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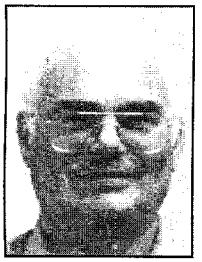
Paul Odendahl
Editor & Publisher

British Horology Times

NAWCC CHAPTER 159

British Horology Chapter 159 of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors

WHO ARE THESE GUYS?



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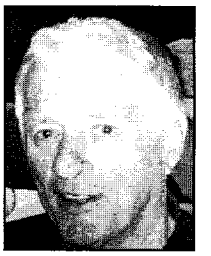

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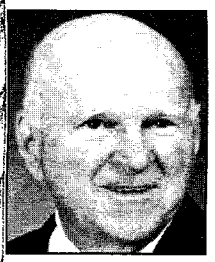

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Time, and our hobby (or profession) are closely bound together. Here are three panels on *time*:

1995

Time: A non-spatial continuum in which events occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past, through the present, to the future.

Microsoft Bookshelf '95 Dictionary

1695

Time, like an ever rolling stream,
bears all our years away;
they fly, forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

2008

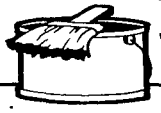
Do you have a philosophy, or any thoughts worth writing down about *time*?

SECOND LINE

NEXT MEETINGS

April 10, in Ft. Mitchell KY. Tom Spittler will discuss English longcase clock movements.

July 11, Springfield MO. Lee Yelvington will discuss "Dating longcase English dials."



THE 'BOGEYMAN' CLOCK

By Doug Cowan (OH)

As I write this the neighborhood children (of all ages) are gearing up for Halloween. The sales of costumes and home decorations (some macabre to say the least) are booming. So I submit this short article in the season's spirit.

When our little boy was 5, he became convinced that ghosts lived in grandfather clocks. If we had owned the clock in Figures 1 and 2, he'd have been unable to sleep nights. The clock is absolutely creepy in its Faustian and evil appearance. The eyes roll back and forth in a most sinister way, accompanied by the red tongue flipping in and out of the mouth. The face, well painted on thin iron sheet, is not jolly. The coloring is harsh and aggressive and well painted.

The brass dialed clock is a traditional mid-18th century example in all other respects. Made by James Cuthbert of Perth, Scotland, who worked 1735 to 1755, the construction and design are of very good quality. I wonder if the automaton face has been added later, but the brass motion work has the same age and color as the rest of the movement, and fits up without any evidence of later fitment. The whole clock is quite spotless in condition, so I cannot even tell whether the painted face has been redone at some time, though it must always have been a face, since the tongue sort of defines that.

The repair shop thought that the case was mahogany, but it was not available for viewing. Maybe the door depicted the black plague! (joke).

Fig. 2

So my question is, why did Cuthbert do it? The subject must have been chosen by the purchaser, or else Cuthbert wanted to depict an enemy (his landlord?) for a clock he wished to keep. Have any of you seem its like? Or recognize the image? If so I can get that information back to the owner, who purchased the clock in Scotland while stationed there back in the 1960s.

-Doug Cowan

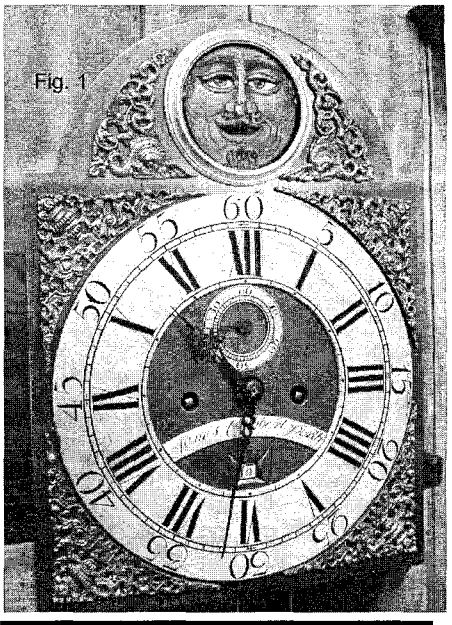


Fig. 1

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All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the Editor.

All applications for membership and payments of dues should be sent to the Treasurer.

Opinions expressed in articles in this newsletter are those of the writers and are not necessarily endorsed by the Chapter and/or by the newsletter and/or by the National Association.

