



British Horology Times

Spring/Summer 2019

Number 76

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

Sam'l Bemis Watch Book 1785 - 1798

By Andy Dervan, MI

In 1991, Henry Ford Museum Archives acquired “Samuel Bemis Watch Book 1785-1798”, and two Samuel A. Bemis watch account books.

In January 2017, I found these accounts books in our archives and received permission from our archivist to transcribe and analyze Samuel Bemis’s Watch Book (see figure 1). It took me approximately a year to transcribe the watch book and another three months to analyze it (repairs, customers, and watchmakers).

Introduction

In 1774, England closed the port in Boston, Massachusetts to trade, because the citizens belligerently opposed all English duties. In April 1775, fighting broke out and revolutionary was underway. Fighting continued to October 1781 when Cornwallis surrendered to Washington. It took two years to negotiate the Treaty of Paris and nine months for all parties to ratify it; the war was not formally over until June 1784. Ten years of no trade - there was a pent-up demand for the watch repair trade: replacement parts, supplies, and tools. It probably took watch sellers and repairer in Boston, MA approximately a year re-establish contact with watch retailers and suppliers in England.

Brief Samuel Bemis Biography

Details about Samuel Bemis’s life are sketchy. In 1754, he was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts to Philip Bemis and Lydia Dix. Cambridge, Massachusetts is across the Charles River basin from Boston, Massachusetts and required a boat to cross it. In 1776, he noted in his diary that he set up a shop in house in Cambridge,

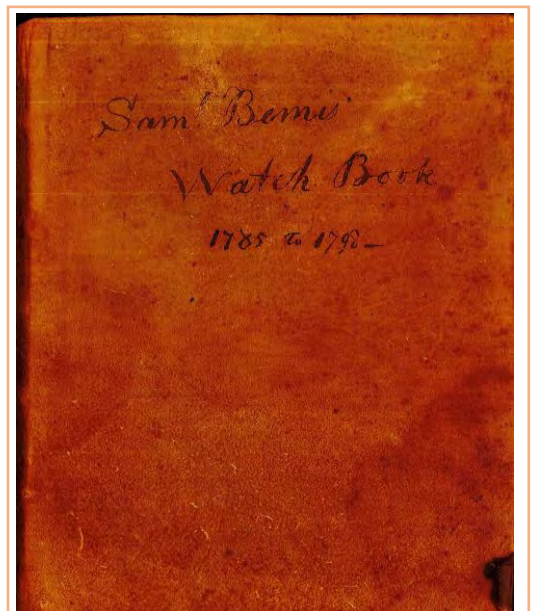


Figure 1 - Cover of Sam'l Bemis Watch Book 1785 - 1798

(Continued on page 4)

Officers of British Horology Chapter 159

Robert Pritzker, President
timeman@live.com
905-640-5197

Rich Newman, Vice President
rpnewman@yahoo.com
630-207-6616

Marion Krajewski, Secretary
marionkrajewski@comcast.net
219-769-8247

Peter Stipanovich, Treasurer
1305 Aviara Place
Gibsonia, PA 15044
440-476-9776
pstipanovich@gmail.com

Ken Johnston, Advisor
horology@suddenlink.net

Andy Dervan, Editor
Dervan14@att.net

British Horology Times

Is a newsletter of British Horology Chapter 159 of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors, Inc. Correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to: britishhorology@gmail.com

Applications for membership and payment of dues should be sent to the Treasurer (see address above). Annual membership costs \$5.00 Worldwide. See website for details.

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

Visit Us At:
www.britishhorology.nawcc.org

© Copyright 2019 by British Horology
Chapter 159

In This Issue...

Samuel Beemis Watch Book	1
Presidents Message	3



Interesting Watch Paper: William Cooke, Manufacture of Patent Lever & Other Watches, Clocks, Time Pieces &c., No 66 Byrom Street, Liverpool. Dated 1832.



President's Message:

Welcome to the Spring edition of the British Horology Times. Much credit goes to our new editor, Andy Dervan, who not only put the issue together but authored the main article as well.

