



HISTORIC BRIGHTON

NEWSLETTER AND JOURNAL

Celebrating our Town's history and educating our community about Brighton's past.

VOLUME 19, No. 3

www.historicbrighton.org

SUMMER 2018

Upcoming Historic Brighton Events

October 21, 2018

Terry Lehr

Retired SUNY Brockport instructor and author of *Black Velvet Band* and *The Great Tonsil Massacre* will speak on the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic and its impact on our area.

January 20, 2019

Michael Lasser

Longtime host of WXXI radio's Peabody Award winning "Fascinating Rhythm" and author of *America's Songs* will present a talk about the ways in which popular songs portray the suburbs.

Spring 2019

Christopher Brandt

Amateur historian and historic preservation architect at Bero Architecture will speak on local contractor and developer Fred Tosch who built many houses and neighborhoods here in Brighton from the 1930s-1950s.

HISTORIC BRIGHTON PRESENTS: THE GIDEON COBB HERITAGE FESTIVAL



Friday, July 20th at 12:00pm
Brickstone Wintergarden

Lunch: by Joey B's

Program: Rochesterville on the Rise

Leo Dodd Heritage Preservation Award

Saturday, July 21st at 2:00pm
The Buckland House

War of 1812 Re-enactment

Music & Activities for the kids

Old-fashioned Ice Cream Social

Visit our website or mail in the form on p.11 to register for the Friday luncheon (\$20) and ice cream social (free with registration, \$1 day of event).

Historic Brighton acknowledges with gratitude:

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BRIGHTON
SECURITIES

1703 Monroe Avenue
Rochester, NY 14618
(585) 473-3590

*for their generous support and sponsorship
of this issue of the Historic Brighton Journal*

Brighton's Social Center: The Old Fair Grounds

By Leo Dodd (1927-2015) | Edited by: Michael Lempert

Many people are familiar with the Great New York State Fairgrounds permanent home in Syracuse, NY just off the New York State Thruway (I-90). However, in the early days of "The Fair," as the name has been affectionately shortened to, the carnival rotated between several large host cities in the state including Utica, Buffalo, and Syracuse, often visiting every few years. Rochester, and more specifically the Town of Brighton, was one of the chosen locations a number of times, although a brief glance at a contemporary map of the city might not suggest so.

