

- FALL 2022 -

## Message from the Director



Greetings Friends and Supporters of Willard,

This summer, we wandered away from our daily mission of preserving the birthplace and sharing the story of the Willard clockmakers. For Willard's 50th Anniversary we filled the calendar with programming and events of all kinds: music, kids puppet shows, and Mr. Potter, the ever popular 19th century magician just to name a few. The summer was capped off with the New Black Eagle Jazz Band. The response to this event was so large that it was moved to the Appletree Arts Performance Center to accommodate the 125 attendees. All agreed it was a beautiful and historic place to hold the last of summer's events and that the summer 'wander' introduced many additional visitors to the museum.

We were fortunate to receive grants to do some long needed work on the south and east facing sides of our main buildings. The barn in particular was sorely in need of scraping, sanding, mildew removal, serious calking, and carpentry work before getting a primer and two finish coats of paint. The historic house and clock shop required the same in addition to having all of the windows re-glazed and repaired. This is only phase 1. Next year, hopefully we can get to the far less compromised north and west sides of these structures.



You will note that our resident scholar, Paul Foley has yielded his usual spot in the Research Corner for a guest scholar, Mary Jane Dapkus. Mary Jane is well known in the horological world for her writings and presentations

which bear witness to her prowess as a historical sleuth. I'm sure you will all agree once you read "Simon Willard's 1801 U. S. Senate Clock". Thank you Mary Jane for sharing this new research on Simon Willard with Willard's members.



Willard is proud to partner with the family of our former conservator, David G. Gow (1948-2021) to announce the **David G. Gow Memorial Scholarship for Horological Education**. This annual financial award will be given to worthy students of horology who plan to seek a career in conservation of antique clocks. Applications are due November 14th, 2022 and the first award presented in December. Please

see our website for additional information.

As always, remember, I hate asking for money. I offer no apologies however, for the various campaigns going on to ask you for money because this place is well worth it!

Horology has been a neglected science throughout our schooling yet it is perhaps the most important of the sciences for the development of our modern world. Virtually every important discovery you can think of depends on horology. David Rooney the esteemed historian of horology went further to say, "A History of clocks is a history of civilization". This places the four Willard brothers in a completely different context, certainly an American story worthy of your support.

The future is our challenge and the future is now.

Thank you for your continued support and a great-big thank you for any additional support you can offer. Our task here is an important one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert". The signature is fluid and cursive.

[robert@willardhouse.org](mailto:robert@willardhouse.org)

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## Reading Corner

A New Masterwork from Paul J. Foley





## Research Corner

Special Contributor, Mary Jane Dapkus

### "Simon Willard's 1801 U.S. Senate Clock"

#### Introduction

Born at Grafton, MA on April 3, 1753, Simon Willard was the eighth of twelve children, and the seventh son, of Benjamin and Sarah (Brooks) Willard. From his youth it appears Simon exhibited both a keen interest in and an aptitude for mechanical pursuits. Over the course of his career he produced tall case clocks, timepieces and gallery timepieces, shelf clocks, tower clocks and regulators. It is said that his skill and reputation as a clock maker, and his integrity in the business, gave him more satisfaction than financial remuneration.[1]

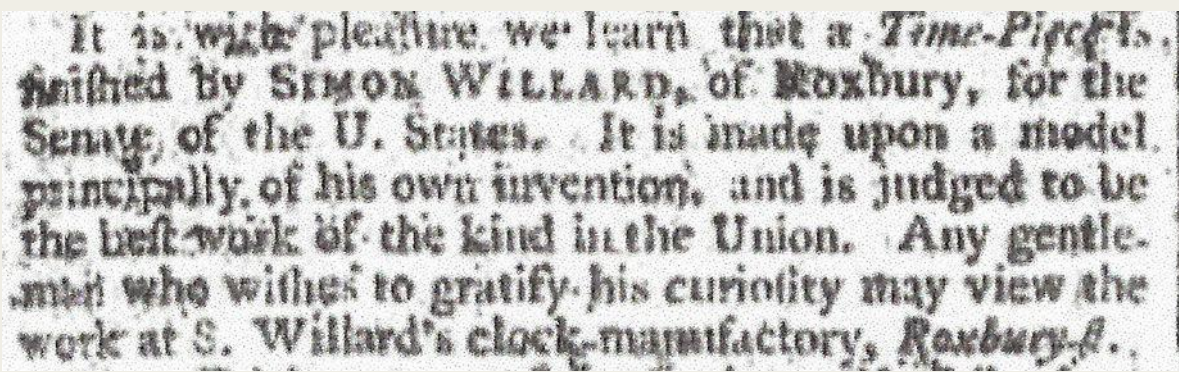
Simon's receipt of a U.S. Patent on February 8, 1802, for his invention of the brass movement "banjo" timepiece cemented his already formidable reputation as a clock maker.[2] The highly successful banjo timepiece undoubtedly also buttressed Simon's financial security by discouraging imitators over the ensuing fourteen years of its patent protection. Interestingly, the schedule for the banjo timepiece patent application, dated November 25, 1801, was prepared about the same time Simon completed work on a different project, one that would earn him even greater prestige. He produced a clock for the United States Senate.

