Part IV of IV

James Arthur and His "Temple of Time": A Cautionary Tale for Collector-Donors and Their Beneficiaries

by Jeanne Schinto

n 1925 New York University (NYU) received from private collector James Arthur (1842-1930) the gift of a horological collection consisting of clocks, watches, sundials, and other timemeasuring devices, along with a library and an endowment. Today, NYU retains the library, the endowment, and about a dozen of the clocks, which decorate administrators' offices or are in storage. The rest are gone, having been dispersed in the 1980s with a court's approval. Approximately 3000 items were divided, unevenly, and went to three entities, the Smithsonian Institution, the Time Museum in Rockford, Illinois, and the National Watch & Clock Museum of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors (NAWCC) in Columbia, Pennsylvania. Parts I, II, and III of this series (*M.A.D.*, November 2018, p. 3-D; December 2018, p. 27-C; and January 2019, p. 32-B) explained the complex reasons why this occurred. This fourth and final part is our story's epilogue.

The Smithsonian received its share, 653 items from the collection, as a gift nearly 20 years after they arrived in Washington, D.C., on a so-called permanent loan basis. Curator Carlene E. Stephens said none of them has been deaccessioned; some have been exhibited, notably in On Time: How America Has Learned to Live by the Clock from 1999 through 2006; and records for a portion have been put online (http://collections.si.edu/search/index. htm) and can be searched as long as you know the accession number (1984.0416).¹ Highlights include a circa 1770 David Rittenhouse tall clock, an 1825-30 Joseph Ives wagon-spring shelf clock, two early 19th-century patent timepieces ("banjo" clocks) by Aaron Willard and Simon Willard respectively, a circa 1880 Juvet time globe, and a cosmochronotrope (see part III for a definition and a photo). There are also many, many mundane items, such as a 1918-20 Waterbury alarm clock. There they sit in storage, most unidentified in an online accounting as having come from either the James Arthur collection or NYU, at what the Smithsonian staff is loath to have us call our nation's attic, its longtime nickname. It's not like an attic at all, they protest. "It's planned, it's organized, it's orderly," one told the Wall Street Journal.2

The same court that allowed the gift to the Smithsonian OK'd the sale of 37 items to the Time Museum in Rockford, Illinois. As it happens, those 37 items are no longer owned by that private collection, which has ceased to exist. Formerly it had been situated in a lower level of Rockford's Clock Tower Resort and Convention Center and open to the public. But in 1986, only four years after the court ruling that allowed its acquisition of the Arthur items, the Time Museum slowly began to sell off its entire collection. The process culminated in a series of auctions at Sotheby's that began on December 2, 1999, a few months after the museum closed its doors; the final sale took place



George Sheldon (1818-1916) of Deerfield, Massachusetts, founder of the town's Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, incorporated in 1870, making it one of America's oldest museums. For more information, see the website (https://deerfield-ma.org).



James Arthur and one of his sundials. Photo courtesy Maude Arthur Brown Family Archive.

October 13-15, 2004. Only a few of the Arthur items at the auctions included that provenance. One that did, an 1875 Freeport Watch Company pocket watch in a gold hunting case, sold for \$51,000 (including buyer's premium) to Cameel Halim, whose own private museum, the Halim Time and Glass Museum, opened in Evanston, Illinois, in 2017. Presumably, the watch is in that collection now.

As for the NAWCC, when the court decision came down, more than 2000 items—including 561 complete watches, 1107 uncased watches, and 210 clocks, clock movements, sundials, and tools—were gifted to its museum. Among the best were a tall clock made by London's Joseph Knibb (1640-1711), two quarter-repeater pocket watches, each of which is signed "Breguet," and a 1952 chronograph by Patek Philippe in an



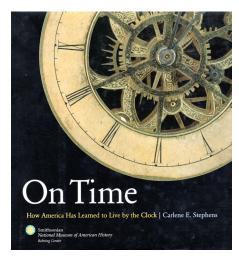
Tom Wilcox, NAWCC executive director, and Sarah Brown Caudell, great-granddaughter of James Arthur, at the Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, in September 2018. Schinto photo.

engine-turned solid gold case.³ There is also a 19th-century Tiffany globe clock donated to the Arthur collection in 1956 by Mrs. Harold L. Chalifoux (1895-1987) of Beverly, Massachusetts, and Santa Barbara, California.

