

# One Man's Joker: Another Man's Japy

D.K. Stevenson (Germany)

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The somewhat "tarty" clock shown in Figures 1 to 6 was sold to me by a German dealer at a flea market in Germany. He described it as a *Joker* from Japy.

My first reaction, "really?," didn't come from doubt that it was a joker, but from surprise that it came from Japy. I hadn't seen a French joker before. Nor even known they'd made them.

A later examination indicated that with a few exceptions—the Japy Frères et Cie trademark certainly, the oval nuts below the sounding board—there was little that would distinguish it from a clock of the German joker type.

Knowing that it was French, however, a simple clock seemed less so. Was a joker by any other name still a joker? And what was implied by viewing it as, for example, a cheap, down-market carriage clock, a "household nickel alarm in the *Pariser Reiseuhr* manner," or as a *réveil américain*?

Similarly, my initial assumption that it was a German joker reveals a particular point of view. This type of clock, in all of its variations, is in fact one of the most frequently encountered at normal all-ware flea markets on a day-in day-out basis.

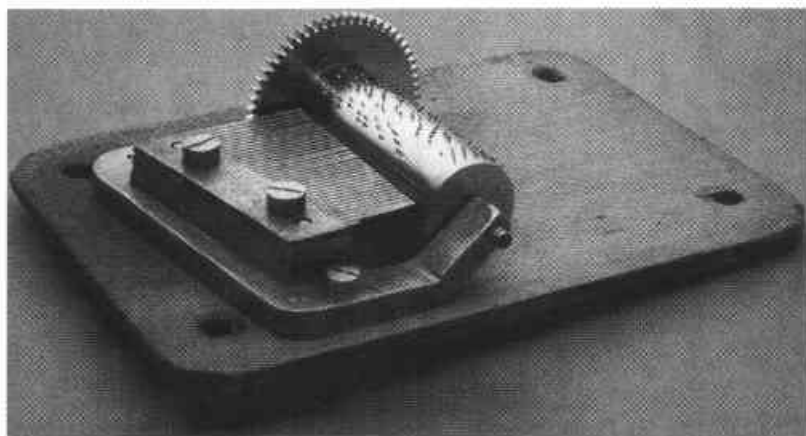
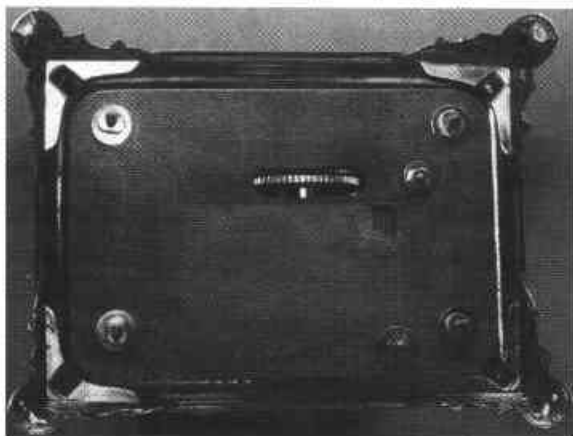
Moreover, as almost all those I see are Black Forest products, whether made here or abroad, it is easy to see them as "typical" Schwarzwald clocks from the industrial era. Of course if we judge the species by its immediate origins, they're not.

Several authorities are in agreement that the German joker is directly descended from a particular Seth Thomas clock. As E.J. Tyler noted in *American Clocks for*



*Above, Figure 1. The so-called joker from Japy. Much of the nickel plating from top, sides and base was gone, most likely from polishing. Below, Figure 2. The original shiny finish can still be seen on the inside, just to the left of the flimsy, stamped door.*





**Left, Figure 3.** The small label that had identified the tune was all but gone. **Right, Figure 4.** Whatever the tune (the frame is stamped 656) the alarm runs for over six minutes (the time side runs for over 42 hours).

the Collector, “the design made its debut in the Seth Thomas catalogue of 1879 under the name of ‘Joker Lever’ and was also made by other [American] firms under different names.”

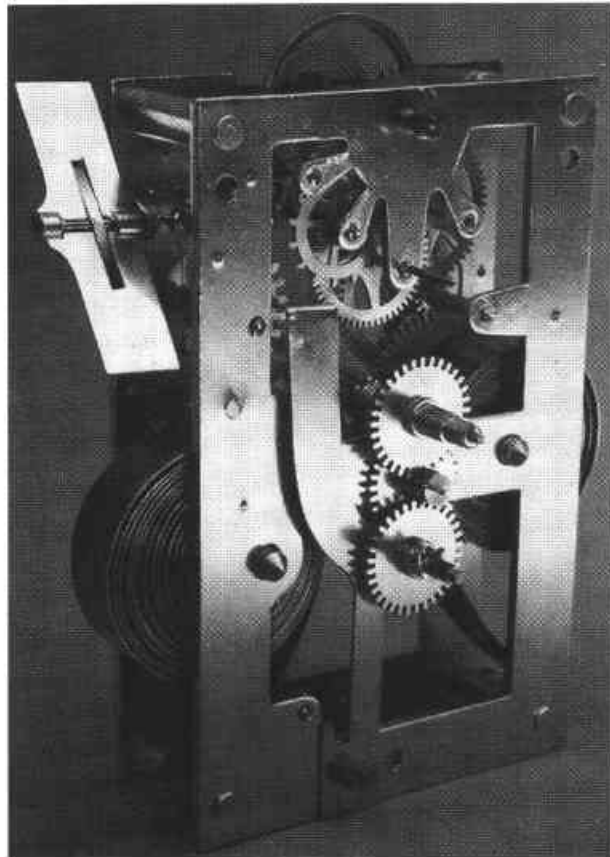
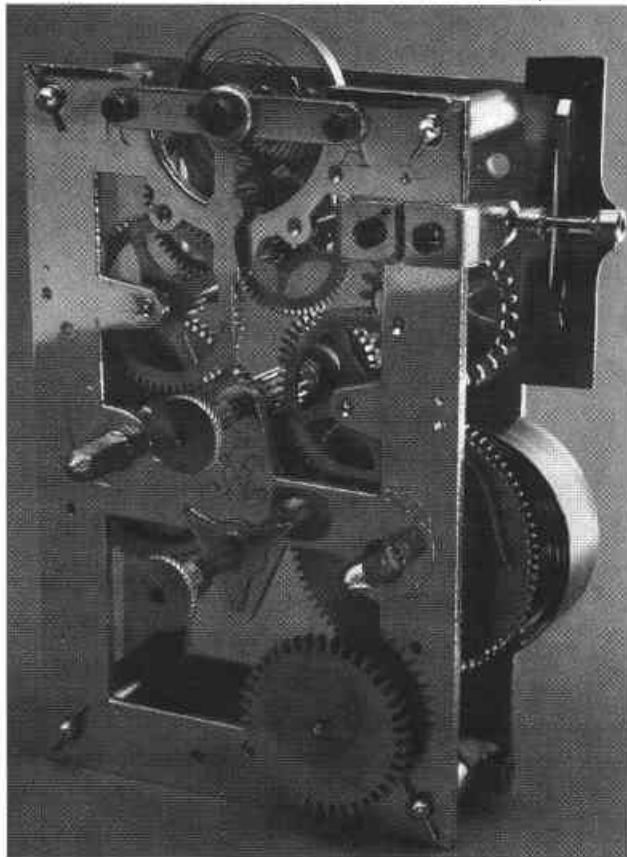
And while speaking of names, it would appear that “joker” was just “a random model name” to Seth Thomas, just as other models in a later (1883) catalogue “such as Elk,

