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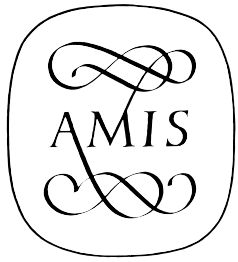

Harry Edward Freund's Great Square-Piano Bonfire: A Tale Told in the Press*

William E. Hettrick

A little over a century ago, piano dealers all over America opened up their latest copies of *The Musical Age* and discovered a rousing call to action. Since its founding in 1893 by editor Harry Edward Freund (who styled himself as its "conductor"), this New York music trade journal had enjoyed success, especially after becoming the self-proclaimed organ of the National Association of Piano Dealers of America, established in 1902. Readers of this and other trade publications had become accustomed to continued editorial promotion of issues of interest to the piano industry, such as the universal one-price system and the reduction of freight charges. Trade journalists had also repeatedly denounced dishonest retail methods used by unscrupulous merchants. One such practice was the "stool-pigeon game" (a ruse still employed today, known as "bait and switch"). Another was the fake "going out of business" sale, which was frequently accompanied by a fraudulent advertising claim that a certain piano had been owned by a respected (but fictitious) professor or impoverished widow who had fallen on hard times and had to liquidate it quickly. Thus the prospective buyer was duped into believing that the instrument was worth far more than

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the asking price; moreover, he could secretly relish the dubious pleasure of benefiting from someone else's misfortune. Still another practice that had been criticized for decades was the selling of "stencil" pianos, invariably cheaply produced, assembly-line instruments supplied to dealers with labels of their choice, sometimes bearing names deceptively resembling those of famous manufacturers.

But here, occupying pride of place on the front page of *The Musical Age* for November 7, 1903, was a new issue—a bold venture to which all dealers and members of the association could contribute on the occasion of their forthcoming annual meeting. "Burn the Old Squares at the Atlantic City Convention" was Harry Freund's headline, and his article went on to explain what he hoped to achieve at the popular New Jersey seaside resort:

> We propose that as there are now over 400 members in the Dealers' Association, each member send, by freight prepaid, to the Atlantic City Convention next May from three to five old squares, which now form part of his stock. The old squares are a bugbear in the piano business, and are used as a means of fooling both the piano man and the piano purchaser. The destruction of a couple of thousand of these old boxes would rid the trade of a considerable nuisance, and would put the retailing of pianos on a more honest basis. When the average piano man finds out that the prospective purchaser has an old square to offer in exchange, which he values highly as a family heirloom, he is compelled in justice to himself, if he has to make any kind of an allowance, to raise the retail price of the new upright or grand accordingly, with the result that two persons are fooled—the piano manufacturer or the dealer and the customer.
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> The old square is used as a basis of fictitious value, and should be obliterated. Unfortunately, however, old squares are not like pins, and do not disappear. They constantly crop up in retail piano transactions, much to the disgust of the piano men.
>
> Now if the dealers will ship to the Atlantic City Convention from three to five squares apiece, a great conflagration could be held daily on the beach with the permission of the local authorities. The press throughout the country will take up the matter, and thousands of visitors will be attracted to Atlantic City, and the piano industry will have an immense advertisement. . . .
>
> The National Association of Piano Dealers of America is offered by *The Musical Age* a great opportunity to make the Convention at Atlantic City in May, 1904, a memorable event in the history of the entire trade by the suggestion now put forth, and which should certainly appeal to the commercial instincts of the piano man. If this practice is followed up, for, say a period of ten years, 15,000 to 20,000 squares would be out of existence.[1]

1. *The Musical Age* [hereafter *TMA*] 44, no. 1 (November 7, 1903): 5. The full text of this article is reprinted in "On the Beach," 4–5.

Once constituting the lion's share of the production of American piano makers, the square had largely ceased to be manufactured during the decade of the 1890s, and by the beginning of the twentieth century it was well-nigh obsolete.[2] But if American piano men were as disgusted with the square as Freund claimed, there had been no hint of this dissatisfaction in the pages of *The Musical Age* or any other music trade journal up to this time. In fact, old square pianos still had a legitimate place in the lower end of the market, to judge from a sampling of dealers' advertisements in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in early 1904, in which prices for used squares range mostly from $10 to $125.[3] Nevertheless, Freund had the genius to realize that this issue would attract the interest of his

2. Henry Edward Krehbiel reported in 1889 that in 1866, the production of American piano makers had comprised 97 percent squares, 2 percent concert grands, and 1 percent uprights; as of the date of his writing, however, the figures had changed to 85 percent uprights, 10 percent squares, and about 5 percent grands. This change, he explained, had been "brought about largely by the improvement of the upright and the economy of room which the instruments offer to a people yearly taking more and more to apartment life." See *The American Musician* 15, no. 6 (November 9, 1889): 27. The firm of Steinway & Sons made their last square piano in 1888. See Edwin M. Good, *Giraffes, Black Dragons, and Other Pianos,* 2d ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 229. William Steinway commented in 1895: "The manufacture of square pianos has now almost entirely ceased. The annual production of American pianofortes consists of about ninety-five per cent. uprights, less than two per cent. squares, and a little more than three per cent. grand pianos. There is no question that by the year 1900 not a single square piano will be manufactured in the United States or any other part of the world." See William Steinway, "American Musical Instruments," in *1795–1895: One Hundred Years of American Commerce,* ed. Chauncy M. Depew (New York: D. O. Haynes & Co., 1895), 512. Steinway's prediction must be tempered by bits of evidence that at least a small number of American piano makers were still producing square pianos in the early twentieth century. Among the many advertisements of manufacturers of pianos and parts for pianos that appeared in the pages of the Chicago music trade journal *The Presto,* for example, one by Kranich & Bach of New York City, mentioning grand, square, and upright pianos (in that order) continued to be run well past the date of the piano dealers' convention in May, 1904. Whenever the advertised squares had been made, the context of this advertisement implies that they were not used merchandise. Another example of the continued manufacture of square pianos is the report (cited below at n. 89) in the July 16, 1904, issue of *The Music Trade Review* that the New York City school system had placed an order for fourteen new squares with William Knabe & Co., Baltimore.

3. Advertisement by C. J. Heppe & Son of Philadelphia in the *Philadelphia Inquirer,* February 2, 1904, p. 14; and advertisement of The Wanamaker Store in the *Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 31, 1904, p. 9. The Wanamaker ad also offers a used Chickering & Sons square for $150 (originally $500) and a used Steinway & Sons square grand for $225 (originally $750). These two ads also offer used uprights ranging mostly from $150 to $325, although Wanamaker also lists a Chickering & Sons mahogany model for $575 (originally $650).

readers and to know how to use rhetorical persuasion to rouse them into action—or at least to pique their curiosity and encourage them to continue to subscribe to his journal. He ran a longer article in his next issue, repeating his call to action and now consolidating his previously announced multiple fires into a single memorable conflagration. His prophesy of the event reveals not only the strength of his fervor, but also his sure knowledge of how the power of the press could be used to attain the results that he predicted:

> Think of the advertising the trade would get out of the incident! Think of the crowds that would gather to witness so novel a spectacle! Think of the way the old squares would afterward be regarded! Many respectable homes now have square pianos where an upright of the best make could well be afforded. The bon-fire would make the owners of these instruments sit up and think. They would realize that they were behind the times and many would visit piano warerooms, especially if the dealers advertised the subject after their return.
>
> What a spectacle it would make! The pile would be larger than a house, and when the fire reached them what a clanging and snapping of the strings there would be, like so much musketry! As the brightness of the fire disclosed the dimensions of the great pile, it would make a sight never to be forgotten. Then the piano men should join hands and dance a war-dance about the leaping flames as they devoured this antiquated form of piano making. They could well rejoice that some of the instruments that had taken the cream off their profits were going up in smoke.
>
> Reporters would be present from every nearby city, and the Associated Press man would send out his columns to all the papers in the service.
>
> There would be interviews with manufacturers and dealers on "Why did you do it?" and the whole subject would be well thrashed out and would be food for the special articles for months afterward. The incident would strike the average newspaper man as picturesque and the "story in it" would be appreciated by all.
>
> It would mean that the public would get a true idea of the real value of the old square piano and would mark the end of the old *regime* with a pillar of fire![4]

Freund touched on the subject again in the issue of *The Musical Age* for November 21, in a report that his proposal of a square-piano bonfire had "attracted the attention of dealers all over the country" and that the communications that had been received "show to what an extent the old square is used both in misleading advertising by certain dealers and by

4. *TMA* 44, no. 2 (November 14, 1903): 29, 31. The full text of this article is reprinted in "On the Beach," 5–6.

customers in an effort to cut down the dealers' profits." He concluded with the battle cry "Burn Up the Old Squares!"[5] In the same issue he reported comments on the proposed bonfire made by Henry Dreher, a piano dealer of Cleveland, Ohio, and the president of the National Association of Piano Dealers of America:

> That idea of yours about burning the old squares is all right, and you can say for me that if others will send, I'll be one of them, and will ship three squares from Cleveland. It's a thing that ought to be done, anyway, and in other lines, [such] as sewing machines, when they get a sample of the work of 1880 they take it out in the back yard and break it up with an axe.[6]

In his issue for November 28, Freund repeated his original call to action and followed it with statements supportive of his plan, consisting of testimonial letters and reprints of newspaper articles. An example of the former is a letter from A. B. Smith, a piano dealer in Akron, Ohio, who begins by complimenting Freund on his "idea of burning up some old squares." He continues:

> I gave a lady one a while ago and we took it up about dusk and placed it in her front room. The next day her little girl came down to the store and asked if we wouldn't come up and place it in the barn. Not coming up [i.e., our not coming up] she exchanged it the next day with one of our competitors for an upright. Consequently, if you were to advise anybody to give them away, advise them to give away good ones. If you cast any very old squares on the water, the water is liable to rise and the piano will be returned to you.
>
> I purchase as high as twenty-five of them at one time, shipping them to Akron in a carload without boxes, and have sold them to customers who wanted something of the kind to torture their "beginning children" with. One old dealer of this city hasn't got over nervous prostration which a dray-load of one hundred and fifty legs and lyres going by at once caused him.[7]

One of the newspaper articles reprinted in the issue of *The Musical Age* for November 28 is a fanciful story of "Seraphina and Her Old Square Piano" taken from the Albany *Argus* of November 15, 1903.[8] Harry Freund could not have found a better story to illustrate his point if he had written it himself. As a girl Seraphina practiced her scales and five-finger exercises diligently on her large square piano, a gift from her

5. *TMA* 44, no. 3 (November 21, 1903): 53.

6. Ibid., 57.

7. *TMA* 44, no. 4, (November 28, 1903): 91. The full text of this letter is reprinted in "On the Beach," 8.

