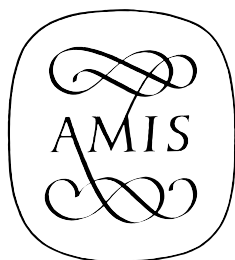


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John F. Stratton: Musician, Manufacturer, and Merchant*

ROBERT E. ELIASON

John Franklin Stratton (1832–1912) (fig. 1) was an extraordinary man—intelligent, musically talented, curious, and highly ambitious. His excellence in performance, conducting, and arranging, plus a machinist's apprenticeship led him from successful soloist and bandleader to musical instrument maker. Along the way he became a leading music merchant as well. Stratton found himself, however, in the midst of the economic and industrial sea change from local artist-craftsmen to large factory businesses, and he was among the few who thrived in making this transition. Stratton's New York music stores led eventually to major accomplishments in instrument manufacturing and merchandising in both Europe and the United States. The catalogs and other primary source documents provide fascinating insight into Stratton's business methods and the instruments that allowed him to flourish in this changing turn-of-the-century economy.

West Swanzey, Lowell, Worcester and Hartford (1839–1857)

The town of West Swanzey, New Hampshire became the home of the Stratton family when Richard Stratton, a tanner, settled there in 1790 (table 1). His son, John, continued the trade, adding to it farming and the selling of lumber. Succeeding generations continued this development of village industry.¹ William Stratton (1808–1873) was a farmer who played violin and keyed bugle and led a small nomadic concert company. His sons, George W. (1830–1901) and John F. (1832–1912), were just seven and nine when they began traveling with him as soloists. For several years they performed as child prodigies in concerts of popular dance music around New England, George on clarinet and John on trombone and keyed bugle. They eventually tired of this, however, and

*This article expands on the work of Lloyd Farrar, "Under the Crown and Eagle," *Newsletter of the American Musical Instrument Society* vol. 12/ii (June 1983), 2.

1. Benjamin Read, *History of Swanzey* (Salem, Massachusetts: Salem Press Publishing and Printing Co., 1892), 550.

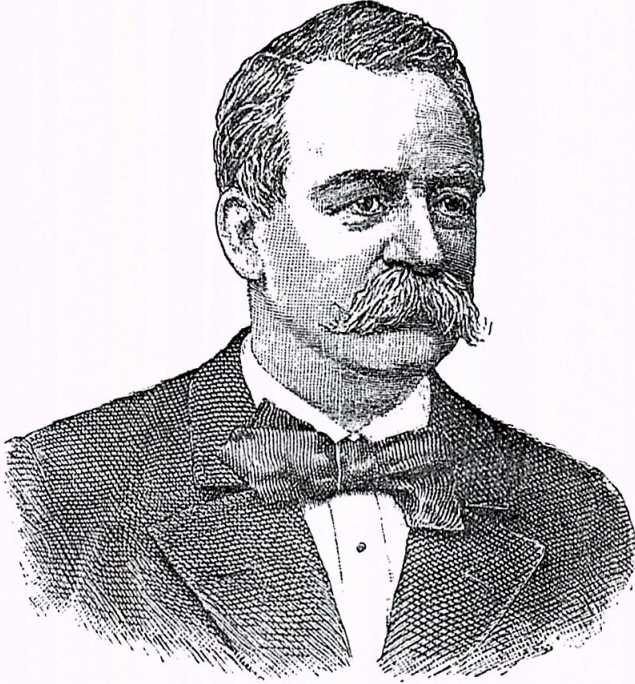


FIGURE 1. John F. Stratton. Illustration from John F. Stratton & Son catalog (c. 1889), 29.

in 1842, rebelled at the constant travel and the same music night after night.² For three years they did little in music.³

In 1845 the family moved to Lowell, Massachusetts where both boys were apprenticed in the machinist's trade⁴ while still finding opportunities to broaden their education. Freund reports:

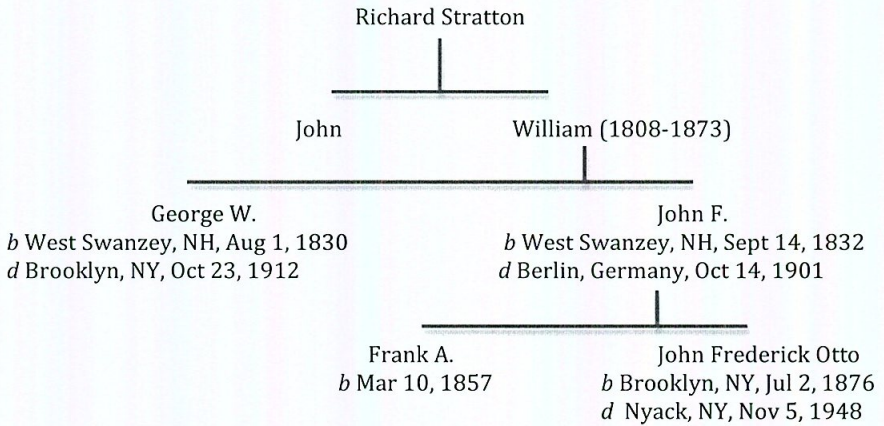
John began serious piano study, but soon found a machinist position and a chance to play in a brass band. A few months at the piano and that became monotonous, and of his own choice we find him, before the beginning of his fifteenth year, apprenticed to learn the machinist's trade at North Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Probably this move laid the foundation of his future success as a manufacturer of musical goods. His place in the machine

2. John W. Moore, *Complete Encyclopaedia of Music* (Manchester, New Hampshire: John W. Moore and Company, 1867), v. 2, 163.

3. Read, 551.

4. Moore, 163.

TABLE 1. Stratton Family Tree.



shop was obtained through his musical talent. They wanted him to play in the North Chelmsford Brass Band. This was a regular brass band and a good one for those days. He remained there over two years, at the end of which time he was taken sick with typhoid fever, after which he never went back again to the shop.⁵

Significantly, as a machinist apprentice John was learning some of the skills that eventually made him one of the most progressive industrialists of the era.

Following his bout with Typhoid fever, John left North Chelmsford to become leader of the Worcester, Massachusetts Brass Band. After one season there he moved to Hartford, Connecticut where from 1849 to 1857 he was leader of the Hartford Cornet Band. During the years in Hartford he also studied violin and led Stratton & Sibley's Quadrille Band. In 1855 he started his first business, and in 1856 married his first wife, Sarah Ann Norton.⁶ The music store did a thriving business until the 1857 financial crash, when it failed along with thousands of other American businesses.⁷

5. John C. Freund, "John F. Stratton, The Interesting Record of a Busy and Enterprising Life," *Freund's Daily and Music & Drama* (Dramatic Daily Publishing Co., c1883). Stratton Free Library files, Swanzey, NH.

6. Connecticut Marriages 1729–1867 (<familysearch.org>).

7. Samuel Rezneck, *Business Depressions and Financial Panics; Essays in American Business and Economic History* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1968), 105–6.

New York (1857–1866)

Having lost his small fortune, Stratton set out in 1857 for New York where he began the second part of his career. A son, Frank A. Stratton, who would eventually join his father in business, was born on March 10 of that year.⁸ In New York he played, taught, wrote, arranged, and soon became director of the Staten Island Philharmonic Society as well as his own New York Palace Garden Orchestra.⁹ Also at this time he was a member of a remarkable quartet club, as described in a New York music publication:

It will be of interest to state here that he was for some years a member of a private amateur quartet club, consisting of Mr. Allen Dodworth, first cornet; [Thomas] Jefferson Dodworth, second cornet; Harvey B. Dodworth, alto; John F. Stratton, baritone, and George W. Morgan, piano. This club was formed for the purpose of playing classic string quartets from Beethoven, Hummel, Haydn, Mozart, Mendelssohn, etc. They were probably the first who ever attempted to perform such music upon brass instruments. The two cornets took the violin parts, the alto the viola and the baritone the violoncello.¹⁰

This connection with the Dodworths, leading New York musicians of the time, as well as his solo playing and conducting, put Stratton in touch with all the best musicians, music merchants, instrument makers, and dealers in the city. Undoubtedly, he was acquainted with John Howard Foote, for they became partners in 1864. J. Lathrop Allen moved from Boston to New York to work with the Dodworths in 1862. Others in the New York brass instrument trade during the war years were Daniel Hess, Franz Lauter, Jules Lecocq, Henry Moennig, Rohe & Leavitt (where Foote worked), Christian Stark, and Charles Zoebisch.¹¹ Surprisingly, of these only Allen, Foote, and Lauter advertised in the city directories as instrument makers or manufacturers during the early 1860s. The rest defined their businesses as “Instrs.,” “Mus. Instrs.,” or “Importer.”

In 1859 the John F. Stratton Company, manufacturers and dealers in brass instruments, was established in the old Harlem Railroad building at the corner of Centre & White streets.¹² Centre is the third street east

8. Connecticut Births and Christenings, 1649–1906 (<familysearch.org>).

9. Read, 559; Freund, “Interesting Career of John F. Stratton,” *John C. Freund’s Music Trades*, September, 1908.

10. Freund, “The Interesting Record.”

11. New York City Directories, 1860–65.

12. “John F. Stratton & Son,” *General History of the Music Trades of America* (New York: Bill & Bill, 1891), 81.

of Broadway, and White is two blocks south of Canal street or about seven blocks north of City Hall Park. Freund describes the factory, writing,

It was during this engagement [Stratton's Palace Garden Orchestra] that he conceived the idea of establishing a factory for the purpose of manufacturing first-class rotary-valve brass instruments on a large scale, so as to be able to furnish good instruments at moderate prices. He immediately began work. He engaged the best instrument makers then to be had, and paid them and all other expenses from what he earned as conductor, writer and teacher. He had already given up playing himself.

The orchestra flourished and the brass instrument factory flourished. The war of rebellion broke out, troops began to pass through New York, and the government wanted quarters for them. The Palace Garden was just the place and they took possession. This ended Mr. Stratton's engagement and also his life as a musician, he having then spent twenty-three years in that profession.¹³

The cost of instruments at that time was about \$45 to \$150, cornet to contrabass, as shown in a variety of catalogs of the period. Stratton decided to make lots of instruments and then sell, rather than making to order, as most firms did at that time. He employed eight men at first, but with the outbreak of war in 1861 and the concomitant increase in instrument demand, expanded to 150–200 employees.¹⁴ The earliest instruments known to have been made by the Stratton firm were signed "J. F. Stratton" (fig. 2). Later instruments always used "John" instead of the first initial. When Charles and Granville Draper of Boston were unable to fulfill a contract to make 400 bugles at \$4.00, Stratton took over the contract and completed it—"Mr. Stratton furnished over 60,000 [typo? Maybe 6,000?] army bugles and trumpets for the United States Government"¹⁵—in addition to his regular band trade (fig. 3 and fig. 4). Freund notes, "Practically, he had the brass instrument business of the whole army in his own hands during the entire period of the war. Nobody else desired to start in, the common impression being that the war would be over inside of three months."¹⁶ Following the war, the firm's workforce was reduced to fifty employees, but Stratton had made a fortune.¹⁷ In 1862, according to New York City directories, Stratton

13. Freund, "The Interesting Record."

14. "John F. Stratton & Son," *General History of the Music Trades of America*, 81.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*



FIGURE 2. (a) Over the shoulder E-flat cornet with enclosed stop string rotary valves (b) signed in script on the bell garland "J. F. Stratton, Maker, New York." Photo courtesy of the Excelsior Cornet Band, Syracuse, NY.