It is with much regret that I announce the retirement of our indefatigable Secretary, Marion Krajewski. Marion has been tremendously involved in NAWCC activities and now must devote more time to issues on the home front. We have had the distinct good fortune that Marion has recorded our activities and corresponded with various people to insure that we have had meeting space at Regionals and the National Conventions for the past many years. She has also helped pull together many of our meetings including a double-check to make sure that we're ready to provide all attendees with our welcoming glass of sherry in the British tradition. We will miss Marion for her tremendous enthusiasm, efficiency and cheery nature. We wish Marion the brightest of futures and say a heartfelt "thank you" on behalf of the Chapter, the executive and from me personally.

At our meeting in Springfield, Massachusetts, in conjunction with the NAWCC National Convention, we will hold our Chapter Elections. From the above, you will gather that the office of Secretary is vacant and we would appreciate you coming forward and volunteering to act in this capacity. The job is not really arduous and Marion will be at the meeting in Springfield and you may discuss the details with her. The remaining executive officers, myself - President, Rich Newman – Vice-President, and Peter Stipanovich – Treasurer have all agreed to stand for election again. We are open to nominations for all executive positions and, hopefully, you will consider putting your hat in the ring.

At the National Convention, I will make a presentation on James Cox and his clocks and watches. Cox was an 18th Century craftsman who was responsible for the creation of many exquisite and animated timepieces. I hope you will join me as I share what I have learned about the man, his creations and his importance in British Horology.

The chapter is looking for people who are willing to share their experience, knowledge or love of British horology as a presenter at one of our meetings or author of an article for this journal. We can provide assistance with the technical details but we do need your story. Please consider sharing with us. You can communicate with any of the executive at one of our meetings to volunteer or send a note to our e-mail britishhorology@gmail.com. On the topic of presentations and articles, I extend the chapter's thanks to Howard Gitman and Graham Jones for their talks at the Florida and Ohio meetings. Thanks as well to Andy Dervan for the article in this issue.

May I remind you that Chapter 159 has agreed to act as co-host for the 2020 NAWCC National Convention in Dayton, Ohio. We are going to need lots of help to make the convention a success. Please plan now to attend and volunteer to assist at this convention.

Looking forward to seeing you at the National in June. Cheerio, Bob

(Continued from page 1)

purchased an “ingine” from Simon Willard, and received some limited clock making training from a James Jumieull who later left Boston for Philadelphia. We can find no record for this individual in any horological literature or any census or city directories. We do not know from whom Samuel received his later watch repair training.

In November 1775, he married Elizabeth Robinson and their daughter, Elizabeth was born December 1775. His father Philip Bemis passed away in late 1778, and in early 1779 “Samuel Bemis, Clockmaker” petitioned the Middlesex Probate Court to be named executer of his father’s estate. In January 1784, the Probate Court awarded Samuel Bemis £115 as settlement. This was a substantial sum of money and provided him funds/credit to begin his watch repair business.

He later married three more times and fathered two sons named Samuel A. Bemis and Henry Bemis with Hazediah McWain between wife number three and four, he had two daughters with his fourth wife, Sally Willis. Samuel Bemis passed away in 1818 and was buried in Old Burial Grounds in Arlington, MA.

Clock Making

He apparently made some clocks as a partial single sheet brass dial for a Massachusetts Shelf clock was found by an individual who brought it to Delaney Antique Clocks in West Townsend, Massachusetts. They photographed and graciously sent me an image; the dial was boldly signed “Samuel Bemis, Cambridge”. These single sheet brass dials were only used for a few years after the end of the revolutionary war and were replaced with painted steel dials. In discussion with clock historian, Paul J. Foley, he believed the dial dates 1785 – 1790.



*Figure 2 – Fragment of Brass Dial MA Shelf clock signed Samuel Bemis, Cambridge
Courtesy Delaney Antique Clocks*

The Conway New Hampshire Public Library has a significant collection of Bemis family papers from the estate of Samuel A. Bemis, son of Samuel Bemis. It contained a number of documents and correspondence relating to Samuel Bemis. One interesting document was a receipt dated Sept. 1779 for him receiving a £ 100 payment for an 8-day clock and case (see figure 3).