Crystal, Rustic, Echo, Signet” were (Chris H. Bailey, personal communication).

This Seth Thomas model, Figures 7 and 8, was directly imitated by many German manufacturers. Junghans had taken over the style and the name (at first spelling it “Jocker”) probably before 1885, and definitely before 1891 (more on that later).

Competitors such as the Hamburg-Amerikanische Uhrenfabrik (HAU), Figure 9, quickly followed. Eventually, as Mühe, Kahlert and Techen point out in *Wecker*, virtually all of the German manufacturers that made alarms also made joker types. And almost all continued to offer one or more in what I think of as the classic Joker Lever style.

**Left, Figure 5.** The familiar Japy trademark—the movement had been roughly handled at some point. **Right, Figure 6.** If hardly “cheap and nasty,” still not of the “Massiv” class.





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## LEVERS.

8	1 Day, Nutmeg, Brass.....	\$ 1.50
9	1 Day, Nutmeg, Brass, alarm.....	1.90
8	1 Day, Nutmeg, Nickel.....	1.60
9	1 Day, Nutmeg, Nickel, alarm.....	2.00
10	1 Day, Joker, time.....	3.00
10	1 Day, Joker, time, alarm.....	3.25
10	1 Day, Joker, strike.....	3.50
11	1 Day, 4 inch, Banner, time.....	1.80
12	1 Day, 6 inch, Banner, time.....	2.50
12	1 Day, 6 inch, Banner, strike.....	2.80
12	1 Day, 8 inch, Banner, time.....	
12	1 Day, 8 inch, Banner, strike.....	
13	1 Day, 6 inch, Brass, time.....	
14	1 Day, 4 inch.....	

Left, Figure 7. The original, as illustrated in the 1879 Seth Thomas catalogue (courtesy of Mr. Robert Spence). Right, Figure 8. Selling at \$3.00 to \$3.50, according to the January 1, 1879, Seth Thomas Price List.

That "classic" is advanced with a bit of a grin, as one could also call the joker the Tin Lizzie of carriage clocks. But a half century after it was introduced by Seth Thomas and adopted by many German firms, it was still being sold, and sold around the world. This is a remarkable run for a distinctive style in any case, Figure 10.

Importantly, the joker did become a type designation in Germany, and today remains so in both popular and horological contexts. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin by considering three aspects of the type, while viewing these clocks, so to speak, as clocks.

First, there is the problem of what the term includes. Although it is used with reference to the German type for example by Allix in *Carriage Clocks*, and by Shenton and Shenton in the *Price Guide*, it is not apparently favored in U.S. usage. Former NAWCC Librarian Eileen Doudna has pointed out (personal communication) that it does not appear in the BULLETIN Master Index as a type.

Secondly, there is the messy, fascinating, matter of the name "joker" as a German trademark.

Figure 9. An early German imitation, from the 1889 Hamburg-Amerikanische Uhrenfabrik catalogue (courtesy of Frau Gisela Lixfeld and the Schramberg Stadtmuseum).

Anker Uhr.

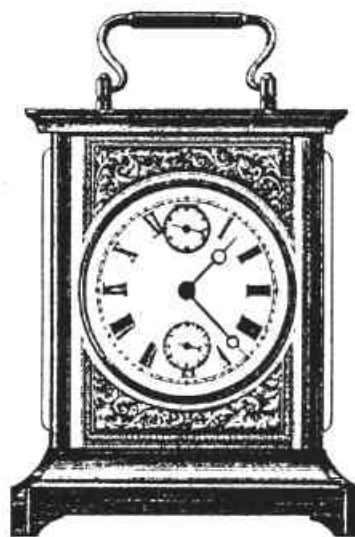
Lever clock.

## JOKER.

Nickel

Vergoldete Front

Gilt front.



Höhe 15 cm.

Height 6 inches.

