

Rt. 1 Box 792
Smithfield, Va.
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Washington, D.C.

Upon my return from "Friends of Music at the Smithsonian" which, by the way, was a most memorable occasion, I looked up the material I had mentioned to you regarding Dr. Cahill (pronounced Cah hill') as you observed from my pronunciation; which I'm sure was the way I remembered hearing it, as a boy.

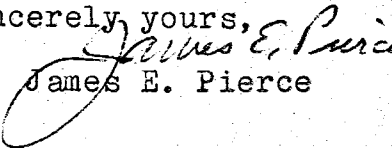
The enclosed carbon copy is one of several, I made at the time of the visit referred to, to distribute to others in the family who might be interested. No doubt, among the many libraries you have access to in Washington, is available the work from which some of this information was taken and perhaps others that deal with the subject more exhaustively.

I wish it were possible to convey in words, the sound of this instrument being played. As near as I can recall, as a boy of 10 or 12, the tone was somewhat organ-like. I don't suppose that a working model is still in existence anywhere.

Another recollection of the factory in Holyoke, Mass., where the instrument, later moved to New York, was being built, was watching machinists in the shop cutting the teeth in the "toothed wheels" referred to in the accompanying article.

The foregoing may be of little value, except to record that you have met someone who remembers hearing the "Telharmonium" played. My father, who played the instrument, had quite a wide and varied career as a musician. Born in Auburn, N.Y. Studied at Leipsic Conservatory. Organist, Pianist, Violinist as well as other instruments; Composer, Writer, Teacher in some Colleges as well as privately. Wrote extensively for such publications as "The Musical quarterly" and "The Etude" (no longer published) for which he also served for a time, as Asst. Editor. His last residence was Annapolis, Md. where he served for 20 yrs. of more, as Organist and Choirmaster of Old St. Anne's Church.

My old friend, Dr. Meaker, with whom my wife & I attended, enjoyed meeting you and other members of the Smithsonian Staff. Perhaps you might find the enclosed clipping from our local paper of some interest.

Sincerely yours,

James E. Pierce

ITEM REGARDING PIONEER INVENTOR OF ELECTRIC MUSIC
AND HIS ASSOCIATION WITH THE PIERCE FAMILY
(Written by J. E. Pierce, August, 1970)

While browsing among some books, on our recent visit to my brother Roderic's, I came upon an item of interest in "The Oxford Companion to Music" (Percy A. Scholes)

Excerpt from article on "Electric Musical Instruments"

"The great pioneer of electric musical instrument invention (before the thermionic valve and loud speaker became available, however) was the American scientist, Dr. Thaddeus Cahill, whose 'Dynamophone' was alluded to with approval by Busoni,* in 1907, in his "A New Aesthetic of Music." This instrument, also called the Telharmonium, produced musical sounds ("Telharmony") in a telephone receiver from the rotation of suitable toothed wheels near the poles of electromagnets, the pure sounds being combined to imitate the timbre of orchestral instruments."

My father, Edwin Hall Pierce, worked with Dr. Cahill in the development of this invention, in Holyoke, Mass. about the years 1905-6. I was too young to comprehend what made it work, but clearly recall father taking some of us, on several occasions, to the plant where it was being developed and playing it for us. However, it appears to me now that the Hammond organ of today uses the basic principle invented by Dr. Cahill.

About 1907 some promoters (who later turned out to be crooks) got hold of it, moved it (and us) to New York City and proceeded to sell stock in the invention. After collecting a goodly sum they gathered it all up and fled the country, leaving us all stranded. Somehow, father got us back to Auburn, N. Y. where we moved in with his mother and Aunt Mary.

An interesting sidelight of the above is that while still in Holyoke, Dr. Cahill, who owned one of the few cars extant in those days, drove over to our house one day and took us all out for a ride. The first time any of us had been in an automobile.

*Busoni, Ferruccio Benvenuto 4/1/66 - 7/27/24
Noted composer & pianist.

(It is probable that father played the Telharmonium for Busoni's appraisal as no one else understood its operation at that time, although I believe father was teaching one or two assistants.)