



*National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors*  
**Western New York Chapter 13**  
 July 19, 2020 Newsletter

**Special Safer @ Home July 2020 Edition!**

**Next Meeting To Be Announced**

10510 Bethany Center Road

Bethany Community Center

East Bethany, NY

In this Edition:

- President's Messages
- Member Highlights
- July Program: Stennes & Campos
- The Hoffman Clock Museum Update

❧ **OFFICERS** ❧

PRESIDENT - Eric Hooker/Kevin Cole

TREASURER - Phil Sortore

VICE PRESIDENT - Joe Walters

SECRETARY - Debbie Cole

DIRECTOR-AT-LARGE - Don Cecala

**Volunteers:**

Treasurer's Assistant—Donna Stengel

Woman's Program Leader— Nancy Ziefel

Member Highlights—Dorothy Baker

Communications Director—Beth Lewis

To go meals—Laurie Kimble

Membership—Ed Oleksy

Show & Tell—Paul Kostelny

**2020 MEETING SCHEDULE—Contact your local group for next meeting dates**

**Bethany Meetings:**

10510 Bethany Center Rd., E. Bethany, NY.  
 3rd Sundays at 10:30 am

January 19  
 March 15  
 October 18  
~~May 17~~  
~~July 19~~

**Rochester Meetings:**

Pittsford Community Center  
 35 Lincoln Ave. Pittsford NY 14534  
 1st 6:30, meeting 7 pm

September 18  
 October 16  
 November 20  
 January 15  
 February 19  
~~March 18~~  
~~April 15~~  
~~May 20~~

**Buffalo Meetings:**

St. Paul's Church, Ellicott & Eagle Sts.  
 3rd Sundays at Noon  
 September 15

February 16  
~~April 26~~  
 Sept 20  
 Nov 15

**2020 CHAPTER 13 DUES—CHECK YOUR MAILING LABEL**

Dues is a value at \$10 for yearly membership. Members 3 years in arrears are dropped from the membership list. A generous patron will pay the first year for new members!

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Hello to all of my clock friends.

We made the decision to publish the newsletter to keep our members informed as to what is happening and to keep in contact with each other.

I have tried a couple of Zoom meetings but was disappointed in the low participation. It requires some effort and I am willing to do it if members want it but the lack of interest is discouraging. Send me a note if you want me to do some more Zoom meetings.

To answer a lot of questions about my health, I am making small progresses but have a long way to go. As the rest of the world is doing, I am being careful about going out only when necessary and wear a mask and wash my hands. I have enough problems without getting the corona virus.

I hope all of you are safe and healthy.

I have just received an updated dues list and 26 members are 2 years past due and this October will make it 3 years. Please mail in your dues to save the Chapter postage, supplies and time, there is a form in this newsletter. Check the mailing label, it tells when your dues expires—if you are red please send your payment today.

I am disappointed that we had to cancel the Picnic meeting but I think you all know it was the right decision. The picnic is always a good time. Our October meeting is the next one and a decision will have to be made as it draws nearer. It will depend on the health situations.

Eric

585-586-2942

dhooker1@rochester.rr.com

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Hi everyone,

Once again, we are starting a new season and hopefully feeling a renewed sense of health and well-being. In order to be cautious and in an effort to keep everyone safe our July picnic is cancelled for this year. The October meeting has not been cancelled. We will keep you posted on the status of that meeting and our Christmas party. Hang in there, we will meet again!

Chapter 13 members do have one thing in common, and it has to do with our love of time, in one manner or another. Maybe someone can answer this: why does it seem like 2020 is standing still and at the same time, moving so quickly? It doesn't seem so long ago that we were having our first meeting of the year and worrying about a forecasted snow storm. Now, it's been over 6 months and every day pretty much seems like the day before.

I would like to pass along this request: when we do have our next meeting, please stop at the front table so that Grandma Donna and Grampa Tom Stengel can tell you about their new granddaughter (you might even be able to see a picture).

Due to our current situation, the 2020 Regional has been cancelled. That is one less opportunity to get together. If you would like to reconnect or have any information you would like to share or if you would just feel like talking, please feel free to give me a call or e-mail.

Kevin Cole

585-322-5581

[Kcole1@frontiernet.net](mailto:Kcole1@frontiernet.net)



Elmer Stennes

I would like to present the following program to my fellow Chapter members. I have a particular interest in the following two clockmakers, as I own clocks made by each one of them. Their stories vary and I would like to share excerpts of interesting information I have garnered on the lives of both of them.