8. This article is reprinted in "On the Beach," 7–8.

proud father. When Seraphina was married, the old square became the centerpiece of the young couple's new parlor, and her musical abilities gave them a high social standing in the community. But when it came time for Seraphina's daughter to start her own regimen of scales and five-finger exercises, it was noticed that the twenty-year-old piano was now hopelessly worn out. "You need a new piano," said the music teacher. Remembering the large sum her father had paid for her piano, Seraphina made sure that she received good value for it as a trade-in when she bought its upright replacement; of course, the dealer simply added that amount to the purchase price of the new instrument. The final scene in the story shows Seraphina shedding a tear as her beloved old square is carted off, while the dealer grumbles to himself, "Another of those old square pianos on our hands!"

As the year 1903 drew to a close and 1904 began, Freund continued his campaign of reprinting newspaper articles about the proposed bonfire in the pages of *The Musical Age*. Some of these rely heavily on the text of his initial call to action, although a few offer original comments, such as the following:

> In his proposal Mr. Freund forcefully states some plain truths that are of interest to users of the piano as well as to dealers. It is certain that a lot of talk will result from the suggestion.[9]

> Now it is proposed that every dealer in the Association shall ship to Atlantic City from one to ten of these musical instruments, and that the Committee on Entertainment be authorized to purchase a tank carload of crude oil. Then, when the convention meets, the pianos, a thousand or more in all, will be piled on the beach and saturated with petroleum. A single match will do the rest, and perhaps a fiddler may be engaged to play the part of Nero while the enormous funeral pyre sends up its flame and smoke to Euterpe's memory.[10]

> At a meeting of the Executive Committee each of the two or three hundred members of the association was requested to send one or two old square instruments before the Annual Meeting. Members must pay the freight. The greater number of square pianos a member can send, the better his standing will be with the Association. The pianos are to be placed on the

9. *Albany Argus* (no date given), reprinted in *TMA* 44, no. 5 (December 5, 1903): 149.

10. *Troy Times,* November 28, 1903, reprinted in *TMA* 44, no 5 (December 5, 1903): 149. The reference to Nero in this article is also found in others reprinted in *TMA*, which suggests that this text had come from a common press release.

> beach and a player put at every instrument. At a signal all will start "Hiawatha," and if this is not enough to make the fish leave the water, then "Mr. Dooley" and "The Good Old Summertime" will follow. Then the bonfire will be lighted.[11]

To his credit, Freund also reprinted comments that were only mildly in support of his plan, such as the following, in which a dealer in Milwaukee is quoted:

> We will certainly send along two or three to help along the jollification, although I am inclined to think it more or less a joke. It is true that the old square is a nuisance, but it also has its place. Many people could not have a piano at all if they were not able to buy the old square at a low figure. Neither is it a basis of fictitious values in stores like ours, where there is one price for new goods. In making a trade we never allow more for an old piano than we can get out of it.[12]

Freund also reprinted an article recording an interview with William H. Daniels of the firm of Denton, Cottier & Daniels of Buffalo, N.Y. Daniels's statements are extremely complimentary to Freund and his work, as the following excerpts show:

> The piano trade of the United States is under another debt of gratitude to Harry Edward Freund, of *The Musical Age*. . . . The articles that have appeared in that enterprising trade journal regarding the destruction, at Atlantic City, of a large number of old second-hand squares have been widely copied by the press throughout the country, and the public is being educated to the fact that while there may be a certain sentimental value attached to an old square which has been in the possession of a family for many years, the actual value is only of a few dollars, under any circumstances. . . .
>
> In making sales, or in completing them, the old square has proven a bane in the piano business, but thus far the majority of houses have hesitated to

11. *TMA* 44, no. 6 (December 12, 1903): 170. All three songs mentioned in this article were greatly popular at the time. "Hiawatha," with words by James O'Dea and music by Neil Moret (Charles Neil Daniels), is a ragtime tune characterized as an "Indian intermezzo." It was copyrighted in 1903. "Mr. Dooley," with words by William Jerome and music by Jean Schwartz, is a rollicking "Irish" song in 6/8 meter that bears a copyright date of 1902. "In the Good Old Summertime," with words by Ren Shields and music by George Evans, remained in vogue for decades following its copyright year, 1902. See Barbara Cohen-Stratyner, ed., *Popular Music, 1900–1919* (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1988), 127, 179, and 244; and William J. Schafer, "Daniels, Charles Neil," *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music,* ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan Press Ltd.; New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music Inc., 1986), 1:578.

12. *Milwaukee Sentinel* (no date given), reprinted in *TMA* 44, no. 8 (December 26, 1903): 215.

> take the matter up and it required the aggressive work of Harry Edward Freund, of *The Musical Age,* to effect one of his usual steps for the benefit of the entire industry. . . .
>
> Personally, I wish to congratulate *The Musical Age* upon its work in regard to the disposal of old squares, and the house of Denton, Cottier & Daniels will only be too willing to ship two or three car loads with freight prepaid for the purpose of having these instruments disposed of in a manner which will forever effectually destroy them and at the same time impress their real value on the piano purchasing public.[13]

At least one astute journalist, writing for the Chicago *Musical Times,* validated Freund's own prediction that the success of his plan would lie not only in carrying out the announced bonfire, but also in generating press coverage, which had already become evident:

> One good thing about that suggestion to burn the old squares at Atlantic City is the frequent mention made by the daily papers. They have all tumbled into the pit nicely and many of them have published long articles about it. In this way the Association meetings have received liberal advertising. *The Musical Age* deserves credit for the idea, which is far more brilliant than any bonfire of old squares ever will be.[14]

In spite of the favorable response that Harry Freund received from sympathetic commentators, his plan to aid piano dealers by eliminating trade in square pianos did not meet with universal approval, especially in the pages of competing trade journals. It is no surprise that *The Musical Age* took little notice of comments critical of Freund's bonfire that appeared in several rival publications during the months that led up to the Atlantic City convention. *The Presto,* based in Chicago and edited by C. A. Daniell and Frank D. Abbot, published an appeal in the issue of January 14, 1904, to piano dealers to dispose of their stock of old squares not by destroying them, but by giving them to the deserving poor. O. A. Field, president of the Jesse French Piano & Organ Co. of St. Louis, is praised for his annual donation, and his philanthropy is described in the following statement by W. M. Robinson, the manager of the company:

> We have noticed the suggestions that have appeared in the trade papers regarding the disposition of old square pianos, but hardly think the extermi-

13. *TMA* 45, no. 4 (February 27, 1904): 441. The interview is dated February 23, 1904. The full text of this article is reprinted in "On the Beach," 8–9.

14. *Chicago Musical Times* (no date given), reprinted in *TMA* 44, no. 6 (December 12, 1903): 170.

nation of them by burning them up would be just the thing. Why not follow the example of Mr. Field, where more good would follow? The writer noticed last Wednesday, when we gave away a number of old pianos and organs at our store, among the great number of people who came, something like 250 or 300, several of the persons who secured one of these old instruments proved to be very worthy people. . . .

Why could not the National Piano Dealers' Association, at their meeting this year, fix upon a minimum price for the square pianos that could be depreciated each year at their meeting and have every dealer and salesman cognizant of what the object is, so that in three or four years, by an act of that kind, they could better eliminate the value of the old piano from the trade altogether.[15]

In their issue for February 11, 1904, Daniell and Abbott pointed out an intriguing connection between the piano and automobile trades:

Possibly the piano trade is not adapted to the art of assimilation as are some other lines of business. But sometimes there appear suggestions which even the piano men might adopt with good advantage. There is one now being put into operation by the manufacturers of automobiles. The makers of the "rigs that run" are comparatively new acquisitions to the world's activities, and they may have more recent ideas and newer notions. In any event, their plan for disposing of the old and out-of-style automobiles seems to be a good one. . . .

But as to the plan of disposing of old things on wheels, that might be applied equally well to old things with keys and strings and checked cases. The automobile association proposes to open warehouses where all second hand vehicles made by members of the association, taken in exchange by any member, will be sent and sold. No matter what the price allowed for the old rig in the trade, it will be fixed up and a selling price fixed at the warehouse. In that way the house which takes it in has no advantage over the others, and the original exchange could not be made so as to infringe upon the rules of fair competition. The results of the final sales of the old machine are divided between the owner and the association. That is, a percentage is turned to the credit of the association for expenses and profit. In that way the dealer who takes in the old machine is not troubled with any second hands, nor are his competitors. Customers for second hands are referred to the warehouse by all the dealers. Now, isn't that a good thing?

If the piano dealers in the large cities could adopt some such system there would be no need of any destructive bonfires at Atlantic City or elsewhere. The old pianos would take care of themselves and they would be destroyed when they came back to the general warehouse in a worthless condition. The plan would constitute a piano clearing house, where the old

15. *The Presto,* no. 914 (January 14, 1904): 17.

instruments would pass for their true value and would be thrown out as "worthless" if they did not possess a certain amount of value.[16]

Another trade journal, *The Music Trade Review*, edited by Edward Lyman Bill and published in New York, ran a report in its issue for January 9, 1904, that a Detroit piano dealer had complained of falling prices for old square pianos as a result of the publicity for the bonfire. Bill appended his own editorial comments on the proposed plan, beginning by damning its originator with faint praise:

> The proposition to make a great bonfire at Atlantic City was the brilliant scheme of a trade newspaper, the conductor of which sent out to the papers a carefully worded press account of the plan, and gave it an official tinge by stating that "at a meeting of the executive committee each of the two or three hundred members of the association was requested to send old square pianos to Atlantic City next summer." This unauthorized use of the association name has made some of the dealers indignant, who regard the whole thing as purely a scheme to advertise a trade paper.
>
> Of course, the proposition is absurd. Imagine a dealer from San Francisco paying freight on an old square piano to Atlantic City. He would have to pay freight on it back again, or to some dumping ground, for the authorities there would not sanction for a moment the creation of a big bonfire on the beach.[17]

In his issue for February 20, Bill included the following reasoned evaluation of square pianos contributed by an anonymous dealer in musical instruments:

> Square pianos are out of style, and they have not been made for more than a decade, but we could not do business without them. It is not often that an old square piano goes to the junk pile; it must be practically worthless before it is unfit for exchange. . . . The majority of the rich and those in moderate circumstances believe that home is not complete without an upright piano, and they exchange their old square instrument, paying us, of course, a good sum in cash or notes. The squares are retoned, cleaned up, and made as presentable as possible, and we have no difficulty in finding ready purchasers among those who are unable to buy an expensive piano. And let me say that some of those dear old-time instruments are far superior to the pianos which have forced them out of the homes of the rich.
>
> But, then, there are many rich people who will not part with their square piano, although they may own one, two, or even three of the up-to-date uprights or grands. They hold to the old piano because it is a fine instrument

16. *The Presto,* no. 918 (February 11, 1904): 6.
17. *The Music Trade Review* 38, no. 2 (January 9, 1904): 18.

and often on account of the associations. In some homes the old square has become one of the family, and the head of the house, as well as the children, does not wish to see it pass into other hands.

