



Vox Temporis *Letters to the Editor*

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Zenith case used by others

In his article on Zenith watches in the April 2010 *W&C Bulletin*, Bruce Shawkey describes the watch illustrated in Figures 5A-5D as "one of the most amazing timepieces I have ever seen."

This watch was of particular interest to me as I have a similar cased watch that belonged to my father, who purchased it in the 1930s in Malaya, where he worked on the rubber plantations. Until I had seen this article I had neither seen another one nor an illustration.

The double case of my watch appears to be identical in design to the one illustrated in the article, except that the outer case is of 18 kt. gold and the inner silver.

Bruce wrote that he believes makers other than Zenith may have used this style of case around the same time, which is the difference between my watch and the one illustrated. My movement is a 16-jewel Vulcain Chronometre. As far as I am aware this is the original movement to the case and the watch is as purchased new.

—Neil Tidmus (UK)



A very rare 1920s Zenith housed in a 14 kt. two-section case, shown as Figures 5A and 5D in the April 2010 Wristwatches column.



George Hoff Sr., 1750-1800, "speaks" in 1985

No, this is not a tale of the supernatural. It is a tale of a spine-tingling experience, the kind that only happens once in a lifetime. And it happened to me ... George Hoff Sr. told me something that he had not told anybody else.

He did not know my name. He did not know when I would get his message but he was fairly sure that sometime in the distant future a specific person would receive his communication.

He decided that he would com-

municate with the person who performed a specific task.

Lucky for me, I was that person.

In 1985 I was approached by a direct descendant of the Hoff family. The family tallcase clock needed attention. We were told that it had always been in the family because it was George Sr.'s personal clock.

The 8-day brass movement with lantern pinions shows the German heritage of George Hoff, who came to America in 1750 and settled in Lancaster, PA.

The brass dial with applied chapter ring shows the engraved inscription:

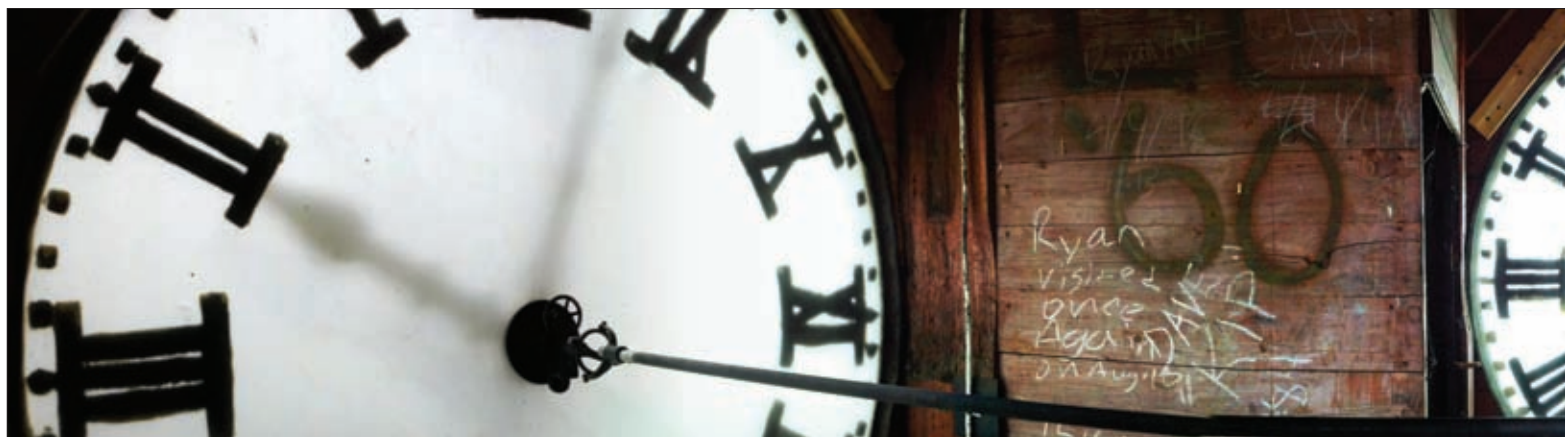
*George Hoff Sr.,
Lancaster.*

The hammered-brass dial plate was very thin compared with more common brass dials.