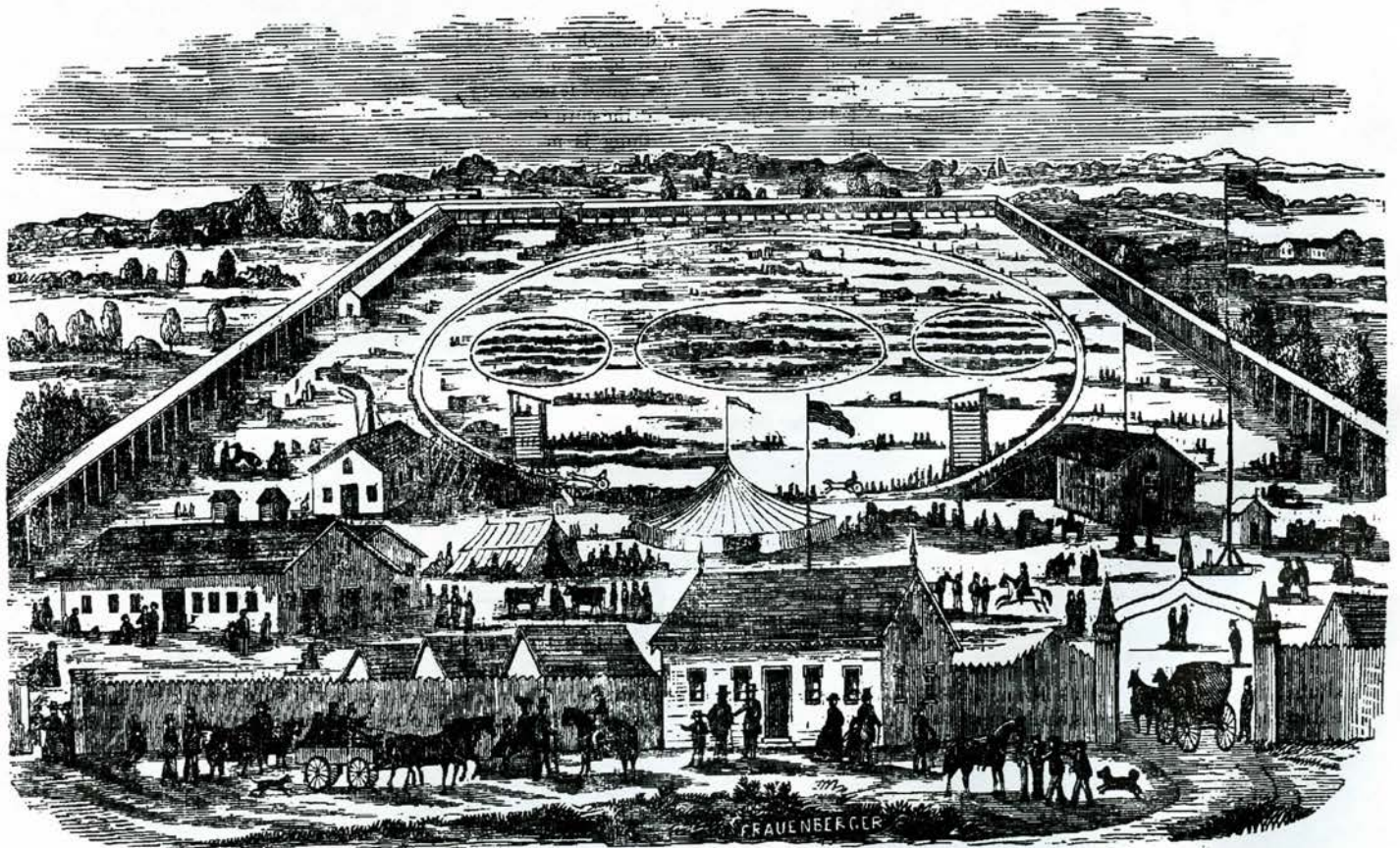
The Monroe County Agricultural

Society, which had been reorganized in the summer of 1840, decided that instead of moving their own local events around from town to town even within Rochester, a permanent local site ought to be established for their Agricultural Fair.

Brighton was selected as that permanent location in 1856. Notable Society members involved in the decision included Oliver Culver (namesake of present day Culver Road). The first fair had been held in 1823, but after the permanent site was established in Brighton, both the New York State Fair and the Western New

York Agricultural Fair returned at least 8 times between 1851 and 1887 before Syracuse was made the permanent State Fair site in 1890. The same site, when not in use for the fair during the Civil War, was repurposed as Camp Hillhouse, a Union military training ground for the 8th Cavalry (fall of 1861), 105th Infantry (winter of 1861) and 22nd Cavalry (Winter of 1863) respectively.

The fairgrounds were located mostly on the parallelogram-shaped plot bordered by present day Mount Hope Avenue and the Genesee River at the East and West, and present day Crittenden



VIEW OF NEW YORK STATE FAIR GROUNDS AT ROCHESTER, 1862

*An 1862 engraving of the New York State Fair at the Old Fair Grounds in Brighton.
From Moore's Rural New Yorker, Vol 13 No 41, 1862 October 11*

Boulevard and Lattimore Road to the North and South. Aside from what became part of Genesee Valley Park, most of the former fairgrounds have been developed into a combination of private housing, a former City Public School, and now medical offices as part of the ever expanding University of Rochester Medical Center.

Festivities at the fairgrounds ranged from the still popular livestock and agricultural competitions to displays of the latest in farming machinery and industrial equipment. There was also the spectacle of a one-half mile oval racetrack that featured horse and bicycle races, and which actually survived long enough to boast early automobile races as well, and towards the end of its history, those in the grandstands also were treated to some of the earliest demonstrations of flight by aircraft primitive enough still be considered “gliders,” rather than proper airplanes.

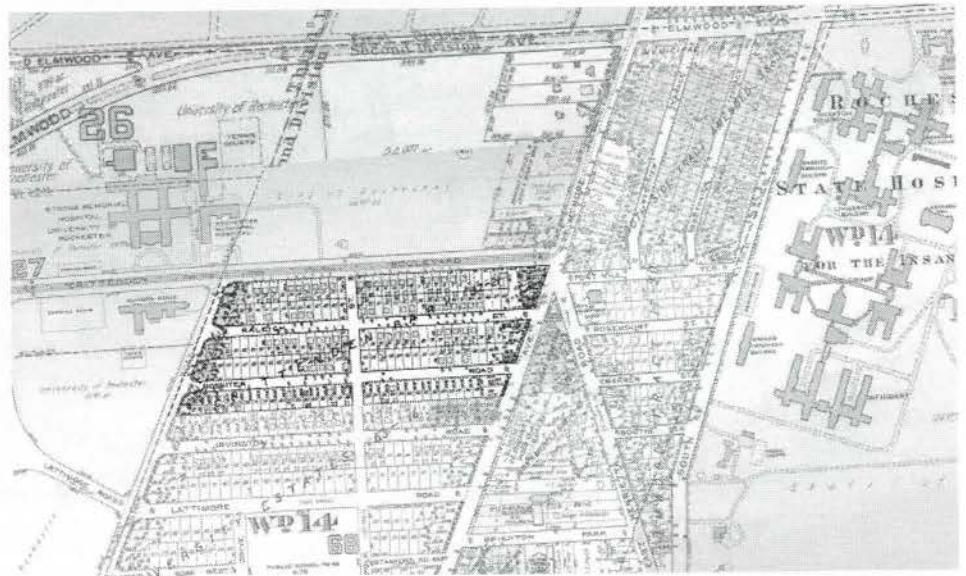
By 1930 the presence of the fairgrounds in Brighton had been eradicated and replaced with a housing development. The racetrack and grandstands had been demolished, and the landscape transformed into a modern suburban neighborhood. Aside from a handful of photographs and etchings of the event, and a few souvenirs scattered about the landscape still being uncovered today by construction crews and metal detecting hobbyists, there is precious little documentation of this grand event having taken place in our fledgling town.