For practice purposes a good square piano cannot be excelled, and dealers sell many of them "for the children to bang on," as the purchasers put it. It is an unwise holder of the purse in a family of moderate means and small income who will shove off a really first-class square piano for an expensive upright; but, then, too, it must be remembered that the upright piano was manufactured as a space saver, and by this I mean that the old square piano is too large to be placed in the small parlors or sitting room[s] and permit of much room for other furniture. It practically crowds out everything else, and it was when people began to live in flats and other cramped quarters that piano manufacturers realized that a room-saving instrument was needed.

I cannot believe that an improved instrument had much to do with the change from the square to the upright, and there are owners of uprights today who would gladly welcome back the old square if they only had room enough for it. . . .

Well, well, there is one consolation—fashion changes, and it will not be fifty years before the rich will be searching around for the rare old square pianos just the same as they are now turning over the old junk houses for mahogany furniture of ancient make.[18]

And in a considerably lighter vein, but still consistent with his opposition to Harry Freund's bonfire, in his next issue of *The Music Trade Review* Bill ran the following report under the heading "Piano Smashing Contest. A Novel Pastime Which Puts to Shame the Bonfire Method of Getting Rid of Old Square Pianos—Has Not Been Recommended by the Association":

Lynn, Mass., Feb. 20, 1904.

The feature of the annual fair recently held by the Clover Cycle Club of this city was a piano smashing contest, something entirely new in the annals of athletic struggles for fame and fortune. The piano—an old square—which was the victim on this occasion was purchased by the club for $50. After it had been set up in the hall the announcement was made that all who wished to enter the contest must pay ten cents each blow for the privilege of whacking the instrument. A prize was offered the person who should knock off the biggest piece.

After a member of the club had played "Hiawatha" for the last time and the club chaplain had made a prayer, a local blacksmith struck the old square a tremendous blow with his axe and sheared off a leg. Then the

18. *The Music Trade Review* 38, no. 8 (February 20, 1904): 15.

> others pitched in and soon reduced the piano to matchwood. The blacksmith won the prize—a silver fruit dish—and a medal for being the champion piano smasher of the country, and the club cleared $100. The strings and iron plate, which are all that is left of the instrument, will be sold.[19]

The ranks of trade journalists who were critical of Harry Freund and his bonfire included his own brother, John Christian Freund, editor of *The Music Trades,* published in New York. In his issue for December 5, 1903, he printed the following (unfraternal) comment:

> The editor of a little trade sheet suggests that at the meeting of the Dealers' Association in Atlantic City, next May, the occasion should be celebrated by collecting all the old square pianos on the beach and burning them. The dealers who have old square pianos are invited to pay the freight on them and send them down.
>
> The proposition was offered to excite attention, and has already caught the eagle eye of the editor of one of our leading dailies, who has taken it up seriously and descanted thereupon.
>
> The suggestion is ridiculous. There are many square pianos, made by our old makers, which, after fifteen and even twenty years of use, are more serviceable and more musical than some of the cheap, rattle-trap uprights that are being put on the market to-day. In the next place, if the dealers want to celebrate their meeting with a bonfire, the best thing for them to do would be to bring to the seashore all their fake advertisements, dirty methods, false statements about one another, and make a conflagration, so that they can start afresh with malice to none and a proper appreciation of the truth that clean business methods pay best in the end.[20]

* * * *

As the reference above to the journalistic work of his brother suggests, Harry Edward Freund came from a family in which literary activity was prized. He was born in London, England, on May 19, 1863, and was christened at St. Giles, Cripplegate, on July 15 of that year.[21] Harry's father was Dr. Jonas Charles Hermann Freund, born in Bohemia, who received his medical degree in Vienna, served as a surgeon in the British Army, and was Deputy-Inspector General of Hospitals for the British-German

19. *The Music Trade Review* 38, no. 9 (February 27, 1904): 16.

20. *The Music Trades* 26, no. 23 (December 5, 1903): 26.

21. Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, International Genealogical Index, British Isles–1, accessed via *http://www.familysearch.org* at the New York Public Library on August 25, 2004. Harry Freund's birthdate is also reported by Daniel Spillane, *History of the American Pianoforte: Its Technical Development, and the Trade* (New York, 1890; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 359.

Legion during the Crimean War. He was the founder and first directing physician of the German Hospital in the Dalston district of London, which was established in 1845 for the purpose of caring for people of German origin living in Britain. He died in 1879.[22] Harry's mother was Amelia Louisa (Rudiger) Freund, who was born ca. 1826 in Germany and spent her first twelve years in that country before coming to England. Under the nom de plume of Amelia Lewis she enjoyed considerable success as an author and speaker on matters of home economics and social reform. In his touching obituary of his mother, Harry Freund recounted that both of his parents "were specially gifted with many talents, and possessed extraordinary minds in every way." They were received at the court of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert and "soon attracted around them a circle of those most eminent in the world of art and science."[23] The English census taken during the night of April 2, 1871, documents the household of James [sic] C. H. Freund at 7 West Street in London. There can be no doubt that this is Jonas, as he is listed as head of the family, age 62, born in Austria (Bohemia), and a physician who studied at the Graduate University of Vienna. Moreover, the household includes John C., age 22 (a student at Oxford University), and Harry E., age 7, as well as four other children (ages 16, 13, 11, and 9) and two female servants. Curiously, Amelia Louisa is not listed, possibly indicating that she was not at home when the census taker came.[24]

Harry Freund's eldest brother, John Christian (born November 22, 1848), devoted his early career to literature and the theater. As a scholarship student at Oxford University, he founded a literary magazine and wrote a play that was produced in 1870 at Queen's Theatre in London. John left Oxford before finishing his degree in 1871 (probably not long after the above-mentioned census was taken) and came to New York,

22. Harry Edward Freund, "Amelia Louisa Freund," *Freund's Music and Drama* 9, no. 21 (March 24, 1888): 3; "Freund, John C.," *Who's Who in New York City and State,* ed. John W. Leonard (New York: L. R. Hamersley & Company, 1909), 512; *The Times* (London), October 17, 1845, p. 7; and the following websites describing historical buildings in London: *http://hoop.ground-level.org/dalstonKingsland/info* (accessed on September 8, 2004) and *http://www.derelictlondon.com/id747_htm* (accessed on September 7, 2004).

23. Harry Edward Freund, "Amelia Louisa Freund," 3; and *Food and Health: A Scientific and Practical Review of Subjects Pertaining to Food and Health* 1, no. 9 (March 26, 1881): 10.

24. Ancestry.co.uk, *1871 England Census* (Provo, Utah: MyFamily.com, Inc., 2004), on-line database accessed at the New York Public Library on August 25, 2004; based on microfilmed copies of enumerators' books, National Archives, London, RG10/436, folio 83, p. 6.

where he first served on the staff of the *Wine & Spirit Gazette* and subsequently founded and edited the *Hat, Cap and Fur Trade Review* as well as a critical weekly entitled *The Arcadian.*[25] John's association with the new field of music trade journalism began in the mid 1870s, when his name first started appearing in the New York City directories. The first issue of his journal entitled *The Music Trade Review* was published on November 3, 1875; it became *The Musical and Dramatic Times and Music Trade Review* on November 1, 1879, and ceased publication some two months later.[26]

Amelia Louisa Freund arrived in New York in 1880, and by the end of that year she had already established herself in the United States as an authority on healthful and economical ways of living. The *New-York Times* reported on December 22, 1880, that Amelia Lewis had given a dinner the day before to members of the American Institute Farmers' Club "to show them what a sumptuous repast can be prepared for 25 cents a head by her new style of economical cookery."[27] The first issue of her new weekly journal, *Food and Health,* appeared on January 29, 1881, and on August 6, she announced another new periodical, *Traveler's World,* edited by John C. Freund. On October 15, 1881, the masthead of *Food and Health* included both Amelia Lewis and John C. Freund as editors, and a notice from Amelia informing readers: "In future my son, Mr. John C. Freund, will be associated with me in the editorship of *Food and Health,* which will be henceforth published semimonthly by the *Traveler's World Publishing Company.*"[28] *Food and Health* appears to have ceased publication in January, 1882, but Amelia Freund continued her literary activity, writing articles for a number of periodicals, including the German-

25. "Freund, John C.," 512. Although it does not tally with the London census of 1871, there is some evidence that John Freund came to the U.S. in 1869. See the *Sun* (New York), January 14, 1880, p. 1; and the *New-York Times,* January 15, 1880, p. 8.

26. John Freund lived considerably beyond his means during the 1870s, paying lavishly (mostly with borrowed money) for a residence in Tarrytown, N.Y., and a well-appointed office in New York City. He showed a similar lack of prudence in his business dealings. In spite of having collected fees for months in advance from advertisers in his journal, he was unable to cover several notes for large amounts that came due on January 8, 1880. He fled New York to parts unknown on January 10, 1880, leaving his wife, colleagues, and creditors to pick up the pieces. See the *Sun* (New York), January 14, 1880, p. 1; and January 18, 1880, p. 6; as well as the *New-York Times,* January 14, 1880, p. 5; January 15, 1880, p. 8; and January 16, 1880, p. 4. He returned to New York some time before August 1, 1881, the date of the first issue of *Traveler's World,* published in that city.

27. *New-York Times,* December 22, 1880, p. 2.

28. *Food and Health* 2, no. 10 (October 15, 1881): 1.

language *Belletristisches Journal,* published in New York. Her son John founded a new music trade journal also in January, 1882, whose title changed several times over a short period. Its first issue of January 7 bears the title *Music, a Review* and contains a section headed *The Music Trade.* A little less than four months later it became *Music & Drama: A Review.* Still later it became *Freund's Music & Drama,* and the business section was called *Trade Talk.*

Harry E. Freund most likely arrived in New York on July 31, 1882.[29] On November 10, 1883, the first issue of *Freund's Weekly: A Review of Music and the Drama* appeared, with himself, at age 20, billed as publisher and proprietor, and his brother John, almost 35 years old, as editor. With the issue for December 27, 1884, the journal's title became *Freund's Music and Drama,* harking back to John's previous publication. Some eight months later, in the issue for August 29, 1885, both brothers were joined by their mother as editor. The collaboration of all three Freunds in the same publication was short lived, however, since John's name was soon removed from the masthead, and he was henceforth represented only by reviews of his appearances as an actor and lecturer in other cities. A play of his was produced at McVicar's Theatre in Chicago in 1885. Amelia is last listed in the masthead of *Freund's Music and Drama* in the issue for March 6, 1886, although she continued to contribute articles for another year. On March 24, 1888, Harry announced the death of his mother in the obituary cited above,[30] and he followed this a week later with a short statement of appreciation for the "large number of letters, telegrams, etc., from my friends, expressing their sincere sympathy at the loss of my mother."[31] It is significant that Harry makes no mention of his brother here, nor did he acknowledge him in any subsequent writings. Sadly, for reasons that are not entirely clear, the two Freund brothers appear to have become permanently estranged by this time. For his part, John also did not mention Harry by name in his writings, although

29. The name Harry Freund appears in a list of passengers arrived in New York on the steamship *Alaska* from Liverpool in the *New-York Times,* July 31, 1882, p. 8. The absence of his middle name (which he used in print throughout his career) and even his middle initial in this document may cast doubt on the identity of this Harry Freund, but the date is entirely consistent with all other evidence of Harry's activities in New York. Daniel Spillane, *History of the American Pianoforte,* 359, states that Harry E. Freund came to the U.S. in 1880, although no source is cited for this information.

