

## *Nicole Freres Cylindrical lever-wind Music Box*

Nicole Frères

Circa 1881

12 sacred airs; Register No. R-13075 with Serial No. 50419 on UK Register of Cylinder Musical Boxes; Gamme No. 3170; Tune Sheet Series Number 109; single comb with 71 teeth.

### Provenance:

This music box has remained within the same family from its purchase in the 1880s to date. It was originally purchased for the donor's great-great-aunt (Catherine Devereaux, of Normandy, France, then Bedfordshire, England). As noted by the UK Register of Cylinder Musical Boxes, it appears to be a special order given the hymn selection. The music box was shipped to the donor's father in Montréal, Canada, for safekeeping just prior to the Second World War. Following the conclusion of WWII, the family elected to ensure its continued safety by leaving it in the care of the donor.

### Noted by UK Register of Cylinder Musical Boxes:

"Nicole Freres were makers of quality musical boxes; they were established in Geneva, Switzerland circa 1815 and over the years until the business was moved to London circa 1879 some 48,000 musical boxes, large and small were made, many for the British market. On completing the move to London, it is believed that Serial Numbers were re-started at 50,000 to signify the London business, although in the transition period, say 1879-1882, some boxes were assembled in London from parts made in Geneva and transferred to London when the business moved. On present understanding of this period in Nicole Freres history, Serial Number 50419 would have been one of those made by this process sometime during that transition period, say circa 1881. Later, the London business of Nicole Freres seems to have acted solely as agents for musical boxes made by other Swiss makers, notably the firm of Paillard of Ste, Croix. Finally, of the 48,000 or so boxes made by Nicole Freres, only around 3,500 have so far been identified as having survived the years.

The word "Gamme" is the French term for musical scale, i.e. the unique sequence of musical notes [or pitches] to which the teeth on a comb have to be tuned in order to play the arrangements of the tunes pinned on the

matching cylinder; a musical box does not necessarily need all the sequence of musical notes found on a piano, some may be repeated on adjacent teeth for emphasis whilst others may be omitted; it all depends upon the tunes selected and the arrangements made for them to be played on a comb with a given number of teeth. These arrangements were made by music specialists known as Arrangers and their individual instructions for tuning a comb were given a unique Gamme number to maintain integrity. The Gamme requirements for tuning the 71 teeth on the comb of your musical box were given the number 3170; this in itself is new to The Register which does not record any other musical box having been found to-date with a comb tuned to this Gamme.

The Musical Programme of Serial Number 50419 is comprised entirely of Sacred Airs or, in French "Aires Sacres" as is sometimes seen on such tune sheets. Sacred Airs on musical boxes can be classified as either Classical, from Oratorios such as The Messiah, ordinary Hymns used by churches or Evangelical & Gospel Songs. The selection on your musical box is entirely of the second category, Hymns; some of them are popular and occur with regularity on musical boxes with hymns in their programme, some less so, and one, "It came upon a Midnight Clear" has not been found pinned on any musical box to come to light to date. All this leads me to wonder whether Serial Number 50419 was made to meet a special order with its selection of hymns being chosen by the customer when the order was placed; we shall never know.

The Tune Sheets found fixed to the lids of some musical boxes, as is the case with Serial Number 50419 have been the subject of a separate detailed study by enthusiasts; unfortunately, Tune Sheets for only half of the 13,000 musical boxes on The Register have survived with their parent box but from those that have over 400 different Tune Sheets, most unique but some with detailed variations have been identified so far. Over the years, designs used by Makers were changed and that with your musical box is one of over 40 such used by Nicole and has been given the Tune Sheet Series Number 109."

Source: <https://www.mbsgb.org.uk>

*Donated to Vancouver Academy of Music by the Lily Fund*

*November 2021*



THE MUSICAL BOX SOCIETY  
of GREAT BRITAIN

Business Address: The Grange Musical Collection,  
Old Bury Road, Palgrave,  
DISS, Norfolk.  
IP22 1AZ

**Certificate of Registration of a Cylinder Musical Box**  
on the  
**Arthur D Cunliffe Register of Cylinder Musical Boxes**

Date of Certificate **22 May 2021**

Register Number Date of First Registration

**R-13075.**

**21 May 2021**

Maker

**Nicole Freres**

Serial No

**50419**

Game No

**3170**

Type

**12 Sacred Air lever-wind**

Cylinder Details

**33 cm x 6 cm**

Bulleid/Reed Tune Sheet Number

**109**

Comb Details

**Single comb with 71 teeth**

**MUSICAL PROGRAMME**

- 1.It came upon the midnight clear.
- 2.Onward Christian Soldiers.
- 3.Sun of my Soul.
- 4.Come, ye thankful people.
- 5.Our blest Redeemer.
- 6.The day thou gavest [Lord is ended].
- 7.Sweet Saviour bless us [ere we go].
- 8.Jerusalem on high.
- 9.We plough the fields [and scatter].
- 10.Angel voices [ever singing].
- 11.Eternal Father; [strong to save].
- 12.Lord of the worlds above.

Comment

Fitted with full length Zither; in a grained case with rosewood veneered lid inlaid with a decorative cartouche and triple stringing. 4 pictures on file.



# Boxes by Francois Nicole & Freres Nicole

by Roy Ison

**T**he purpose of this article is to try to clear some of the confusion that surrounds musical boxes made by Francois Nicole and those made by Freres Nicole during the period of 1815 to 1834.

The problems occur with boxes which were made by Francois Nicole from about 1820 to 1827. After 1827 most of the musical boxes by this maker had the comb marked *Francis Nicole*, before 1827 the musical boxes by this maker sometimes had a comb stamp of *F Nicole* or in some cases had no name stamp at all. What all these boxes by Francois Nicole had in common was a square pattern cylinder marking. The cylinder had both vertical and horizontal lines giving the effect of producing a small square pattern on the surface of the cylinder (fig.1). This type of box in the past has been known as rigid notation or graphic notation. The reason for the square pattern cylinder marking is not at all clear; some collectors and restorers think it had some use in pinning the cylinder but Francois Nicole seems to be the only maker to use this marking. Another view is that it may well be a type of trademark or a method of identifying special order boxes made by Francois Nicole. For the rest of this article all this type of box will be referred to as square pattern cylinder boxes.

