

# THE CULVER CLOCKS

## Part II

### The Clocks Compared

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All of the “Fashions” were 8-day clocks, with a perpetual calendar. The movements were larger and heavier than those found in most other clocks during this period, but it was known to be a practical household timepiece rather than an attempt at high precision construction.

From 1875 until 1889 the Southern Calendar Clock Co. sold eight basic models. There were changes in cases, the clock movement, the hour strike and pendulum, but the calendar mechanism seems to have remained the same in all models.

Model No. 1 had a solid wood door with two glass openings, usually referred to as portholes. The case was a mahogany veneer. The Seth Thomas Parlor Calendar No. 3 was very similar, with the exception of the curvature in the base of the “Fashion” and the molding around the door. While there seems to be no record as to what the Fashion No. 1 sold for, the Seth Thomas Parlor No. 3 listed for \$17.50.

While Model No. 2 was still referred to as a porthole clock, the change in the style of case was the greater than in any subsequent model. The base was modified, side pillars were added, and a rounded top was completed with three wooden finals. The case was walnut veneer. The patent for the case design of Model No. 2 was issued on July 16, 1876 to H.H., L.L. and W.W. Culver. The calendar dial on the No. 2 states that the clock was patented on July 4, 1876, but undoubtedly, this date was used as a marketing feature to take advantage of the 100th birthday of the nation.

This was not the first or last patent pertaining to the clocks issued to the Culvers. On October 11, 1875 a patent for the trademark of the work “Fashion” was issued to Henry H. Culver. Beginning with Model No. 3 there was another significant case design change with a move away from the solid wood door with two glass openings to an all glass door with a wood frame. Beginning with Model No. 3 and all subsequent models, the cabinets were ‘made of the best kiln-dried and most thoroughly seasoned Solid Walnut’. The patent for the case design was awarded to Lucius L. Culver on March 18, 1879. Less than a month later on April 8th, Lucius received a patent for clock movement plates with an arched top and

rounded feet, described as “massive and tower-like”. On May 9, 1882 there was a patent for a new gong and base, and on August 7, 1883 a patent for the word “Fashion” was again issued to Henry H. Culver, as president of the Southern Calendar Clock Co.

With the introduction of Model No. 3 the name “Fashion” appeared in gold-leaf across the glass between the two dials. Also beginning with this model, a second hand was added. The clock and calendar movements were larger and heavier, necessitating a larger case to support the additional weight. Models No. 3 and 4 had short pendulums and many felt they were the most eye-pleasing of the “Fashions” because the pendulum and brass bell could be seen through the door.

The No. 3 was referred to as the “Texas” model because of a star mounted on the pendulum bob. The No. 4 had a larger brass covered pendulum, with a small wood rod going through it instead of the pendulum wire that was on the Model 3. Some examples of Model No. 4 had a small secret compartment in the back of the case, where valuables could be hid.

Models No. 5 and 6 were basically the same except that No. 5 had a white face and No. 6 had a black face. There were minor changes in the lettering styles and clock hands, but the major change in these more deluxe models was the long pendulums with large bobs engraved with concentric circles. The calendar dials were mounted on doors which opened by removing the calendar hand. Unfortunately, the attractive pendulum was hidden by the calendar face.

Various types of hour strikes were used. The brass bells in the earlier models gave way eventually to a combination bell and coiled wire gong. The bell and wire gong were held by the same screw and the strike hammer hit on the wire gong. Known as the “Cathedral Chime” the sound was softer and more resonant. The brothers were very excited with this innovation for they felt it would greatly increase the sale of the clocks. The gongs appeared as variants on models as early as the No. Beginning with Model No. 6, the gongs were used exclusively.

Some considered Model No. 7 to be simply a variant on earlier models. There were very slight changes in the mechanism, but a side view reveals that this model does not have a curved hood covering the entire top. The clock was inscribed on the top half of the calendar dial “Made for the G.J. Pettigrew Clock Co., Fort Worth, Texas”. Except for the missing hood, this model is every bit as heavily built as Models No. 5 and 6.

Model No. 8 had two carvings on the calendar door between the dials. There was no name on the upper half of the calendar dial. Other than these two features,

this model was identical to No. 5, having the curved hood and all other features.