Some of the Arthur items are being or have been exhibited by the NAWCC. In 1985, shortly after they arrived, about 100 went on display for a while. But the curators have also felt free to deaccession others over the years—an allowable action, according to a "Memorandum of Understanding" dated March 3, 1983, and filed by the Surrogate's Court in the County of Westchester, New York. On May 3, 2015, through the auction house Jones & Horan of Goffstown, New Hampshire, eight lots of 20 pocket watches and pocket watch movements each, one lot of 14 of the same, and one lot of six were sold for a total of \$9350 (Jones & Horan charges no buyer's premium). They were either in poor condition or poorer examples of duplicated pieces in the museum collection, according to NAWCC museum director Noel Poirier.

Like the Smithsonian, the NAWCC museum has the items online (https:// nawcc.pastperfectonline.com), but only 86 of them are identified as having come from the Arthur collection, and these identifications were inadvertent. The collector's name just happened to be mentioned in the item descriptions. The NAWCC said it does not give the provenance of any donated items because of privacy considerations. And even though there would be no such issues in the case of the Arthur items, these listings still follow that protocol. But working backward from the ones that are identified, whose accession numbers all begin with "83.82," it's easy to pick out the others.

What Arthur collected does not compare in quality to the collection of, say, J. Pierpont Morgan (1837-1913), whose 250 clocks and watches went to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1917. Nor to that of the brothers Thomas R. Proctor (1844-1920) and Frederick T. Proctor (1856-1929), whose 300 European and



Book jacket of the catalog for an exhibition on view at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, from 1999 to 2006, *On Time: How America Has Learned to Live by the Clock* by Carlene E. Stephens, published in 2002. Stephens, a curator in NMAH's Division of Work and Industry, recently recalled that the exhibition included about a dozen items from the Arthur collection.

American timepieces were donated by them to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, New York. Morgan and the Proctors were acting much more in the European tradition, interested in horological objects as decorative arts or simply as curiosities. They collected them in addition to all manner of other art, antiques, and antiquities, and they were rarely interested in their technical aspects. Arthur was different. He amassed his share of firearms, ivory, glass, china, furniture, and walking canes, but when it came to his collection of timekeepers, he always intended it to be studied more than merely admired. He wasn't a bit averse to taking clocks and watches apart, and he built some clocks of his own, including the cases. He was not a devotee of original surfaces or a purist of any other kind. He enjoyed his collection, he learned from it, and he hoped that NYU students would do that same.

Unfortunately, he didn't anticipate how changes that would take place at the school, in the city, and around the world would affect his gift. No one did, including the curators and donors who added material to the collection over many years—e.g., the Patek Philippe, which came from Sampson R. Field, whose money came from the printing business—transforming it into the kind of collection that Arthur never envisioned. The thoughtful man with a philosophical bent had more on his mind than clocks and watches anyway. Time and its mysteries, the subject of the lecture series that bears his name, was one of his preoccupations. Originally hosted by NYU but now the responsibility of the NAWCC as part of the legal agreement, the series is what perhaps must be his lasting legacy. Clock and watch collectors of today know him, if at all, because of it. But even they probably don't know that he endowed two other lecture series. Upon his death, \$75,000 went to the Smithsonian for an annual lecture on the subject of the sun and \$50,000 went to New York's American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) for one on the evolution of the human brain.4

The Smithsonian began its series promptly, running it unbroken from at least 1931 through 1955. Sharon K. Allen of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, Cambridge, Massachusetts, said in an e-mail that records show lectures were also given in 1959, 1967, 1980, 1996, and 2006. She also said that in 2004, astrophysicist Sallie Baliunas used the lecture fund for research on

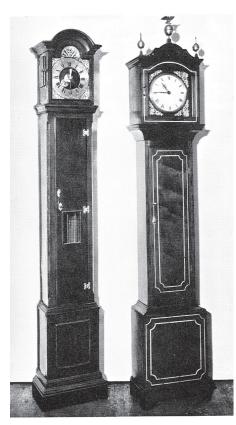


Fig. 21; No. 32 Fig. 20; No. 30 PLATE V

A 19th-century English tall clock restored by James Arthur is pictured on the right in an illustration in Daniel W. Hering's book The Lure of the Clock. It is now owned by this reporter's husband, Bob Frishman, who provided a list of the restorations made to its case and movement by Arthur, the craftsman-owner of a machine works business in Brooklyn, New York. Frishman noted that the clock was "not anything special." In fact, a similar movement and dial in original condition was in his shop for repair. "But unlike purists, I love seeing these modifications, which say a lot about the man, and make the clock identifiable and unique."