Francois Nicole was born April 1st 1766 to Susann Marie Golay and Pierre Nicole and baptised on April 17th 1766 at Chenit, Vallee de Joux Vaud, Switzerland. He had one older brother, David Louis Philippe, born August 26th 1764.

David and Francois were described as horologers en musique working at Nyon in 1787, moving to Geneva in 1796. On the death of the boys' father, Pierre Nicole, David and Francois came under the guardianship of Daniel Piguët, marchand and horologer, and later David Golay who was also an

horologer, brother of Susann Golay, their mother. David Golay left in his will 6928 Florins, a substantial amount, for the two brothers who were working as horologers in Nyon at the time. They also received monies from the estates of their

father and grandfather. This would give the brothers capital to establish a workshop.

Francois Nicole had seven children by his marriage to Marie Magniet. They were: Francois Louise Elizabeth, b.1793, who

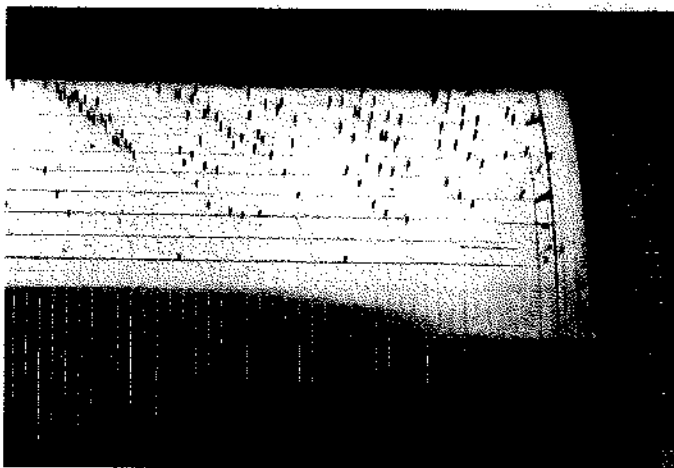


Fig. 1. Square pattern on cylinder.



Fig. 2. Grooved Ring.

*..Francois Nicole seems to be the only maker to use this marking.*

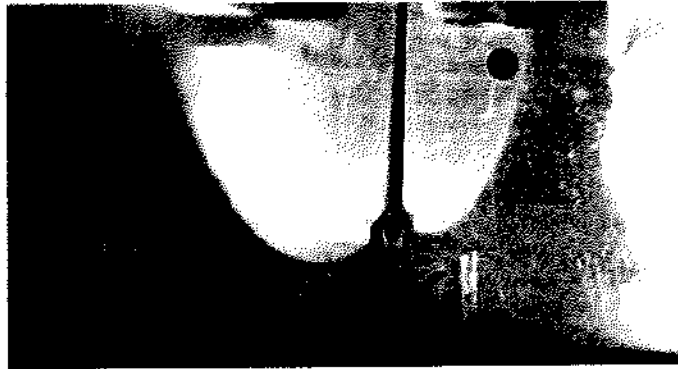


Fig. 3. Claw for grooved ring.

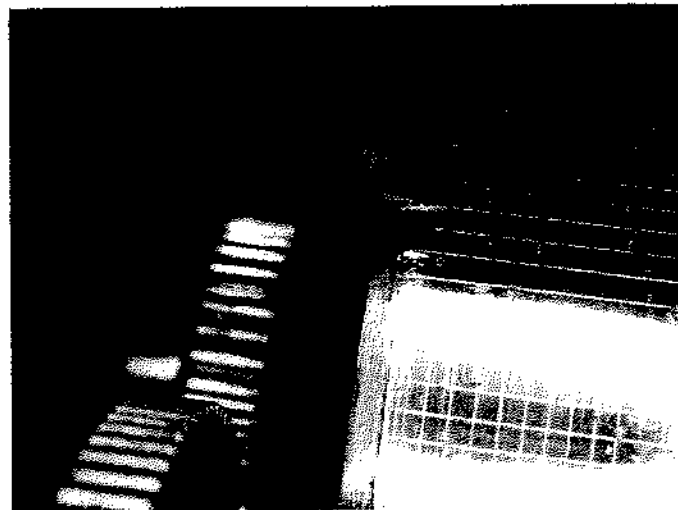


Fig. 4. Cap in grooved ring.

*... producing  
steel that  
compares  
advantageously  
with English  
steel.*

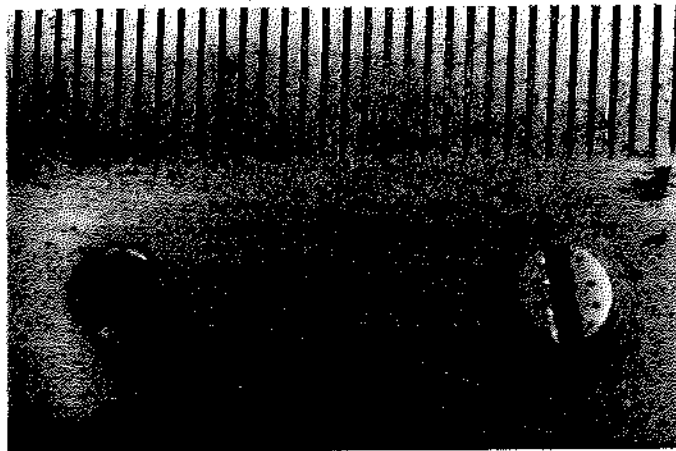


Fig. 5.

married Francois Louis Lecoultre; the second daughter, Cesarine Anorienne Louise, b.1795, who married Henri Francois Reymond (later known as Reymond Nicole); the third daughter, Ami Matthieu, b. 1796 d. 1802; Jean Louis Philippe

b.1800 d. 1875; Francois Louis Andre b. 1804 d.1805; Marie Louise Francoise b.1806 d.1808; Francois Louis b.1808 d.1862. From the names of the parents and the children it can be seen the complications and confusions which arise.

