

Necessaires

by Marguerite Fabel

Mechanical music takes on many forms and styles. I have found one of the most fascinating of all to be the necessaire. (The name necessaire is derived from necessaire de reparations — necessary repair kit.) Collecting music boxes is my husband, Clarence's hobby, but since I usually am with him to look for them, and since we occasionally find a necessaire, I decided they would be a good item for me to collect.

Some necessaires are very simple, as depicted in Photo 1. This one has an inlaid case with bone-handled sewing implements, as seen in Photo 1a. The musical unit is 3" long with a five-tooth-per-section comb and plays two tunes. There is no identification mark, which is typical of the necessaires in our collection. Most necessaires have a thimble, scissors, bodkin, needle case and embroidery punch. There can be other items such as bobbins, a small bottle containing a white powder (I wonder if this was originally smelling salts in case you pricked a finger while sewing?), button hook, crochet hook, knife and needle threader.

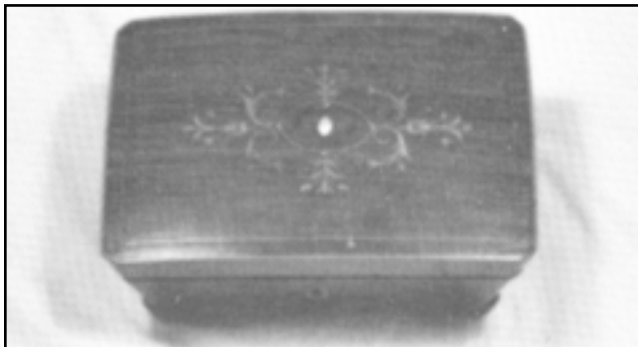


Photo 1 above. A "simple" necessaire.

Photo 1a to the right. The inlaid case with bonehandled implements



There are also necessaires with ivory, mother-of-pearl trimmed with gold, silver steel and silver implements. All early necessaires seem to have the same type five-tooth-per-section musical unit with two tunes. Some cases had a domed top as in Photo 2,

or a nice glass cover over the musical unit as shown in Photo 2a. Others had a paper-covered tin for the top cover. The one in Photo 2b is made of mahogany with mother-of-pearl implements trimmed with gold. The start and stop levers for this box are on the bottom.

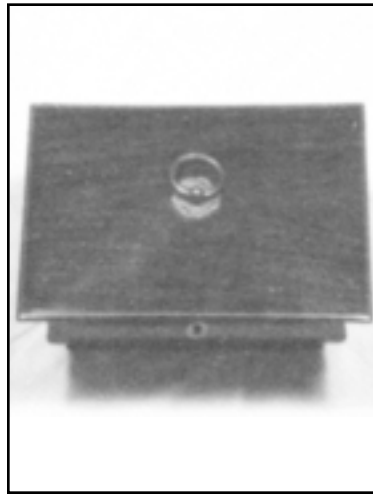


Photo 2 left. A domed case.

Photo 2a right. Showing the glass cover.



Photo 2b. Mother-of-pearl trimmed with gold.

The necessaire in Photo 3 is a light-colored, rectangular, wooden box, trimmed with brown wood and marquises. It contains ivory implements decorated with painted flowers and a gold thimble on which is inscribed "Laura" (See Photo 3a). The levers for this box are at the back.

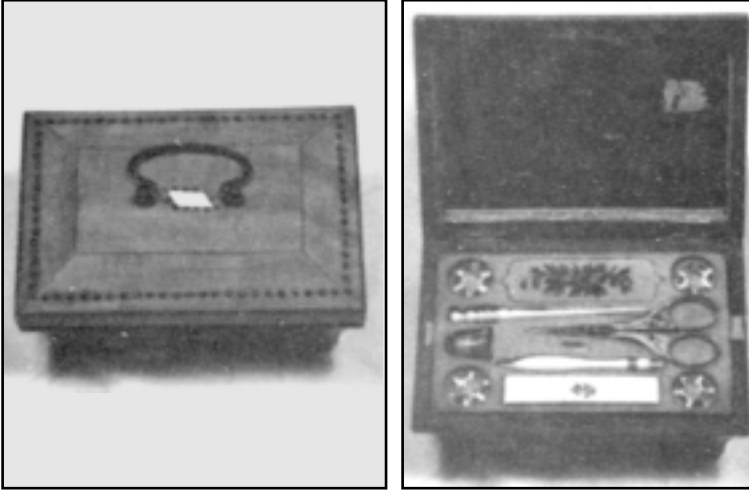


Photo 3 left. An inlaid domed case.
Photo 3a right. A gold thimble inscribed "Laura."