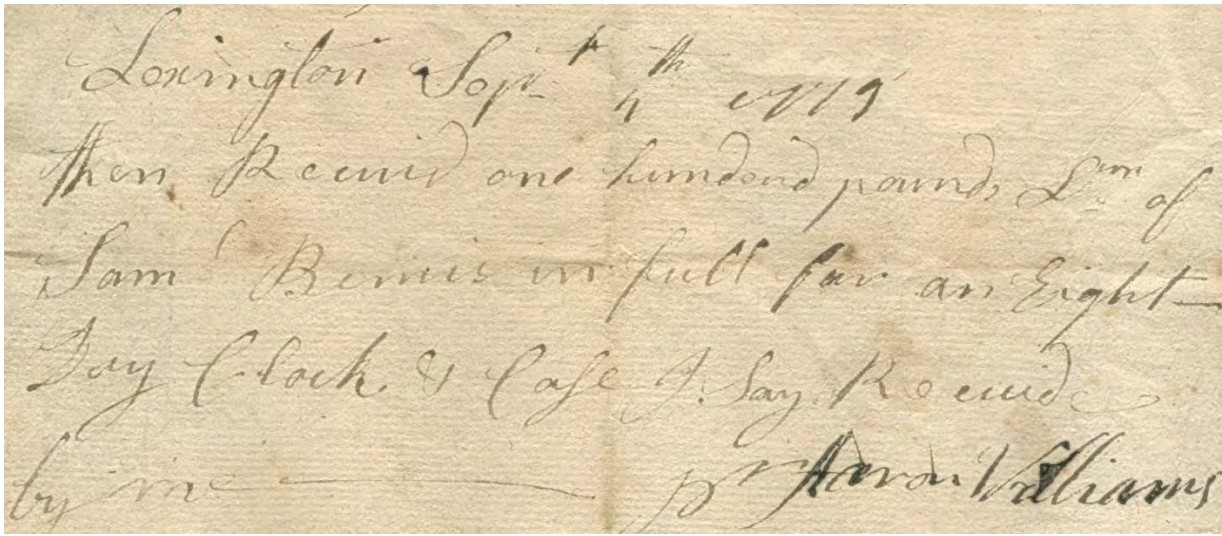


Figure 3 - Receipt £ 100 payment for an 8-day clock and case
 Courtesy Conway Public Library

Watch Repair Book

His watch repair book pages were small (7 ½ inches H and 6 inches W); he completely filled his 187 page watch repair book including inside cover pages with watch repair notes. He typically recorded five or six repairs per page. He billed his customers in the former English Colonial Currency: Pound (£), shilling, and pence, and he recorded his charges in three unlabeled columns representing Pound (£), shilling, and pence.

Samuel Bemis worked on exclusively verge watches that were the main production in 18th Century in both England and Europe. Many of his repairs involved the escapement: hairspring, verge, and count wheel and count wheel verge depthing in addition the fusee chain, fusee hook, and fusee clicks, and the mainspring repair and replacement along with cleaning (see figure 4 Exploded View of Verge movement).

