

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

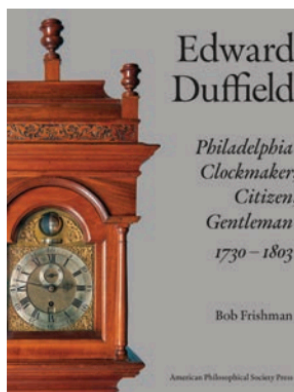
Book review by Bruce R. Forman, NAWCC Fellow (IN)

Author Bob Frishman formerly organized the annual NAWCC Ward Francillon Time Symposium for many years. As Symposium attendees know, Frishman is detail oriented, which ensured the success of that lecture series and also ensures a thorough examination of the topic of his new book, a detailed biography of Edward Duffield, a clockmaker who worked in 18th-century Philadelphia.

Unlike most colonial clockmakers who generally came from humble beginnings, Duffield was born into a wealthy family who owned large tracts of land in and around the City of Philadelphia. He inherited some of his family's wealth, and the income from the real estate holdings relieved Duffield from the economic pressures normally experienced by many clockmakers. This has led some historians to describe Edward Duffield as a "gentleman craftsman."

Duffield did little advertising of his trade but appears to have serviced clocks owned by the affluent members of Philadelphia society. He was good friends with Benjamin Franklin and was a member of the American Philosophical Society. His clocks are normally of the expensive 8-day variety housed in high-style Philadelphia cases.

The book begins by describing the origins of the Duffield family. They were from England and prospered after arriving in America. Many of the family members are chronicled in detail, and this historical overview shows how the Duffield family became part of the DNA of Philadelphia society. Some readers may find the book densely packed with historical references. However, others like the reviewer will find it refreshing that the



**Edward Duffield:
Philadelphia Clockmaker,
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by Bob Frishman, 2024,
256 pages, 227 illustrations,
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author fully integrated the life of Edward Duffield into the historical events of the time.

For example, the author gives the historical background for the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia that claimed the lives of more than 4,000 people, including several clockmakers. Like many other wealthy residents, Duffield fled to his country estate to wait out the epidemic that stopped much of the commercial business inside the city for several years. The author touches on many other historical incidents that had an impact on Duffield, including the 1794 eruption of Iceland's Laki volcano that caused a worldwide drop in atmospheric temperature, leading to crop failures and the formation of ice flows in the Gulf of Mexico. This book should appeal to a wider audience than just the horological community, as readers who enjoy discovering details of American history will also enjoy this book.

This Duffield biography is well illustrated with high-quality, color images. More than 70 clocks and surveying instruments made by Edward Duffield are illustrated, along with details and explanations surrounding the making of the clock dials, movements, and cases. The illustration of so many early colonial clock cases will be especially helpful to those who restore cases from that period.

If you enjoy reading about American history or colonial clockmaking, this book should be in your library. It is published by the American Philosophical Society, which Edward Duffield became a member of on March 8, 1768.