

Part 15

Horology *in* Art

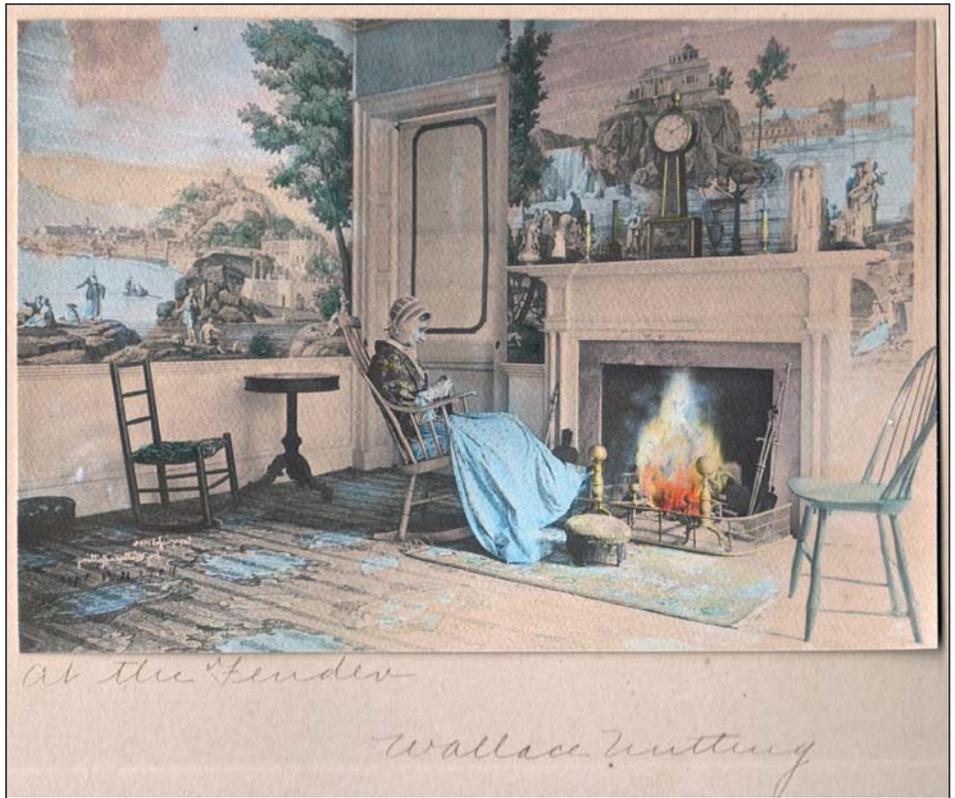
By Bob Frishman (MA)

My previous article featured an 1860 Japanese print. In this installment I again describe an artwork that I can afford to own and not just admire at a museum. Here, the artist is a household name.

Early in the twentieth century Wallace Nutting's mass-market hand-colored photographic prints adorned the walls of American homes everywhere. He claimed to have sold more than 10 million prints and at one time employed 200 "colorists" to enhance his black-and-white prints. Capitalizing on the widely popular Colonial Revival movement in architecture and interior decoration, he re-created period scenes in old homes he owned or borrowed, mixing fact and fantasy in those images. Today, dealers and collectors still enjoy these prints and seek ones that best retain their original sharpness and colors and that represent the most appealing sizes and subjects.

The subject for me, of course, is revealed in my group of framed Nuttings that include a clock in the picture. Shown on this page is *At The Fender* with the title and Nutting signature penciled as always below the print. We see a contrived assemblage of furniture, painted wallpaper, decorated flooring, fireplace equipment, and outdated clothing. A banjo clock rests above the roaring hearth. Early in my clock repair career, I commented on a customer's banjo clock sitting on her mantel, explaining that it would be more appropriate hanging on the wall. This image later demonstrated that she was not alone in choosing the location.

It is possible that Nutting's banjo clock actually was made in his furniture shop. His business ventures included crafting and selling high-quality reproductions of older American styles. In the archives of Historic New England, I viewed his Seventh Edition Catalog, published sometime after he moved in 1912 to Framingham, MA. Item 961, which appears to be quite similar, is listed as Banjo, Mahogany and Gold, Simon Willard Type. During a Chapter 8 (New England) symposium I organized in 2000, at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, CT, then curator and Nutting expert Thomas Dennenberg asked how many



of us had ever seen a signed Nutting clock. Nobody had, which raised the unsettling prospect that faithfully reproduced Nutting clocks are being sold and collected as much older antiques.

Wallace Nutting (1861-1941) has even greater importance to horologists than all this. *The Clock Book*, first published by him in 1924 and followed by later editions, was one of the first reference books to compile lists of makers, descriptions, and more than 200 photographs of important clocks. Many years before we had tomes by Brooks Palmer, Chris Bailey, and Tran Duy Ly, collectors could search his groundbreaking volume for information about what they owned. The book remains useful today, and his prints with clocks can serve as supplements we can display right near our horology bookshelves.

About the Author

Bob Frishman has repaired, restored, collected, sold, and researched antique timekeepers since 1980. His business, Bell-Time Clocks, is based in Andover, MA. He was head of publicity for the recent Time For Everyone symposium where he presented his "Clocks on Canvas" program during the add-on day in Santa Barbara. He has authored many articles for the *Watch & Clock Bulletin* and can be reached via www.bell-time.com.