

# A Brief History of Time

THE HALIM TIME & GLASS MUSEUM INVITES THE PUBLIC TO SHARE A COLLECTOR'S ENTHUSIASM FOR CLASSIC CLOCKS AND THEIR MAKERS. BY JOHN DORFMAN



From top: André Romain Guilmet (attrib.), Automaton Submarine, France, circa 1880; Organ Clock With Automata, Black Forest region, Germany, 1875.



"THE STORY OF clocks is the story of time," says Cameel Halim, founder of the Halim Time & Glass Museum in Evanston, Ill. "And time has an enormous history. All of our modern life is based on knowing the time, and our modern industry is based on the horology industry. This is what fascinates me." Halim's fascination began when he was a child in Egypt and took apart the family's alarm clock to see how it worked, but the seed of the collecting passion was planted shortly after he and his wife, Hoda, emigrated to the U.S., when she picked up a classic American schoolhouse clock for \$40. At the time, amassing an unparalleled cache of clocks wasn't

at the top of the Halims' agenda; they were more focused on building a real estate business in the Chicago area. But before long, they had acquired a musical grandfather clock and then an English jappaned clock. "Collectors don't intend to be collectors," says Halim. "It just happens over time. You buy one clock and then you buy another. It's like designing a puzzle and then filling it in."

The puzzle isn't complete yet, but it now has 1,100 pieces, each one of which has a story to tell. Eleven years ago Halim, his wife, and their three daughters decided to create a museum to house these amazing objects and make them available to the public, along with another collection consisting of over 70 pieces of antique stained glass by Louis Comfort Tiffany, John LaFarge, and other masters. The Halims' dream finally came true on September 26, 2017, when the Halim Time & Glass Museum opened in a





five-story building, constructed specifically for the purpose, with eight rooms dedicated to clocks, four rooms for stained glass, and a clock repair and restoration workshop on the premises, in which each of the clocks in the collection has been fully restored, both mechanically and cosmetically.

The workshop also offers services to the general public, because, as Halim puts it, “after the staff finishes restoring our collection of 1,100 clocks, we have a choice—lay them off or go into the business of restor-

ing old clocks. It’s now almost four months since the service was started, and they’re very busy.” The museum itself is also very busy, with attendance doubling every month, according to Halim.

For Halim, each clock in the collection is like a person with a story to tell, not only about its own past but about the ways in which the history of clockmaking illuminates other histories—technological, economic, and political, not to mention art history. He illustrates his argu-

*From left: Clock as Tribute to Napoleon Presented by the People of Lyon in Honor of his Egyptian Campaign (1798–99), France, circa 1800; Imperial Chinese Ormolu, Enamel, Paste-Set, and Soapstone Musical Automaton Clock, Guangzhou, Qianlong Period, circa 1790.*





Clockwise from top left: Automaton Clock in the Form of an Airplane, France, circa 1918; Richard of Wallingford, Tower Clock of St. Alban's Abbey, St. Alban's, England, circa 1356 (original), replica, 20th century; Constantin Louis Detouche, Grande Sonnerie Skeleton Table Regulator, circa 1865.

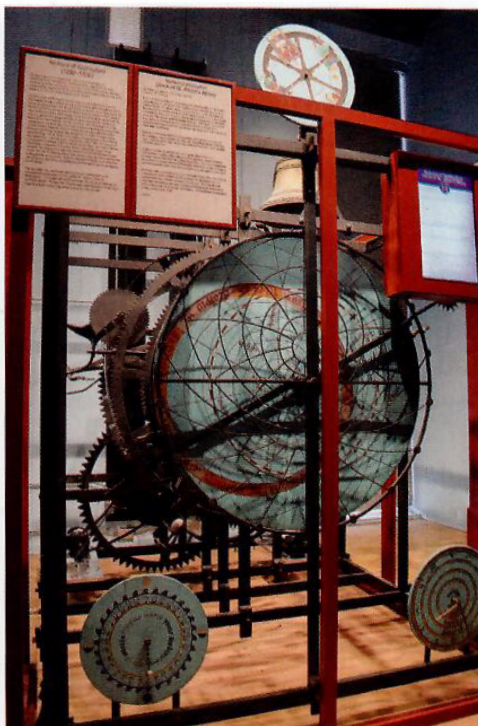


ment that horology is at the root of the Industrial Revolution by pointing to a circa-1815 shelf clock made by Eli Terry of Plymouth, Conn. It has a rare horizontal movement, a 30-hour duration with striking, and a painted wooden dial with visible escapement, all contained in a mahogany case with a verre églomisé tablet. Halim says, "People think Henry Ford invented the assembly line, but Terry built 4,000 clocks in two years. He really started the modern American clock industry. European clocks at the time were for royalty and very rich people. When the Americans started making clocks, they said, we need to make something for everybody, so every American will own a clock. That is the greatness of the American clock industry."

