

# The Howard Banta Alarm Clock Chapter



Chapter 178 of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors

2004 Volume 1

## Doug Stevenson

In this issue we are pleased to present a reprint of Doug Stevenson's article Wakers and Makers appearing originally in Clocks.

## Alarm Clock Chapter Meeting at the February 2004 Greater Los Angeles

At the Chapter 178 Alarm Clock Chapter meeting, Vince Angell showed the 1978 Alarm Clock slide show "Alarm Clocks are Collectible" which was created by Vince, Ron Hoops, and John Fossette. The slide show is still very timely - no pun intended. Vince also provided a terrific display of Darche Electric Alarm Clocks and shared his booklet on Darche clocks with the members and guests. A big thank you to Marge Smith and Mike Wilson who provided their beautiful Darche clocks for the display. The photos on page one and two are all from the Chapter Meeting as well as shots taken at the Mart.



## A Note From Mike Wilson

Unfortunately we've only recently realized how many members are unable to access *AlarmclockChapter* in Yahoo Groups, which is where the newsletters have been posted. We have recently conducted two tests to help us gather our members current email addresses. The last and final test will be to contact by traditional mail the remaining members so we can update our records with current email addresses.

Our objective is to make sure every member has received all four of last year's newsletters as well as this issue. We are pleased to provide our newsletters in color - its just makes a more interesting publication. As you might guess, sending color newsletters by traditional post is rather costly. But we will gladly mail the issues to any member who prefers to receive the publication by mail. We do ask that those of you who are able to print the newsletter by accessing the Web to please help us out by opting not to received the newsletter by mail. It will really help.

Do not worry about your problems with mathematics,  
I assure you mine are far greater.

Albert Einstein

**Officers, Contacts, etc.**

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**Sell it Through the Newsletter**

Every member may submit one ad per newsletter. This includes a *Wanted to Buy* or *Wanted to Sell*. The newsletter comes out at the beginning of March, June, September and December.

**Instructions to Authors**



All are encouraged to submit articles for publication in the *Alarm Clock Chapter*. Please include your name, address and phone number with the article. Although certainly not a complete list, suggestions for topics are:

- Specific alarm clocks or manufacturers
- Unique design - movement or case
- Special methods of cleaning
- Descriptions of interesting repairs
- History of a manufacturer
- Helpful tips on repair

Photos along with the text are always appreciated. Please email to the editor at:

saraandmary@sbcglobal.net

**Errata**

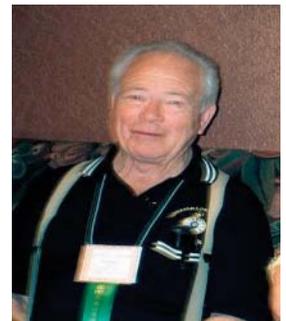
The 2003 Vol. 4 newsletter provided photos of a wonderful alarm clock display at the *2003 Silver Dollar Regional*. There were, in fact, two contributors to that display. Both Ron Hoops and Vince Angell. Our appologies Ron, for the oversight.

**Next Issues ...**

The second of Doug Stevenson's articles entitled "Wakers and Shakers" will be included in the next newsletter. Thanks very much, Doug, for providing the complete set of text and images for reprint. And its truly never too early to think about the December Holidays. Joel Zautner has kindly supplied us with the complete set of images making up the December 1934 *Tick Toc* publication produced by Westclox. This seventy year old publication contains some interesting thoughts reminding us once again that *The More Things Change, The More They Remain the Same*.

**Newsletter Name Change to The  
 Howard Banta  
 Alarm Clock Chapter**

We mentioned in our last newsletter that Howard Banta passed away in August of 2003. Howard was one of the founding members and past president of The San Fernando Chapter 75. He was a NAWCC Fellow and served a term as a National Director.



Perhaps most known by many alarm clock enthusiasts is that he was also the guiding force behind the founding of the Alarm Clock Chapter # 178 and it's first President.

Howard was always willing to show folks his truly remarkable collection. A few of his pieces are shown in Collins book entitled *Pastime*. There are many photos of his collection available for viewing in the *AlarmclockChapter* Yahoo-Group website.