Annual membership costs: USA $5; Canada $5 overseas $6 — in US funds or equivalent.

THE TWO THOMASI

Paul Odendahl (LA) says: "I invented the word. I could have used 'Thomases' or even 'Thosi", but Thomasi seemed better." The word refers to two clockmakers: Thomas Tompion (1638-1713) and Seth Thomas (1785-1859). They both made clocks hundreds of years ago and they both lived to about 75 years of age. Both were country boys. But beyond that, were they ever different!

What is an ardent English clock collector doing writing about Seth Thomas? Not only am I a collector of English clocks, I am the editor of this publication devoted to British horology. Who wants to hear about the American Seth Thomas?

Well, there's a lesson to be learned and I'm going to tell you about it. It's a simple lesson and you may have encountered it already.

It begins with Seth Thomas. Rather it really begins with my Grandson, Neal, and his activities at the 1985 National Convention Mart Room. Neal was a 12 year old boy then who accompanied me to the meeting for his first time.

Not at all overwhelmed by the magnitude of the space in the Mart, or the sometimes frenzied activity, or the great numbers of buyers and sellers moving around, Neal soon tired of just sitting at our table. He found that there was a need. Neighboring table holders were often too busy to leave for refreshment. Off went Neal to get coffee for them. Or a snack. Coffee cups, napkins, snack wrappers, cutlery all created trash which

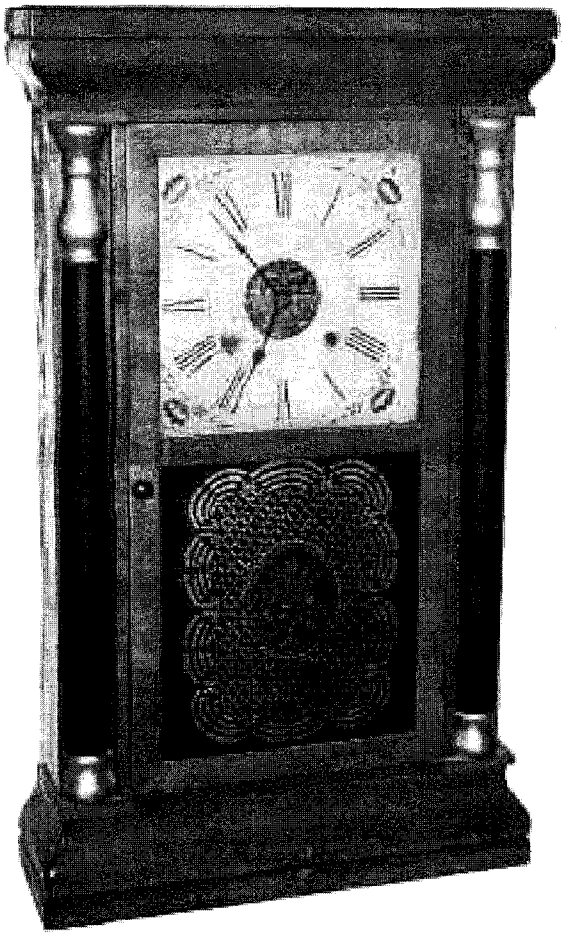

Fig. 1. Neal's Seth Thomas Shelf Clock as it looked when new in ca 1860.