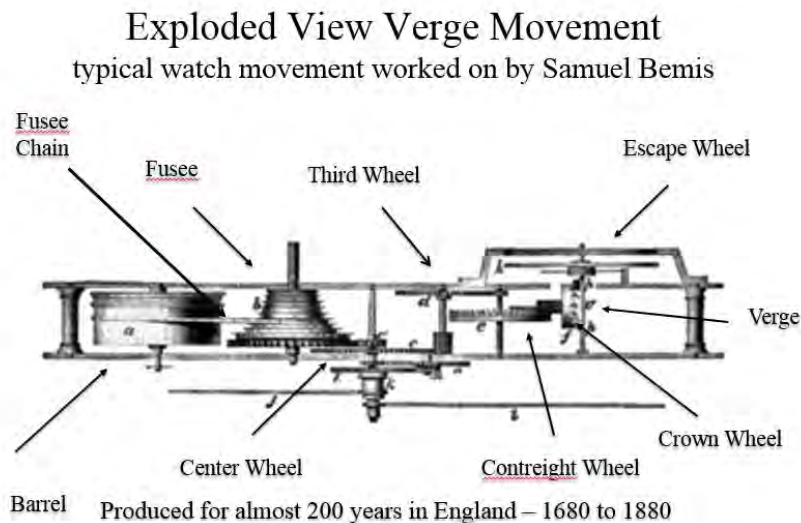


Figure 4 – Exploded View Verge Movement
 Wikipedia

Samuel began his watch repair business on April 27, 1785 in Cambridge. The first watch that he repaired belonged to his widowed mother Lydia Bemis (see figure 5).

Bemis recorded these key details on watches that he received for repair and where he was working:

- Date when he received the watch
- Customer's name and sometimes his home town
- Watch information (watchmaker's name, serial number, location)
- Repairs completed and Charges

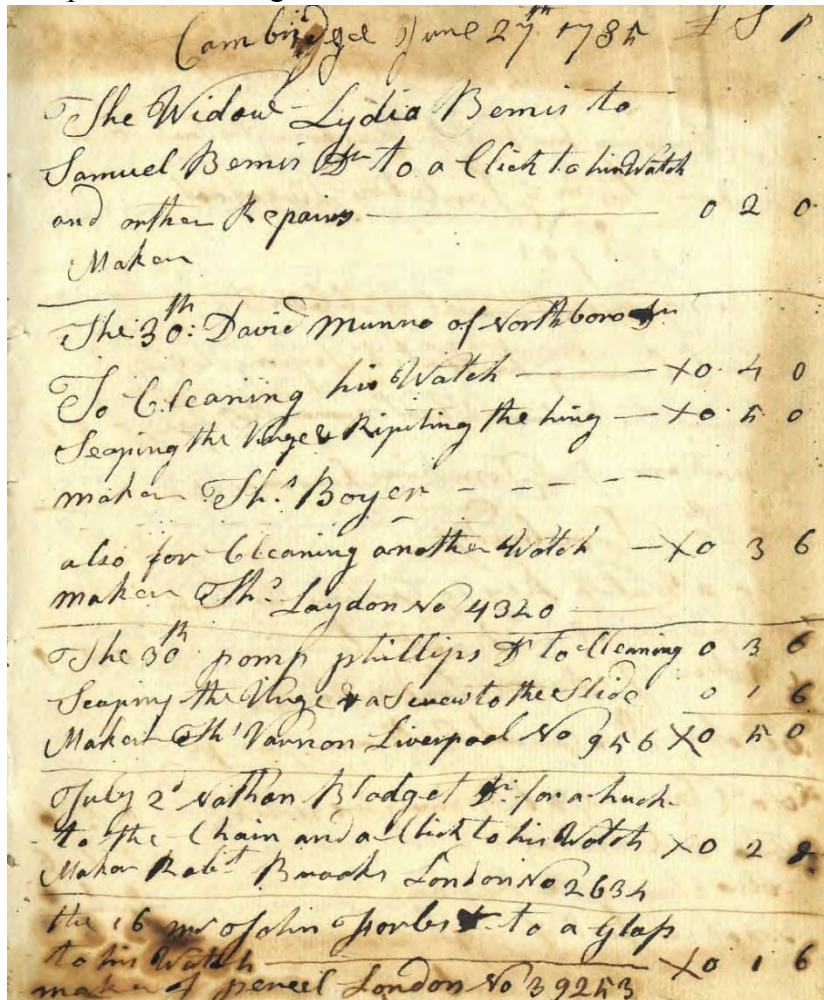


Figure 5 - Earliest Page from his Watch Repair Book (Cambridge, June 27, 1785)

