

The Calliope Man

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On April 3, 1902, Josiah C. Stoddard, inventor of the calliope died, forgotten and poverty stricken at Springfield, MA. The steam piano to him meant only years of hard work with no material gain.

For more than 25 years he had lived just outside Springfield, as a sort of hermit who tended beehives and invented things.

Josiah Stoddard was a typical inventor in that he had virtually no business sense. He was a Christian who felt his rewards would come in the next life and who honestly believed that one day he would come face-to-face with God. As a result, he subsisted on the love and affection that came from children who would often bring gifts and visit him.

The inventor's taste for music was acquired at an early age when he formed a brass band at Pawlet, VT. Later he moved to Albany, NY, where he learned the trade of a wood finisher, working mostly on pianos.

Soon his inventive genius developed, and he made an automatic mouse trap. Later he invented a three-horse rack, an aerial torpedo, a canal boat, a drawbridge, and toys. When he wasn't working on an invention, he wrote poems and songs, many of which were published.

Stoddard's most significant invention was the steam calliope. Money for the project was obtained from friends, who later made a fortune from their investments.

It took Stoddard nine months to build his first calliope, then one day he set down and played "Rosa Lee" – the first tune ever played on a calliope. The impromptu concert attracted people from miles around, and by 1855 everyone wanted one of the new instruments.

The calliope first became popular on the Mississippi River steamboats and at one time it was thought that churches would prefer a calliope over an organ.

P.T. Barnum was quick to realize its potential and so he bought one for his show. After that any circus worth its salt had a calliope on the lot.

When the calliope became a popular instrument, a stock company was formed to produce them in quantity. The men who owned the stock were not as honest as the inventor and they soon pushed Stoddard out of the company.

Some children who went to visit him found him ill and so officials took him to the Buscall's Sanitarium where he passed away a few days later. He was buried in Worcester, MA.

Today, the calliope has regained popularity and it still shatters the air whenever it is played. But Josiah C. Stoddard, its inventor, is forgotten by all, except perhaps a few people who visited him when they were children.

Patent Application:

Apparatus for producing music by steam or compressed air.

Patent No, 13,668 granted October 9, 1855

From the application introduction:

Be it known that I, J.C. Stoddard, of the city and county of Worcester and State of Massachusetts, have invented a New Musical Instrument to be Played by the Agency of Steam or Highly Compressed Air.

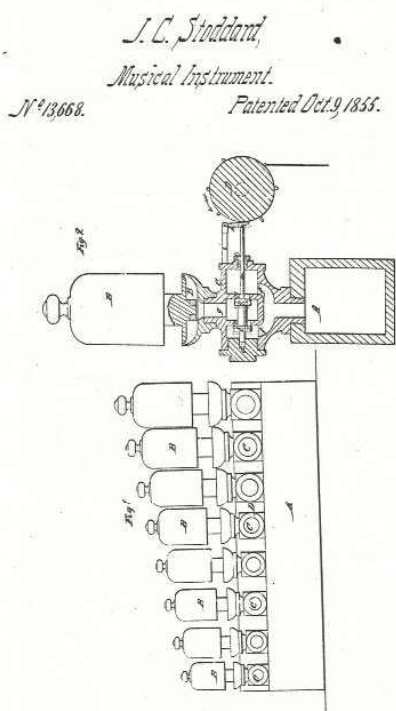
From the application close:

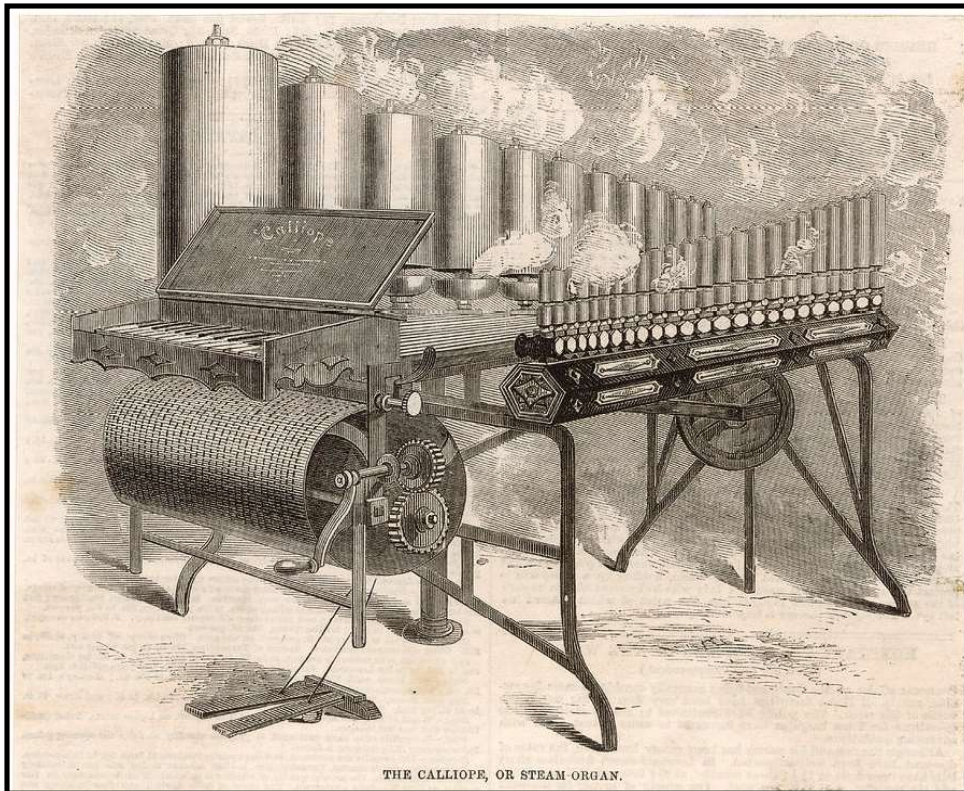
Having thus described my invention, I will proceed to state what I claim and desire to secure by Letters Patent:

1. I claim the musical instrument herein described consisting of a number of what are commonly known as steam whistles of such tones as to produce a musical scale arranged in a convenient manner upon a steam chest, chamber pipe or generator, and furnished with valves and a rotating studded barrel, finger keys or other suitable mechanical means of opening the said valves to allow the escape of steam or air to the whistles substantially as herein set forth.

2. As a part of the said musical instrument, I claim the within described valve with its two puppets and seats of unequal size and with one end of its stem exposed to the atmosphere.

J.C. STODDARD





THE CALLIOPE, OR STEAM ORGAN.

