

Vox Temporis—*Letters to the Editor*

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Death of an NAWCC Chapter

June 21, 1947 – June 19, 2011

It is with great sorrow that I must announce the death of NAWCC Southern California Chapter 4. In July of 1944 member Jack Willey asked that members of the NAWCC in the Los Angeles area contact him about forming a local chapter. It was not until June 21, 1947, that the first meeting of the NAWCC was held on the west coast. At this meeting an application was signed and sent to Headquarters requesting a Chapter Charter.

The Chapter survived and grew with its many members branching off and forming other local chapters. At one time the membership was over 150 members and its minimarts drew over 200 attendees. In the last ten or so years the numbers have dwindled and even though the membership list included 35 names, its meeting saw only ten to fifteen regular attendees with none but a few willing or able to take on the task required to keep any organization running. Without leadership no entity can survive so the decision was made by the members at the June 2011 meeting to request that Headquarters withdraw its Charter and remove it from the roll of active chapters. All current members were contacted and asked if any would step forward and assume the responsibility of running for office. Since none replied, the next step was to decide on the distribution of Chapter assets. At a meeting in July 2011 of the current acting Board of Directors it was decided to divide the cash among five local Chapters, the NAWCC and the West Coast Watch and Clock Museum. Other physical assets were donated to the

Greater Los Angeles Regional and local chapters. A letter was sent to all members describing the distribution and requesting any questions or comments. With no response, the deed was done and NAWCC Southern California Chapter 4 no longer exists.

I believe the major cause was that the Chapter formed a habit of having officers remain in office in perpetuity, that is once someone took on a major office it was expected that you would remain there till some major event precluded your functioning in that capacity any more. This breeds complacency and originality tends to go out the window.

With this in mind I would encourage all members of chapters to get involved and volunteer to be an officer. It doesn't require a great deal of your time if everyone does his or her part and it surely makes a healthier and livelier organization. To paraphrase Edmund Burke; an eighteenth-century English statesman and philosopher: "All that is needed for a chapter to fail is for good people to do nothing."

—Robert Linkenhoker (CA)

The Model 21 Detent

Ifound the article about the Hamilton Model 21 Chronometer interesting because I was not working when those timepieces were produced. One part of the detent assembly is familiar to me . . . I have one of Item No. 7 from the "exploded view" shown in Figure 4 in the article, and have included it here.



Hamilton Watch Company Model 21 Chronometer
- Double Spring for Detent -

I was surprised to learn that the double spring parts were made in Memphis.

—Robert Hostetter (PA)

On Burnishing

Stephen Nelson's Technical Tidbit No. 11 in the October 2011 *W&C Bulletin*, "Burnisher 101: How to make your own," reflects nothing more than eighteenth-century folklore, long discredited by centuries of modern technology.

Machinery's Handbook, 27th Edition, a publication of some 2,500 pages and the industry standard for nearly 100 years, does not even mention "burnishing" in its index or elsewhere. Clock and watch pivots are generally less than 0.060 inches in diameter and cannot possibly withstand the side pressure of an attempt to "burnish" them with any sort of tool, even if such effects could be demonstrated.

—David Anderson (TX)

Steven Nelson responds:

Dear David,

Thank you for taking the time to read my recent Technical Tidbit on making ones own burnisher.

In point of fact, I have been truly amazed at the impact burnishing has on the performance of long duration clocks—the clocks I most enjoy working on. Granted, week-running clocks also benefit, but it is the month, six-month, and year-duration weight-driven clocks that show fantastic benefits of burnishing. Unfortunately, for those that don't use fairly strong optical devices, burnishing often is a black art (pun intended—keep reading). Every

time I burnish a pivot that has been stoned flat with a very fine Arkansas stone or Jasper slip I am mesmerized by the visible change, going from a shiny, scratched surface to a black, glass-smooth surface (hence the reference to “Black Art”).