Howard was always willing to share his knowledge and insights and he is sorely missed. We are pleased to undergo a name change in his memory to that of

**The Howard Banta  
 Alarm Clock Chapter.**



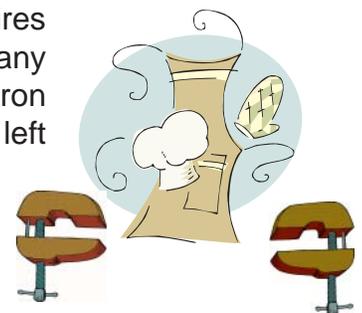
**More Photos from GLAR**



**Workshop Tips**

Sometimes you'll see photo's of watchmaker's aprons. A great way to help keep track of those parts that fly off your work table. Why is it they seem to always be made of brass? Seems like the apron connects somehow under the desktop.

Here's an idea that requires less fussing. Just use any old apron - a kitchen apron works is well. Put the left bottom apron corner under the edge of your desk to your left. Use a clamp to keep it in place. Stretch the tight along the underside of your desk running over to your right. Clamp the apron's right corner to the desk.



apron

..... the Editor ....

# WAKERS & MAKERS

CLOCKS - 24.IV.02

by **DK Stevenson, Germany**

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There's a surprised delight in the weird or wacky time-keeping device. As if in the midst of a horological zoo, among all the expected lions and camels and monkeys, we suddenly saw a live gargoyle winking at us from the back of a cage.

Alarm clocks as a genus seem to have mutated more than their fair share of this type. But then again, that alarms have attracted makers who have great ideas in the middle of the night is perhaps not surprising. And while most of us have learned that great ideas in the middle of the night are best left there, others have stayed awake to realize them.



**Figure 1 — The Kerzenwecker – a candle alarm – illustrated in the 1914 *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung***

The *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung* was not only fond of the slightly wacky *Wecker* (an alarm, literally a 'waker') and often mentioned them. The editors actually admitted this predilection. As they did for instance in an article about a candle-alarm device, **figure 1**, which appeared in the 15<sup>th</sup> August 1914 issue.

The device seemed strangely familiar, but it probably would on first sight too. Looking for another source though did remind us of Ivan Slee's essay, 'Of clocks and candles', in the September, 1991 *CLOCKS*. This candle alarm was not mentioned, yet the article reprinted Kenneth Ulliyett's illustration of a 'graduated candle of unspecified date'.

And this in turn made one wonder if there are *CLOCKS* readers who haven't yet tried to mold their own candles with, say, alternating red and white strata? With very little,

Yet returning to the 1914 *DUZ* article, there was also pleasure in the unnamed author's droll approach. He described an alarm clock for example as a *Marterapparat*, an apparatus of torment. Worse yet it's for self-torture. 'The victim' knowingly arranges his own punishment with his own hands — that which will 'tear him from his own sweet dreams' — the night before.

Another pleasure is that familiar, if underrated one that comes from looking through older technical references and journals. The technical illustrations in these German clockmakers' journals were often beautifully drawn, an art form

however applied.. There was also that ritual of italicized letters within the drawing, and the attendant explanations.

In this case, the 'device illustrated' was only identified as an apparatus that had been sent to the editors by a *Herr Kollege*, a fellow-clockmaker, one A Jesper 'in Nieder-Marsberg' (ie Marsberg, about 30km south of Paderborn). No other source, or thoughts about its origins, or even a dating, was offered.

Rather, after noting that how the gadget works should be obvious to *DUZ* readers from the illustration alone, how it does work was detailed at some length. We can't of course know for sure today. But this stating of the obvious as a poker-prose form of humour was unlikely to have been intentional then.

It was noted for instance that the Roman numerals on the candle can be said to form a *Zifferblatt*, a dial. Yet those to whom the purpose of the device was not known might not recognize this. Similarly, if we assume that the candle was lit at 10pm, then it would serve until 5am. This is because that is how far the Roman numerals go.