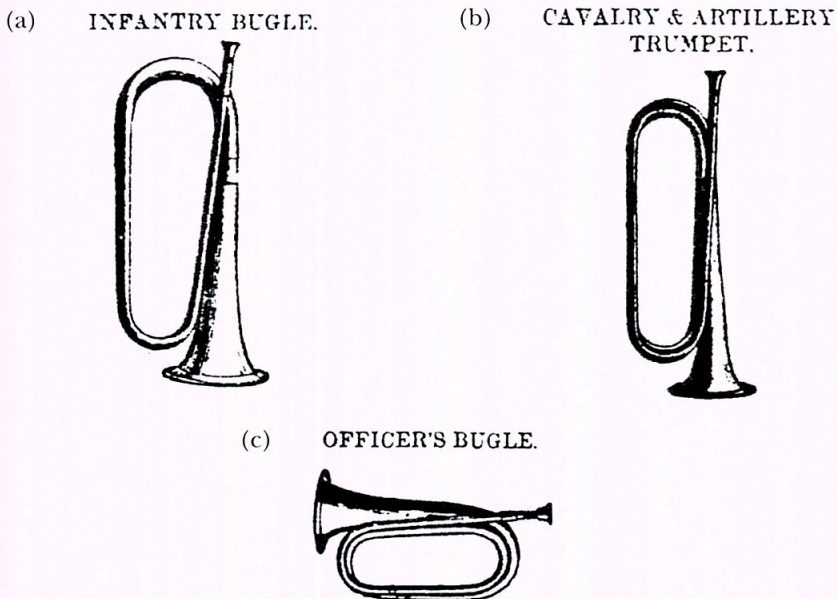
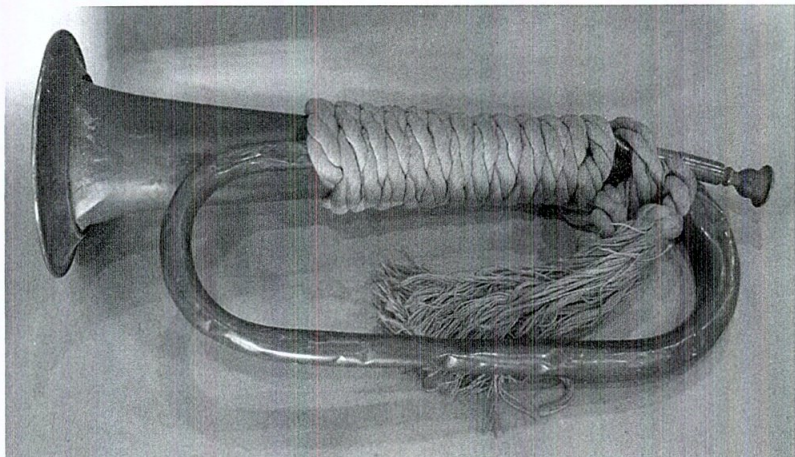


FIGURE 3. (a, b) Infantry bugle and military trumpet illustrations from c. 1875 flyer and (c) 1878 catalog.

(a)



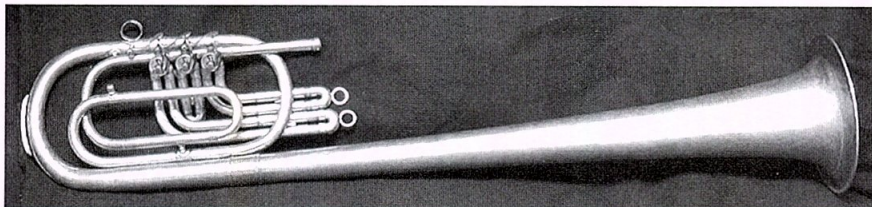
(b)



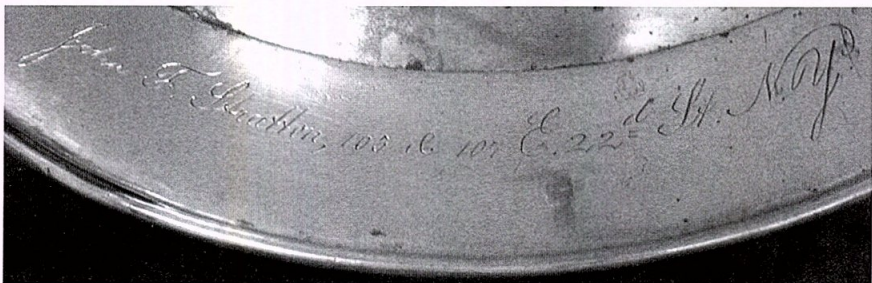
FIGURE 4. (a) Stratton infantry bugle of the kind made beginning in the early 1860s with (b) signature on the bell rim. Photos courtesy of Bill and Lois Eagan, Grafton, NH.

moved his business to 105 East 22nd, a little further north, but still in that part of the city where most instrument making was being done. Inscriptions on instruments show that at this time he also occupied the building next door at 107 East 22nd St. (fig. 5 and fig. 6).

In 1864 Stratton formed a brief partnership with John Howard Foote (1833–1896) whose business was at 31 Maiden Lane, a street in the center of the musical instrument making area running from Broadway to the East River about four blocks south of City Hall. Foote had been working since 1857 as a musical instrument maker with Rohe & Leavitt, musical instrument dealers at that address since 1840. He took over their business in 1863. He and Stratton advertised as Stratton and Foote, suc-



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 5. (a) Over-shoulder tenor in B-flat, German silver, three string rotary valves, (b) signed on bell rim "John F. Stratton, 105 & 107 E. 22nd St., N. Y." Photos courtesy of the Bob Baccus Collection, Huntsville, AL.

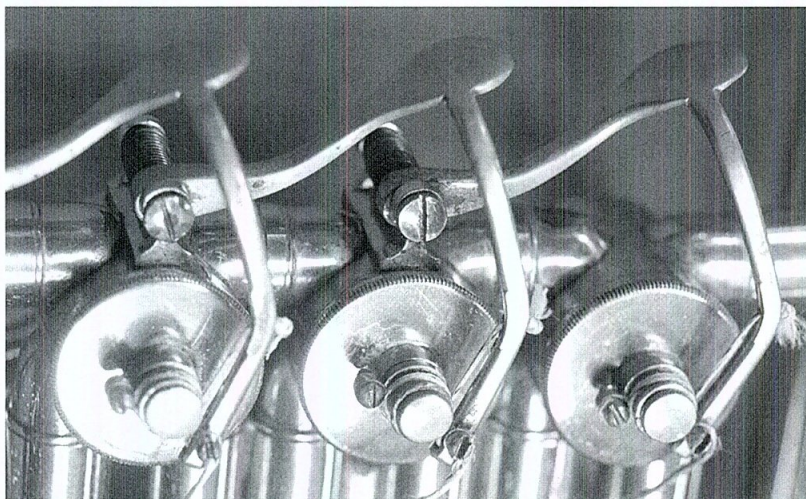
cessors to Rohe and Leavitt. Both the 105 E. 22nd St. and 31 Maiden Lane addresses were maintained (fig. 7 and fig. 8). Through his association with Foote, Stratton gained additional experience and knowledge about running a retail store and especially about importing goods. In terms of the instruments themselves, Stratton & Foote instruments are the first by Stratton to put the maker's inscription on an applied shield. Stratton's enclosed stop rotary valves of this period are almost exactly like those sold by Rohe & Leavitt and were either imported or designed by John Howard Foote (fig. 9). The partnership lasted only one year, however, and in 1865 Stratton moved his manufacturing to 118 W. 27th and opened retail stores at 538 and then 735 Broadway (fig. 10). Foote remained at 31 Maiden Lane, continuing business there until 1880.

Although John F. Stratton is known to have designed machinery for making instruments,¹⁸ his only known patent (US patent 51,363 of 1865)

18. Freund, "Interesting Career."



(a)



(b)

FIGURE 6. (a) Upright tenor with enclosed stop rotary valves, (b) signed "John F. Stratton/105 & 107 E. 22nd St./N. Y." Photos courtesy of Interlochen Center for the Arts, Interlochen, MI.

is for a brass instrument practice mute very similar in design to the modern Harmon mute.¹⁹ He described it as follows:

This invention consists in the use as a mute for brass instruments of a plug made to fit the bell of the instrument, and provided with a central tube, ex-

19. Clifford Bevan, "A Nineteenth-Century Harmon Mute," *Galpin Society Journal*, vol. 42 (August, 1989), 129–130.



FIGURE 7. Over-shoulder B-flat cornet 5057, signed “Stratton & Foote” (shield). Photo courtesy of the National Music Museum, The University of South Dakota.



(a)

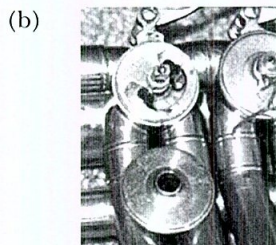
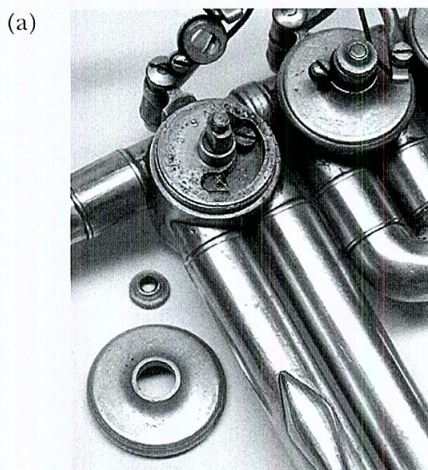


(b)

FIGURE 8. (a) Circular cornet in B-flat and A, (b) signed “Stratton & Foote/31/Maiden Lane/N.Y.” (shield) [1864]. Photos courtesy of Interlochen Center for the Arts, Interlochen, MI.

tending through both heads of said plug in such a manner that when the plug is applied to the bell of the instrument the sound is deadened without throwing the instrument out of tune, and pupils are enabled to practice on the instrument without annoying their neighbors.²⁰

20. *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Patents for the Year 1865* (Washington, DC, 1867), II, 952.



(c)



FIGURE 9. Enclosed stop valves on (a) the Stratton over shoulder cornet belonging to the Excelsior Cornet Band of Syracuse, NY; (b) similar valves on an over shoulder E-flat tuba by Rohe and Leavitt from the collection of Larry Jones, Windsor, VT; and (c) another example by Stratton from a tenor in the Conn/ Greenleaf Collection, Interlochen Center for the Arts, Interlochen, MI. Photos by the author, courtesy of the Conn/ Greenleaf Collection.

In an 1872–1881 circular he states: “Stratton’s Patent Mute for Brass Instruments, furnished gratis with all instruments ordered.”

New York, Markneukirchen and Leipzig (1866–1876)

Following the war Stratton went to Europe looking for sources of the best violin strings and rosin. While there, he visited many of the European brass instrument factories. Most, he was surprised to discover, were

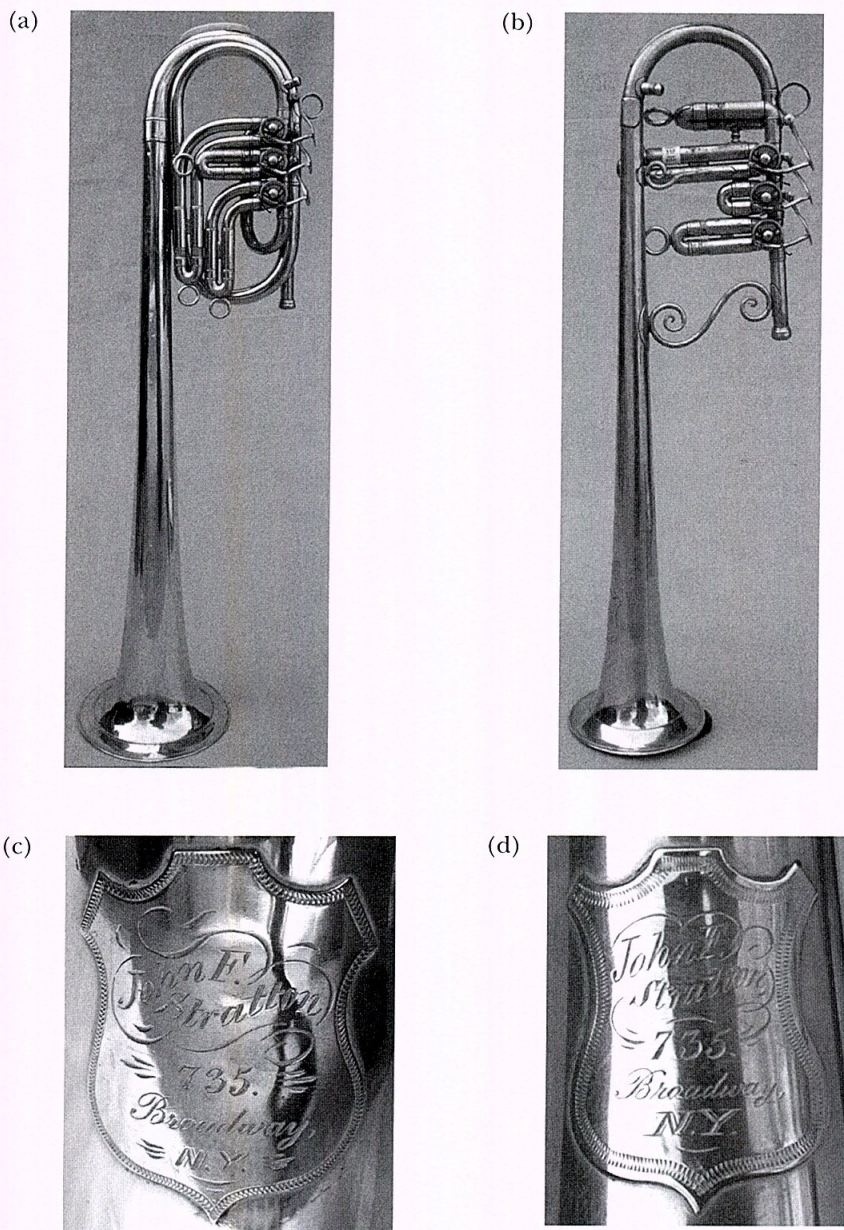


FIGURE 10. (a) Over-shoulder E-flat alto 31F and (b) over-shoulder E-flat cornet 11F, signed on shields with the 735 Broadway address (c and d). Photos courtesy of the Heritage Military Music Foundation, Watertown, WI.

making instruments on order from the United States. He was also interested to learn that, while the weekly wage for a brass instrument maker in the United States was \$12, a similar maker in Europe was paid only about \$4. Adding duties and shipping to wages, a product requiring a week of skilled European labor could be had in New York for about \$6.²¹

Based on his experience making instruments during the war, his work with John Howard Foote, and what he had learned during his European travels, Stratton developed a business plan worthy of Henry Ford and Sam Walton. He realized that most people would buy a medium-quality instrument and, therefore, sought to make and import instruments of that quality to sell at low prices. He planned to make large quantities of instruments instead of making them to individual order, and took advantage of cheaper overseas labor. He invented machines for the processes of instrument making, divided the work to take advantage of less skilled labor, and out-sourced some of the complicated parts. Because of these advances in manufacturing and marketing, soon adopted by other producers, the era of the individual musical instrument craftsman was waning, and the American brass instrument market was soon dominated by large companies formed over the last half of the nineteenth century: The Boston Musical Instrument Manufactory (1869), C. G. Conn (1875), York (1882), and H. N. White (1893).