#### The Clock's Story

On February 25, 1801, the U.S. Senate had passed the following resolution:

***Resolved. That the Secretary of the Senate be directed to purchase an eight-day clock and cause it to be set up in the Senate Chamber, and that the expense be defrayed out of the contingency fund.***[3]

By October 15, 1801, Boston's *Independent Chronicle* announced that such a clock had been completed. The announcement appears below, as Figure 1.



It is with pleasure we learn that a *Time-Piece*, finished by SIMON WILLARD, of Roxbury, for the Senate of the U. States. It is made upon a model principally of his own invention, and is judged to be the best work of the kind in the Union. Any gentleman who wishes to gratify his curiosity may view the work at S. Willard's clock-manufactory, Roxbury.

Figure 1. Source: *Independent Chronicle* [Boston, MA], October 15, 1801. (Courtesy Paul J. Foley.)

On December 16, 1801, some ten months after the Senate resolved to buy a clock, the *U.S. Senate Journal* reported the following:

*The President laid before the Senate a letter from SIMON WILLARD to the Secretary of the Senate on the subject of compensation for an eight-day clock, purchased by order of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February last, for the use of the Senate Chamber, which was read and referred to MESSRS. JACKSON, J. MASON, and T. FOSTER, to consider and report thereon.*<sup>[4]</sup>

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) had taken office as the third U.S. President on March 4, 1801. Four years later he was re-elected to a second and final term, serving until March 4, 1809. Based on the Senate record, it appears the Secretary consulted with President Jefferson about the contents of Simon's letter.

The Secretary of the U.S. Senate referred to in the record was Samuel A. Otis (1740-1814), who, like Willard, was a Massachusetts native (Figure 2). Previously, Otis had served as a Continental Army quartermaster, the Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation in 1787-8. On April 8, 1789, one month after the commencement of the new U.S. Constitutional government, the capable Otis was chosen as the Senate's first Secretary. Three weeks later, on April 30, 1789, he held the Bible at the swearing-in of George Washington as the nation's first President.

For the next twenty-five years Samuel A. Otis filled the Senate's secretaryship with skill and grace. He died while in office in 1814 without ever having missed a day's work<sup>[5]</sup> - and having been a familiar correspondent of Simon Willard's.



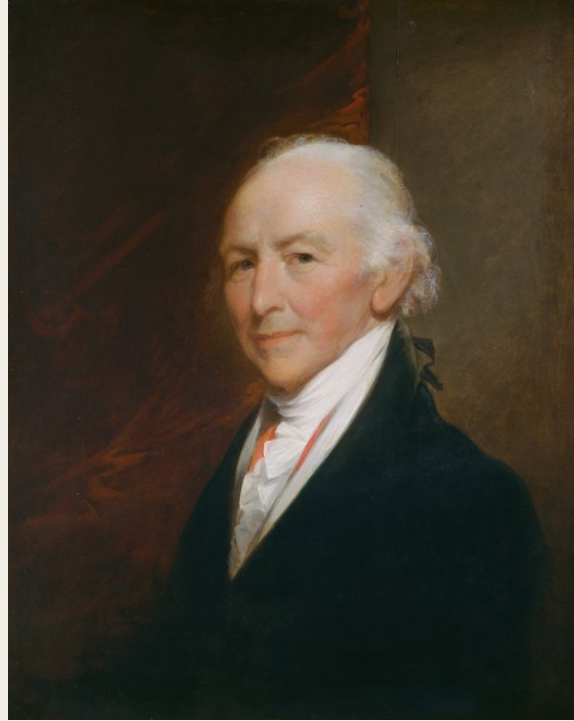


Figure 2. Portrait of Samuel Alleyne Otis (1740-1814), by American artist Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828), 1813. (Courtesy WikiArt, <https://www.wikiart.org/en/gilbert-stuart/samuel-alleyne-otis-1813>.)

