

HOROLOGICAL TIMES

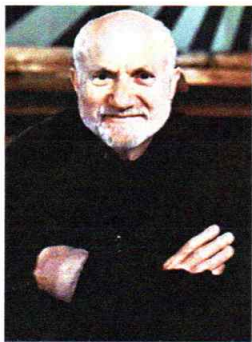
**Membership
Has Another
Say in
AWCI's
Future**

**Don't Overlook
the Obvious,
Part 3**

**Burnishing
Pivots, Part 1**

**Two New
Members to
Join BOD**

*E. Duffield
Philad^a
?*



Edward Duffield: Philadelphia Clockmaker, Citizen, Gentleman 1730–1803

By Bob Frishman.
Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society Press, 2024.
Hardcover with dust jacket, 256 pages, \$60 US

Reviewed By Daniel Benson, CMW

There's a highly specialized niche of literature devoted to exploring the life and work of individual clockmakers and watchmakers. The subjects are usually historical, famous figures who have changed the course of horological history. We might think of Harrison, Breguet, Terry, Thomas, or Daniels. Lesser makers are seldom profiled, even if they were prolific or notable in their own time. The biographer's task in this context is always daunting, as there is seldom a lot of documentation to work with. Imagine, for a moment, someone deciding to write your biography some decades after you've "left the bench." What would they be able to discover about you, your life, and your work, from your tools, repair records, letters, emails, bills, and other documents you left behind?

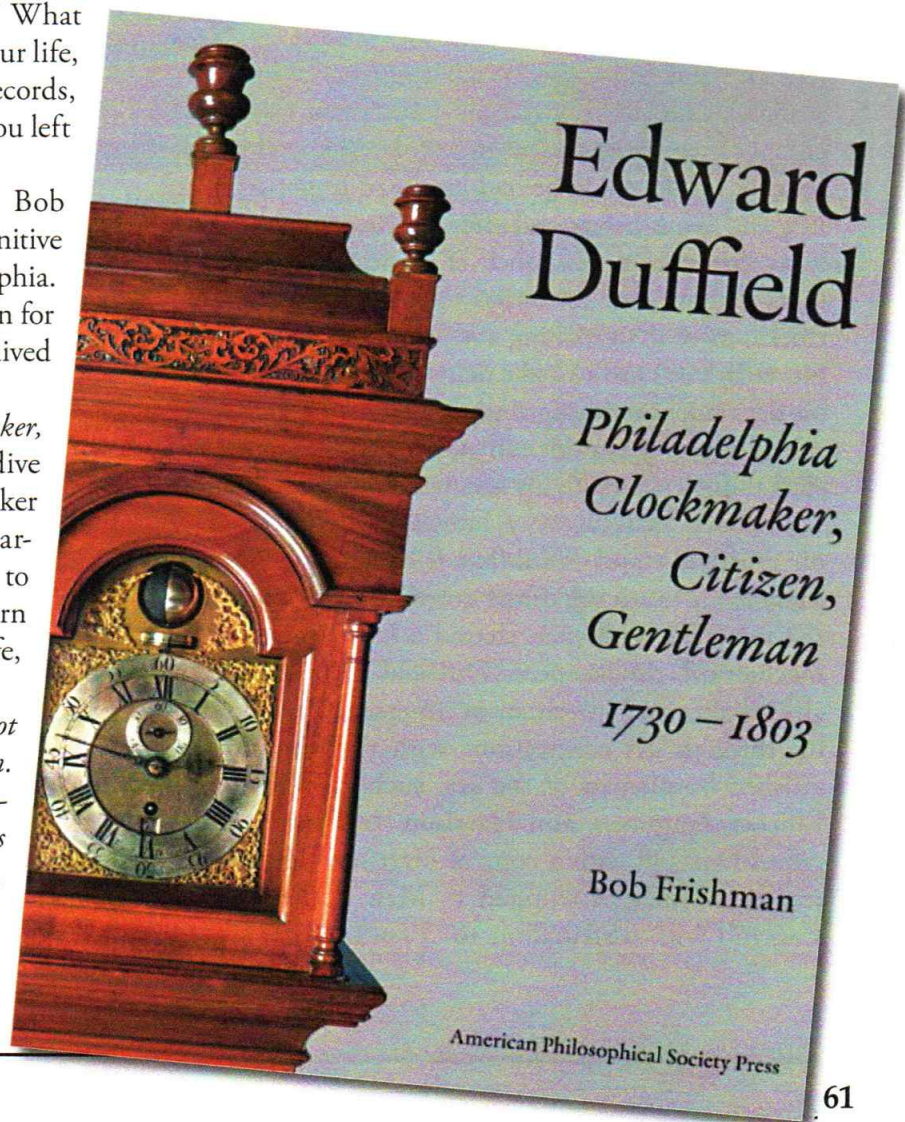
Well, that's exactly the mission that Bob Frishman set for himself in writing this definitive biography of Edward Duffield of Philadelphia. And, the task was even more challenging than for your imaginary biographer, since Duffield lived several centuries ago.