The distance between the Roman numerals was assumedly established by burning a like candle. How this was timed, by an hour glass perhaps or even a proper clock, wasn't mentioned. Which begs another question not asked. Why have the Roman numerals instead of just marks in the first place?

No less unique' than the dial is the *Weckerzeiger*, the alarm hand or pointer, which is formed by the metal pin *d*. This pin is warmed at its tip. It can then be easily inserted at the desired place.

Below the candleholder proper *K* we see a bellcage-like extension *B*. Within it is a shaft *a* that serves as the 'axis of rotation' for the bell *G*. Hanging from the ends of each of two arms attached to the shaft, *b1* and *b2*, are small chains with small lead weights attached to their ends.

After the alarm is set to the desired hour — 'here 4 o'clock in the morning' — one of the two chains is hung from the hook-formed end of pin *d*. The affected arm (*b1*) is thereby raised. And the bell hangs tilted 'as the drawing illustrates'.

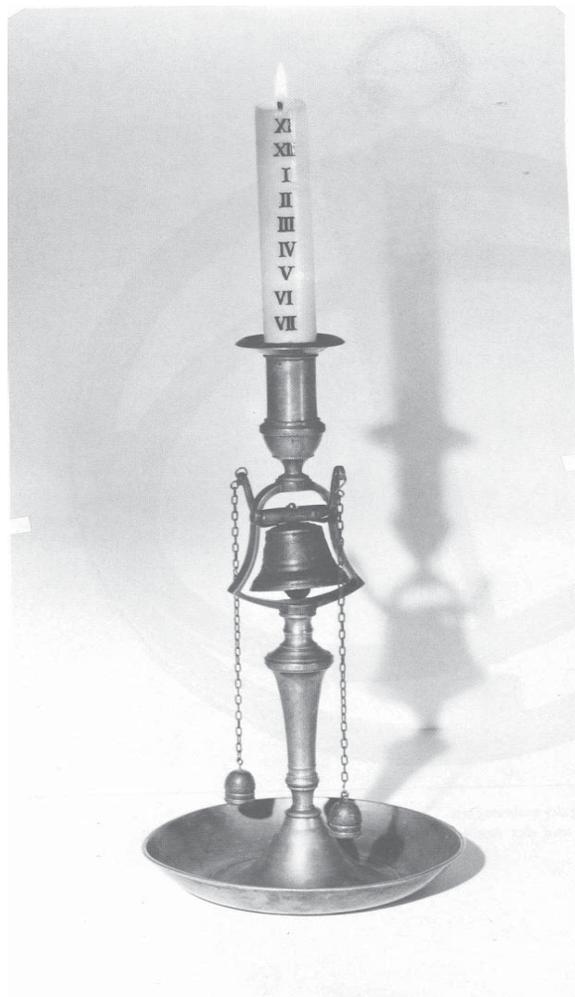
'What happens next is obvious.' The candle burns down slowly, the indicator-pin *d* is 'melted free' at 4 o'clock, and it falls allowing the chain to come free as well. Aided by the weight, this jerks the bell back. It rocks and rings for a short while, until it has found its equilibrium. 'During which that of the sleeper is successfully disturbed'.

At this not unwitty ending, my own mental balance was restored. And the memory awakened of where this 'candle as an alarm device' had been seen before. It was not unsurprisingly where it first might be expected, in the volume *Wecker* (1991) by Mühe, Kahlert and Techen, from the Deutsches Uhrenmuseum in Furtwangen.

This photograph, **figure 2**, kindly supplied by the German Clock Museum, does not necessarily show the same device as the one in the 1914 *DUZ* drawing. It's identified in *Wecker* only as south German, from the 18th century. Yet if it is not the same one, it is certainly one very similar.

While still presuming its authenticity, it would nonetheless be interesting to know if there are any others of its mien, as opposed to those of a similar conception, besides the single example in the Furtwangen collections. Past such, to argue whether or not this was actually used as an alarm, or how practical it might have been, is rather like asking if the alarm was worth its candle.