1 Tag Wecker. No. 56 1/2. 1 day alarm.  
 1 Schlag. 55A. 1 strike.  
 mit Secunde. with second.

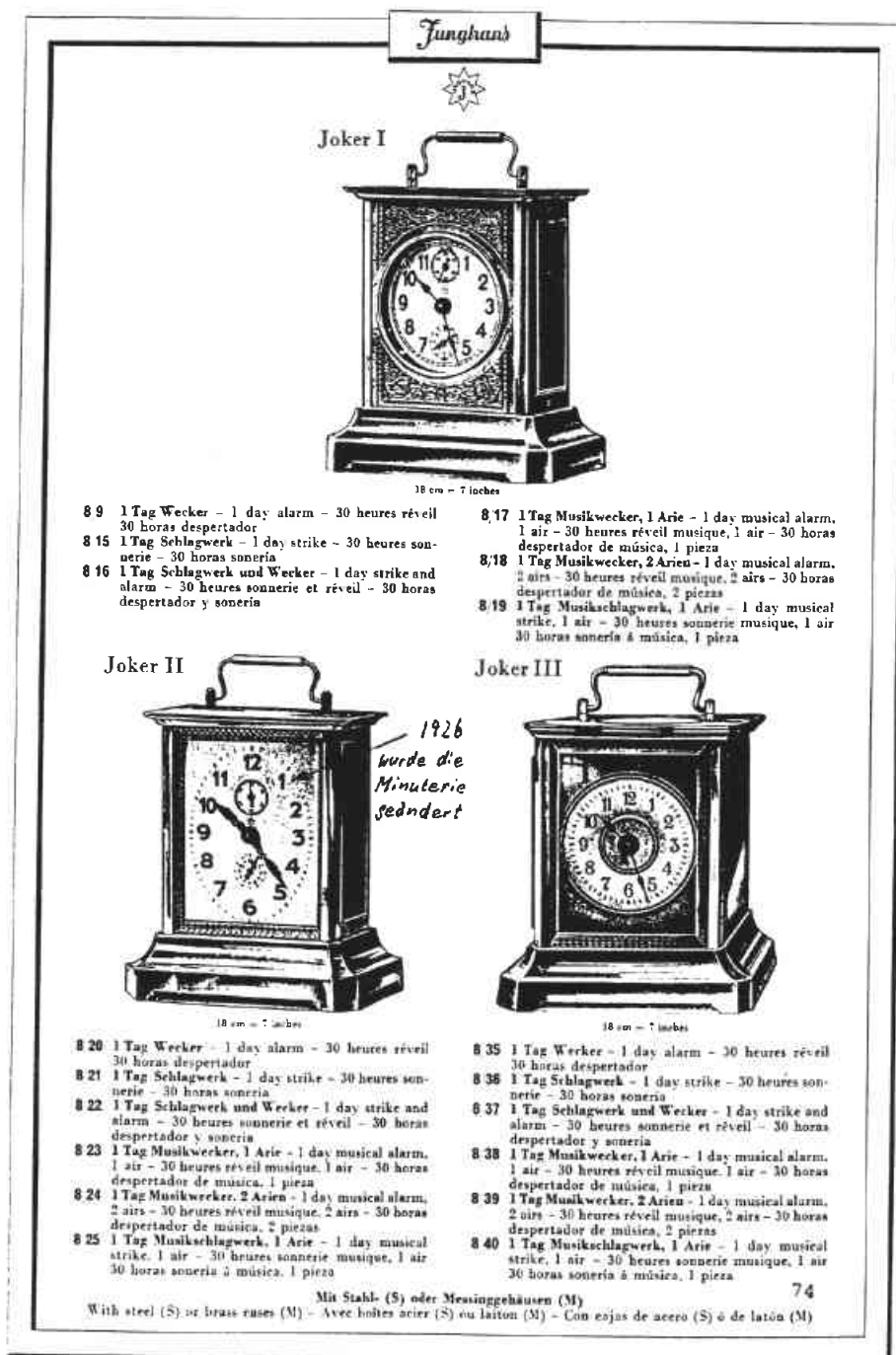


Figure 10. The "classic" style was still being sold by Junghans into the 1930s—here in a 1925 catalogue (courtesy of Mr. Hans A. Krauss).

And thirdly, there is the question of certain primacies—who, for instance, first fitted the musical (comb) alarm to the joker-style clock, and when.

It is easier to define the term *Joker* in terms of what it *should* include, rather than its actual usage.

It is used, for example, with those clocks which have stamped decorative sides—often the neo-this and neo-that of *Historismus*—as well as those which have the normal glass sides.

It is also applied (as in Figure 10) to those which have a full rectangular white dial (of thin cardboard, etc.) as opposed to the round

dial set within the stamped-brass "gilt" front. Yet some of those with the round dials had enamel dials proper, commonly (as in some drum alarms) in the form of a chapter ring with a stamped-brass disc in the center.

The basic rectangular shape of the case, and its cheap, nicked sheet-metal construction, with the stamped back door and so on, might seem to be a constant distinguishing factor, not just one most noticeable, or frequently noted.

The term, however, is also sometimes found applied to wood-cased clocks, or as in "wood-cased alarm with joker movement." And to clocks with nicked sheet cases in the shape of a house. And to those with rounded shoulders, in *Jugendstil* (e.g., *Wecker*, page 40).

It is also sometimes used with, say, a cuckoo-striking clock, the cuckoo in a small house above what appears to be otherwise a more or less normal Joker Lever style case, with the pipes and bellows in the base where one would expect a bell or a music box movement (*Clocks*, October 1996).

Similarly, the open-plate so-called American-style movement might appear to be a consistent marker. Lenzkirch, however, also made jokers, but with a good quality "Massiv" movement, that is, with full plates, solid instead of lantern pinions, barrelled springs, and so on.

Such "yes, but" examples should be sufficient to indicate that the term is both rather inclusive and frustratingly elusive. The concept of quality, nonetheless, seems central. Those carriage clock style clocks from the industrial era which have solid cases, or real full enamel dials, or platform escapements would not be included.

Still, the joker is not an either/or type which is easily resolved into a list of precise differentiae. In practice, variation is usually weighed or acknowledged.

