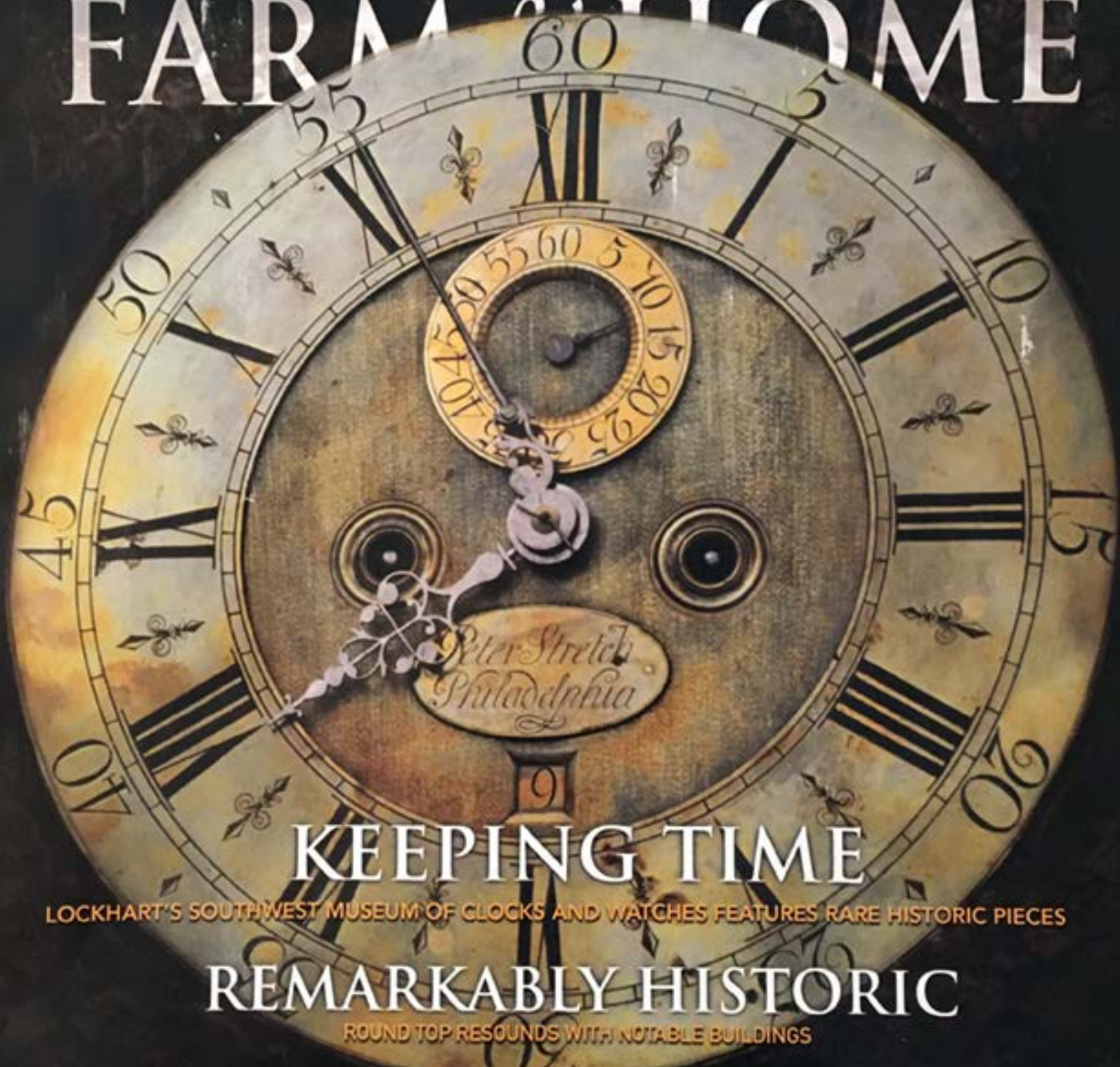


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LOCKHART'S SOUTHWEST MUSEUM OF CLOCKS AND WATCHES FEATURES RARE HISTORIC PIECES

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Gene Galbraith, horologist

KEEPING TIME

Lockhart's Southwest Museum of Clocks and Watches features rare historic pieces

Story by **WAYNE STEWART**
Photography by **CHRISTINA STEWART**

“ I IMPART A LOT OF FEELING AND EMOTION INTO EVERY CLOCK HERE. I WORK HARD AT GIVING EACH PIECE THE RESPECT IT DESERVES AND I TRY TO TREAT EACH ONE EQUALLY.” — GENE GALBRAITH

Mankind has been marking time for millennia, whether by following the seasons or staring at the sun, they have sought to break down the earth's natural cycles into measurable moments.

