

The Springfield NH Meeting House Wall Clock

The wall clock in the Meeting House was given to Springfield on October 16, 1940 by Clarence Dexter Collins (1871-1963). He was a native of Springfield NH.



Clarence Collins

Photo by Don Hill

The 1880 census shows Clarence age nine “at school” in Springfield with his parents and five siblings. The family is listed: Henry Joseph Collins (1847-1896, a blacksmith) and Ezra Ann “Lizzie” Bennett Collins (1849-1919), four sisters and one brother. Three more siblings would follow – a brother in 1880, a sister in 1885 and a third brother in 1888. Parents Henry and Lizzie are buried at the Pleasant View Cemetery.

The 1900 census shows Clarence living at 85 Laurel Street in Newport, a “Merchant” with his wife of six years, Nellie *Chandler*. Over the next 30 years, he lived in George’s Mills, Watertown and Framingham, had two sons, divorced twice and married Josephine *Mahoney* (i.e., his third wife). These years are well documented by the Sunapee Historical Society in its book “*Historic Buildings and Places of Sunapee, Volume One.*”ⁱ

He returned to George’s Mills in 1930 with Josephine and son Perley “Lee” where they bought the Elias Abbott Homestead at 6 Prospect Hill roadⁱⁱ. In 1932 they opened the “Old Clock Museum,” charging admission to view some 300 clocks. Admission was ten cents in 1938ⁱⁱⁱ and fifty cents in 1947^{iv}.



The Museum was a popular and entertaining venue for locals and tourists alike:

“It is fun to listen to the various medleys of tone, each old-timer seemingly striving to express its individuality, simultaneously the quietness of the museum is suddenly awakened by a symphony of chimes as the clocks begin to strike the hour.”^v

Although the museum supported the family well, even through the Depression, Josephine “would not abide having all the clocks chiming, binging and bonging at the same time so Clarence set their times slightly staggered, but still, being in their presence on the hour was memorable for any visitor.”^{vi}



The most famous timepiece in the collection was a 13 foot “Great Historical Clock of America” made in 1892 for the Chicago World’s Fair. Lee Collins sold the clock to the Smithsonian Institution in 1979^{vii}.

Josephine Collins passed away in 1961 and Clarence on May 14, 1963. He was remembered in an article appearing in the Argus-Champion titled “A Tribute to a Neighbor – Clarence Collins Made Sunapee History Alive” a month later .

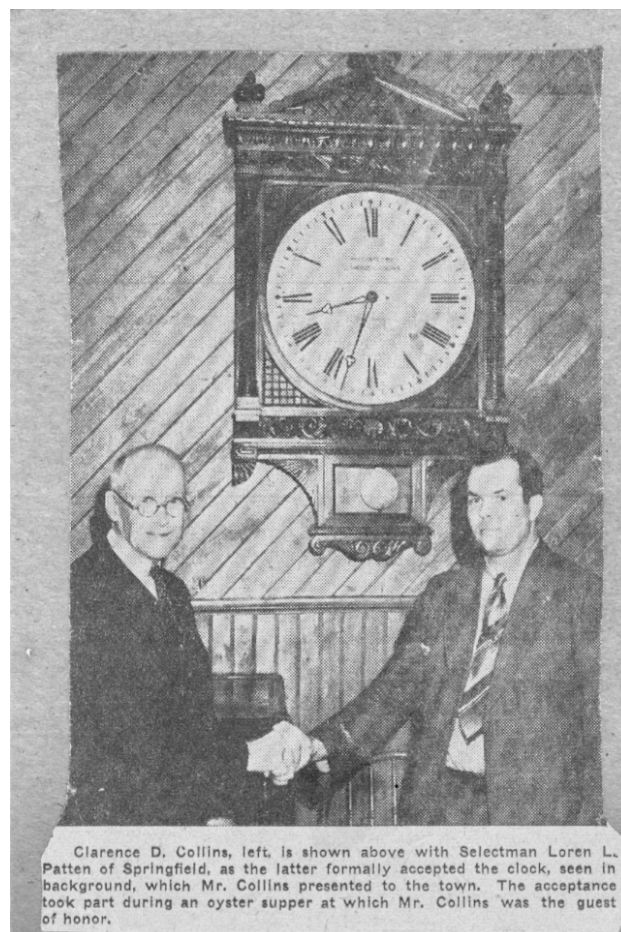
“Clarence Collins had a sort of magnetism which attracted people to him and to his unusual curiosity shop. Customers were so quickly and easily ‘customers’ no longer – but friends.”^{viii}

Clarence and Josephine are buried together at the Pine Grove Cemetery in Newport.