David Nicole was unmarried and lived at the works site, Rue des Etuves 130. Just around the corner at Rue Rousseau 60 lived Francois Nicole with his two sons, neither of whom was involved in the making of musical boxes. Also in the same building lived his second daughter, Cesarine, with her husband, Henri Francois Reymond (Reymond Nicole), his other daughter Francois Louise Elizabeth, with her husband Francois Louis Lecoultre, also lived on another floor in the same house.

David Nicole participated with Jacques and Francois Lecoultre in the establishment of a forge in Chenit in 1811. Around 1812 a letter addressed by the local council to the Department of the Interior of the Canton of Vaud indicates that David Nicole, Jacques and Francois Lecoultre were "watchmakers and mechanics by profession of their own invention and without anybodies (sic) help in producing steel that compares advantageously with English steel." At this time English steel was held in great esteem.

The information obtained from the MBSGB register of boxes has been very useful but not all owners have given full details regarding the name of the early boxes: for example, boxes made between 1815 and 1830 are listed as Nicole Freres but should have been recorded as Freres Nicole as stamped on the bedplate of the movement. Other details such as cylinder dimensions, number of teeth on the comb and tune identification (when known) are also often missing.

In the register three boxes have been listed with a date stamp on the spring. They are serial number 7279 date 1826, serial number 8346 date 1828 and serial number 15723 date 1834, also a box presented in 1840 serial number 19020. This type of information is very useful in an attempt to fix a date to serial numbers. If a starting date of 1815 is taken as the first box in the register with a serial number of 337 then from this date to 1826, the first spring dated box, it can reasonably be assumed that 650 boxes were made per year. Then from around 1827 to 1830 about 750 per year were made and from 1830 to 1840

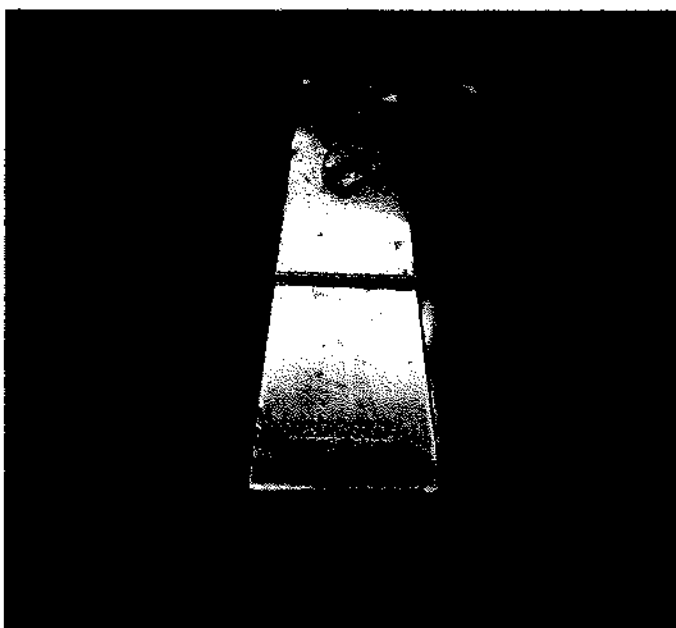


Fig. 6.

about 850 boxes per year were made. As more musical boxes are registered this may well need updating.

From 1815 to 1840 only 122 musical boxes have been recorded in the register to date. The period from 1815 to 1821 is where the first cartel box is recorded in the register with a serial number 3570; all the boxes recorded before this date are snuff boxes, 26 in number, apart from 2 cartel boxes, the first being serial number 3570 followed by serial number 3762. Both of these boxes play overtures and have

cylinder lengths of 23 cms and have similar features to the Francois Nicole boxes which were also being made about 1821/1822. Boxes 3570 and 3762 have fine combs, 21 teeth to the inch, the combs on both boxes are stamped F Nicole. Box 3762 plays one overture on two turns and two airs on the third turn, the combs have 200 teeth. Both boxes have Freres Nicole stamped on the bedplate (fig.10) and box 3570 has a three section comb. Both of these boxes are very similar to the type of box being made by Francois Nicole at

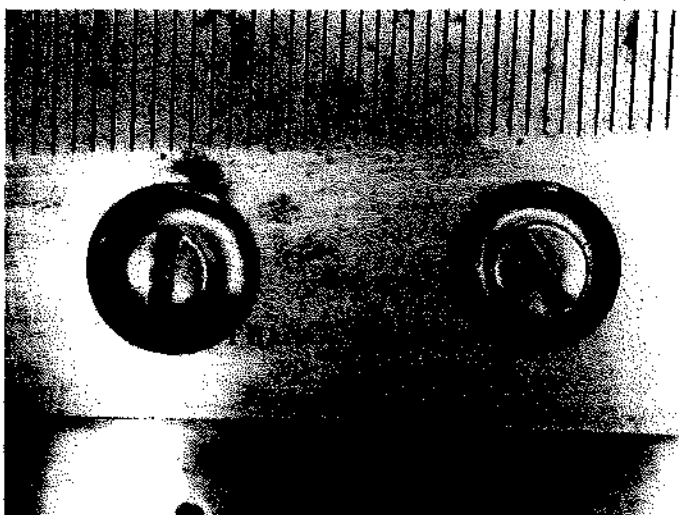


Fig. 7.

this time, visually the main difference is the square pattern cylinder and the grooved cylinder ring on the left hand side. Boxes made by Francois Nicole were not stamped on the bedplate, sometimes the combs were stamped F Nicole. From 1821 to 1832 nineteen snuffboxes have been registered and eleven cartel boxes; after 1832 no more snuff boxes have been recorded. The manufacture of snuffboxes by Freres Nicole appears to have stopped after 1832, after which all boxes seem to have been of the cartel type including movements for clocks and automata.