Thus, one might speak of a joker that has a cheap, nicked case,

“but with a quality ‘Massiv’ movement.” Or a joker with an inexpensive American-style movement in a nickeled, sheet-metal case, “but is in the shape of a house.” Or just as (and my favorite) “a joker variant!”

It would be fair to conclude, in fact, that this “yes, but” aspect is, at the descriptive level and by usage, common to the type, however circular this might seem to the logic of definition.

The joker name itself as used in Germany involves a bit of a quirky mystery. Seth Thomas, and Junghans, and other German firms had used the name earlier. However, as E.J. Tyler has noted (e.g., in an article in *Clocks*, September 1987), the Badische Uhrenfabrik registered a (German) trademark with “Joker” in it in 1906.



Figure 11. The Badische trademark—the mark of chutzpah?

This mark is shown in Kochmann’s *Trademark Index* and reprinted here, Figure 11, with his kind permission. Did Badische have some agreement with Seth Thomas? And what about Junghans or any of the others? In short, how could they, how did they, do that?

In approaching this question we should probably keep in mind that the pirating not only of names and trademarks, but also what we’d call intellectual property, was a widespread activity throughout the nineteenth century. The booty was carried both eastwards and westwards across the Atlantic well into the twentieth century.

Just how blatant this was with goods horological, say, forged trade marks on watch cases, can be seen in attempts to control it (such as

the Merchandise Marks Act, 1887). It would, therefore, be naive of us to assume that trade names and marks were only transferred lawfully.

More specifically, a search of the U.S. horological patents (kindly carried out by Eileen Doudna) failed to turn up any referenced by “joker.” The fact that, for instance, in the 1893 Waterbury catalogue there are several clocks which certainly look like the Seth Thomas model, but carry names such as Traveler, Voyager, Tourist and Guide suggest, however, that some reluctance was there.

If so, whether by law or market practice is hard to say. The latter is perhaps more likely. Allix in *Carriage Clocks* shows a Black Forest joker labelled “Joker Musical Alarm Clock” which was available in the U.S. through an American wholesale house in 1904.

As far as the German side and the Badische Uhrenfabrik go (and my thanks to Frau Christa Tietz of the German Patent Office, in Berlin, for her assistance), I would suggest the following possibilities.

One is that Badische noted that other German firms had not, following the 1894 law on *Warenzeichen*, trade names and marks, registered “joker.” And then seized the opportunity and did so, motivated by, well, chutzpah and the main chance.

This, however, does not explain how these firms, for example, Junghans, could have then continued to use the name, which they obviously did.

Another theory is that because the term was already in common use in reference to a type of clock, it was considered a generic, a *Freizeichen* that could not be protected (e.g., today’s “cola”). And as a result, what was being protected was the mark and name as a unit. As a *Freizeichen*, anyone could use “joker.”

But in a 1992 publication listing such exempted words and marks, going back to 1906, “joker” is not

listed in connection with clocks. There are several cases where applications were denied for trade-names involving “joker,” but with other references (e.g. a board game, “Ostfriesen-Joker,” because it had a geographical reference, and because “joker” is the name of a playing card).

Or then, while not a *Freizeichen*, as a unit mark, that is, the design and the term together. This would explain why although the Badische Uhrenfabrik had been granted the protection, other German firms could continue to use “joker” after 1906, and around the world.

This last explanation, therefore, seemed the best. And at this point it was clear that a look at Badische’s application would most likely provide a definitive solution to this no doubt most significant horological mystery. The joker in the pack (which somehow should have been expected) was that these *Warenzeichen* files were not kept.

Having gone this far along traditional lines, it would be petty not to mention the alternative explanation only alluded to earlier. This is that other firms simply ignored Badische’s “protection,” not impressed by a ploy to rip off, as it were, that which they’d ripped off. Needless to say, this is not an explanation that appeals to patent offices, then or now.

The last of the three questions with regards to the German joker has to do with the origins of one of its most popular variations, the musical alarm, the movement (almost always) mounted in the base.

This question is related to when, exactly, Junghans adopted the basic joker style. Expert opinion at present is “by 1890” (e.g., in *Wecker*).

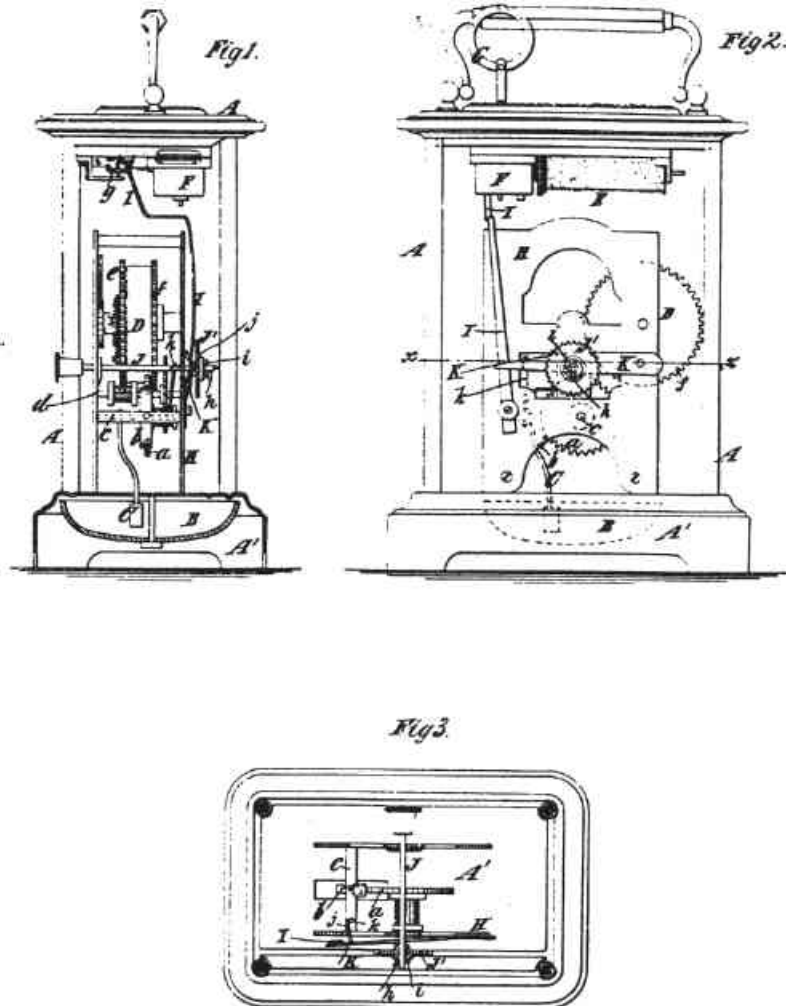
Was this a German addition to the joker type (it being found much earlier in “proper” carriage clocks, not to mention other types with various origins, for instance, the Morez)? Or was it just part of the American package brought over?