Much of that history is chronicled at the Southwest Museum of Clocks and Watches in downtown Lockhart. This one-of-a-kind museum presents not just the history of time-keeping, but the evolution of clocks, not only in America, but throughout Europe. To go along with the history, there

are dozens of clocks on display from small shelf clocks, to long case clocks — today known as grandfather clocks — to tower clocks and other specialty clocks most could never imagine. Behind the museum is the mechanical genius of Gene Galbraith, a modern-day horologist (timepiece expert), who ended up in Lockhart when he was asked to restore the Caldwell County Courthouse clock tower seven years ago.

From Mr. Galbraith's work on the tower, a museum was born, a museum meant to literally, mark the time. For Mr.



ABOVE: A tower clock set up in the museum gives guests a glimpse of how it works. LEFT: Bob Brewer, a local historian, explains the mechanics of a clock. FACING PAGE: Dan Sweet talks about a 1710 Peter Stretch clock (featured on the cover of this magazine). A hip toggle clock was one of the early battery operated clocks. In the background are banjo clocks.

Galbraith, a former music teacher, there is no favorite clock of his in the museum, as each one has its own special story of how it came to be in the museum, and its own space in the history of clocks.

"I impart a lot of feeling and emotion into every clock here," Mr. Galbraith said with a grin. "I work hard at giving each piece the respect it deserves and I try to treat each one equally."

He takes a fatherly view of the clocks in the museum, and his care has been noted as the Texas Historical Commission has recognized the museum for its efforts in restoring clock towers across the state and its preservation work in the community. In 2013 the Southwest Museum of Clocks and Watches received the prestigious John L. Nau III Award of Excellence in Museums.

Helping Mr. Galbraith at the museum, which is open only on Saturdays, or by appointments, are dedicated volunteers. Dan Sweet, called by Mr. Galbraith the "Wizard of Time," as he gives visitors an in-depth tour and history of the pieces of the museum; also helping out are Bob Brewer, a local Lockhart historian and Dianne Stevenson, who also serves on the Board of Directors for the museum.

Inside the museum, separate galleries are dedicated to different types of clocks, as there is an American clock gallery, a French and German clock gallery, shelf clocks, and many other types.

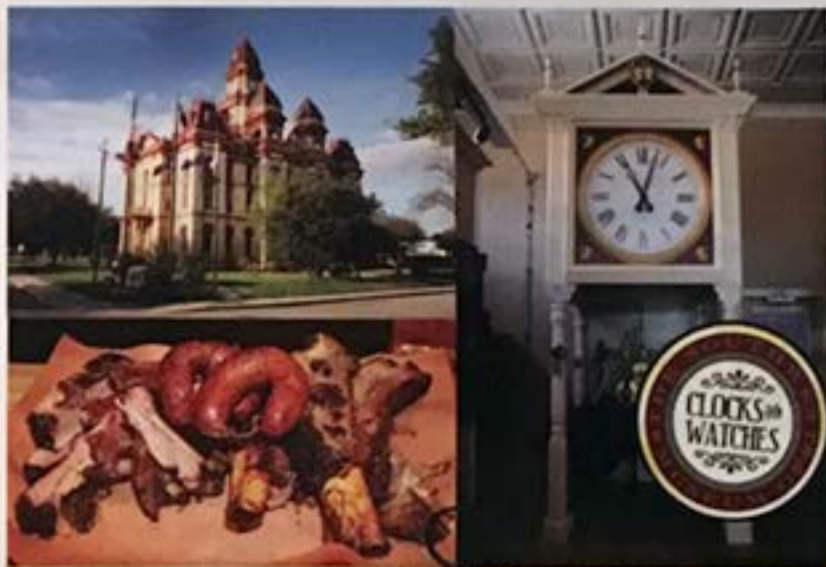
"In our American gallery, every clock in it was designed by an American," Mr. Sweet, noted. "There are Seth Thomas clocks, we have a large selection of those; we have a Peter Stretch clock..."

That Peter Stretch clock is the oldest clock in the museum, dating to 1710, made in Philadelphia. It is a long case clock and it is quite special.

"This clock was handed down from father, to son, and so on," Mr. Sweet explained. "From what we have learned, it is the oldest Peter Stretch clock in existence and it is the seventh clock he ever made."