The total number of boxes made from 1815 to 1840 would be about 19000 although the register holds only 122 so far recorded. In 1823 the ordinary comb of a two-air snuffbox had about 70 teeth and was 2.5 inches (6.5 cms) long. Larger one piece combs were being made at this time, but not many. In 1823 the larger comb represented only 7% of the total production. In 1826 the largest one-piece comb being manufactured was 8.5 inches (21.5 cms.) long. Looking at the above statistic, two cartel boxes and twenty-four snuffboxes, gives a similar percentage of comb production. Only greater exchange of information will help to better this result.

From 1815 to 1820 the output of musical movements by Freres Nicole was mainly to satisfy the demand for snuffboxes. This was due to the difficulty in producing the larger one-piece combs which would be required for the cartel box, the alternative was to use a sectional comb. In 1814 a larger one-piece comb was developed by Francois Lecoultre and this improvement was in general use by 1818. This coupled with the earlier invention of the spring damper by Francois Nicole allowed the manufacture of larger cartel musical boxes, and so from 1820 the cartel box was being made in small numbers. At the same time cartel boxes were being made by Freres Nicole, all of which had a serial number stamped on the front of the bedplate, a comb marked F Nicole and a bedplate stamped Freres Nicole on the top left hand

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*The total number of boxes made from 1815 to 1840 would be about 19000 although the register holds only 122 so far recorded.*

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corner (fig.10). Also at this time Francois Nicole was making a cartel box of similar design and this had cylinder lines both vertical and horizontal which had the effect of showing a small square pattern over the surface of the cylinder (fig1), the normal conventional cylinder

box had only vertical lines. The square pattern cylinders do have other build differences from the conventional boxes. Apart from the square pattern marks on the cylinder nearly all have a grooved ring fitted to the left hand side of the cylinder (fig.2). This method

has also been found on a box made by Falconnet This grooved ring locates onto a steel claw fitted to the top left hand side of the bedplate (fig.3). This arrangement controls the alignment of the cylinder and keeps it in register. At the end of each revolution there is a gap in the grooved ring (fig.4) which allows the cylinder to move to the next tune position; there are other differences which will be explained later when individual boxes are described in detail. The identity of the maker of some of these earlier square pattern cylinder boxes cannot always be authenticated as some do not have a name on the comb or any maker's mark or number on the bedplate or anywhere on the build. The early boxes, around 1820-1826, sometimes have F Nicole stamped on either the comb (fig.5) or on the governor cock (fig.6) or on both but sometimes no marks at all. Boxes after about 1827-1834 do have their combs stamped Franc' Nicole (fig.7) but never on the bedplate. Further differences between earlier and later boxes appear to be in their comb design. The earlier period boxes mostly seem to have four part combs (fig.8) comprising a bass section with around 4-6 teeth, a lower section of 90-100 teeth, then an upper section of 90-100 teeth and, finally, a small treble section with 6-10 teeth. From the data collected about musical boxes of this early type with square pattern cylinders most have the comb or governor cock marked F Nicole and others have no mark or stamp anywhere.

The information collected from private collections and sales catalogues throughout Europe and the USA shows that musical boxes with the four part combs fall into the period of 1820-1827. The music played and identified on some of these early boxes is of overtures and operatic airs composed in or before this period; none after 1827 have been found to date on these early boxes.

From about 1827-1834 the comb design changed, the four part comb was replaced with the two part comb (fig.9) for the larger boxes of cylinder length 12 inches and diameter 3 inches. This must

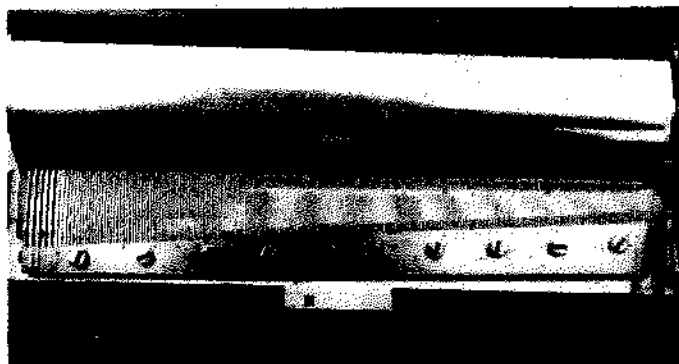


Fig. 8. Four part comb.

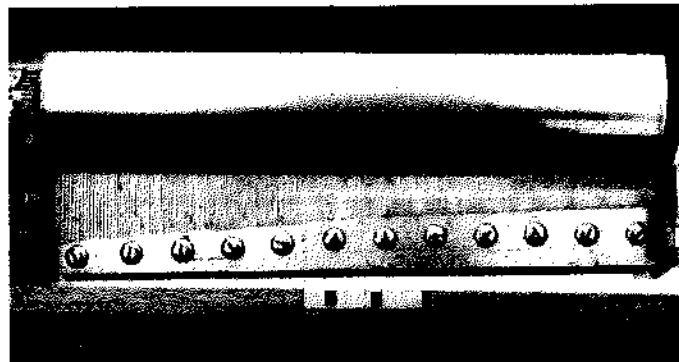


Fig. 9. Two part comb.

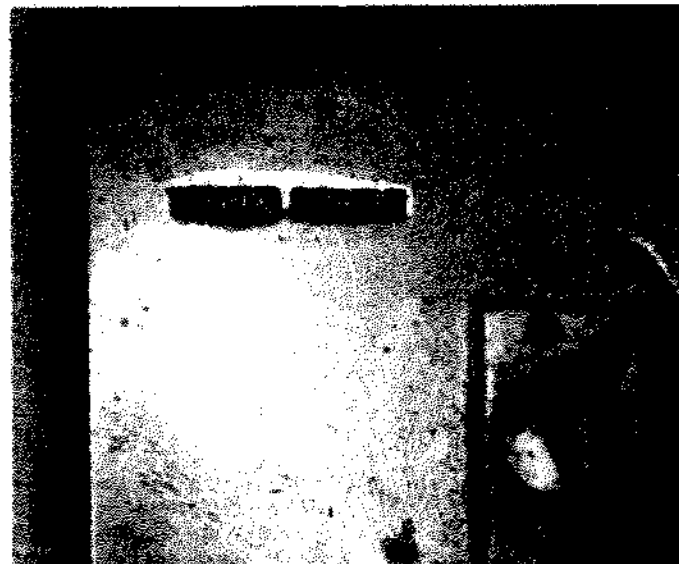


Fig. 10.

