

Thanks to the special knowledge and sharp eye of NAWCC member Bruce Forman, the tower clock in one of the early horological stereoviews I presented in my June 2007 BULLETIN article “More Clocks in 3D” proves to be the only known on-site photograph of one of America’s most famous timekeepers.

Reproduced on that issue’s back cover, and shown here at right, the stereoview has text that only hints at the clock’s location: “Views on the Pennsylvania Central Railroad.” Fortunately, Bruce has been intensively researching the history of clockmaker Isaiah Lukens (1779-1846) and suggested to me and the National Park Service curators at Independence National Historical Park that this was the Lukens cage-frame clock installed in 1828 inside the newly reconstructed tower of Independence Hall.

Lukens was paid \$2,075 for his clock, which replaced the unreliable first Independence Hall timepiece made by Peter Stretch in the mid-1700s. For a half century the Lukens clock was considered the standard for city time, but it was replaced in 1876 by a new top-of-the-line Seth Thomas, still in service today, which was donated along with a new bell by local philanthropist Henry Seybert.

Soon after my article was published, Museum Curator Bob Giannini climbed up into the tower to compare my stereoview’s image with actual construction details in the room pictured, and he concluded that they match, despite subsequent structural reinforcements. We also know that the stereoview’s photographer, W. T. Purviance, published aerial shots of the city taken from the tower in the early 1870s, so it is reasonable to assume that he also turned his camera on the machine at work behind him.

The story gets better. In May 2003, a group including museum staff, Philadelphia city representatives, and local clock restorer John B. Spencer Jr. visited the tower of the old boarded-up Germantown Town Hall. At Spencer’s instigation they were there to see what was left of the Lukens clock, which had been moved to that nearby town in 1877. Much remained, and all agreed that it should be returned to the National Park.

Lukens Clock & Stereoview Return to Independence Park

by Bob Frishman (MA)

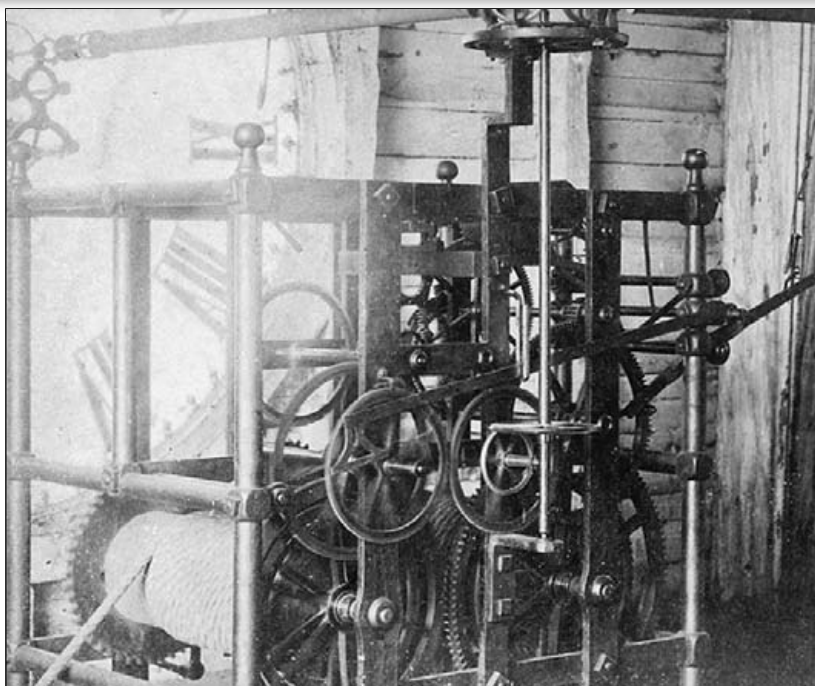


Figure 1. Here is the left half of the ca. 1870 stereoview by W. T. Purviance showing the Isaiah Lukens 1828 iron-frame brass-gear movement in the tower of Independence Hall. Note the glass dial and tower timbers visible in the background. The ground-glass faces were a great novelty, and at night they were illuminated from behind by strong gaslights. Now belonging to the National Park Service, the original stereoview will aid restoration of the clock and research on the tower’s original construction.