For those who are interested in alarms in general, and odd alarms in particular, one approach then is to go through old German clockmakers' journals. The *Deutsche Uhrmacher-Zeitung's* fondness for the unusual alarm does turn up the occasional example on its own. In addition, as was shown for example in the article, 'On the lighter side' in the February 2002 *CLOCKS*, a descriptive article of a 'different' alarm sometimes followed a patent granted for the same.



**Figure 2**  
**The *Kerzenwecker* from the collections of the German Clock Museum, in Furtwangen.**

Photo from Mühe and Kahlert (1993) *Die Geschichte der Uhr*, courtesy of the Museum.

There's been good news, by the way, for those who are hunting for specific information about German historical horological patents. Most of the DRPs (see eg 'German Patent Letter Clues' in the April, May and June 1998 CLOCKS) are now available on-line through [www.depatistnet.de](http://www.depatistnet.de), and at no cost.

A DRP number is still needed, that is, group searches and 'trolling' are not possible. But that the Deutsches Patentamt has also made the more than 3,000 horological patent specifications issued between 1877 and 1945 so easily available to researchers around the world is remarkable and praiseworthy. Quite typically – the German Patent Office is admittedly a favourite 'org', known for its courtesy as well as its competence — the site is also contoured in English.

Still, for those who would survey historical developments, or who would have their different-drum pleasures served up buffet style, access to the original patent specifications remains a need, as well as a pleasure. Both derive from the fact that the patents were not only sorted into different classes and those classes into groups, etc. The specifications were also physically shelved according to these same categories.

What this means is that the most convenient approach to looking at all DRP kith and kin in a particular strain – in this case alarms — is to go through the actual specifications so gathered. Furthermore, it's one thing to say that there were 'quite a few' even of the full DRP patents (the many more DRGMs are not included) which concerned alarms. And another thing to pull down a heavy carton full of original copies, and be able to go through them.

There were in fact, under the then-classificational system, 12 sub-groups of the major clock classification 83a which dealt with alarms. These did not include electrical alarms with remote control or signalling, it should be noted. Yet these dozen groupings, groups 64 through 75 of Class 83a, included just about everything else.

The so-called 'simple alarms' of group 64 were the most numerous. There were also many patents for alarms which with only one winding would go for several days. There was a group for alarms which in some manner ignite lights (with variants, it was noted, to be sometimes found in classes 4d, 28, 21c, 40, 34l, 8, 74a, and 17). An especially interesting group was dedicated to alarms in connection – literally in connection — with beds. There was a group for alarms with music. And for pocket watch alarms and, well, what have you?

I feel lucky to live not far from one of the DPA's regional research centers, housed in a university library, which maintains a complete file of the original DRP specifications. A day was dedicated to going through some of the alarm

patents. While I understand that going through old specifications is not about to replace the disco as a form of mass entertainment, it was a most enjoyable way to spend a day. A clockie's equivalent of 'a clean well-lighted place'. Counting how many DRPs there were in each group and all together, however, proved more time-consuming than expected. It was too easy to be side-tracked by a particularly interesting specification or drawing. Or some especially strange horo-ghoulie or long-leggety alarm beastie. Or start chuckling at some particularly bumptious-in-the-night device, lose track, and have to start over again.

Then too, there might well be — we should assume there are — specifications which are missing, or have been misfiled in another group or class. And we'd only know they are missing when looking for a specific patent. With this plus or minus assumed, a fair estimate is still over 215 DRPs in this 12-group set of alarm patents. Again, this total does not include the many more DRGMs. If they were included, estimating at a rough 1 to 2.5, DRP to DRGM ratio, we'd have somewhere around 750 German historical patents relating to alarms alone.

To select one or the other DRP therefore as the 'most interesting' alarm patent — one would avoid saying 'the wackiest' *Wecker* — wouldn't do. The 7 patents of group 71, those alarms connected to beds, certainly require their own article, for instance. Simply put, both mind and body boggle.

An old favourite, DRP 1873, **figure 3**, is nonetheless sufficient to indicate what glories still bloom among these old specifications. As the low number 1873 indicates, it was one of the first patents granted by the then new Kaiserliches Patentamt. The patent is officially dated 13<sup>th</sup> November 1877. The first unified German Reich patent law went into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1877. The early date is also shown by its original 83 classification having been later inked by hand to 83a Gr 64 in the centre's copy when the classification system was refined.