30. Harry Edward Freund, "Amelia Louisa Freund," 3.

31. Harry Edward Freund, "To My Friends in the Trade, Profession and Press," *Freund's Music and Drama* 9, no. 22 (March 31, 1888): 3.

he did refer to him anonymously in a demeaning manner, as shown above.[32]

John Freund returned to music journalism in New York in the late 1880s, editing *American Musician* ("A Weekly Paper devoted to the interests of the Musicians and Music Trades of America") with J. Travis Quigg and then founding, with Milton Weil, *The Music Trades,* which proved to have lasting qualities (it is still in existence). Along the way he edited the *Dolgeville Herald,* published by the musical entrepreneur Alfred Dolge in Dolgeville, N.Y. In 1898, again teaming up with Milton Weil, he established *Musical America,* which lasted some forty years after his death in 1924.[33] Harry Freund, praised in 1890 as "a popular young editor, and highly esteemed throughout piano circles, professional and commercial,"[34] continued to produce *Freund's Music and Drama* until it ceased publication with the issue for January 23, 1892. In the following year he founded the publication that would prove to be his most substantial contribution to music trade journalism. It started on January 7, 1893, with the title *Freund's Weekly*—yet another example of the bewildering repetition of titles used by the Freund brothers for separate publications—and appeared as *Freund's Musical Weekly* from December 2, 1893, to January 8, 1896, before its permanent title, *The Musical Age,* was established.

* * * *

Harry Freund's efforts in the months leading up to the convention in Atlantic City in May 1904 to ensure the success of his big event are largely unrecorded. Since he published only a few articles on the subject in *The Musical Age* during this time, most of his work to encourage piano dealers to ship their unwanted squares to be sacrificed to the flames on the New Jersey shore must have been accomplished behind the scenes. One newspaper mentioned that "huge postal cards" announcing the af-

32. John C. Freund's habit of launching repeated, personal attacks in the pages of his journals was combined with an ambition that was evidently so intense that it caused him to overstep the bounds of ethical conduct from time to time. His changing relations in this regard with Joseph P. Hale, Albert Weber, and William Steinway in the late 1870s and early 1880s are outlined by D. W. Fostle, *The Steinway Saga: An American Dynasty* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 244–45, 247, and 309–15. John Freund's demonstrated personality and character may hold the key to the mystery of the Freund brothers' estrangement.

33. "Freund, John C.," 512; and "John C. Freund Passes Away after a Lingering Illness," *Musical America* 40, no. 7 (June 7, 1924): 39.

34. Spillane, *History of the American Pianoforte,* 359–60.

fair had been sent out to dealers, and piano men in Milwaukee[35] and Akron[36] reported having received them. Harry's reputation was demonstrably growing at this time within the ranks of American piano businessmen. He must have been in very high spirits on the evening of March 19, 1904, when a special banquet was held in his honor at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco by representatives of the local piano trade. The event was duly reported in the issue of *The Musical Age* for April 2, 1904, in which it covered a five-page spread[37] including his portrait (see fig. 1) and facsimiles of the cover of the printed program, the menu, and the order of events. After dinner, the piano dealer who served as toastmaster and chairman on that occasion praised Freund for his efforts on behalf of the trade as editor of *The Musical Age,* which he claimed was the first paper to advocate the forming of the National Association of Piano Dealers. He continued with an enumeration of the improved business practices that the establishment of a music trade association in San Francisco would also produce to benefit piano dealers in that city. Among these, he said, was "Uniform allowances for old squares—or, as Mr. Freund might suggest, 'Send our old squares to Atlantic City for bonfires.' " Harry Freund's address began with a statement of his appreciation for the unique contributions of piano dealers to the music trade and the growing necessity for these businessmen to act in concert for their mutual advantage. He spoke of his work some three years earlier as one of the founders of the National Association, which had afforded a wonderful opportunity for cooperation between manufacturers and dealers. He pointed with pride to his accomplishments on behalf of dealers, including the unhesitating support that *The Musical Age* had given them and his "good fortune to meet the dealers from Maine to California individually" over the course of his travels, which had amounted to "over 30,000 miles within the past twelve months." He also reminded his audience that he had produced special issues of his journal, entitled *The Musical Age Daily,* for the purpose of giving full reports of the Association's annual conventions. Distributed free-of-charge to delegates each morning at the breakfast table, this publication proved, he said, "that my

35. *Milwaukee Sentinel* (no date given), reprinted in *TMA* 44, no. 8 (December 26, 1903): 215.

36. *TMA* 44, no. 4 (November 28, 1903): 91.

37. *TMA* 45, no. 9 (April 2, 1904): 549–53. Although this article is indicated as having been contributed "by special correspondent to the *Musical Age,*" one might assume that Harry Freund himself was the author.

HARRY EDWARD FREUND,
EDITOR
THE MUSICAL AGE.

FIGURE 1. Portrait of Harry Edward Freund, *The Musical Age* 45, no. 9 (April 2, 1904): 549. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

efforts have been untiring, regardless of labor and expense, to do all in my power to place this industry in that position where it can be recognized as on the same footing with other lines of trade."[38] Harry Freund's remarks were followed by "eloquent addresses" presented by "prominent members of the trade," two of whom, although supportive of their honored guest's advocacy of the "One-Price System," were not entirely in agreement with his incendiary plans for disposing of old square pianos:

> Mr. Freund has suggested that we burn the old squares to show the public their proper value, and he has mentioned that the sewing machine and cash register people, as far as possible, destroy their second-hand instruments. But these machines have not the value of the old square. There are many people who cannot afford to buy a new piano, and have to content themselves with an old square.[39]

> Mr. Freund has spoken of burning the old squares, and I suppose regards that as a good way to remedy that bad feature of the business, but I doubt if a conflagration at Atlantic City, or anywhere else, would efface the old square proposition.[40]

* * * *

Members of the National Association of Piano Dealers of America had a right to be enthusiastic about the evident success of their young organization. As described in a published statement of the association, it had "accomplished more in the three years of its existence than its promoters had expected would be accomplished in the first ten years." A dealer from the far West who had traveled over a thousand miles to attend the 1903 convention of the association in Buffalo is quoted as saying that he "would have come twice as far to have received one-half of the enjoyment and benefit of these discussions."[41] The 1904 convention in Atlantic City was scheduled for Monday through Thursday, May 23–26, overlapping with the convention of the National Piano Manufacturers' Association of America on Tuesday through Friday, May 24–27. The first day of the dealers' convention was devoted to the reception and registration of delegates. Tuesday morning's activities included reports of the officers and the nomination and election of new officers. On Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning there were joint sessions for members

38. Ibid., 550
39. Ibid., 552.
40. Ibid.
41. *TMA* 44, no. 4 (November 28, 1903): 95.

of both associations, featuring papers and discussions on a variety of topics. Tuesday evening offered a performance of the play *My Friend from India* in the ballroom on the Steel Pier, with special vaudeville entertainment between the acts. Final sessions for the dealers were held on Wednesday afternoon, with the banquet taking place in the evening. Thursday was described as "Outing Day" for the dealers, who were free to enjoy the attractions of the beach, boardwalk, and other delights of Atlantic City. In the evening the manufacturers' association sponsored a reception and promenade concert by the Kaltenborn Orchestra of New York on the Steel Pier.[42] In spite of the large amount of press coverage of the square-piano bonfire before, during, and after the two conventions, it is noteworthy that this event was not part of the official convention schedule of either association.

The conventions were held at the Hotel Rudolf in Atlantic City, situated at the northeastern end of the boardwalk at New Jersey Avenue. It was a frame structure with a brick section at the back,[43] and a new wing had just been added the previous year.[44] With a capacity of 400 guests, it was one of the largest hotels in Atlantic City. Its location was described in a contemporary account as being "in the most aristocratic part of the city." The hotel was heated with open fires and a steam system and boasted its own electric generator, as well as its own artesian well. The baths offered both fresh and sea water, hot and cold. The spacious ballroom, parlor, and music room featured polished floors covered in places with oriental rugs "of great beauty." Dances were offered on Friday evenings, and music was also provided during meal hours. A special feature of the Rudolf (and the location of some of the activities of the manufacturers' convention) was its "grotto," where concerts were often given. At night, when illuminated by colored incandescent lights, it possessed a special charm that led an observer to comment: "throughout the large cavern-like retreat, a scene of fairyland greets one and all."[45]

* * * *

In spite of the skepticism and downright opposition of some commentators, as shown above, Harry Freund forged ahead with his plan to stage

42. *TMA* 46, no. 2 (May 14, 1904): 38–39.

43. *Atlas of Atlantic City* (Philadelphia: A. H. Mueller, 1908).

44. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* January 28, 1904, p. 1.

45. John F. Hall, *The Daily Union History of Atlantic City and County, New Jersey* (Atlantic City: The Daily Union Printing Company, 1900), 239–41.

a fiery sacrifice of old squares at Atlantic City and, through the power of the press, to derive maximum benefit from it. The *Atlantic City Sunday Gazette* reported his moving in an entire staff of well over 200 employees, taking possession of half a floor of the Rudolf, to produce sixteen-page issues of *The Musical Age Daily.* The staff included editors, reporters, stenographers, and all the other graphic and business professionals necessary for turning out a complete newspaper.[46] The extent of this activity was described:

> The equipment for the daily *Musical Age* is almost as great in scope and detail as that of a metropolitan publication. Several photographers and artists have been employed to take daily pictures, cartoonists will draw caricatures and engravers have made special arrangements to turn out their productions for publication the day following their creation. The cuts are to be made in Philadelphia and will be brought down by messengers on a Pennsylvania Railroad express.[47]

It was further reported that the resources of "a local newspaper plant" had been secured to aid the production of the special daily publication.[48] Another local paper, the *Atlantic City Daily Press,* issued an editorial giving glowing praise of *The Musical Age Daily* and including the following statement:

> The *Press* hastens to extend the glad hand of welcome to its new local contemporary, *The Musical Age Daily.* . . . As a journal representing a great industry, it certainly has all other trade papers left at the post. The warmth of Atlantic City's welcome to the *Age* is tempered with the keen regret that it is not here to stay. The vim, snap, abili[t]y and enterprise displayed in its columns would make its influence felt for the good of the community were these qualities adapted to the general field of newspaper activity.[49]

While Harry Freund was assembling his staff in the rooms of the Rudolf, Frank P. Anderson, a piano dealer from Brooklyn, N.Y., was laboring below on the hotel's veranda to set up a trophy piano that he had prepared in support of the bonfire. Dubbed the "White Elephant,"

46. *Atlantic City Sunday Gazette,* May 22, 1904, p. 1. This article gives the size of the staff of *The Musical Age Daily* in two separate places, 250 in the heading and 230 in the body.