*The Old Fair Grounds as seen in the 1902 Plat Map of the County of Monroe.
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division*



*The area of the Old Fair Grounds seen in a 1923 aerial photograph. Note remnant of half-mile track.
From the The Leo Dodd Archives*



*The area of the Old Fair Grounds from the 1935 Plat Map of the County of Monroe.
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division*

Images Throughout the Years at The Old Fair Grounds



Motorcycle race at Crittenden Park, 1912.
From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, RMSC



Aerial daredevil Lincoln Beachey takes flight at 1911 Aviation Show
From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, RMSC



The Grand Stand at Crittenden Park (formerly the Old Fair Grounds)
From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, RMSC



Crowds gather at the curve of the half mile track.
From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, RMSC

The Starr of the Fair

By Jeff Vincent and Deb Bower

So often there are few, if any, artifacts that last the tests of time to go along with a story. We are extremely fortunate that the star artifact, a mere coin and the inspiration for this article, was and remains so beautiful that it was not just shoved into a corner but rather has been showcased again and again for over 150 years! It's amazing the myriad of connections that have come together to breathe new life into this extraordinary piece of Rochester history because of a little coin and a single piano!

That piano came to my attention in 2001 when Ann Salter, the Director of the Rochester Historical Society (RHS - at the time located at "Woodside" on East Avenue), arranged for a special New Year's Day salon concert. I was honored when Ann hired me to get the piano in the living room prepared for the concert, which was to feature the Eastman School's opera singer Cecile Seine and pianist Howard Spindler. The piano was a Frederick Starr (1799-1869) square grand made on Main Street in Rochester sometime between 1849 and 1855. I was so impressed by this instrument that I created a file folder to keep for my own records containing photos of the piano, a biography of Frederick Starr, and newspaper ads from the period for Starr's furniture and pianos. Frederick Starr was an established cabinet maker at the time that his first piano debuted.

Years later, this past July, 2017, Jeff Monnier (a metal detecting hobbyist friend of mine) came up to me and said he had found something he thought I, as a local

piano tuner, might be interested in. It was an advertising coin for Starr pianos that he had recently found in Mendon Ponds Park. I went into the house and got the folder on Starr and the RHS square grand piano from my file cabinet. Amazingly, within the Starr biography there was an exact description of the coin:

"Another interesting Starr momenta is a small brass coin, about the size of a nickel, which has on its face the facsimile of a grand piano and the inscription "Musical Instruments & Merchandise" around the edge. On the obverse it reads: "Frederick Starr, State Fair, 1851, Premium Pianos. Main Street, Rochester, N.Y." According to numismatists this was a "merchant's token" used as a form of advertising. It is one of two such tokens known to have been used by local merchants. The other was issued between 1850 and 1863 by Olcott Bros. Locomotives."



Obverse of Starr Token
Photo courtesy of Michael Lempert



Reverse of Starr Token
Photo courtesy of Michael Lempert



The Silas O. Smith House (Woodside), built 1839-1841. The Rochester Historical Society owned and operated it as a museum and their headquarters from 1941-2008, when it became a private residence again.
Photo courtesy of Christopher Brandt

The Rochester Historical Society also has some of these coins in their possession and Starr's biographer writing in 1953 made mention of the coin in the biography.

The biography about Frederick Starr only makes a minor mention of Starr's piano manufacturing endeavors. Starr was also a prominent member of the community outside of having created a successful cabinet-making and piano business. Starr was a church elder, a village trustee,

a New York State Assemblyman, the President of the Temperance Society, and was highly competent in numerous other organizations and endeavors. It is amazing that Starr also had the time to develop his high quality cabinet making business, and later his piano building factory.

The note displayed on the Starr Square Grand Piano at the RHS it reads:

Rosewood Square Grand Piano

*Frederick Starr Co., Rochester, c. 1855
Donor, P. V. Crittenden*

In 1849 Dwight Gibbons built the first piano in Rochester in the furniture shop of Frederick Starr, on the south side of Main Street, Nos. 45-51, between the Genesee River and South Water Street. Mr. Gibbons then made other pianos under the Starr label that attracted wide favor...

I asked Rochester piano tuner and local historian, Alan Mueller, about Dwight Gibbons and Frederick Starr. Alan speculated, "You more than likely have come across a patent created by Dwight Gibbons that has been assigned to Frederick Starr." Because of the patent I think it is pretty clear that Gibbons was responsible for creating the piano action (the metal, felt and wooden pieces of the piano mechanism), whereas cabinet-maker Starr most likely designed and manufactured the outer case. Records show that Gibbons had a shop right next to and across Main Street from Starr just before he left Starr in 1860,

FREDERICK STAR, **PIANO** **FORTE**

MANUFACTORY AND MUSIC STORE,
Orphean Buildings, Nos. 45, 47, 49, 51 Main Street, Rochester, N. Y.