First, to really grab your attention, I will begin with Elmer O. Stennes:

Between the 1940s and the 1970s, Elmer Stennes was famous for being the only large-scale reproducer of classic American clock cases in the country. His former friends and associates remember him for another reason - he killed his wife and was later killed himself. It's hard to say whether the clocks and other items made by Stennes are so collectible today because of their quality or because of his notoriety.

**ELMER O. STENNES** was born in Somerville, Massachusetts, in 1911. He was the son of a Norwegian sea captain, or so he told a local newspaper reporter the year he earned a spot in Brooks Palmer's widely respected reference volume, *A Treasury of American Clocks*. There he is, alongside 19th-century masters Lemuel Curtis, Silas Hoadley, and members of the Willard family, whose timepieces were so well replicated by Stennes that Palmer actually used photos of a couple of them as illustrations. That was in 1967, when Stennes was 56 and, reputedly, the only living craftsman to be so honored. The distinction caused a few good-natured jokes, his wife, Eva, told another reporter. A few years later, those jokes would seem ominous.

Elmer was nearly six feet tall, a lanky man with slicked-back hair and a long, angular face, Stennes didn't start out as a clock maker, although he did like to say he began making furniture at the age of 13. He also claimed he was a graduate of the Wentworth Institute of Technology, but the school has no record of him. Stennes worked as a carpenter throughout the 1930s and that during World War II he was employed at a Boston shipyard, building prototypes. Along the way he kindled an interest in horology.



Elmer made banjo clocks, shelf clocks, and girandoles and tall case clocks, too. He made grandfathers, grandmothers, granddaughters, and one in between, which he designed and dubbed the Wessagusset, the Native American name for the Weymouth shore. Stennes worked in mahogany, inlaid and hand-rubbed; native pine, native birch, and maple. He didn't make the movements - he bought antique ones, rebuilt them, and installed them in his reproduction cases. The finishing touch was with his own name painted across the dial. Not only a craftsman, Stennes was also a crafty marketer, and his clocks were sold nationwide through contacts he made as a member of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors.

In 1948 Stennes left the shipyard and started working full-time on his business. Elmer had two sons (Elmer Jr. and Eric) by his first wife who seemingly died a natural death. His second wife, Eva, bore him a daughter, Esther, in 1942. In 1951 Eva had another son, Elliot. When Elliot was very small, he started working alongside his dad, the only one of Elmer's four children to be apprenticed to him. At age 11, Elliot was said to have been capable of operating most of the machinery in the workshop. Originally Stennes worked out of a room in the house; but in 1959 he erected a separate building on the 16-acre lot. He nicknamed it 1 Tick Tock Lane.

Stennes has been described as "a seat-of-the-pants kind of guy," one who "lived by his wits." He has been characterized as "a wheeler-dealer," "a tough trader" who cruised the flea markets, a "classic Yankee" who "turned things." Unfortunately Stennes is also described as a hard drinker whose never had a sunny disposition, could quickly become as ugly as his clocks are beautiful. Once, Elmer's daughter Esther, in a letter to the court, begged leniency for her father. Esther would admit that her parents had often argued. But the marital strain wasn't widely apparent in August 1968, when the couple hosted the annual picnic of the clock collector association's New England chapter at Tick Tock Lane. Members recall that after a few drinks, Stennes often did become abrasive at meetings, but he was still politic enough to be elected their chapter president. At the group's October gathering that same year, Elmer and Eva sat with Brooks Palmer, and someone took their picture. It shows the 50-year-old Eva wearing dark-framed glasses in the style of the day, smoking a cigarette, and smiling. However, by the time the photo ran in the association's *Bulletin*, Eva was dead.



## JULY PROGRAM—PART 2

It happened shortly after Thanksgiving, on December 2, 1968, in the kitchen of 45 Church Street. Robert Webber was there that afternoon and remembers Elmer and Eva having words. As Webber tells it: "Elmer was seeing somebody else, and Eva found out about it." After Webber went home, Elmer and Eva continued to argue. According to court documents, teenage Elliot was there, too, but fled for his life when Elmer took out his .357 magnum derringer, which he was licensed to carry, and shot one bullet into Eva's head. She staggered from the kitchen and died on the bathroom floor.