Edward Duffield: Philadelphia Clockmaker, Citizen, Gentleman 1730–1803 is a deep dive into the life and work of a local clockmaker during the American late-Colonial and early-Independence years. Frishman seems to have left no stone unturned in his zeal to learn as much as possible about Duffield, his life, work, and context.

As the author notes himself, *"this is not the story of a typical 'leather-apron' artisan. It is many interwoven stories about an eighteenth-century urban craftsman who was deeply involved in his community's economic, civic, and religious life...."* As a wealthy merchant, businessman, landowner, and clockmaker with exceptional social connections,

Duffield provided clocks, scientific instruments, engraving work, and other services to the community. Duffield's unique situation is grounded not just in his horological endeavors, business acumen, and social standing, but also in his close friendship with Benjamin Franklin; he therefore moved in Philadelphia's (and, indeed, America's) elite social and political circles.

Frishman has divided the main body of the book into nine generously illustrated chapters, each one covering a significant aspect of Duffield's life, work, and community. The first chapter offers a thorough



background of the man and his family. The next three chapters focus on Duffield's business, his clock and instrument making, and the broader horological context of Philadelphia at the time. Further chapters detail Duffield's involvement in the social, fashion, religious, and communal life of Philadelphia. Lastly, two chapters are devoted to Duffield's properties and land holdings, and to his extraordinary and close relationship with Benjamin Franklin.

Practical clockmakers and watchmakers will be keenly interested in the chapters on Duffield's clocks and his workshop, where he also provided engraving services and repairs. Frishman carefully examines several of Duffield's clocks in detail, noting that, while well-made, the design and workmanship was consistent with the prevailing models and methods of the time. The romantic ideal of the lone craftsman carefully making each individual piece of the clock by hand is put firmly to rest by Frishman. This was neither plausible nor economically viable for makers like Duffield, since specialized craftsmen were available who could do certain jobs better, faster, and cheaper than the lone clockmaker; as well, ready-made parts or blanks could be had locally or imported from England (both before and after the Revolution). Finally, as Frishman notes, much of a horologist's business then, as now, was in repairs to existing watches and clocks, more than making and selling new timepieces. Nevertheless, Duffield, like many makers, put his mark on the trade, producing unique features such as a full sphere moon phase instead of the painted disk, and several single-train, highly accurate timepieces to order.

Readers will be very interested in the chapter on Duffield's and Franklin's friendship. Curiously, there is no surviving direct correspondence between the two. Yet both men shared a keen interest in mechanical timekeepers: Duffield as a practicing clockmaker and merchant of timepieces, and Franklin through his connections with the most distinguished horologists of the era, such as Whitehurst, Ellicott, Ferguson, and Harrison. In fact, Franklin gifted Duffield with a copy of Harrison's horological treatise, which he shipped to Mrs. Franklin from England with instructions to "Present it from me to

our ingenious Friend Mr. Duffield, with my love to them and their Children"[sic]. The fellowship between the Duffields and Franklins actually precedes Edward's birth, as Franklin was more than 20 years Duffield's senior. However, it is clear Franklin thought very highly of his young friend for both his skills and character, as Duffield was one of two executors of Franklin's will and estate. High praise and trust, indeed!

While Frishman has researched his subject deeply and sifted through an enormous quantity of documentation, at the distance of several centuries huge gaps in the narrative are inevitable. Understandably, then, a certain amount of speculation is necessary to help bridge those gaps. Throughout the book, Frishman frequently offers his theories about this or that to help flesh out the story and fill in the blanks. However, he's very careful in this, being mindful to offer suggestions and explore possibilities, but also never to reach too far or draw inferences that might be interpreted too conclusively. The reader, therefore, is happily left with a strong history of Duffield and his era, with many parts well detailed and others slightly shrouded in mystery.

As noted above, the practical clockmaker and watchmaker may find the chapters directly related to horological matters the most interesting, but they would be well-advised to read the other chapters as well. The windows into late-Colonial/early-Independence eras offer some interesting insights on the nation's history.

These nine chapters, as described, comprise the first major section of the book. The latter half includes numerous appendices (Duffield's will, an inventory of his household goods upon his death in 1803, and a copy of Edward Dent's 1837 list of parts in a pocket watch), an extensive bibliography of some 400 resources, and a catalogue of known Duffield clocks.

The catalog, in itself, is a most remarkable investigative work, the result of scouring household inventories, auction notices, museums, and private collections. Frishman has listed some 70 Duffield clocks and instruments. Most of the items are long case clocks and are helpfully organized by their case designs. Some instruments are included as well, such as a few compasses and a sundial. Most of the catalog features high-quality,

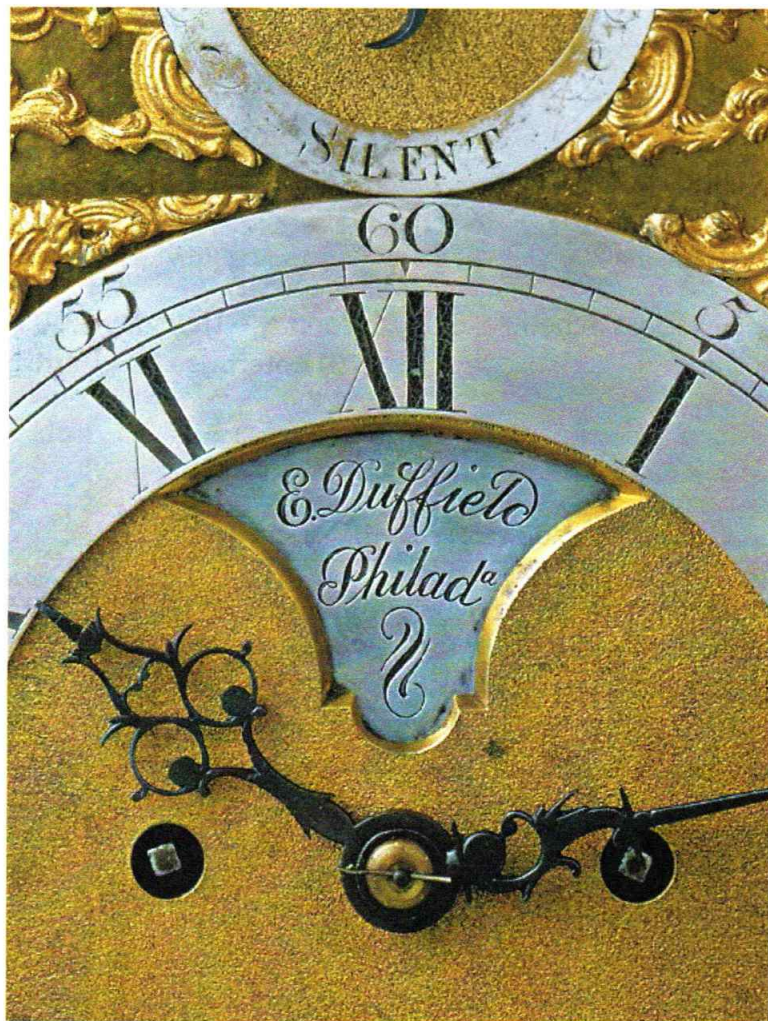


full-color plates of the clocks and close-ups of the dials, while some images are drawn from auction catalogs, sales brochures, magazines, books, etc. In numerous instances, the photos are accompanied with pictures of the owners, the houses where the clock resides, repair marks chalked inside a case, repairer's cards, etc.; these delightful little details add depth and interest to the story of each timepiece.

Notably, there are very few photographs or details of the movements to accompany the pictures of the cases and dials in the catalog. Frishman explains this omission in the introduction to the catalog, noting that Duffield's mechanisms followed a typical English pattern and were generally similar amongst most of the clocks described. Additionally, access to photograph the movements was often limited. With restricted access and feeling that too many similar photos of movements would create needless clutter and repetition, the author refers the reader to the photographs of numerous Duffield movements in Chapter 3.

In *Edward Duffield*, Frishman offers us a truly definitive work, not just on an individual clockmaker, but on the world in which that man lived. It draws connections across many aspects of the horological, political, commercial, social, and religious life of the earliest years of the nation, and is highly recommended reading for anyone who is interested in horological or American history—or both!

Franklin founded The American Philosophical Society in 1743. Duffield became a member some years later and also supplied the Society with several clocks that continue to grace its premises in Philadelphia. So, it is very fitting that the Society partnered in the publication of this in-depth study that touches so close to home.



Dial detail of an Edward Duffield-signed bracket clock, from the collection of the Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library.

Edward Duffield: Philadelphia Clockmaker, Citizen, Gentleman 1730–1803 can be ordered from your favorite bookstore, Amazon, or other online booksellers, or from the publishing arm of The American Philosophical Society—<https://www.pennpress.org/9781606180099/edward-duffield/>. Also, check out the author's website dedicated to this book, www.edwardduffield.com. The author has generously donated a copy to the AWCi library, which is available for loan by members.

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