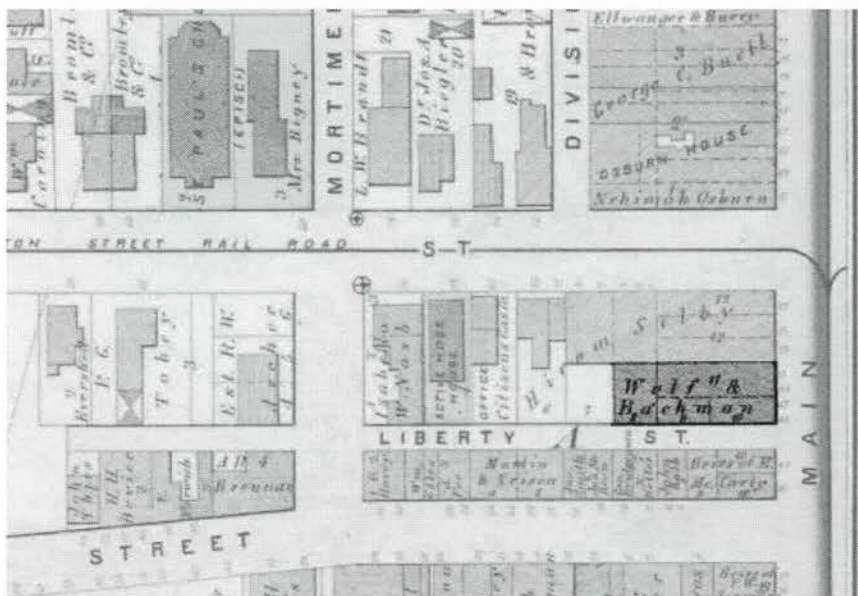
Always on hand from 20 to 50 of STARR'S unrivaled

PREMIUM PIANO FORTES,

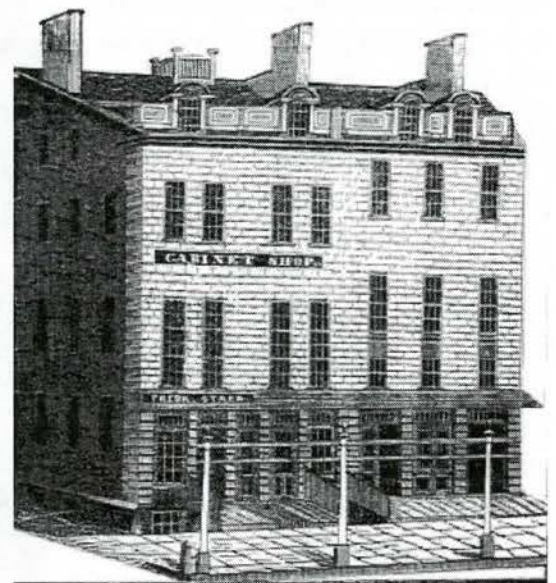
Made upon the Tri Chordia Scale, with the Tri Baron Damper, and my new PATENT HOLLOW CYLINDRICAL FIBULO. Every Instrument will be warranted to please the purchaser or no sale. Also,

Melodeons, Seraphines, Accordeons, Guitars, Violins,
SHEET MUSIC & MUSICAL MERCHANDISE IN GREAT VARIETY.

*Period advertisement for Starr Pianos with likeness of the 1851 State Fair Square Grand Piano
1855 Buffalo Business Directory, Hunter & Ostrander, p.191*



*Starr Piano Factory at Main Street and Liberty Street, labeled "Wolf & Bachman"
1875 City Atlas of Rochester, New York, by G. M. Hopkins Company
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.*



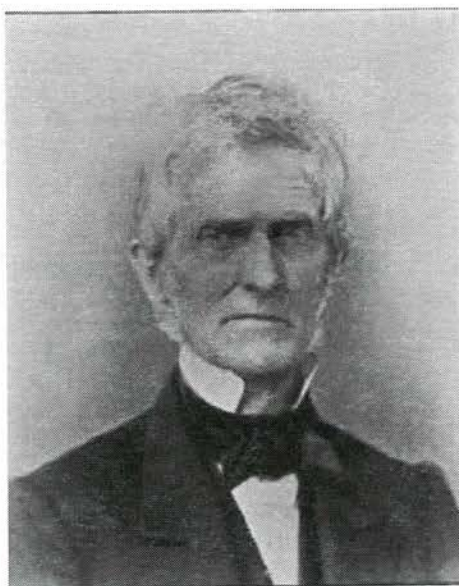
*Starr's Cabinetry Shop on Main Street
Semi-centennial History of the City of Rochester, 1884
Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division*

when he then went into business with Lyman Stone. I surmise that it is unlikely that one person would be skilled in the successful design of the inner workings of a piano and to be just as equally skilled with the meticulous case designs like the exquisite Mother of Pearl inlays. It seems obvious that Gibbons and Starr combined their skills to create a superior instrument of the day. Within a decade they employed over 20 staff at their State Street factory. They later relocated in 1883 to a new factory on Hill Street.

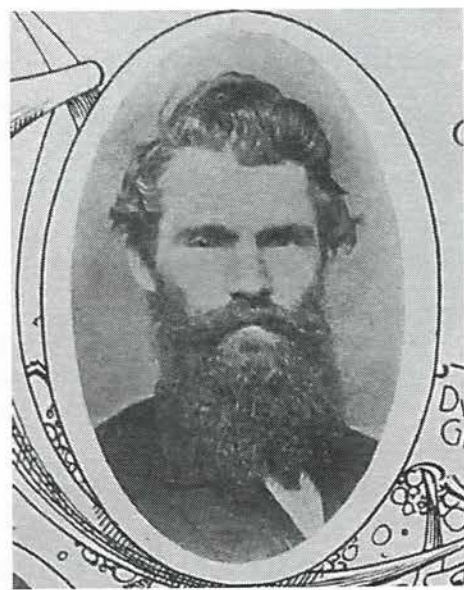
Later research revealed that Patrick Corbett was among the list of Gibbons and Stone piano owners listed in the company's 1905 advertising brochure. This means that's the Starr token featuring the grand piano was presented to me on the front step of my home - the Corbett House - less than 20' away from where Corbett's own Gibbons and Stone piano once sat under the staircase (according to the story as told by Corbett family).

It is interesting to note that what had become downtown Rochester by 1849 along the Genesee River was merely a swamp not many years before. Yet by this date Starr and Gibbons had made their piano in Rochester. The ads touting Starr's products over the years in business were no exaggeration as made obvious when one actually sees and plays the Starr piano.

In 1933, Frances Crittenden, the wife of Pharcellus V. Crittenden, donated their "Starr" Rosewood Square Grand Piano, along with a Swiss cylinder music box, to the Rochester Historical Society. It



Frederick Starr
Rochester and the Post Express: a History of the City of Rochester from the Earliest Times, 1895.



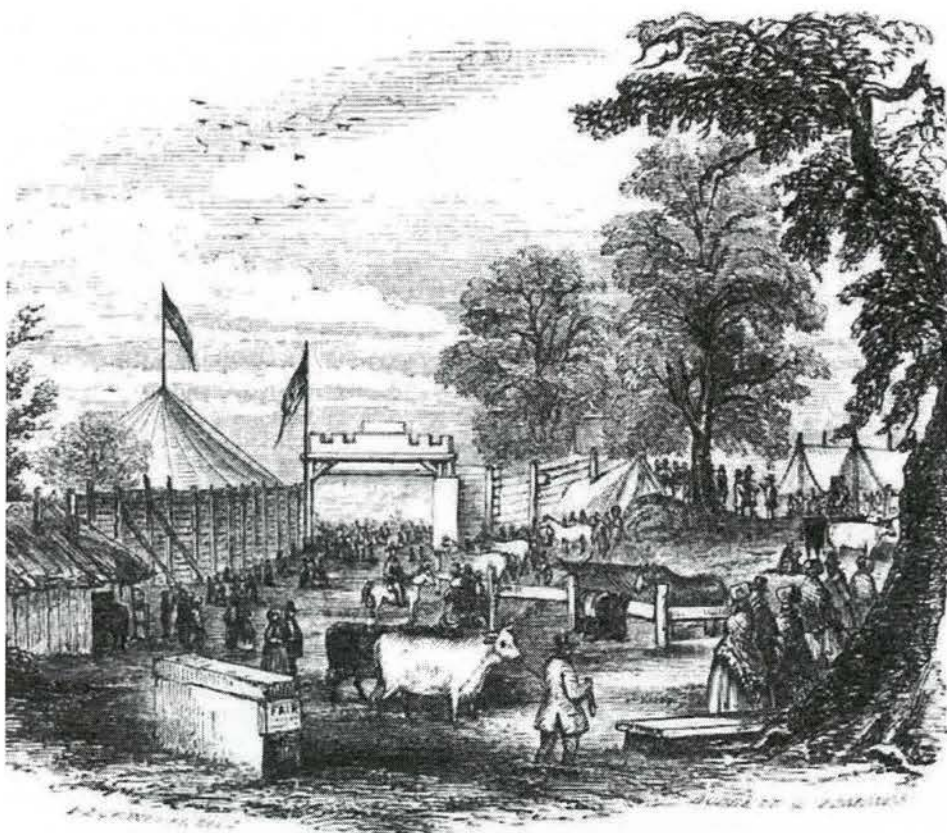
Dwight Gibbons
1905 Gibbons and Stone Brochure
Photo courtesy of Jeff Vincent



The 1851 Starr Square Grand Piano seen today in the archives of the Rochester Historical Society
Photo courtesy of Michael Lempert