Albert L. Hutton Jr., the lawyer who defended him, says Stennes called the Weymouth police himself. "I know what I've done," the police reports say Stennes told them. "I'll give you no trouble. The gun is here in my back pocket." Attorney Hutton also says that when Stennes was released on a bond of \$25,000, there was "consternation among the neighbors and chagrin in the police department." Elmer Stennes could even get away with murder; it appeared to those who saw him drive downtown each day to buy his habitual bottle. It was also business as usual at Tick Tock Lane, with one exception. Stennes now added a flourish to his clocks, branding them with the initials, "O.O.B.," to signify his new status - "out on bond."

"The craftsmen of Tick Tock Lane", a phrase from a Stennes clock catalog, were back at work, too. In truth, he had only one full-time employee, [Foster S. Campos](#). As reserved a man as Stennes was flamboyant, Campos started working for Stennes in 1952 and continued for 22 years, so he knew him perhaps as well as anybody did. Of the O.O.B. insignia, the taciturn Campos, who now runs his own reproduction-clock business in Pembroke, Massachusetts, has only this to say: "He had a quirky sense of humor. Plus, he knew he was going to be famous."

Stennes pleaded not guilty to murder, but admitted guilt to manslaughter. He was sentenced to eight to ten years. "He accepted his fate. He handled it well. He was Elmer Stennes," says Robert L. Steadman. Retired Chief Justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts, Judge Steadman was Stennes' personal friend and counsel before the crime; he is also the owner of a Stennes cherry-wood grandmother clock as well as a one-of-a-kind, custom-made Stennes item that seems to prefigure a chapter in Stennes' life: a gavel!

The Judge and others regularly visited Stennes in, the Massachusetts Correctional Institute at Plymouth. Campos came, too, but not to chat. Supposedly Stennes was teaching carpentry classes in the prison wood shop; he was actually carrying on his business, using prison equipment and inmates, with Campos bringing wood and other supplies and taking cases back to Tick Tock Lane for finishing and sale. The prison clocks, as they were called, have their own idiosyncratic mark branded into the cases: "M.C.I.P.," the abbreviation of Stennes' temporary address, or alternately "Made Case in Prison" — a coincidence that surely amused the peculiar Stennes.

In January 1972, Stennes was paroled, after serving only two years and four months, and business resumed at Tick Tock Lane. So did Stennes' social life. In December 1973, he married again. The bride was 50-year-old Phyllis Means, an attractive widow of a local businessman. For their first anniversary Elmer made her a grandmother clock out of a holly tree from the yard, and on the dial, he painted the inscription "Warranted for Phyllis," who couldn't have imagined that she was going to be widowed again so soon.

At approximately midnight on October 4, 1975, as Phyllis and Elmer were sleeping in their bedroom, two men burst in and started shooting. Stennes was shot four times in the mouth and once in the side of the head; Phyllis was hit seven times in the face, neck and chest. The police arrived to find her covered in blood and screaming that Elmer was dead.

From her hospital room Phyllis recounted how she had rolled under the bed and played dead to foil her intruders; she also accused 24-year old Elliot Stennes of being one of them. She had seen his face, recognized his clothes, and heard his voice say, "Dad," claimed Phyllis. But after five witnesses testified that at the time of the shooting Elliot had been with them at a bar in Franconia, New Hampshire, the charges were dropped.

Bobby Webber and Foster Campos believe Stennes met his killers in prison. "He was the kind of guy who would promise you anything to get you to do something," says Webber. Maybe a guy got out and Stennes hadn't kept his promise, and..."

Others, however, still feel sure that Elliot, and perhaps one or more of his siblings, planned their father's death and hired men to carry it out. They point out that nothing was taken during the crime and that only someone who knew the house well (or who had been given a careful description of it) could have bypassed the alarm.

## JULY PROGRAM—PART 3

It was also mentioned that Stenne's will, redrawn after his marriage to Phyllis, left his children nothing.

Esther Stennes stabbed herself in the stomach a little over a year after her father's murder, in late 1976. The 33-year-old mother of two died a few days later. Her employer—a Braintree, Massachusetts, furniture executive—had been shot to death some months earlier, after answering a pounding on his front door. A salesman named Kenneth Fox, who sold Stennes clocks on the road, also died by his own hand; but those who knew him say he, too, was a drinker.

The shocking tale detracted from the value of Stennes' clocks for a time. Campos said some people even asked him to remove the notorious name from the dial. Later, when the prices started rising, a few had the name put back on. For the last 20 years, while other clock prices have remained stable, Stennes prices have climbed. As for Campos, his sales brochure alludes to his "extensive apprenticeship under a highly renowned master clock maker," but doesn't mention his mentor's name.

