

Clocks spelled status in 1800s

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Making and selling them was big business hereabouts

A prized household possession a century and a half ago was a clock, the best that one could afford.

Fine homes had a hall clock with a gold or silver dial, ornately painted. Other rooms may have had shelf clocks. Lesser households prized a shelf clock, some of them made completely of wood.

It is said that people would sit and look at their clock with its mesmerizing pendulum in much the same fashion that later generations watched a record turn on a Victrola or stared at the test pattern on early television sets.

It is amazing how much clock making and clock selling activity went on in this area.

The earliest clockmaker we know of was John McKee (1787-1871) of Chester district. He was advertising as early as 1816. One of his clocks of that time (now in the Museum of Southern Decorative Arts in Winston-Salem, N.C., has a label inside the clock which reads: "At J. McKee's Clock Factory, Chester Court House (S.C.) is made and sold all kinds of Clocks, with, or without, cases, warranted for their quality and perfor-

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mance, also packed up and warranted to go safe to any distance." This clock is 8½ feet tall and has an iron dial painted with a global map that has Australia labeled "New Holland," Australia's name before 1811.

McKee ran a general store of quality on "the Hill" in Chester where he sold plantation supplies, dry goods, household furniture and books. McKee started as a watchmaker and continued to make watches and repair them.



Nearby
History

**Louise
Pettus**

He also served in the state legislature and was a delegate from Chester District to the South Carolina Secession Convention.

Other clockmakers were members of George Suggs' family of Bethel community in York District, who came by way of Virginia although originally from Waterbury, Conn. Records of Bullocks Creek Church show that Thomas E. Suggs was in that area in the 1840s. The Rev. R.Y. Russell, pastor of that church, purchased a clock made at "Waterbury Clock Factory at Bullocks Creek."

At Pinckneyville, the old courthouse town on the Broad River, it is said that Seth Thomas of Connecticut owned property and is thought to have done some of his work there. And there was "Carolina Fashion Clocks of Bullocks Creek District."

In Yorkville during the 1840s, a firm was doing business as a co-partnership under the name of McElwee and Sutton. Jonathan McElwee and Alexander C. Sutton sold general merchandise, but their trade was far broader than just the Yorkville area.

McElwee and Sutton employed at least a half dozen men to work at the combination trading of clocks, carryalls and slaves. Covering a geographic area that extended from North Carolina to Alabama, the "peddlers" roamed the countryside to show their wares.

The carryalls, most of them manufactured by McElwee and Hutchison, were wagons especially made to carry slaves and their luggage or to carry clocks. There is a record of 50 clocks picked up from a freight station in Cheraw, S. C. which were peddled across Georgia.

There is an account by Thomas N. Pettus of his taking a caravan of mules and carryalls (one carryall would pull two more with additional mules tied to the end gate of the last carryall) for sale in Alabama in October 1846. At Stewart City, Ga., on the Alabama line, Pettus said he met up with C.C. Horn, a clock peddler for McElwee and Sutton. Horn told him that he sold every clock he had.

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