In September 2007, the second-generation clockmaker disassembled the machine in the tower, carried more than 1,500 pounds of its parts down to street level, and then devoted nearly 80 hours in his shop to cleaning and reassembling it for eventual full restoration and display. While certain key parts are missing, including the great wheels and the unusual upper pendulum/escapement assembly, copies could be made from a very similar 1829 Lukens movement, which retains these pieces and is at the York County (PA)

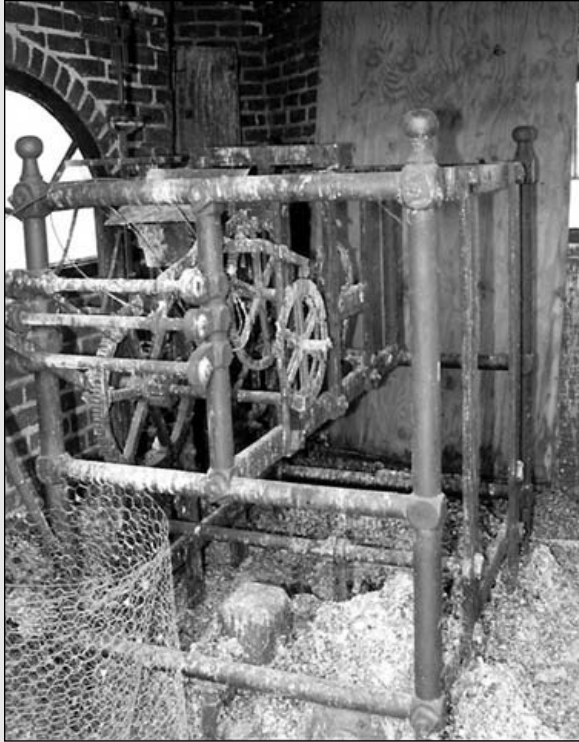


Figure 2. John Spencer's photo reveals the sorry state of the Lukens movement when first inspected in the old Germantown Town Hall. Pigeons had visited for decades, and several components had been removed when the machine was electrified earlier in the century. Luckily, the large hollow drums were still in the room. With all frame parts rusted and frozen, disassembly was difficult and tedious. The original bell still hangs in this abandoned tower but cannot be removed without partially dismantling the cupola.

Historical Society. Another example, also with these parts intact, is in Colonial Williamsburg (VA); photos are included in an April 2000 *BULLETIN* article by Michael Tyler.

On January 24, 2008, when I came to Philadelphia to donate my stereoview to Park Service curators, John Spencer happened to arrive at the same time in his pickup truck to deliver the cleaned-up movement. I photographed that historic event and took pictures inside the tower where Lukens' creation had served for nearly half a century. The tower is not open for public tours, but Chief Curator Karie Diethorn guided our small group up the narrow stairs for a close-up view of the tower's rooms, dials, and the Centennial Seth Thomas.

Bruce Forman currently is preparing a detailed history of Lukens, and other material on this highly skilled clockmaker, machinist, and instrument maker is available in *BULLETIN* articles as well as in Frederick Shelley's book *Early American Tower Clocks*. I am happy to have been able to contribute more to this important horological story.



Figure 3. Philadelphia clock restorer John B. Spencer Jr. prepares the movement for unloading outside the Living History Center. The count and escape wheels are visible as is the unique central shift lever, which allowed both trains to be wound from a single arbor.