Unfortunately, some unscrupulous people have put the Stennes name where it doesn't belong: Stennes fakes have been cropping up at auctions and elsewhere. Buyers at a Cape Cod sale could be fairly confident that their items were real, since they were consigned by Phyllis Stennes herself. A petite blonde in her early seventies, Phyllis was sitting in the front row on the night of the sale, flanked by family members and looking entirely under scathed by her ordeal of more than 20 years ago. The auction house says she kept only one clock for herself. It wasn't, however, the clock Elmer made her for their anniversary.

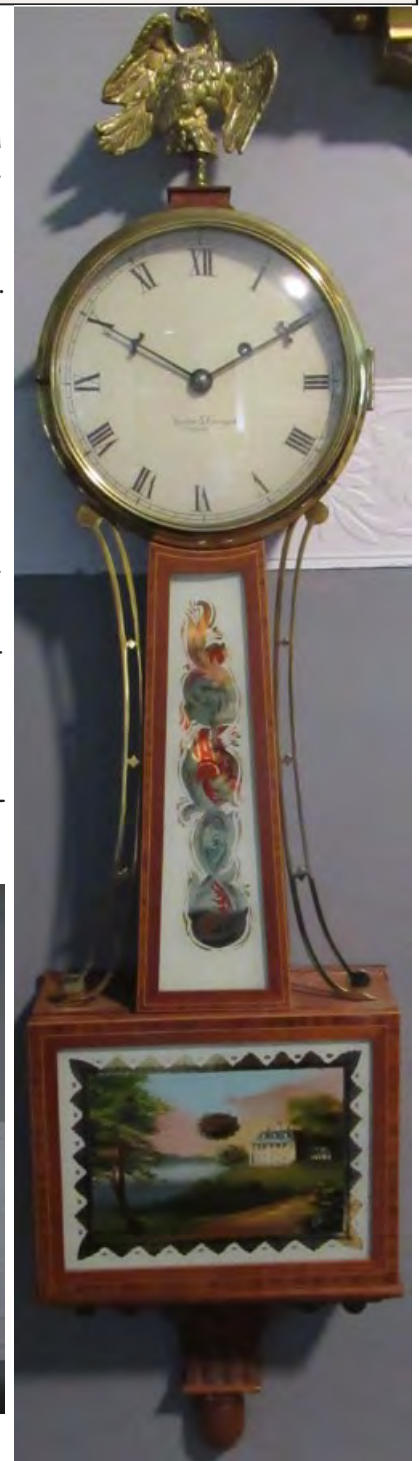
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**FOSTER S. CAMPOS** (1926-2007) of Pembroke, Massachusetts was a very well-known and respected maker of fine quality reproductions of early American shelf, banjo and grandmother clocks. Foster Campos created some of the finest replicas of classic early American timepieces that are available today. Following his retirement and death, interest in Foster's clocks has continued to grow. His clocks are becoming difficult to find and are holding their value as seen in numerous clock auctions.

Foster was trained by and was the sole employee of Elmer Stennes. Campos' sales brochure alluded to his "extensive apprenticeship under a highly renowned master clock maker," but his mentor's name was never mentioned!



Foster S. Campos



## LEARN MORE ABOUT CLOCKS AND HISTORY

Did you know if you have a Smart device i.e. cell phone or tablet, you may enjoy downloading **UNIGUIDE** tour system from the Google Play Store or the Apple App Store?

You can take virtual tours of museums around the world including the Hoffman Clock Museum.



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## THE HOFFMAN CLOCK MUSEUM UPDATE

ERIC HOOKER

The Hoffman Clock Museum just received a donation of clocks from the Cali family, many of you know Jim and Dave Cali from Chapter 13. Jim is downsizing and moving back to the area, he remembered the Museum. There are some nice pieces and some will be on display in the museum.

The Museum is still closed, we will open when conditions will allow. Richard Rank and Dave Richardson installed new LED lighting before all was shut down; it looks great but it shows all of the dust, dirt and fingerprints: Looking for volunteers to give us a hand cleaning the cases, windows and of course the clocks, lunch will be provided. Watch for further details when we can set a date.

Photo to the right is Cali donation is a Seth Thomas short drop. The Cali's obtained it from the person who remodeled Judge Allen's courtroom where it hung from the time it was new until July 1895. This makes the Hoffman the 4<sup>th</sup> owner of the clock. Judge Allen and his court were located in LaSalle, NY now called Niagara Falls, NY. The clock looks brand new.



Also from the Cali donation, a late 1940's car clock and matching speedometer.

