

Horologica

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—*Fortunat F. Mueller-Maerki, FNAWCC (NJ)*

Claggett Clock Reunion

Back in the September/October 2015 *Mart & Highlights*, I reported on a day-long seminar I recently had attended, “Time Well Spent: Clockmaking in Colonial America.” In the reading room of the venerable Redwood Library and Athenaeum in Newport, RI, my eyes had alternated between the podium and a stunning japanned-case tall clock by famed Newport maker William Claggett.

On December 14, 2018, I again was at the Redwood—this time with other NAWCC representatives including Tom Wilcox, Philip Morris, and Jerry Thornsberry—for the opening reception of an historic exhibit of 35 clocks by William Claggett (1694–1748), his son-in-law James Wady (circa 1706–1759), and his younger likely-relative Thomas Claggett (d.1797). Bringing together so many clocks by these three highly skilled Newport horologists was an unprecedented feat, unlikely ever to be repeated.

The official exhibit title is “The Claggetts of Newport: Master Clockmakers in Colonial America.” I have named this review a “Reunion” although in actuality these clocks never were all together until now. They were crafted at various times during more than 50 years when 18th-century Newport prospered and could provide a strong local market for such luxury household products.

The idea for the exhibit was spawned before the 2018 publication of *Claggett: Newport’s Illustrious Clockmakers*, also reviewed in this issue. At first just proposed as a book-signing venue, the Redwood became the site of a dramatic display for the Claggett book’s subjects.

Authors Frank Hohmann and Donald Fennimore list 89 Claggett and Wady clocks in their book. Not surprising, more examples emerged after the book’s release, and nearly half of The Redwood exhibit’s clocks were previously unrecorded, never exhibited, and now add to the scholarship. At the recent reception, the two authors presented an illustrated lecture and signed a stack of sold book copies.

The exhibit’s logistics were handled by another committed team. Ed Kane, a serious underwriter and researcher for Hohmann and Fennimore, also is a Redwood member and donor. Two years ago, he connected with the library’s energetic executive director, Dr. Benedict Leca, and planning commenced. In 2018, dealer and scholar Gary Sullivan was enlisted as co-curator, and he was instrumental in arranging loans, transport, design, labels and



One clock in the exhibit was not a tallcase. No. 10 in the book, it is a black japanned bracket clock, circa 1740. Its fusee movement is time-only with a “drop strike.” The arched dial shows moon phase and date of lunar month at its top. A mock pendulum swings in the curved aperture. PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB FRISHMAN.

signage, and setup. They also called on local clock makers Ed Christiansen and Peter Nunes for their expertise in moving, installing, and running these antique machines.

A second historic Newport group also is in on the act. The Newport Historical Society has mounted a companion exhibit, “My Small Ability: The Life & Work of William Claggett.” Along with ephemera and artifacts, tall clocks by William Claggett and James Wady are on view, but most inspiring is William’s circa 1732 oversize octagon-head japanned tavern clock that still hangs in

its original location in the Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House, now part of the Society's headquarters.

The Redwood exhibit is the exhibition's sole venue, and the loaned clocks return to their several private and institutional owners after April 21, 2019. NAWCC members should not miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. For more information, visit <https://www.redwoodlibrary.org>.

—Bob Frishman, FNAWCC (MA)



William Claggett's fine engraving ability is clear on this silvered brass dial; his skills were so good that he was hired to produce copper plates for printing local paper currency. Those original plates are on view at the Newport Historical Society. PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB FRISHMAN.



Benedict Leca, Executive Director of the Redwood Library.
PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB FRISHMAN.



On Newport's historic Bellevue Avenue, The Redwood Library and Athenaeum, founded in 1747, is in America's earliest public neoclassic building. PHOTO COURTESY OF BOB FRISHMAN.