

# **Steinway Upright Restoration Project**

**Day 3**

## Restoration Project Photo Essay - Steinway upright

**Plans, as they say, change.** In working on a project with a group of people, finding a time that fits into people's schedule is not always easy.

For the work done on these pages, the timing of the meeting had been set in advance. I was planning on accomplishing certain jobs on the Steinway on the day of the meeting, most notably, removing the old pinblock and cutting the new ones to size. If the tools and pinblocks had all arrived on schedule, that's what we would have done. Alas, the mail does not always arrive when you want it to, and not everything was at the shop for the planned projects to take place. Such is life.

Instead of sitting on our hands, cursing FedEx, we rolled up our sleeves and got busy on other aspects of the restoration process. A piano rebuild is anything but one dimensional, after all, and there's work to be done on a number of fronts.

In one room of the shop the action was put on a bench to be disassembled. I've not quite decided whether to restore or replace action parts, but I'm leaning towards restoration, with all new felt and leather, but saving the old wood. The wooden components of the action do not appear to be brittle and I think the work involved with restoring the old parts would be a good exercise in patience for the chapter members who haven't tried their hand at this type of work.

With the case of the piano already disassembled, stripping and sanding parts was another task to launch into. Chapter members found stripping off the old finish without damaging the veneer (as happens when you scrub the veneer the wrong way with steel wool) to be challenging. At the sanding bench, some of the stripped pieces were then sanded in preparation for staining. I think the members who got involved with these processes came away with a new appreciation of the amount of work that is involved in refinishing a piano! It is not a simple weekend task if you want things to turn out right.

The old keytops had already been removed, so gluing on the new ones at yet another work station became the focus for several other chapter members. In that I was one of the last die-hard advocates of contact cement, I had to swallow my pride and admit that we were indeed using PVC-E glue on this project. It really does the job quite well and is without a doubt less trouble to use. I am an old dog (and getting older), but occasionally I do pick up a new trick or two.

Finally, one of our more experienced members, looking at the bass bridge, offered to remove it to take to his shop for duplicating. I agreed, but specified that we needed pictures to show the processes involved. Harold, if you're reading this, don't let me down! Take pictures!

After the meeting, everything I had been waiting for arrived at the shop within a day or two, naturally. I can now say with confidence that at our next get together, we will be making progress on the pinblock installation. Until next time, then, enjoy the holidays!

Chuck Behm

## Restoration Project Photo Essay - Steinway upright



*Photo 86: Henry Lippert begins disassembling the Steinway's action. The tentative plan is for restoring the original hammer butts with new leather and felt, replacing the old hammer butt springs, etc. There will be plenty to do in the course of the project - enough for everyone to try some things they haven't done before.*



*Photo 87: Harold Marling works at a second bench removing hammers from shanks while David Krueger watches and learns a few things from the expert.*



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*Photo 88: With all the hammers removed, David takes a turn at the bench, using a hammer shank reducer to remove the 100 year old remnants of hot animal hide glue.*



*Photo 89: In another room of the shop, Steve Haag applies stripper to one of the legs of the Steinway.*

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*Photo 90: Dan Shere also tries his hand at removing the old varnish, and finds it challenging to get the old varnish out of the crevices in the ornamentation to the leg. I show Dan the old "cut-off brush" trick, and it goes a lot easier.*



*Photo 91: Bev Ohm takes the case parts once they're stripped, and begins the sanding process.*



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*Photo 92: Don Winchester (with the beard) and Annie Greishop (sunglasses) work at the keytop replacement bench gluing new German keytops from Schaff onto the prepped surface of the keysticks using PVC-E glue. All the keytops were glued, and are now ready for filing.*



*Photo 93: Harold Marling offers to lend his expertise in bass bridge duplication. I agree that he can take the bridge home to his shop on one condition - "Take lots of pictures!" We'll just see if he comes through with them or not. Here he makes an initial attempt to pop off the top portion of the bridge.*

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*Photo 94: Realizing that the entire bridge will need to be removed, I make myself useful for the first time of the day, and crawl under the piano to remove the screws holding it in place. One of them, being conveniently located behind a post, requires an off-set screwdriver to remove - the type of tool you don't need on a regular basis, but when you do, nothing else will work.*



*Photo 95: Dan finishes the job, removing the entire bridge assembly with several smart blows from the mallet to the large chisel.*