The large necessaire in Photo 4 is 9 1/2" x 6 1/4" and has a little plaque with "Souvenir" inscribed on it. An unusual feature of this box is a round, cut-glass bottle (Photo 4a) with a small telescope in the center. This has mother-of-pearl, gold-trimmed implements. It also has a paper-covered tin cover, and the start and stop levers are in the back (Photo 4b). On the bottom of the case is a paper label with the inscription: "L.E. Kesul, Faiseur de Toutes, Socles de Marchandises, en Maroquin, Cassettes de Voyage -- A, St. Petersburg." (L.E. Kesul, Maker of all, Merchandise Stands, in Morocco leather, Traveling Cases -- At St. Petersburg.) This has marquise trim on the corners and edges.

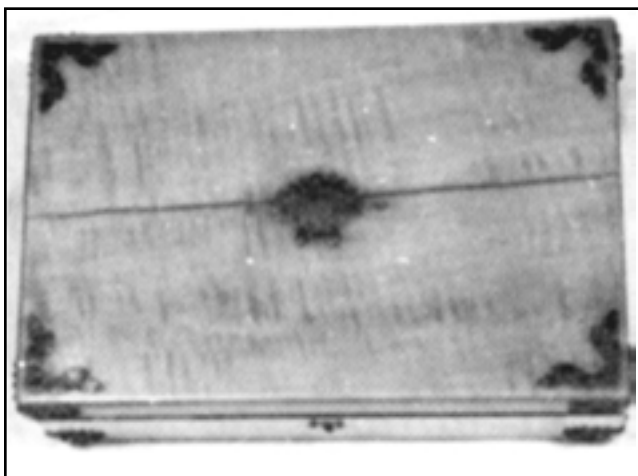


Photo 4. A large version - 9 1/2" x 6 1/4".



Photo 4a left. The round, cut-glass bottle with a telescope in the center. **Photo 4b right. Open view.**

The largest and most elaborate box is 8 1/4" x 12" with marquise trim (Photo 5). This is probably a personal traveling case. It has the sewing implements in the top tray, and they are lavishly decorated in silver (Photo 5a). There are two round bottles with silver tops, a silver eye cup and a silver funnel in the

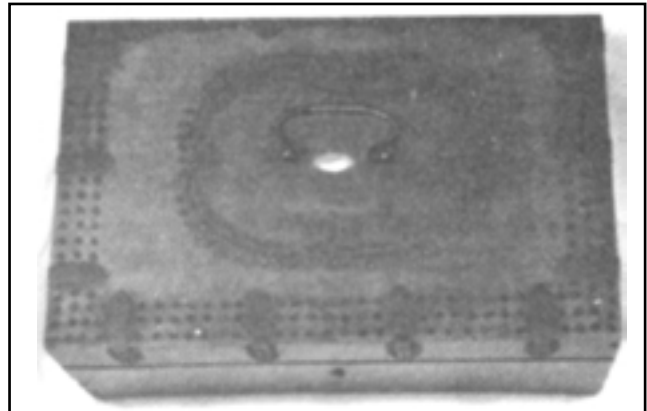


Photo 5. The largest, 8 1/4" x 12".



Photo 5a. The silver sewing implements.

back of the box (Photo 5b). The lower tray has a comb, scissors, toothbrush, bodkin, bobbins and a needle punch (Photo 5c). The mirror in the lid can be lifted out and there is a pocket behind this for storing paper and such stationery.



Photo 5b. The silver toiletry implements.



Photo 5c. An open view of the movement.

Another rather common type of necessaire is the baby grand piano style, as seen in Photo 6. I have seen these with ivory and with mother-of-pearl implements (Photo 6a). I have also seen a necessaire with automata (little figures that moved as the music played).

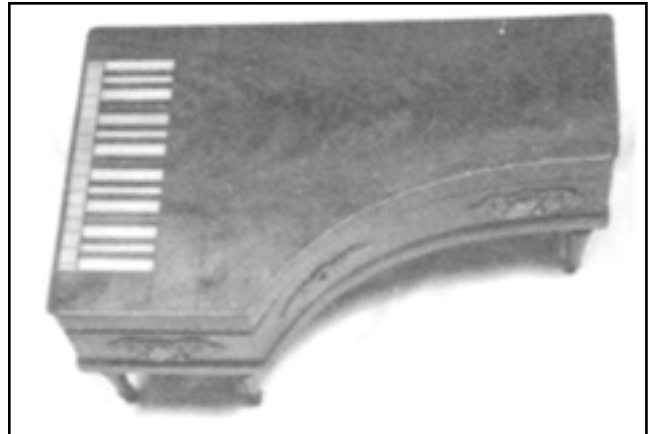


Photo 6. A rather common type in the form of a piano.



Photo 6a. Ivory and Mother-of-pearl implements.

Necessaires are nice items and add a quality dimension to a collection of mechanical music. Even if some of the implements are missing, do not hesitate to purchase one if the musical unit is there. You can find sewing implements at antique shows and in antique shops.

Editor's Notes: This article was written by one of our founding members, Marguerite Fabel and published in the Autumn "Technical Journal" 1984.

Marguerite shared her knowledge and love of these exquisite pieces. Following in her footsteps, Pamela Young writes a very well researched article, "Traveling In Style" which was published in "Mechanical Music" Spring 2004.