Arthur fabricated and installed a heavy brass latch on the case trunk door, above the original skeleton-key lock (probably because he did not have a key to that old lock), to keep that door closed. He probably did not have a key for the top bonnet door, either, so he installed a pull-knob above the keyhole. He installed seven steel screwed-down plates across the back of the case to strengthen the case structure. He made four heavy brackets, with nice knurled brass knobs, to secure the complete dial—with its unique porcelain convex plate—that he made for the movement. The original dial would have been a Birmingham white-painted dial, or if earlier, a brass dial with a silvered chapter ring. He made a heavy L-shaped steel bridge for hanging the pendulum, replacing the original more decorative brass one. He made a heavy L-shaped steel bracket for mounting the large bell above the movement, replacing the original smaller steel post. He made an oversize brass weight pulley to replace the smaller, weaker original. He made a nicely machined counterweight for the weight chain, integrating a pulley as seen on the larger weights in his own regulators. There originally would have been a small, heavy lead donut.

the long-term variability of stars; and in 2016, the fund supported a presentation by astrophysicist Henry "Trae" Winter to New York City museums, including Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum. (Allen added that there may have been other lectures and expenditures, but, "Unfortunately I cannot find more records and do not have the staff to research this any further."5)

The first lecture at the AMNH was given on March 15, 1932, by Frederick Tilney, chairman of the department of neurology at Columbia University Medical Center. A website (http://digitallibrary.amnh. org/handle/2246/5988) lists all lectures given from the 1950s through the early 2000s. Most recently, another AMNH website (www.amnh.org/calendar/jamesarthur-lecture-evolution-of-the-humanbrain) states that on March 6, 2018, the lecturer was Diana Reiss, a cognitive psychologist and marine mammal science, who discussed her research on dolphin communication and the evolution of intelligence.6 (There may well have been other lectures before and after, but e-mails to the museum asking for more details were unanswered.)

These institutions got only money; they should consider themselves lucky. Without the burden of caring for threedimensional objects, they were able to use their bequests as they had been intended. The fields of astronomy and neuroscience are not what they were when Arthur died, but it doesn't matter; these lectureships have, like the human brain, evolved.

To be sure, money gifts are not without their problems. The Pearson Family Foundation, which in 2015 had pledged \$100 million to the University of Chicago to fund research aimed at reducing conflict around the world, is currently suing the school for breach of contract and for the return of the \$22.9 million



Robert C. Cheney at the NAWCC's annual educational symposium at the Henry Ford, Dearborn, Michigan. **Executive director of the Willard** House & Clock Museum in Grafton, Massachusetts, Cheney is a semiprofessional photographer who is rarely seen without a camera. Schinto photo.

Wilcox promised Caudell that he would "right the wrongs of the past" regarding James Arthur.

that it has given so far. In 1995 Yale decided to return a \$20 million donation made four years earlier by Lee M. Bass, who wanted the school to develop a program in Western civilization meant to be an antidote to multiculturalism. Bass wanted to choose the instructors. Descendants of the A&P grocery store chain sued Princeton University in 2002 for mismanaging a \$35 million gift given in 1961 to educate graduate students for careers in government. The case was

Doug White, author of Abusing Donor Intent: The Robertson Family's Epic Lawsuit Against Princeton University, published in 2014, writes that there are far more situations like these that never go to trial, either because they are resolved out of court or because "[m]ost donors love their institutions, and, when they are unhappy, too often they are not willing to go public. They just go away. The issue is never pressed." There was no case to be made for donor intent having been abused by NYU. The school sought a legal way out of their bind and received it. That is not to say that the Arthur family isn't saddened by what transpired.

