

Breguet & Tiffany Carriage Clocks, ca. 1900-1905: Emulation Is the Highest Form of Flattery

by Richard Perlman (PA)



Figure 1A, above. Tiffany No. 12837.

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An article I authored in the February 2006 BULLETIN, “The Basilisk Myth—A French Carriage Clock circa 1880-90,” discussed two carriage clocks that are closely related in style. One illustrates the Basilisk Myth and the other Gulliver’s Travels. Powerful themes of political satire are reflected in the elaborate engraving and raised work of both remarkable clocks.

The Gulliver’s Travels clock was featured in *A Century of Fine Carriage Clocks*, published in 1987. I presumed that, when the book was published, the Gulliver’s clock was believed to be unique.

The discovery of the Basilisk example suggested these clocks are probably not unique, and perhaps there are other related clocks yet undiscovered.

Shortly after my article appeared, a second identical example of the Gulliver clock was brought to my attention, confirming that the documented clock was not unique.

Here I present a similar example of a carriage clock, believed to be a unique Breguet product made between 1890 and 1905 that apparently was also sold by Tiffany.

Figure 5, left. Henry Capt Geneve No. 13732.

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Figure 2, above. Breguet No. 5096.

HABSBUERG ANTIQUORUM, THE ART OF BREGUET, GENEVA (SUNDAY, APRIL 14, 1991), P. 375.



Figure 4, right. Breguet No. 586.

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Figures 1B. Rear view of case.



Figure 1C. Right side views of case.



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Figures 1D and 1E, above and below. Case stamping.



Figure 3, below. Breguet No. 4594.



Figure 1F, above. Movement stamp showing "E.C. PARIS."

Figure 1G, left. Movement.

Portable Time

When French carriage clocks first appeared at the start of the nineteenth century, they represented an innovation—a reliable portable clock—the rich immediately wanted. In the early twentieth century they had become a type of clock almost anyone could afford. The earliest carriage clocks were the product of the great watch and clockmaker A. L. Breguet (1747-1823). By the 1830s clockmakers in France (Paul Garnier and others) would essentially standardize the carriage clock form. For the next



J. FANELLI AND C. TERWILLIGER, A CENTURY OF FINE CARRIAGE CLOCKS (BRONXVILLE, NY: CLOCK TRADE ENTERPRISES, 1987); P. 19.

hundred years (1830-1930) carriage clocks were essentially unchanged.

The development of the French carriage clock industry is thoroughly discussed in Charles Allix's excellent book, *Carriage Clocks: Their History and Development*. Allix notes that basic unfinished movements (*blanc-roulants*) were readily available in an assortment of sizes and quality from manufacturers in St. Nicolas-d'Aliermont, near Dieppe, or from those in the Franche-Comte, the frontier between France and Switzerland. Paris finishers obtained blanc-roulants, completed and cased them, and brought a wide array of clocks to market, predominantly through retailers.

What's in a Name?

Many very good quality carriage clocks are completely unmarked. Others are profusely marked. This circumstance encourages speculation about attribution.

The practice of buying-in various components or whole movements to assemble and sell complete clocks was practiced from an early date. This practice is vividly described in Daniels' *The Art of Breguet* and reflects the fact that in a center of a complex industry almost anything is possible because specialists were available to meet demand. This was particularly true in the carriage clock industry.

Indications of names or other marks on carriage clocks can be confusing. There are marks on cases and movements that are often thought to be that of the clockmaker. To be clear, the marks found on carriage clocks can be those of manufacturers (clockmakers), finishers (firms that finished and cased movements bought-in from manufacturers), casemakers, specialist makers of particular parts, or of retailers.

Retailers presented the best that Paris finishers had to offer, and their names most often appear on dials of carriage clocks.

Finisher "marks" are found on the backplate of movements, often in a logo, usually but not always incorporating their initials. These include the "marks" of well-known firms, such as Jacot, Drocourt, Margaine, and many others. Manufacturers and finishers infrequently retailed clocks themselves.

Retailers might have their name engraved on the backplates of movements along with marks of a manufacturer or finisher and their number. In some instances two different numbers might appear on the backplates: one of the finisher and the other of the retailer.

I have seen four different marks on the same carriage clock: Henri Jacot, whose mark is stamped onto the dial support plate, and whose initials are hidden under a click wheel; FD on the gong stand; AB in a distinctive script ligature (believed to be Alfred Baveaux, who was associated with Jacot) stamped three times between the plates or otherwise hidden; and Klaftenberger Paris, on the dial and engraved onto the

edge of the movement plate, clearly the retailer. Klaftenberger was vice-president of the British Horological Institute. All these marks are on one very high-grade, engraved, Gorge-cased, grand sonnerie carriage clock.

