. In 1823 the shop at Walnut and Fifth was given up, and for 1823 and 1824 the directory lists Catlin only at his home, then 6 Randall's Court.

In 1824, when Catlin was forty-six years old, his business in Philadelphia began to improve somewhat, assisted in no small measure by the publicity given his products at the first exhibitions of the Franklin Institute. This organization was founded in 1824 to promote American mechanical and scientific endeavors and to encourage invention and discovery. Its yearly exhibits drew attention to products and improvements of American manufacture. The following are the judges' reports of two flutes and a bassoon entered in 1824:

No. 5 & 6 Two Flutes Made by George Catlin of Philadelphia

These are complete, highly finished, excellent instruments, believed to be equal in quality to the best that are imported.

No. 7 A Bassoon Made by George Catlin

This instrument possesses several improvements, which we think it right to mention. These are, 1st., a key by which the B natural and C sharp in the lowest octave are produced, a difficulty which is almost invincible in the common bassoon, so that these notes, however important to the harmony, have been hitherto avoided by composers for this instrument. 2d., an additional G sharp key, which admits an easy transition from F sharp, to G sharp, and vice versa. Without it, it is impossible to execute passages in which this transition is immediate, so that they have been avoided by composers who understood the instrument. 3d., a B flat key, and D sharp key for the second and third octaves, which offer great advantages in execution. The instrument has also other improvements by which many defects of the old bassoon are overcome. Its chromatic scale is perfect, from the lowest to the highest note; and the skillful amateur to whom it belongs has given us many opportunities of witnessing the excellence of its tone. We recommend it to the particular notice of the Board.

On behalf of the Committee

Oct. 26, 1824

R. M. Patterson  
Chairman<sup>26</sup>

Without a more detailed description it is difficult to envision Catlin's improvements to the bassoon, but some possibilities can be suggested

26. Manuscript material related to the Franklin Institute Exhibit of 1824, Archives of the Franklin Institute, Philadelphia.

at least. A single closed key for the left little finger, opening a small hole on the bass joint, might be able to raise the pitch of both B flat and C enough to produce B and C sharp. The extra G-sharp key would probably be installed for the right thumb. The other two keys for B flat and D sharp (or E flat) would undoubtedly be small keys between the second and third fingerholes for each hand. Examples of most of these additions can be found on European bassoons of similar date.

In 1825 Catlin opened another shop at 153 Walnut and continued his residence on Randall's Court. His entry in the Franklin Institute Exhibit that year was a "patent flute," but no details are given. The judges remarked that "the ingenuity and skill of this artist are well known, and the flute presented by him was a very fair specimen of his talent."

The 1826 and 1827 Franklin Institute Exhibits included flutes by Catlin which drew the following comments from the judging committees:

1826 #481 Flute George Catlin Price—\$75

Flute—Mr. Geo. Catlin, of Philad., to whom a medal was awarded at the first exhibition, has maintained his character as a workman, by a beautiful flute, which he has just finished. It is of ebony, with gold mountings, is very true in its scale, and has an excellent tone.

The uniform beauty & excellence of the workmanship in these instruments attracted universal attention, and showed, that, in this department of mechanics, so essential to one of the most delightful of the fine arts, our country may now claim an independence of the foreign manufacture.

1827 #229 Flute (cocoawood) Catlin

Flute—Mr. George Catlin. Of this instrument it is the highest commendation for us to say, that it is worthy of the highest reputation of its maker.

The committee cannot close this report . . . without expressing their favourable opinion of several articles. . . . Amongst these are. . . a beautiful and highly finished flute by Mr. Catlin.<sup>27</sup>

Even with the very favorable publicity of these exhibits, Catlin does not seem to have been very successful. He moved his shop to 65 South Eleventh Street about 1827 and to 20 Library about 1832. From 1837 on he worked only from his residence. He did not exhibit again at the Franklin Institute Fairs until 1838.

Catlin's address from 1837 to 1843 was 49 Prune, and from 1844 on,

27. *Ibid.*, exhibits of 1826 and 1827.



FIGURE 7. Philadelphia, 1838: view west from Independence Hall Steeple. Photograph courtesy of the Robert H. Tannahill Research Library, Edison Institute, Dearborn, Michigan.

117 North Fifth Street (fig. 7). The only evidence of his activity during this period is found in the catalogues and reports of exhibits at the Franklin Institute Fairs. In 1838 both George Catlin and his son George F. Catlin entered flutes, but they were not mentioned in the judges' report. In 1840 Catlin's ingenuity won the following comment from the judging committee:

A flute made by the union of successive layers of linen or cotton drawn tight over a mandril also attracted notice as a highly finished instrument; but the peculiar advantages of its structure were not explained; the maker is Mr. Catlin of Philadelphia.<sup>28</sup>

Catlin exhibited "trimmings of musical instruments" at the Franklin Institute Fairs of 1845 and 1847, but his last instrument was entered in 1846, when he was sixty-eight years old:

No. 619, an eight-keyed flute by George Catlin, Philadelphia. This instrument presents nothing new; but its quality of tone is so good that it is deserving of a third premium.<sup>29</sup>

28. *Ibid.*, exhibit of 1840.

29. *Ibid.*, exhibit of 1846.

George Catlin died on May 1, 1852, at the home of his son-in-law and was buried in Odd Fellows Cemetery in Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup>

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Part 2 of this article will examine Catlin's known instruments and assess his importance as a musical instrument maker.

### *The Edison Institute*

30. *Public Ledger*, Philadelphia, May 3, 1852, p. 2, col. 1.