

# The New York-Pennsylvania COLLECTOR

• LIVING WITH ANTIQUES, ART & AMERICANA •

August 2016

Section B

## Rare Pennsylvania Shelf and Bracket Clocks Featured at The August Eastern States Regional Clock and Watch Show

By Dave Richardson

The public is invited to the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors (NAWCC) 47th Annual Eastern States Regional (ESR) convention on Friday, August 12th and Saturday, August 13th. The event takes place at the Holiday Inn, 441 Electronics Parkway, Liverpool, NY. ESR is the “largest and friendliest” annual gathering of clock and watch enthusiasts in the Northeast.

Thousands of antique and vintage clocks, watches, repair tools and horological items will be on display. This year’s Special Exhibit features rare handcrafted Pennsylvania shelf and bracket clocks made by important but lesser-known Pennsylvania clockmakers.

The public is invited to the event. The hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday, and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday. For registration information and a listing of events, go to [www.nawccesr.com](http://www.nawccesr.com). The \$25 (\$17.50 for students) entrance fee includes a three-month NAWCC membership, which includes unlimited access to resources at the NAWCC website and a subscription to the NAWCC Bulletin.

The Special Exhibit starts on Friday, as well as the Mart, which provides an outstanding opportunity to buy and sell horological items, build a collection, acquire books or obtain tools and parts for repairs. Also on Friday, NAWCC Special Interest Chapters on specific areas of horology including electrics, tower clocks, tools and 400-day clocks will meet. Friday evening features an auction that is open to the public. Dan Horan, R.O. Schmitt Fine Arts: Horological Specialists is the auctioneer.

On Saturday, family heirlooms or a newly acquired watch or clock can be taken to hands-on workshops to have it assessed for its provenance, value and overall condition, and learn about repair techniques. The workshops include dial painting, stenciling on wood, troubleshooting a 400-day (or anniversary) clock, replacing teeth in a spring barrel, mainspring assessment, bushing installation, us-



Montgomery County Clock  
Maker Unknown



A clock made in the Norristown area of Montgomery County circa 1830 will be exhibited with a movement attributed to Jacob Custer (1805-1871).



Being showcased is a John Albert, Tyrone Township, Perry County, Pennsylvania clock. Albert was a clockmaker, watchmaker and silversmith in the early 1800s.

ing a clock main spring winder, repairing case veneer and trouble shooting old American-style clock movements. Repairs require a range of skills and tools, but many of the workshops will focus on repairs and routine maintenance that can be performed with limited horological experience and common tools.

The Special Exhibit showcases rare Pennsylvania shelf and bracket clocks. The Exhibit is based on the 2008 NAWCC publication *Pennsylvania Shelf and Bracket Clocks – 1750-1850* authored by Edward F. LaFond Jr. and J. Carter Harris. The exhibit is dedi-

cated to the memory of Ed LaFond Jr., who passed away in 2015. Ed was one of America’s premier clock researchers, authors and a great friend and a long-time supporter of ESR. All photos included in this article are courtesy of the LaFond family and J. Carter Harris.

ESR is privileged to have as its display consultants Ed’s wife Virginia and son Will, who will share with attendees these remarkable clocks. The Exhibit will tell the story of the highly skilled Pennsylvania shelf and bracket clock makers in the period from 1750-1850. Unlike many of the Connecticut clock-

makers of the same time period, these clockmakers did not produce clocks in large numbers. The exhibit is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Friday, with a lecture at 1 p.m., and on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

In the early 1800s, wood works movements transitioned to mass production when Eli Terry simplified construction methods and production to reduce manufacturing time and costs. Terry was a pioneering clockmaker who developed waterpower-driven machinery to manufacture interchangeable wood-

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# Rare Pennsylvania Shelf and Bracket Clocks

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en clock parts, which enabled parts to be cut dozens at a time versus one at a time with handcrafted movements. Terry's techniques were copied by others who standardized the clock industry in Connecticut and in other areas of New England and Ohio. During this time period, Pennsylvania clock and watchmakers were renowned for their high-quality craftsmanship and were aware of their Connecticut counterparts, but did not lower their standards in response to mass production.

