

## 200th Anniversary of Lemuel Curtis Patent

**O**n July 12, 1816, Lemuel Curtis (1790-1857) was granted a patent for "improvements on Willard's time-piece." Because of the 1836 fire that destroyed the US Patent Office in Washington, DC, the details of his patent are not known.

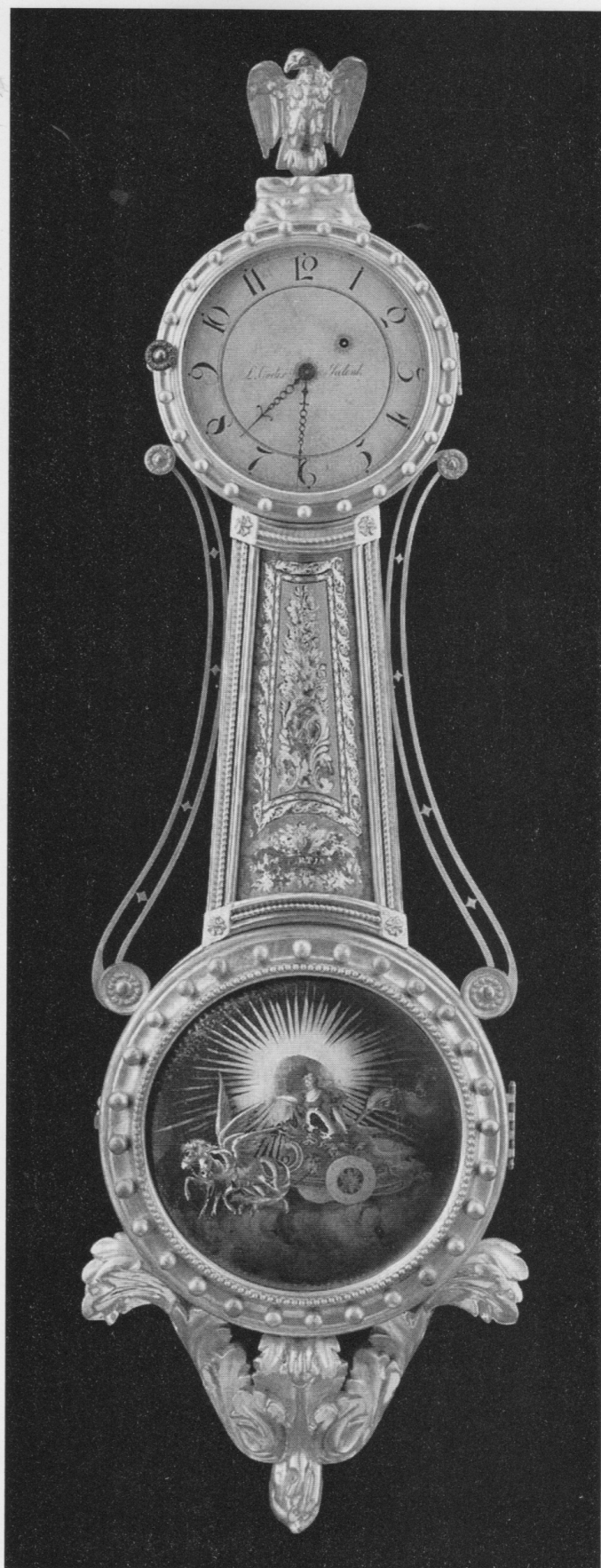
Thanks to information about Curtis in Paul Foley's book titled *Willard's Patent Timepieces* (Norwell, MA: Roxbury Village Publishing, 2002) we can make some assumptions. After completing a Willard apprenticeship, Curtis set up shop in Concord, MA. He was the first to attach banjo clock movements with a bolt through the case back, securing the movement far better than Willard's through-bolts. His pendulum suspension improvements reduced the problems of pendulum dislodging and refitting.

Curtis is best known for developing and producing his girandole wall clocks, an elegant banjo clock variant that many have called America's most beautiful clock design. Not a financial success, however, original Curtis girandoles number fewer than a hundred and command huge prices when available for purchase. His 1816 patent, however, does not seem to apply to this case design. One proof, perhaps, is my recent photo of a repair customer's standard gold front banjo clock with the "L. Curtis Patent" throat glass (Figure 1). I also include a photo of the grand Curtis girandole clock on display in the Art of the Americas Wing of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (Figure 2), the location for the 2017 Ward Francillon Symposium. For more information on that event, visit [www.horologyinart.com](http://www.horologyinart.com).

— Bob Frishman, FNAWCC (MA)



**Figure 1.** Throat glass detail of Lemuel Curtis banjo clock.



**Figure 2.** Girandole wall clock by Lemuel Curtis, Concord, MA, ca. 1816-1821, with accession number 1991.241.

COURTESY OF BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS.