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More Early Hamilton Ball & CO Observations

More Early Hamilton Ball & CO Observations (Part 2)

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In the June 1910 Bulletin, I authored an article entitled "Early 18 sz Hampden Ball and Hamilton Ball Watch Observations". Further research has enabled me to fill in some of the gaps in that article. This analysis is limited to the production of Hamilton watches produced for Ball & Co. (Hamilton Ball serial numbers lower than 170400). While many other companies produced watches for Ball, my research has been limited to Hampden and Hamilton. I find these old 18 size watches fascinating. They were produced in relatively low numbers and their early obsolescence along with the tendency for them to be scrapped for parts make them hard to come by. In my previous article there was little mention of Brotherhoods, 21 Jewel watches or watches found in a mixed run from 90101-90950 or the last two runs of Ball & CO watches. This was due to the confusion caused by insufficient data and mismatched marriages of watches and dials that helped muddy the waters. While future research may improve or correct my conclusions, I think I have discovered some very interesting facts.

999A are to be 21J with sunray damasceening. (Thanks Rhett Lucke!)

999B are to be ORRS, either Ball and Co or Private Label.

999C are BRT.

999D are BLF

999E are Ball's Standard Railroad Watch Co at least until 90601-90750.

999F are Railroad Watch Co, at least until the 90751-90950 run. Things get a little confusing there.

8701-8800 left the factory designated as 938;s

13001-13020 = 999C 13021-13070 = 999D 13071-13400 = 999B

14001-14100 = 999B 14101-25 = 999D 14126-14150 = 999C 14151-14850 = 999B 14851-75 = 999C

14876-14900 = 999D 14901-15000 = 999B

20501-20800 = 999E 20801-29000 = 999F

28001-28100 = 999B 28101-28115 = 999D 28116-28130 = 999C 28131-28400 = 999B 28401-28450 = 999C
 28451-28500 = 999D 28501-28550 = 999C 28551-28600 = 999D 28601-28625 = 999A 28626-29000 = 999B

42001-42100 = 999D 42101-42200 = 999C 42201-42300 = 999B 42301-42350 = 999D 42351-42400 = 999C
 42401-42500 = 999A 42501-42600 = 999B 42601-42700 = 999A 42701-43000 = 999B

Official Railroad Standard Watches (ORRS) produced for Ball & Co. by Hamilton numbered about 4600 from 1895 to 1903 beginning with one hundred in the run numbered from 8701-8800.. A smaller amount of Official Brotherhood Standard watches were produced during this period. It is widely recognized tht the ORRS was a huge marketing success and had great appeal to the general public but it is believed that the Brotherhoods sold a bit slower. They met resistance from the railroad men who might have felt resentment to the inspector/salesmen and the Ball brand. That may be the reason that Ball advertsed heavily in the union journals and offered free watches to those who sold a specified number of journal subscriptions.

BROTHERHOOD WATCHES

Comparing factory records with observations and reports for Ball & CO. leads me to believe that only700 Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF) and Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT) can be said to have left the Hamilton factory so marked. Hamilton designated the BRT's as 999C's and the BLF's as 999D's. Neither Ball & Co Brotherhoods or ORRS watches had the factory designations marked upon the movements.. The various lettered 999 designations were for internal Hamilton factory use only. Their wonderful damascening makes them particularly desirable to collectors. (figs 1&2)



Fig 1 Early Hamilton factory BLF damascening damascening.

photo courtesy of NAWCC Message Board
Message board

Fig 2 BRT with "brakewheel"

photo courtesy of NAWCC

In my data bank, I have 50+ observations/reports of these Hamilton factory produced Brotherhoods or about 7 percent of the total production. In addition, I have 17 observations or reports of Brotherhoods that are not factory designated 999C's or 999D's. All of these 17 have the same Ball 17 or 21Jewel damascening as seen on their ORRS counterparts.(figs3 A & B) These figures are not Brotherhoods but illustrate the damascening pattern on

the ORRS watches is the same as found on the non factory designated Brotherhoods. I have had the opportunity to examine or have reports on several of these 17 non designated Brotherhoods and have found none as yet that have serial numbers stamped under the barrel bridge. All of the 50 factory designated examples do have the serial numbers stamped under the barrel bridge. I have no picture of a Brotherhood barrel underside but it is similar in marking to its ORRS counterpart as shown in fig 3B. If these 17 survivors approximate 7 percent of the examples produced, I am estimating that 240 of these BLF and BRT unserialized barrel bridges were produced.

