

A Timely Discovery

The Story of Winterthur's Jacob Graff Clock

by Lisa Minardi



A chance discovery has enabled curators at Winterthur to reconstruct the history of one of the most treasured clocks in the museum's collection (Fig. 1). The clock, made by Jacob Graff between 1745–1755, was acquired in 1946 by Henry Francis du Pont. Regarded as one of the rarest examples of early Pennsylvania German clocks, it is noteworthy for its elaborate brass and silver dial with cast pewter spandrels and the unusual canted pediment on the hood. Until now, the clock had no history other than a dealer's statement that it came from the Illig family of Millbach Township, Lancaster (now Lebanon) County, Pennsylvania. This changed in October 2006 while going through research files at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on the Millbach house (Fig. 2), the stone house with adjoining mill built in 1752 by George Miller (1706–1784) and later expanded by his son Michael. The original kitchen was removed in 1926 and installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, where it is one of the highlights of their Pennsylvania German collection. Both the house and mill, which are currently undergoing restoration, remain dominant features of the local landscape.

Among the files was a transcription of an old newspaper article about a tall-case clock in the possession of a Dawson Weigley (1877–1947). According to the article, Mr. Weigley's clock had originally stood in the kitchen of the Millbach house. The clock was described as having a walnut case inlaid with "tulip and sunwheel designs." The words "Jacob Graff Machet Dieses" (Jacob Graff made this) were engraved across the face.

These details exactly matched the clock at Winterthur, one of only three known Graff clocks in existence. Research revealed that du Pont bought the Winterthur clock in 1946 from Charles Montgomery, who in turn had purchased it from

Edgar Sittig, an antiques dealer in Pennsylvania. According to Montgomery's notes, Sittig stated it had come from the Illig family. Although no papers linking Sittig to Dawson Weigley have been found, a living Weigley descendant was located who was certain it was the same clock and recalled the family's anger with Dawson Weigley after he sold it. However, there was one problem; the article noted that Weigley's clock had a small disc that indicated the day of the week with a capital letter for each day. Winterthur's clock had no such disc, but further detective work explained its absence. In the research papers of Edward F. LaFond, who wrote his master's thesis on Winterthur's clock collection in 1964, he noted that there was originally a small disc mounted on the face of the



clock that likely indicated the days of the week. Inspection of the clock's face confirmed that indeed there had been such a disc, but all that remained was the small pointer (at the base of numeral I in the main chapter ring) and the mount to which the disc had been attached

Fig. 1 (left): Tall clock, Lancaster (now Lebanon) County, Pa., 1745–1755. Black walnut; H. 98, W. 24¼, D. 12½ in. Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont. Courtesy of Winterthur Museum. 1965.2261.

Fig. 2 (above): The House of the Miller, Village of Millbach, Lancaster (now Lebanon) County, built 1752. Courtesy of The Millbach Foundation.

(Fig. 3). The final detail matching the Weigley clock to the one at Winterthur was thus confirmed.

But what of the Weigley family and their connection to the Millbach house? According to the newspaper article, Dawson Weigley had acquired the clock from his uncle Wayne Weigley (1844–1930), who in turn had inherited it from his father, Isaac Weigley (1813–1898). Isaac was the son of Jacob Weigley (1789–1880) and Catherine Miller (1792–1869), who were married in 1810. Catherine was the granddaughter of Michael Miller (1732–1815), who acquired the house and mill from his father George in 1753. Jacob and Catherine Miller Weigley resided in the Millbach house until the mid-1800s, when the house was sold to the Illig family. The clock evidently went with the Weigleys, explaining why it was not there when the Philadelphia Museum of Art purchased the kitchen in 1926. The Millbach property was owned by the Illigs from 1849 until 1936, and was known locally as Illig’s Mill, which is likely why Edgar Sittig believed the clock had originated with the Illig family.

Little is known about the clock’s maker, Jacob Graff, other than that he was taxed as a clockmaker in the town of Lebanon in 1750, and his will indicated that he lived there when he died in 1778. The craftsman who fashioned the inlaid and paneled walnut case remains unknown, and no other clock cases from the same shop have yet been identified. It also remains to be determined when the clock entered the Millbach house. The clock’s ringed winding holes, engraved moon face, and use of half-hour markings indicate a date range of about 1745–1755. Was the clock originally acquired for the house by George Miller or perhaps by his son Michael, as its mid-1700s date would suggest? Or was it made for the Weigley family and did it come into the house with the marriage of Jacob Weigley and Catherine Miller in 1810?

The discovery of the clock’s history is doubly exciting for Winterthur, as it can now be related to another object in the museum’s collection, a New Year’s greeting made in 1765 for Michael and Mary Elisabeth Miller, the second owners of the Millbach house (Fig. 4). This large drawing, an early example in the Pennsylvania German fraktur tradition, has a meticulously drawn flowering vine surmounting the text, with trumpeting angels and rampant lions flanking the composition. Clearly the Germanic heritage of the Miller family was evident throughout the household and its furnishings. @

The history of the Jacob Graff clock will play an important role in an exhibition being organized by Lisa Minardi and Wendy A. Cooper, the Lois F. and Henry S. McNeil Senior Curator of Furniture at the Winterthur Museum. Set to open at Winterthur in 2011, the exhibition will focus on documented examples of southeastern Pennsylvania furniture from 1725 to 1850, of which they are actively seeking examples. If you own or know of a piece of furniture that meets this description, please contact them at sepaurnproj@winterthur.org or call 302.888.4775. Perhaps your family heirloom has an interesting story just waiting to be discovered!

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Fig. 3: Clock face and works, Jacob Graff (1729–1778), probably Lebanon, Lancaster (now Lebanon) County, Pa., 1745–1755. Brass, pewter, iron, and silver plate. H. 16½ in.



Fig. 4: C.F. Artist, New Year’s greeting. Heidelberg Township, Lancaster (now Lebanon) County, Pa., 1765. Hand drawn, colored, and lettered on paper. H. 20½, W. 16¼ in. Bequest of Henry Francis du Pont. Courtesy of Winterthur Museum. 1957.1202.