Maude Arthur Brown, James Arthur's granddaughter, learned only belatedly, i.e., 14 years belatedly, that a portion of the collection had gone to the Smithsonian's National Museum of History and Technology (NMHT) (now the National Museum of American History) in 1964 as a permanent loan. In 1978 she made a visit to Washington, D.C., from her home in Clearwater, Florida, and she wasn't happy with what she found there. "The exhibit on time was pitiful!" she wrote to S. Andrew Schaffer, an NYU vice president and general counsel. She continued, "My own collection of Arthur clocks and watches are of more value and interest than those on display!" She

mentioned that Carlene Stephens had shown her the storage area. "The Arthur Collection stacked like kindling!" Cases "dusty, neglected...This is what happens, Mr. Schaffer, when there is no longer a full time curator for the collection. When museums think there is no one to care, old collections are pushed aside and forgotten.... I feel that I owe it to my grandfather and to my heirs to see that something is done.... It was a surprise to learn about the loan but I understand why New York University did it. I sincerely hope the agreement can be enforced and something accomplished."8

agreement, arranged Smithsonian curator Edwin A. Battison, had promised to maintain the collection as "an entity," with any portion of the collection not exhibited and not undergoing restoration to be kept in "live storage." He promised further to exhibit as much of the collection as possible and to lend material that was not on exhibit to other museums.9 By 1978 Battison had left the Smithsonian, and his promises were unfulfilled.

There must have been some communication between Schaffer and NMHT director Brooke Hindle. We have the letter Hindle wrote to defend himself. "I do believe that Mrs. Brown's impressions were, in part, inaccurate," he said. "As you probably know, but she may not. I am very familiar with the manner in which the Collection was stored at New York University...very damp and...leaky room...all jammed together without labeling...." He described the Smithsonian's storage as being humidity controlled. He also said that Battison had been replaced by Otto Mayr, a Germanborn mechanical engineer with a Ph.D. in the history of technology. Together, he and Mayr were "anxious to give this Collection exactly the kind of handling which the original agreement called for and which Mrs. Brown agrees will call for much further input on our part."10

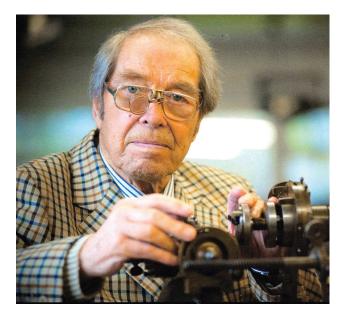
As displeased as she was about how the Smithsonian was handling the collection, Brown was more irked about NYU having retained some of the clocks for its administrators' offices. She was





This is the Arthur-made remontoire regulator that sold at Skinner on June 2, 2012, for \$15,405 (est. \$1000/1500). The case is 81" tall. For those who need it, here is a definition of remontoire: Any mechanism that provides a more constant force to the escapement than could be obtained directly from the gear train. Photos courtesy Skinner.

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Since taking over the James Arthur lecture series on time, the NAWCC has hosted such lecturers of distinction as British watchmaker extraordinaire George Daniels (1926-2011), who is pictured; Jonathan Betts, M.B.E., curator emeritus at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich; and art historian John Wilmerding, whose lecture was titled "Time in American Painting." Photo courtesy Bonhams.



Now owned by the NAWCC museum and currently on exhibit there, this globe clock was donated to the James Arthur collection in 1956 by Mrs. Harold L. Chalifoux (1895-1987). Its case is sterling silver with turquoise enamel; its base is onyx. The astronomical movement is inside the silver dome beneath the globe that revolves on its axis once every 24 hours. Its indicators, when properly situated, can tell the time of day and date anywhere in the world. It was made by Tiffany's own clockmakers and jewelers for display at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. "I am so glad that I have found a proper home for this very magnificent clock which I have grown up with since childhood," the donor wrote to Edward C. Smith, the Arthur collection curator at the time. She was obviously under the impression that the clock would be at NYU forever. Asked about its current value, a New York auction-house specialist kindly replied via e-mail: "The clock is fully described in Tiffany's catalog of its exhibit at the World's Fair. Based on that, I would say informally that it would easily fetch at auction a sum in the low to mid six figures." Schinto photo.

particularly keen to get a certain clock "away from New York," as she put it in a letter to Stephens, and down to the Smithsonian, where she hoped it would be put on display. It was a year clock that Arthur had made. Capable of running for a year on one winding, it had been wound annually by a different member of the Arthur family, and the name of the winder and the date had been engraved on a brass plate set in the clock's case. Arthur liked to boast that the clock would last forever. "Why should it remain in the Dean's office?" Brown rhetorically asked.¹¹

An NYU inventory dated December 1, 1964, notes that a "Grandfather clock, 1 year with 1 winding" and signed "James Arthur 1906" was in the office of a Professor Singer. A letter sent to Brown on February 8, 1978, by someone in the NYU office of legal counsel says it was in a different location, "Room 818 of the Tisch Building which is the Dean's suite of the College of Business and Public Administration." Where that clock is today is unknown. NYU archivist Janet Bunde did not respond to requests for a current inventory of Arthur collection clocks. The latest one she offered, already obtained by this reporter from the archives, is dated March 9, 1981, lists about 15 clocks in seven deans' offices and elsewhere, and makes no mention of a year clock.