(No Model.)

H. J. DAVIES.  
ALARM CLOCK.

No. 270,400.

Patented Jan. 9, 1883.



type clocks with various names showed up, only two American-made clocks were found with musical alarms.

The first was the Ansonia "Oriole" which was in the 1886-87 catalogue, but not in the 1880 or 1914 catalogues. The second, also in the 1886-87 Ansonia catalogue, was one of three variants of the "Peep O'Day Carriage" (the name "Peep O'Day" was first attached to nickel drum alarms, and is also found spelled as "Peep-o'Day" or "Peep-o'Day-Carriage"). There are no patents on either with a musical alarm.

There may be other American-made joker-types with musical alarms which have been overlooked. Yet it does seem reasonable to conclude that, as one correspondent phrased it, "this style of joker was apparently not very popular."

More specific information, however, was gained through first, a U.S. patent to H.J. Davies dated January 9, 1883, which had been applied for on June 10, 1882, Figure 12 (supplied by the NAWCC Library through a research request), and second, through subsequent correspondence with Chris H. Bailey, staff horologist at the American Clock & Watch Museum (for whose kind help I am most grateful).

Davies' invention consisted of the combination, in a clock "of common construction," of an "alarm-train and a tune-playing device." The tune-playing "or musical device" could be arranged "otherwise than as shown," and "as here represented, consists of the ordinary musical box movement." In short, with changes to the actuating spring and such, our basic "joker-type" with a musical attachment.

After the Ansonia Clock Company was established in Brooklyn, New York, in 1878-1879, Henry J. Davies became its general manager. The 1880 catalogue had several inexpensive carriage clock styles (including the Peep O'Day Car-

Witnesses:  
J. W. Haynes  
C. L. Adams

Inventor:  
Henry J. Davies  
by Wm. A. Adams  
Attorney

Figure 12. Davies' 1883 design allowed the playing of a tune immediately after the alarm was sounded on a bell.

What we know, however, is that the Seth Thomas Joker Lever in the 1879 catalogue was not listed with a musical alarm as an option. And the same clock in 1892 also did not have one.

In addition, some correspondents in the U.S. kindly searched through several American trade catalogues of the era—including Ansonia, Ingraham, Kroeber, New Haven, Seth Thomas, Waterbury and Yale. Although plenty of joker-



riage), yet none with musical attachments. But then in the 1883 catalogue, one does appear, simply called "Musical Carriage," Figure 13.

It would appear, therefore, that soon after Davies received the patent, at least one model with a musical alarm was available in time for the 1883 catalogue. And then by the 1886–87 catalogue, the two models were ready. Interestingly, in the 1894–95 catalogue, no carriage clock styles with musical alarms are noted.

The March 27, 1877, patent date on the dial of this "Musical Carriage," by the way, is not specific to this musical alarm (it refers to a spring arrangement, and evidently also appears on clocks which have no features of this patent).

An American correspondent, John O.G. Darrow, in Pennsylvania, informs me that his Peep O'Day carriage "musicals" have a June 9, 1880, patent on the back (which refers to a clock-case design, granted to H.J. Davies and D.M. Somers). But not the January 9, 1883 one. Also, their musical movements are mounted in the base (he has not yet seen one mounted above the movement).

Such details are, I believe, worth recording. Yet more importantly, it would appear that the first American-made joker-type with a musical attachment was this Ansonia "Musical Carriage" of 1883.

On the German side, the problem is that although it seems certain that Junghans was the first to imitate the Joker Lever, it is not known exactly when. No joker of any type is shown in the 1878 Junghans catalogue, reprinted in Kahlert's *Großuhren 1880*.

Unfortunately, there would appear to be a gap in available Junghans catalogues until 1891, alas, exactly the period in which the Joker was taken over. But by the 1891 catalogue (and I am indebted to Frau Gisela Lixfeld, of the Schramberg Stadtmuseum, for providing the following informa-

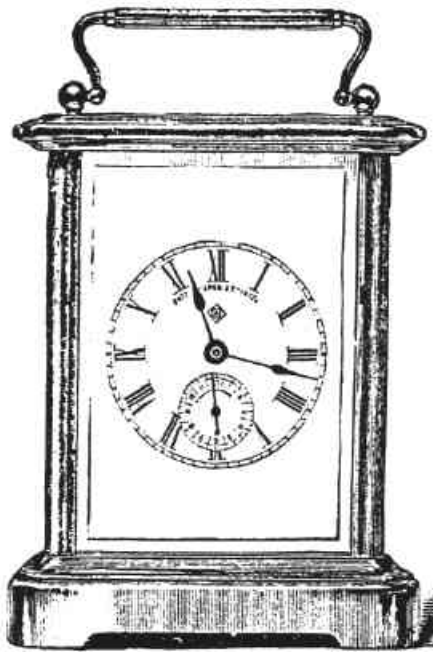


Figure 13. In the 1883 Ansonia catalogue—apparently the first joker type clock with a musical attachment.

tion) the joker shows up in several variations.

