Restoration of the 1875 Haines Brothers Square Grand Piano
The restoration of this piano was made in memory of Katherine F. D. Uehling
-Edward R. Uehling, M.D.
Square grand pianos were most popular during the 18th and 19th centuries, in both the United States and England. The Gorgas House Museum's square grand piano was made by the Haines Brothers Company of New York.

The company was established in 1851, by English brothers, Napolean and Francis Haines. Beginning in the 1870's, the company began phasing out square grand pianos for the newly popular, upright piano. After Napoleon's death in 1900, his brother sold the company, but the Haines Brothers name was used into the 1930's.

There is no record that the piano was playable when it was donated to the Museum in the 1950's. However, a ceiling leak in 2010, assured that the piano could not be played. In the summer of 2011, Dr. Edward Uehling expressed an interest in undoing the damage.
Water and residue damage from the 2010 ceiling leak.
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Through research, several companies with experience restoring square grand pianos were located within the Southeast. Local companies were asked to come to the Museum for an interview and to provide cost estimates. A local company, the Allegro Piano and Organ Shop, recommended by the University of Alabama School of Music, was selected to complete the restoration. In December of 2011, the piano was disassembled and taken to their workshop in Reform, Alabama.
During disassembly, we found that the piano's unique serial number (14537) was on each removable piece. The serial number dates the piano to 1875.
The action of the piano, including the keyboard and strings, were removed.

Then, the piano was covered and mounted, on a specialized cart, to remove the legs.
When the legs were removed, we discovered that each leg, and corresponding hole, were numbered 1 through 4.

Since the piano was made by hand, each piece is one-of-a-kind.

The numbering system and serial number labeling assure that the piano can be put back together correctly, if taken apart.
Wood paneling was laid down to shield the antique floor from damage, as the piano was rolled, by cart, onto the second story porch.

From there, members of the University of Alabama Department of Logistic and Support Services lifted, and carried, the piano down the spiral staircase.
The piano was removed from the Museum in December, 2012.

In February and March, visits were made to the Allegro Piano and Organ shop, in Reform, Alabama, to see the restoration process.
With the metal plate and keyboard of the piano removed, several large cracks in the soundboard were visible.

There was concern that these cracks would impair the piano's sound. However, the restoration procedure was able to repair the damage and return the genuine, full-bodied sound of the square grand piano.
During the restoration process, the metal plate was cleaned and painted, and the strings and felt pads were replaced.
During the restoration process, several "surprises" were uncovered. The first, was that beneath layers of well-aged varnish is a beautiful, rosewood case. It is believed to be of full rosewood, not a veneer, which is very rare. Second, the music rack is still fully intact. Given the delicacy, and intricate carving, it was often the part most easily broken. Finally, two signatures were uncovered. The signature pictured here was on the inside of the piano's cabinet, the other was on the side of one of the bass keys. It is likely that these signatures were from the craftsmen who constructed the piano.
In May, the fully restored piano was returned to the Gorgas House Museum. The entire piano cabinet, with keyboard and plate intact, had to be carried up to the second story. It weighed approximately 1,000 pounds.
The Gorgas House Museum would like to thank Dr. Edward Uehling for his gracious gift and the Allegro Piano and Organ Shop for their fine craftsmanship!