A transcript of Simon Willard's letter to Secretary Otis, made by John Ware Willard, one of Simon's great-grandsons (and later, his biographer), exists. Discovered in the collection of the National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors some years ago,<sup>[6]</sup> it was dated at Roxbury, MA, November 20, 1801. The letter read as follows (spelling and punctuation preserved):

*November 20, 1801*

*Sir*

*The clock sail[e]d a few days ago. I am verry [sic.] sorry that their [i.e. there] has been such delays about it, it would have be[e]n completed at the time you left Boston had the Gilder acted his part well, he was too attentive to the bottle which circumstance I did not know of when I first set him to work, he is master of the business yet he fail[e]d in the composition & was oblige[d] to do all his work over again which was a great loss to him; as well as a great trouble to me. i should have wrote to you but your son said he would write,—*

*I hope Sir, the clock will give you & all sattisfaction. I have spared no pains nor cost to have it complete as I could for the time I had to do it in, I hope it will meet their Approbation—*

*As to the price of the clock, I do not wish to be out of... [worn] way my bills was pritty reasoinalbe [sic.], yet...[worn] are about five times as high as the clock in the Representative[s'] Chamber in Boston which cost 150. Dollars and their [i.e. there] is five times the work & cost that their [i.e. there] is in that clock which will make the Capitol clock come at 750 dollars yet if Judges of work think it too high you will please to alter; my ambition is to give them sattisfaction—their [there] is many matters in it that is entirely new the method of its going at the time of winding up & the method of its striking &c— if I was to go through with the work again it could be done with much less work and expense as I had all new patterns to make it being different from any I ever saw.—*

*I have sent you a time-piece agreeable to my proposal, you will please to present it to the patent office, you will do what you think is proper, & if you should get a patent for me. you will please to pay the expenses, if the time-piece will pay for the patent & your trouble I shall be glad. The time-pieces are very sailable [sic.] here & they fetch me fifty*

*dollars. I should have sent you one some more complete if I had time, the method of putting on the face is not complete. If the time-piece should get injured a going & it should not perform well I think it will be best not to expose it much & I will send on another---*

*I am Sir With the Greatest respect*

*Your most Hum[b]l[e]  
Serv[an]t Simon Willard*

Based on the information provided in the letter, Simon Willard (who had apparently been producing banjo timepieces for some time before applying for the U.S. patent), shipped the “sample” banjo timepiece about the same time as the U.S. Senate clock, intending that Otis utilize the former to defray the cost of the patent application.[7]

The Senate clock was a new design for Simon, as his letter states there were “many matters in it that is entirely new”, and gives two examples. In the first, Simon refers to “the method of its going at the time of winding up”, evidently meaning the clock had a newly designed maintaining power. In the second example, Simon states that the clock's “method” of striking was also like no other he had ever made. Although the letter did not specify whether the clock was of the gallery style, the fact that it was gilded suggests it probably was.

Simon Willard's letter to Secretary Otis of November 20, 1801 went on to explain that if he ever made another example like the U.S. Senate clock, it would take less time and cost less to complete. The reason he gives for this, “...as I had all new patterns to make it being different from any I ever saw--”, is intriguing. Given Simon's considerable experience in making public clocks (for example, the one for the Massachusetts' Representatives Chamber in Boston referred to in his letter), the U.S. Senate clock may have been rather unique.

Meanwhile, when the U.S. Capitol staff received the Senate clock some time in December 1801 or early January 1802, they installed it but were unable to get it to stay running. A letter from Simon Willard concerning the matter, dated January 18, 1802, addressed to Secretary Otis, was reproduced in John Ware Willard's biography of his great-grandfather Simon.[8]. For convenience this letter is transcribed below:

*Roxbury Jan[uar]y. 18, 1802*

*Dear Sir,*

*I have received all your favors, the last of which gives me disagreeable feelings as it respects the Clock stop[p]ing. I think it must be owing to putting it up or to being transported such a distance. I paid the greatest attention to have the Clock well finished & regulated and well packed that it might be sure to go well; but I hope you will not meet with much difficulty in setting it agoing [sic.] – the clock is made upon a plan not subject to stop or get out of order, it will I think go twenty years without cleaning as the movement part is made almost air tight; & I think the clock will keep the most accurate time if it should gain or loose [sic.] a little the person who takes care of it can regulate it by screwing the pendulum up or down.*

