

# Who was “W A M”? A 25-Year Horological Mystery—Solved!

By Paul J. Foley (MA)



**Figure 1.** “D.L.W.” stamp on the bottom board of a North Attleboro, MA, regulator. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.

Clocks are often found with inscriptions or notations inside them made by the clockmaker, casemaker, apprentice, repairman, previous owner, or others. Sometimes these are simple written repair notations, but often they are more permanent labels, engravings, or stampings.

When similar notations are seen repeatedly and not identified, they beg the question—what do they mean?

“DLW” is a good example. Numerous North Attleboro, MA, wall regulators and banjo clocks are known to be stamped with the initials “DLW”. Usually this stamping is found in the front edge of the wooden bottom board (Figure 1). Today these clocks are easily recognized as products from North Attleboro, but 50 years ago their origin was not well known. For decades collectors wondered about the meaning of these stamped letters. In the 1950s and 1960s, collectors’ questions to the NAWCC Answer Box brought varying ideas and answers.<sup>1</sup> One recurring theory was that these were regulators previously owned by the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad and had been stamped by them. It was a good theory, but there was no real evidence to back it up.

The correct answer was finally provided in 1981 by Steven Petrucelli in his pioneering *NAWCC Bulletin* article “Attleboro Clockmakers.”<sup>2</sup> He identified the “DLW” initials as belonging to David L. Williams, a North Attleboro cabinetmaker and clock manufacturer. Williams, by himself and in partnerships with others (Williams & Aldrich, Williams & Hatch<sup>3</sup>), produced many weight-driven wall clocks in the 1860s in North Attleboro.



**Figure 2.** Closeup of “WAM” stamp on the rear of the pendulum of David Wood shelf clock (see Figure 14). AUTHOR’S PHOTO.

A similar mystery has been circulating for decades about the initials “W A M” found stamped inside a number of early American clock cases of different types (Figure 2).

My first exposure to a marked “W A M” clock was an early banjo clock observed at a Robert C. Eldred, East Dennis, MA, auction preview in 1988.<sup>4</sup> This was an early circa 1810 patent timepiece with an Arabic dial, crossbanded mahogany frames, and with a naval battle scene tablet (probably restored). This clock was unsigned except for the initials “W A M” stamped three times inside the case and once on the front of the lead weight. The stampings were made with three individual letter stamps. Who was “W A M”? I had no idea.

Although a nice early, unsigned timepiece, it was difficult to attribute. This case had a large head and bezel, the head inside was round cut-out, four external screws held on the throat frame, and the sidearms were pinned through the center diamond. These are all features found on early period Willard-school patent timepieces made in Roxbury, MA.<sup>5</sup> The case

contained a large, quality-made T-bridge, step-train, 8-day brass movement. But the movement was held into the case by two rear center screws, not by the diagonal through bolts one would expect to find on a Roxbury timepiece of this period. The case was well made but differed in small construction details to known Roxbury cases. I concluded that the clock was not a Willard and was made outside of Roxbury, possibly in Concord or Boston, MA.

But who was “W A M”? The stampings were definitely old and possibly original to the clock. The initials didn’t seem to match any known Roxbury or Boston clockmakers or cabinetmakers. I thought this might be a new discovery. With the idea that the clock could have been made in Concord, I first speculated that “W A M” could stand for William Munroe (1778–1861). Munroe was a Concord cabinetmaker who had served his apprenticeship in Roxbury, MA, with Nehemiah Munroe. He was in an 1800–04 partnership in Concord with his clockmaking brothers Daniel and Nathaniel Munroe and was known to have made cases for them. At the time this seemed like logical speculation except that Munroe was not known to have a middle name or initial “A.” Perhaps some research would reveal a middle name that he didn’t normally use?

This proved fruitless. I was unable to establish a middle name for William. Yet, with the possibility that the clock had been made in Concord, I couldn't completely eliminate him either.

For years I was occasionally reminded of this "W A M" clock and in my research, I tried to put a name or explanation to it without success. I heard rumors of other clocks also stamped but didn't have the opportunity to see them in person. No one I contacted had an answer for the "W A M" stampings.

In October 2000 another "W A M" clock surfaced at a Sotheby's New York auction.<sup>6</sup> This time it was a Simon Willard tall clock (Figure 3). This was a beautiful Roxbury inlaid and crossbanded mahogany tall clock with a 13" "OSBORNE" Birmingham painted dial. Sotheby's catalog described the clock as having "the seatboard stamped three times W.A.M." I had the opportunity to inspect and photograph the clock sometime after the auction. Although I didn't get close-up photos of the stampings, the seat board was indeed stamped three times in the same manner and with the same stamp as the attributed "Concord" banjo clock noted above. The impressions were definitely old and looked period.