In your letter you indicate that *Machinery's Handbook*, 27th edition, does not mention burnishing in its index or elsewhere. I have managed metallurgical research projects working with PhD metallurgists, who did understand the purpose of burnishing. I think perhaps a better way of thinking of burnishing is as an art—much like using a handheld graver instead of a cross slide when doing lathe work. Earlier today when I was burnishing a pivot that is just under ten thousandths of an inch, I was thinking once again how magical the results are. Can you do such burnishing with a machine? In fact you can. But, that is not the way I do it. I suspect art is a better description of the technique—better anyway than machining.

Recently, I had a chance to discuss burnishing with a young WOSTEP-certified watchmaker. I do not use the term “watchmaker” loosely, in that this gentleman does handmade watches. He was trained at the Lititz Watch Technicum in Lititz, PA. Your letter gave me an excuse to call this watchmaker. He assured me that burnishing is critical in preparing pivot and mentioned burnishing a three-thousandths pivot.

I always appreciate comments on my articles and look forward to hearing from you again.

—Stephen Nelson (WA)

John Harrison Corrections

This letter is in regards to the June 2011 *Watch & Clock Bulletin* article “Peter Iles: Defining the Term Master Watchmaker.” In the beginning of that article a page is devoted to John Harrison, the master watch/clock maker who solved the longitude problem. The author states “... John Jeffrey (sic) made H4...”. Be-

cause H4 was the watch that finally won Harrison his prize money and is arguably one of the most famous watches ever made, I would like to correct the author’s error.

John Jefferys did make a personal watch for John Harrison to Harrison’s specific specifications in 1753. Harrison carried this watch in his pocket for the rest of his life. John Jefferys died in 1754, several years before Harrison started working on H4, in about 1757. Jefferys’ shop was taken over by his apprentice, Larcum Kendall, who may have helped Harrison with H4, although this is not known for certain. The watch was completed in 1759 and was signed by John Harrison and sent on its sea trials, as the author states, in 1761.

Sir Isaac Newton died in 1727 and could not have led the scientific community in its opposition to Harrison’s solution to the problem of longitude. Further, Harrison did not notice “...the remarkable accuracy being achieved by watchmakers such as Thomas Mudge...”. Quite the opposite: the relatively poor performance of Mudge/Graham watches convinced most people that a watch would never be the solution.

Harrison heard of the prize in 1726, not 1720. There are a few other minor errors, but this covers the most significant ones.

I thank Mr. Jonathan Betts, Senior Curator of Horology at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, England, for his help with this letter. Mr. Betts is a world famous authority on John Harrison and his clocks and watches.

—Daniel Hammer (FL)

Looking for More “Waltham’s Patterns”

Waltham Willard banjo clock have been an interesting research topic for me, and I have written four *Bulletin* articles about them and two articles about their reverse-painted glasses (listed below). Many Waltham Willard clocks contain the standard Mt. Vernon scene, but there are smaller numbers of clocks that have unique variations of naval scenes, Boston State House, and other historical buildings. These variations are always interesting for a collector. At the recent May 2011 R. O. Schmitt Auction I saw a clock with another surprising glass variation: a geometric-design throat and tablet combination mounted in a gilded frame case, produced about 1930-1932. I almost missed it at first glance, however, upon closer inspection I noticed painted on the throat glass “Waltham Pattern” (see figure). It was very interesting that Waltham made a marketing statement for their glass design.

I would be interested in hearing from other collectors if they have observed clocks with these glasses or other design notations.

Articles by Andrew Dervan mentioned above are as follows:

1. “Study of Full Size Waltham Willard Clocks,” *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 343 (April 2003): 157.
2. “Study of Half and Three-size Waltham Willard Clocks,” *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 346 (October 2003): 601.
3. Andrew Dervan and Philip Schilke, “Practical Repair and Restoration of Waltham Willard Clocks,” *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 350 (June 2004): 367.



4. "Continued Analysis of Full Size Waltham Willard Banjo Clocks," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 376 (October 2008): 528.

5. "Waltham Willard Clocks with Mt. Vernon variations," *NAWCC W&C Bulletin*, No. 385 (April 2010): 169.