Courtesy Henry Ford Museum Archives

Samuel Bemis was itinerant watch repairer; he had no permanent location. From 1785 to 1793, he traveled back and forth between Cambridge and Lexington Massachusetts; he spent extended periods in both places. In April 1793, he moved to Westmoreland, New Hampshire (a small town in southwestern NH bordering Connecticut River). In January 1794, he returned to Massachusetts (staying in both Lexington, MA and Lynn, MA) for nineteen months. In April 1796, he relocated then to Brattleboro, Vermont (small city in southeastern Vermont along the Connecticut River) for eleven months, and then back to Lexington, MA. In June 1797, he moved back to Westmoreland, NH when the book ended in May 1798. He spent 30 months in

Westmoreland, NH and Brattleboro, VT and repaired 190 watches. He was very productive repairing watches living in these small towns. He continued living in Southern New Hampshire most of rest of his life with occasional trips back to Cambridge, Massachusetts.

One of his watch papers printed prior to 1807 based on the printer label was saved by his son Samuel A. Bemis (see figure 6).



*Figure 6 - Samuel Bemis watch paper
Courtesy American Antiquarian Society*

It was surprising how far watches traveled to Samuel Bemis for repair in his early business years (see table 1 below).

He lived in Cambridge and traveled to Lexington routinely, distances watches came to him:	Miles
Lexington	10
Bedford, MA	16
Marblehead, MA	18
Northborough, MA	32
Groton, MA	35
Townsend, MA	40
Jaffrey, NH	71
Hartland, VT	135

Tables 1 and 2 below document costs of simple and more expensive repairs

Simple Repairs

a Key 0 0 6
Oiling & Setting his Watch a Going 0 1 0
Fixing the hairspring to his Watch 0 1 0
Jasting the hour hand to his Watch and a Collar for the hour hand 0 1 0
a minute hand 0 1 2
Mending the Chain and oiling his Watch 0 1 6
a huck and fixing the Click 0 1 6
Cleaning his Watch 0 3 0

More Expensive Repairs

Seaping the Virge, Repairing the Draft Wheel, & Cleaning 0 4 0
Bushing up the hole for the Contwright Wheel pinion to play in, Repiting on the Ring, Repairing the Crown Wheel 0 4 6
Cleaning his Watch, turning & sharpening the teeth of the Crown Wheel, Seaping the Virge, a crystal 0 5 0
Bushing the Contrright Wheel pinion, turning the Crown Wheel Laying it nearer the Virge, Seaping ditto Cleaning 0 6 0
a new main Spring to his Watch 0 6 0
Cleaning after falling into Salt Water 0 6 0
a Virge to his watch, one inch of chain, and new Cutten the fusee, turning the Base of the main Spring, and a crystal 0 12 0

Samuel Bemis's spelling was atrocious and his repair terminology was confusing; I received assistance from two watch repairers, Mahlon Shelter and Robert Loomes to help decipher his repair terminology.

He often handled customer watches multiple times over the years and performed a variety of repairs to them in order to keep them running. It was surprising that individuals owned multiple watches. He had a number of long term customers who owned 3 – 4 watches and he worked on them for 5 – 10 years.

The watches typically required servicing every 2 years as evidenced by his need to repair breaking fusee chains, clicks, and mainsprings as well escapement adjustments and cleaning.

Normal Customer Repairs

Date	Customer	Watchmaker	Watch Repair and Cost
July 27 th 1790	Col Aaron Ames	A Collins London No 435	Cleaning his Watch a Glap Repairing the Curb a Ripet in pendant 0 4 2 Re ^d 1/6
March 11 th 1792	Aaron Ames	A Collins London No 435	a New main Spring and key 0 7 6 7/1 ^{1/2}
March 11 th 1794	Col Aaron Ames	A Collins London No 435	Fixing the outside Chain Cleaning & Sundry 0 5 0

Col. Ames A. Collins watch received initial serving and ran 20 months before the mains spring needed replacing, and it ran two years before cleaning and repairing the outside chain