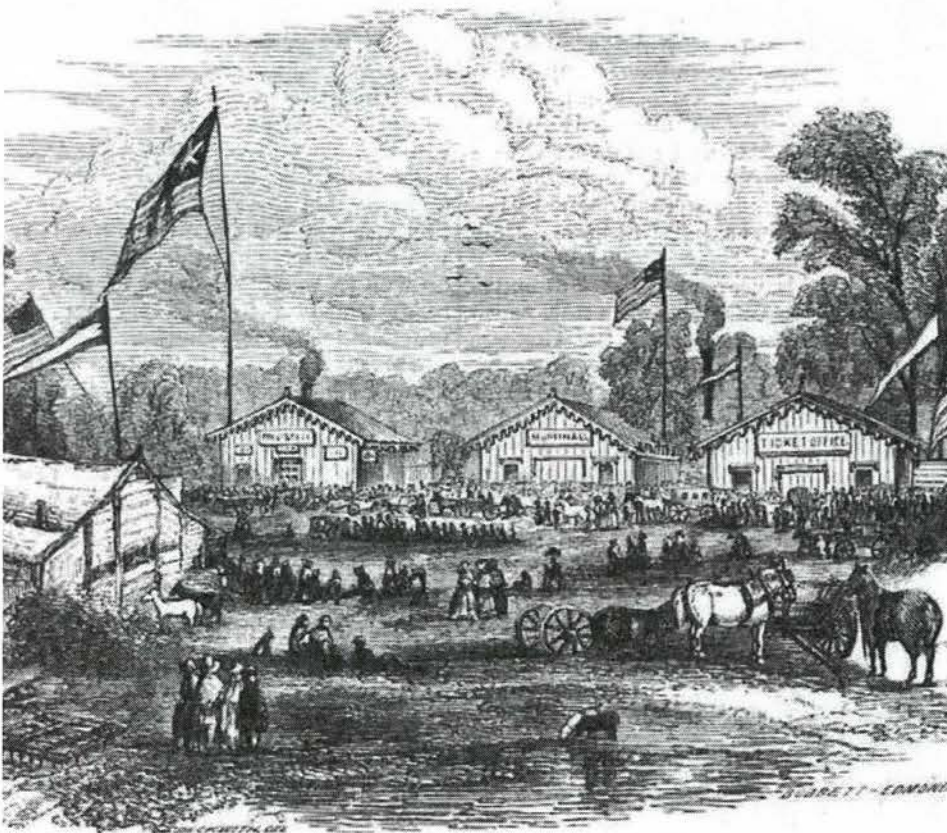


Closeup of the intricate mother of pearl inlays on the 1851 Starr Square Grand Piano
Photo courtesy of Michael Lempert



View of the Interior of the 1851 New York State Fair

The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science, Vol 4 No 4, 1851 Nov 1, p.435.
Etching by Henry Beckwith, engraved by Bobbett and Edmonds



View of the Exterior of the 1851 New York State Fair

The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science, Vol 4 No 4, 1851 Nov 1, p.433.
Etching by Henry Beckwith, engraved by Bobbett and Edmonds

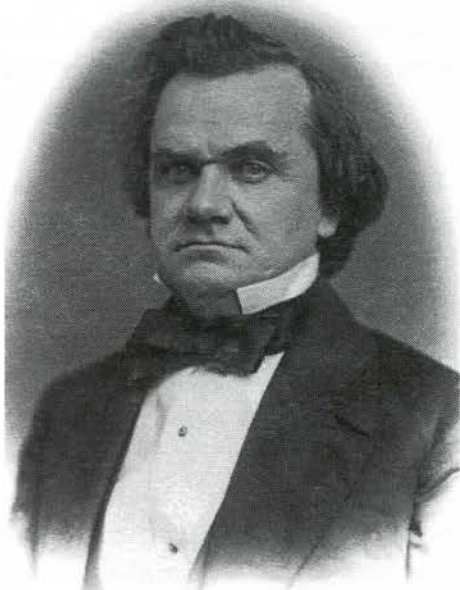
was interesting to discover that the Crittenden family had donated these items, because it was also the Crittendens that had sold their land (at one time they owned from the Methodist Hill in Henrietta to the Mount Hope Cemetery) to Monroe County for the Monroe County fairgrounds which also became the location for the New York State Agricultural Fair in 1851; the same fair where the above mentioned Starr piano was first displayed. P. V. Crittenden was five years old at the time of the 1851 Fair. Maybe his parents fell in love with this piano when they first saw it there and decided to purchase it when the fair had ended.

Horace Greeley, the founder and editor of the New York Tribune, one of the great newspapers of its time, wrote about the 1851 New York State Fair held in Brighton at the Monroe County Fairgrounds (formerly the Crittenden farm):

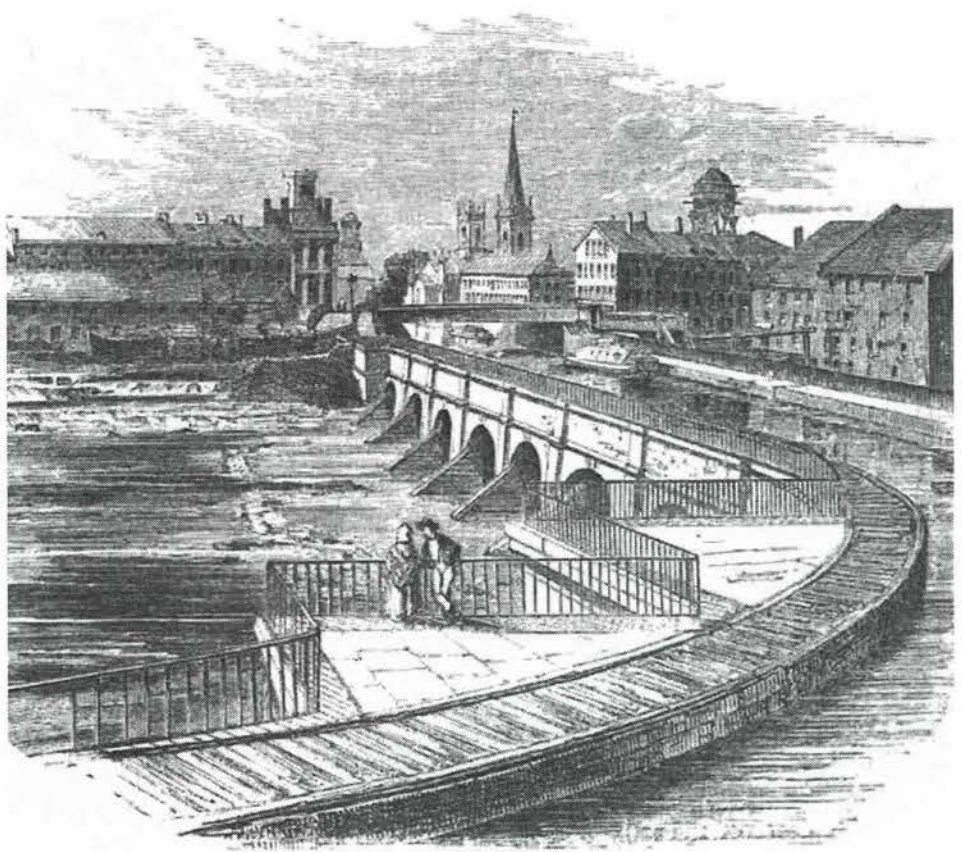
"The Fair was held at Rochester, in a large open field about a mile south of the city...near the Genesee River. Gigantic stumps scattered through it, attested how recently this whole region was covered with the primeval forest. Probably fifty thousand persons live within sight of the Rochester steeples, though not a human being inhabited this dense and swampy wilderness forty years ago. And here, almost wholly from a region which had less than five thousand white inhabitants in 1810, not fewer than one hundred thousand persons, two thirds of them adult males, were drawn together expressly to witness this exhibition. This annual exhibition is as yet the Farmer's University, they will in time have a better, but until then they do well to make the most of that which already welcomes them to its cheap, ready and practical inculcations"