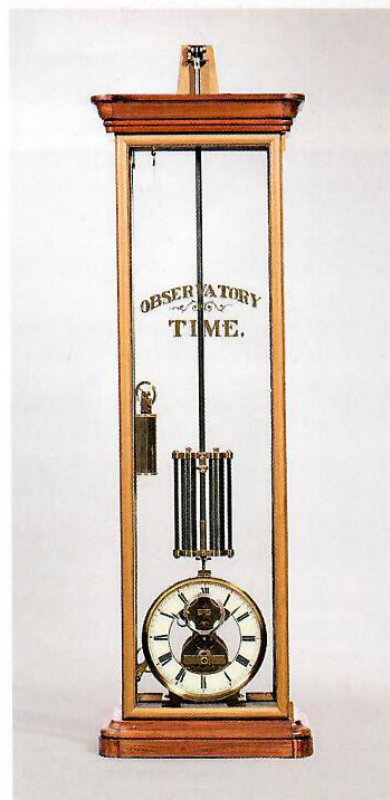
Another American clock, made by Simon Willard & Son of Massachusetts around 1828, is shaped like a lighthouse, a unique design. Willard (with whom Terry apprenticed) is credited with inventing the "alarm clock," although this particular example lacks the alarm functionality. "Willard was a great American clock-

maker," says Halim. "He was the first to realize that American clocks needed to be smaller and more robust in order to travel. He put them in covered wagons, to go over rough terrain. He was first to envision a different kind of use for clocks, not just as luxury items. He started to see idea of clocks being in every home."

International trade, a hot topic in today's news, is also a major theme in the history of clockmaking. Halim points to an extravagant Imperial Chinese soapstone, enamel, paste and ormolu musical automaton clock, made in Guangzhou toward the end of the Qianlong period, circa 1790. It has an elephant on top, little revolving whirligigs, spiral-shaped glass rods that simulate falling water as they turn, and eight bells that play four tunes. This astonishing piece was made for the Emperor himself, who had 6,000 clocks in his possession by the time he died. Halim draws the parallels to today's trade wars: "In the 18th century, the Chinese were sending export objects to the West and taking all their money. They wouldn't buy anything from the West. So the British







said they'd break this pattern and send them beautiful clocks. The Chinese said, we like these English clocks, but we're going to make our own."

The Time & Glass Museum also has an example of the kind of clock the English used to try and redress the balance of trade. Made around 1780 and shaped like the famous 15th-century Porcelain Pagoda of Nanjing, the bronze automaton clock is encrusted with 10,000 pearls—all of which had to be removed and individually cleaned during the restoration process. Its tiered structure expands from 30 inches high to 50 inches high when it chimes (to the tune of a Chinese folk song, *Mo Li Hua*), shrinking back to 30 inches over the next hour. The Asian iconography and design show how carefully the English clockmakers targeted

Clockwise from top left: Eli Terry, Pillar and Scroll Shelf Clock With Visible Escapement and Strike, Plymouth, Connecticut, circa 1815; Pagoda Automaton Musical Clock for the Qing Imperial Court, London, circa 1780; Simon Willard & Son, "Lighthouse" Clock, Massachusetts, circa 1828; Charles Fasoldt, Patent Inverted Dial Regulator, Albany, N.Y., circa 1865.



Clockwise from top left: Imperial Alabaster Automaton "Fishing Boy and his Catch," Guangzhou, China, late 18th century, English-made clockwork; Pierre Etienne Romain, bronzier, Fall of Phaeton Clock, France, circa 1798; Benjamin Vulliamy, Derby Biscuit Porcelain Mantel Clock With Revolving Chapter Rings, "Andromache," London, circa 1790.



the Chinese market.

International competition in horology also went on between England and France. French clocks were known for their elegant porcelain cases, while English clocks tended to be more utilitarian-looking. "The English said, we're going to show the art inside, the movement," says Halim, "so they made the skeleton clock. Then the French went back and said, if the English are making skeleton clocks, we will make them, too!" The museum has a gorgeous French skeleton clock, a Grande Sonnerie Skeleton Table Regulator, made around 1865 by Constantin Louis Detouche. It has a subsidiary seconds dial and chimes the hours and half hours on glass bells, an unusual feature. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, French clockmakers were fond of celebrating industrial progress by creating whimsical timepieces such as one from around 1880 in the form of a submarine with a periscope, or a pair of clocks (circa 1918) that sport little airplanes flying around a central tower. The



HALIM MUSEUM OF TIME & GLASS





Halim museum has the largest collection of French industrial clocks in the world.

One of the most astonishing timepieces in the museum is an eight-foot-tall replica of a clock made between 1336 and 1356 for St. Alban's Abbey in England. Designed by Richard of Wallingford, the original was mounted in the abbey's tower, where it rang to summon monks to prayer and was also used to time astronomical observations. During the time of Henry VIII, when the abbey was seized by the crown, Richard's clock disappeared, but his drawings survived and made it possible to reconstruct this astronomical wonder. The Halims bought the replica from the Science Museum in Chicago and added a motor, so that it is always running.

Halim's personal favorite among his clocks is one presented to Napoleon Bonaparte around 1800 by the people of Lyons, in honor of his Egyptian campaign. The mahogany base has an enamel portrait of Napoleon in its center, wearing the scarlet uniform of the First Consul, a position to which he was appointed in 1800. As an Egyptian, Halim finds special appeal in the fanciful ancient Egyptian iconography of this clock, such as the inclusion of granite from Aswan, a river god of the Nile reclining on a sphinx and playing with crocodiles, and Egyptian female caryatids. "It has a pipe organ that plays Oriental music from Egypt, and a fountain of carved rock crystal," enthuses Halim. "French people, they go crazy about this clock!"



From left: Meissen Porcelain Manufactory, modeler Johann Kändler (attrib.), clockmaker Julien Le Roy, Athena and Hermes Porcelain Mantel Clock, France, circa 1750; Joseph Knibb, Longcase Clock with Quarter Hour Strike, London, circa 1680.