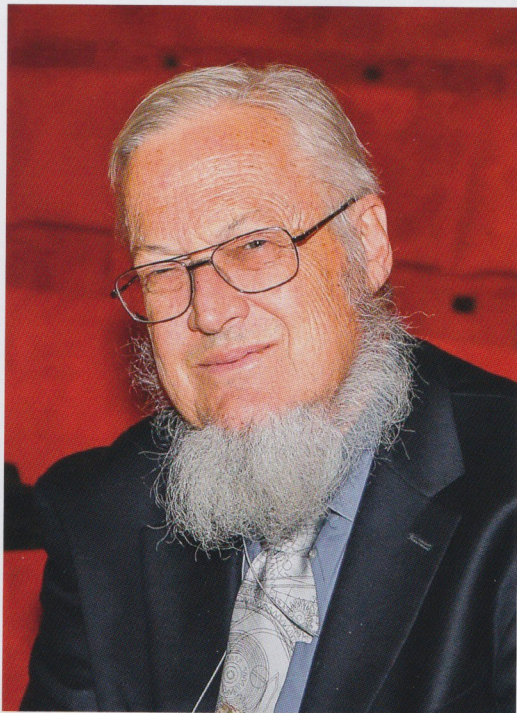


News

Fortunat Mueller-Maerki (1946–2026)



Fortunat at the 'Horology in Art' symposium at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in 2017. Photo courtesy of Robert C. Cheney.

It would be difficult to think of someone who has contributed more to horological sharing and scholarship than Fortunat Mueller-Maerki. Two compelling indicators: a name search of this journal's index shows 104 entries from the years 2000 to 2023; and searching his name in the online NAWCC *Bulletin* index produces six pages, 255 entries, from 2002 to 2016, and would show even more if updating of that database had continued.

Born in Zurich in 1946 and a 1973 graduate of the University of Bern, he came to America for a 1975 Harvard University MBA degree, remained in the USA for a 25-year career at an executive search firm, and then pursued full-time his passion for horology — 'still working but no longer for pay' as he once told me. He passed away 1 June at age 80 near his New Jersey home.

Many of those journal entries reference the hundreds of articles and book reviews he authored. Others point to his longstanding leadership roles at the NAWCC as a Board member and library chair, and as an active AHS member. But none fully reveal his immense generosity as a horological bibliophile who insatiably purchased thousands of books and ephemera items — two of each so that one would immediately be donated to the NAWCC library that now bears his name. The second of each volume went home, adding to the long lines of shelves, until in 2022 donated as a 25,000-plus world-class collection to the Horological Society of New York. He stipulated that this central Manhattan library should be named to honour the brilliant Swiss clockmaker Jost Bürgi (1552–1632).

Book collecting and donating was not enough. With the late Bob Holmstrom (d.2024) as software builder two decades ago, he created and constantly updated the free-access searchable website, *Bibliographia Horologiae Mundi*, a 'comprehensive bibliography of published horological knowledge' that documented and described every book, paper, and printed-out email in his collection. This huge database, no longer maintained, initially informed the HSNY about the depth of the donation and eased the immense task of re-cataloguing according to professional library protocols.

Fortunat was certain that soft-cover publications are always at risk of being discarded. Over the decades, he paid immense sums for hard-cover rebinding of magazines, auction catalogues, and pamphlets to ensure their preservation. These now line HSNY's shelves, their titles clearly visible on cloth spines.

Sometimes he produced his own hardbound books, available from print-on-demand services. Some recorded the horological study tours he created and led, with photos, texts, and itineraries. Another was even more impressive: he devoted many hours to photographing the colour illustrations in C.C. Williamson's 1912 rare deluxe catalogue of J. P. Morgan's watch collection — now housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art — and in 2012 published them in an 80-page book for the benefit of owners of the massive 1972 replica that instead reproduced the images on tipped-in black-

and-white prints. Morgan amassed these 3,000-plus watches for their age, rarity, and beauty; Fortunat recognized that fully appreciating their enamels and precious metals and stones required full-colour imagery.

Naturally, Fortunat owned important antique timepieces as well. While not a major collection, some were valuable loans to a horological books exhibition held in New York City at the Grolier Club: 'On Time: The Quest for Precision: An Exhibition of Books on Time and Timekeeping from the Linda Hall Library'. Eighty-six illustrated books, dating back to the fifteenth century, were complemented by Fortunat, a member of this venerable book-lovers society, with his sundials, clepsydra, tools, weight-driven clocks, chronometers, and railroad-grade watches.

During my tenure as head of the NAWCC Symposium Committee, Fortunat attended and supported each of my conferences in Delaware, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, and New York City. We worked closely together as NAWCC representatives for the 2019 historic joint symposium with the DGC in Nuremberg: 'Time Made in Germany: 700 Years of German Horology'. Our advance preparatory trips included travels around Germany and Switzerland; essentially private tours just for me to the museums and collectors that had warmly welcomed Fortunat in the past. We overnighted in Thun, the lakeside town with the church where he and his wonderful wife, Ruth, were married and began a family of two sons and a daughter.

I first became well acquainted with Fortunat in 2014 when he presented an NAWCC Fellowship to me. We both later became Silver Star Fellows, the top award. Our friendship and collaborations blossomed, and his memorable phone calls to me always began with 'Hi Bob, nothing urgent...'.
Bob Frishman