

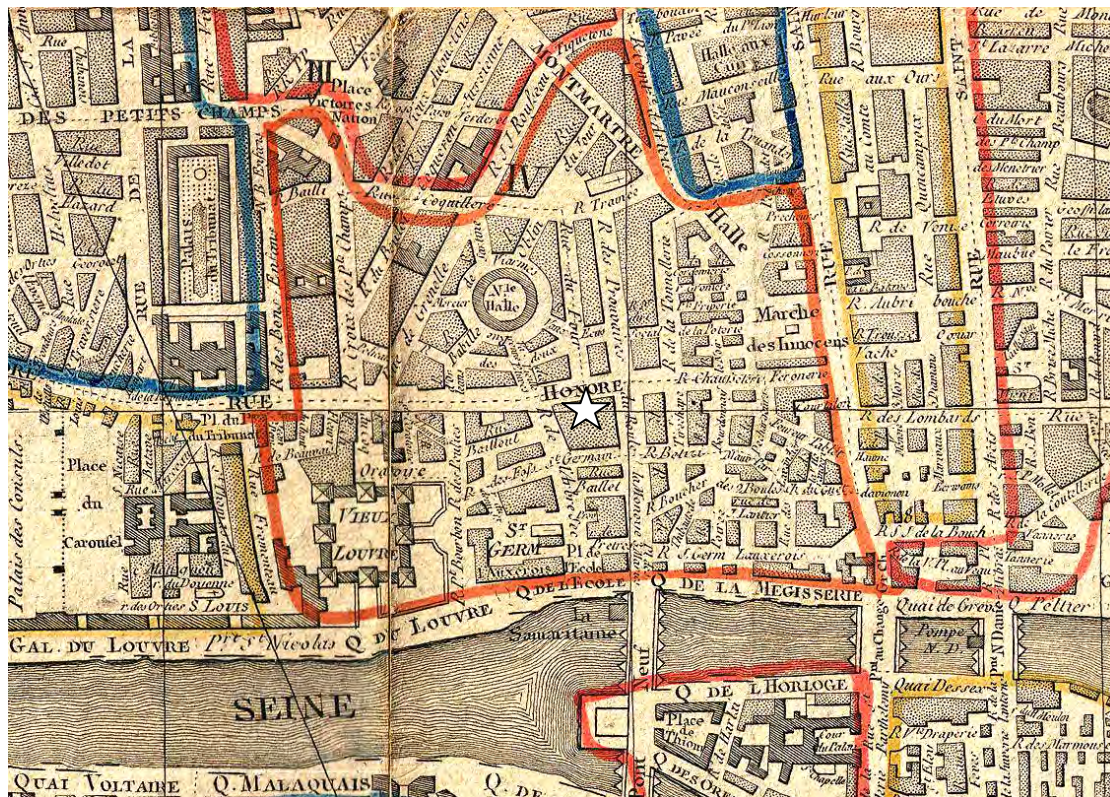
Short Biography of P. G. Dackweiller – Thomas Strange, Dec. 3, 2012

Paul Guillaume Dackweiller was born in the diocese of Coloniensis, Ubach Germany, in 1750 and baptized on August 16th of that year. His father was Guillaume François Dackweiller (died Ubach Nov. 23, 1764) and mother was Agnes Hermans Dackweiller, along with two older sisters. His father was a ploughman (farmer) by profession, and strong evidence exists that Paul was apprenticed to a fine cabinet maker or joiner rather than continue the farming tradition.

He immigrated to Paris in 1783, becoming an apprentice/associate of Jean Kilien (Johannes Kilianus) Mercken, with a shop on rue du Chantre. Mercken was also from Ubach, and his father had been a farmer as well. With only seven years separating them, it is possible and even likely, given the small size of Ubach, that the young Dackweiller knew Mercken prior to Mercken's leaving for Paris around 1770. If Dackweiller entered the same shop in Ubach as Mercken, at age 12 which was usual for starting an apprentice, Mercken would have been 19 and completing his apprenticeship, and positioned in the shop such that he would have been a strong influence on young Paul. Dackweiller's 1789 pianoforte nameboard reads:

Dackweiller / Éleve du Sr. Mercken, Parisiis 1789 / Rue Saint-Honoré en face des pilliers des halles / N° 692

(Dackweiller / Student of Mercken. Paris 1789 / Rue Saint-Honoré on the ground floor facing the Market / {street number} 692)



Likely location Dackweiller. Map of 1789.