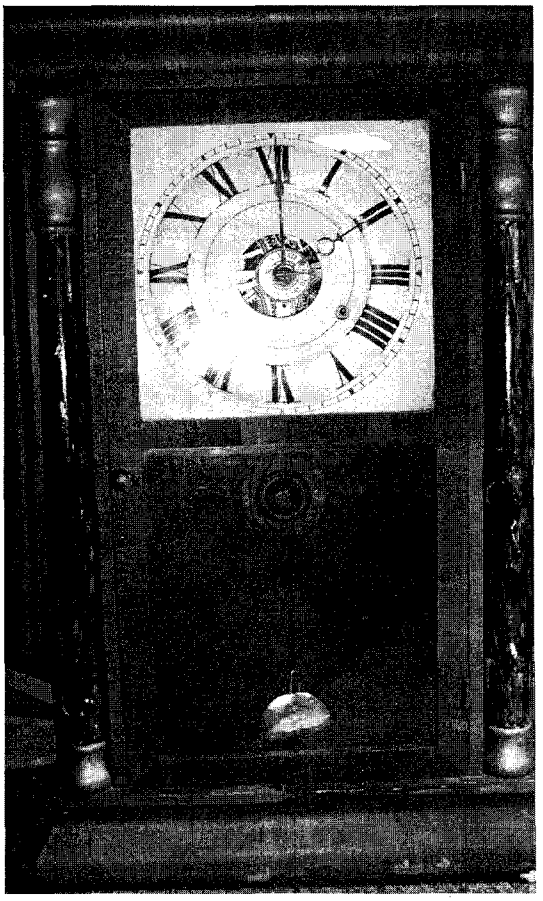

Fig. 2. Neal's Seth Thomas Shelf Clock as it looked 147 years later in 2007.

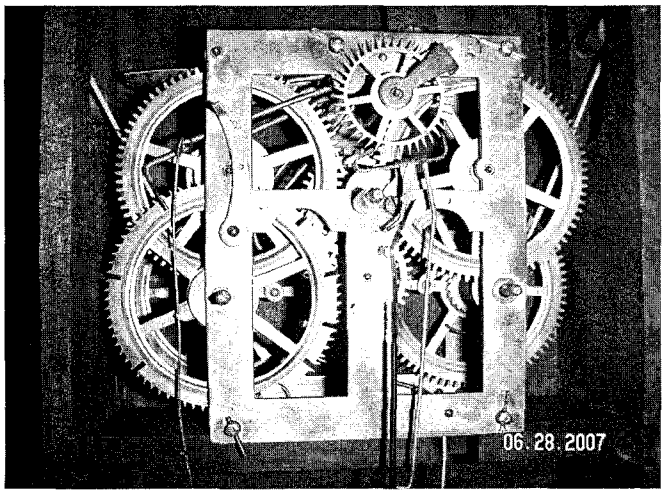

Fig. 3. The Seth Thomas Clock movement.

sometimes wound up on the floor. The first time Neal picked up two paper cups off the floor and ran them over to the trash barrel, a quarter was placed in his hand when he returned. After that, the spaces around our aisle and the neighboring ones were the cleanest in the place. That, coupled with the "keep the change" attitude of his "customers" who were financing their own drinks and food via Neal's trips to the concession stand, Neal was running a veritable delivery and clean-up business. And he did run. No sooner was a new order taken than Neal was off running. And back, with the still steaming coffee.

The kid had all he could handle and he was doing business without any haggling or bargaining. All he had to do was cruise the aisle and smile. He became a known supplier of services. It was all profit.

Neal's willingness and energy did not go unnoticed. In the waning hours of the last mart day one of Neal's "customers" stopped at our table carrying a clock.

"It's for you, Neal," he said, handing it to Neal. "It doesn't run and needs work but maybe you can learn about clocks from it." Neal's jaw dropped. So did mine. It was a 30 hour Seth Thomas shelf clock, with weights and shell columns. About 25" high.

That's the first part of the lesson: nobody ever goes wrong working hard, being polite and smiling.

So we took the Seth Thomas home to my house where there was room for it and there it has languished for 22 years. Neal went back to living with his parents. I had the clock in plain sight for all those years but did nothing except swing the pendulum once in a while and watch it