*I hope it will give them satisfaction and not think the price much too high. I am making a clock for Portland [apparently MA, later ME] meeting house for which I am to have 750 dollars – and the expense and time I was at about the Senate clock, is as much as the Portland clock – clock makers here who saw it did not think it too high some gentlemen who saw it thought I ought to have more however I shall be satisfied with a deduction, but I hope it will not be more than 100 dollars.*

(Signed)  
Simon Willard

To Sam. A. Otis<sup>[9]</sup>

### Financial Aspects

Remarkably, John Ware Willard viewed an original record of the sale of Willard's U.S. Senate clock in 1911, when the document was in a private collection.<sup>[10]</sup> Here is a transcript:

*United States of Am[eric]<sup>a</sup>*

*To Simon Willard Dr.....*  
*to a Clock for the Senate of*  
*United States at Washington} \$750*  
*to packing said clock..... 20*  
*\$770*

*Recdpay[?]*

*Roxbury Nov. 21. 1801.<sup>[11]</sup>*

Although the second to the last line of the bill is somewhat difficult to read, it appears Simon Willard received payment for the clock, which was apparently shipped in a specially constructed wooden crate. But how much payment did Simon actually receive?

On Tuesday, April 6, 1802, the *U.S. Senate Journal* reported the following:

*The committee to whom was referred the letter of SIMON WILLARD to the Secretary of the Senate relative to a clock made by the said Willard for the use of the Senate, reported a letter from John E. Rigden, a watch and clock maker of this city [i.e. Washington], which declares, as his opinion, that five hundred dollars will be an ample and liberal reward for such a time-piece, and the committee recommends the following resolution:*

*Resolved. That Simon Willard be paid by the Secretary of the Senate the sum of five hundred dollars for an eight-day clock, of him, agreeably to a resolution of the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, 1801, to be defrayed out of the contingent funds.*

*And the report was adopted.<sup>[12]</sup>*

As a dealer in clock and watch parts, movements, and supplies in the historic Georgetown neighborhood within Washington, D.C., John E. Rigden was well-positioned to consult in the prices of horological products. Rigden, who kept a well-stocked store at 226 Market Street, apparently with a branch in Baltimore, also produced tall case clocks in partnership with one Charles Alexander Burnett. Such clocks were inscribed "Burnett & Rigden" on their dials.<sup>[13]</sup> A few years later Rigden sold to or repaired a watch for President Jefferson.<sup>[14]</sup>

Simon Willard's letter to Samuel A. Otis of November 20, 1801 suggests Willard kept no record of how many hours he spent working on the Senate clock, nor did he document the materials and supplies and costs thereof he used in constructing it. As a consequence, Simon's basis for asking \$750 (worth about \$17,400 today<sup>[15]</sup>) for the clock was poorly supported. Furthermore, after stating in his letter to Otis of January 18, 1802: "...I shall be satisfied with a deduction", there would have been little ground for Willard to appeal from the Senate's resolution, and there is no indication that he did. Thus it appears that



Simon Willard accepted \$500 as payment for the U.S. Senate clock.

This is in keeping with previous characterizations of Simon Willard to the effect that: "...in making a clock he did not consider the money side of the transaction at all, he aimed to turn out his best work, whether he made a profit or not", and further, that he "...was a very poor business man..."[16]

### The Clock's Fate

The clock Simon Willard produced for the U.S. Senate was reportedly destroyed by fire when British soldiers burned the U.S. Capitol building during the War of 1812.[17] A published history of the Old U.S. Senate Chamber states that following the events of August 24, 1814, the Capitol's exterior was "...scarred and blackened, the interior gutted, and the Senate Chamber destroyed." (Figure 3).[18]

Another account describes the furniture as having been piled up in the Old Supreme Court Chamber (located directly below the Old Senate Chamber), and set in a "great bonfire". So destructive was the conflagration that it not only consumed the Chamber's interior and a portion of the building's exterior stone walls, but also severely damaged the Old Senate Chamber and its contents above.[19]

Based on this information, on research conducted by Simon Willard biographer John Ware Willard, and also on a 2011 legislative appropriations bill relative to the care and restoration of the two Simon Willard clocks (both dating to 1837), still in the U.S. Capitol's collection,[20] it seems reasonable to assume that the 1801 U.S. Senate clock did not survive the fire.[21]



Figure 3. George Munger (1781-1825), "U.S. Capitol after burning by the British", 1814. Ink and watercolor on paper. (Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.23076>.)



