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## Marble-faced clock is Gilmanton treasure

By BEA LEWIS Union Leader Correspondent Jan 22, 2018



Nate Abbott of Gilmanton Iron Works launched a GoFundMe page to raise money to repair this historic clock that hangs in Gilmanton Academy.

Bea Lewis/Union Leader Correspondent



GILMANTON – A marble-faced clock that once kept time amidst the hustle and bustle of the Boston Stock Exchange has become the "tock" of the town.

Thanks to recent skillful intervention by Denis Carignan of Carignan Watch Company of Belmont, its tick has resumed its cadenced rhythm.

Geraldine Besse, who called Gilmanton Iron Works home since 1953, gifted the unique timepiece to the community about 15 years ago. She died in 2003, at age 86.

Former Selectman Nate Abbott, recounted that Besse came to a board meeting and told them when her husband, Col. Harry Besse, retired as president of the exchange he was given the clock and that following his death, she had it cleaned and wished to present it to the town.

"It's an heirloom that she didn't want to go to auction after she died. It helps tie the community together a tiny bit," said Abbott whose own homestead was built and formerly owned by the Besse family.

The clock hangs on the front of the choir loft in the second-floor meeting room in the 1894 Gilmanton Academy that now houses the town offices and the local historical society.

"Gerry was really interested in town standing and in civic traditions, Old Home Day, the Fourth of July Parade. She really loved Gilmanton and was a donor to a number of causes including preserving this building," said Abbott.

Col. Harry Besse who served in the Army Air Corps during World War II was a fearless pilot and used a cornfield near the top of Halls Hill as a makeshift airstrip. He flew to and from work in Boston and would climb out of his plane in suit and tie at days' end. He'd walk up to the house, change into overalls to tend his sheep and other animals before sitting down to his own dinner.

He enjoyed sharing his passion for flying and children who grew up in the community in the 1970s and 1980s recall taking their first plane ride with the Colonel. He served as town moderator for 30 years.

The clock does more than just keep time.

“It’s tying us to our past. It has a face. It looks down, it’s a witness,” said Abbott, who concedes he has a special affinity for the timepiece, as he grew up surrounded by them as his father repaired clocks in Baltimore, Md.

During his six-year tenure as selectman, Abbott served as keeper of the mechanical clock that must be wound weekly to keep it running. Abbott handed off the job to Brian Forst when he became selectman. He dutifully continued the weekly ritual until the clock began to stop mid-week and then finally froze.

Abbott launched a GoFundMe page to raise money to pay to repair the clock while he tried to find someone local who had the needed skillset. The clock which features brass works and an internal pendulum is weight-driven and has a shallow drop as the case is just two feet tall.

“It’s not the kind of thing that you ask people to pay for with tax dollars when some are eating by using food stamps and others are worried about having enough oil to keep warm,” said Abbott.

Donations began to trickle in \$25, \$50, then \$100. Ultimately \$855 was collected.

“To his credit Denis came and took it down and was able to machine a new main shaft which he installed. He brought it back and hung it up and didn’t charge us for that. I hope he will continue to be a steward of the clock,” Abbott said.

At town meeting, residents will be asked to approve setting up a reserve account to accept donations to maintain the clock and to authorize the selectmen to spend the funds for that purpose. The warrant article specifically prohibits any appropriation of funds from tax dollars being deposited in the account.

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