### Beware Of Invitations

The popularity of the 'Fashion' clock brought numerous invitations. The Ithaca Calendar Clock Co. had a "Fashion" made to compete with the Southern Calendar Co. With the exception of the finals, the Ithaca clock looked much like the No. 6 with a black face. The mechanism was lighter in weight and the calendar was "simple". A very similar clock, with black face and simple calendar, was also manufactured by the New Haven Clock Co. for the National Calendar Clock Co.

The Southern Calendar Clock Co.'s reaction to this competition was carried in the "Fashion" Magazine.

### **BEWARE OF JEALOUSY**

It has recently come to our notice that certain interested persons, jealous of our success, are trying to use the great popularity of our Calendar Clocks "Fashion" for their own benefit as asserting that they can and will sell the same for less money than the price charged by our salesmen.

For the information of our patrons and all others interested, we state that

### **One Thousand Dollars**

will be paid, on demand, to any person who has heretofore, or may hereafter, purchase a Calendar Clock "Fashion" for less money than the price charged by our salesmen, or from any other parties in America, except the same has been obtained through parties to whom we have sold it.

### **Five Thousand Dollars**

will be paid for the exhibition of a movement like the Fashion", or for one equal to it, either in size, weight, style or finish, or durability. We make this statement with Malice toward None and Charity for All.

Very respectfully,

SOUTHERN CALENDAR CLOCK CO.

There is no record that any rewards were paid.

### The Price

There have been questions as to the selling price of the clocks. As stated, the Seth Thomas Co. sold a clock nearly identical to Model No. I for \$17.50. A Memorandum of Agreement, showing Model No. 2 listed the price at \$36.00, and the same memorandum with a No. 3 pictured quoted a price of \$33.00. Other printed note forms indicated that by the 1880's the price had been increased to \$42.00. Other sources have indicated that some of the deluxe models sold for as much as \$85.00.

The salesmen carried printed note forms which were used if the customer was unable to pay cash. The notes carried a clause which provided for the waiver of the signer's rights under the home-stead laws, and for interest at the rate of 10%. The notes were usually payable in six months; however, due to the scarcity of "cash money", the notes were often dated to mature at about the same time as the cotton or corn crop.

The company assumed responsibility for the collection of the notes and had a group of collectors for this purpose. Besides their commissions the salesmen received a bonus on all notes which were paid when due, and for that reason used more care in choosing their prospects.

### Competing Against Stoves

In 1881 the Culver brothers founded the Wrought Iron Range company to manufacture and sell the Home Comfort Stove. This business became so extensive that the brothers were unable to give time to their clock business, so in September 1889 the Southern Calendar Clock Co. ceased business.

During the 1890's the company was revived by W.L. Culver, a son of Henry Harrison Culver and a Mr. Skelton, who had been a supervisor for the original company. They maintained their headquarters in Columbus, Mississippi, but after a few years Mr. Culver discontinued operations and returned to the Wrought Iron Range Company.

The revived company sold two models during its brief existence. Keeping the 'Fashion' name, Model No. 9 was manufactured by the New Haven Clock Co. In looks, the clock closely resembled the No. 6 with a black face, but the mechanism was lighter in weight and the calendar was simple. An interesting note concerning the New Haven Clock Co. is that by 1890 they were in serious financial condition and nearly took bankruptcy in 1894.

This may explain why Model No. 10, the last clock sold under the name of the Southern Calendar Clock Co., was manufactured by the William L. Gilbert Clock

Company of Winsted, Connecticut. The Gilbert Company sold the same clock under the name of Elberon for \$11.50. For Culver's purpose, "The Fashion" was added to the glass above the day window and "Southern Calendar Clock Co." was added at the bottom of the glass.

The Southern Calendar Clock Co. occupied a relatively brief period in the history of the Culver family. Their clocks, however, continue to provide untold pleasure to the owners and collectors of these handsome time pieces.

*Fred Lintner began his Culver career as a Woodcraft counselor and joined the winter school faculty in 1968 as counselor to Troop B. He joined the Development Department in 1978 in charge of Planned Giving. He was named the department's director in 1992 and served until his retirement in 1998. Not content to sit back, Fred became involved in county politics and now serves as the President of the Marshall County Council, the Fiscal arms of county government. Fred also serves as a member of the board of directors of the St. Joseph Medical Foundation.*

*He has long held a fascination with old clocks and is recognized as an authority on Southern Calendar Clocks.*