Marks for setting hands, winding, alarm-set, along with names of retailers and finishers, are found on the backplates of carriage clocks. Earlier, high-quality clocks often had these marks hand-engraved, with the finisher mark and clock number generally die stamped. On later clocks almost all these marks are die stamped.

Retailers' dial signatures were generally applied onto dials after they were made. The method of application is quite fragile, and one pass of a cleaning cloth can cause a signature to disappear. Infrequently, retailers had their names permanently fired onto enamel dials when they were manufactured.

Occasionally, a known finisher's name (other than repair marks) can be found scratched onto a clock part. I have seen this on the back of brass dial parts and on other parts.

Attributing a carriage clock to a specific maker or finisher because certain features are present is problematic.

There are some, including Allix, who have suggested that the type of arrows used to indicate winding, hand-set, or alarm-set direction on French carriage clocks helps to indicate a specific maker/finisher, and while generally true, this is not consistent. I have seen three very high-quality Margaine clocks each with very different directional arrows. What these Margaine clocks all had in common was the Margaine "beehive" mark and an engraved scale on the very top of the backplate, directly under the platform plate, to calibrate fast/slow adjustment. Finding similarities other than a bonafied mark may be helpful, but not always conclusive.

Marketing and Distribution

Carriage clocks are portable and were easily shipped to the four corners of the earth. As styles changed, or came back into fashion, over the 100 years carriage clocks dominated the scene (1830-1930), competitors freely borrowed from each other.

The carriage clock industry parallels the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century; developments that shaped the future during this period also shaped this unique industry.

The legendary firms of Breguet, Tiffany, Asprey, and other retailers and wholesalers around the world sought to meet the appetites of the market. This was particularly true as the nineteenth century closed. Marketing and distribution became more and more the critical link in the clock trade. Retailers and wholesalers might represent any number of manufacturers and finishers and could carry a broad line to please the

public's taste and pocketbook (See Allix, Appendix C—The activities of Maurice Pitcher are the substance of Appendix C in Allix. Pitcher and his father were carriage clock wholesalers.)

Breguet and Tiffany

The clocks discussed in this article suggest that firms could and would “borrow” from, or even replicate, the work of their top competitors.

The three Breguet clocks discussed here were apparently made by the best Paris finishers for Breguet, or the Breguet firm supervised the finishing themselves. The name Breguet and number were placed on the clock movement. The Breguet name is often also found on the dial, and they meticulously maintained a record of their numbered clocks.

There is also a similar record for Tiffany, but only under the name “Tiffany & Company Makers” along with a number. The Tiffany & Company Makers record, preserved in a ledger in the collection of the New York Historical Society, covers a brief period of production starting in 1879, when Tiffany was producing their finest and most original clocks. These Tiffany & Company Makers clocks range from carriage to grandfather, and beyond. Many are extraordinary, and some are unique. Tiffany had other business associations in the clock trade. This is reflected in the names found on carriage clock dials (i.e., Tiffany Reed et Cie Paris).

With the preceding in mind, when I came across the Tiffany & Company New York carriage clock, shown in Figures 1A-1G, which dates about 1905, in a form which I believed to be an exclusive Breguet product, I was to say the least not surprised.

The Devil Is in the Details

The cast dore bronze case of the Tiffany clock is identical to Breguet No. 5096 illustrated on p. 39 in Derek Roberts book *Carriage and Other Traveling Clocks* and here as Figure 2. This same Breguet clock also appears as lot No. 142 in the 1991 Habsburg/Antiquorum sale *The Art of Breguet*. The decorative hard-stone panels are different from the Tiffany clock, as are all panels of the several related examples discussed here. The hands of both clocks appear to be identical. The dials are probably the same size, but there is a slight difference in that Breguet No. 5096 has Arabic and Roman numerals at every five-minute mark, whereas the Tiffany has Arabic and Roman numerals, but Arabic only on the quarter hours. The dial of the Tiffany clock, however, is identical to Breguet No. 4594, as are the hands (see Figure 3). The dial bezels all seem to be identical.

The three similar, but clearly not identical, signed Breguet carriage clocks within this group were made about 1890-1905. The design is reminiscent of early

Breguet carriage and other small clocks. Some of these are shown in Daniels' *The Art of Breguet*.

The signed and numbered Breguet clocks of this group have somewhat similar case castings, but none are identical. All have different hard-stone decorative panels: Breguet No. 586 has lapis lazuli panels (this example may be earlier than the others, ca. 1890, and is referred to as *Retour d’Egypte* style in the Antiquorum archive) (see Figure 4); Breguet No. 4594 (see Figure 3) has green marble panels, and Breguet No. 5096 (see Figure 2) has jasper panels. I have not seen other Breguets of this type. Although the case handles are all similar, they are not identical. It would seem that this “family” was unique to the Breguet firm and perhaps thought to be one-of-a-kind. The Tiffany example clearly brings this assumption into question.