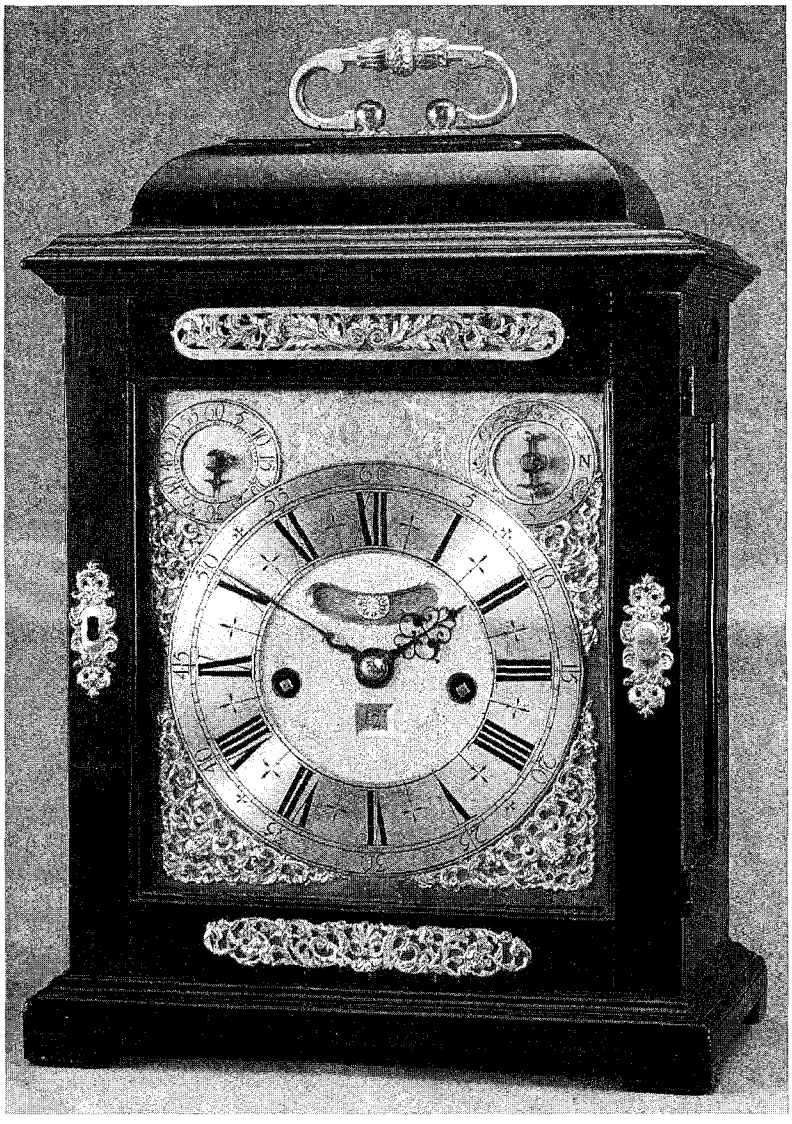

Fig. 4. A Thomas Tompion Bracket Clock, ca 1700.

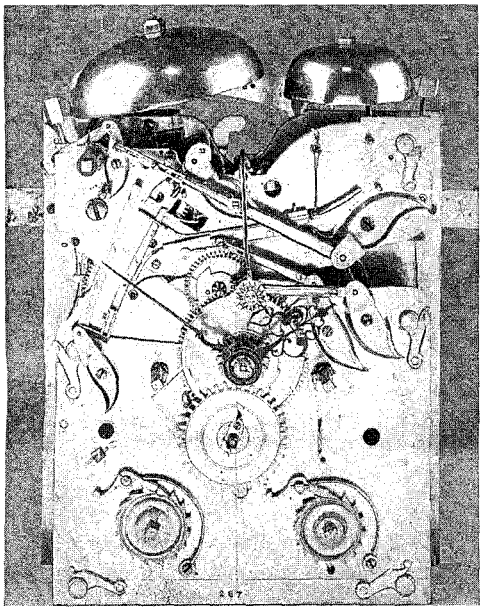

Fig. 5. The Thomas Tompion Clock movement.

Fig. 6. Signature on the back plate of the Tompion clock. He also signed on the dial.

Fig. 7. Signature on the movement of the Seth Thomas clock.

The different philosophies in the signing of their clocks is seen here. Tompion engraved his signature twice in plain sight on the front and back of the clock. Seth Thomas' movement signature cannot be seen without removing the alarm dial and looking closely below the cannon pinion, and he supplemented that by pasting a paper on the inside of the case.

stop after a minute or two. Neal has grown up now, has a family and lives in Texas.

During those 22 years I have had the pleasure of working on clocks by Thomas Tompion but never clocks by Seth Thomas. To me, "working on" means cleaning, or oiling, or adjusting, or replacing minor parts, or maybe even just sitting in front of the movement, looking.

I have come to wonder at the ability of the English maker could produce such complicated mechanisms. I mean both designing them and then making them from scratch without the use of electricity. The careful shaping of brass and steel plate and castings all had to be done by hand. It makes me wonder how many pieces were botched and thrown away. No wonder that these clocks can still run after more than 300 years.

Now, in 2007, I have "worked on" Neal's Seth Thomas clock. It's quite different from what I am used to in English clocks. It has stamped plates, bent wires, a stamped and bent anchor, but it did work when made. Now my job was to see if I can make it work again.