A clock made circa 1835-1840 by George Solliday (1797-1871) of Montgomeryville, Pennsylvania will be featured in the Special Exhibit. Connecticut shelf clocks of the mid-to-late 1830s inspired the case style. The clock is constructed of mahogany and mahogany veneer over pine, and bird's eye maple veneer. The painted glass in the door is a replacement and originally the door probably contained a crotch mahogany veneered panel as often found on Montgomery county clocks.

The brass weight-driven movement is a smaller scale version of an eight-day tall clock movement. It has a rack and snail striking mechanism with an English type strike arrest. The warning pin extends from the fan arbor like Connecticut Salem Bridge movements. The pendulum utilizes a double keystone to accommodate the second's hand pivot and the center arbor. Solliday's movements shared characteristics with German and English, as well as Connecticut clocks, which shows that some Pennsylvania clockmakers in this time period were familiar with movements from other geographic regions. See the accompanying photos of the clock and movement.

Another clock made in the Norristown area of Montgomery County circa 1830 will be exhibited with a movement attributed to Jacob Custer (1805-1871). The case is constructed of mahogany and mahogany veneered tulip popular, white pine and birch. The door panel is crotch mahogany veneered on tulip popular. The painted iron dial is attributed to William Jones of Philadelphia. The influence of the Connecticut pillar and scroll style case is obvious.

The eight-day time and strike, brass weight-driven movement has skeletonized plates. The movement has an unusual escapement set-up with the verge pivoted on a pin at the rear and suspended from a short steel suspension spring in the front. The strike system utilizes a pinned count wheel, which was a feature out-of-date from most

other clockmakers of the same period. Another feature of the clock is a number of plugged holes in the movement plates suggesting that Custer refined the movement as he built the clock. Interestingly, this is a feature seen on other Custer clock movements. See the accompanying photo of the clock.

Custer is an important name in American horology and as with many Pennsylvania clockmakers, he was self-educated and had no formal training. He made approximately thirty Pennsylvania pillar and scroll style clocks with cases similar to Eli Terry's famous shelf clocks. However, in contrast to the thirty-hour wood works movements used by Terry, Custer's clocks featured high quality, eight-day, brass, weight-driven movements that often contained unusual features such as moon phases and alarms.

As with several of his clockmaker contemporaries such as Eli Terry and Joseph Ives, Custer was an inventive genius, who moved freely from the largest to the smallest time-pieces as well as fashioning clockwork mechanisms for a number of different applications. He made over 100 tower clocks at his Norristown foundry as well as complete watchcases and movements except for the hairsprings and fusee chains. He designed an umbrella that opened and shut automatically to advertise a parasol maker, which was probably one of the first automated advertising signs. Additionally, Custer developed a bullet-making machine that was used during the Civil War, an improved steamboat propulsion system and a mechanism to rotate lights on costal lighthouses.

Another clock that will be displayed also was made in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania circa 1835. An unknown maker built the case of mahogany, mahogany veneer over white pine, tulip popular and cherry with a bowed cherry front drawer at the bottom of the case. The columns are solid mahogany as are the finials and bun feet. The upper door is a replacement as is the bird's-eye veneer door panel.

The thirty-hour, weight-driven movement is unusual and was made by an unknown clockmaker. The cast brass skeletonized frame is poorly finished. The brass wheels are made of rolled sheet brass and the teeth are crudely cut and finished. The innovative movement shares characteristics with 18th century Black Forest clocks. The brass wheels are pressed onto turned wood arbors, and the lantern pinions are constructed of steel pins driven into enlarged collars on the turned wood arbors. The pillars for the plates are also made of wood. The verge is mounted on a pin on the

front plate similar to Terry and other Connecticut clockmakers. The escape wheel front pivot is part of the front plate that has been bent forward to accommodate the front escape wheel pivot. This feature is observed on some Joseph Ives clocks from his Brooklyn period circa 1825 - 1827. See the accompanying photos of the clock and movement.

