

Sewing Kit/ Music Box

c. 1825

Mahogany, satinwood, ebony, brass, mother of pearl, ivory, fabric, other metals

JJ.1958.38



This unique piano-shaped sewing kit and music box was made in France around 1825. Crafted mostly from mahogany, the top of the box has inlaid keys that are made from mother-of-pearl, or Nacre; a material found in the inner shell of some mollusks, but mostly from outer shell layers of pearls. The legs are made of ebony with ivory feet.

Some similar boxes have interior lids that were mirrored but ours is solid and fabric covered. These objects are also known as a necessaire, or a small case for holding personal items. This box contains several ladies' sewing items; today we only have the needle case, hook crochet bodkin, awl and the handles of the scissors, but it would have originally had a thimble, a round winder, 2 matching reels, and a crystal bottle (for rose water/perfume) as well.

It is also a music box; there are two keyholes on the side of the piano and the mechanisms lie beneath the fabric tray. To the right is a lock and to the left is another keyhole, which was used to wind up the motors. After being wound with a key, the box would then play for a set period of time. The key fits through the hole and onto a lever which is then wound; when released, the small motors would unwind and the cylinder (or disc) would turn. Music boxes made sound by having a set of pins on a revolving disc, or a cylinder, that would pluck the teeth of a steel comb which hung over the disc/cylinder. It would have a very similar look to a 20th century record player, with the pin making sound by contacting grooves on the record itself.

The maker of the object and how it came into the possession of the Jay family is unknown.