

A BRIEF HISTORY OF The Canadian Clock Museum

Deep River, Ontario

Allan Symons, November 2022



Canada's only clock museum was set up formally in December 1999 as a federal non-profit Canadian corporation and registered charity. In 2022 its focus remains telling the impressive story of two centuries of Canadian clock makers and sellers. That goal has been achieved both through the acquisition, preservation, and exhibition of representative clocks in the museum and online, and through the research for and print publication of peer-reviewed articles about them.

The museum's physical location is the former Calvary Pentecostal Church in Deep River, Ontario. More than fifteen thousand people of all ages have visited the museum since it opened to the public in May of 2000. Through the internet the museum's web site (at canclockmuseum.ca), with its text descriptions of the companies and many Galleries of pictures, has helped thousands of people doing research about their inherited and found clocks.

The collection of alarm, mantel, wall, and 'grandfather' clocks has grown from the initial six hundred examples provided by the museum founder, retired scientist Allan Symons, to more than three thousand examples today. These have been acquired by purchase and by donation. In addition, the museum's own library has hundreds of reference books and hundreds of issues of horology magazines that are accessible to visitors.

A guided tour is offered with the modest admission fee. Cameras are welcome. A personal souvenir can be created by 'clocking in' with a reproduction employee time card on a 1930s factory time clock. The tour can take up to an hour or more, depending on the interests of the visitors. There are clocks dating back as far as the 1820s and many period artifacts that include working phonographs that play old 78s records and Edison music cylinders. A blend of sights and sounds awaits – ticking and chiming clocks, and an 1870s melodeon to sit down at and play.

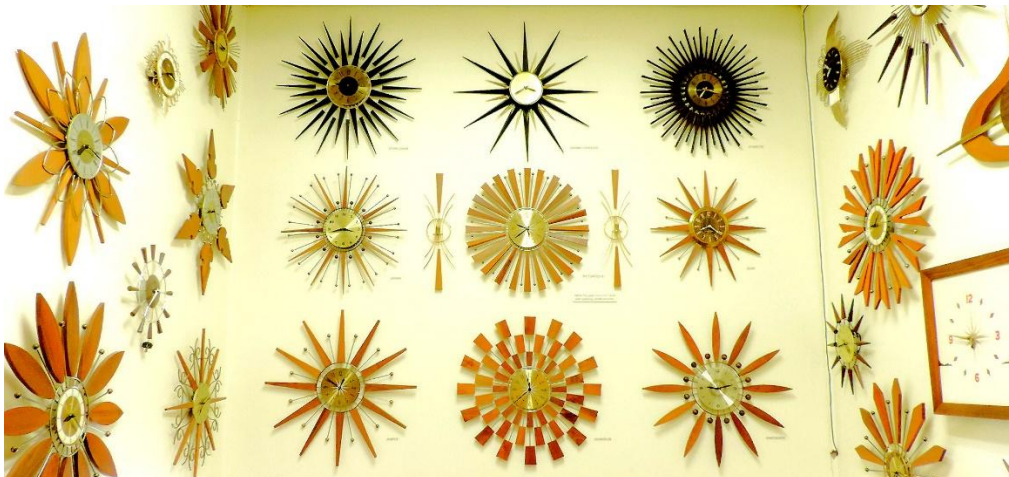
Major 20th century Canadian manufacturers included Westclox in Peterborough, Snider in Toronto, and The Arthur Pequegnat Clock Company in Berlin/Kitchener. Lesser known companies that made clocks included Walter Clocks in Toronto and Girotti Sculptured Art in St. Catharines, plus the Canadian operations of several American companies: Ingraham Canadian in Toronto, General Electric in Toronto, the Seth Thomas brand in the Westclox factory, and the New Haven Clock Company in Brantford.

On display are many examples of 1850s/1860s weight-driven shelf clocks imported by Leeds County peddlers from the Seth Thomas clock company in Connecticut.

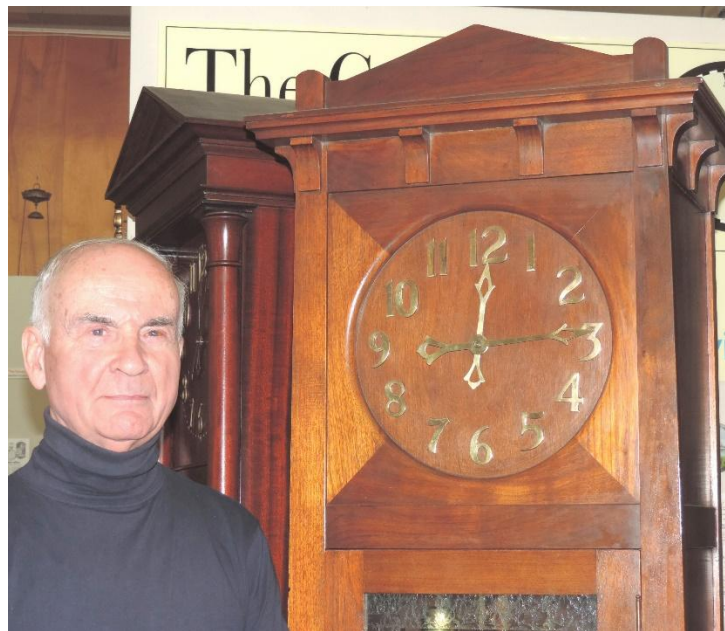
The first 100% Canadian-made clocks were produced by the short-lived Canada Clock Company in Whitby in the early 1870s. There followed four years each as the Hamilton Clock Company (1876-1880) and finally the second Canada Clock Company in Hamilton (1880-1884). The collection of these rare weight-driven and spring-driven clocks includes examples of most known models.



A century later, “starburst” wall clocks were popular in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s. This panorama inside view above the museum’s front entrance shows nine Westclox examples plus at each side some of the many Snider starburst models on the side walls. On those walls you will also see several of Harry Snider’s pink and turquoise models among dozens of the company’s electric clocks, plus a windup ceramic ‘birdhouse’ model from the 1950s.



Part of the museum's large collection of 100% Canadian-made Pequegnat clocks (Berlin 1904 / 1916 / Kitchener 1941) is displayed in the PEQUEGNAT ROOM (picture below) and in other locations in the Exhibits Room. The museum often gets questions by e-mail, and also telephone, from owners of these high quality clocks whose movements and cases were made in Ontario.



Allan Symons beside the walnut version of Arthur Pequegnat's ca. 1920s/1930s VERNON model, weight-driven 'hall' clock.

VIRTUAL TOUR: Starting in late 2021, a virtual tour of the museum's exhibits has been offered to online visitors through a link on its web site home page. To date, more than fifty thousand people have taken the tour via Google. Some have then decided to drive here to see the museum in person.