*The identity of the maker of some of these earlier square pattern cylinder boxes cannot always be authenticated...*



have been due to the improved development of comb technology. These larger boxes also played early Rossini and Mozart overtures but were often mixed with later ones by Auber or Mayerbeer dated 1830-1831, so a dating system for

overtures or operatic airs of "not before" can be used. With these later boxes the comb was signed Francis Nicole (fig.7); there were also smaller movements made in this period for clock bases and smaller cartel boxes.

### Different types of square pattern cylinder boxes

Over the past ten years a survey on the square pattern cylinder boxes made by Francois Nicole has been carried out. A total of twenty-four boxes have been found in private collections in Europe, UK and USA

The next series of boxes to be described are all of the square pattern cylinder type. They range from the early simple fruitwood cased ones with a four-section comb through to the later two-section comb and larger cylinders.

The two early boxes found in the survey have simple fruitwood cases with the usual 3 control levers protruding from the left hand side of the case; they both have a four section comb, square pattern cylinder and a grooved ring on the left hand side (fig.2). Box 1 plays 6 operatic airs by Rossini, its comb has a name stamp F Nicole and from the information supplied by the owner no other number or bedplate mark. Box 2 plays two overtures by Rossini, La Gazza Ladra parts 1 and 2 and Adelaida di Borgogna. This box has no comb name stamp, no numbers or maker's marks. Both boxes have the dot and X tooth marks at the tip end of each tooth (fig.14). The date of manufacture would be about 1820/1822. The two overtures were first performed in 1817 and the operatic airs came from two operas, Armida and Othello, first performed in 1817 and 1816.

The next three boxes are a little later in the date of manufacture, about 1824-1826. The case design is of a better quality, two of them (boxes 3 and 4) being made of mahogany with brass furniture and control panel (fig.15), the third one (box 5) is contained in a clock case. Boxes 3 and 4 have similar case design, all three boxes having a similar movement build comprising a 10inch x 2.5 inch cylinder marked with 98 horizontal lines plus a tune gap of 2 lines, four section comb with 210 teeth marked with dot and cross on the tooth tips. Box 3 plays Der Freischutz by Weber first performed in 1821 and L Italiana in Algeri first performed in 1813. Der Freischutz is played on two full turns of the cylinder and the L Italiana in Algeri on one turn of the cylinder.

*This box has no comb name stamp, no numbers or maker's marks.*



Fig. 11.

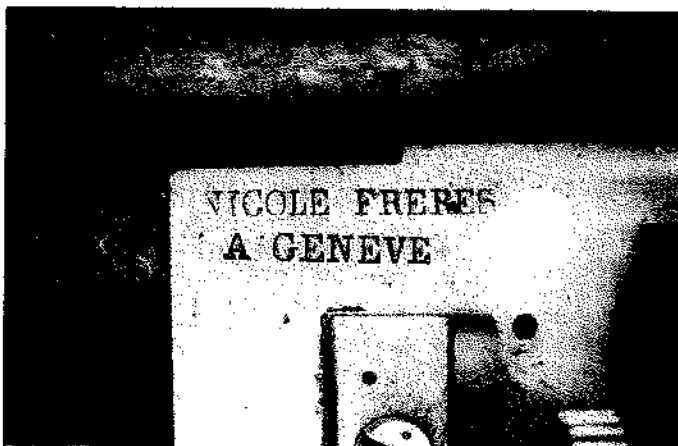


Fig. 12.

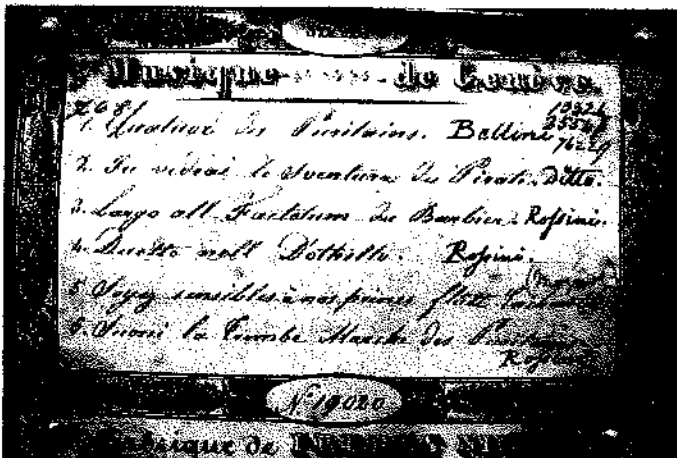


Fig. 13.

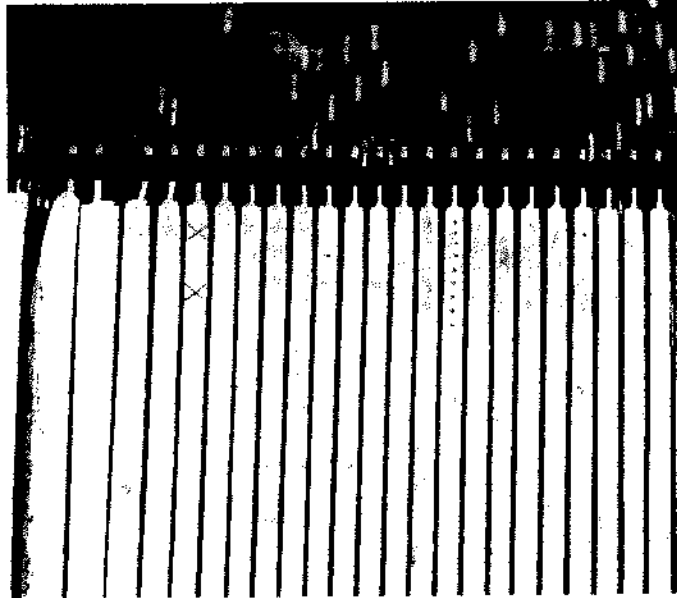


Fig. 14. Dot and x tooth marking.