Who was this "W A M"? Now his initials were known on a signed clock definitively made in Roxbury, MA. This Simon Willard tall clock and case can be dated circa 1795–1800. Could this still be the stamp of William Munroe while he was serving his cabinetmaking apprenticeship in Roxbury, MA? Continuing research still could not establish any middle name for William.

Later that year another "W A M" clock came to my attention. I received an inquiry from a dealer who wanted to know if I knew anything about clocks stamped "W A M," since he had been offered a crossbanded banjo clock stamped inside the case. I explained what I knew (or thought I knew) about the subject. I don't know if he ever bought the clock. I never personally saw this clock, and it's possible it was the same earlier "Concord" clock from the Eldred auction, but from its description I believed it was another new "W A M" example.

In 2002 David F. Wood, curator of the Concord Museum, Concord, MA, contacted me about a Daniel Munroe tall clock recently acquired by the museum. He was requesting some information about the Boston painted moon dial on the clock. During our conversation he mentioned



Figure 3. Simon Willard, Roxbury, MA, tall clock with "W A M" stamped three times on the seat board. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



Figure 4. William Munroe, Concord, MA, "W-M" stamp on a tall clock backboard. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

Figure 5. Simon Willard, Roxbury, MA, No. "1574" tall clock. Seat board stamped "W A M" four times. 94 1/2" ht. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



the case was made and signed by William Munroe. This was known through a stamp "W-M" on the inside backboard of the clock. This required examination, so I went to the museum to inspect the clock. It definitely appeared to be a Concord-made clock and case. The "W-M" stamp was quite clear and not of the same lettering style (Figure 4). This seemed to eliminate the possibility of the "W A M" stampings belonging to William Munroe.

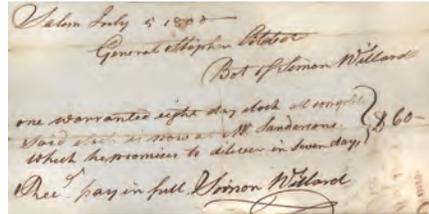
In March 2003 another "W A M" tall clock surfaced at Delaney Antique Clocks. This mahogany tall clock was signed for Simon Willard, Roxbury, MA, and numbered "1574." on the 12" "WILSON" Birmingham moon dial (Figures 5 and 6). The movement seat board was stamped "W A M" four times (Figure 7). In addition, this clock contained an original handwritten bill of sale: "Salem July, 5, 1802 / General Stephen Abbot / Bot of Simon Willard / one warranted eight day clock all complete . . . \$60 . . . / Rec'd pay in full Simon Willard" (Figure 8). In hindsight, this receipt contained a possible clue to the identity of "W A M" but I didn't recognize it at the time. Who was "W A M"?



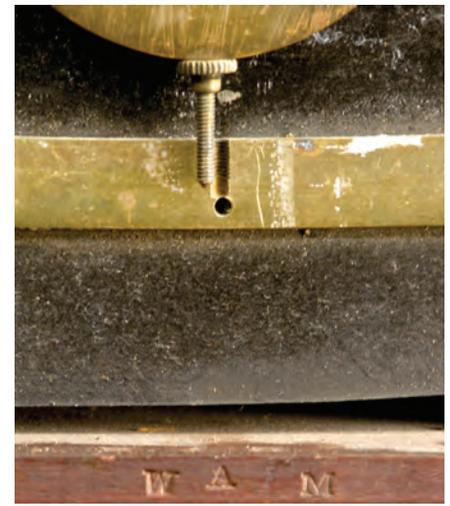
**Figure 6.** Simon Willard, Roxbury, MA, 12" WILSON Birmingham moon dial from tall clock in Figure 5. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



**Figure 7.** "W A M" stamp on the seat board of the Simon Willard tall clock in Figure 5. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



**Figure 8.** Simon Willard bill of sale from the tall clock in Figure 5. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



**Figure 10.** "W A M" stamp on the bottom board of the Simon Willard patent timepiece in Figure 9. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.

**Figure 9.** Simon Willard, Roxbury, MA, patent timepiece stamped "W A M" six times. 34" ht. AUTHOR'S PHOTO.



Forward to April 2006, when another dealer showed me an early signed "Simon Willard's Patent" crossbanded banjo clock with geometric glasses (Figure 9) and asked me if I knew what "W A M" meant, as this timepiece was stamped inside six times (Figure 10). I had no answer.

