

Tour of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia and its Clocks, with Gladys Brooks Curator of Architecture, Bruce Laverty and Collections Care Manager, Denise Fox

From 1818 to 1847, the Athenaeum of Philadelphia was located on Independence Square in rented rooms in Philosophical Hall. Its current building on Washington Square, designed by Scottish-born architect John Notman, has been its home ever since. Within this National Historic Landmark is one of America's oldest subscription libraries; an internationally significant collection of architecture and design history, and a remarkable display of 19th century furniture, paintings, sculpture, and clocks.



Photo of Athenaeum Reading Room by Tom Crane

The tall-case clocks at the Athenaeum are examples of the superior craftsmanship of Philadelphian clockmakers. Scroll pediments and carved rosettes were hallmarks of Philadelphia clock cases. Other hallmarks include broken arch pediments with decorative carving and ogee-bracket feet. Three of the most important Philadelphia clockmakers are represented in the Athenaeum collections. The tall-case clock made by James Lane is one of the first pieces ever to be acquired by the Athenaeum and still keeps time today in the Reading Room. Two clocks demonstrating the skills of the father and son team of Seneca and Isaiah Lukens are also present to illustrate the way that many clockmakers passed their skills onto their sons. The Athenaeum owns examples of the work of both father and son, with Seneca's work on the first floor and Isaiah's on the second.