Stephens, for her part, says that the Smithsonian did try to get some of these clocks from NYU. In an e-mail she quoted from a letter written on May 13, 1975, by Hindle to NYU chancellor Sidney Borowitz. "Hindle asks if NYU would consider 'adding some of the tall clocks withheld [from the original loan] for office use in 1964.' NYU declined to send the additional clocks." 13

To be fair, extended Arthur family members have apparently let other Arthur-made clocks go. We know this because they come up on the secondary market now and again. At its May 13-15, 2016, auction, R.O. Schmitt Fine Arts of Windham, New Hampshire, sold one of Arthur's floor-standing remontoire regulators. ("I have built a considerable number, all for experimental purposes," Arthur wrote of his remontoire clocks in his book Time and Its Measurement.14) Bearing a presentation label to his son Daniel (1866-1910), dated June 13, 1901, it sold to private collector Mark Frank of Chicago for \$17,770 (with buyer's premium). On June 2, 2012, Skinner Inc. of Boston and Marlborough, Massachusetts, sold another Arthur-made remontoire regulator for \$15,405. And at the same sale, the auction house sold an Arthur-made drum-head tall clock, with a presentation label that reads "To Bessie Humphrey Arthur, From her Father James Arthur, October 25th 1904." It sold for \$4444. That same clock was back on the market a little over six years later, offered at R.O. Schmitt Fine Arts October 26-28, 2018. At that sale, it sold for \$12,100. The buyer was the NAWCC, which was given a break on the buyer's premium by auction house owner Daniel Horan. Half the cost was donated by some NAWCC members; the rest was from the museum acquisition fund. The purchase was approved unanimously by the collections committee chaired by board of directors member Philip E. Morris.

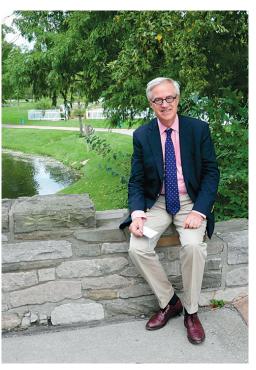
Undoubtedly, there are and have been private sales of Arthur-made clocks that we aren't privy to. Likewise, there are and have been sales of other items formerly in the collection. This reporter's husband, Bob Frishman, bought in January 2018 an Arthur-restored clock that is pictured in the 1932 book about the collection by its first curator, The Lure of the Clock by Daniel W. Hering. It is a clock that Arthur himself wrote about for The Jewelers' Circular, describing it as "a semiantique, the mahogany case being by an unknown amateur cabinet maker." He added, "The remarkable feature of this clock is the dial which is about as thick as an ordinary dinner plate. A file test on the back shows it to be terracotta color. This is the only dial of the kind I have seen. An art dealer informs me they are known, but rare."15 Frishman bought it from fellow collector John Fitzwilliam of Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, who said he bought it from a dealer in the late 1990s. Its provenance doesn't go back any further.

In September 2018 Robert C. Cheney, executive director of the Willard House & Clock Museum in Grafton, Massachusetts, gave the 2018 James Arthur Lecture at the Henry Ford in Dearborn, Michigan, at the annual NAWCC educational symposium. His subject, appropriately, was early collectors. With humor and honesty, his trademarks, he expounded on the idea that, like it or not, we are in the midst of a profound cultural shift, one that has its well-known deleterious effects on the world of antiques collecting, with American furniture taking "the biggest hit."

Cheney traced the history of collecting early Americana from the mid-19th century, when only people believed to be cranks collected it, through the 1990s, when "collecting was cool." He told about ridiculed but prescient men such as George Sheldon (1818-1916) of Deerfield, Massachusetts, founder of the town's Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association,



Halim Time and Glass Museum, Evanston, Illinois, is the current owner of a pocket watch made in 1874-75 by the Freeport Watch Company, Freeport, Illinois, that was formerly in the Arthur collection and the Time Museum collection. Schinto photo.