In January 2010 I located another "W A M" clock, this time on eBay. It was a patent timepiece with half round mahogany frames signed on the dial "Warranted / by / L. W. Noyes" for the clockmaker Leonard W. Noyes of Nashua, NH (1799–1867). This clock was stamped three times: twice on the case under the dial and once on the edge of the lower case between the door hinges.<sup>7</sup>

I now had examples of different types of clocks from Massachusetts and New Hampshire stamped "W A M". This meant it was not a cabinetmaker or clockmaker's stamp. They must have been added by a collector or repairman. If it was a collector, he must have been quite discriminating for an early collector, since most of these clocks were fine examples of New England clockmaking. Who was this "W A M"?

A new, important clue appeared in 2012. An unsigned round, gilt, gallery wall clock attributed to Simon Willard & Son appeared for sale by Delaney Antique Clocks (Figure 11). This clock was of interest to me because it had a lighthouse-type movement and I was studying lighthouse clocks at the time.<sup>8</sup> This clock was stamped "W A M" twice on the rear of the pendulum bob (Figure 12). When the dial was removed, the case interior contained a number of penciled repair marks inside. More importantly, on the rear of the wooden dial was written



**Figure 11.** Attributed Simon Willard & Son gilt gallery wall clock with “W A M” stamped twice on the rear of the pendulum. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.

**Figure 12.** “W A M” stamps on the rear of the pendulum from Simon Willard & Son gallery clock in Figure 11. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.



**Figure 13.** “W. A. Marden / April / 1896” written on rear of the dial of the Simon Willard & Son gallery wall clock in Figure 11. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.

“W. A. Marden / 1896” in pencil (Figure 13). It looked like this might be “W A M”—but who was W. A. Marden?

With only the initials, a last name, and a date, I ran into another dead end. There was no Marden that I could find related to horological collecting or repair. Numerous books and online genealogical searches were inconclusive without further identifying information.

Finally another clue appeared. In 2013 I had the opportunity to examine and photograph a Massachusetts shelf clock signed by clockmaker David Wood, Newburyport, MA, in the Delaney Antique Clock collection (Figure 14). I had seen this clock years earlier but never examined it in detail. This pine and mahogany veneered case contained a nice Boston painted dial signed for Wood with a scene in the arch and a timepiece movement. This clock, circa 1815–20, was also stamped “W A M” six times: four times on the seat board (Figure 15) and twice on the rear of the pendulum (Figure 16). These were old stampings identical to those seen on the previous clocks.

This clock held the final clue. Close examination of the dial on the rear revealed an old notation in pencil “W. A. Marden / Salem, / Mass / 1896” (Figure 17). It appeared to be the same handwriting as the previous example. Finally, there was a location to add to the search. Was he the owner/collector of these clocks or a repairman? Who was W. A. Marden?

Online genealogical sites soon provided the answer. William A. Marden was born on February 22, 1856, in Salem, MA. His parents were Lemuel and Lucy Marden. Lemuel’s occupation is listed as a carpenter. William’s first name is sometimes listed as “Willie,” but it may be a misreading of handwritten documents. William is listed in 1878–1926 Salem Directories as a watchmaker or as a clock and watch repairer at 22 North Street. From the available census records it appears he never married and spent his whole life in Salem. In the 1930 US census he is listed on North Street and his occupation as “clock repair.” In the 1940 US census he is apparently retired at age 84 and residing in Bertram Home (for Aged Men).<sup>9</sup> His death record has not been located, but it is assumed he died in the 1940s.

A 25-year search for “W A M” finally produced results. Marden was apparently a clock and watch repairman who liked to mark the clocks he repaired. From the clocks known, he serviced many quality, high-end clocks. His clients were likely prominent citizens in the Salem area. I’m sure there are other “W A M” clocks out there still to be identified.

### Acknowledgments

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Notes and References

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9. Ancestry.com, Massachusetts Birth Records, Salem Massachusetts Directories, US Census Records.



**Figure 14.** David Wood, Newburyport, MA, shelf clock with “W A M” stamped six times on the pendulum and seat board. 41 ¾” ht. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.



**Figure 15.** “W A M” stamp on the seat board of the David Wood shelf clock in Figure 14. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.



**Figure 17.** “W. A. Marden / Salem / 1896” written on rear of the dial of the David Wood shelf clock in Figure 14. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.



**Figure 16.** “W A M” stamps on rear of the pendulum of the David Wood shelf clock in Figure 14. AUTHOR’S PHOTO.