Another clock that will be showcased is a John Albert, Tyrone Township, Perry County, Pennsylvania clock. Albert was a clockmaker, watchmaker and silversmith in the early 1800's. The case is constructed of mahogany and mahogany veneer on mahogany and cherry. The eight-day, brass weight-driven time and strike movement is a smaller scale version of a tall clock movement and utilizes a rack and snail strike system with a German strike arrest. The weight arrangement is set-up with the weights descending the sides of the case in channels like Terry and other Connecticut clockmakers versus having the weights descend directly below the movement, which is typical of an English tall clock. This clock has a rear-hung pendulum similar to a tall clock. See the

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A clock made circa 1835-1840 by George Solliday (1797-1871) of Montgomeryville, Pennsylvania will be featured.

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# Eastern States Regional Clock and Watch Show



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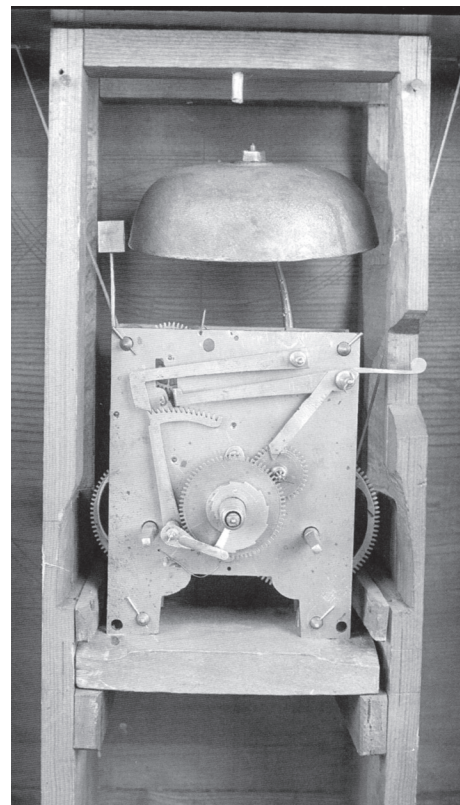
accompanying photos of the clock and movement.

The Special Exhibit showcases Pennsylvania shelf and bracket clocks by historically significant clockmakers that individuals rarely have an opportunity to see. Unlike many of their Connecticut contemporaries, these clocks were handmade in very small numbers and few examples survive today. We know that Pennsylvania clockmakers had at least limited interaction with other makers through repairs or travels because their movements share characteristics with German, English and Connecticut movements. Eventually, the Pennsylvania clockmakers' handcrafted clocks succumbed to technology and mass production. Do not to miss this opportunity to view these rare clocks.

While attending ESR, consider visiting the Hoffman Clock Museum, which is a short 45-minute drive west of Syracuse, located in the picturesque town of Newark on the historical Erie Canal. The museum is in the Newark Public Library, and admission is free. The museum specializes in New York State clocks and houses one of the finest collections in the country. Along with American clocks, the museum features clocks from Austria, Germany, France, Japan and China. Close to 400 clocks are on display as well as watches and horological tools.

A rare Eli Terry tall clock circa 1808 was recently added to the museum's collection. The clock was part of the Porter Contract of which there are less than fifteen known examples. Porter contract clocks refers to an agreement in 1807 between Terry and Edward Porter and Levi Porter of Waterbury, Connecticut to manufacture 4,000 tall clock movements in three years, which significantly exceeded the capacity of other clockmakers at the time. Terry simplified the movement, construction methods and production to reduce manufacturing time and costs. In doing so, Terry successfully completed the Porter Contract.