This reflects Dackweiller's need to stress the student/master relationship he seems to have felt towards Mercken. The address is near the great market in downtown Paris, on the same side of the street as the Louvre and a few blocks down, as we can see in the map above, and a period view of the general scene is found below.



He married, Agathe Vauthelin (b. Mar. 16, 1753 in Haute-Marne, France, daughter of Jean Vauthelin and Anne Cyrot) who was a neighbor - resident of the rue du Chantre, on Oct. 21 1783 in the church St Germain l'Auxerrois which was in the neighborhood where they lived and worked.

As stated earlier, the family lived and operated their shop at 692 Rue St. Honoré, on the ground floor (Piliers), across from the Halles (main market). The address had changed to 320 Rue St. Honoré in 1798/99, as a result of renumbering of streets at the time.

Dackweiller was allowed into the 'Community of Tabletiers (fine cabinet makers), Violin makers and Fan makers' {Tabletiers, Luthiers et Eventailistes de la Commune de Paris. The exact phrase is useful to find the repertories, etc., as luthiers in those days did not mean only violin makers but any instrument maker} in 1787, indicating that he had achieved master class skill, and signaling that he may have had experience with making keyboard instruments, and certainly fine cabinet making before coming to Paris, given the speed at which he is admitted to the guild. He would now be able to make his own cases for pianofortes legally, rather than have them made by other guild craftsmen. Erard had violated this rule in 1785 by making his own cabinets for square pianofortes outside of obtaining guild recognition, which landed him in prison and required intervention by Marie-Antoinette and Louis 16th with a royal pardon.

There were two ways of being allowed to open a shop, either you were accepted in the “corporation” (rarely before the age of 30 according to the many examples researched) or you had a brevet from the King or some noble family (in the case of Erard it was the Duc de Villeroy in the early days, and then Royal protection from 1785 onwards)

They had at least six children : (*Weber has two more : Antoine and Louis-Joseph but with no further indications about dates*)

- A first child, Paul-François (died in infancy) born on February 11, 1786
- Pierre-Honore, born June 9, 1787 (Archives de Paris 5MI1/72), married Angélique Marie Antoinette Joséphine des Gallois de La Tour on September 8, 1836 in the 1st district of Paris (Archives de Paris 5MI1/2091). Pierre Honore became captain in the Napoleonic armies, a member of the Legion of Honour, and was with Napoleon at most of the major battles.
- Agathe Emilie (married Alexis Chamerovzow, with a daughter born on April 6, 1815)
- Joséphine Antoinette (Marie Angélique) married André Hippolyte Lemonnier on August 26, 1839 in Batignolles (Archives de Paris. 5MI1/2110)
- Marie Antoinette (*Weber has Marie-Antoine ??? a boy*) , born on September 4, 1793 (Archives de Paris. 5MI1/86)
- Cecile Emilie Constance (another record identifies this as individual as Jean-Henry, but Cecile was wed 10/4/1815 so far more likely to be the correct child), born on November 17, 1798

Agathe Dackweiller did not survive long after the birth of Cecile, and died on February 1, 1799 in the 7th old district of Paris (Archives de Paris. 5MI1/1143).

Dackweiller married a second time to Agathe Louise Marguerite Langlois (b.1758), éventailiste (fan maker), and widow of Louis-Charles Bénard, harpsichord maker, on June 16, 1800. In the last years of his life, because of his remarriage, Dackweiller has as an address the N° 306, rue Beaubourg (the “bride’s house”, which Dackweiller has now married into, and which allowed him to use Bénard’s tools and etc.). They had a child, Pierre-Louis, born in June 1801, but a few months later Paul Guillaume died on September 13, 1801 under mysterious circumstances, since his body is deposited with the Mortuary after being fished out in the Seine, the cause of death determined to have been drowning.* (Archives de Paris 5MI1/1148).