47. Ibid.

48. *Atlantic City Sunday Gazette,* May 8, 1904, unnumbered editorial page.

49. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 26, 1904, p. 4. No copies of the issues of *The Musical Age Daily* produced during the 1904 convention appear to have survived (those formerly in the New York Public Library are now missing). Fortunately, Harry Freund reprinted several articles from this paper in *TMA.*

it was an ornate square dating from 1876, every inch of whose veneered exterior had been covered with white paint. A number of legends, ostensibly the literary work of the donor, appeared in black letters on the available vertical surfaces and even on the top of the lid. They included the inscription "It was Harry Freund that caused these Squares to go up in smoke" as well as the following two poetic attempts:

> From Brooklyn I came,
> Anderson is my name,
> The boss don't give a dame
> If I do go up in flame.
>
> No longer the dealer will tear his hair,
> Nor gnash his teeth in wild despair.
> My days are done, poor old square.
> I'll feed the flames by the salt sea air.[50]

Later, as the "White Elephant" was being carted off to the bonfire, one piano dealer was quoted as saying:

> Just imagine that bulky old thing in a Harlem flat. Why, it would take up so much space you couldn't enter the room. For sane ideas in piano manufacturing, if nothing else, I'm for the Harlem flat.[51]

Concerning the logistical aspects of the bonfire, the *Atlantic City Daily Press*—citing the authority of D. E. Woolley, a piano dealer in Philadelphia—reported on May 17 that Atlantic City Mayor Franklin P. Stoy had given his permission for it to take place on the beach, and that the local fire department would be on hand to prevent any mishap.[52] That plan was soon abandoned, however, reportedly because of the lingering memory of a devastating fire on April 3, 1902, that had caused widespread destruction along two blocks' worth of the boardwalk.[53] In the meantime, the mayor's office had been swamped with letters mostly from local citizens decrying the waste of valuable pianos and asking that the instruments be given instead to worthy recipients (including the letter writers themselves). By May 21 Mayor Stoy had evidently been persuaded that

50. *The Presto,* no. 934 (June 2, 1904): 32; and *TMA* 47, no. 8 (September 24, 1904): 554.

51. *New York Evening Journal,* May 25, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 48, no. 7 (December 17, 1904): 183.

52. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 17, 1904, p. 1.

53. Ed Davis, *Atlantic City Diary* (Atlantic City: Atlantic City News Agency, 1989), 28; and *Chicago Daily Tribune,* May 25, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 46, no. 4 (May 28, 1904): 87.

the square pianos to be burned were worthless, but had not yet decided on a suitable location for the bonfire.[54] Nevertheless, news was already spreading that a site had been chosen far from the beach and boardwalk "on the meadows close to the trolly line and easy of access to all who wish to witness the event."[55] Harry Freund's statement, issued on May 22, was definite as to time and place:

> In can be positively stated . . . that the big bonfire of pianos will take place Tuesday evening, according to the present arrangements, on the meadows, arrangements having been completed with the committee having this feature in charge and the traction company to run special cars for the accommodation of all who desire to witness this novel bonfire.[56]

The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that Mayor Stoy had finally granted permission for the fire because smaller resorts in the Atlantic City area had begged for the privilege of hosting the event.[57] As late as the day of the fire, May 24, it was still being announced in the local press that the conflagration would be held on the meadows, "probably on the old fat house site."[58] This place might have been considered appropriate for a blaze, since the "fat house" (a fat rendering plant) had twice burned down during the previous nine months.[59] The owners of the property, however, were reported as being opposed to the plan.[60]

In the days leading up to the big event, published estimates varied as to the number of pianos to be sacrificed. Harry Freund's original call to action, as shown above, had set the number at two thousand and had also proposed that as many as 20,000 pianos could be destroyed if the bonfire were repeated annually over a period of ten years. In Atlantic City, the word from the mayor's office was that the number of pianos would probably be only about 300,[61] although most reports maintained that it would be at least a thousand. This was consistent with the pre-bonfire prediction of Harry Freund, and he stuck to that number after the fact in his account of the bonfire that appeared in *The Musical Age Daily* on May 25:

54. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 21, 1904, p. 1.
55. *Atlantic City Evening Union,* May 21, 1904, p. 1.
56. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 23, 1904, p. 6.
57. *Chicago Daily Tribune,* May 25, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 46, no. 4 (May 28, 1904): 87.
58. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 24, 1904, p. 1.
59. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* April 13, 1904, p. 1.
60. *Atlantic City Evening Union,* May 24, 1904, p. 1.
61. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 21, 1904, p. 1.

Brilliant, thrilling and sensational was the burning of a thousand old square pianos on Chelsea Heights near Atlantic City at ten o'clock last night. The mountain of instruments towered in the form of a pyramid fully fifty feet in height, and when the torch was applied the neighborhood for a mile or more around was brilliantly illuminated, and the high buildings between the fire and the Steel Pier, alone prevented the hundreds of spectators on that structure from seeing it. However, the glow of the flames on the sky could be plainly seen, and the piano men knew that one of the obstacles to their greater prosperity was going up in smoke; but it meant more than this for the burning of these old square pianos was symbolic of their complete passing out of the sphere of usefulness whether musical or commercial. . . .

The number of spectators was limited because of Mayor F. P. Stoy's strict orders that every precaution should be taken to protect life and property. . . .

The danger from fire was talked of all over the land, but the fears were groundless, as precautions in compliance with Mayor Stoy's requests were taken, and the flames could at any time have been kept in control by the fire-fighting apparatus which was on hand prepared for such an emergency. A number of police were also there to prevent too near approach to the fire by the people who gathered on the Turnpike Bridge from neighboring localities to the number of about fifteen hundred. It was 10:10 P.M. when Harry Edward Freund, selected for the part by universal assent as chief of the ceremonial which he first suggested some months ago, applied the torch. It only required a few moments before the pile of ancient relics was a roaring furnace driving back the spectators who had approached too near, and as it grew in height the flames illumined the entire southern part of the city. . . .

After the wood had become thoroughly ignited there began a snapping and cracking as the wires parted that sounded like the rattle of musketry or the bombardment of Port Arthur. The air was filled with a shower of sparks, which fell in a rain for hundreds of yards around. At first the spectators watched the scene in silence, but when the flames had reached their height they broke out in loud applause, and congratulations were extended to Harry Edward Freund on the successful termination of his crusade against the old square, which had culminated in the destruction of so many of these trade bug-bears. . . .

The flames burned fiercely for a time, but the spectators did not leave the place of execution until the mountain had fallen into a great glittering heap of glowing embers. Every one present, realizing the importance of the event, wanted souvenirs of it, and picked up parts which had fallen out of the range of the flames and carried them away.

Much disappointment was expressed that the delay in announcing the plans for the bonfire prevented many from being present who wished to witness it, but while there had never been any intention of giving up the plan, there was a great deal of difficulty in securing a place of a suitable character, and in addition, Mayor Stoy was anxious to prevent too great a crowd from

collecting. The intention of the promoters of the idea was at first to burn the instruments in some central location, but this, on investigation, was found not to be practicable.

The American piano industry has in this event been afforded by Harry Edward Freund the opportunity to place the basis of exchange of the old square piano on an absolutely honest basis. The passing of the square will give new impetus to the trade, and create an era of added prosperity for the piano industry of the country.[62]

Notwithstanding the crowd's enthusiastic search for souvenirs of the bonfire, as described above, there were evidently enough remnants of the sacrificial flames remaining for Freund and his staff to prepare a scorched souvenir for each of the more than 400 diners at the festive banquet held the following evening at the Hotel Rudolf. Laid beside each dinner plate was a burnt piece of square piano attached to a tag bearing the following inscription:

SOUVENIR
OLD SQUARE BONFIRE
Atlantic City,
May 24, 1904.

Compliments of
HARRY EDWARD FREUND,
Editor[,] The Musical Age.[63]

Further testimony on the bonfire had been offered at a convention session earlier in the day by James C. Miller of Philadelphia, the newly elected president of the National Association of Piano Dealers of America. His eyewitness account has the ring of truth:

I wish to make what might be called an authoritative statement upon the subject of the bonfire, and I wish you all to take my word for it that I am going to say absolutely nothing but what is true. I do not want any more weeping of your eyes and looking funny and wondering. I am going to tell you absolutely the truth, and I want you to believe me.

Now, as to this bonfire, it was absolutely arranged by Mr. Freund and some of us Philadelphia dealers to have a bonfire. As to the place and time when this was to start, it was deemed advisable absolutely not to allow anyone to know, because the mayor first decided that he must have absolute protection to the city. Insurance men came to him and said they would

62. *The Musical Age Daily,* May 25, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 46, no. 4 (May 28, 1904): 87. The full text of this article is reprinted in "On the Beach," 11–13.

63. *TMA* 46, no. 4 (May 28, 1904): 151.

cancel policies and all that sort of thing if he had the fire in proximity to the buildings, and we guaranteed—and he would give his permission under no other circumstances—that this fire should take place in an absolutely remote place from any dwellings or places in Atlantic City, but the committee purposely avoided letting anyone know where it was until it was too late to get there. If you had read the list of inquiries we had, and heard everything that we heard, you would have found that there would have been no interest in anything else, in the meeting or anything of the kind, and there would have been such a mob there that there might have been danger from accident and other things. Now, the location was decided upon hastily, the instruments were not car[r]ied there, and the fire was not made until late, but they were all loaded on the wagons and along late in the afternoon or evening it was decided upon where they would be burned. They were started, and the urchins of the city, who had been watching, tagged on behind and followed the teams away out to the place where the fire was to be had. About between 10 and 10:30, on Chelsea Heights, the fire was started and occupied in time about an hour or a little more. There was to be a lot of red fire thrown into the pile in order to illuminate the heavens, and that red fire was an absolute thing, because we bought it and paid for it, intending to illuminate the heavens with it. These urchins that followed on out, what you might call cribbed the red fire, and they were dancing around so that we did not get much of it on the piano fire. The urchins stole it and danced around the bonfire. But, at all events, the bonfire was had, and it was seen from the drawbridge by 1,500 or more people. The trolley cars were blocked, and it was really a successful fire.