6. "Legacy of Daniel J. Steele," *NAWCC W&C Bulletin*, No. 392 (June 2011): 306.

American Watchmakers in the Eighteenth Century

The discovery of the Henry Voight watch, presented by Philip Poniz at the 2011 NAWCC National Convention, pictured on the cover of the October 2011 *W&C Bulletin*, and shown at right, is tremendously significant to historians and collectors; it is a definitive "smoking gun" that evidences sophisticated local watchmaking in America in the eighteenth century. The Voight watch is serial no. 22, likely indicating that other watches by him were made. Another American-made watch by John Cairns of Providence, RI, utilizing a traditional English movement design, circa 1790, was the subject of an extensive article by David Cooper, and I wrote about colonial and early American watchmakers more recently (see note 2). It is interesting to point out that Henry Voight is not the only watchmaker to publicize that he made watches locally; in fact, there are numerous examples in newspaper advertisements going back to at least 1745.

Throughout the history of the NAWCC horologists have sought to understand watchmaking in colonial and prefactory-era America. It seems the time has come for an extensive study of this heretofore largely ignored yet likely significant aspect of English and American watchmaking.

—Richard Newman (IL)

Philip Poniz responds:

I have a problem with the idea that, during the period when American attitudes toward the English were far from friendly, an American watchmaker would decide to produce a watch, make-believing that it was English. Doing so would also be against the interest of a watchmaker; in general, a watchmaker either made something different to distinguish himself regardless of the cost, or

bought an inexpensive English ebauche.¹ Enough eighteenth-century American watch-material advertisements exist to assure us that European watch material, including ebauches, was readily available in America.²

The argument that some of the American watchmakers with English backgrounds were trained in English methods of production and had English tools, etc., by no means shows their necessity to have copied English products. The so-called English-style watch prevailed in Britain due to the relative standardization of English parts, which were made by specialized workers who had specific templates and jigs capable of making quickly the same, or almost the same, parts. The English-style watch was designed not as a result of love by the British for this particular design but rather because of the restrictions of the Prescott parts industry, which made these types of jigs and templates.

When an English watchmaker decided to make a watch by himself, not using Prescott parts, he rarely adhered to the typical English style; see Emery, Sinclair, Mudge, to say nothing of Harrison, John Russell, Margetts, Pendleton, just to name a few. There is no reason to expect that an American counterpart would be different.

When eventually someone in America decided to make watches from scratch, they made them to their own, unique design; for exam-

ple, the Pitkin brothers. Theirs was a short-lived endeavor, for they relatively quickly realized that they could not compete with inexpensive English or Swiss cottage production.³

There are other examples of later American watchmakers making uniquely designed watches. Saati from Providence, for instance, in the 1880s designed a single-wheel timepiece and made at least one in marine-chronometer form and two in pocket watch form.

This individualism continues even today; it is seen with Gene Clark, who made a few distinct tourbillons in the 1980s and 1990s; Peter Iles who, a few years ago, made a tourbillon running around the escape wheel; and a few other contemporary American watchmakers who make or made watches recently. None of them makes watches in established designs; all of their watches are made in individual, unique patterns. The same was true in the nineteenth century, and there is no reason to expect that the eighteenth century was any different.

Watches made by Americans in eighteenth-century America definitely existed, but there were very few and they were made in specific, individual ways. Voight's watch, the first of these re-discovered, is the only known watch indisputably made completely, or almost completely, on U.S. soil.

1. In 1889 Henry Abbott, sketching the history of American watchmaking, comments "...Mr. Goddard could not compete with the cheap foreign watches..."

2. "John Cairns (1751-1809) and Other Early American Watchmakers" by David Cooper, *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 366 (February 2002): 27, or Richard Newman's "Colonial and Early American Watchmakers," *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 389 (December 2010). Philip Poniz notes: "It was Richard's enthusiasm and many long emails on the subject that revived my interest in early American watchmaking."

3. As Abbott put it in 1889 "The cost of manufacture was too great [for the Pitkins] to compete with those made by the Swiss."