The chapter ring was of regular thickness, but some 200 years of polishing had removed all of the silver. The owner only knew the clock with the tarnished brassy chapter ring and preferred to keep it that way.

We took the movement, the weights, and the pendulum home to perform the requested complete restoration of the movement.

Before it was finished, our client called and told me that she had



changed her mind about the chapter ring after doing some research. Would I please resilver it using the silver oxide method that I had told her about?

I finished the movement and set it to running before I started the dial work. My initial examination of the dial showed all indications that the dial had never been disassembled. It took quite a bit of effort to remove the four pins that secured the chapter ring without making some ugly scratch marks. It appeared that they had never been removed before.

I turned the dial over and started to lift the chapter ring but it stuck to the dial plate. I had to carefully pry it loose. After I lifted the chapter ring from the dial plate, I was staring at a nicely engraved cartouche that contained the date 1777. It was located under about the II.

I felt like I was in a twilight zone. George Hoff Sr. was telling *me* when he made this clock. If he wanted the year of manufacture to be common knowledge, he would have engraved it below Lancaster. Instead, he hid that information, to be found sometime in the future, by the first clockmaker who removed the chapter ring.

I still wonder why I was the chosen one to find it. Was it random? I would have missed it if the owner would not have changed her mind.

Our client was pleased to learn what I had found but clearly without the thrill that I experienced.

I gave her a picture of the engraving, but secretly hope it will be lost, so that the next restorer who removes

the chapter ring will again be spoken to by George Hoff Sr.

—Peter Recourt, FNAWCC, FL

York Daily Record panoramic photo gallery featuring clock tower leads to reminiscence

Christ Lutheran Church in downtown York, PA, one-half block from the town square, is the oldest Lutheran church west of the Susquehanna River. As a child and young adult it is the church I attended with my family. I was also married there. My father was a watchmaker, clock repairman, and jeweler. As part of our family contribution to the church, he took care of the maintenance of the tower clock. This included getting it going when it malfunctioned, regular lubrication, changing the bulbs of the back lighting for the dials as they burned out, and manually correcting for daylight saving time and back again.

As children, my younger brother, Max, and I were allowed to climb to the clock tower with my father when he serviced the clock. If you reached the area behind the dials where the movement was, there was a trapdoor with a ladder which went to an area above the clock. There is a banister around it and the area is fully open to an excellent view of downtown York and the surrounding area. If Max and I were well behaved, we

Panoramic view of the Christ Lutheran Church, York, PA, clock tower made using an automated-process feature of a Motorola Droid X smartphone. Courtesy of the *York Daily Record/Sunday News*.

were allowed to climb the ladder and have the great fun of looking all over town.

This is a very beautiful, historical church. The exterior and interior are architecturally interesting and worth a visit.

When I was 13, my father sat me down at the bench and taught me to be a clock repairman, which I did in several jewelry stores in York while attending public school. I learned skills which I have retained to the age of eighty. In the church tower at a very young age I first learned how one tower clock movement could operate four clock dials.

—Fred D. Reiss (PA)

Postcard translation

The postcard, submitted by Bob Frishman and published in the *October W&C Bulletin*, led five members to send in translations of the postcard verse and interesting related comments: Bob Frishman sent in a translation from a German customer; this was followed by translations from Manfred G. Koehler (WI), a member of Chapters 47 and 168; John Dyall (UK); George Hochschild (NC), Chapter 126 treasurer; and Philip Enzweiler (KY).