The Gift to Springfield

Clarence Collins’s gift to Springfield was reported in the Argus Champion on Thursday, October 24, 1940^{ix} :

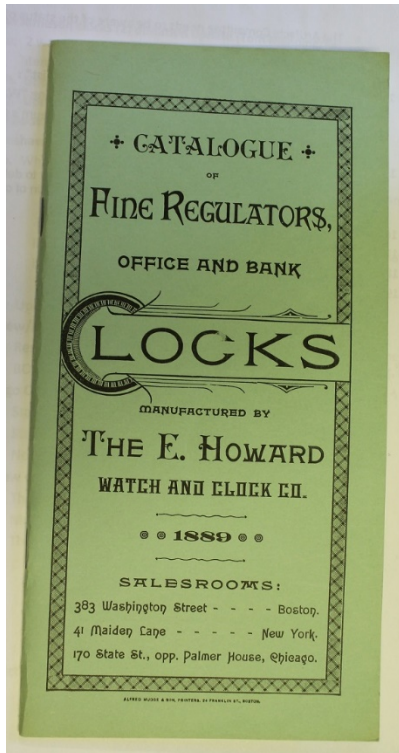
“The residents of the town were guests of Clarence D. Collins, proprietor of the Collins Museum at Georges Mills, at an oyster supper in the Town Hall on the evening of October 16. Mr. Collins, who is a native of Springfield, recently had placed in the Town Hall, a clock which was made by the Howard Company of Boston, which is recognized as one of New England’s finest clock makers. The case is of solid hand carved mahogany with a marble dial, and works of heavy brass. Following the supper, Mr. Collins, in an informal speech, presented the clock to the town and the gift was accepted for the town by Loren L. Patten of the board of selectmen. It was estimated that over 150 persons enjoyed the supper, and special guests at the table with Mr. and Mrs. Collins were the following old school mates, who with Mr. Collins, attended District No. 1 many years ago; Ruel L. Heath and Mrs. Lillian Kimball of Newport; Mrs. Alice Holmes, Mrs. Josie Martin and Mrs. Stella Russell [Collins’s younger sister] of Georges Mills; Mrs. Libbie Cass, Arthur Collins, Joseph George and Willard Severance of Springfield. There were many others who



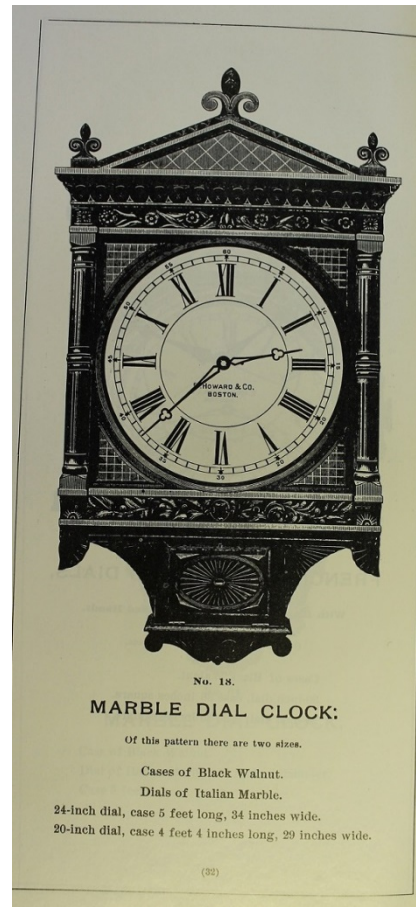
were born in town and the occasion was a reminder of the Old Home Day observances which were held in the early part of this century. A program of old time songs, readings and recitations was given and remarks made by several of those present, one of whom was Mrs. Morgan, wife of Dr. William Gerry Morgan of Washington, D.C., who has been one of our summer residents for over forty years. Music for old fashioned dances was furnished by Charles Austin, violinist, with Mrs. Helen Nichols at the piano. The party ended at a late hour but the memory of the evening will long be cherished."

About the Clock

The clock was made about 1890 by E. Howard & Company of Boston, known then and today as a maker of high grade clocks, primarily weight driven wall timepieces and regulators. Their most popular styles were tower clocks for public buildings and banjo clocks for homes. The firm also produced many thousands of pocket watches which today are valuable collectors' pieces.