* Usually one's corpse was brought to the morgue when the death occurred outdoors, was a suicide, accidental death on the street with no immediate identification, etc. As Dackweiller was a long time resident in Paris with an active business, his removal to the Morgue suggests a death out of the usual course, at age 51, and was possibly a murder or suicide, though one cannot rule out an accident - for instance possibly drunk and so fell into the Seine (two other piano makers who drowned are documented, and Tobias Schmidt was famous for being a drunkard!) He was identified within the same day and was buried on the 27th Sept, 1801.

From the remaining instruments:

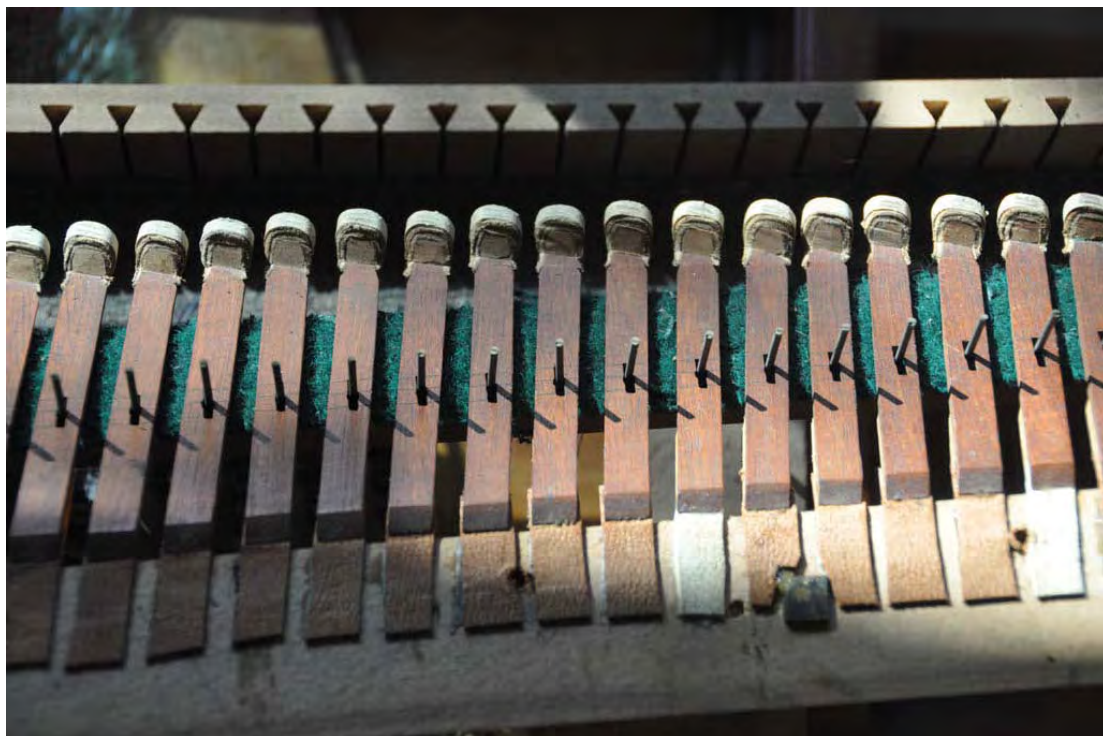
Two surviving Dackweiller pianos are known as of November 2012, one in the south of France (owned by Jean-Claude Gisclard, castle of St Bauzille Bessan road, near Béziers) and one in the USA in South Carolina.



Courtesy of Jean-Claude Gisclard, dated 1789



Piano in SC, USA, dated 1790



An examination of the piano in SC gives the following: We can make out some construction details immediately; we have a rear guided rack for the key levers, small hammers on straight shanks similar to the earliest square pianos, and an overall size close to English pianos dating to ~1770, with a length of 1480 mm.

The Clinkscale Early Piano Database reads:

Marks

"Dackweiller Parisiis, Fecit A(nn)o 1790 / Rue Saint Honore', en face de Pilier's des Halles / No 692" in ink on nameboard

Where Made (Country/Province/City) - France/Paris

Serial Number - none

Keyboard:

Compass

FF-f3

Octaves

5 oct.