Now, then, gentlemen, do not wink any more, and do not say that you did not see it. As to the accounts that appear in the newspapers, you can take them for what they are worth. The exaggerations as to the number of pianos in the fire I do not propose telling you, because I do not know, but everything that I do tell you is absolutely true, and I want you to depend upon it. I am not responsible for any of the accounts in the newspapers. I simply say to you that the fire took place. It was a suitable bonfire. There were a great many pianos furnished by the Philadelphia dealers. I myself furnished three, and there was one concern furnished two concert grand pianos that were no good. There were a lot of pianos furnished.[64]

The report of the bonfire that appeared in the pages of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and was picked up by several other papers described the fire, held "on the beach," as being "visible twenty miles out at sea." The following item was also added to the lore surrounding the event:

Joining hands, the members of the Association danced around the blaze in a monster ring, singing verses, written for the occasion, to the air of Mr. Dooley. The first verse ran:

64. *The Presto,* no. 933 (May 26, 1904): 14.

Who is the greatest business man this country has to-day?
Who always makes the public think he[']s giving things away,
Who knows the art of finance—every point and every trick,
Who can give Morgan every trump and yet make him look sick?
The piano dealer—the piano dealer;
In a business way he's always in the van.
The piano dealer—the piano dealer[;]
The public says he is the perfect man.[65]

The story was further embellished by the *New York Evening Journal:*

> After a concert of "Bedelia," "Hiawatha," "Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight," and other atrocities, once as popular as the old squares, the discarded pianos were piled in a heap. The bonfire was kindled, and while the flames burned merrily the dealers grasped hands and in a ring danced about the ruins. Other squares will be burned next year. No sentimental tears were shed.[66]

A colorful story with local interest was offered by the *Atlantic City Union* the day after the bonfire*:*

> Police Sergeant Barrett is one of the best-natured officers on the local force, but his patience was sorely tried yesterday. The Sergeant went on duty yesterday afternoon at 4 o'clock and had no more than seated himself before the telephone bell rang. He answered it, and some one wanted to know where and when the pianos were to be burned.
>
> Barrett answered the question to the best of his knowledge, and hung up the receiver only to hear the other 'phone bell ring. It was the same question, "where are the pianos to be burned?"
>
> But this was not all, for there was not a space as long as five minutes from the time he went on duty until he went off at midnight that some one did not want to know about the pianos. His time sheet, which he usually made up thirty-five minutes after going to work, was not completed until nearly 11 o'clock.
>
> The "Piano Sergeant," as he has [b]een dubbed, declared this morning that the telephone calls received by him asking questions about "uprights,

65. *Chicago Tribune,* May 25, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 46, no. 4 (May 28, 1904): 87. The full text of this article is reprinted in "On the Beach," 13–14.

66. *New York Evening Journal,* May 25, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 48, no. 7 (December 17, 1904): 183. "Bedelia," an extremely popular "Irish" song with words by William Jerome and music by Jean Schwartz, was copyrighted in 1903. "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight" was composed in 1886 by Theodore August Metz, the orchestra leader for the McIntyre and Heath Minstrels. A dozen years later, it became a rallying song of Theodore Roosevelt's "Rough Riders" during the Spanish-American War. See Cohen-Stratyner, *Popular Music, 1900–1919,* 32; and Edward A. Berlin, "Metz, Theodore August," *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music,* 3:220–21.

downright, square and crooked pianos" numbered not less than five hundred.[67]

Back in New York after a brief respite, Harry Freund set his post-bonfire campaign into full swing in *The Musical Age,* boldly proclaiming the "Passing of the Square Piano" and publishing self-congratulatory editorials accompanied by barrages of supportive testimonials, many of which he repeated several times over the next several months. Among the approximately sixty correspondents were representatives of the leading piano manufacturers and dealers from all over the country. Here are just a few of their comments:

> Your bonfire idea was capital and has been the talk of the country. . . . I was at a house dinner last night of a dozen persons, and they all discussed the bonfire as the eighth wonder of the world. It has caused owners of old pianos to realize how valueless they are, and therein may be found much of value to piano dealers everywhere.[68]

> The old square piano has been a menace to the trade, and Harry Freund deserves the greatest credit for having removed it.[69]

> The burning of the old squares was a good thing and every retail dealer must approve of Mr. Freund's plan to impress the public with the fact that the square has gone for good and never will return.[70]

> [W]hatever has been accomplished by Harry Edward Freund, of *The Musical Age,* is not a question of how many thousand instruments were burned, which is a minor matter, but that he has placed before the public the fact that the square piano is not only a back number, but of little use, and the means of inflated conditions, when it comes to the question of exchanging them for modern instruments.[71]

> The immense publicity that Mr. Freund, of *The Musical Age,* attained for the bonfire of old squares at Atlantic City, is an achievement unprecedented in the history of the piano industry.[72]

67. *Atlantic City Union,* May 25, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 48, no. 7 (December 17, 1904): 181.

68. J. P. Byrne, Lyon & Healy, Chicago, Ill., June 4, 1904. *TMA* 46, no. 6 (June 11, 1904): 229.

69. William H. Currier, The Whitney & Currier Co., Toledo, Ohio, July 25, 1904. *TMA* 46, no. 13 (July 30, 1904): 392.

70. Hugo Sohmer, Sohmer & Co., New York, N.Y. *TMA* 46, no. 11 (July 16, 1904): 343.

71. Nahum Stetson, Steinway & Sons, New York, N.Y. Ibid.

72. William B. Armstrong, The Foster-Armstrong Co., Rochester, N.Y., July 20, 1904. *TMA* 46, no. 13 (July 30, 1904): 394.

> In the passing of the square piano, Harry Edward Freund, of *The Musical Age,* has removed the regrettable bargaining element in retail piano selling, and has made it possible for a gentleman to do piano business.[73]

Along the way an editorial appeared in the *New York Times* entitled "The Passing of the Piano," citing the bonfire in Atlantic City as evidence of the decline of the piano in general in domestic use. The following excerpt illustrates the extent to which this writer was influenced by an anti-piano sentiment:

> There are many encouraging indications warranting the belief that as an article of usual household furniture the piano is passing into innocuous desuetude. There are still several pianos sold annually, no doubt, but the proportion of those in normal use which remain silent from three hundred to three hundred and sixty-five days in the year is steadily increasing. The burning at Atlantic City recently of a small mountain of square pianos which could not be sold and perhaps could not be given away was indicative of something more than a change in domestic architecture which makes the old shape inconvenient.[74]

Rebuttals to this editorial came from many sources, including Harry Freund, who endeavored to set the *Times* straight on the continuing importance of the piano industry in the United States, as well as the true purpose and significance of his bonfire, which, he maintained, was "typical of the American spirit that is identified with the growth of this country."[75]

Freund's final salvo of bonfire opinion was delivered in the issue of *The Musical Age* for December 17, 1904, in a section entitled "The Passing of the Old Square Piano: Comment of the Press of the United States," which bombarded readers with reprints of 281 articles, originally published both before and after the bonfire, culled from newspapers in 133 cities of the United States (and Canada). Freund is cited frequently and favorably in this material, and quotations from him and his supporters are amply furnished. Some of the early articles in fact serve up large portions of text quoted from *The Musical Age.* Other obvious repetitions show reliance on common news releases, which were not completely factual.[76] While some of the more fanciful articles reveal a degree of

73. Charles S. Utley, Buffalo, N.Y., July 22, 1904. Ibid., 393.

74. *New York Times,* June 26, 1904, p. 6.

75. *TMA* 46, no. 9 (July 2, 1904): 309.

76. It is here that two myths about the bonfire began that have been perpetuated to the present day: that it was the work of the National Piano Manufacturers' Association,

nostalgia for the old square, hardly a contrary word can be found about Freund's project, although entertaining comments are inserted from a few journalistic wags who declined to take the matter seriously. The *Tribune* of Johnstown, Pa., for example, announced:

> Several carloads of pianos were destroyed in a bonfire at Atlantic City the other day. Let us hope there were among them some street pianos that were headed toward Johnstown.[77]

And the *Evening Post* of Bridgeport, Conn., went further with the following irreverent quip:

> About a million cornets and a few trainloads of fiddles ought to improve that bonfire.[78]

Perhaps the cleverest example of bonfire humor appeared in an editorial in the Chicago *Inter Ocean*. Although it was reprinted in *The Presto* (and not in *The Musical Age*), it is appropriate to quote it here:

> Musical instrument makers are going to make a bonfire of 1,000 pianos at Atlantic City. By any happy chance, do these include the pianos in the adjoining flat, the flat overhead, and the flat beneath?[79]

While *The Musical Age* published huge amounts of material supportive of Harry Freund and his bonfire, rival trade journals devoted far less space to their promotion of opposite opinions, although their level of disparagement was generally high. John C. Freund, for example, published an editorial statement in the issue of *The Music Trades* that came out just before the beginning of the convention, complaining about press coverage of the music trades in general and specifically the way the newspapers had been enticed by the ridiculous bonfire proposition:

> It is interesting to notice the attitude of the daily press towards the musical industries. Never, as I have often before said, do the great papers, by any possible chance, get in a line as to the enormous progress the industries are making; as to the manner in which they are capturing foreign markets; as to

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and that it was an official event in the joint convention of that organization and the National Association of Piano Dealers of America.

77. *Johnstown Tribune,* May 26, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 48, no. 7 (December 17, 1904): 209.

78. *Bridgeport Evening Post,* June 1, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 48, no. 7 (December 17, 1904): 207.

79. *Chicago Inter Ocean* (date not indicated), reprinted in *The Presto,* no. 934 (June 2, 1904): 15.

their endorsement by the most distinguished artists of world renown;—but let some silly story be started somewhere, and, lo, and behold! They all grab it with the eagerness of a hungry trout for a May fly. And the story need not be fresh, either. It may have been the rounds two or three times. Provided it is only absurd enough, it will always go the rounds once more.

Some months ago, a little trade sheet, in an endeavor to get up an excitement, broached a plan by which the dealers were to bring all the old square pianos they had, down to the beach at Atlantic City, and make a bonfire of them; presumably to furnish the necessary heat to roast the chestnuts always provided on these occasions.

This scheme, whose futility as well as ridiculousness are apparent, was promptly seized upon by the Philadelphia papers, from whence it worked its way to New York,—then went the rounds of the country. A month or so later it popped up again[,] some eagle-eyed reporter in the South having just discovered it, and again traveled the rounds.

Once more it starts in, and is getting prominence even in such enterprising papers as the New York "Herald" and "Sun," which discuss it seriously.[80]

John Freund's last word on the subject appeared within his review of the dealers' and manufacturers' conventions published in his issue for May 28, 1904:

The much talked of bonfire was a puzzle as far as official sanction was concerned, and the gentleman whose brain evolved this brilliant (?) scheme found himself in a peck of trouble over it. The mayor refused a permit for the fire, as the insurance men got after him and threatened to cancel all policies held here if the bonfire was started. Accordingly the affair looked more like a funeral than a festive occasion.