Fig. 15. Control panel.

*The unusual method of playing the two overtures in box 3 is often found in early Francois Nicole boxes.*

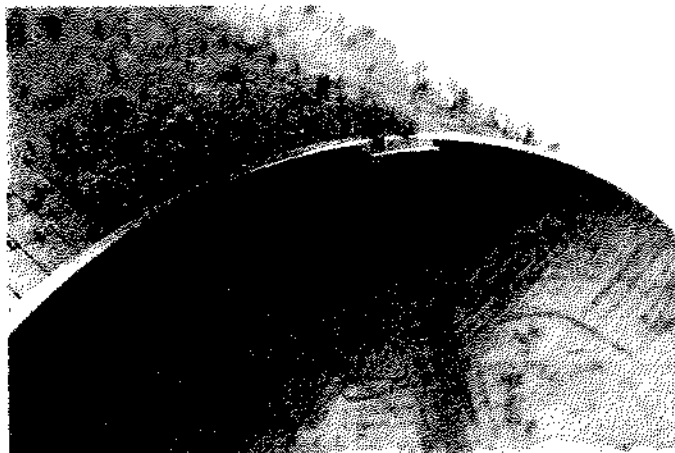


Fig. 16. Extra pin.

The unusual method of playing the two overtures in box 3 is often found in early Francois Nicole boxes. The first tune pinned on the cylinder is the last part of Der Freischutz, the second tune is L. Italiana in Algeri and the third tune is the first part of Der Freischutz which completes the full programme on three complete turns of the cylinder. Boxes 4 and 5 play a similar programme which includes L Italiana in Algeri, Il Barbiere di Siviglia and Der Freischutz; each overture is played on one complete turn of the cylinder. With this group of boxes care must be taken when the movement is removed from the case as there is no support for the bedplate; therefore if the movement is put down on a bench the complete movement rests on the underside of the cylinder. This can obviously cause damage to the cylinder pins.

From about 1827 to 1835 some larger boxes were made with cylinders 12 inch x 3 inches, with the comb constructed in two parts (fig.9) with a total of 246 teeth or more in some cases. Box 6 has a cylinder of 12 inch x 3.25 inches marked with 114 horizontal lines with a tune gap equal to 3 lines. It has a two part comb, 115 teeth in the lower section and 131 teeth in the upper section, giving a total of 246 teeth. With this type of comb every tenth tooth is marked with a dot on the bottom of the tooth (fig.7). This type of later comb is always signed Franco Nicole. This particular box plays two overtures and a waltz, Fra Diavolo by Auber 1830 on one and a half turns of the cylinder, Robert le Diable by Meyerbeer 1831 on one full turn of the cylinder, and du Duc de Reichstadt by Straus on half a turn of the cylinder. On this box the second instant stop control lever is fitted to the left hand side of the case.

There are throughout the manufacturing period a number of movements that have been fitted into clock bases; they seem to cover the full build range. They all have the usual features associated with Francois Nicole, square pattern cylinder, fine combs in two or four part construction, but no

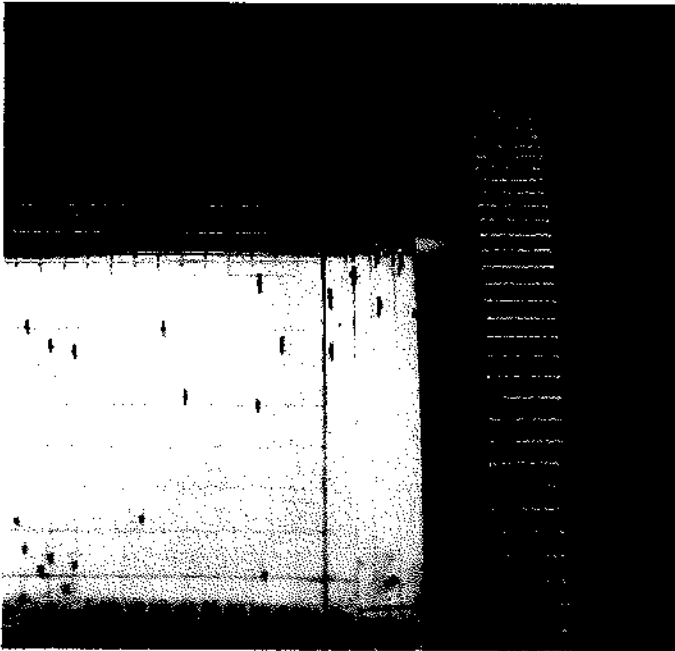


Fig. 17. Extra pins in end cap.

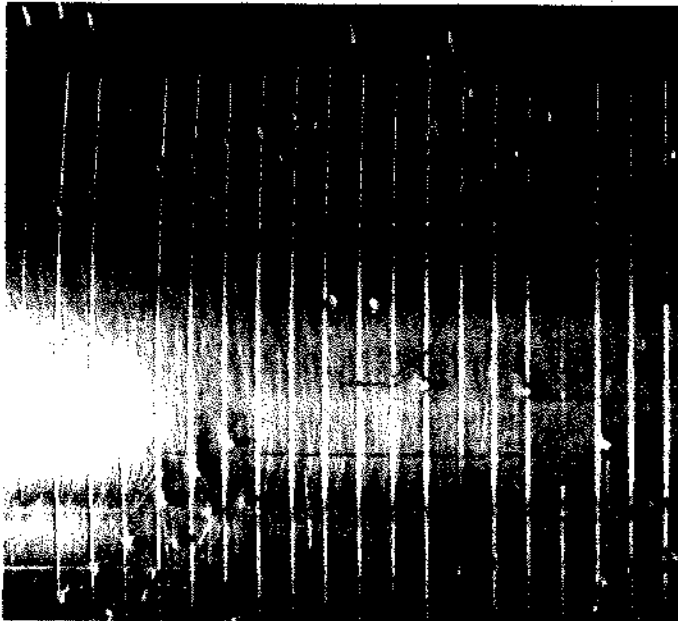


Fig. 18. Registration dots.

second instant stop is fitted to these movements. Also on some movements the grooved ring on the left hand side of the cylinder is missing.