I was getting nowhere. The anchor kept hanging up on the escape wheel. Sometimes it would run for 15 minutes. Sometimes only for 2 or 3 minutes. I put dots with a Sharpie on the escape wheel teeth where it would repeatedly hang up. They looked pretty good, even under magnification. I considered replacing the escape wheel and found that supply houses sell a matched set of "verge", as they call the anchor, and escape wheel. But this escape wheel runs on a cock which is fastened to the front plate. I didn't want to tackle that. I spent many days trying to make the escapement work properly. In the end it turned out that the problem was not in the escapement at all.

So in a blank moment when I was trying to decide what to do, I decided out of curiosity to remove the alarm dial from the cannon pinion. It looked like a press fit and it was. Nothing appeared to be rubbing against anything - the back of the alarm dial was smooth. I left it off and set the clock running.

It ran for 10 hours!

Other than making the clock run better, the only other result of the removal of the alarm dial was a better view of the anchor. I wound the clock and watched the action of the anchor and escape wheel. It ran as it should. No hesitation. No hang-ups.

Can you believe it? Removing a part, a part not related to the running of the clock, allowed the clock to run where it had failed to consistently run before.

I can't believe it either.

I checked again for rubbing or interference of some kind. Nothing. I replaced the alarm dial. The clock stopped after 45 minutes.

What goes on here? I can't just leave the alarm dial off. There's a big hole in the clock dial for it to fit in. I thought to myself, "One day Neal is going to show up around here and ask about his clock". It would be nice if I could give it to him ticking and striking away, requiring nothing more than the daily winding.

With the alarm dial off and the clock able to run, I looked around in the movement at the striking train. It worked, gave warning and struck. A bit of pushing here and a spot of oil

there seemed appropriate. I put the alarm dial back on, started the clock and crossed my fingers. It was about noon. Still running when I went to bed.

The next morning I could hardly wait to take a peek: old Seth Thomas was just a-ticking away! I let it run. It is now four days and the clock is still running with daily winding.

With subsequent tinkering, I now have solved the mystery of why the clock ran with the alarm dial off and wouldn't run with the alarm dial on. The dial is mounted on a cylinder and is simply a push fit onto the cannon pinion. I found that if I pushed the dial on all the way until it "bottomed", the inside end of the dial cylinder lodged against the clock front plate and apparently there was just enough friction there as the dial cylinder rode along with the cannon pinion to make the clock stop.

The clock has a curious feature. At least it's curious to me, not being an American clock expert and not having studied them before this project. It has an old paper pasted on the lower part of the case backboard which says "Seth Thomas, Thomaston, Conn, Warranted Good". It's the warranty that's curious.

What does "good" mean? It seems to me that anybody can make anything and think that it is "good" and therefore can safely warrant that it is good (in their opinion). Were the customers in those days that gullible?

In the days when Thomas Tompion was working I don't think that there was a written warranty at all and certainly there was none inscribed upon the clocks. The warranty was the clockmaker himself whose living and whose reputation depended upon his clock being "good".

You may be wondering: "What is the second part of the lesson learned?"

Simply put, the rest of the lesson is that things are not always what they seem, and if at first you don't succeed, try, try again.

Haven't you heard that before?

Paul Odendahl, like most people, does best when everything goes as it should.

Author's note: I haven't spoken with Neal about his clock in 22 years, nor does he have an inkling about the work I have done on it. The first time he'll know that his clock is working is when he reads this article in the complimentary copy of BHT which I will mail to him.

COMPARISON OF THE TWO CLOCKS

SETH THOMAS SHELF CLOCK		THOMAS TOMPION BRACKET CLOCK
Ca 1860	Date	Ca 1700
Rosewood with shell columns	Case	Ebony, domed top
25 inches	Height	15½ inches
Weights	Drive	Springs
30 hours	Duration	8 days
Brass with 5 pinned pillars	Movement	Brass with 7 ringed, latched pillars
Anchor	Escapement	Verge
Countwheel	Strike Control	Rack and snail
Coiled gong	Strikes on	Bells
8¼ inch square pressed iron	Dial	7 inch wide x 8 inch high brass
None	Dial Spandrels	Mask and foliate
Wood seatboard	Movement to case	2 brass brackets & screws into bottom
$200 (in 2007)	Value	$136,000 (in 1991)