In 1866 Stratton moved his brass instrument factory to Markneukirchen in Saxony. That same year he opened a retail store at 63 Maiden Lane in New York City, and began importing large quantities of general music merchandise, moving to 55 Maiden Lane shortly thereafter (fig. 11). The *New York Commercial Path Finder* notes,

In May 1866 the firm of John F. Stratton & Co. commenced business at No. 63 Maiden Lane, removing a few months since to the more commodious quarters at No. 55 Maiden Lane. The building is 30 by 70 feet in area, and Messrs. Stratton & Co. occupy the four upper floors; the first for offices and as a salesroom for musical merchandise generally, the second almost exclusively as a salesroom for violins, the third for brass instruments and the packing and shipping goods, and the fourth for the storage of original packages of merchandise.

In the stock, prominence is of course given to the brass and German silver band instruments of their own manufacture, in the production of which they exceed all the other makers in the country combined; and in the spe-

21. "John F. Stratton & Son," *General History of the Music Trades of America*, 81.

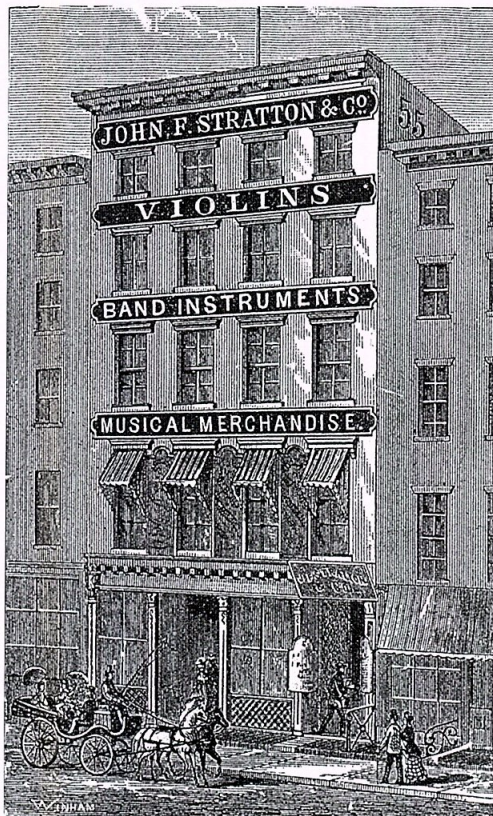


FIGURE 11. Stratton & Co. store at 55 Maiden Lane. Illustration from the Spring Trade Catalog (1877–81).

cialty of rotary valve instruments they are the most extensive makers in the world.²²

Stratton moved to Leipzig in 1867 to expand, and in 1870 built the largest violin factory in world on Mockern street in Gohlis bei Leipzig at a cost of not less than \$40,000. The building was four stories high and 130 feet long with steam power throughout all its parts (fig. 12). Freund writes, “He invented all the machinery and fixtures used, and these were so wonderful, curious and ingenious as to attract the attention of not

22. John F. Stratton & Co. Catalog (1871), 24, 25 as quoted from *New York Commercial Path Finder*.

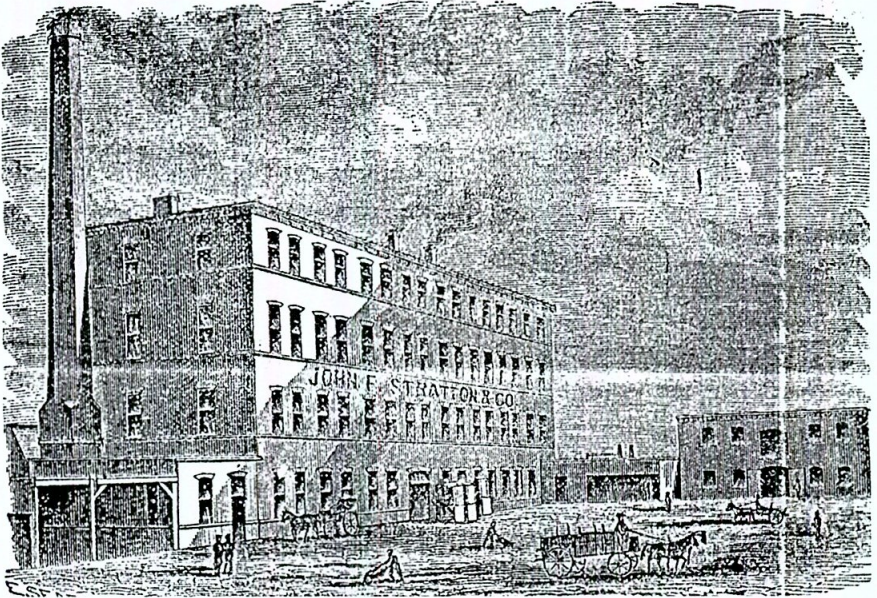


FIGURE 12. Stratton's factory in Leipzig as illustrated in his catalogs.

only learned technicians and inventors, but also the nobility of Saxony. . . ."²³ and the *New York Commercial Path Finder* notes, "Every part of the wood work is produced by machinery, put together with great care, and the result is a class of violins which compare favorably with the best made by hand work, and at prices astonishingly low."²⁴ Most of the 150 employees were women. Violins produced bore the labels Antonius Stradivarius, Giovan Paolo [Giovanni Paolo Maggini?], and Nicolaus Amatius. They were sold wholesale only.²⁵ The new factory was of considerable local interest and drew a visit from the Saxon royalty:

On the 30th of July [1872], this factory was honored with a visit from His Majesty King John of Saxony, who came accompanied by the Court Marshal, Count Vitthum von Eckstadt; the Counselor to the Court Bar; the Court

23. Freund, "Interesting Career," 3–4.

24. John F. Stratton & Co. Catalog (1871), 25 as quoted from *New York Commercial Path Finder*.

25. *Ibid.*, inside cover; "The Stratton Violins" from an unidentified catalog of about 1873, 34; and "John F. Stratton's Violin Factory" quoted from the *Leipzig Tageblatt* in a Stratton Band Instruments flyer c. 1872.

Master of the House, General Major v Thieulau Russing; the General Aid-de-camp, General Major Krug von Nidder; the Director of the District, von Burgsdorff; and the High Constable of the District, Dr Platzman. The King examined the establishment very closely and it made such a favorable impression upon his Majesty, that he expressed to the proprietor (using the English language) his extreme satisfaction.²⁶

As noted in a c.1873 catalog, Stratton invented steam-powered machinery to shape the parts of violins:

The most curious machines are those for turning out the tops and backs. These machines (there are four) attended by one girl at \$2 per week, will turn out tops and backs for 150 violins per day.²⁷

Six tops or backs is a good day's work for a violin maker; therefore there are 150 tops, and 150 backs, it would take 50 skilled workmen to do the work of this one girl, which at \$5 per week's wages, [a man's wages] would cost just \$300, instead of \$2, and this is only one of the many labor-saving machines which Mr. Stratton has invented.²⁸

In 1871 John's brother George W. Stratton was persuaded to leave his Boston business in a capable manager's hands and move to Leipzig to oversee the factory. Unfortunately, in 1874, after only a few years in this capacity, he suffered "severe partial congestion of the brain and prostration of the nervous system" and was unable to continue.²⁹ He spent much of the remainder of his life traveling in Europe.³⁰ By the late 1870s Stratton was advertising his factory violins at wholesale prices as low as \$12.00 a dozen, or \$1.00 each (fig. 13). Although it was described as a violin factory, more than half of the employees made brass instruments.³¹

26. *John F. Stratton & Co., Publishers of Brass & Quadrille Band Music, and Manufacturers of Military Band Instruments, No. 55 Maiden Lane, New York, c1873, 20.*

27. *Ibid.*, 35.

28. "The Stratton Violins" page from an unidentified catalog of about 1873, 35.

29. *Read*, 556.

30. George W. Stratton had studied music seriously with the ambition of becoming an opera composer. He taught and performed in Manchester, NH 1849–1866 and although he did compose one grand opera, he found success in writing operettas for school children. His business career started in 1853 when he began selling pianos and sheet music. In 1866 he opened a store in Boston, becoming a very successful musical merchant and publisher, while continuing to compose operettas. Despite his continuing illness, in 1885 he built and stocked a library for his home town, West Swanzey, NH. His wife, Lucy Ladd Stratton, was an accomplished artist whose flower and landscape paintings can be seen at the Library of Congress and other museums. An article about her work appeared in the *New Hampshire Union Leader* (November 5, 2006).

31. "John F. Stratton & Son," *General History of the Music Trades of America*, 81.

Trade Price List of Musical Instruments and Toys.

15

STRATTON VIOLINS.

The only Low Priced Instruments IN THE WORLD which have the qualification of
TONE.

Medal Awarded at the Centennial Exhibition, 1876.

No. 203 $\frac{1}{4}$ VIOLIN.....Per Doz., \$12.00	No. 207 VIOLIN.....Per Doz., \$18.00
This No. 203 $\frac{1}{4}$ is a handsome, finely finished, and fine toned violin; color, red; imitation ebony trimmings. The top and back of these violins are worked out just the same as the best which we make, and are also of the same model, and when we only say that "they are fine toned," we do the violins injustice. They produce a splendid tone—full, rich and brilliant. Tune one of these violins up to concert pitch and keep it there for one week, and we are ready to compare the tone with that of any violins made, by any maker, at any price. Of course, these violins do not <i>all</i> give exactly the same tone, and if they were trimmed with ebony they would give a better tone, as the finger-board and tail-piece are too light; but even with this disadvantage, we say keep these tuned up for one week, and play enough upon them to get the strings well rosined, and we are ready to compare.	Dark red; fine imitation ebony trimmings. No such violins as the preceding three numbers were ever offered for sale for <i>anything</i> like the same price.
While examining these violins (at \$1.00), please notice the manner in which they are trimmed and strung up—the strings, finger-boards, tail-pieces, pegs, bridges, and necks; these are all good, well-made and durable, and are suitable, just as they are received, to be tuned up and played upon any occasion. And we sell these violins for \$1.00 each.	No. 209 $\frac{1}{4}$ VIOLIN.....Per Doz., \$18.00
Please calculate the cost of the above trimmings, deduct the same from \$1.00, and then imagine how we can make that finely finished, fine toned violin for the remainder.	Light red; inlaid around edges.
No. 204 $\frac{1}{4}$ VIOLIN.....Per Doz., \$15.00	No. 210 VIOLIN.....Per Doz., 21.00
Dark brown, same finish as No. 203 $\frac{1}{4}$, with better trimmings.	Dark brown; inlaid; fine trimmings.
	No. 216 VIOLIN.....Each, 2.25
	Dark red; inlaid; <i>real ebony</i> finger-board, pegs, and tail-pieces.
	No. 217 VIOLIN.....Each, 2.50
	Red; French varnish; <i>real ebony</i> trimmings.
	No. 218 VIOLIN.....Each, 3.00
	Dark brown; ebony trimmings; <i>fine wood</i> .
	No. 218 $\frac{1}{4}$ VIOLIN.....Each, 3.50
	French finish; ebony trimmed.
	No. 218 $\frac{1}{2}$ VIOLIN.....Each, 4.00
	Imitation of an <i>old</i> violin.
	No. 218 $\frac{3}{4}$ VIOLIN.....Each, 4.50
	French finish; made of handsome wood.
	No. 218 $\frac{3}{8}$ VIOLIN.....Each, 5.00
	Imitation of a very <i>fine</i> <i>old</i> violin.
	No. 219 VIOLIN.....Each, 6.00
	Imitation of a very <i>old</i> violin.
	No. 219 $\frac{1}{4}$ VIOLIN.....Each, 7.00
	Imitation of a very <i>old</i> violin; <i>fine wood</i> .
	No. 225 VIOLIN.....Each, 12.00
	French finish; very handsome wood, and <i>finely</i> finished.