So few people saw it that James C. Miller had to make a statement in the dealers' meeting that it actually occur[r]ed. . . . [N]o glory attended the burning, which was very soon over, as so few instruments were contributed that Mr. Miller refused to tell their number.

In fact the affair became such a huge farce that it is a standing joke today, and will so remain for many moons.[81]

C. A. Daniell and Frank D. Abbott began their editorial condemnation of the bonfire in the issue of *The Presto* for May 26, 1904:

The spectacular fake of the week was the promised burning of a thousand old square pianos. Of course there has never been any consideration given to that project which was the child of the brain of an eastern trade editor. . . .

The Presto has discountenanced the foolish suggestion from the start. But the remarkable thing associated with it is that many great newspapers

80. *The Music Trades* 27, no. 21 (May 21, 1904): 30.
81. *The Music Trades* 27, no. 22 (May 28, 1904): 57.

> throughout the country were fooled into printing fake dispatches giving lurid accounts of the burning of the old squares. Even the Chicago *Tribune,* usually so correct in its news service, had a column of stuff last Tuesday morning telling in detail of an event which had not come off.[82]

This is followed on the same page by a whimsical poem entitled "Not Enough Burning":

> They talked about the worn-out squares
> That lighted up the ocean,
> And said their burning lightened cares—
> Where did they get that notion?
> And then they counted up the list
> To see how great the gaining,
> And lo! So few they won't be missed—
> Compared with those remaining![83]

At the bottom of the page appears a humorous cartoon with the caption "On the Board Walk:—What Might Have Happened Had There Been a Real 'Holocaust,' " depicting Harry Freund, tormented by the shades of the old masters who presumably wrote their great works for the old square piano, while a piano manufacturer, piano dealer, and trade editor are in flight, all denying any responsibility for the bonfire (see fig. 2). In the following week's issue of *The Presto,* commentary on the bonfire is prominent, beginning with the following editorial statement:

> We believe that *The Presto* is the only trade paper that has told the truth about the Atlantic City "Holocaust." We have tried to set the piano dealers right, and we want to emphasize the meager size of the fire fake of last week. We do not believe that the piano manufacturers or the dealers generally favored the fire. Such as did favor the thing did not consider the effect upon the trade as it might influence the public. Our only thought now is to try to offset the possible harm by suggesting to the dealers that the extent of the burning has been so magnified as to make the whole performance ridiculous.[84]

Further on in the issue, a short editorial piece offers the estimate that not more than a half dozen squares had been burned,[85] and after that appears a one-page selection of quotations from the national press entitled "Smoke from the Fake Fire at Atlantic City." In general, these

82. *The Presto,* no. 933 (May 26, 1904): 7.
83. Ibid.
84. *The Presto,* no. 934 (June 2, 1904): 5.
85. Ibid., 9.

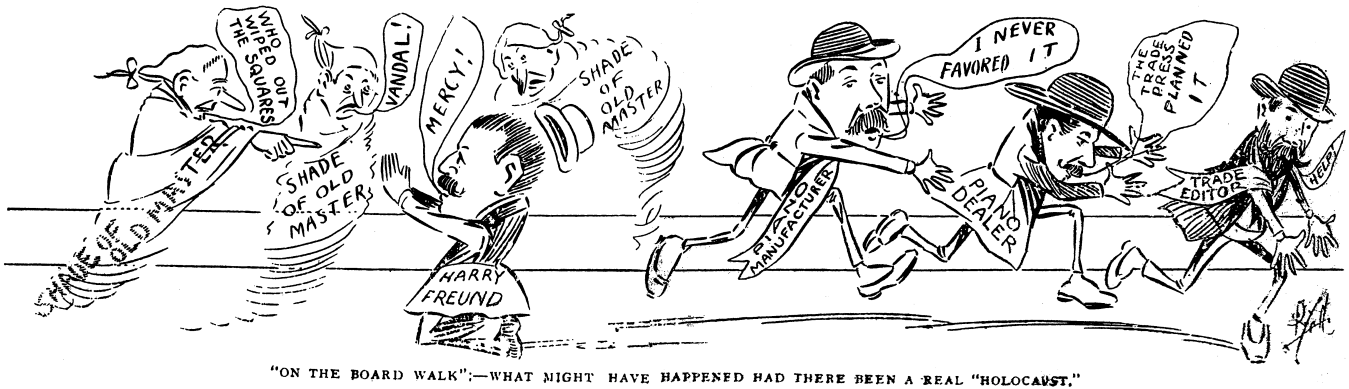

FIGURE 2. Cartoon satirizing Harry Edward Freund's square-piano bonfire, *The Presto*, no. 933 (May 26, 1904): 7. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

comments touch on the wastefulness of destroying valuable property.[86] Finally, an article about Anderson's "White Elephant" claims that the instrument was not burned, but was presented to a nine-year-old girl who had written to ask that one piano be spared and given to her.[87]

Also opposing the bonfire, Edward Lyman Bill had his say in *The Music Trade Review* in the issue for June 18, 1904:

> When the idea was first promulgated to burn the old squares at Atlantic City, it was looked upon by many as a joke, and it was referred to in a laughing way by members of the trade, who considered the idea of paying cash money for freight on old pianos to burn them up to be an absurdity. They did not, however, think it would reach the point of the issuing of false reports that a thousand square pianos had actually been burned at Atlantic City.
>
> The bait given out to the Associated Press was caught easily, and reports were printed that thousands of old square pianos had actually gone up in flames at Atlantic City. Even the full consequences of this report did not dawn upon those who were willing in their official capacity to support the scheme.
>
> Now it is different, for complaints are coming from all sources from dealers who have sold square pianos to customers who are now dissatisfied, and declare they were cheated, that the old squares are worth nothing.[88]

A month later Bill reported (no doubt with some sense of vindication) that the board of directors of the public schools of Greater New York had given an order to William Knabe & Co. of Baltimore for twenty pianos, fourteen of which were to be squares. He made a special point of indicating that these would be new instruments.[89] In his issue for July 30, 1904, Bill again took up the theme of the bonfire, claiming that although it had been a fiasco, its creator had been generously shielded from ridicule by the Association of Piano Dealers, which had allowed the false report to get out that a thousand squares had been destroyed; this, in turn, had caused a noticeable slump in the piano business in many localities. Bill concluded with his own rhetorical estimate of the number of pianos that had been burned, a reference to the article in the *New York Times* heralding the downfall of the piano, and a final censure of the paper responsible for the deception:

86. Ibid., 15.
87. Ibid., 32.
88. *The Music Trade Review* 38, no. 25 (June 18, 1904): 7.
89. *The Music Trade Review* 39, no. 3 (July 16, 1904): 29.

> No matter if only three pianos were destroyed the fake reports were sent forth and swallowed wholesale by the press, and now the press as a result of this retaliates in extended notices on the decadence of the piano.
>
> After all, is this not paying us back in the same kind of coin dealt out? The first was a fake, and the return is wholly untruthful. This should be a lesson to all music trade associations in the future never to ally themselves with or father any ridiculous propositions simply because they desire to show a friendly spirit towards a paper which knowingly sends forth reports which lack truth in every particular, even to the extent of picturing the editor applying the torch to a mountain of pianos.[90]

Common themes that run through the statements of Harry Freund's rivals, as shown above, are the smallness of the bonfire, in both number of pianos and size of audience, and the fault of the press (evidently guilty of both perfidy and gullibility) for issuing false reports. In the matter of the former, it seems logical that the only trustworthy evidence could come from unbiased eyewitnesses, and the testimony of James C. Miller (given above) seems to qualify. In spite of John Freund's charge that Miller refused to reveal the number of pianos burned, it is more reasonable to say that he declined to give an exact number, although he did say that a "great many pianos were furnished by the Philadelphia dealers" and that it "was a suitable bonfire" (it is noteworthy, however, that he did not say how many of the former actually ended up in the latter). Furthermore, Miller reported that following the wishes of Mayor Stoy, the committee of piano men had agreed to stage the bonfire in a very remote spot, and for reasons of safety and the avoidance of competition with other convention activities, they had decided not to divulge the exact location until the last minute. Miller did say that the fire was seen by 1,500 people, but they had to remain at a somewhat distant location. As for the observers closer in who danced around the blaze, Miller mentioned only the urchins of the city, who had stolen most of the "red fire" (incendiary preparations) that the committee had provided.[91]

Another reported eyewitness was Marcellus Roper of Worcester, Mass., whose account of the bonfire of a thousand old square pianos was published in the *Worcester Telegram* on May 30, 1904. His report is hardly impartial, however, considering his wholesale use of language taken directly from Harry Freund's victory announcement first published in *The*

90. *The Music Trade Review* 39, no. 5 (July 30, 1904): 8. The picture referred to in Bill's account must have been printed in the issue of *The Musical Age Daily* for May 25, 1904. It does not appear in *TMA*.

91. *The Presto,* no. 933 (May 26, 1904): 14.

Musical Age Daily on May 25.[92] Roper says, for example, that the burning of instruments piled in a "pyramid fifty feet in height" was "brilliant, thrilling and sensational"; he describes the "snapping of wires" as sounding like "the rattle of musketry"; he speaks of the congratulations extended to Freund "on the successful termination of his crusade, which had culminated in the destruction of so many of these trade bugbears"; and he calls the event "typical of the American spirit—to destroy that which has become useless." Moreover, the article containing Roper's account was reprinted in *The Musical Age* and had therefore received Freund's imprimatur.[93]

A far more convincing account of the bonfire is found in an article entitled "Angry Crowd Waited Long for Piano Fire" in the issue of the *Atlantic City Daily Press* for May 25, 1904. Typically unsigned, this testimony must be given credence because it is unique (and therefore not just copied from a national news service) and is ostensibly a first-hand observation by a local reporter, written up hurriedly for his morning newspaper, as the loose syntax and grammar of the first paragraph suggest. Furthermore, the impartiality of the paper in question is evident: although it had issued an editorial critical of the destruction that the bonfire would cause,[94] it had also been reporting objectively on various aspects of the convention and even the work of Harry Freund, including a favorable description of *The Musical Age Daily*.[95] Finally, like all other negative reports of the square-piano bonfire, this article was not reprinted in *The Musical Age*. Here is the account of this anonymous Atlantic City observer:

> Instead of 1000 square pianos being burned last night about 15 actually made the much advertised pre-arranged blaze, owing to the indefinite information as to when and where the fire would take place the crowd where it actually happened, was very slim, but where the fire did not take place, there was fully 700 to 1000 people gathered, and such a crowd of angry people would be hard to find.
>
> For several days it had been printed, and the newspapers were informed from many sources, that the pianos were to be burned on the meadows somewhere. Finally it was stated that the fire would take place on the old fat house site.