The Curator of the American Clock and Watch Museum^x (ACWM, Bristol CT) found the Collins clock listed in an 1889 catalog as a "Number 18 Marble Dial Clock." This is the only catalog in which the Curator found it, so it was likely in a fairly short run and not many were sold.



The clock was offered in two sizes:

- 24 inch dial, five feet long and 34 inches wide. Price \$150 (about \$4,100 in 2019)
- 20 inch dial, 4 feet four inches long, 29 inches wide. Price \$125 (about \$3,400 in 2019)

The clock in the Springfield Meeting House is the larger version. This clock style was offered for "Office and Bank" so it would have been marketed primarily for use

in public buildings. The Collins clock was appraised in 2014 for insurance purposes at more than twice the \$4,100 value of 2019.

Its provenance prior to Mr. Collins is unknown.

The case is carved black walnut with top quality grain and joinery. The dial is Italian marble. The dial and case are both in excellent condition. With the exception of the door at the bottom, all parts of the case are original. The 1889 catalog shows the door at the bottom to be solid carved wood, whereas the door in the Springfield Collins clock is a glass window to view the pendulum bob swing. It's pretty much anyone's guess how that happened.

About the Movement

The Town contracted servicing of the movement with Philip D'Avanza, an expert in repair and restoration of historic timepieces. After unsuccessful onsite servicing in April 2019, Mr. D'Avanza removed the movement from the case and took it to his shop in Goffstown, NH on May 2, 2019 where it was disassembled, ultrasonically cleaned and various worn parts were restored. The suspension cable was the only part replaced. After a two week test run, the movement was reinstalled on June 6, 2019. Over the next month, it was adjusted to keep time to about one minute per week. The pendulum is plumb and the beat is even.

The movement is an E. Howard Number 17. Die-stamped on the dial-side plate are:

- "E. Howard & Co." – the maker's name
- "Boston" – the maker's location,
- "24 $\frac{3}{4}$ " – the movement size



It is "time only" (i.e., no chimes), weight driven, eight day with counter balanced wheel work and a Geneva stop-work mechanism to mechanically stop the winding drum when fully wound to prevent damage from over-winding. The plates are thick brass, which is typical of very high quality clocks. The power of the ten pound weight is controlled by a recoil escapement regulated by a gilded wood pendulum and a zinc bob covered with brass facing.

The clock error – gain or loss of time – is adjusted by raising or lowering the pendulum bob with a small nut. Because the Meeting House temperature is not constant, the weekly error may change seasonally by a few minutes. If the error is

reasonable, there should be no need to “chase” the seasonal change with the bob nut – it is best to let the clock run uninterrupted and adjust the minute hand to correct time during the weekly wind. The minute hand (not the hour hand) is used to change to standard/daylight time – it’s OK to move the minute hand counterclockwise when changing from daylight to standard.

Early lubricants were derived from animal fats and congealed in a few years. This required frequent cleaning and servicing. The May 2019 restoration used modern synthetic lubricants (without “diamond ball bearings” which can embed in the brass and abrade pivots and bearings). The clock will run many years and should be serviced if the wound clock stops or the swing of the pendulum is reduced. Service may also be advised if the error change (the rate) is more than can be explained by seasonal temperature variation.



Great care must be taken when removing or reinstalling the dial – it’s about ½ inch thick and very heavy. If damaged it is virtually irreplaceable.

End notes

ⁱ The book is available at the Sunapee archives building on the corner of Route 11 and Route 113 (previously the Abbott Library)

ⁱⁱ Sunapee Historical Society’s “*Historic Buildings and Places of Sunapee, Volume One.*”

ⁱⁱⁱ “A Guide to the Granite State” written by the Federal Writer’s Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of New Hampshire.

^{iv} “Guide to America” edited by Elmer Jenkins for the American Automobile Association

^v The Argus-Champion, Thursday October 24, 1940

^{vi} Quote is from the Sunapee Historical Society’s “*Historic Buildings and Places of Sunapee, Volume One.*”

^{vii} Atlas Obscura, June 13, 2017 “This Mechanical 19-Century ‘Clock of America’ Animates U.S. History”
<https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/great-historical-clock-of-america>

^{viii} The Argus-Champion, Thursday June 13, 1963

^{ix} The Argus-Champion, Thursday October 24, 1940

^x We are grateful to Thomas Manning, Curator of the American Clock and Watch Museum
<https://www.clockandwatchmuseum.org/>