These variations include, all with one-day going, those with an alarm (on a bell), alarm and calendar, striking (on a bell), striking and alarm, two music alarms (instead of the bell), one with one tune and one with two, and a music-striking movement.

In the 1891 catalogue, the Joker is not extolled as a new model, but simply included like any other. One can, therefore, assume that jokers had already been introduced in the 1880s.

Most interestingly, "judging by the numbering system" used in this catalogue with various models, "the joker without music was introduced earlier—the earliest, however, the end of the 1870s, in any case after 1878, and probably the beginning of the 1880s—as the joker with music, which I would date at the earliest as 1887 or 88" (personal communication, my translation).

The clock offerings of Junghans' Schramberg competitor, HAU, tend to support this dating, Frau Lixfeld believes, as Junghans was customarily a *Nasenlängen voraus*,

a nose length ahead, of the other Black Forest manufacturers.

The earliest source for HAU, from 1882, does not contain any jokers. But the next available trade catalogue, from 1889 (as well as the next from 1892), does have jokers, but only as strike and alarm, without music.

There is no evidence, therefore, that Junghans offered a music alarm variant before Ansonia. Following Frau Lixfeld's reasoning, such would be most unlikely.

Furthermore, the dates for that first Seth Thomas joker, as well as the Ansonia "Musical Carriage," are rather firm. The "Joker Lever" was not listed in the Seth Thomas 1878 price lists, but was listed in their January 1, 1879, lists.

The odd historical reference would also support this position. It is noted in *Wecker* for example that around 1880, when referring to "nickel alarms" in general, "Weckern nach Ansonia-System"—alarms following, or based upon, the Ansonia system—was sometimes used as well.

A definitive judgment could be reached had we access to Junghans catalogues from the 1880s. Unfortunately, the German Clock Museum does not have any in its collections, either. Nor are they aware of one. Needless to say, should any reader have knowledge of one (with access), this information would be most welcome!

If then name, basic style, and almost certainly, the musical option were immediately American in origin, a century later, it is the German jokers with musical alarms which are the better known, more common, and indeed, among those jokers most eagerly sought, on both sides of the Atlantic. In other words, it was not just a matter of an American model growing into a German type.

This brings us to a different perspective on the joker-type and its origins, and away from the emphasis on these clocks as clocks.

The joker can also be viewed as an artifact, however humble, of the most significant change in the history of Black Forest clockmaking—the switch from home to factory production, with the related adoption of “the American system.”

It is this viewpoint, in turn, that will bring us back to that so-called joker from Japy.

When looking at the German joker as a type, one could stress its immediate descent from a particular American model, the term's present distribution and, otherwise, view these clocks as clocks.

One can, however, take a different, and much broader perspective, and stress that the joker was only one of several American clock styles, and one of several American alarm types, which were first adopted, then adapted by German manufacturers in the 1870s and 1880s.

This is an emphasis which is underlined, for example, by Reinhold Krämer in his excellent, “*Amerikanische Wecker aus dem Schwarzwald*” (“*American Alarm Clocks from the Black Forest*”). His title, nicely enough, highlights the two perspectives I've mentioned by playing upon a gradation of meaning in German.

An *amerikanische Uhr* would be an American clock. But a term common at the time, *Amerikaneruhr* (or movement, or alarm) would be an American-type or style of clock, made in Germany. The form in his title is in between, and is lightly ironic, almost “so-called” American clocks.

There is, relatedly, a rather common German-to-English error in that 1878 Junghans catalogue, which I haven't seen mentioned before. The title page, as illustrated in *Großuhren 1880*, Figure 15, has “Catalogue of american clocks.”

That lower-case “a” reflects German capitalization rules and, if unintentionally, that fine line between what is original and what

would, intentionally, appear to be so.

There is little doubt about that intent. E.J. Tyler (in the *Horological Journal*, September 1979) with reference to a “Junghans Brothers” label, with no town given, pasted in a Junghans OG, states that “the idea was to suggest to the customer that the clock had been made in America, as the American clocks had obtained such a firm hold on the public at that time.”

From this larger perspective, however, the adoption of American styles was not simply a matter of accent, orthographic or otherwise. The joker can be seen as an artifact of what was undoubtedly one of the most significant structural changes in Black Forest clockmaking, the adoption of a different concept of manufacture.

Even so, it wasn't just a concept, the “American system,” that was taken over. It was also a matter of, for instance, initially importing actual machinery, of very closely imitating movement designs and case styles, of some firms also initially taking on American-sounding aliases, of “borrowing” model names and naming practices, as well as advertising techniques such as the pasting of labels on or in cases.

Several young firms, not just Junghans, sent people across the Atlantic to study American methods in American factories. In several cases, Germans who had emigrated were actively encouraged to “come home.”

Such examples are no doubt individually familiar, as are those German manufacturers which (at least for several decades) were clear exceptions in that, for example, they had looked to the more traditional French model.

Still, it is this central tendency that needs to be stressed here, either for the irony of it or, from the Black Forest enthusiast's point of view, the spice of it all—what put the smile on the face of the joker.

When the Schwarzwald clock industry entered into what Bender terms its “deepest crisis,” around the middle of the last century, it was largely but not only because of American competition. But it was also largely through this adoption and adaptation process—of which the joker is one footnote—that Black Forest clockmaking first survived, and then prospered.

Then quickly enough, leaving its industrial adolescence behind, with its own distinct character now fronted, it began to dominate several markets.

It might seem overdrawn to thus link such a cheap alarm to such a significant process. Yet for the most part, by stressing the former instead of the latter, we have consistently understated the linkage.

By contrast, Krämer and Lixfeld flatly state that “the *Industriewecker*,” the cheap, mass-produced alarm that met the needs of industrialization and industrial workers, “was the most important product of the [German] clock industry—it owed its growth to it.”

