

RESTORATION OF A ROXBURY TALL CASE CLOCK

by Frank Rhodes

Roxbury Massachusetts, the New England town where an 18th century clock style Roxbury was derived is home to the Willard family of clockmakers. The Roxbury Case, very distinctive in its proportions was preferred by the Willard family. The name signifies quality, elegance and craftsmanship. A recent Willard Eight Day Grandfather Clock sold for approximately one quarter of a million dollars that could well be a record.



Our restoration project, circa 1795, is unsigned yet embodies the similar construction, design and characteristics of a traditional Roxbury style. The cabinet making trade during this era was very prominent. There were carving, cabinet, turning, chair, brass foundries and refinishing shops dedicated to the woodworking trade. The Willard family chose various high quality shops to build their clock cases. It is my theory that one of these shops built our case but used an eight-day movement without a makers

stamp yet the iron painted dial and inner workings are a masterpiece of craftsmanship.

Like the traditional Roxbury style, this Federal Inlaid Eight Day Tall Case Clock is made of fine imported mahogany. The hood has three brass spired ball finials on string inlaid plinths, delicate applied fretwork and a cornice with an arch at front and center. Two freestanding brass stop fluted columns

with brass capitals flank the glazed door with arched top. The rear quarter columns are applied. Each side of the hood has arched side lights which lend a view to the music barrel, brass wheels, cut pinions, seconds pendulum and grooved winding drums.

The waist or mid section of this clock has a core molding at the top with stop fluted brass quarter columns supported by brass capitals. The waist door has applied molding and banded panels with one-quarter inch fans. This is all supported by the double-step molded base ending in ogee bracket feet and a base panel with string, banded and fan inlay.



The painted iron dial is somewhat worn but the original roman hour numerals and Arabic minute numerals can be seen. There

are floral sprays and fruit in the spandrels with a moon dial and transfer painted global maps. The hands are pierced with an arched calendar aperture below. This is truly a work of art.

The clock was in relatively good condition with some previous repairs. Most of the original parts were intact. Basically brittle hide glue joints failed in certain areas and normal wear and tear has taken its toll. The fretwork had to be supported for reglue. We used animal hide glue “universal in the 18th century” for this job. As a conservator of fine antiques, I



prefer using traditional restoration methods and save all possible finishes. After the glue had set we added several splines for support over the delicate fretwork cracks. Wax paper was used to help remove the glue jigs after setup.

Next we had to reglue some base molding on the hood. Tiny wood clamps and strips of wood help to protect the original finish.



On the lower waist a section of brass stop flute was missing and the capital was loose. The correct gauge brass was located and molded to fit. Then the original bracket feet had to be re-glued. With a little wax and elbow grease we gently cleaned the original finish and brought out the beautiful patina.

Lastly we took the movement to a clock repairman to have it placed in good running order. A few bushings were



worn, which is to be expected. Two small bearings were replaced and after a little cleaning, the job was completed.



I have been building authentic reproductions and restoring fine furniture since 1983 as well as collecting patterns from museum quality furniture for reproduction. This allows the owner to have a piece or several copies to

use and pass down to their children, while donating the original to a museum for preservation. While hand made furniture may be considered expensive, these

beautiful future heirlooms are much less than their antique counterparts. In addition there is a showroom featuring our handcrafted furniture.

We also have an upholstery shop specializing in 18th and 19th century techniques. All reproduction pieces are upholstered as they would have been originally. Our fabric showroom carries hundreds of traditional fabrics as well as contemporary.

Our shop just reproduced a Mahantongo Paint Decorated Chest of Drawers, which was four years in the making. My next reproduction projects are a Roxbury Painted Dial Clock and a Pennsylvania Brass Dial Clock.

For additional information, visit our website at www.frankbrhodes.com.

This book was used as a reference in the original article on the clock. "The Willard House and Clock Museum and The Willard Family Clockmakers" by Roger W. Robinson and Herschel B. Burt.