## The Aftermath

In 1802, Simon Willard completed the tower clock he made for the North Church meetinghouse in Portland, located in the portion of Massachusetts that was set off as the State of Maine in March 1820.[22] This was the same clock Simon referred to in his letter to Samuel Otis of January 18, 1802, for which he claimed he “was to have \$750”.

Evidently the U.S. Government was pleased with Simon Willard's 1801 U.S. Senate clock, and likely also with the latter's generous flexibility on its price. More than three decades later Simon was retained to build two additional clocks for the Capitol at Washington, D.C., where he traveled to oversee their installation. One of the clocks was placed in the Office of the Chief Clerk of the U.S. Supreme Court. The other, consisting of a specially constructed movement, was installed in a unique marble case designed and executed by the Italian sculptor Carlo Franzoni (1789-1819) some twenty years earlier (Figure 4). The case depicts Clio, the Muse of History, holding a book in which she records unfolding events. She sits in a winged chariot astride a marble globe on which the Zodiac signs appear in relief. The clock's dial comprises the chariot's wheel.[23]

Just as he completed the case sculpture, on May 12, 1819, the thirty-year-old Franzoni died and was buried at Washington, D.C.[24] Both clocks survive to the present day.

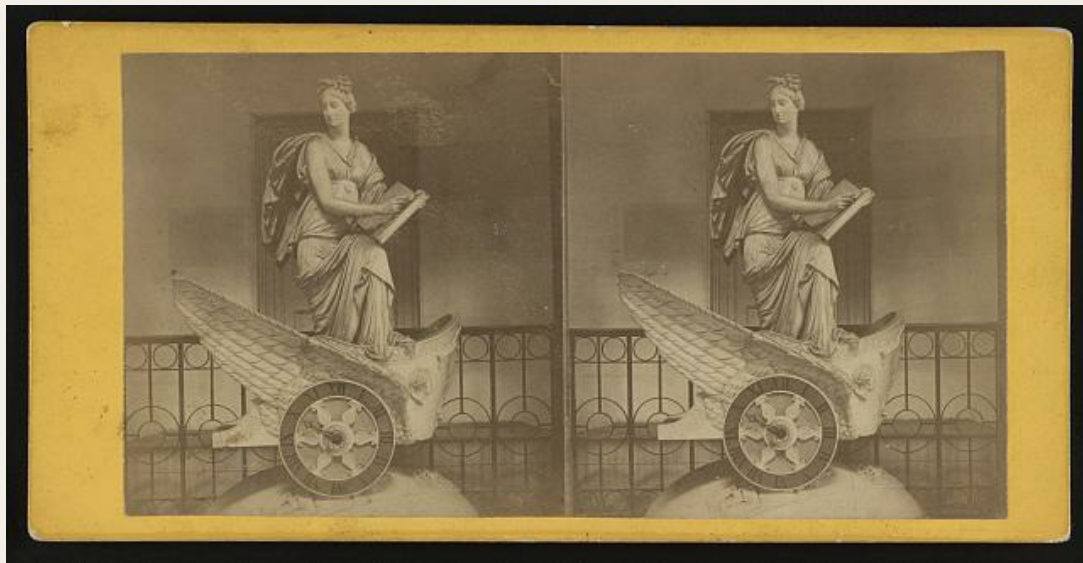


Figure 4. Stereophotograph ca. 1860-90, “The Car of History”, depicting marble sculpted clock case by Carlo Franzoni (1789-1819), 1819; containing 1837 movement by Simon Willard. (Courtesy Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <https://loc.gov/item/2007876450/>.)

## Post Script

Simon Willard spent his final years at the home of a daughter in Milton, MA, and at the home of a son-in-law at Boston, where he died on August 30, 1848, at the age of over 95 years. He was buried in the old Eustis St. Cemetery at Roxbury. Later, his remains were removed to Forest Hills Cemetery, Jamaica Plain, Suffolk County, MA.[25] Although not the greatest of businessmen, it may not unreasonably be said that during his lifetime Simon Willard became America's premier clock maker.

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## Acknowledgments

Many thanks to Paul J. Foley for his gracious assistance in this article's preparation.

[1]See, for example: Simon Willard, "Memorial to the General Court of Massachusetts", January 1784 (quoted in: Paul J. Foley, *Willard's Patent Timepieces* (Norwell, MA: Roxbury Village Publishing, 2002): Appendix A; and John Ware Willard, *Simon Willard and his Clocks* (1911; reprinted at New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1968): 17-20.

[2]Paul J. Foley, 2002: 6.

[3]*Journal of the United States Senate, being the first session of the sixth Congress...*, Vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1821): 162, entry for February 25, 1801.