There are a few more build/design features peculiar to Francois Nicole movements which are worth noting:

1. A small extension at the end of the cylinder which is made to

accommodate just one pin (fig.16) so that this can be used in the musical arrangement when the pinning of the cylinder is undertaken.

2. Often a few extra cylinder pins are fitted to cylinder end cap (fig.17).

3. There are no normal registration dots along the cylinder tune gap, often just two dots in the centre

of the cylinder (fig.18) and a single dot on the far left of the cylinder.

4. Early boxes have the tooth tips marked with a cross and dot symbol (fig.14).

5. The later two part combs have every tenth tooth marked with a single dot at the base of the tooth (fig.7).

6. The second instant stop is often fitted to the right hand side key compartment and to the left hand side of the case in later boxes. This second instant stop is used to lock off the movement so that when the lid on the case is locked, the external start lever cannot start the movement (fig.19).

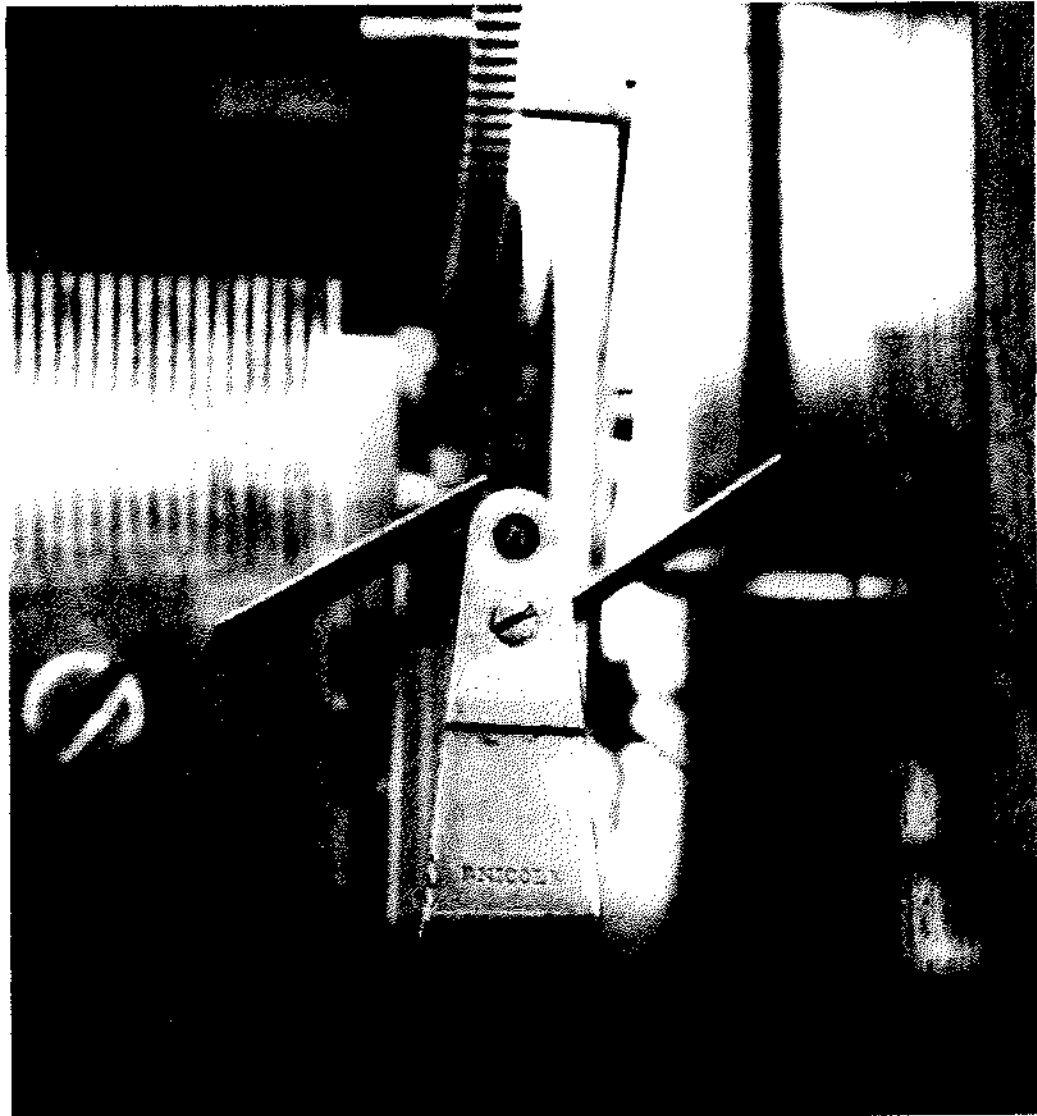
7. Early boxes have a four-part comb sometimes signed F Nicole (fig.8) but sometimes no signature. Later boxes with the two part combs are always signed Francois Nicole (fig.9).

8. No Francois Nicole box movements to date have been found with a bedplate maker's stamp.

All of the above information is based on a survey of 24 Francois Nicole squared pattern cylinder boxes discovered so far; as more boxes are located some of these statements may need to be revised.

The limited information on Francois Nicole appears to show that the four-part comb with laminated base teeth do seem to be earlier. Chapuis quotes from a trade show report in 1828, "Francois Nicole had resumed making larger boxes with up to 244 teeth and more".

