

Edward Duffield

Philadelphia Clockmaker, Citizen, Gentleman

1730-1803

By MADELIA HICKMAN RING,
EDITOR

PHILADELPHIA — “Collectors of antiques are likely to think of clocks as furniture rather than as timekeepers. They pay considerable attention to the case, but little or none to the mysterious mechanism within, though that is actually the clock, and in most cases the only part of the whole thing made by the man whose name appears on the dial. Cases were made by cabinetmakers, dials were usually imported, and the product of the clockmaker was the hidden work. It is

these complex devices that concern the true clock collector, and the story of their development, and the growth of the clockmaking industry in America, is a fascinating one indeed.”

That paragraph, penned in June 1952 by *The Magazine ANTIQUES* editor Alice Winchester, was used by author Bob Frishman to introduce readers to *Edward Duffield: Philadelphia Clockmaker, Citizen, Gentleman 1730-1803*, which was recently published by the American Philosophical Society (APS) in Philadelphia. Prior to its publication, scholarship on the clockmaker was scant and early: two articles by George Eckhardt, in 1959 and 1960, and Ian Quimby's unpublished 1963 Winterthur thesis. The torch wasn't picked up until 2006, when David Sperling wrote an article on Duffield for the January 6, 2006, issue of this publication and another that appeared in the October 2006 issue of the *National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors' (NAWCC) Bulletin*.

Frishman took up the task more than four years ago, at the request of Winterthur trustee and horology philanthropist Edward W. Kane, who also previously underwrote books on clockmakers David Rittenhouse and William Claggett. Kane not only financially supported the publication of this book but also penned its preface. Frishman is quick to point out that he received no financial compensation from either Kane or APS for writing the book, nor will he receive royalties from its sale (those will go to APS).

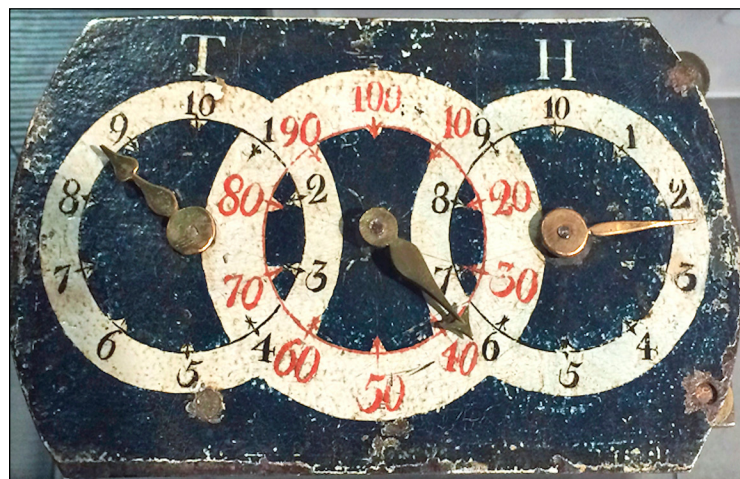
As a clockmaker, Duffield was



Tall case mahogany clock with a single-train movement commissioned of Edward Duffield in 1769 by the American Philosophical Society, for the purpose of timing the transit of Mercury; Duffield completed the works in three weeks and received £15.17.6 for it. Collection of the American Philosophical Society, John Wynn photo.



Suggested by Frishman to be an early Duffield clock because of its square dial with single hand, this clock, housed in a plain flat-top case now in a private collection, has a 30-hour brass-plate pull-up movement with count-wheel strike. Bob Frishman photo.



This waywiser originally owned by Benjamin Franklin may be one bequeathed to Duffield. Photo courtesy of the Franklin Institute.



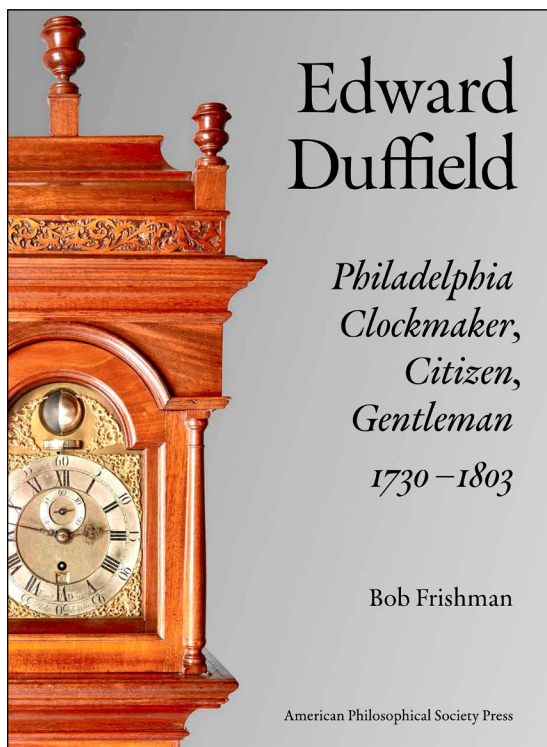
This surveying compass in the collection of the American Philosophical Society dates to circa 1765 and has an unusual quartz pivot bearing at its needle center. Photo courtesy American Philosophical Society.



Photograph of Duffield Homestead, Benfield, *A History of the Townships of Byberry and Moreland, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* by Joseph C. Martindale and Albert W. Dudley, 1901, p. 303. Courtesy of Internet Archive.



Detail of dial of a tall case mahogany clock made for the American Philosophical Society by Edward Duffield in 1769. Collection of the American Philosophical Society, John Wynn photo.



Edward Duffield

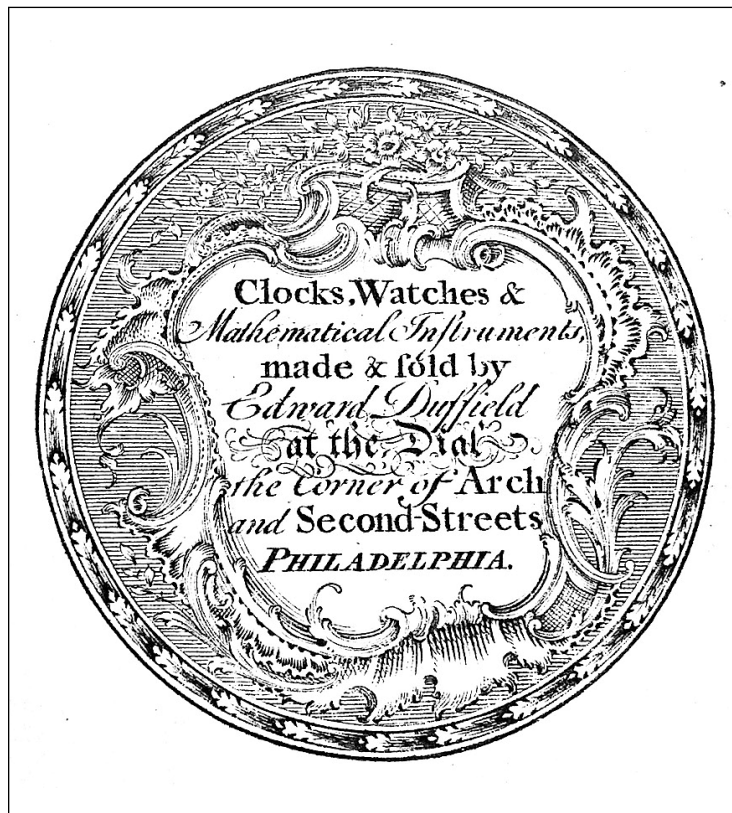
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American Philosophical Society Press



Possible portrait of young Edward Duffield, location unknown, Courtesy of Frick Art Reference Library, New York City.



Undated Edward Duffield watch paper. Courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library; Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, Doc. 499.



This English walnut and mahogany bracket clock by the mid-Eighteenth Century London clockmaker Thomas Best features Duffield's name on the dial. Because Duffield was not known to make bracket clocks or have the ability to fabricate the specialized parts of its mainsprings, crown wheels and fusées, Frishman points to this as evidence that Duffield imported and signed English examples. Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont, photo courtesy of Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library.



1. Front Plate
2. Back Plate with Turned Brass Pillars
3. Weight Pulleys
- TIME TRAIN**
4. Time Mainwheel with Click and Click Spring
5. Time Winding Barrel With Ratchet
6. Barrel Clip
7. Center Wheel
8. Third Wheel
9. Escape Wheel
10. Anchor Pallets and Crutch
- STRIKE TRAIN**
11. Strike Mainwheel with Click and Click Spring
12. Strike Winding Barrel With Ratchet
13. Barrel Clip
14. Strike Second/Pin Wheel
15. Strike Third Wheel
16. Strike Fourth/Warning Wheel
17. Fly
18. Hammer and Arbor
19. Hammer Spring
- ON BACK PLATE**
20. Pallet Bridge
21. Bell Stand
- ON FRONT PLATE**
22. Snail on Hour Wheel
23. Minute Wheel
24. Reverse Minute Wheel
25. Bridge with Hour Pipe
26. Setting Spring Clutch
27. Lifting and Warning Pieces
28. Rack and Rack Tail
29. Gathering Pallet
30. Rack Hook
31. Calendar Wheel
32. Calendar Wheel Pipe

List of names of movement parts shown in a photo of the disassembled movement of a Duffield tall case clock in his collection. Bob Frishman photo.



Disassembled movement of a Duffield tall case clock in the author's collection that shows the complexity and variety of parts. Bob Frishman photo.

unique for a few reasons. He was born into a family of means, owned many properties and was not dependent on his clockmaking skills to provide for himself or his family. He stands alone in his family for his interest in horology: there are no clockmakers in the generations that preceded or followed him. He is not known to have served an apprenticeship though in mid-Eighteenth Century Philadelphia, there were no guild or trade restrictions requiring one. Frishman speculates that Duffield — like many intellectually curious and wealthy young men who were his contemporaries — was attracted to the costly timepieces his family had the means to own. Lastly, Duffield advertised his services infrequently and there are no extant account books or ledgers to document his horology business.

The practice of advertising by Philadelphia clockmakers is one Frishman explores in detail. The first time Duffield's name and

Now in a private collection, this tall case clock with engraved brass and moon-phases dial was once owned by James Curran. Frishman notes the pitched-pediment broken-arch top is a favored English design but unique for clocks with Duffield works. Gregg Vicik photo.

identity as a watch maker appears in the Philadelphia papers — he advertised in 1751 as a purveyor of food — was in 1756 when he advertised for the return of a stolen silver spoon. The only known undated watch paper, which is in the Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera at Winterthur Museum, Garden & Library and which would have been pressed into the back of a pocket-watch case, would have been one way for him to spread the word of his trade. The only time Duffield advertised his ser-

vices — for a “genteel” clock he did not make — was for a chamber or table clock that appeared in the November 8, 1770, issue of *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

Duffield and his family were close friends with Benjamin Franklin and his family. Frishman, who believes Franklin was a strong influence on his younger friend's choice of career and its success, devotes an entire chapter to their relationship which began between Franklin in-laws and Duffield's parents before Edward was born — the families lived next door to each other — and lasted for decades, ending with Duffield being one of three executors of Franklin's will in 1790 (he was also named as executor in Franklin's first draft of his will, in 1757). The two men shared not just an appreciation for artisans making things by hand but also a love of horology.

Frishman is clear to note that while Duffield made many of the clocks he sold and repaired both clocks and watches, it does not mean that he made watches, which could be acquired already



Its location currently unknown, this engraved sundial was previously in the collection of the late William K. du Pont and published in *The Magazine ANTIQUES* (August 1992) and *Worldly Goods: The Arts of Early Pennsylvania, 1680-1758* by Jack Lindsey (Philadelphia, 1999). It is the only known example by Duffield and features not only the date of 1757 and finely detailed engraving but an additional scale of minutes to add or subtract time when converting sundial time to watch and clock time. Laszlo Bodo photo.

STOPPED lately by EDWARD DUFFIELD, Watch-maker, at the corner of Second and Arch-streets, Philadelphia, a silver spoon, that was offered for sale, on suspicion of its being stolen, as the marks were defaced. The owner proving his property, and paying the charge of advertizing, may have it again, by applying as above.

Advertisement placed by Edward Duffield on page 4 of the July 8, 1756, issue of *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Image courtesy of Newspapers.com.

A GENTEEL Eight Day CHAMBER CLOCK, almost new, which Chimes the Quarters, to be sold, by EDWARD DUFFIELD, at the Corner of Arch and Second-streets. N. B. Wanted in two Weeks, a sober industrious man, who understands driving a Team, and taking Care of Horses. Enquire of said Duffield.

Advertisement placed by Edward Duffield on page 4 of the November 8, 1770, issue of *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Image courtesy American Antiquarian Society, via Genealogy Bank.

assembled from English counterparts. Indeed, with interest in buying and owning British-made goods, no economic reason to “buy American” and given the extensive time and cost required to make watch parts, Duffield would have had little incentive to do so. To circle back to Alice Winchester’s comment at the beginning of this story, Duffield — like contemporaries in America and England — housed his clock works in wooden cases made by skilled woodworking cabinet-makers.

Interestingly, for a dozen years, Duffield had the honor of being the keeper of the large clock atop the Pennsylvania State House (now Independence Hall).

Compared to contemporaries

such as David Rittenhouse, who made clocks with additional complicated elements, Duffield’s clocks are conservative in their complexity. However, four Duffield clocks that feature a rotating spherical lunar indicator in the dial arch are unusual and possibly unique to him. Frishman knows “of no others made in America at that time, and a small number of English predecessors have a different system for turning the little metal moon.”

Antiques and The Arts Weekly asked Frishman if, in the course of his research, there were any surprises or revelations that dispelled any preconceptions he had when he began.

“While I understood from decades of servicing antique clocks that the movements and dials of such Eighteenth Century tall clocks are quite similar, I thought that perhaps I would discover more significant differences among them. I wanted to claim that Duffield, and perhaps his Philadelphia contemporaries, were somehow working at a higher level. However, while of consistent fine quality — evidenced by the fact that many of them still tick and strike flawlessly today — this was not the case.”

Duffield’s profession as a clock-maker ended in 1775 when he leased his shop to clockmaker John Lind, and retired to Benfield, his country estate in Moreland Township, Philadelphia County; in 1779, he appears as a

“farmer” on the tax list. There could have been several motivating factors for this life change: at 45 years of age, he may have grown weary of toiling at a workbench, or anticipated what the oncoming political turmoil that led to the American Revolution would do to his trade in British-made parts. Not least, he would have faced growing competition in a city that, according to the 1774 tax list, reported 30 percent of its properties owners as craftsmen of some kind, including many newly arrived horologists.

“Every biographer’s fear is that a new trove of primary materials surfaces shortly after publication, but I will consider that a good thing,” Frishman admits. For the book, he drew from existing primary source material and Duffield’s surviving clocks and watches. The catalog of Duffield’s clocks and instruments includes every documented example, even where the location is presently unknown; a total of 71 objects are included. Frishman hopes more may surface in the future.

Not only does Frishman’s book detail the context in which Duffield worked and the professional craftsmen he interacted with but also gives a comprehensive account of the social spheres Duffield inhabited. He mingled regularly with the city’s non-Quaker elite as a vestryman and warden of the prestigious Anglican Christ Church, and he had many other important civic duties.

A transcription of his 1803 will — and estate inventory — provide a late-in-life snapshot of a man whose limited production stands on a par with some of Philadelphia’s greatest clock-makers.

With so many of Duffield’s clocks in permanent museum or private collections around the United States, Frishman regrets that an exhibition on the clock-maker is unlikely to be pulled together. He is already at work on his next project — a comprehensive study of the Mulliken family of Massachusetts clock-makers that will be published by the Concord Museum; a late 2026 publication date is anticipated, as is a probable exhibition shortly thereafter.

Editor’s note:

Edward Duffield: Philadelphia Clockmaker; Citizen, Gentleman 1730-1803, by Bob Frishman, with preface by Edward W. Kane and foreword by Jay Robert Stiefel. Published by the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 2004. Black and white and color, 242 pp, \$60, hardcover.



Often written as “Edw.” or “E.,” here, Edward’s name is engraved in its entirety and embellishes a broken swan’s neck pediment walnut clock now in a private collection. Nathan Merkel photo.



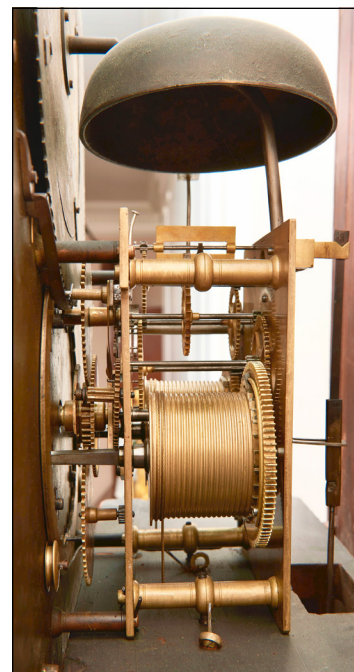
Photograph of the former Lower Dublin Academy, which has a now-empty dormer window under the eaves that once housed a single-dial clock by Duffield that had a 30-pound cannonball as a weight. Bob Frishman photo, March 2020.



This dial accompanies a clock in the collection of the American Philosophical Society that was passed down through the family of Benjamin Franklin’s daughter and was given as a gift of Junius S. and Henry S. Morgan in 1954. It is one of just four Duffield clocks that has a spherical moon in the dial arch. Collection of the American Philosophical Society. John Wynn photo.



Duffield made comparatively few silvered-brass sheet dials but they were less costly than the composite brass dials he favored. This engraved sheet brass dial accompanies a tall case clock in the collection of the Baltimore Museum of Art. Photo courtesy Baltimore Museum of Art.



Movement strike-side view of an Edward Duffield movement in a Philadelphia walnut tall case clock in a private New Jersey collection, cat. no. 25. John Wynn Photo.



J. Rogers print of Pennsylvania State House. Bob Frishman collection and photo.