92. *TMA* 46, no. 4 (May 28, 1904): 87.

93. *Worcester Telegram,* May 30, 1904, reprinted in *TMA* 48, no. 7 (December 17, 1904): 190.

94. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 19, 1904, p. 4.

95. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 24, 1904, p. 1.

> Shortly after dark people began to gather at the fat house, a considerable distance on the meadows, and when [t]he pianos arrived, and piano men failed to appear, the language of the crowd was as loud as it was emphatic. Many women had ventured a trip through a salt marshland and mire to see the blaze, and were disappointed. Young America like, a number of boys not to be cheated out of some kind of fire, started a blaze out of old barrels and had just as much fun as if 10,000 pianos were being burned.
>
> The piano fire took place on Chelsea Heights. At that point, far from any buildings, the torch was applied to a pile of old, broken down square pianos, worthless for anything but firewood.
>
> There were more red fire rockets burned than pianos.[96]

According to the account given above, an unreported number of pianos had been brought to the site of the old fat house on the meadows, where a large group of people had assembled, but the only fire that happened there was the result of boys' setting a few old barrels ablaze. The bonfire of old square pianos, presumably the fifteen mentioned at the beginning of the story, actually took place some distance away, on Chelsea Heights. Many of the items in this account tally with those in the descriptions (also of May 25) of both Harry Freund and James C. Miller: the delay in announcing the precise location of the bonfire until the last minute, the identification of that location as Chelsea Heights, the smallness of the group of people close to the fire, and the description of a much larger crowd (estimated variously at between 700 and more than 1,500 people) gathered some distance away. With respect to the last item, locations identified as the "Turnpike Bridge" (Freund), the "drawbridge" (Miller), and the "fat house" (this report) are probably one and the same, as the site of the former fat rendering plant was close to the bridge.[97] Chelsea Heights was the name of a large strip of land at the southwestern end of Atlantic City, bounded by waterways (called thoroughfares) on the southeast and northwest sides, as well as the northeast tip. Close to that tip on the northwest side was the Turnpike Bridge (a drawbridge), where (or near where) by all accounts the large crowd gathered to see the bonfire. The fire was probably staged somewhere in the undeveloped area further to the southwest of the bridge; if it was along the northwest shore, bordered by the Beach Thoroughfare,[98] then the claim made in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and other newspapers

96. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* May 25, 1904, p. 1.
97. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* April 13, 1904, p. 1.
98. *Atlas of the State of New Jersey* (New York: Survey Map Company, 1905), map 6.

(quoted above) that the fire had been "on the beach"[99] was at least partially correct—although it was not the beach on the Atlantic Ocean! The report in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* also paints a colorful picture of members of the Association of Piano Dealers joining hands, dancing around the bonfire, and "singing verses, written for the occasion, to the air of Mr. Dooley."[100] The implication here is that the occasion in question was the bonfire, but this is contradicted by a description in *The Music Trade Review* of the vaudeville entertainment given in the ballroom of the Steel Pier on the evening of May 24 and "attended by over 500 members and lady guests." The account identifies "the event of the evening" as the solo performance by Miss Edyth Wells Kelly, who sang the lyrics written by Association member Ben H. Janssen, entitled "Our Glorious Men," to the tune of "Mr. Dooley." The complete poem is reproduced; it begins with the lines quoted in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and goes on to several more verses in the same jovial vein, some of which make good-natured references to distinguished members of the Association. The commentator concludes: "All of the persons referred to were present and the fun just bubbled over when they were mentioned."[101] The theater and vaudeville performance was scheduled to begin at 8:00 p.m.[102] *The Music Trade Review* reports that the printed programs (which presumably contained the new verses set to the hit song) did not arrive,[103] so even if some of the reported 500 members of the audience had been able to leave the Steel Pier right after the performance and get themselves all the way out to the site of the bonfire in time to sing this song while dancing around the burning pianos (with the urchins?), they would have had to sing it by memory. All in all, therefore, it seems very likely that the story in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* is a conflated concoction of separately occurring events.

If Harry Freund was aware of any of the criticism and conflicting reports given above, he seems to have been undeterred by them. He proclaimed the "Passing of the Square Piano" in the pages of *The Musical Age* and stated confidently that this act had now made possible the one-price system, which he continued to advocate. He published no more

99. *Chicago Daily Tribune,* May 25, 1904 (report dated May 24, 1904), reprinted in *TMA* 46, no. 4 (May 28, 1904): 87.

100. Ibid.

101. *The Music Trade Review* 38, no. 22 (May 28, 1904): 59.

102. *TMA* 46, no. 2 (May 14, 1904): 38.

103. *The Music Trade Review* 38, no. 22 (May 28, 1904): 59.

than brief references to the bonfire in his journal after December 1904, except for an article in 1913 reporting that at a recent auction of the inventory of the Bollman Bros. Piano Co. in St. Louis, twenty square pianos had sold for fifty cents each. The reason for this is explained in a statement from a spokesman identified as a "prominent dealer":

> When old square pianos sell at fifty cents, it is a silent tribute to the great work which *The Musical Age* accomplished for the benefit of the trade by burning the old squares at Atlantic City in 1904.[104]

The article also includes editorial comments that evaluate the accomplishments achieved by the bonfire. One is the monetary advantage, evidenced by a claim that it "has saved to the piano trade of the United States many millions of dollars." The other describes the benefit to the trade of clever manipulation of the power of the press:

> The unique occasion received probably the widest publicity that any trade has ever obtained from the daily press throughout the world, being a front-page feature in the leading journals of the United States, Europe and countries more remote.[105]

After all is said and done, regardless of any of the contested features of the bonfire of square pianos that Harry Freund planned, publicized, executed, and publicized again, this statement (even allowing for its hyperbole) best describes his professional legacy to trade journalism.

* * * *

Evidence of the remainder of Harry Freund's career is sketchy. The federal census of 1910 places him (at age 46) at 441 Riverside Drive, living with his wife of twenty-six years, Florence (age 44, born in New York), with no children.[106] *The Musical Age* ceased publication in 1914. The final issue of March 28 of that year gives no hint of impending cessation and shows Freund still hard at work on the improvement of trade practices, advocating measures such as the elimination of the dishonest

104. *TMA* 84, no. 1 (October 25, 1913): 11.

105. Ibid.

106. Ancestry.com, *1910 United States Federal Census* (Provo, Utah: MyFamily.com, Inc., 2004), on-line database accessed at the New York Public Library on August 25, 2004; based on National Archives and Records Administration, *1910 Federal Population Census* [microfilm], series T624, roll 1027, part 1, p. 113B. The address reported in this census is not corroborated by the New York City directories.

"stencil" piano and the establishment of a universal one-price system.[107] The New York City directories, which show him at various residential and business addresses beginning in 1884, last list him in 1914. After he left New York, presumably in or after that year, he seems to have abandoned music trade journalism, although he still wrote on musical matters from time to time. In 1923, at the age of 60, he contributed a facetious letter to the *New York Times* that was published under the heading "A Peace Worse than War":

> I read in *The New York Times* that "Ja, wir haben Keine Bananen heute" has arrived in Berlin. Now, here is an idea. Let the United States Government circulate a billion copies of "Yes, We Have No Bananas" in all the languages. With the whole world singing "Yes, We Have No Bananas" in their native tongues, the world's problems may be solved and a World Court may even be found unnecessary.
>
> Harry Edward Freund
> Atlantic City, Oct. 9, 1923[108]

Since the Atlantic City directories do not list Freund as a resident at that time, perhaps he was a visitor to the seaside resort as he had been almost twenty years before. He is next found in Chicago in the mid-1920s, working "as the director of the music research bureau and as the originator of the Christmas carol movement in 1925 and 1926."[109] On August 4, 1925, he delivered an address entitled "Tune Up America and Make It Musical" to the annual convention of the National Piano Tuners' Association in Detroit. He was employed as public-relations advisor for a Chicago advertising agency in 1928.[110] On October 15–20 of that year, the *Chicago Evening Post* printed a set of six articles on the progress of women written by Freund. Collected and published together under the title *Today—The Day of Woman*, they are well-researched, engaging essays on women's accomplishments in politics, arts, science, business, government, and organizational activities the world over.[111] Freund had spoken on behalf

107. *TMA* 85, no. 10 (March 28, 1914): 147.

108. *New York Times,* October 19, 1923, p. 18.

109. "Articles to Show Woman's Part in World's Affairs: Harry Edward Freund Writes Notable Series for the Post," *Chicago Evening Post,* October 13, 1928, reprinted in Harry Edward Freund, *Today—The Day of Woman* (Chicago: The American Research Foundation, 1928).

110. Ibid.; and *Polk's Chicago City Directory,* 1928–1929.

111. Harry Edward Freund, *Today—The Day of Woman.*

of the business community of Chicago in a letter to the *New York Times* dated August 18, 1928, in which he maintained that New York's announced plan to hold a world's fair in 1932 would have an adverse effect on Chicago's own world's fair scheduled for 1933.[112] Still writing from Chicago, he contributed another letter a year later (August 26, 1929) expressing gratitude to New York for withdrawing its proposed fair in deference to Chicago's "A Century of Progress" in 1933, although he points out that a New York newspaper had printed the comment that for this event "Chicago is putting up the money and the location, but New York is supplying the brains." He concludes on a magnanimous note:

> Chicago, with its big and broad purpose to make "A Century of Progress" of service and benefit to all humanity, will wholeheartedly welcome the cooperation of the brains of the world.[113]

Freund's last-known publication is a letter to the *New York Times* in 1937 in which he capitalizes on a thought expressed years earlier by C. A. Daniell and Frank D. Abbott, a connection between selling pianos and trading in another product whose merchants are also known to use devious techniques:

> "Three million automobiles are going currently to the junk heap yearly" is the statement of a leader in the automobile industry. Here is an example for the piano trade to follow: Junk old and worn-out pianos, which are a menace to the musical education of the younger generation. The sales of pianos are on the upward trend and this is the psychological time for the piano men to clean house.[114]

Harry Edward Freund must have felt a touch of nostalgia and pride as he looked back on his career at the age of 74 and relived for a moment the subject of his journalistic triumph so many years in the past—his Great Square-Piano Bonfire of 1904.

112. *New York Times,* August 21, 1928, p. 22.

113. *New York Times,* August 29, 1929, p. 22.

114. *New York Times,* August 1, 1937, section 4, p. 9. Freund's location is given at the end of the letter as "Woodstown, N.Y." No town of this name has ever existed in New York State, and this may be a misprint for Woodstown, N.J., although no evidence has been found to show that Freund was living there. The author has also not been able to determine the place and date of Freund's death.