John Dyall wrote: . . . “the German script on the postcard reads as follows:

*Gestatten Sie, dass
ich mich vorstelle,
_____ sagte die Uhr
am 30. April,
11 Uhr Abends
und stellte sich
1 Stunde vor!*

“This text is hard to translate,



because it is a play on the reflexive verb 'sich vorstellen,' which can either mean to introduce oneself or to put something forward. The clock (or in this case a watch; the word *Uhr* can mean both) is saying: 'Allow me to introduce myself, said the watch on April 30 at 11 o'clock in the evening and put itself one hour forward!' The pun doesn't work in English and makes the text rather uninteresting.

"The script itself is called *Suetterlinschrift* and was popular before and during the second World War.

"Now only older people (like me!) can read and write it."

Bob Frishman's customer added: "From wikipedia:<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sommerzeit>: 'Daylight saving time' became official in Germany on April 30, 1916. It was meant to increase daylight hours (to save energy, candles, etc. ...) In 1975 it was reactivated because of the energy crisis (with modifications).

"If you translate word by word with the double meaning, the card reads:

"Allow me to put me forward (instead of to introduce me)... said the clock on 30th april 11 o'clock in the evening and put itself 1 hour forward. So the postcard probably is from 1916."

Manfred Koehler wrote: "Sixty years ago in my first year of high-school German, we were still expected to be able to read the old German script. As a result we were able to read letters that arrived from Germany written with pen and ink(!) in the 'old-hand.'"

And Philip Enzweiler commented that "perhaps a jeweler or a clock dealer sent this card to customers."

Thank you, translators!

Waterbury Enigma

Enigma: anything that arouses curiosity or perplexes because it is unexplained, inexplicable or secret.

Since submitting my article on Waterbury long wind watches (October 2010 *W&C Bulletin*) I

have come into possession of the Waterbury watch shown here, which is an enigma. The case is a very neatly skeletonized Series E that appears as though the modifications may have been done by a watchmaker or very skilled craftsman. The movement is a standard series A.

One has to wonder what the intent was when this "franken" watch was created. It certainly is a very good platform to show how the Waterbury rotary architecture was constructed and how it operates, and it does so more clearly than the standard 6-spoke case. Although the rotary movement had changed to solid plates by the time the case for the E was produced, using an A movement with its skeleton plates shows the wheels, balance, etc., more easily. The watch remains an enigma because the current owner does not have knowledge of when or why it was made, nor who the person was who made it. The watch was obtained from a seller in the UK who could not provide any information about the watch. It is, by the way, in good running condition.

—William Dunn (NY)



Front (left), notice the case body has been cut into a 6-spoke design.

Back (left), notice the spring cover has been cut to expose the spring.

In Memoriam Geraldine Jordan

1938-2010

Geraldine Jordan had been an NAWCC member since 1993 and a Chapter 68 member as well. She was a lifelong victim of polio, which limited her mobility, but she managed to graduate from the Bulova school of Watchmaking in New York and run a watch repair business with her husband for many years in Jacksonville, FL. She was with Goodwill Industries for 22 years and was their Goodwill ambassador to the King and Queen of Denmark in Copenhagen. Her hobbies were gardening and watercolor painting. She was predeceased in 2005 by her husband of over 40 years, Harvey F. Jordan, a master watch repairer, also a member since 1987 and also a polio victim.

—David J. Stillwell (GA)

Errata

Member Daniel Burgoyne of Ottawa, Canada, wrote *Watchmaking* columnist Joel Trenalone regarding his August 2010 *W&C Bulletin* column and correct word usage:

"I am writing first to thank you for your current and past articles, which I have found very informative and well written.

"As a French speaker, I wanted to bring to your attention that *artisanat* means the craft, whereas *artisan* is the skilled laborer doing the *artisanat* (craft). The quote by André Seigfried is correct, but the title of the article and the first paragraph mix the two words."



Regarding Tom Spittler's Answer Box commentary on p. 601 of the October *W&C Bulletin*, while the photo is a bit murky, I would vote for the arch painting to be the Last Supper. It portrays the scene after Judas left to "do his thing," and the artist anticipates the crucifixion by giving Jesus a premature crown of thorns.

—Rev. E. J. Wynne Jr. (ME)