The pine stained mahogany Terry case houses a thirty-hour, time and strike, with a calendar and second hands, wood works, weight-driven, pull-up movement. The rear of the dial is marked in India ink with "1973" which is how Terry tracked movement production. The movement has identifying characteristics of Porter clocks



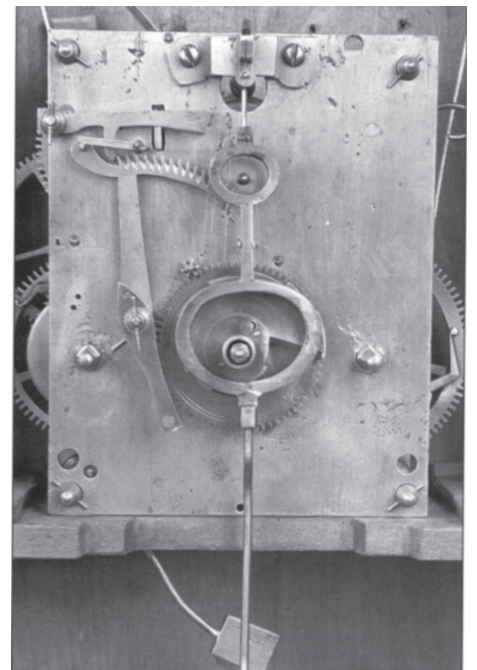
The eight-day, brass weight-driven time and strike movement from the Albert Clock is a smaller scale version of a tall clock movement and utilizes a rack and snail strike system with a German strike arrest.

- (1) a back plate mounted flush to the seat-board with pinned dowels instead of a dove-tailed joint, (2) plain arbors with square collets, and (3) three extended plate pillars with square shoulders without decorative turnings.

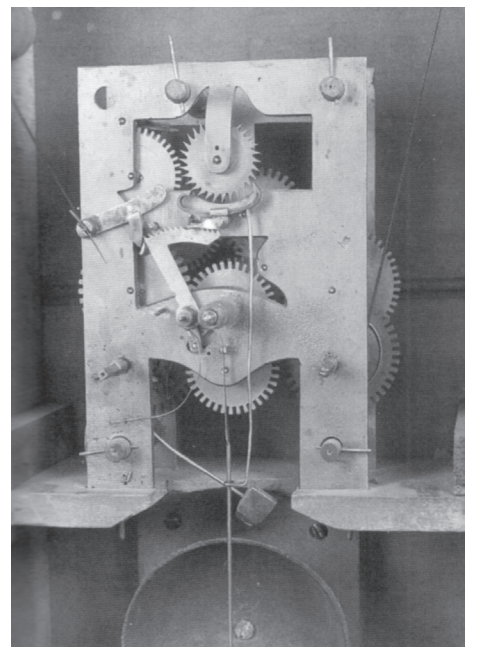
Additionally, a rare shelf clock circa 1835 with a Buffalo, New York, William A. Whiting & Co. label was added to the Hoffman collection. William was the cousin of Riley Whiting another noted Connecticut clockmaker. The clock is unusual in that the case appears to have been clearly made in New York State. Previously, based on other examples and label attributions, William was assumed to have simply sold complete Connecticut clocks and movements manufactured by Riley with Buffalo, New York labels. The stenciled half-column and splat clock houses a thirty-hour, wood works, weight-driven movement.

So plan a side-trip from ESR for your first visit, or if you've visited the Museum before, plan a return trip. For more information, contact Eric Hooker, Curator, Hoffman Clock Museum, at [www.hoffmanclockmuseum.org](http://www.hoffmanclockmuseum.org).

The Eastern States Regional offers



A brass weight-driven Sollday movement is a smaller scale version of an eight-day tall clock movement.



A movement from a Montgomery County clock, maker unknown.

an outstanding opportunity for learning, networking, adding to your collection and meeting your repair or tooling needs regardless of your horological interests. For further details on ESR, go to [www.nawccesr.com](http://www.nawccesr.com) or contact Russ Oechsle, General Chairman, via email at [russoechsle@gmail.com](mailto:russoechsle@gmail.com), and for questions regarding this article, contact Dave Richardson, via email at [dprichardson43@gmail.com](mailto:dprichardson43@gmail.com).

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