Several Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineer (BLE) and Order of Railway Conductors (ORC) barrel bridge undersides have also been reported as unserialized. Factory records of the top plate serial numbers designate these as 999B's or ORRS. I have 26 reports of these Brotherhoods in my data base and estimate that around 365 of these barrel bridges were produced on the assumption that just like the others, the 26 represent 7 percent of the production.. Ball obviously used these bridges to fill Brotherhood orders as they came in. He used the same technique later on with plugs, the little round removable part of the movement that contained the ORRS or Brotherhood seal, in the 16 size watches. We know that there was some resistance to Ball watches by union members resentful of the pressure applied by Ball's inspectors (footnote1) Perhaps slow sales made this a more efficient and cost effective way to control inventory.

I had always been surprised by what I considered the lower than expected reports of Ball & CO Official Railroad Standard (ORRS) watches given the factory records showing so many produced. Understanding that over 600 ORRS barrel bridges were replaced with Brotherhood barrel bridges explains the anomaly. It is even more glaring when you realize that of the 425 21 Jewel watches produced for Ball & Co and designated by Hamilton as 999 A's prior to the 118k run, only 6 of the 30 survivors known to me have been reported as ORRS's and the other 24 have been reported as Brotherhoods. Again, when you look under the barrel bridge, you will find that unserialized Brotherhood barrel bridges have replaced serialized ORRS barrel bridges. ORRS 21 Jewel Ball & CO are obviously rarer than their Brotherhood counterparts!



fig 3 17 Jewel circular damascening (Bill Kapp collection)



fig 3 A 21 Jewel damascening (Bill Kapp collection)

HAMILTON BALL SERIAL #'S 90101-90950

90101-90200 Left Hamilton as updated Railroad Watch Co models with 17 Jewels . Just before the turn of the

century, the Ball firm had an infusion of capital from Rockefeller interests. This began a transitional period where marketing and product design underwent a change.(footnote 2) As can be seen in figure 4, the Ball & CO signature is now on the barrel bridge. Previously in the run of watches with serial numbers from 20801-21000, the signature was absent. From my data base with only four reports, we see that the Railroad Watch Co nomenclature has been dropped from the dial and they are now marked Webb C Ball, (fig 5) with one exception. One watch is reported with a replacement unserialized Webb C Ball Barrel bridge underside whose damascening does not match the rest of the movement.(fig 6) and has a Roman dial. Interestingly enough, the barrel bridge would have been a great match for the dial shown in figure 5! I believe serial # 90129 left the Hamilton factory with a serialized Railroad Watch Co bridge just like the other examples we have seen. Ball or someone else used the replacement unserialized Webb C Ball barrel bridge in the same manner as the Brotherhood unserialized barrel bridges were used to replace ORRS bridges. But if Ball did the substitution why did he not follow his usual custom of matching the dial and the damascening?