REFURBISHING WOODEN CLOCK CASES

By Roger Gendron (MI)

Fig. 1

For those of you who feel uncomfortable stripping the old or original varnish, lacquer or shellac finish off of a clock case, yet would like to improve its appearance, I suggest that you try the following procedure. You will need three things: Natural Watco Danish Oil Finish, #0000 fine steel wool, and a roll of paper towels. First try the procedure on a small unobtrusive or hidden part of the case to be certain that the Danish Oil will not dissolve the finish and that the finish will not prevent the Danish Oil from polymerizing. Using a paint brush of suitable size, flood a small area of the surface with Danish Oil. Then rubbing the wood in the grain direction with the steel wool, work the oil in. Keep the surface wet with the oil all the time you are using the steel wool. You will have to wipe the oil off periodically to check your progress. Re-apply the oil before you start again. The steel wool will not only take off the worst of the outer finish, it will also work the polymerizing Danish Oil and the dust from the finish into the cracks in the finish resulting in a much smoother finish. Continue until you reach the level of improvement that you desire or until additional rubbing gives no improvement. Then wipe all the remaining Danish Oil off of the surface. You may have to wipe it more than once with the paper towels if the oil bleeds out, as it sometimes does. Another advantage of the Danish Oil is that artist's colors can be dissolved in it and used to touch up places where the original color has been scratched or worn off. Mix small quantities on a palette or a piece of plastic. Let the oil and color mix dry thoroughly and buff to the desired sheen.

A few words of caution. Do this in a well ventilated area. Use protective gloves. Unless touching up small areas with color, never allow the Danish Oil to dry on the case. It becomes tacky after about 15 minutes and can be hard to remove. If it gets too dry, it can be removed with mineral spirits or turpentine within about a half hour. Store your used steel wool and paper towels in a closed metal container until you can dispose of them as the oil is very flammable. Do a lot of experimenting and practicing before you try this procedure on a rare or expensive case. Be sure the result is what you want.

Fig. 2

NOTES:

1. This article was originally written for Chapter 67's newsletter some years ago.
2. Watco Danish Oil is available at Lowe's and Home Depot. It is available in a few wood tones as well as natural so you may be able to match the color of your case. Watco appears to now be a division of Rust-Oleum.
3. I have never used this procedure on polyurethane varnish but I see no reason it would not work. It should work on any finish that it does not dissolve or that prevents polymerization.
4. This procedure is very similar to a procedure described by Tom Spittler in a workshop except that Tom uses coarser steel wool and shellac. ⓘ

-Roger Gendron

AND WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

ANSWERS IN THE JUNE ISSUE OF BHT

1.

1602-1696. Was apprenticed for 8 years to a goldsmith.

2.

1629-1695. Dutch mathematician, astronomer and physicist who first successfully applied the pendulum to clockwork.

3.

1639-1713. Gained admission to the Clockmakers' Company by paying for it instead of serving as an apprentice.

British Horology Chapter 159 NAWCC

FINANCIAL REPORT

December 31, 2007

2007 was another good financial year for the Chapter with a Net Income of $491 compared with $930 last year. Revenue was $1096 compared with $1577 last year. 2006 results reflected a concentration of Dues receipts in 2006 from the timing of the Dues notices. As I have mentioned before, we are on a cash basis. The numbers from year to year are not easy to compare, particularly relating to Dues payments which reflect timing and substantial prepayments. Our major expenses are for printing and mailing of the BHT and both are presently under control.

We had 142 Members at 12/31/07, versus 143 last year. Of the 142, 25 Members carry 2007 expiration dates. We will continue to make the efforts to get new members and keep the present members. The Chapter's well being and its financial health depend on its members. Dues stayed the same at $5 per year and barring any major change, should continue at that level. We had $4,721 in the bank at 12/31/07.

Details and explanations are available upon request.

Respectfully, Dave Kern
Treasurer, Chapter 159
email: dkern@optonline.net

MART

MART ADS are free to members and should pertain to to British or Anglo-American horology.

WANTED / FOR SALE

I have the bottom half of a good 18th century Liverpool clock case. I need the top (hood) or will sell bottom for $350.00

Tom Spittler,
telephone 937-845-9032
before 9PM EST

Contents

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