FIGURE 13. Violin price list from the John F. Stratton *Spring Trade Catalog* (c. 1877–81), 15.

Stratton claimed in an 1871 catalog that "I have now the largest manufactory of rotary valve musical instruments in the world; I have more capital employed, and turn out a greater number of instruments than all the others makers in the United States combined."³²

Stratton brass instruments sold in New York for less than half the price of those made by the leading Boston Makers. A price list from a Stratton flyer of 1869 shows brasses from E-flat cornet to E-flat contrabass at \$20 to \$45 (fig. 14), significantly less expensive than similar models in a price list from a D. C. Hall flyer (December 1864) asking \$50 to \$110.³³ Likewise, an 1876–77 D. C. Hall catalog shows B. F. Quinby brasses at \$45 to \$100³⁴ and an 1881 Isaac Fiske catalog lists comparable instruments at \$45 to \$110.³⁵ Prices for these instruments remained the same through

32. John F. Stratton & Co. Catalog of 1871, 33.

33. D. C. Hall flyer, December 1864, [1].

34. *Illustrated Catalogue of D. C. Hall, Importer, Manufacturer & Dealer in Musical Instruments, 126 Court Street, Boston*: Goodwin & Drisko, 1876 or 1877), 12.

35. *Illustrated Catalogue of Musical Instruments Manufactured by Isaac Fiske*, July, 1881, 5–16.

JOHN F. STRATTON & CO..

MANUFACTURERS OF

BRASS AND GERMAN SILVER ROTARY VALVE INSTRUMENTS

OF ALL KINDS, AND DEALERS IN

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS, FOR BRASS OR CORNET BANDS,

OF EVERY DESCRIPTION.

Office and Salesroom, 55 Maiden Lane, New York.

INSTRUMENTS WITH BELL OVER THE SHOULDER, UPRIGHT, FRONT AND CIRCULAR.

		ROTARY VALVES.	
		Brass.	German Silver.
E♭	Cornet, 3 valves	\$20 00	\$25 00
B♭	Cornet, 3 "	22 00	28 00
E♭	Alto, 3 "	26 00	35 00
B♭	Tenor, 3 "	30 00	40 00
B♭	Baritone, 3 "	35 00	45 00
B♭	Bass, 3 "	38 00	48 00
E♭	Contrabass, 3 "	45 00	60 00
E♭	Contrabass, 3 " large size.	50 00	70 00
B♭	Orchestra Cornet, 3 valves, top action crook to G.	24 00	30 00
B♭	" " 4 " " " " "	30 00	36 00
B♭	" " 3 " side action, " " "	26 00	32 00
B♭	" " 4 " " " " "	32 00	38 00
C	" " 3 " top action, " " "	25 00	32 00
C	" " 3 " side action, " " "	27 00	35 00

STRATTON'S Patent Mute for Brass Instruments, furnished *gratis* with all instruments ordered.

In ordering instruments, please be particular to state whether you wish the Bells upright over the shoulder, or circular in shape, and whether they are to be used in orchestra or in street bands.

☞ Infantry and Officers' Bugles, and Cavalry Trumpets, of Brass, Copper or German Silver, and German Silver Fifes of every variety,

N. B.—ALL INSTRUMENTS MADE BY US ARE FULLY WARRANTED, and may be returned if not perfectly satisfactory in every respect. All instruments purchased from us will be subject to the following conditions :

Any time within three months of the date of purchase, any instrument not giving perfect satisfaction in every respect, may be exchanged for another of the *same* kind, *without extra cost to the purchaser*; and any Instrument may be exchanged for one of *another* kind by paying the difference (if it is more) in the price, as per our printed price-list. If the price is *less*, the difference in cost *will be refunded* to the purchaser. This last privilege we consider of the *greatest importance* to new bands or beginners, as it is important always to tell which Instruments are best suited to new performers.

FIGURE 14. Price list from *John F. Stratton & Co., Manufacturers of Military Band Instruments, and Publishers of Brass and Quadrille Band Music, No 55 Maiden Lane, New York*, 2. Collection of Kurt Stein, Springfield, PA.

the 1870s, as shown in the company's 1878 catalog, although some new models including a piston valved cornet not listed earlier, were priced somewhat higher (fig. 15).

The John F. Stratton & Co. catalog of about 1871 is concerned mostly with violins made at the new factory and with the quality and sources of violin strings. In it, however, Stratton did state, "In Brass and German Silver Rotary Valve Instruments we have not relaxed in the least, on the contrary we have done all that it was possible for us to do to improve them."³⁶ He also announced, "I have now added to my former business of Importing violin strings, and manufacturing brass and German silver rotary valve instruments, &c, &c., that of importing all kinds of musical goods on the most extensive scale."³⁷ This part of his trade would grow over the next decade until it constituted the bulk of his business.

A brief history of the Stratton company that appeared in the *New York Commercial Path Finder* is included in the c. 1871 catalog. Among other things, it mentions that "Mr. Stratton has made many inventions and improvements in machinery for making brass instruments; materially reducing their cost while enhancing their quality."³⁸

The same catalog includes a section near the end on brass instruments "written several years ago" that includes a number of interesting observations:

Can an E-flat cornet be made that blows easily on the high notes? (I've made ours as easy to blow as possible);

Which metal makes the best tone? ("I cannot see why there is any difference");

What is the use of the fourth valve on an E-flat cornet ("I am not in favor of fourth valves.");

Can a set of instruments be made to change from over-shoulder to upright? (no);

Can a good C cornet be made? (no);

Concerning the B-flat bass: ("I consider it of no use at all").³⁹

A paragraph about pricing confirms that the J. F. Stratton company, at least by the time this section was written (just before 1871), was having the valves for its brasses made by an outside contractor:

36. John F. Stratton & Co Catalog of 1871, 27.

37. Ibid., "Introductory Circular to the Trade," 11.

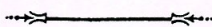
38. Ibid., 24, 25.

39. Ibid., 34, 35.

PRICE LIST

OF

The Stratton Band Instruments.



**IMPROVED ROTARY VALVES WITH BELL OVER THE SHOULDER,
UPRIGHT OR FRONT.**

	ROTARY VALVES.	
E♭ Cornet, 3 valves.....	Brass, \$20.00	German Silver, \$25.00
B♭ Cornet, ".....	" 22.00	" 28.00
E♭ Alto, ".....	" 26.00	" 35.00
B♭ Tenor, ".....	" 30.00	" 40.00
B♭ Baritone, ".....	" 35.00	" 45.00
B♭ Bass, ".....	" 38.00	" 48.00
E♭ Contrabass, ".....	" 45.00	" 60.00
E♭ Contrabass, " large size.....	" 50.00	" 70.00
B♭ Orchestra Cornet, 3 valves, top action crook to G.....	" 22.00	" 28.00
B♭ " " " side action to G.....	" 26.00	" 32.00
B♭ Tenor Valve Trombone.....	" 35.00	" 46.00
B♭ " Slide.....	" 22.00	
French Horn, crooked from B♭ to D.....	" 50.00	

FIGURE 15. A similar price list from Stratton's 1878 catalog, 2.

My contractor on valve work is now engaged on a contract for one thousand sets of rotary valves without regard to when they will be used. Who cannot see that these valves can be made better and at less prices than those made in small numbers, say three or four sets at a time.⁴⁰

A four-page flyer of c. 1875 is the earliest source found so far that illustrates Stratton bugles and band instruments (fig. 16). Below are surviving instruments matching the flyer illustrations (fig. 17 and fig. 18).

John F. Stratton & Co. published a considerable amount of music during the 1860s and 1870s. The Library of Congress lists 175 individual works for brass band from that period as well as *Stratton's Military Journal No. 1*, a collection of twenty-one brass band selections, and *Stratton's Orchestral Journal No. 1*, a collection of twenty-five dance orchestra pieces, both published in 1871.

From 1866 to 1869 Stratton published dozens of arrangements for band and other smaller ensembles. His *First Series*, printed in score only, included fifty-two quicksteps, polkas, marches, waltzes, songs, serenades,

40. Ibid., 35.



FIGURE 16. Cover page of the c. 1875 flyer.



FIGURE 17. E-flat cornet 6858 matching the 1875 flyer illustration. Photo courtesy of the National Music Museum, The University of South Dakota.

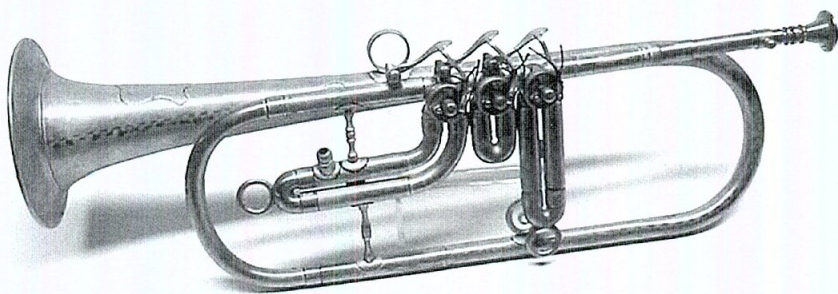


FIGURE 18. B-flat cornet matching the 1875 flyer illustration. Photo courtesy of the Excelsior Cornet Band, Syracuse, NY.

and operatic airs, including one of his own quicksteps as well as an overture and a quickstep by his brother, George. As was the custom at that time, musicians were expected to copy out their own parts from the score. A *Second Series* of fifty-three scores included printed parts for each instrument. Well known composers whose works appear in one series or the other include: Balfe, Bellini, Gounod, Gungl, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Offenbach, Strauss, and Verdi. Lesser known composers represented by three or more works are: Franz Wilhelm Abt (1819–1885), Henri E. Cramatte, Josef Gungl (1810–1889), Kiefer, Lechleitner, Lippe, and Stiner.

Copies of his *Military Band* (New York: John F. Stratton, 1866–71) score (141 nos.) plus parts for brass band are found in the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress. Two more series, the 500 and 600 also appeared during this time. These selections are in score only and tend to be for smaller ensembles arranged for anything from quartets to octets.

In 1875 Stratton published G. F. Patton's *A Practical Guide to the Arrangement of Band Music*, a monumental work with information and instruction on every aspect of brass band arranging, as well as on organizing and managing the band in rehearsals, parades, concerts, serenades, and balls. Lavern John Wagner suggests that Stratton may have published the tome because of a connection with G. F. Patton's brother, Charles L. Patton, who was president of University Publishing Company in New York City.⁴¹

41. Lavern John Wagner, "Doing-It-Yourself in 1875: George F. Patton on Arranging Band Music," *American Music* vol. 6/i (spring 1988), 29.

New York and Leipzig (1876–1883)

In 1876 Stratton married Marie Therese Junge (b. Germany October 31, 1852), and another son, John Frederick Otto Stratton (1876–1948), was born in Brooklyn, NY.⁴² John F. Stratton & Co. exhibited “Violins, Wood and Brass Musical Instruments” at the International Exhibition held in Philadelphia in 1876. The group of ten judges assisted by a number of well-known Philadelphia musicians recommended an award “because their productions are of good workmanship, and they are likewise of good quality, and yield a good tone to the player.”⁴³ Stratton & Co. made much of the fact that while their instruments were commended because of their tone quality, competing instruments from Germany were commended for “cheapness as articles of trade.”⁴⁴

Stratton & Co.’s catalog of about 1878 (fig. 19) introduces his first piston valve instrument: “Stratton’s Cornet for Artists, Light Action Piston Valve.” According to the catalog, “It is constructed on the model of the best English cornets . . .” (fig. 20). The catalog also features a “large bore” rotary valve cornet “made with extra large valves and tubing throughout,” and distinguished by its large diameter back bow (fig. 21). Subsequent pages illustrate other instruments equipped with rotary valves. As in the earlier catalog of 1871, there is a section of “Everyday Questions Answered” which includes more interesting observations:

Do you make and recommend the helicon shaped instrument? (We furnish them only under protest, and have always considered them a very foolish shape, invented by a very foolish man, for very foolish bands.)

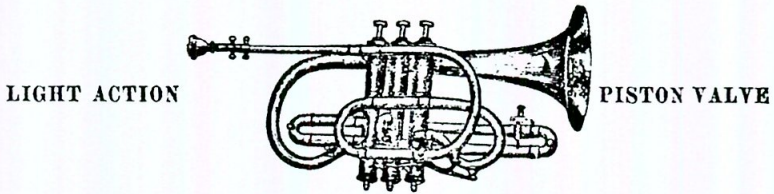
Will you please send me an E-flat cornet made of light, thin metal. Put no tip on the bell. (We are glad to receive any order for a cornet, but must strongly object to any subsequent instructions as to how to make the instrument. We have spent nearly a score of years in studying this subject; . . .)