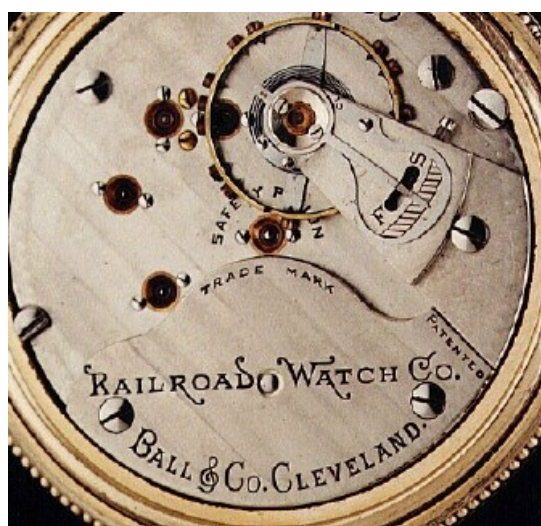


Fig 4 from Don King Collection
courtesy of Bob Kerr



Fig 5 from Don King Collection



Fig 6 Photo

Bob Kerr's movement # 90129.(Fig 6 A) shows the replacement unserialized Webb C Ball barrel as found on the movement. The dial found on this watch is a surprising Roman dial, the only 18 size example I have ever seen.(figs 6 B & C) The nomenclature on the dial is suggestive of its being a rejected prototype for the run of Ball's Standard Railroad Watch Co movements bearing the serial numbers from 20501-20800. While I am skeptical that this watch is in its original configuration, it has fascinating components and would be a delightful addition to anyone's collection. Throughout this run, we will see the Railroad Watch Co and Ball's Standard Railroad Watch Co gradually evolve and transition. If ever there was a run where we would expect prototype bridges and dials, this would be it. The Railroad Watch Co venture was obviously not a success either as a line of watches or as a separate company and I would speculate that Ball was considering replacing the model with a Webb C Ball adjusted version but chose instead to go with the unadjusted commercial standard model. Note that both the commercial standards observed after 90751 and this run of 100 left the Hamilton factory designated as "F"s



Fig 6 A courtesy of Bob Kerr



Fig 6 B courtesy of Bob Kerr



Fig 6 C courtesy of Bob Kerr

90201-90600 left the factory designated Uniform Standard, but from reports and observations appear to be marked Adjusted A (fig 7) and some of them are also marked Sapphire Pallets and / or Single Roller. The Sapphire Pallets marking is difficult to see as the letters have not been blacked in as you would normally expect. It almost appears that the stamping was done at a later date! Note the wider circular damascening on this run, it is similar to the damascening found on 999 E's. (Ball's Standard Railroad Watch Co) From current reports, it would appear that adjusted "A" movements should all have double sunk ORRS dials but we do not have enough reports to confirm that. (fig 8) A prototype Uniform RR Standard dial has been seen on a Ball's Standard Railroad Watch movement but no movement marked Uniform Standard has been reported. I have a poor quality photo of the Uniform RR Standard dial. (fig 9) As this dial is a mismatch in its present location, it seems very likely tht it might be a prototype considered for this run of watches that Hamilton designated Uniform Standard.



fig 7 barely able to see sapphire pallet on left



fig 8 ORRSI DS Ball dial

movement

(From the Bill Kapp Collection)

dial !!

message board)



fig 9 would love to have a matching

for this Uniform RR Standard

(photo from NAWCC

90601-90750 left the factory designated as 999E's but have been reported as mostly ORRS with some and perhaps all marked Single Roller. It appears that Ball's Standard Railroad Watch Co is being displaced by this new

model. Serial # 90624 has been seen with a BLE Single Roller marked barrel bridge and a matching BLE double sunk dial. Again from existing reports, it appears the dials should be all double sunk. Ball disparaged double sunk dials as unsturdy, but during this transitional period seems to be changing his marketing strategy. As confusing as this run is, it is amazing how the dials are consistent in that the Brotherhood and ORRS dials are both double sunk. It would appear that Ball ordered sufficient appropriate brotherhood dials for his replacement brotherhood barrel bridges. I would be skeptical of any combination of Brotherhood dial and movement that did not match the corresponding ORRS dial and movement in its run.

90751-90950 left the factory designated as 999F's!! Prior to this, we would have expected the F designation to be associated with the Railroad Watch CO!. All my reports show these ended up as Commercial Standard watches. Most with Ball Watch Co dial & movement markings but some with Ball & CO markings. This marks the first appearance of Ball Watch Co in 18 size movements.

118001-119000

118001-118100 is a run of 21 Jewel watches, all 6 reported are Brotherhoods. Finishing room records show these evenly divided between ORC and BLE but our observations show some BRT's mixed in.

118101-118550 appear to have left the Hamilton factory as 17 jewel with a report of at least one brotherhood. Finishing room records indicate a mixed run of Brotherhoods and ORRS.

