

## Notorious and Melodious at the West Coast Clock & Watch Museum - Ed Pasahow

Clockmakers have applied their artistry and intellect to convert utilitarian timekeepers into devices that can delight and amaze our senses. They exerted themselves in this way not only for personal satisfaction but also to gain one-up on the competition. Being trendy was just as important in the 19th century as it is today. Because they did not have access to Facebook accounts, these entrepreneurs had to produce a better product to convince consumers to buy from them. Let's look at a few examples of the clocks we are fortunate to have in our collection.

First the Notoriety



The World's Columbian Exposition celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's voyage to the New World in 1893. The fair raised Chicago's prestige in social and cultural standing by introducing the latest in industrial creativity. Among these mechanical innovations was the original Ferris wheel. Another not forgotten feature was the "Street in Cairo," home of Little Egypt. Fahreda Spyropoulos, known by the stage name Little Egypt, brought the belly dance to America. The dance created a stir and her audience quickly dubbed it the "Hoochee-Coochee". Her impact on society can be judged by the fact that while watching the dancer perform a few years later, Mark Twain had a near-fatal heart attack.

The uproar over Little Egypt's dancing could easily be compared to the combined effect that Kim Kardashian and Lady Gaga have today. Her videos would have instantly

gone viral on YouTube had the application been available then. Not having access to such technology, however, clockmakers of the day immortalized Little Egypt with a fabulous clock.

The arabesque clock consists of the central timepiece surrounded by two sidepieces. The French company Japy Freres et Cie (Japy Brothers and Company) made this unique clock for the Smoking Room at the exposition. Japy was founded in 1749 by Fredric Japy, a watchmaker and inventor of fixtures and machinery for the clock and watch trade. Japy's company was highly influential in the development of mass produced clocks and watches. Consequently, the company thrived. Adolphe Japy was running the company at the time this clock was made. He was so well thought of that he became the mayor of the town of Beaucourt several times and was knighted and made a member of the French Legion of Honor. Japy's clock movements, according to Karl Kochmans, author of the Clock and Watch Trademark Index, are considered the best original French clock making.



The clock's ornamentation consists of intertwined flowing lines reminiscent of Moorish decoration. The scrolling, line work, and interlacing create a rhythmic expression accented by crescent moons. The clock dial is brass with inlays of twelve teardrop-shaped enamel inserts with red numerals denoting the hours. The dial is mounted on double columns with an elaborate finial on top.



Little Egypt emerges dressed in harem pants, two fringed sashes, intricately figured blouse, and a draping shawl. She wears a bejeweled headdress and satin slippers. In her performances, she was more scantily clad, however. Two humidors for storage of smoking paraphernalia flank the dancer.

One of her guards is bearded and stands with crossed arms. He wears a robe, cloak, sandals, and a close fitting cap. The other, more formidable, guard stands bearded and mustachioed with crossed arms. This burly fellow holds a flintlock musket. His attire consists of a robe secured with a sash and a clasp

at the neck. A necklace, turban, and sandals complete the attire. Collared ostriches stand behind each of the guards. Three-candle candelabras intertwine around their heads and beaks.

This fantastic clock must have had almost a great an impact on the smokers as the dancer did. This unforgettable sight could be remembered with the purchase of a souvenir supplied by shrewd vendors. Fair goers could return from the big city with a miniature version of the clock manufactured by the Ansonia Clock Company of New York to impress their small town neighbors. The WCCWM collection also contains one of these keepsake clocks for our admiration.



Now on to the Music

Events like Little Egypt were insufficient to sustain the clock industry for long. Clock companies looked to other technologies to stay competitive. Musical clocks were popular with the public and manufacturers responded to the demand. Keep in mind that the technology of the day did not include

iPods, and nothing had Bluetooth. The clockmakers had to apply pure mechanical ingenuity to develop their melodious products.

The bracket clock was a favorite style with homemakers of the day. As the name implies, bracket clocks were small clocks that could be mounted on brackets extending from a wall. Owners were just as likely to place them on tables or other stands, however.



An English bracket clock by John Ellicott of the Royal Exchange, London is in the collection. The style is Early Regency Period with a mahogany case inlaid with brass mountings. The clock runs for eight days on a single winding and sounds the hour with a deep strike. The owner can select among six tunes to accompany the sounding of the hour. Eighteen bells play the tunes. The clocks dates from about 1810 to 1820.

The owner has a variety of choices to make when using this clock. Such catchy tunes as Bonny Wee Wife, Buy a Brgom, Di Tanti Palpiti, Polly Hopkins, Huntsman Chorus, and Auld Lang Syne make selection a challenge.

Undoubtedly, these songs went to the top of the charts in the early 19th century. In addition, the clock has a repeater function. This operation will repeat the last strike and melody whenever a lever is pulled. Furthermore, the chiming of the tunes could be turned off at times when more decorum was appropriate.

The final clock for our consideration is an English bracket clock by Gravelle and Tolkien of London made around 1850. Clockmakers had not been standing still in the forty years since the development of the Ellicott clock. New technology abounds in this example. The ebonized walnut case is provided with gilt bronze mounts and a silver dial. Timing is more accurate because the clock movement includes a fusee. The fusee is a mechanism that makes the beating of the clock more regular as the mainspring power winds down over a period of time. Typically, the power provided by the mainspring varies from when it is fully wound to when it is nearly unwound. The fusee tends to smooth out the variation in the timing. This clock strikes the hour and plays musical selections from eight tunes on sixteen bells.



Here again the hits of the day are featured. Choices include Sailor's Journal, Richter's Hornpipe, Bonny Lad, Oscar and Malvina, Devil's Dream, Bonny Charley, Dusty Miller, and Duncan Davidson. Nevertheless, the choices do not end there. This clock too is a repeater. The owner can also selectively silence the striking or the music. For example, a more serious note is appropriate when the boss comes to dinner, so the host, not wanting to be thought frivolous, will turn the music off and just allow the businesslike sounds of hour striking to prevail. Party times call for music only because who cares how late it gets and one does not want to be reminded by the strike of the hour. In addition, one can make further decisions regarding the volume of the striking or music.

These three clocks are a small sample of the nearly 400 items in our collection. Such richness need not be overwhelming because the museum offers easy ways to gain and understanding of the clocks and watches—even if you have very little experience with timepieces. First, the friendly docents will gladly explain the inner workings and demonstrate how each performs. Amazingly, almost all of the clocks and watches are in operating condition. A touchscreen computer is a second resource open to you. The display showing photos of many of the clocks and watches is accessed by

simply touching the one of interest. A new screen offering a detailed description then pops up. We hope that you will make plans to visit the WCCWM soon and see these wonders yourself.

If these stories about clocks have you thinking that it might be fun having a clock in your living room, plan to visit the Antique Gas & Steam Engine Museum during the American Craft Weekend in October. The Vista Chapter 136 of the National Clock and Watch Collectors will be celebrating by holding a Clock Mini Mart. The event will include displays of clocks for sale along with parts and literature. The enthusiastic horologists presenting the mart will be pleased to answer any questions you may have and to assist you in selecting a clock that will be perfect for your home.

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