It would appear that the earlier boxes all had three or four part laminated combs, some signed F Nicole and others not signed at all. From the data so far collected from 24 Francois Nicole boxes found to date there does not seem to be an obvious numerical numbering system. Occasionally numbers are stamped on the bedplate but not necessarily, but all of the boxes do have the square pattern cylinder marks, which could be considered as a typical Francois Nicole trademark. After 1827/28 all combs are stamped Francois Nicole; at this time Francois Nicole would be 63 years old and nearing the end of his musical box production.



After 1835 no other square pattern cylinder boxes were made...

Fig. 19. Movement locking lever.

### Conclusions

From the information collected certain facts start to appear:

- When a cylinder box movement has a square pattern cylinder with either the comb or the governor cock, or both, marked F Nicole then it is more than likely to have been made by Francois Nicole. In Geneva in the early 19th century, the custom was to put the initial of the Christian name first, before the family name. Using all the data collected from private collections and the MBSGB register it can be seen that from 1820 to 1834 Frere Nicole were producing similar cartel boxes to Francois Nicole

except that the Frere Nicole boxes only had normal vertical cylinder lines. Also their boxes all had a name stamp of Frere Nicole on the top left hand corner of the bedplate (fig.10) and a serial number stamped on the front of the bedplate (fig.11). The serial numbers follow in sequence the manufacture of boxes.

- From all of the twenty four boxes so far located made by Francois Nicole no bedplate stamp has ever been found and there does not appear to be a dedicated serial number system. There are numbers on some boxes

either on the bedplate or the spring barrel case, other boxes have no numbers or marks at all, but all the boxes do have a square pattern cylinder. Perhaps these boxes were special order boxes. The information collected on the comb build seems to indicate that the early square pattern cylinder boxes fall into approximately two groups. The earlier group have four piece combs made up of a small base section, containing four to six teeth, a lower section of ninety to a hundred teeth, an upper section of ninety to a hundred teeth and a treble section of six to ten teeth. These were

made from about 1820 until about 1826; the combs are sometimes signed F Nicole but not always. In 1826/1827 larger two-piece combs started to be used with about one hundred and twenty teeth in each section; these combs are nearly always stamped Francis Nicole. As yet no convincing explanation has been put forward to give a reason for the square patterning of the cylinder. The general view is that it could have been a trademark. Francois Nicole seems to have been the only maker to have used this method of cylinder marking. After 1835 no other square pattern cylinder boxes were made, apart from one which has so far been found with a comb marked Raymond Nicole and a square pattern cylinder but no number on the bedplate or any part of the movement. This is the only one of this type to have been discovered with this type of cylinder. The possible explanation for this could be a combined build when Francois Nicole retired; it may have been partly built by Francois and the comb work finished by Raymond Nicole. They both worked in the same building, Raymond Nicole being the son-in-law of Francois.

- From the MBSGB register all Raymond Nicole boxes have serial numbers, starting at 99 and continuing through to 786. Until this box was discovered only Francois Nicole boxes existed with square pattern cylinders.

- The firm Freres Nicole started around 1815, but whether it was Pierre Moise Nicole and David Eile Nicole or Francois and David Nicole who were the original Freres Nicole is still open to debate. From the evidence it seems more likely that Francois and David Nicole were the original Freres Nicole; they had a lot of skill and experience in musical box manufacture, including comb work and also the capital to set up the business. Due to the family connection it is possible that the second cousins Pierre Moise and David Eile joined the firm about 1820, then when David Nicole died about

1830 and Francois retired in 1834 the firm was passed on to the younger brothers.

In 1815 Francois and David Nicole would have been 49 and 51 years of age. 1815 was early for the manufacture of cartell boxes with single piece combs, as the main output at that time was snuffboxes. Both brothers had the experience in manufacturing musical movements; David was involved in comb manufacture and Francois had been involved in musical box manufacture and development, being responsible for the introduction of the steel spring damper in 1814.

Francois is also thought to have been the first to use cement filling in the cylinder.

At the same time David Eile and Pierre Moise Nicole (thought to be second cousins of Francois and David Nicole) were 23 and 28 years of age and it may have been possible that the younger brothers were employed by the older brothers. From the records in Geneva we know that there was a close relationship between the families of musical box makers.

About 1834 Francois Nicole retired, he would have been 68 years old. David, his elder brother is thought to have died about 1830. After 1834 changes in the firm began to take place. After the retirement of Francois Nicole no further square pattern cylinder boxes were made, the manufacture of snuffbox movements by Freres Nicole stopped in 1833.

A musical box made in 1835, recorded in the MBSGB register, has a comb marked Nicole Freres and the tune card is Freres Nicole. A movement made in 1837 is marked on the bedplate Nicole Freres A Geneve instead of Freres Nicole. Often at this time the combs are marked F Nicole, in fact, some movements with serial numbers in the 21000-24000 range still have F Nicole combs fitted which means that this type of comb was still being used up until 1844. This could possibly be the using up of old combs from Francois Nicole's association with the firm.

Francois Nicole died on

November 19th 1849 aged 83 years. His death certificate describes him as being "A gentleman of independent means". In the year 1838 some tune cards are still marked Freres Nicole and some Nicole Freres, for example, a six-air box, serial number 19020, date 1839, has a tune card marked Freres Nicole (fig.13) a bedplate stamped Nicole Freres A Geneve (fig.12) and a comb marked F Nicole. It was not until about 1844 that all boxes have Nicole Freres on the tune card, bedplate and comb.

All the statistics used for this article are based on a survey of a small number of known square pattern cylinder boxes by Francois Nicole in private collections and museums throughout Europe and the USA. Also details from 122 recorded boxes by Freres Nicole and Nicole Freres listed in the MBSGB Register with dates from 1815 to 1840. The choice of whether Francois and David Nicole or David Eile and Pierre Moise Nicole were the original brothers to set up the firm of Freres Nicole or later known as Nicole Freres is open for debate. Perhaps this article will generate some interest and encourage more collectors to exchange information about their boxes and any relevant ephemera. ■

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