Similarly, with our natural inclination to favor quality over quantity, it is easy enough to see numbers as specious or crude. Figures first reported by Kuckuck in 1907, however, are still striking today, and underscore the point made by Krämer and Lixfeld, above.

In 1905, in the Württemberg part of the Schwarzwald alone, German clock factories produced 5.8 million clocks. Of these, 4.1 million—seven out of every 10—were alarms.

The rapid growth of Black Forest manufactories in the last two decades of the nineteenth century necessarily affected those outside of Germany. It meant, for instance, that German-made jokers were exported to the U.S.

We might note in passing the self-satisfaction in that Horatio Alger story *auf Deutsch* about Arthur Junghans; he who once worked as a lowly floor-sweeper in



a clock factory in America, rose to be a leader of one of the world's greatest in Germany!

But what was in fact a truly dramatic growth also meant that American-style German-made clocks (and German clocks made following the then Germanized, American system) were viewed as a threat to the French clock industry.

This brings us back round to that so-called joker from Japy.

The origins of the joker are marked by a fascinating ambiguity. We could stress a specific German borrowing, that of the American "Joker Lever," or emphasize that this was but one of many borrowings, itself part of a larger process.

Nor would it be out of focus to claim that despite these immediate origins, the German type should be in the foreground—"the jokers that made the joker famous" sort of thing.

Nonetheless—and what some observers have chosen to stress—the Seth Thomas joker was also only one of many inexpensive American-made clocks which, like their more sophisticated, up-town sisters, more or less resembled French carriage clocks.

Thus one could claim that the German joker was essentially a European gone to America—and then returned home, a bit down at the heels perhaps, but with accent and, if seen sympathetically, virtue intact. Therefore, our "joker" from Japy could be viewed as a French variation on an imitation of a French clock!

This approach would dovetail with an older and more inclusive European view, a view of self and an excuse in one. Closer to our own time, it is probably best expressed by Stephen Spender's observation that "Europeanization gone to America and returned to Europe as Americanization is now complete."

Or following the same tradition but by contrast now emphasizing that also familiar "culture versus commerce" argument, we could see

the Japy "joker" as an exception to their general rule of quality—a she-stoops-to-conquer necessity. In other words, as a *réveil américain*.

While such is interesting, and would reflect attitudes not only of the past, it does seem to be a bit of a burden to place upon those rather thin, sheet-metal shoulders.

More interesting, I would suggest, is to acknowledge that the joker is a blend of American, French, and German influences (needless to say, not necessarily in that order) and, keeping pride or parochialism apart, view it as a by-product of the competition among all three.

There is no doubt that Japy was very aware of the American competitive threat, especially in the area of mass-produced, inexpensive alarm clocks. Moreover, despite any genetic markers or nods to their heritage, these American clocks were hardly viewed as distant family to be welcomed home.

Although he was already looking back, Beillard, writing in 1895 (quoted by Allix) still brings forth this general point of view: "...but for her own powerful horological industry France would have been swamped with inferior American clocks which, although selling for the same price as Japy's, were far from being of equal value."

This type of statement is one reason why, a century later, I was surprised to see that Japy-made "joker" in the first place. It is also why I was disappointed (also naively) that it wasn't clearly a class above the others I'd seen.

Pierre Lamard, however, offers a much more complex, complete, and differentiated analysis of Japy's concerns, in his 1984 thesis at l'Université de Franche-Comté, *Histoire d'un capital familial au XIXe siècle: le capital Japy (1777-1910)* (and I am grateful to M. Antoine Simonin for bringing it to my attention).

As a basis for his 350-plus page treatise, Lamard searched through

a mass of previously unexamined documents, reports and correspondence in Japy's archives, and combined all in great detail with a mass of out-of-house material, both primary and secondary.

As a result, to even attempt to summarize all that is relevant to Japy's concerns with American and German clocks and clockmaking industries, would go far beyond the bounds of this article and, indeed, be presumptuous. I believe that three points can be sustained, nonetheless, based upon material in Lamard.

First of all, Japy as a part of the French horological industry was faced with the same general crisis—if at a somewhat later period, to a somewhat different degree—that was facing the Black Forest industry.

The threat stemmed initially and primarily from the U.S. or, as Lamard put it, "the principal menace came from America" (my translations, sympathetically restored by Dr. Michèle Wolff):

"The American industry had begun to triumph in clockmaking thanks to its development of automation and, above all, standardization. The fusion of these two methods considerably reduced net costs and provoked an acute crisis on the Continent."

Japy was most aware of this threat as it affected both its transatlantic and European markets. Correspondence and reports detail the losses, especially "in the North."

In a letter sent to M. Henri Japy in 1882, for instance, it is noted that "our sales in England in 1873 exceeded 230,000 francs; at present they only reach 60,000 francs."

As might be expected of an industry leader, Japy undertook many studies and analyses of American methods and approaches, paying special attention to their applicability, or lack of it, to Japy. This included (as it did in Germany) the sending of individuals or

commissions to the U.S. to report back, first hand, on what they saw.

One such trip made in the late 1880s was intended to compare methods at the Beaucourt factory with those of a modern American factory (which turned out to be Waltham). The subsequent report includes a fascinating point-by-point contrast in 18 specific areas.

The final point, however—literally the bottom line—was economics, not aesthetics or the value of the products. Waltham, they emphasized, showed an annual profit of \$120,000; Beaucourt an annual loss of 25,000 francs. Japy knew that if the Americans would swamp France with those “inferior American clocks,” they hardly intended to do so at a loss.

Secondly, this general crisis as it affected Japy was strongly aggravated by the growth of, and growing competition from, German, mainly Schwarzwald, manufacturers.

We can again pick out one example as it concerns England (from a letter written by Charles-Frédéric Dietz-Monnin in 1873 to Beaucourt). “We have come to the belief that it is London above all where the international struggle among clock industries is taking place. America now reigns there supreme.