In Christie's November 1998 sale, “The Dr. Eugene and Rose Antelis Collection of Important French Carriage Clocks,” lot No. 107 appears to be very similar to Breguet No. 586. Lot No. 107 was retailed by Henry Capt Geneve (No. 13732) and has alabaster panels (see Figure 5). This clock is quarter striking with alarm. The enamel alarm dial is inside the case.

The Tiffany example panels are an ocher-colored marble. See Figures 1A-1G. The case, dial plate, and movement bear the marks and name of Ed. (Edouard) Chartier. This is stamped on the case and movement in several places and is numbered No. 12837 (see Figures 1D and 1E). Chartier was apparently the finisher of the movement and perhaps the casemaker. If Chartier made this case, did he make the case for Breguet No. 5096 also and perhaps the others?

Allix describes a similarly signed fine carriage clock by Ed. Chartier, ca. 1900, which is shown in Allix on p. 112, Plate V/11. The photo shows Chartier's very finely cased clock No. 13393 (see Figure 6), with the distinctive, similar, but not identical handle to Breguet No. 5096 (see Figure 2). No. 13393 also has similar feet and castings to other Breguet clocks in this group.

In Allix, on pages 107-109, the experiences of M. Pitou, a Paris carriage clock finisher, are described. M. Pitou in 1970, at age 80, was finishing carriage clocks from old stock of the best makers, among them Henri Jacot. It is noted that M. Pitou was apprenticed to one of two Chartiers working in Paris, when he was probably 12-14, about 1902 or later. I would have loved to talk with M. Pitou, but I presume he is no longer with us.

The movement of Breguet No. 5096, as described in Roberts, is a petite sonnerie with alarm and repeat. The enamel alarm dial is inside the case on the backplate. It strikes on two gongs, with a strike/silent lever in the base. The Tiffany movement is hour and half-hour strike with repeat and alarm. The enamel alarm dial is inside the case on the backplate. I would not be surprised to find that both alarm dials are identical.

The movement of the Tiffany is quite small, 6 x 8 cm, and sits on a decorative rectangular bracket within the case. The lever platform escape wheel is club-tooth, with compensated, notched, bimetallic balance with flat hairspring. The cadrature of this movement, while of very good quality, made about 1900, shows a brass rack. Earlier clocks would have had steel racks, which are more expensive and time consuming to make.

All five carriage clocks discussed are about 5" tall, all with the same size and type of dial and bezel, all with five decorative hard-stone panels (no two clocks have the same panels), all but No. 586 with gilt bronze ornaments applied to the hard-stone panels. The only two cases that are completely identical are the Breguet No. 5096 and the Tiffany No. 12837.

Emulation Is the Highest Form of Flattery

There are carriage clocks that are unique. These are most likely early nineteenth-century French or English clocks that were made to order and generally of very high quality. As the capacity for production (the industrial revolution), marketing, and distribution grew, it was less likely that uniqueness was sustained. Perhaps the Breguet firm did not offer exact duplicates, so customers would feel each and every clock was unique, as

indeed they may have been, up to a point beyond Breguet's control.

World War I, technological change, the advent of the wristwatch, and the inexpensive folding Swiss travel clocks relegated traditional carriage clocks obsolete, except as collectibles.

The testament here, in finding this Tiffany version of what was believed to be a unique Breguet design, is that in 1905, about the time these clocks were made, the demand for *qualite soignée* was quite alive. Perhaps other examples will be found and shed more light on this subject.

These are unusual, beautiful, and very special clocks that reflect the changing times and a dedication to quality that has always been a hallmark of the Breguet firm. Emulation is the highest form of flattery.

References

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About the Author

Richard Perlman, born in 1942 in the Bronx, New York City, graduated from Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, NY (1963), earning a bachelor's degree in Fine Art. After graduation he served in the United States Marine Corps. In 1967 he started a graphic design firm in New York City, where he served numerous major corporations, governmental entities, and global organizations for nearly 30 years.

Richard's interest in American clocks led to a role as consultant/dealer in American clocks to a prominent New York firm dealing in antique clocks and watches. He was president of Westchester Chapter 90 for four years and has been a contributor to the BULLETIN's Answer Box. In 1996 he brought an early American factory clock by Benjamin & Truman Hanks, ca. 1806, to the attention of the Smithsonian Institution, where it is now on display. He has authored and coauthored several articles for the BULLETIN.

An interest in history, culture, and design has stimulated Richard's activities in horology. He has no formal training as a clockmaker.

Figure 6. Ed. Chartier No. 13393.



CHARLES ALLIX, *CARRIAGE CLOCKS: THEIR HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT* (SUFFOLK, ENGLAND: ANTIQUE COLLECTORS CLUB, 1974), P. 112.