Another popular clock in the American collection are the banjo clocks, first designed by Simon Willard, which made the early clocks a more manageable size, something most of the early clocks were not.

Early versions of clocks, according to Mr. Galbraith, began as sundials. From there mechanics began to play a role in time keeping.



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"Time keeping really began in the 1330s to 1350s with sun dials," Mr. Galbraith explained. "They really were crude and primitive, then they developed techniques for making gears interact and then telling time on a dial. Timekeeping really began to evolve through the 1500s and 1600s — that's when it really took off."

Much of the evolution of clock making goes back to some enterprising blacksmiths.

"We owe a lot to the smiths," Mr. Galbraith continued. "They were instrumental in setting up the foundries to fashion the gears and develop the clock parts and to figure out how they interact, to know how many teeth to put on a gear and then learn how to power them."

"The first (mechanical) clocks were powered by water, some were even powered by wind and some used donkeys to turn big wooden gears. Eventually they added weights to power the mechanical clocks," Mr. Galbraith added.

The advent of the mechanical clock was one of the engines that powered the industrial revolution; it also spawned its own industry as clock making became a huge industry on the American East Coast.

Many delved into clock making, including founding father Benjamin Franklin. There is a replica of Franklin's clock in the museum.

"The clock keeps great time," Mr. Sweet said as he explained how the clock operated. "The only thing about this clock is, you have to know what time it is in order to know what time it is, as



it is very hard to read."

Clocks are mechanical works of art, and possibly one of the greatest works of art in the museum also may be one of its most famous and treasured, the desk clock of the famous circus master P.T. Barnum.

"The clock originally started as music box," Mr. Sweet explained. "It has two paintings of King David, one of him being crowned king by the tribes of Israel, and the other of him being tended by a Shunammite woman in his elderly years.

The music of the desk actually is an organ consisting of 72 hand-carved pipes. A drum with bellows pumps air into the pipes to play the music and makes dancers twirl near the top of the desk.

The clock was added to the desk in 1831.

"How do we know it was 1831?" Mr. Sweet asked. "Well, when Gene (Mr. Galbraith) was restoring the clock he found a German newspaper from March 1831 used as a shim."

The desk, made from mahogany from Honduras, first came into Barnum's possession after he saw it during a tour of a castle in southern Germany.

"He bought it and he ships it back to America," Mr. Sweet said. "When

FACING PAGE: Mr. Sweet points to dancers on top of the desk clock owned by P.T. Barnum. **TOP:** From left, Dan Sweet, Gene Galbraith and Bob Brewer. **ABOVE:** A Seth Thomas Mantel Clock, circa 1909, featured a wood case with Adamantine finish.

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he got it home, everybody always wanted to come see it and hear it play.

"Ever the businessman, he has a hole carved into it so people had to put money into it to make it play," Mr. Sweet added.

The piece was one of Barnum's favorite pieces of furniture, but his wife did not like it, so when he died she had it shipped to a ranch he owned near Huntsville and it stayed there for 80 years until it came into the possession of Mr. Galbraith and the clock museum.

It took him four years to restore the clock.

"We got a call from the Florida Circus Museum and they wanted us to donate it to them," Mr. Sweet told. "We told them we were grateful they recognized the desk, but we were not going to part with it."

During the restoration process Mr. Galbraith had to learn a lot more than just clocks.

"Learning how the organ works, the bellows and the air tubes was a matter of disassembly," Mr. Galbraith said. "There really is no book that tells all of that. I did learn organs look much like the inside of a clock."

There are dozens of other clocks with their own stories in the museum, such as a tower clock brought to the U.S. from a cathedral destroyed during the London Blitz in World War II; there also is the rare radio clock only made by a couple of companies.

Inside every clock is an act of discovery for horologists like Mr. Galbraith, who loves unlocking their secrets. Some of those secrets are inside old clock towers across Texas, and one of the goals of the museum is the restoration of these clock towers around the state through their tower clock initiative.

"There are 50 county courthouses with tower clocks," Mr. Galbraith said. "Only about a dozen of those works and six of them we restored."

Which is one of the reasons the Southwest Museum of Clocks and Watches received the Texas Historical Commission Award of Excellence, for being distinguished in the art of horology.

To learn more about the Southwest Museum of Clocks and Watches, visit their website at www.swmuseumofclocks.org.

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Dianne Stevenson, a member of the museum staff and board member.



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