Our instruments are “Over-the-shoulder” and our cornets “bell-front.” When the band is on parade, should the cornet players march in the front or rear ranks? (Put the cornet players in the front rank, and make them march backward, so that the sound of all the instruments will go the same way. It may be a little inconvenient for them, but they richly deserve it for being so stupid as to get front cornets to use with over-the-shoulder instruments.)

42. John Frederick Otto did not follow in his father’s business, but went to sea at an early age and traveled world wide, becoming an engineer.

43. International Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1876 award citation, published in the *New York Monitor*, August, 1877, 4.

44. *Ibid.*

(a) **Stratton's Cornet for Artists.**

In response to a desire expressed by many of our customers who have adopted the prevailing prejudice among Soloists for fine Piston Valve Cornets, we have produced the above. It is constructed on the model of the best English Cornets, and we have spared no expense to make it as perfect as possible.

We cheerfully invite any professional or amateur player to compare it critically with the work of any maker, either here or in Europe, and we are confident of the result.

For ease of blowing, correctness of tune, purity of tones, quickness of action, it cannot be excelled.

PRICE.

Brass, - - - Each, \$45.00 | Silver Plated, (Triple.) Each, \$60.00

Every one of the above is provided with

B^b and A Shanks, with Extra Tuning Shanks,

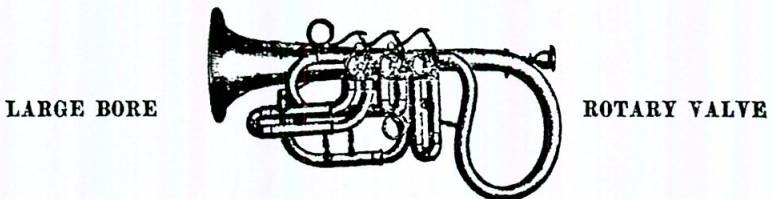
Two Mouth Pieces, Stratton's Patent Music Rack,

And is put up in a

Handsome Velvet Lined Case.

We send these upon the same terms as our other Band Instruments, viz: C. O. D., with the privilege of six days trial; at the end of which time, if the Instrument is not entirely satisfactory, the money will be refunded by the Express Agent, and the Cornet returned at our expense.

→*STRATTON'S CORNET FOR ARTISTS*←



This Instrument is made with extra large valves and tubing throughout.

Brass, - - - Each, \$30.00 | Silver Plated, (Triple.) Each, \$40.00

IN VELVET LINED CASE.

FIGURE 19. Brass instrument illustrations from the 1878 catalog pages (a) 1, (b) 3, (c) 4, and (d) 5. Prices are rising a bit, especially for his featured cornets.

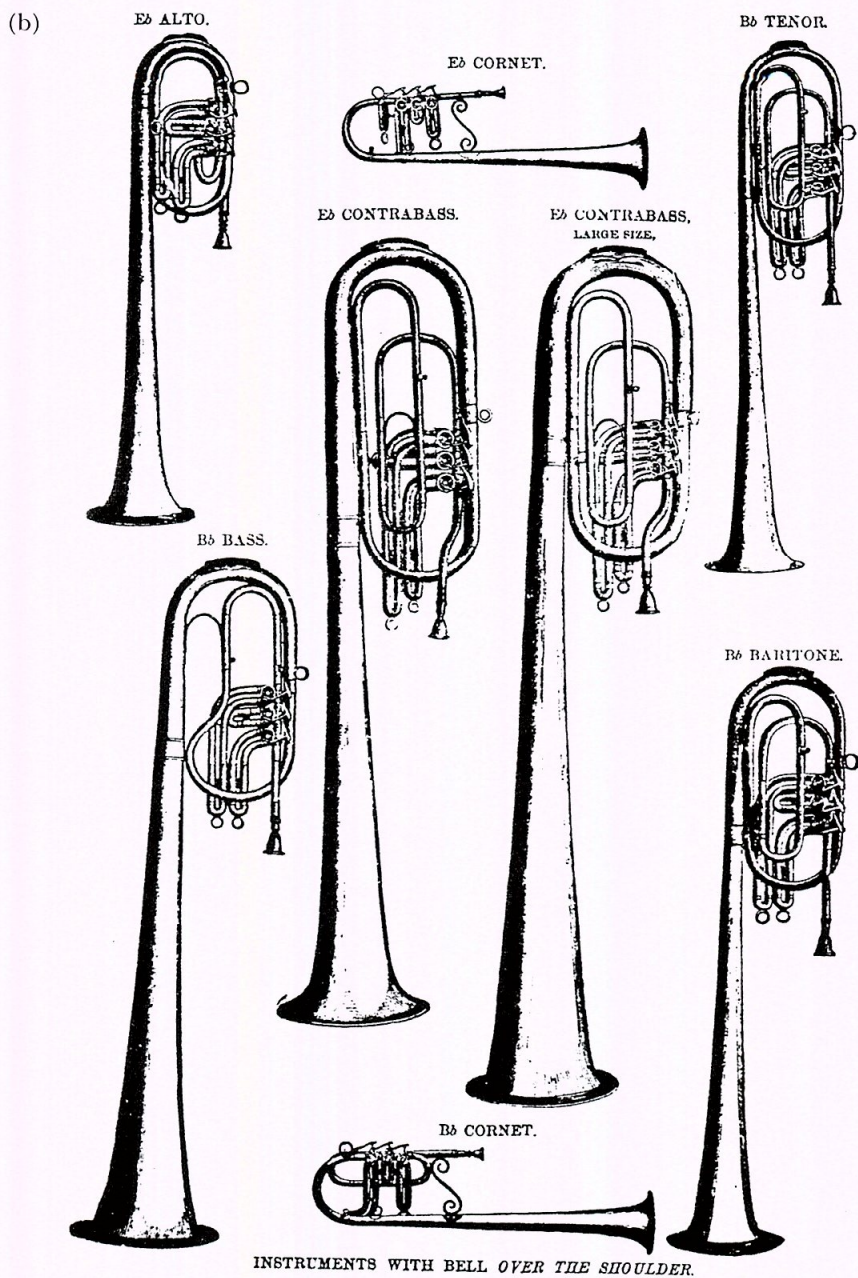
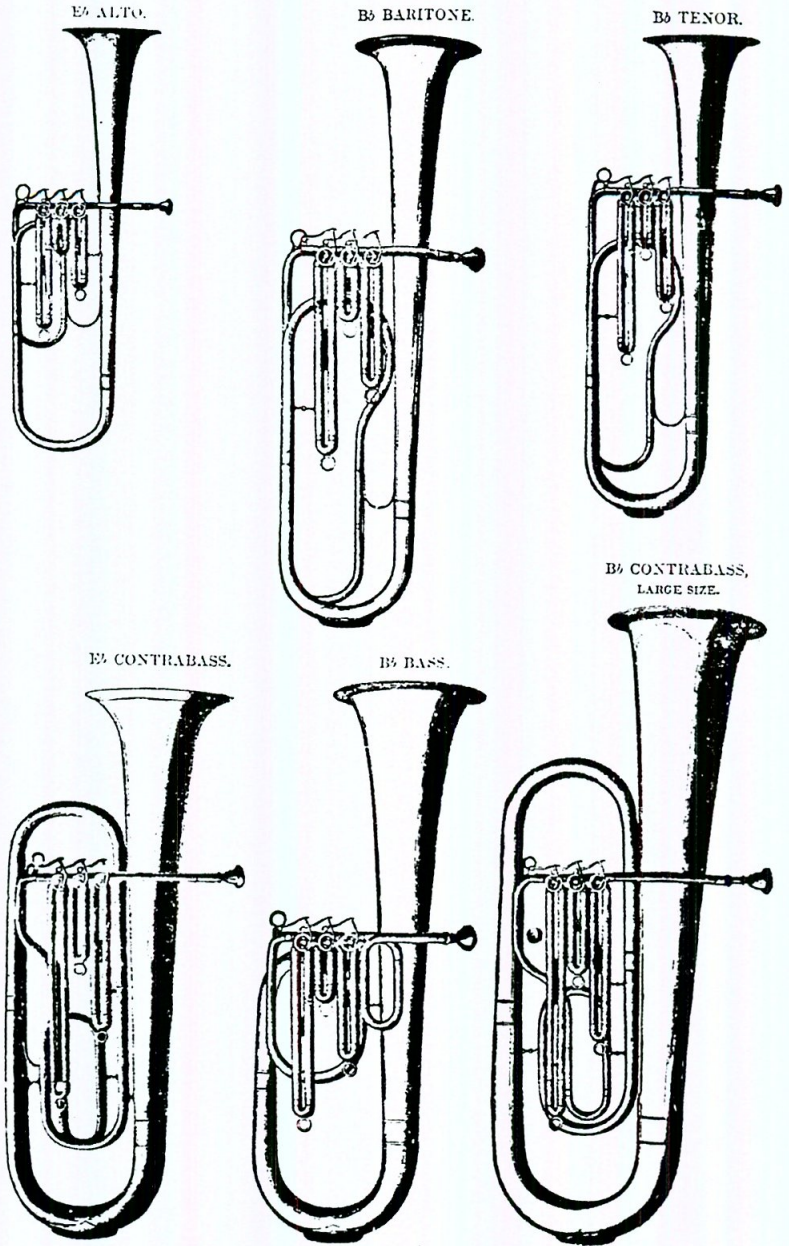


FIGURE 19. (continued)

(c)



INSTRUMENTS WITH BELLS UPRIGHT.

FIGURE 19. (continued)

(d)

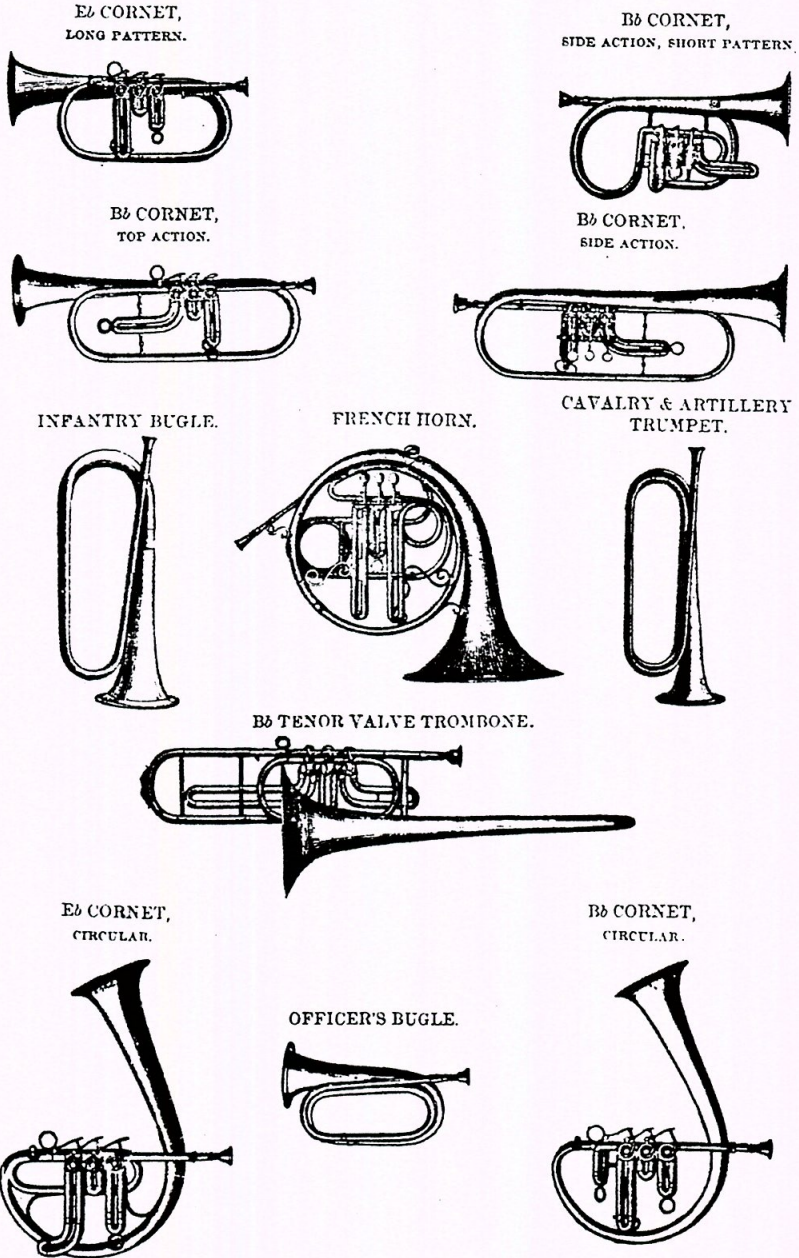


FIGURE 19. (continued)



FIGURE 20. Piston valve cornet in C with B-flat slide 7262. Photo courtesy of the National Music Museum, The University of South Dakota.

