

A Brewery, a Clock Watch, a Bond, a Legacy

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The NAWCC lost a true friend on March 24, 2017, with the passing of Herbert F. Leisy Jr. His generous commitment was evident in his donations of some rare Leisy family heirlooms and his yearly contributions to the Museum. In his will he also gifted \$50,000 to the *For All Time* Endowment and Capital Campaign.

How did this friendship start and why did it flourish, especially since he was not a horological enthusiast?

It all began in 1997 when Herbert F. Leisy contacted the NAWCC about the donation of a family heirloom in honor of his grandfather, Otto Isaac Leisy. This contact was the beginning of a bond between Herbert F. Leisy, the extended Leisy family, and the NAWCC.



Figure 1. The Leisy clock watch.



We need to go back farther to the beginning. Between 1892 and 1914, and under the managerial expertise of second-generation proprietor, Otto Leisy, the Leisy Brewing Co. in Cleveland, OH, was prospering. The Leisy Brewing Co. was started by Otto's father, Isaac, and two of Isaac's brothers. They had moved to Cleveland from the family farm in Iowa and purchased an existing brewery in 1873. Of Swiss descent and from a Mennonite background, the patriarch, Abraham, along with his 14-member family, had emigrated from Germany to the United States in the mid-1800s to seek political freedom and economic opportunities. They became farmers in Iowa.

In time, only Isaac remained in the brewery business due to Mennonite support of Prohibition. Although it was a successful brewery, it could not survive Prohibition and closed in 1923. Herbert Sr., the father of Herbert F. Leisy, was the third-generation brewer. The brewery was reopened after Prohibition but was closed permanently in 1958.

Otto Leisy traveled frequently to Europe. On one of these trips he acquired a circa 1905 A. Lange and Sohne minute repeating clock watch made by Ferdinand Adolph Lange, who was born in Dresden, Germany, in 1815. Lange worked in Paris with Winnerl, a renowned chronometer maker and famous student of Breguet. In 1845 Lange returned to Germany and opened his own manufacturing facility in Glashutte. A. Lange & Sohne was founded in 1868 with sons Richard and Frederick Emil. Today, these Lange & Sohne watches are known as premiere examples of nineteenth-century European watchmaking.

Correspondence in the Museum archives shows Leisy's appreciation for the clock watch as both a rare timepiece and Leisy family heirloom: "As this timepiece has been in our family for three (3) generations, some of our considerations in making

this watch available to the Museum and the viewing public are: professional handling, maintenance & display, avoidance of overhandling, retention of the name Otto Leisy as part of the identifying title, reference to accompanying Greenberg letter April 13, 1979 regarding operations, care and maintenance." With the donation came documentation of the clock watch's unique provenance and Leisy family history.

Leisy's contact with the NAWCC was timely. The expansion of the national facilities in Columbia was about to get underway. The clock watch was introduced to the membership of the NAWCC in the August 1997 *Bulletin* as the cover photo and in an article.¹ When the expansion opened in 1999, the Leisy clock watch was featured in the new exhibit design and pictured on the 2000 Museum poster. Leisy visited the Museum on

at least two occasions; one visit was in November 1999 when members of the extended Leisy family attended the installation. The most recent appearance of the clock watch is in the NAWCC's *For All Time* 75th Anniversary Endowment and Capital Campaign publication.

Leisy understood the value of his timepiece and continued to support the Museum in its ongoing care of that timepiece. He expressed that understanding in a letter dated August 20, 1997: "In appreciation of the extra efforts you are expending to make the acquisition and installation of the clockwatch a success, I have made arrangements today for the National Bank of Cleveland to send you funds to assist in this process." Each and every year thereafter, he made a monetary donation to the Museum, continuing to provide for the professional handling, maintenance, and display of all timepieces in the Museum.

In 2014 Leisy donated his father's 1952 Patek Philippe Calatrava to the Museum as a "companion to a previous gift (ref. Lange 'Grand Sonniere' [sic]) and hopefully a meaningful addition to your already distinguished watch collection."



Figure 2. Leisy's Patek Philippe Calatrava.



Figure 3. Calatrava movement.

Past and present Museum Curators, Museum Directors, and Executive Directors of the NAWCC have had the pleasure of corresponding with Herbert F. Leisy, whose interest in the A. Lange & Sohne clock watch remained strong as did his commitment to supporting the Museum. As his sister Elsa Bacher recently wrote of her brother, "He was a very thoughtful and generous man and strove to take the long view of important matters."

"Mr. Leisy was always a joy to speak with on the phone, inquiring as to how things were going at the Museum and sincerely interested in the answers. I always enjoyed the opportunities to speak with Mr. Leisy and wish I had the opportunity to meet him in person," said Noel B. Poirier, NAWCC Museum Director.

Thank you, Herbert F. Leisy and family.

Notes

1. Patricia Tomes, Curator. The NAWCC Museum. "A. Lange & Söhne Clock Watch Donated to Museum." *NAWCC Bulletin*, No. 309 (August 1997):467-470.

Sources

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- Leisy, Herbert F. Letter to Tom Bartels, February 3, 1997.
- Leisy, Herbert F. Letter to Patricia Tomes, July 1, 1997.
- Leisy, Herbert F. Letter to Noel Poirier, October 26, 2014.
- Morais, Richard C. "Making up for lost time." *Forbes*, November 21, 1994:122-123.