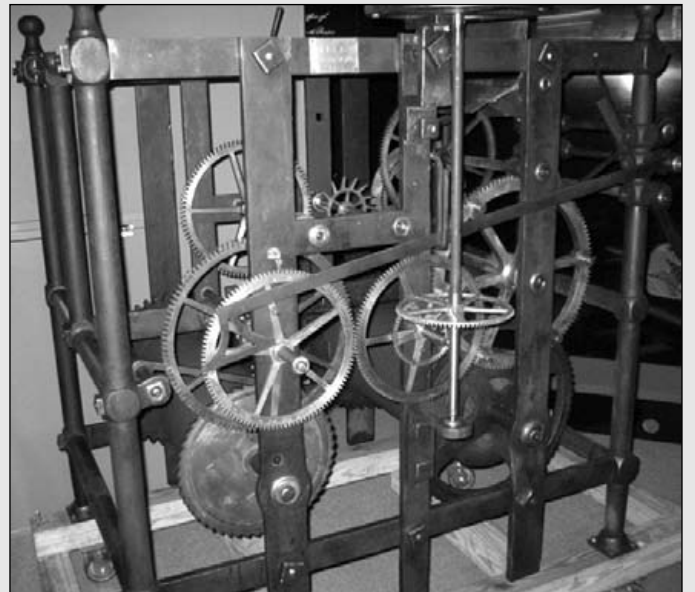
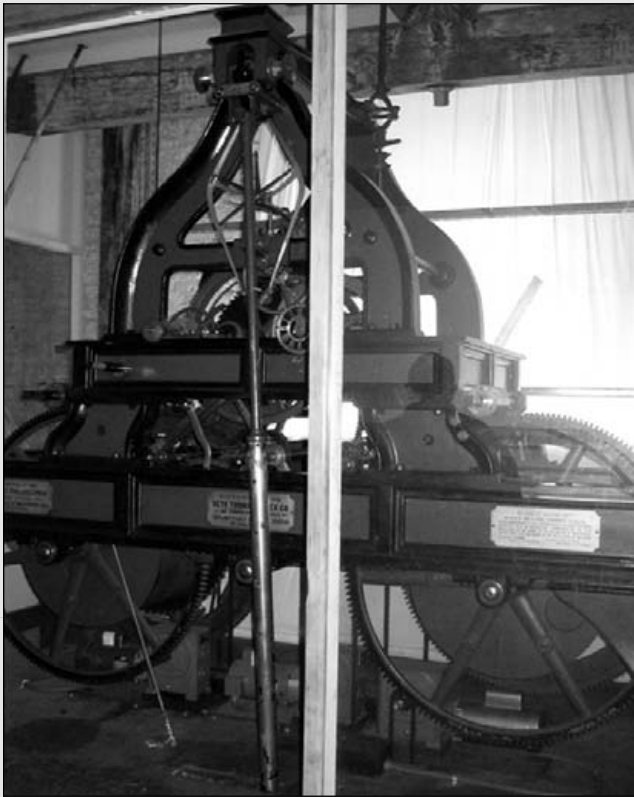


Figure 4. The movement, seen from its other side, rests on its new rolling pallet inside the museum. The brass maker's plate reads "I. LUKENS FECIT 1829." Page 57 of Shelley's book shows the missing crutchless circular pallet unit with jeweled deadbeat pallets and knife-edge suspension. The National Park Service (NPS) hopes to eventually restore and exhibit the working clock, which remains city property on long-term loan to the NPS.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bob Frishman repairs, restores, and sells antique clocks at his home-based shop in Andover, MA. A past-president of New England Chapter 8, he is a frequent contributor to the *BULLETIN*. For more information, visit www.bell-time.com.

Figure 5, left. In its distinctive green paint and protected behind sliding glass doors, the massive Seth Thomas still ticks inside the tower of Independence Hall. A plate on the frame indicates that this clock was presented "by a citizen" to the city on July 4, 1876. Reportedly, the Lukens movement still was running well at that time, but city fathers did not want to reject the generous donation of its Centennial replacement.

Figure 6. The Lukens movement originally sat here, one floor above the Seth Thomas room, on the site of the stereoview image. Now we see the system, driven from below, for distributing power to the four sets of hands at this level.



Figure 7. Motion works mounted behind one of the large glass dials, which are modern stronger replacements.