Do you make any of your upright altos, tenors, and basses with the long side-action keys? (No; we do not consider them desirable. In coming to this decision, we have been guided not only by the opinions of many old musicians, but by a personal experience of many years. The side action will answer {although we do not think it desirable} with cornets, but with the larger instruments it is very tiring to the hand. The position of the hand is open and without any support except such as can be got from the little finger, and the strain on the muscles of the hand and fingers is much greater than with the top action, where the hand is at rest, and the fingers move but slightly to work the valves. The fatigue caused by side-action valves will not, of course, be noticed much in playing a single piece, but in a long parade it is painfully perceptible.)⁴⁵

45. John F. Stratton & Co. Catalog (1878), 9–10.



FIGURE 21. (a) Rotary valve B-flat cornet 22G and (b) signature. Photos courtesy of the Heritage Military Music Foundation, Watertown, WI. An identical example is found in the Conn/Greenleaf collection, Interlochen Arts Academy, Interlochen, MI.

This problem does not seem to have been discussed in modern brass playing literature, perhaps because few cornets with side lever action have been used in the last century. Stratton made mostly top action string rotary valves, and, as seen by the quote above, he had reason to prefer that kind of valve and action. Nevertheless there are Stratton instruments with side lever, lever over, and T-lever action (fig. 22) string rotary valves, rotary valves with enclosed stops, Berlin piston valves, and Périnet piston valves.

By 1880, in addition to brasses, Stratton's catalogs offered a variety of musical merchandise including toy instruments of all kinds, whistles, metalophones (bells), xylophones, rattles, bones, castanets, jews harps, harmonicas, and accordions; as well as flageolets, fifes, flutes, piccolos, clarinets, violins, banjos, guitars, drums and accessories. He also introduced, about this time, the McTammany Organette, a small reed organ played by turning a crank and operated pneumatically from perforated

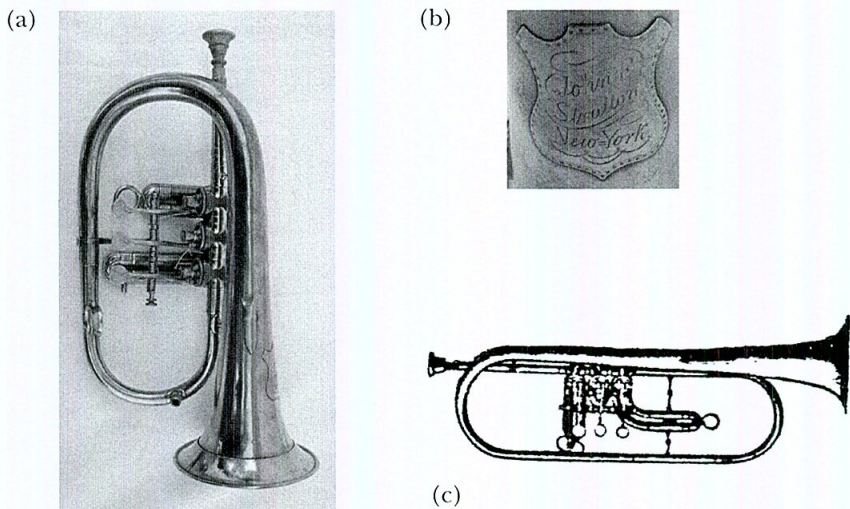


FIGURE 22. (a) John F. Stratton E-flat cornet with T-lever action string rotary valves and (b) signature. Photos courtesy of Eric Totman, Livermore, CA. (c) Illustration of a T-lever B-flat cornet from page 5 of the c. 1878 catalog. A similar illustration appears on the c. 1875 flyer (see above).

paper rolls. Music rolls for it were sold at six cents per foot.⁴⁶ The operating principles of this device would eventually fuel the player piano industry.

In 1882 Stratton & Co. in New York moved to larger quarters at 49 Maiden Lane, and in 1883, after residing in Europe for sixteen years, he returned to New York and took personal charge of the business there as an “Importer and Wholesale Dealer in all kinds of musical Merchandise.”⁴⁷

In spite of his busy life John F. Stratton still found time to pursue his personal music studies, and was able to take advantage of the excellent teachers available in Europe:

During all these years of work and excitement Mr. Stratton has never entirely forgotten his “first love,” music. He has always kept a Steinway in his house, and since his different operations and enterprises have become more perfected and easier to manage, he has given, for his own amusement, much

46. John F. Stratton & Co. *Catalog and Price List of Musical Instruments and Toys*, 1877–81.

47. “John F. Stratton & Son,” *General History of the Music Trades of America*, 81.

time to practice. He studied for three years under one of the greatest professors of the world—Dr. Oscar Paul, of the Conservatory of Music in Leipzig—going through a regular course of study of harmony, counterpoint, fugue, composition and piano.⁴⁸

Later Years in New York (1883–1912)

The factory in Leipzig was sold in 1883 to A. Ehrlich (pseudonym of Arthur Payne) who later sold it to The Association of Leipzig Musical Instrument manufacturers, indicating that musical instruments continued to be produced there for a time. Stratton & Co. offered rotary valve brasses until 1889 when a catalog of that year gave notice of discontinuation. Stringed instruments were offered as long as the company was in business. The Leipzig factory buildings were eventually bought by a firm that produced machine made embroidery.⁴⁹

In 1886 Stratton's son Frank A., who had been connected with the business since 1872, was made a partner in the firm. By 1889 the quarters at 49 Maiden Lane were much too small, and Stratton & Son moved to Nos. 43 and 45 Walker Street, NY.

Since 1884, the house has increased its trade more than three fold; introduced some of its greatest attractions; and made many of its most important improvements in the qualities of its goods. . . . By reason of the great demand for their different kinds of guitars, Stratton & Son started in New York city, in 1890, a large guitar and mandolin factory.⁵⁰

By 1894 when the firm moved to 811–817 East 9th Street, more than one hundred men were employed in the manufacture of guitars and mandolins alone.⁵¹

The Strattons were not above a little mislabeling if it was to their advantage, as shown by a lawsuit brought successfully against them by banjo maker Frank B. Converse in 1888. Converse claimed “that they had not lived up to their agreement in the manufacture of the Frank B. Converse

48. Freund, “The Interesting Record.”

49. Roy Ehrhardt, *Violin Identification and Price Guide*, p 297. Machines to embroidery lace were developed around 1880 by the Plauen, Saxony merchant, Theodor Bickel. “On the world exhibiton 1900 in Paris eleven embroidery companies from west Saxony were awarded the Grand Prix for the product well-known under the name ‘Plauen Lace’ or ‘Dentelles de Plauen.’ ”

50. “John F. Stratton & Son,” *General History of the Music Trades of America* (New York: Bill & Bill, 1891), 81.

51. *Music Trade Review* 19-18-16 (November 24, 1894), c 1 & 2, 16.

Banjo. Evidently Stratton had sold other banjos (presumably inferior instruments) with Converse's name, in violation of their contract, had marketed the Converse model without his trademark for their own profit, and had neglected to keep accurate accounts of those sold under his name. A New York judge ruled in Converse's favor, rescinding the contract, delivering the trademark to him, and appointing a 'referee' to ascertain the royalties due."⁵²

On the other hand, stealing from Stratton & Son brought serious trouble. The *New York Times* of April 23, 1889 reported the following:

MUSIC BOXES AS WITNESSES

Two music boxes, loaded with popular airs, were witnesses against Henry Frankenstein, aged seventeen, and Jacob Levy, aged eighteen, who were found guilty in Judge Cowing's court yesterday, of stealing them from the store of John F. Stratton & Co. at 43 and 45 Walker street. They were silent witnesses until Judge Cowing began to tell the boys that they had been mixed up in other small thefts. Then one of the boxes began to reel off "We've Oft Been There Before, Many a Time." "You've been in trouble before," said Judge Cowing to Levy, "and your sentence is ten months in the penitentiary." The music box stopped for an instant, and then started in on another tune. A court officer seized it and carried it out. Then Judge Cowing gave Frankenstein eight months.⁵³

Stratton & Son used a truck pulled by a heavy white horse to fetch and deliver goods around New York City during the 1880s, as shown by an incident reported in the *New York Times* of May 30, 1889. Evidently street excavations, called "everlasting openings" in the article, were as common and annoying then as they are today. Stratton's truck "undertook to go around the hole at about 2:30 o'clock, when a south-bound pair of heavy truck horses crowded the horse so that it fell into the hole." Unfortunately, workmen were unable to get the horse out before it died.⁵⁴

In the John F. Stratton & Son catalog of 1889 (fig. 23a-g), piston valves are featured on all brass instruments shown, and models made by Parisian maker M. Goulet are introduced.⁵⁵ The following notice indicates that the firm has ceased to make rotary valves altogether.

52. See *Gatcomb's Banjo and Guitar Gazette* 1, no. 5 (May/June 1888): supplement as cited in Philip F. Gura and James F. Bollman, *America's Instrument: the Banjo in the Nineteenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 275.

53. *The New York Times*, April 23, 1889.

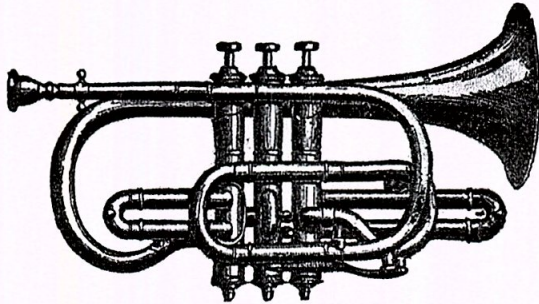
54. *The New York Times*, May 30, 1889.

55. *John F. Stratton & Son, Manufacturers of the Celebrated Stratton Band Instruments, Sole Agents For The United States of the Renowned M. Goulet Band Instruments*. c. 1889, 48-page catalog accompanied by a letter dated August 20, 1889.

(a)

3

**STRATTON'S LIGHT ACTION, FRENCH PISTON, B \flat CORNET.—Double Water Key. With A Shank.
German Silver Mouth Piece.**



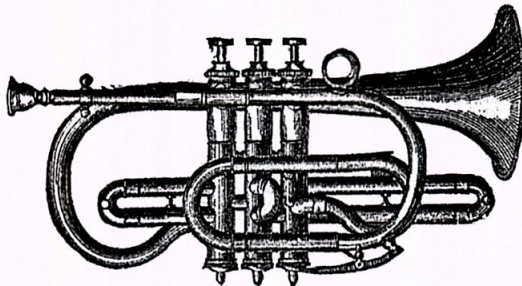
The tone, tune and workmanship of all my Cornets cannot be excelled. The valves are of German Silver, the action is short, and as light as it is possible to make. The trimmings are plain, but neat and durable, and they blow easy and free. I shall be glad to have them compared with any Cornet of any make or price.

PRICES.

Brass.....	.....	\$11 00
Nickel Plated.....	.....	18 00
Triple Silver Plated.....	.....	20 00
“ “ “ and finely Engraved Bell.....	.....	28 00
“ “ “ fancy throughout Bell, Crooks, Slides, Set Pieces, &c.....	.....	25 00
“ “ and Gold Plated, and finely engraved Bell.....	.....	25 00
“ “ “ fancy throughout, Crooks, Slides, Set Pieces, &c.....	.....	37 00

— THE —

**M. GOULET, Paris, France, B \flat Cornet.
German Silver Valves, Water Key, A Shank, German Silver Mouthpiece.**



THE CHEAPEST FRENCH LIGHT PISTON VALVE CORNET MADE.

Prices.

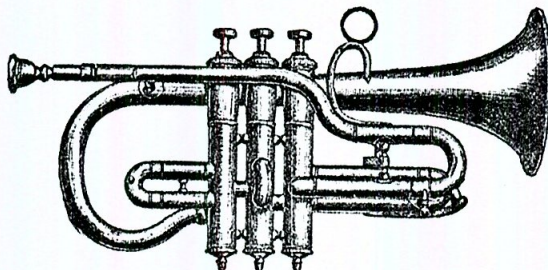
Brass.....	.....	\$ 7 50
Nickel.....	.....	9 50
Triple Silver Plated.....	.....	16 50
“ “ “ and finely Engraved Bell.....	.....	19 50
“ “ “ fancy Engraved Bell.....	.....	21 50
“ “ and Gold plated, and finely Engraved Bell.....	.....	21 50
“ “ “ “ fancy “ “.....	.....	28 50

FIGURE 23. John F. Stratton & Son catalog of 1889 pages (a) 3, (b) 5, (c) 7, (d) 9, (e) 10, (f) 12, and (g) 13.

(b) 5

STRATTON'S LIGHT ACTION, FRENCH PISTON, E^b CORNET.

German Silver Valves. Water Key. German Silver Mouth Piece.

