



# Canadian Piano News<sup>©</sup>

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## The Pianos of Dundurn Castle

To the right is the front view with the high carriage way. In front is a large area with grass and trees. To the left is the famous back view. It has been the back drop for television and movies.



Walking through this restored 1835 Hamilton, Ontario Canada building one gets a sense of how life was in early Victorian Canada. The kitchen and servant areas were in the basement with the entertaining and public rooms of the main floor to the living quarters of the family in the upper floor.

Dundurn is Gaelic for strong fort and the local residents called it a castle. It was built for Sir Allan Napier MacNab (1798-1862); boy soldier in 1812, lawyer, landowner, railway builder and the Premier of the United Canadas (1845-1856).

During the 1850s the piano was not only for private but public entertainment. Dundurn Castle has three pianos on display. As far as it can be determined one piano was distributed in Canada another was made locally and the third came from England. (Due to the age and condition of these instruments the insides could not be looked at in any detail and overall information is limited.)

### The School Room Piano

On the upper floor in a small back room called the school room along with a table, chair, and bookcase is an upright piano standing about 1.38 m or 4.5 ft high. It came from L.W. Herbert & Co. of Montreal. There are no known serial numbers for this company only that they made and imported pianos from 1835 to 1861. With three young daughters (Anne Jane, Mary Stuart, and Sophia Mary), his position, and this pianos style it is highly probable it became part of the household in the late 1830s.



To the far left is the Herbert piano with cloth draping covering the strings. When the keyboard cover is lifted there is a collapsible music desk capable of holding a few sheets of music (centre picture). Below is the enlarged view of the manufacturer's label. This label covers the original manufacturer thus was probably made elsewhere.



To the left is an enlarged view of the two wooden foot pedals. Metal pedals on uprights were not used until the 1880s and three pedals began in the mid 1890s.





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## The Upper Hall Piano

In the upper hall is a square grand piano made by Charles Lewis Thomas of Hamilton, Ontario (known as Canada West C.W. at that time). Thomas got into the piano trade in 1832 and began making pianos in 1855 and then closed in 1892 after Thomas' sudden death. An 1886 publication said a Thomas piano was of excellent quality and should last a lifetime.

Square grands were made of solid wood, were excellent pieces of furniture but were not good playable pianos. This style with an iron frame was made between 1845 and 1875.

This piano has no serial number and based upon the design and C.W. it was made prior



to Canadian confederation in 1867. It is just over a 1m or 1.25 yd tall.

To the left is an enlarged view of the Thomas name from the above picture. The name is stenciled into the wood indicating it was actually made by C.L. Thomas.



To the right shows the crafted legs, two metal pedal leg stand, and the triangle base piano stool. Piano benches were not used until the 1890s.

## The Drawing Room Piano

Although this is not a Canadian made piano it does deserve mentioning. When upright pianos were first being made in the early 1800s the flat style of a grand was just turned upright. The hammers struck at the same level but the space below the keyboard was empty.

When Sir Allan became successful and was re-married in 1831 a piano of significant design would have been purchased befitting their social status. Although this piece was not part of the original Dundurn building it was acquired for restoration. A show piece such as this piano would have been placed in the drawing room.

Standing over 2 m or 6.5 ft tall this is a very impressive piano. The wood is solid and has elaborately carved legs. Its rose coloured cloth covering the strings is still in excellent condition and has hole in the middle from which the cloth was fanned out. The triangle base stool has a pink cover that matches the floor and the piano has two wooden foot pedals.



Upper left is the enlarged nameplate bearing the name William Porter Dreaper of Liverpool, England. This nameplate covers the original manufacturer as there is no record of Dreaper making pianos.

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