



1889 McPhail upright before restoration

The subject of this semi-rebuilding will be an A.M. McPhail upright, built in 1889 (2 years before the company became a corporation).



Glitter under in the key bed sparkling

As can be expected from a 128 year old piano, it is very dirty. Lots, and lots of dust, dirt, webs... and glitter. Yes, apparently this piano attended a party at one time. Probably more recently since most of the dust and dirt is *under* the glitter.

After 128 years of protecting the wood, this shellac finish is just about worn out. Enough finish is missing over the entire surface as to no longer be able to protect the wood. In keeping with the piano's age, the owner has chosen to have the instrument refinished with a new shellac finish.



While shellac has its weaknesses -  
withstanding time isn't one of them



Loose veneer on a 128 year  
old McPhail upright

As can be seen, there are multiple areas of damage or missing veneer. The loose areas will be reattached (in the correct manner - with hide glue), and the areas of missing veneer will receive patches.



Lid 1889 McPhail Upright - cracks  
visible on left (before restoration)

The rear portion of the lid has suffered multiple cracks which will need mending.



Center Inset Panel with Music Shelf

The upper panel contains three inset “hand carved” (according to the maker’s 1892 catalogue) panels – the center panel, containing the larger inset, which pulls forward and a small shelf folds down to hold sheet music.



Left Inset Panel in Upper Panel

The above photos shows the upper panel’s left inset panel. A little over half the old shellac has been gently removed to reveal the wood beneath. As can be seen, the old finish (what remains of it) has become quite clouded with dust and age.



Angle View of 1889 McPhail Upright (before  
restoration)

Here, an angle showing the fallboard and an overall view. As we move lower – a photo of the turned leg.



Turned Leg (the far leg was removed  
before the photo)

Another view,



Side and Leg 1889 McPhail Upright  
(before restoration)

Removing a portion of the old shellac on the side of the piano reveals the wood pattern below the dark and cloudy finish. The wood grain can temporarily be made to look “finished” by wiping it with a little paint thinner as I have done for these two photos.



Side - Portion of Old Shellac Removed



Same Side

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A short update to this post.

Since I have had a couple of people mention that the piano’s finish looks ok in the photos, I thought I would post this quick photo. It is taken much closer, the sun is coming in from behind the camera, and no flash. You can see the problems with the finish much clearer.



Deteriorated Finish