Naturals

Ivory

Sharps

Ebony

3-Octave Measure (average)

484 mm

Present Owners (unstructured)

US/SC/Easley: Thomas Strange

Present Location

US/SC/Easley

Former Owners

US/CT/New Canaan: W. Kerner

Case

Mahogany with stringing in diagonal alternating stained fruitwood and holly with thin holly lines above and below, nameboard in mahogany and figured sycamore, with the name in an oval inlay of boxwood, on 4 turned and fluted legs with cast brass bottom tips but no casters. Pedal arrangement at rear left leg detaches and is supported by leg.

Length

1480 mm

Width

523 mm

Depth

190 mm

Height

782 mm

Strings/Scale

Strings

Bichord throughout

Scale C2

321

Mechanical Description

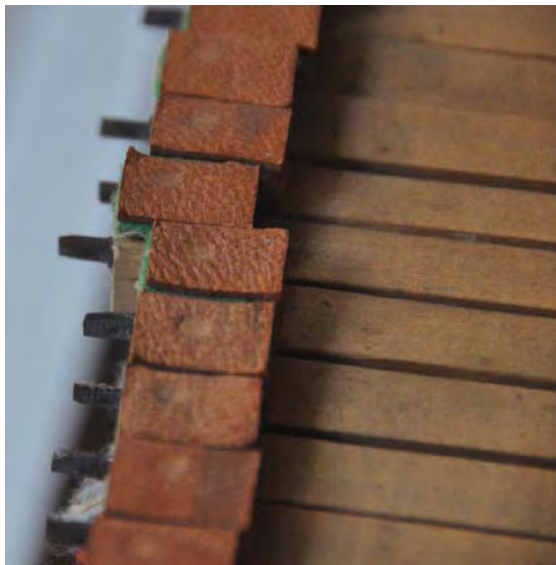
Action

English single. Keylevers use rear guided rack, action frame is in two pieces to allow easier removal from front. Overhead dampers in rack with brass spring tension rather than whalebone. Dampers are 'split flag' type.

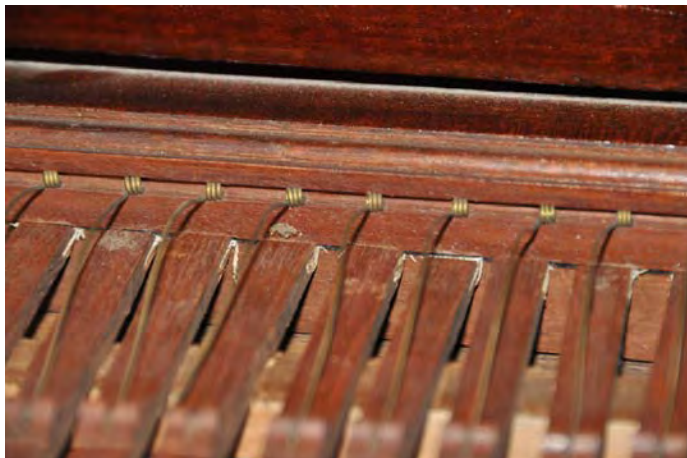
Pedals

2: buff stop, dampers

Overall, the construction is extremely neat and orderly. The action works quite smoothly in the rack, and the use of a V cut slot minimizes the amount of rubbing from the hardwood slips, set into the tail of each key lever, against the rack.



Key lever tails showing the hardwood slips to guide each key



Springs over dampers for tensioning the damper levers, similar to Mercken



Damper heads



The action frame is intricately cut compared to period English pianos.



Pedal trap work below.

A diagonal wooden brace was added at some point to correct case warping, and the wrest plank has broken free on the interior, which must be corrected.

The conclusion of the preliminary examination is that the workmanship exhibited in the piano is of a very high order, and that Dackweiller had earned the title of master craftsman. The design is for a piano that was perhaps in vogue in the UK some 10 years earlier, but a Garka and a Houston piano from 1788, and the early 1790s and made in London were of similar proportions. Therefore, while Broadwood and Longman and Broderip were building larger pianos with more soundboard and deeper actions using heavier hammers, this type of piano was still current in both Paris and London even as late as 1790.

Thanks to **Didier Girard**, assisted by **Claude Lebrun** and his genealogy team “*éclat de bois*” in cooperation with research by **J.F. and M.C. Weber**, published in “J.K. Mercken: Premier Facteur Parisien De Forte-Piano”, Flute de Pan, 1986