If you know what car this is from, please call me at 585-943-1262!

## MEMBER RECOGNITION—KEVIN COLE

DOROTHY BAKER

Many thanks are to be given to Kevin Cole. Over the past few years he has seen the need for our members to be recognized for their years with NAWCC. He has worked with NAWCC to have our members receive all their 10 year pins and now has helped NAWCC create a recognition Certificate for long time members. Chris Tahk is the first member of our Chapter to receive this award with 60 years of membership. NAWCC sent the award to Kevin along with a letter for him to present it to Chris. Since we have not had any meetings because of the virus situation, we want to congratulate Chris and thank Kevin for making it possible. Below is the contents of the letter Kevin received:

Hello Kevin,

Thanks to you we are going to implement a new program for our 60 year members. We are creating a certificate for them to receive for being a member for 60 consecutive years. Thank you for caring for our members as much as you do and doing as much as you do for the members of the NAWCC. I will have Mr. Tahk's certificate to you by the 15th for you to present it to him.

Have a great day,

Stacey Strayer, Member Services Manager

[sstrayer@nawcc.org](mailto:sstrayer@nawcc.org) [www.nawcc.org](http://www.nawcc.org)

## MEMBER HIGHLIGHT— Chris Tahk—60 Years with NAWCC DOROTHY BAKER



Originally from New Jersey, his interest in clocks began at age 10 when a neighbor gave him an old alarm clock to tinker with. Since he loved mechanical things he started to take it apart and of course all the parts went flying. That would have been discouraging for a small boy but with the help of his 7<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher, Adolph Amend, he went on to do many more things with clocks. Adolph had been a master clock maker, designer for General Time Corp, had a fabulous collection and was an author of many articles for the NAWCC Bulletin. By encouraging Chris to keep interested in clocks, Chris became a NAWCC member. Chris's family moved to New Hampshire in 1953 his interest was increased as there were many antique clocks and other antiques there. At 16 he bought his first real clock, a drop octagon wall clock for \$1.75 and learned about maybe making a profit, as the auctioneer offered to buy it from him. A later auction purchase introduced him to the wood works clocks which delighted and amazed him.

Chris eventually became an educator and retired after 16 years of teaching and administration at Buffalo State. While studying for his many degrees, Chris had several fraternity brothers who ended up being great friends. One of them was Ken Roberts and Chris learned many things from him, not only by reading the many books he wrote alone and with Snowden Taylor, but by talking to him about the many clocks and wood planes that they both enjoyed.

During his graduate years Chris was in Rochester and was able to visit his science teacher Adolph's old Rochester friend, Neil Henry. Neil was an early member of Chapter 13 and had assembled a remarkable collection of American Clocks. Adolph, along with a woodworker friend, had made eight numbered exact copies of an Aaron Willard Massachusetts shelf clock. They each kept one and sold the others to friends. Neil had one of them that Adolph previously had, offered it to Chris at a reasonable price, but as a student could not afford it at the time. Two decades later, Chris had an opportunity to buy it at an auction of Neil's estate, but was outbid. It was not until another decade had past, that Chris found another one in a tent at the Clarence Flea Market. To his amazement it was the same one that Adolph had offered to him many years back as there was a label with his and Neil's name and address on it. Knowing the chance would not come again and having the funds to do so, Chris bought it.

Now Chris is still collecting. Eclectic items, early wood and metal tools, technical and scientific devices. Wood planes are his special interest. His fraternity brother Ken Roberts wrote important books on early American wood planes and edge tool makers.

Chris was honored this year with a certificate from NAWCC commemorating his 60 year membership with our organization. What a great honor for him. Over his many years with NAWCC he has done many projects including assisting Fred Robjnt and the late Marv DeBoy in getting the Buffalo History Museums Apostle clock running again.

Chris enjoys life with his wife of 55 years and their two children and three grandchildren and of course his many clocks and wonderful items he has collected over the years.

### CHAPTER 13 DUES FORM

Enclosed is \$\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ years (\$10 per person/year)

\_\_\_\_\_MEMBER

\_\_\_\_\_MEMBER

**Mail dues to:**

Phil Sortore

1056 Transit Road

Pavilion, NY 14525

Western NY Chapter 13  
995 Atlantic Ave.  
Rochester, 14609



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*National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors*  
Western New York Chapter 13

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# Watch your mailbox for details when meetings will restart!

**IMPORTANT NOTE:**

Summer meetings are cancelled. Stay safe and enjoy  
this month's our Safer At Home Edition!