“But Germany (the Black Forest) has taken America as a model, and then improved upon it and, before long, will be a more dangerous rival for French clockmaking than America.”

Some 26 years later, a report on clockmaking by Eugène Borneque (contained in the proceedings of the Belfort chamber of commerce) would seem to substantiate Dietz-Monnin’s conviction.

“Manufacturing in Germany has undergone a complete evolution; it is now endowed with a powerful stock of machine tools which, constructed on principles from America, assures a standardization of manufacture; and [this] is carried

out with a spirit of rigorous methods.”

Much earlier reports had come back that, in the Netherlands for example, “German-made imitations” of American clocks were displacing Japy products. This growing pressure was to be especially felt in the sector of “la grosse horlogerie (pendules et réveils).”

This competition, mainly from America and Germany was, Lemard concludes, “a decisive factor” for Japy in the second half of the nineteenth century. Without a doubt, “Japy were very aware of the situation.”

Thirdly, an obvious question (in the midst of a host of others coming from Japy’s interests in many other areas of manufacturing) was what to do about it. Certainly, it was agreed, the spirit and methods of the American-style clock factory were not compatible with many of Japy’s traditions and approaches.

Nonetheless, a major and, remembering Beillert’s comment, not quite guileless answer came in the form of “vast quantities” of Japy-made *réveils américains* (Allix, page 408), of which this one joker-type clock is another, somewhat more downmarket reminder, that is, in addition to the one shown in *Carriage Clocks* (page 140).

According to Allix, “the production of [this particular] Japy type *américain* is said to have begun from about 1880 and it is certain that *réveils américains* were still in production in 1907.”

We can assume that these clocks are reflected in the observation made by J. Tripplin in 1889 (in his account of the French International Exhibition, i.e., Allix’s Appendix (b)) of “...the resolution come to by MM Japy and some other important manufacturers to make completely at their factories some cheap and popular form of timepieces.”

As a general conclusion, it could be said that whatever the transatlantic influences or the cisatlantic motivations or the varying points

of view then and now, all three clockmaking industries did come to much the same conclusion at roughly the same time at least on one level by turning out a common clock—in both senses of the word.

One man’s joker, in other words, was another man’s Japy.

Still, when all is said, I don’t really view this specific clock in such a general way. Nor is it another man’s joker, but my one and only Japy of its type. Despite its complex parentage, it should be addressed by its proper, given name.

Finding this information turned out to be more difficult, especially when one considers how large Japy was, than might be expected. Unfortunately, Japy catalogues do not appear to be readily available, whether in convenient reprint form or through some of our larger horological libraries. Illustrations of this “cheap and popular” range of clock would also seem to be uncommon.

Finally, however, through the most kind efforts of the Musée Frédéric Japy, in Beaucourt (and I am especially grateful to Mme Henzelin-Beuchal) the clock was identified, classified, and had its “real” name restored.

It is, I was informed, a “*réveil de voyage*” from Japy, and “dates from the end of the 19th century.” Its musical movement “was furnished to Japy by *la maison August l’Epée*, and it was found illustrated in a later (No. 25, after 1909) *Album d’Horlogerie* from Japy Frères & Cie, Beaucourt, with its variants, Figure 14, as “Le Boer.”

In the end the name Le Boer came as a surprise, just as the clock itself had at the beginning. This seems to be in the nature of jokers, however. And at this point it seems enough to have learned it.

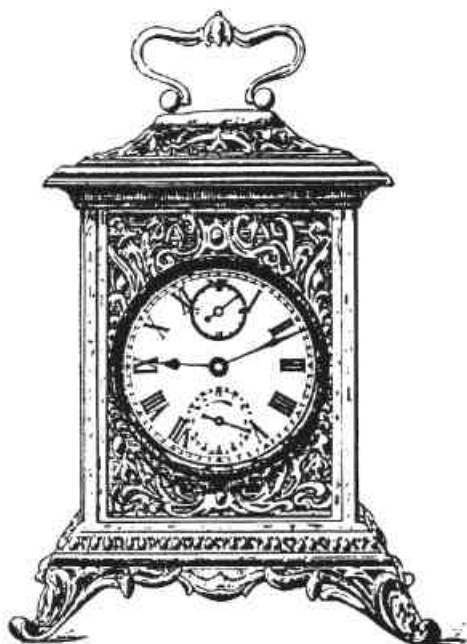


Figure 14. In the end, the name was as much of a surprise as the clock itself had been at the beginning.

### Acknowledgments

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### About the Author

Douglas K. Stevenson, a native of Michigan, has lived in Germany since 1974, where he teaches at a German university. He is a member of the British Horological Institute, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Chronometrie, the NAWCC, New Jersey Chapter #25, and the Antiquarian Horological Society. His e-mail: duck@catzen.gun.de

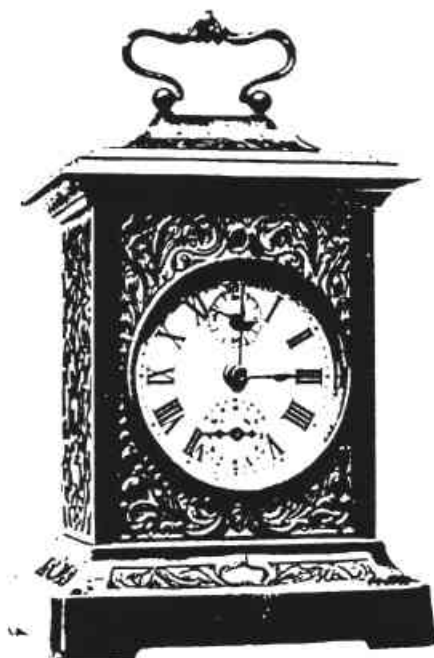


Figure 15. The rather "American" looking cover of the 1878 Junghans catalogue (courtesy of the Deutsches Uhrenmuseum).



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of  
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