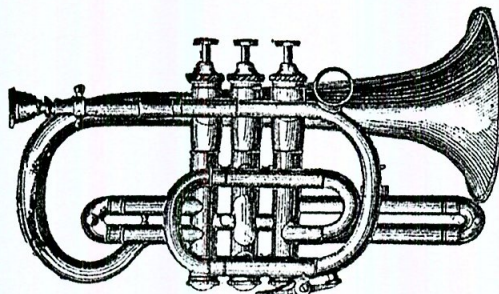


PRICES.

Brass.....	\$10 00
Nickel Plated.....	12 00
Triple Silver Plated.....	17 00
“ “ “ and finely Engraved Bell.....	20 00
“ “ “ “ fancy “ throughout, Bell, Crooks, Slides, Set Pieces, &c.....	22 00
“ “ and Gold Plated, and finely Engraved Bell.....	32 00
“ “ “ “ fancy “ throughout, Bell, Crooks, Slides, Set Pieces, &c.....	34 00

STRATTON'S LIGHT ACTION, FRENCH PISTON VALVE, C CORNET.

German Silver Valves. Water Key. B^b Shank. A Crook. German Silver Mouth Piece.



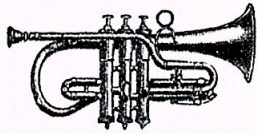
PRICES.

Brass.....	\$12 00
Nickel Plated.....	14 00
Triple Silver Plated.....	21 00
“ “ “ and finely Engraved Bell.....	24 00
“ “ “ “ fancy Engraved throughout, Crooks, Slides, Set Pieces, &c.....	26 00
“ “ and Gold Plated, and finely Engraved Bell.....	36 00
“ “ “ “ fancy “ throughout, Bell, Crooks, &c.....	38 00

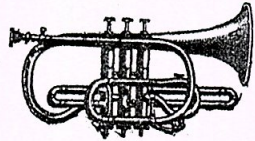
FIGURE 23. (continued)

(c)

7



STRATTON'S
Light-Action French
PISTON VALVE
Instruments.



The Pistons, or the inside of ALL
French Light Action Valves are made
of German Silver.

[For Prices See Next Page.]

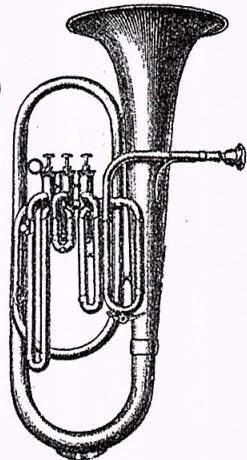
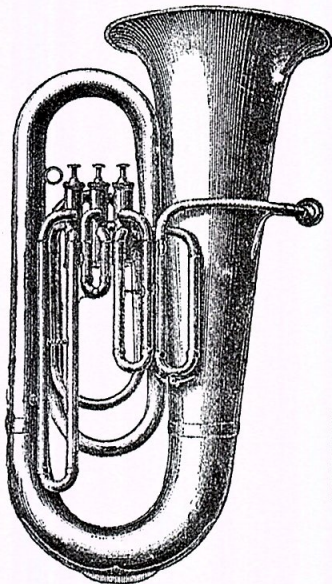
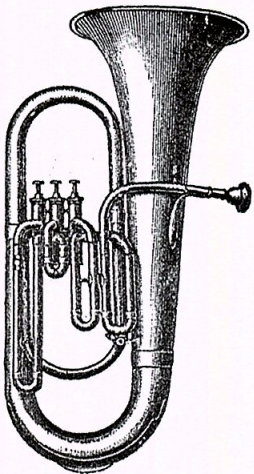
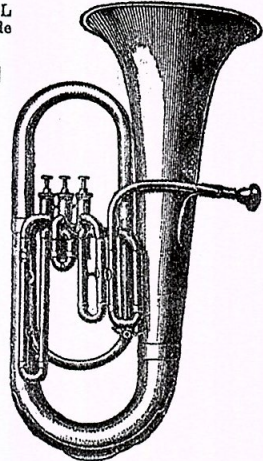
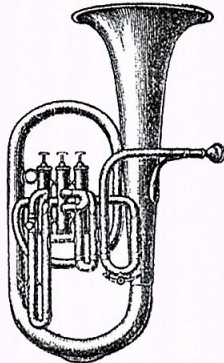
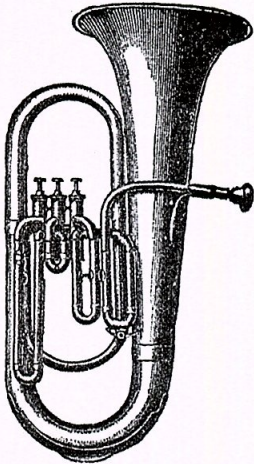
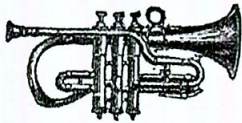


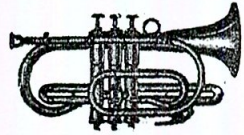
FIGURE 23. (continued)

(d)

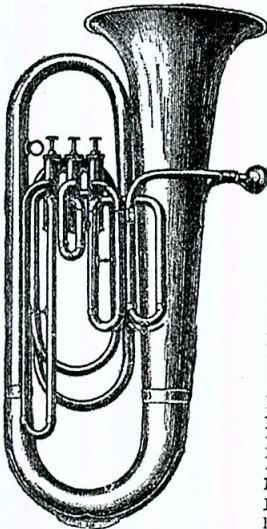
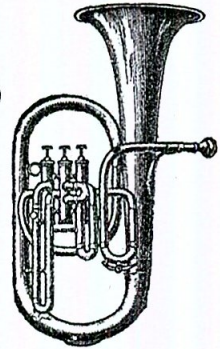
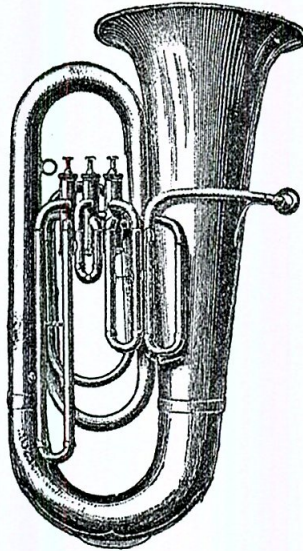
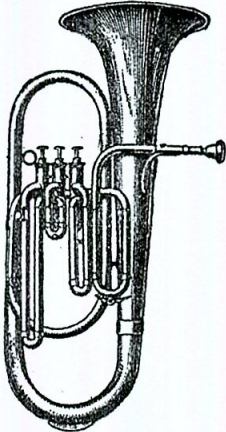
9



THE
M. GOULET
(PARIS, FRANCE.)
Band Instruments,
Light Action, French Piston Valves,
German Silver Pistons,
Water Keys.



Made Exclusively for us after our own Celebrated Models.



PRICE LIST

OF

M. Goulet Instruments.

	Brass	Nickel	Silver
E♭ Cornet.....	\$7 25	\$9 25	\$14 20
B♭ "	7 50	9 50	16 50
E♭ Alto.....	10 50	14 50	24 50
E♭ " Trom.....	10 75	14 50	24 50
B♭ Tenor.....	12 00	18 00	27 00
B♭ " Trom. Val.	12 00	18 00	27 00
B♭ " " Slide.	10 00	14 00	23 00
B♭ Baritone.....	14 00	20 00	34 00
B♭ " Trom.	14 00	20 00	34 00
B♭ Bass.....	16 50	24 50	38 50
E♭ "	21 00	29 00	46 00
E♭ " large size.	23 00	33 00	51 00
E♭ " Helic n.	32 00	42 00	62 00
E♭ " large size	38 00	48 00	65 00

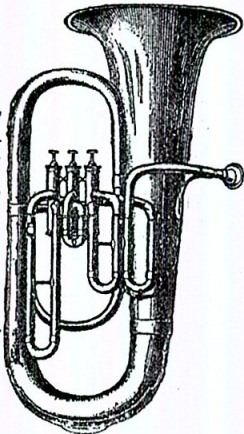


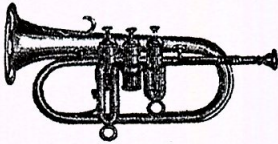
FIGURE 23. (continued)

(e)

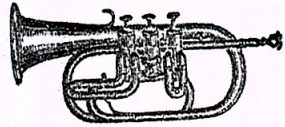
10

German Piston Valve Instruments.

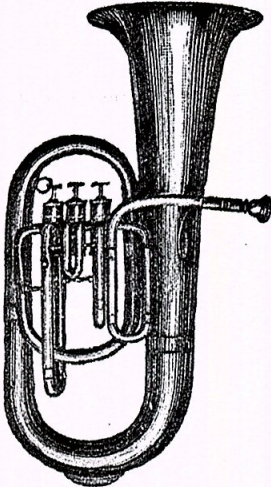
E♭ CORNET.



B♭ CORNET.



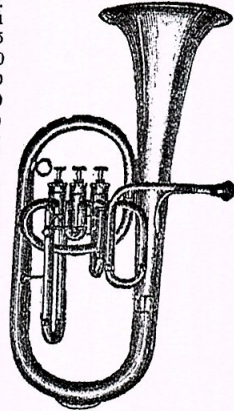
B♭ BARITONE.



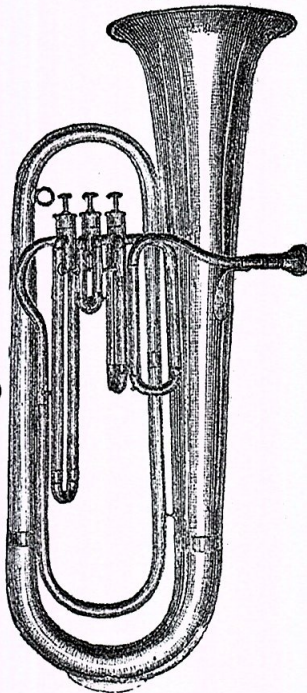
Price List of German Piston Instruments.

	Brass	Nickel	Triple Silver Plated
E♭ Cornet	\$5 25	\$7 25	\$12 25
B♭ Cornet	5 75	7 75	12 50
E♭ Alto	7 50	11 50	21 50
B♭ Tenor	9 00	15 00	24 00
B♭ Tenor Tro.	9 00	15 00	24 00
B♭ Baritone	10 75	16 75	30 75
B♭ " Tro.	10 75	16 75	30 75
B♭ Bass	12 00	20 00	34 00
E♭ Tuba	16 50	28 50	40 50
B♭ " large.	18 00	28 00	46 00

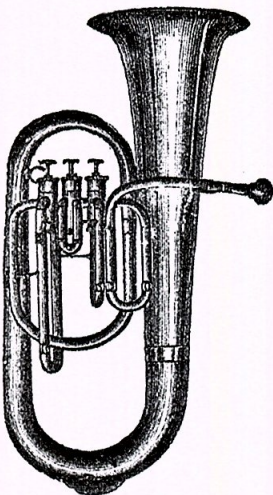
E♭ ALTO.



E♭ TUBA.



B♭ BASS.



B♭ TENOR.

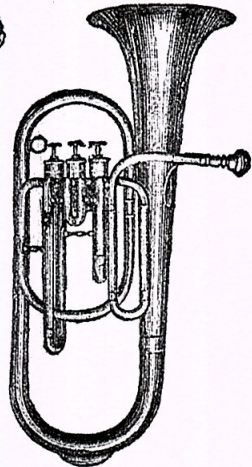
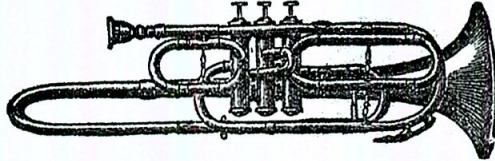


FIGURE 23. (continued)

(f)

TROMBONES.

E^b ALTO TROMBONE.—French Piston Valve.
German Silver Pistons. Water Key.

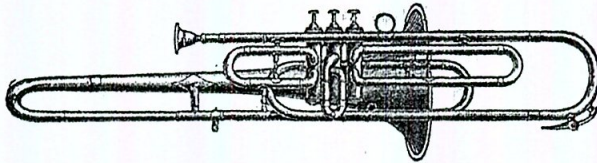


John F. Stratton.
Brass.....\$14 00
Nickel..... 18 00
Silver Plated..... 28 00

PRICES.

M. Goulet.
Brass.....\$10 50
Nickel..... 14 50
Silver Plated..... 24 50

B^b TENOR TROMBONE.—French Piston Valve.
German Silver Pistons. Water Key.

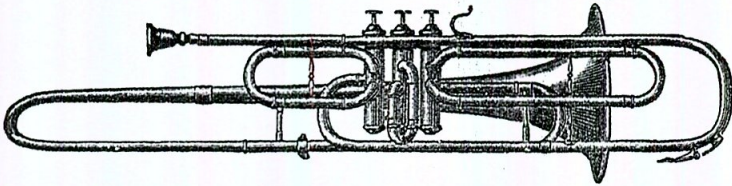


John F. Stratton.
Brass.....\$16 00
Nickel..... 22 00
Silver Plated..... 31 00

PRICES.