John Metcalfe of New York City at Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan, during the NAWCC symposium. Metcalfe, whose preferred term for his profession is antiquarian horologist, has taken care of the James Arthur clocks at NYU for many years. However, he said he has never seen the missing year clock with the signatures engraved on a brass plate. At the symposium, Sarah Brown Caudell asked him to be on the lookout for it, and she extends that request to M.A.D. readers. Schinto photo.

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and Cummings Davis (1816-1896), whose collection was the start of the Concord Museum in Concord, Massachusetts. He characterized the end of the 20th century as the "me-me-me" generation of collecting. To wit: "Love my collection, love me." Or vice versa. He reminisced about the heydays of Brimfield and lamented the fact that he was having trouble selling his antique house, an 18th-century manor about two-tenths of a mile from U.S. Route 20 (Brimfield's Main Street) and the start of the thrice-yearly flea markets there. Built in 1783 for Abner Morgan (1746-1837), a major in the American Revolutionary War who was a Harvard-educated lawyer and legislator, the house has 12 rooms, nine fireplaces, and most of its original paneling, floors, walls, and ceilings. And yet, Cheney said, ranch houses in the area are priced comparably.

Cheney ended his talk with a question: "How do you transfer the joys of collecting to the selfie generation?" Whereupon he produced a selfie stick, turned his back to the audience, and took a selfie with them, after having asked everyone for a standing ovation. As he well knows and acknowledges, however, the question is a serious one and needs to be answered.

Sarah Brown Caudell, Arthur's great-granddaughter, traveled to Dearborn from Clearwater, Florida, to be in the audience to hear Cheney's talk. She hugged him afterward. Over the course of the weekend, she had conversations with Tom Wilcox, the NAWCC's executive director. Relatively new to the job—hired in 2017—Wilcox promised Caudell that he would "right the wrongs of the past" regarding James Arthur. To this end, he vowed to relabel the items that came to the NAWCC from NYU to reflect their James Arthur provenance. Until now, those on exhibit and those in storage but searchable online said only that they were from NYU—if they said anything at all about where they had come from. Wilcox also promised that the NAWCC museum would mount an exhibit that tells the story of James Arthur. To that end, it would put more of the NAWCC's James Arthur items on display, perhaps arrange for loans from both public and private collectors of other James Arthur clocks, and illustrate the exhibit with photos from the Maude Arthur Brown Family archive, the same ones that have been published in this series that now comes to an end.

For more information about the NAWCC, see the organization's website (www. nawcc.org). To reach the author of this series, see the contact page of her website (www.jeanneschinto.com).

Notes

- 1. E-mail to author from Carlene E. Stephens, July 3, 2018.
- 2. Daniel Nasaw, "It's Tight at the Museum with 20 Million Parasitic Specimens," *Wall Street Journal*, June 7, 2018, p. A1+.
- 3. NAWCC Bulletin, October 1985, pp. 590-91.
- 4. "Endows Research in Time, Sun, Brain," New York Times, May 9, 1930.
- 5. E-mail to author from Sharon K. Allen, May 1, 2018.
- 6. For more information, see the website (www.amnh.org/calendar/james-arthur-lecture-evolution-of-the-human-brain).
- 7. Doug White, *Abusing Donor Intent: The Robertson Family's Epic Lawsuit Against Princeton University* (St. Paul, Minnesota: Paragon House, 2014), p. 206.
- 8. Maude Arthur Brown Family Archive, Maude A. Brown to S. Andrew Schaffer, April 6, 1978.
- 9. New York University Archives, New York University Libraries, Papers of the James Arthur Collection of Clocks and Watches, RG 42.1, Box 2, Folder 19, Letter from Edwin A. Battison to Arthur L. Brandon, October 21, 1963.
- 10. Maude Arthur Brown Family Archives, Brooke Hindle to S. Andrew Schaffer, May 19, 1978.
- 11. Maude Arthur Brown Family Archives, Maude Arthur Brown to Carlene E. Stephens, August 1, 1979.
- 12. Maude Arthur Brown Family Archives, S. Andrew Schaffer to Maude Arthur Brown, February 8, 1978.
- 13. E-mail to author from Carlene E. Stephens, January 10, 2018.
- 14. James Arthur, *Time and Its Measurement* (Chicago: H.H. Windsor, 1909 reprint), p. 40.
- 15. Quoted in Daniel W. Hering, *The Lure of the Clock* (New York: New York University Press, 1932), p. 39.



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