[4]U.S. Senate, *Journal of the Senate of the United States of America, being the first session of the sixth Congress...* Vol. 3 (1821): 162, entry for December 16, 1801.

[5]<https://www.senate.gov/about/officers-staff/secretary-of-the-senate/otis-sam.htm>.

[6]Snowden Taylor, "Simon Willard and the Patent Timepiece", *Bulletin of the National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors* No. 301 (April 1996): 225. According to this source, the typescript included the following note at the bottom: "Copy of a letter found in December 1911 among some old family papers, and proves that Simon Willard charged fifty dollars for his timepiece and that he was making them before he applied for a patent[.] J. W. Willard Dec 20-1911." See also: Paul J. Foley, 2002: 8-9.

[7]Snowden Taylor, *NAWCC Bulletin* No. 301, 1996: 225.

[8]John Ware Willard, 1911: 18-19.

[9]Simon Willard to Samuel A. Otis, January 18, 1802 (location unknown), reproduced in: John Ware Willard, 1911: 18-19.

[10]John Ware Willard, 1911: 20-21. As in the case of the letter in Note #9, the invoice's present location is unknown.

[11]John Ware Willard, 1911: 21.

[12]"Proceedings and Debates of the U.S. Senate at the First Session of the Seventh Congress...", in: *The Debates and Proceedings of the Congress of the United States, Seventh Congress...* (Washington, D.C.: Gales & Seaton, 1851): 253-4.

[13]Sonya L. Spitter, Thomas J. Spittler, and Chris H. Bailey, *Clockmakers and Watchmakers of America by Name and by Place*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Columbia, PA: National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors, 2011): 343.

[14]A letter from John E. Rigden to Thomas Jefferson, dated December 1, 1808, states, in part: "Hope your watch goes to please you."

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-9210>.

[15]<https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1800?amount=750>.

[16]John Ware Willard, 1911: 35.

[17]John Ware Willard, 1911: 20.

[18]Office of the U.S. Senate Curator, *The Old Senate Chamber 1810-1859*, Senate Publication 109.9 (Washington, D.C., undated).

[19]<https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/buildings-grounds/capitol-building-history>.

[20]Letter from Henry C. Karr, Washington, D.C. [to John Ware Willard], dated March 30, 1908, quoted in John Ware Willard, 1911: 31. In his letter Karr stated that he had charge of caring for the U.S. Capitol clocks at that time. See also: U.S. Senate, Office of the Secretary, Hon. Nancy Erickson, Secretary of the Senate, "Legislative Branch Appropriations for fiscal year 2011. One Hundred Eleventh Congress, second session, S.3799, in: Hearings before a subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, "An Act making appropriations for the legislative branch for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2011."

[21]The existing information does not rule out the possibility that the British took the clock; however, the author has seen no evidence indicating that might have been the case.

[22]John Ware Willard, 1911: 130-131.

[23]<https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/car-history-clock>.

[24]John Ware Willard, 1911: 29-31; and William Kloss and Diane Kiskvarla, *United States Senate Catalogue of Fine Art* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, Senate Document 107-11, 2002): 228-31.

[25]John Ware Willard, 1911: 33-35; and <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/13606676/simon-willard>.



# Event

## Willard House and Clock Museum: 50-Years Of Collecting Excellence - A Lecture With Robert C. Cheney at The Grafton Public Library



A program in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the [Willard House and Clock Museum](#) and the loan and installation of a Benjamin Willard 1795 eight-day clock in the Library's Historic Reading Room will be held on **Monday November 14, 2022 at 7:00pm** in the Community Room with a reception to follow.

The installed clock was made by Benjamin Willard (1743-1803) at the historic Grafton workshop preserved at the museum. The installation includes printed terminology guides, background information on the clock museum and a QR code to the museum website.

**Grafton Public Library**  
35 Common  
Grafton, MA 01519  
508-839-0469

[Register Here](#)



## Plan Your Visit

### Museum Hours:

Open Thursday- Saturday

### Museum Fees:

Members FREE

Tours: 10:30am and 2:00pm

Large groups by appointment only

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all national holidays: Closed

Adults \$10

Seniors 60+ \$9

Kids 13 plus: \$6

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The Willard House and Clock Museum is very grateful for the generous support of the following corporate and personal donors. At Willard, we try very hard to maintain a high level of programming throughout the year and without outside support, this would not be possible.

If you or your business wishes to support the programs, donations of any size are welcomed and go to continued and new events here at Willard.

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