A featured draw to this fair was then nationally prominent Illinois Senator, Stephen Arnold Douglas, mostly remembered for the Lincoln–Douglas debates during his presidential candidacy in 1860. Having inherited 100 slaves from his southern wife, he downplayed taking a position on slavery and promoted the right of the people to decide on such issues. His speech at the Fair was upbeat about the future of agriculture. This must have taken one to two hours for a book of fifty-four pages was published. In the speech Douglas said:

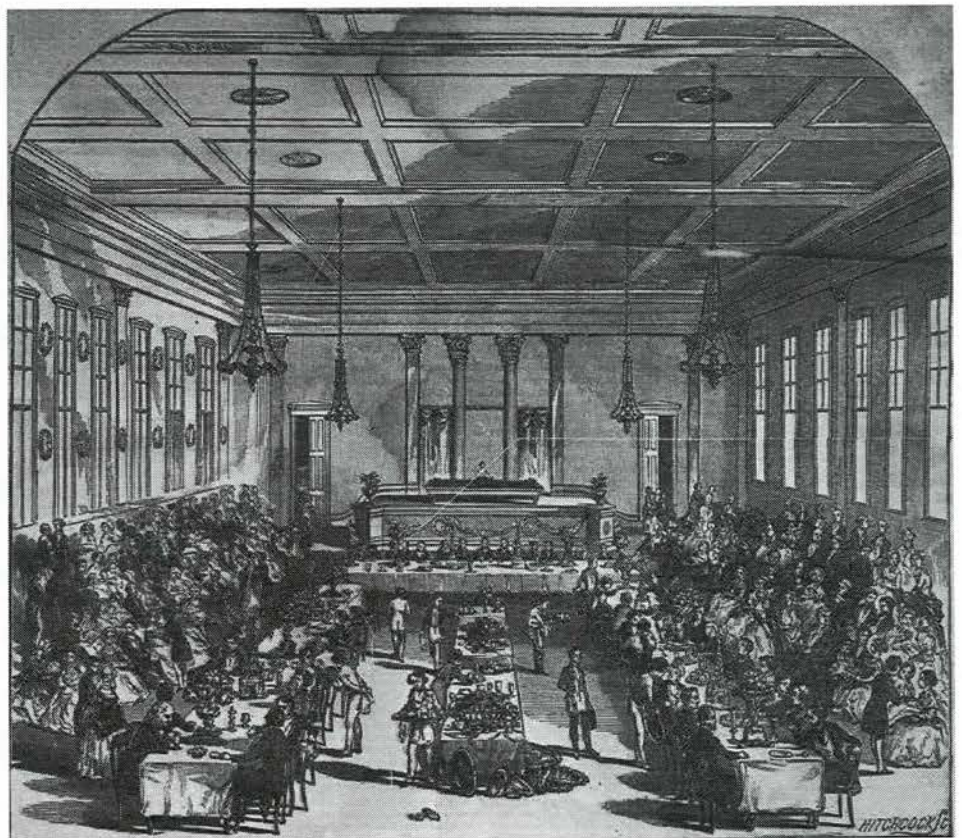
“As long as the great body of our population is composed of owners and cultivators of the soil, we shall remain true to our republican instincts. We may not succeed in the production of every luxury for the enjoyment and gratification of man; but we will produce, at the cheapest rate, and in the greatest abundance, those things which contribute most to the comfort, happiness and peace, not only of our own people, but of the laboring classes of all other countries.”



Stephen A. Douglas senate portrait in 1859
By Julian Vannerson, from Library of Congress



View of the the Erie Canal Aqueduct and Downtown Rochester in 1851.
The International Monthly Magazine of Literature, Art, and Science, Vol 4 No 4, 1851 Nov 1, p.434.
Etching by Henry Beckwith, engraved by Bobbett and Edmonds



Stephen A. Douglas' address was the keynote event at the conclusion of the 1851 NYS Fair and was held in Corinthian Hall in downtown Rochester pictured above.

The Illustrated American News, 1851.