118551-118600 has the first 50 Ball Watch Co ORRS movements and dials!

118601-118700 is another run of 21 Jewel watches, only 3 reported and they are all ORRS.

118701-118900 appear to have left the factory as 17 jewel with reports of a few Brotherhoods.

118901-119000 left the factory as 17J. I have only two reports in this run and both are reported as Ball Watch Co ORRS.

. I have not had the opportunity to examine or had any reports on whether or not any of the Brotherhood barrel bridges in this run are unserialized.

170001-170400

170001-170100 Factory records show the first 100 as 17 jewels and the 3 reported are Ball Watch CO ORRS.

170101-170400 left the factory designated as 999E's!! Definitely not the 999 E's of earlier years (Ball's Standard Railroad Watch Co). Almost all of the reports in this run are recorded as Single Roller and Double Sunk ORRS. I have no reports of Brotherhoods in this run but there is one report of a Wm Kendricks private label ORRS (170257). It seems a bit out of place, but only an examination of the underside of the barrel bridge would tell us if it belongs to an earlier run.

Private Labels (jewelers Watches)

They are rare enough that even a movement without the correct dial is desirable, but a complete watch will attract much greater collector interest. While many will argue over correct matchings on other Ball watches, there is near unanimous agreement on these private label or jeweler watches as to what constitutes a correct pairing of dial and movement. (figs 10 & 10a) As correct replacement dials are nearly impossible to locate, one does not fear a substitution and collectors are hard pressed to find a story to validate an incorrect marriage. The cleverest marriage I have seen is a Hamilton dial marked Marcy Special on a Marcy ORRS Ball watch. I have 45 reports and observations in my data base and at least one third of these surviving private label movements have been observed without their

correct dial. That seems reasonable to me on watches that are almost 120 years old. We do not expect dials to have the same survival rates as movements.

By the same measure, I would expect all Ball & Co watches of this era to have the same or similar percentage of replaced dials.(33% or more!) This is why it is so important to have a sense of what is correct and to be skeptical of unusual pairings.



Wm Kendrick's Sons movement from Bill Kapp's collection



Wm Kendrick's Sons dial from Bill Kapp collection

CONCLUSION

It has been interesting to attempt to find order in the seeming chaos of incomplete data, sometimes erroneous data, and the sprinkling of potential mismatches due to either later era repairs or misplaced collector enthusiasm. The Hamilton serial number online lookup maintained by NAWCC and the online finishing room records have been invaluable in this quest. Many would contend that we are searching for order where it never

existed and that we cannot know with certainty what is correct or original. Actually, as none of us were the original purchaser, all we can hope for is to have a good idea of what should be correct. Some argue that that Ball or Hamilton employees were responsible for mismatching dials and movements and point to the overlap in shipping and receiving dates in two of the earlier Ball Hamilton runs. (28001-29000 & 42001-43000) If so, then these errors would not be correct by definition! Sadly, I note that all of these arguments center around the Brotherhoods. It seems the employees had no problem matching correct dials and movements with the ORRS watches. By keeping records of our observations and reports, we can at least hope to reduce the opportunity for future mismatches. I would appreciate readers adding more information to the list I keep open to the public at <http://community.nawcc.org/Chapter52/Pages/BallCoList/>. As recently as the LA Natl convention, the list was useful in identifying watches that had been altered since they were first recorded in my database.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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All knowledge by necessity has to be derived from others, but the interpretations in this article are the authors and any errors or omissions are my sole responsibility. Corrections or comments can be addressed to william_k_93420@yahoo.com. or discussed on the NAWCC message board that I monitor almost daily.

About the Author

Bill Kapp is a 21 year NAWCC member who has contributed three previous articles to the Bulletin. He is a graduate of UCSB in Economics and has been employed in both finance and law enforcement. Bill collects watches and clocks and his bride of 43 years collects everything else. They both love Tennis and travel.

NOTES

1. The Ball Watch Story-Part 3 The private label and Brotherhood watches by E. Ueberall and K. Singer p 620. Bulletin 340
2. The Jewelers Circular November 1, 1899

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