Long Term Customer Repairs – Doc David Fisk

Date	Customer	Watchmaker	Watch Repair and Cost
Dec 11 th 1790	Do ^c David Fisk	Edw ^d Jeffrey London	Bushing the Bottom of pontance of his Watch alting the Cock Bush & the falloween a new Dovetail for the Crown Wheel pivot Repairing Senter Wheel 0 6 0 Cleaning 0 3 0
Lexington Feb 15 1794	Do ^c David Fisk	Edw ^d Jeffrey London	Cleaning and Riping on the Locking Spring 0 3 6
July 22 nd 1794	Do ^c David Fisk		a Key for his Watch 0 0 8
Lynn August 23 rd 1794	Do ^c David Fisk	Walf ^f Ratland London No 2095	mending the main Spring 0 3 0 Rec ^d 2/
October 4	Do ^c David Fisk of Lexington	Edward Jeffrey London	
Nov 1794	Do ^c David Fisk	Edward Jeffrey London	Cleaning and Sundry Repairs 0 4 6
Lexington April 22 ^{n^d} 1795	Doc David Fisk	Edw ^d Jeffrey London	mending the main Spring and Cleaning 0 4 6 a crystal 0 1 6

Samuel Bemis repaired three of Doc David Fisk watches 14 times over 8 years. His Edw^d Jeffrey received extensive initial servicing and ran well for almost 3 ½ years. It required significant servicing (repivot locking spring, repairing mainspring twice, and other sundry repairs) within a year.

Analysis of Repairs


- From June 27, 1785 to May 1, 1798 (almost 13 years):
 - Samuel handled **888** watches
 - He purchased **4** watches
 - He noted **30** watches, but did not record any repairs or charges
 - Noted repairs on **854** watches
 - He often did multiple repairs on watches, some noted repairs & frequency:
 - Cleaned – **442** watches
 - Replaced **141** Glaps
 - Sharpening, Topping, Repairing the Crown Wheel teeth – **169**
 - Seaping the Virge – **140**
 - Leveling & Stratning the hair Spring – **60**
 - Installed **33** Cock Bushes & **40** Dovetails
 - Oiled **53** watches
 - Replaced **62** crystals
 - Replaced **42** main springs

Fusee chains, Fusee clicks, and main springs often broke and required repairing

Making Ends Meet

His watch repair income averaged 12-14 £ year based that amount would have difficult to survive on. In the Bemis Papers collection at the Conway Public library I found numerous loose receipts that he repaired a variety of household items that would have provided him a good supplemental income.

Analysis by Watchmaker

- Repair database sorted by watchmaker:
 - **Approximately 430** identified watchmakers (difficult due to spelling & signatures)
 - Vast Majority are signed “London” and few other cities like “Liverpool”, etc.
 - **44** French watches (24 signed and mostly from Paris)
 - **8** signed Irish watches (Dublin)
 - **4** American Watches (obviously English made)
 - **1** Spanish watch
 - **1** Swedish watch
 - **1** “Forran watch that winds on the Face”
 - Numerous makers have sold multiple watches to customers
 - J Butt London – 7 unique watches
 - Geo Clark London – 6 unique watches
 - Cha Reynolds London – 5 unique
 - Waltr Ratland London – 3 unique watches
 - Jno Edmonds London – 2 unique watches
 - T/Tho Butt London – 3 unique watches
- 

Analysis by Customer

- Individual customers brought watches to him for repair, and other individuals brought many watches came to him for repair:
 - Approximately 596 individual customers (atrocious & inconsistent spelling)
 - Approximately 80 repeat customers
 - Normally two or three times per customer
 - Long term customer: Reverent Thomas Green (4 watches 9 times in 6 years)
 - Long term customer: Doc David Fisk (3 watches 14 times in 9 years)
 - Long term customer: Doc Joseph Fisk (3 watches 10 times in 6 years)
 - Joseph Mulliken, Concord clockmaker, brought **12** different watches for repair over **2** years
 - Richard Francis brought **16** different watches for repair over **5** years
 - Thomas Jessenden, father-in-law of deceased sister, Thomas Jessenden Jr., and Ickabod Jessenden brought **19** different watches for repair over **8** years
 - Stephen Robbins & Stephen Robbins Jr. brought **22** different watches for repair over **10** years
- 