M. Goulet.
Brass.....\$12 00
Nickel..... 18 00
Silver Plated..... 27 00

B^b BARITONE TROMBONE.—French Piston Valve.
German Silver Pistons. Water Key.

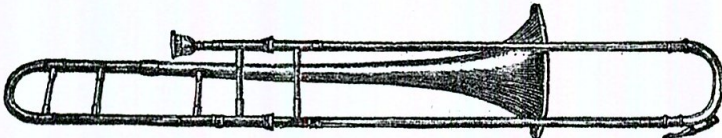


John F. Stratton.
Brass.....\$19 00
Nickel..... 25 00
Silver Plated..... 39 00

PRICES.

M. Goulet.
Brass.....\$14 00
Nickel..... 20 00
Silver Plated..... 34 00

B^b TENOR SLIDE TROMBONE.—Water Key.



John F. Stratton.
Brass.....\$15 00
Nickel..... 19 00
Silver Plated..... 28 00

PRICES.

M. Goulet.
Brass.....\$10 00
Nickel..... 14 00
Silver Plated..... 23 00

FIGURE 23. (continued)

(g)

13

STRATTON'S Light Action Helicon E^b Bass.

German Silver Pistons. Water Key.



PRICES.

No. 1 Brass E ^b Bass, small size	\$40 00
2 " E ^b " large "	45 00

Helicon E^b Bases. Notwithstanding I never have, nor do I now recommend Helicon Altos, Tenors or Baritones, I can fully recommend Helicon E^b Bases of both the small and large pattern. Heretofore, the great trouble with these Instruments has been, they could not make them to fit all sizes of players; lengths of necks etc., etc. If a Helicon Bass does not fit the performer, they are very awkward to play and tiresome to carry. I overcome this disadvantage by the use of two short crooked set-pieces. It would be difficult to explain how these work, but by their use the mouthpiece can be placed so that the instrument can be played and held with perfect ease by any performer. Helicon Bases are used in all of the European Military Bands, and very many of the bands in this country, and especially the large New York and other city bands.

FIGURE 23. (continued)

Special Notice! Rotary Valve Instruments. At the present writing the great demand is for piston valves. For this reason we have discontinued the manufacturing of rotary valve instruments, and shall make no more until further notice.⁵⁶

Instruments are offered in brass, German silver, triple silver plated or gold plated. They could have finely engraved bells, or fancy engravings throughout bell, crooks, slides, or set pieces (fig. 24).

All instruments illustrated in the 1889 catalog are either bell front or upright in shape, except for the bass helicon described in the following quote. The two short offset shanks, still in use on sousaphones today to adjust mouthpiece position to a player's physique, are mentioned here for the first time:

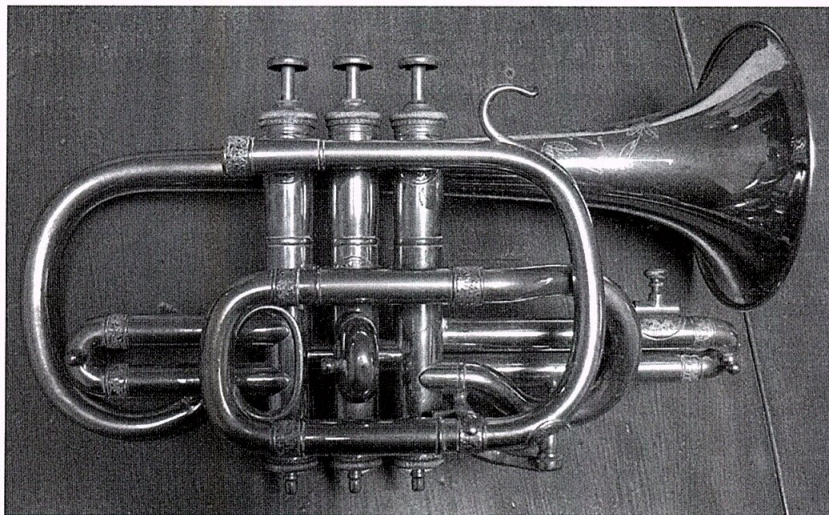
Helicon E-flat Basses. Notwithstanding I never have, nor do I now recommend Helicon Altos, Tenors or Baritones, I can fully recommend Helicon E-flat Basses of both the small and large pattern. Heretofore, the great trouble with these instruments has been, they could not make them to fit all sizes of players; lengths of necks etc., etc. If a Helicon Bass does not fit the performer, they are very awkward to play and tiresome to carry. I overcome this disadvantage by the use of two short crooked set-pieces. It would be difficult to explain how these work, but by their use the mouthpiece can be placed so that the instrument can be played and held with perfect ease by any performer. Helicon Basses are used in all of the European Military Bands, and very many of the bands in this country, and especially the large New York and other city bands.⁵⁷

Stratton's manufacturing of brass instruments probably ended with the sale of the Leipzig factory in 1883. From that time on he gradually moved from having his brasses manufactured to his specifications by other firms, to importing them directly from other companies, such as M. Goulet of Paris. With this catalog he offers instruments with Berlin (German) valves (fig. 23e). Where these were made is unclear. All known examples are very similar to the catalog illustrations and are signed either JOHN F. STRATTON/NEW-YORK or JOHN F. STRATTON & CO./NEW-YORK on the body of the instrument, not on the usual applied shield (fig. 25 and fig. 26).

All of the Stratton catalogs include pages of testimonials to their instruments' safe arrival and superiority of finish and tone. Most are little more than a sentence of praise, but occasionally there is something

56. *Ibid.*, 11.

57. 1889 Stratton catalog, 13.



(a)

(b)

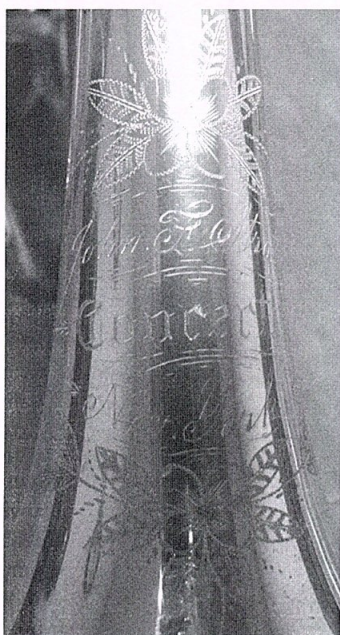


FIGURE 24. (a) B-flat cornet similar to those shown in the 1889 catalog, silver plated, with fancy engraving; (b) signature. Photos courtesy of the Montour County Historical Society, Danville, PA.

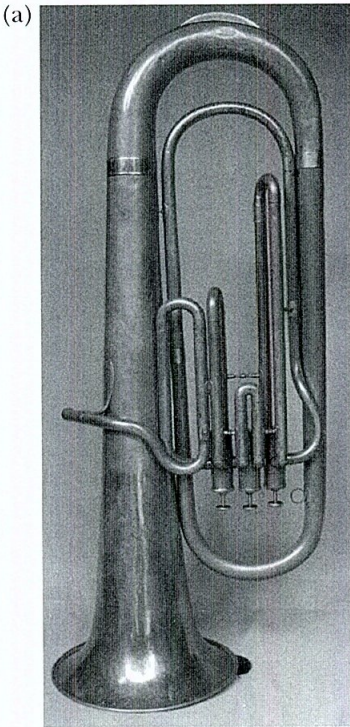


FIGURE 25. (a) John F. Stratton & Co. E-flat bass with Berlin valves, HMMF 63C; and (b) signature. Photo courtesy of the Heritage Military Music Foundation, Watertown, WI.

amusing or of particular interest. The following was quoted from the *Cadillac News*:

Will C. Reber, the genial and obliging Deputy County Clerk, has joined the I. O. O. F. Band, and blows an elegant silver B-flat cornet. The instrument, which is most beautiful in workmanship and as clear in tone as any ever heard, is of J. F. Stratton make, and is a credit to the house. With Will at the little end of it, the music at the big end is most delicious, indeed.⁵⁸

The 1880s had been a period of remarkable economic expansion in the United States. In time, however, the expansion became driven by speculation, much like the technology bubble of the late 1990s and the housing bubble of 2008. This time the associated industry was railroads. The resulting “Panic” was a serious economic depression in the United States that began in 1893. In addition to the economic problems this brought on, farmers, particularly in the Midwest, suffered a series of

58. *Cadillac News*, City of Cadillac, MI, July 17th, 1884.



FIGURE 26. (a) Baritone with Berlin piston valves and (c) signature. Photo courtesy of the Steve and Mary Gasiorowski Collection, Grafton, NH. (b) E-flat Alto with Berlin piston valves, 33C. Photo courtesy of the Heritage Military Music Foundation, Watertown, WI.

droughts, which left them short of cash to pay their debts, and drove down the value of their land. By 1894 unemployment in the United States was more than 12 percent and remained close to that through 1898.⁵⁹

The musical instrument industry too had become bloated, and suffered along with everyone else. By November 1896, even Stratton & Co. had reached the end of their credit, and the following notices appeared in the *Music Trade Review*:

John F. Stratton Assigns.

Gives up the fight, owing to too much competition.

John F. Stratton, importer of musical merchandise and manufacturer of guitars and mandolins, at Nos. 811 to 817 East Ninth street, made an assignment Thursday last to Bernard F. Schmeckpeper, without preference, except to employees for wages. Burr & Delacey, counsel for Mr. Stratton, said that times had been very hard in this line of business; that there was so much competition that there was no money in it, and Mr. Stratton had decided to give it up. He has enough assets to pay all creditors. They did not think the liabilities would exceed \$65,000.

John F. Stratton was one of the oldest "small goods" men in the trade, his business having been established in 1859. For a time he controlled factories in Germany, and his violin factory in Leipzig was said to be the largest in the world. In 1890 Mr. Stratton, who was then in partnership with his son, engaged in the manufacture of guitars and mandolins in this city, and up to the recent depression was considered to be doing a splendid business. The disappearance of such a prominent figure from the music trade will be regretted.⁶⁰

Stratton's Schedules.

Schedules of John F. Stratton, manufacturer of guitars, mandolins, etc., at Nos. 811 to 817 East Ninth street, show liabilities, \$74,320; nominal assets, \$44,050; actual assets, \$19,601. He owes \$36,000 in Germany, \$24,000 to Katie Sidwell, of Shohola, Pa., and \$8,000 to F. Machlin, of this city.⁶¹

There was some lively competition at the auction sale of John F. Stratton's stock and fixtures, which took place on Friday and Monday last. The violins brought good prices; brass instruments, hardly anything; accordions, barely the cost of reeds. Robert H. Benary, the well known importer, was the only one reported to have had combination on auction; he claims to have bought \$1,000 worth of goods for \$1.25, and set the boys up in great style.

59. Samuel Rezneck, *Business Depressions and Financial Panics; Essays in American Business and Economic History* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1968), 177.

60. *Music Trade Review*, 23-16-06 (November 7, 1896) c 1, 8.

61. *Ibid.*, 23-21-09 (December 12, 1896) c 1, 11.

We understand that Mr. Stratton has resumed business, and is still filling orders at the old stand. It is reported that he will shortly take an office on Broadway.

Among the firms represented were Hamilton S. Gordon, Wm. Tonk & Bro., C. Meisel, M. E. Schoening, Frank Scribner, all of this city.⁶²

The firm had become John F. Stratton & Son (Frank A. Stratton) in 1886, but in 1895 Frank assumed a separate address (37 Howard), and the firm returned to the name "John F. Stratton & Co." John F. Stratton & Co. continued some business until John's death in 1912. *Music Trade Review* reported that "John F. Stratton & Co. have removed from E. 9th St. to the fourth floor of 52 Grand St. this city." The business was purchased by C. Bruno & Son in 1914.⁶³

Conclusion

John F. Stratton was a fine musician, but he was not an innovative instrument maker. No advances in instrument design can be attributed to him, excepting the pair of bits to adjust a bass helicon's mouthpipe to a player's anatomy. Rather, his genius was in production and marketing. Stratton used his mechanical skills to create machines for many different operations in instrument construction so that they required less skilled, lower paid workers. He made instruments of middle quality that the largest number of people would buy and was successful in selling them in large quantities at half the price of his competitors. At the same time, he published vast amounts of music for the bands playing his instruments, not just scores as was the norm, but some including parts for each instrument as well. He published *Patton's Practical Guide to the Arrangement of Band Music*, the most complete reference available at the time for everything to do with bands and band music. Along with these endeavors, he gradually developed an enormous trade in imported musical accessories and toys. His importance lies in being the first to bring these concepts and practices to the music trade and to combine them in one enterprise, the original musical one stop shop.

62. *Ibid.*, 23-23-19 (December 26, 1896) c 1, 21.

63. *Music Trade Review*, 1897-24-16 (April 17, 1897).