

Lemuel Curtis, Master Clock Maker

Compiled by President, Curtis/s Family Society

First patented in 1802 by brothers Aaron and Simon Willard, the banjo clock was one of the most popular clocks of its time. Despite the patent, it didn't take long for other clockmakers to jump on the bandwagon and copy the Willard design. Unfortunately for collectors of antique banjo clocks, many Willard banjo clocks do not carry their maker's name, so it is often difficult to identify who made it.

Of all the clockmakers who adopted Willard's model, probably none made such beautiful clocks as did Lemuel Curtis. Lemuel was born in Boston on July 3, 1790, son of Samuel (1761-1821) and Sarah (nee Partridge) Curtis (c1767-1850). Mary Partridge, an older sister of Lemuel's mother Sarah, married Aaron Willard in 1789. She was probably the driving force for bringing her nephew, Lemuel Curtis, into her husband's business as an apprentice. Lemuel moved to Concord, Massachusetts, in 1814 and married Mary Abbott in Concord on December 1, 1814. Lemuel and Mary had seven children.

On January 12, 1816, Lemuel took out a patent on an improvement to the Willard design. The form of his clock was much finer than that of the Willard brothers, and they are all quite similar, differing only in minor details. Lemuel was also the inventor of the masterpiece Girandole banjo timepiece.

Lemuel lived in Concord until about 1820, when he moved to Burlington, Vermont. He died there in 1857. He was a sixth generation descendant of a line from William Curtis and Sarah Eliot of Roxbury 1632; thus, Lemuel⁶, Samuel⁵, Benjamin⁴, Samuel³, Isaac², William¹ of Roxbury.

The clock in the figure is a Federal Massachusetts "Presentation Banjo Timepiece" made in Concord, Massachusetts about 1820 by Lemuel Curtis. The case is constructed in mahogany and features rope turning within the frames. The bezel and the side arms are brass. The original dial is signed "L. Curtis" and is painted on iron featuring Arabic numerals. Behind this dial is a classic Curtis brass 8-day movement with butterfly formed bridge,

mounted to the backboard of the case with a single screw. The classic Concord style case has a very distinctive cutout in the head. The pendulum features a Concord style key stone and a brass bob. This clock is typical of banjo clocks with a length of approximately 41 inches.

References: Wikipedia, BostonClocks.com, LiveActioneers.com, U.S. Census, CFS Database