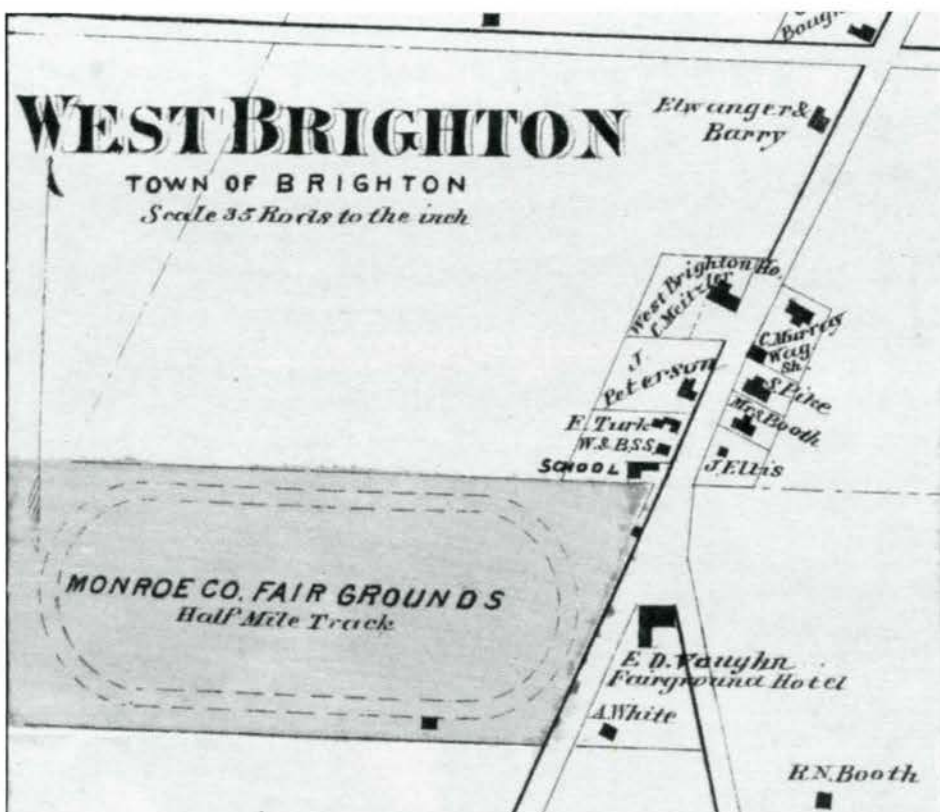
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division.

In light of Douglas' mention of luxury items one can't help but wonder what he thought of the luxurious Starr piano that was then on display.

The Rochester Historical Society vacated the Woodside Mansion on East Avenue sometime in the early 2000's and it was later sold to the Tait family, known in Rochester for their real estate endeavors. As it happens, a conversation with the current owners revealed that the Tait family has family ties to the Crittenden family, and the "C" in the current owner Robert C. Tait's name is for Crittenden. Unbeknownst to the Tait family, the Starr grand piano that was donated to the RHS by their ancestors once inhabited the parlor of their current home.

In most cases, physical evidence of an area's accomplishments fade out of existence. Yet here we have a most extraordinary artifact, an advertisement in the form of a small coin, still in existence and still being discovered one hundred and sixty-six years later! This small coin is such a great representative of the spirit of those times which can, amazingly, still be felt when holding the coin in your own hand. Greeley states, "They will in time have a better..." yet with this piano made just a mile north of the primeval stumps, the frontiersmen may have already reached their 'better' adding an air of European gentility to the Young Lion of the West.

HB



West Brighton and the Old Fair Grounds in the 1872 Atlas of Monroe County by F. W. Beers
From the Rochester Public Library Local History & Genealogy Division

Sources & Credits for Photos and Historic Material:

Brighton's Social Center: The Old Fair Grounds

- http://www.leododd.com/1923_Image_Air/Fair_Ground.html
- Democrat and Chronicle Archives, Rochester, NY
- Rochester Public Library Local History and Genealogy Division
 - Digital Monographs and Historic Maps Collections
- The Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum and Science Center
- Google Books

The Starr of the Fair

- Rochester Public Library Local History and Genealogy Division
 - Digital Monographs and Historic Maps Collections
- Rochester Historical Society Archives
- The Internet Archive: <https://archive.org>
- Google Books

Historic Brighton Newsletter and Journal is edited by Michael B. Lempert and Christopher M. Brandt

GIDEON COBB HERITAGE FESTIVAL REGISTRATION

Please visit our website to register immediately, or mail this form to us as soon as possible.

Name: _____

E-mail: _____

Attending: ☐ Friday Luncheon (\$20 per person)

☐ Saturday Ice Cream Social (Free)

Number of Guests: _____ X _____ (registration subtotal) = _____ (amount enclosed)

Please make check payable to and mail with this form to:
Historic Brighton, P.O. Box 18525, Rochester, NY 14618

The 1851 Starr Square Grand Piano

All photographs taken by Michael Lempert at the Rochester Historical Society



The elaborately detailed 1851 Starr Square Grand Piano with its equally intricate stool



The shimmering mother of pearl keys



Closeup of the delicate fretwork of the music desk



Hand carved details cover all four sides of the piano



Closeup of the piano pedals and carved lyre



Delicate inlay and hand painted decoration on the fall board