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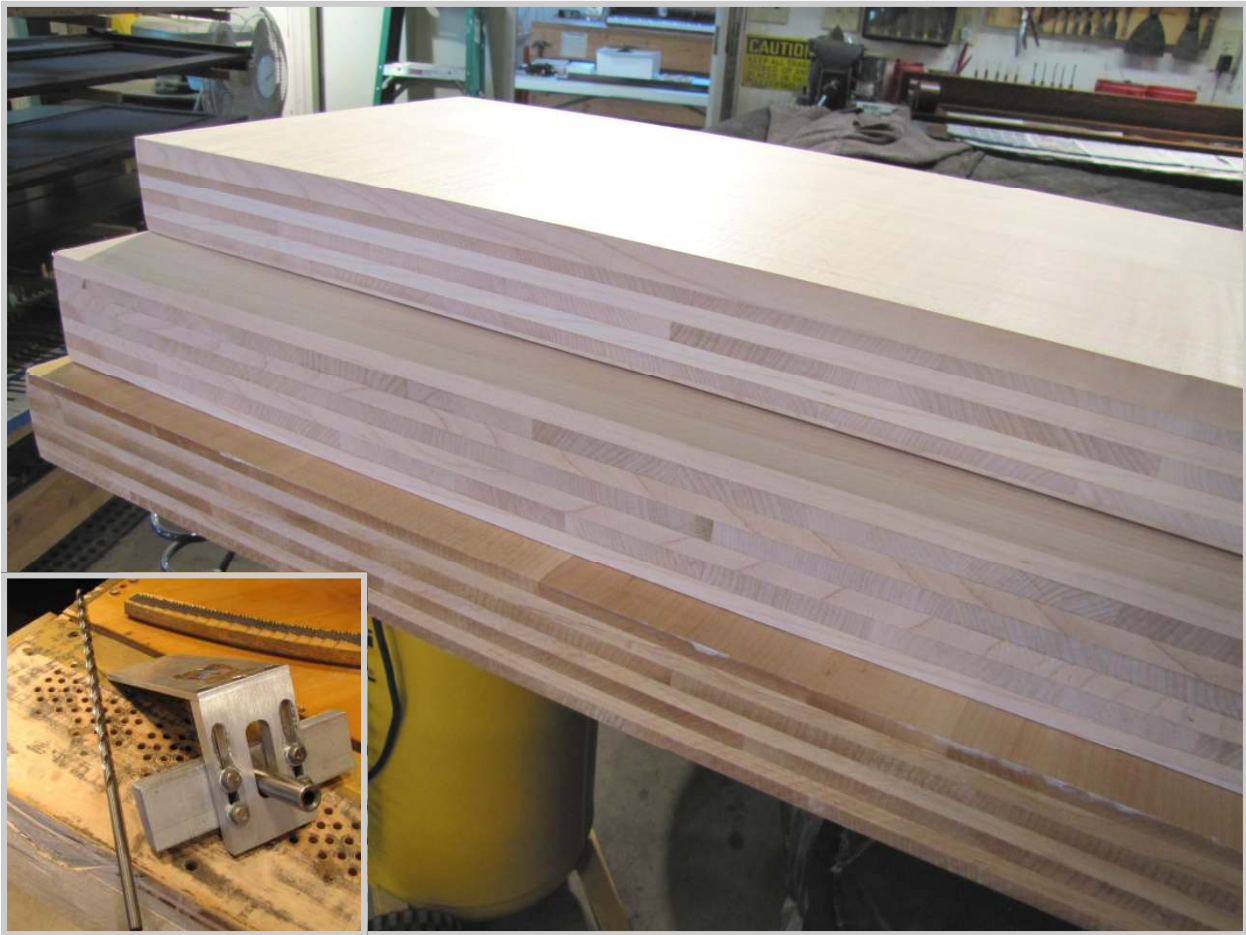
*Photo 96: The bass bridge comes free with minimal damage to the soundboard.*



*Photo 97: By the end of the week (after the chapter meeting) all three of the pinblocks have arrived, and they are each a beautiful work of craftsmanship. Shown in this photo is a gorgeous 7-ply 2" thick pinblock sent by WNG.*



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**Next up:** In taking delivery of each of the 3 sample pinblocks sent to our shop (one from Alex Kapteyn's Central Michigan Piano, one from Wessel, Nickel and Gross [Mason & Hamlin] and one from Christian Bolduc [Pianos Andre Bolduc]) I realized what an honor and privilege it will be to be able to work with these outstandingly made products. These pinblocks are made in the tradition of the blocks found in premium pianos from the past, and are simply beautiful.

At the next gathering of chapter members, we will get down to the serious business at hand. First, we'll be using the specialty tools (inset) provided by Christian Bolduc to remove the entire original block, *without creating any damage to the upper portion of it* (preserving it for use as a reference in fitting the new block). Christian has shared photos with me with showing the process, and it's all I can do to wait on the other guys to show up at the shop to share in the fun.

With the old block removed we will be cutting and fitting all three of the new blocks, providing everyone who attends with the opportunity to work with the pinblocks on the band saw, then in fitting them to the flange on the cast iron plate (much in the manner of most grand pianos). It will be a fun day of projects to accomplish and photos to take.