What more slowly strikes the mind is that this patent, by one FW Schwenzer, in Cologne, was for a *Wasseruhr mit Wecker*, a clepsydra with an alarm. And while trying to understand the long and detailed explanations, and while looking back and forth among the accompanying illustrations, one wonders why anyone in 1877 would have designed, let alone patented, a clepsydra with an alarm.

It wasn't as if there weren't enough inexpensive alarms already available, whether the Black Forest-made *Schottenwecker*, or the American-type drums and so-called *Nickelwecker* which were already hammering out the way the German clock industry would go. And electrical clocks

world, and to California, not to mention obelisks and cuckoos, and then come back around to a candle alarm, I realized that the patent-lawyerly looking gentleman who'd been examining modern patents at the next table had glanced up, and was smiling at me.

Had I whistled? Most likely. Cuckooed? 'It's an old patent for a *Wasserruhr mit Wecker*' I mumbled. 'Fascinating'. 'Really?' he politely replied. 'And how did it work?'

I looked at the almost impenetrable explanations which clogged on and on from *a* to *Z*, **figure 4**. I didn't understand them – could anyone? Had even Schwenzler understood them? Indeed, maybe they were the reason Einstein left the Swiss patent office. 'Oh, it should be clear from the illustrations alone' I said. **Figures 5, 6 and 7**.



**Figure 3 — One of the early horological patents, DRP 1873 from 1877, a clepsydra with alarm**



**Figure 4 — The explanation clogged on and on from *a* to *Z***

Figure 5

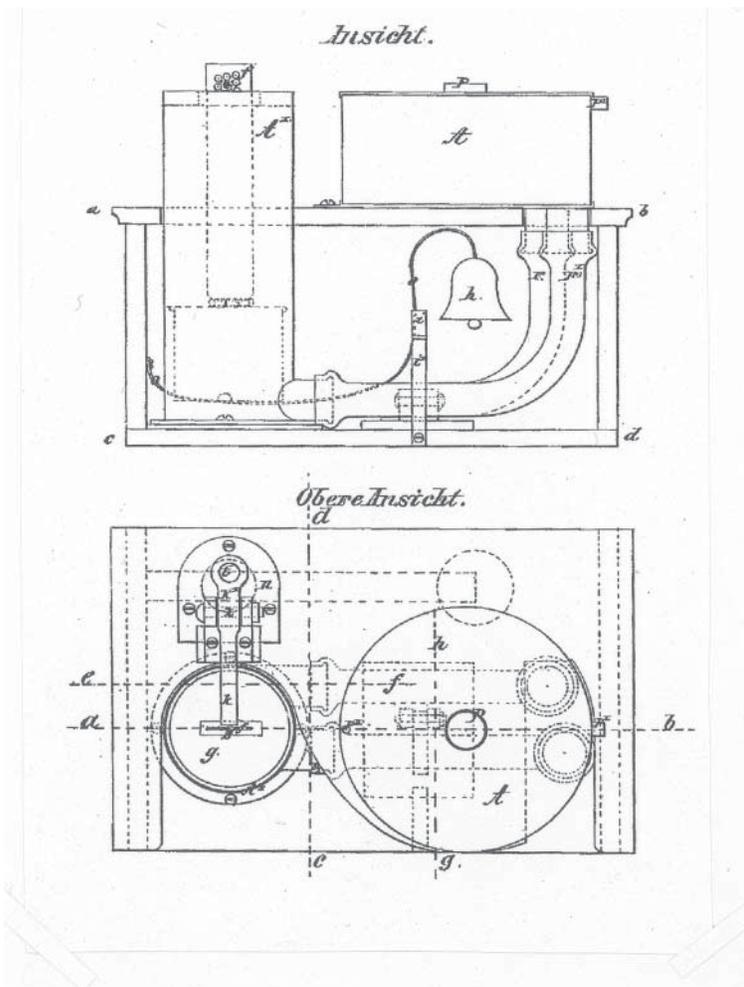


Figure 7

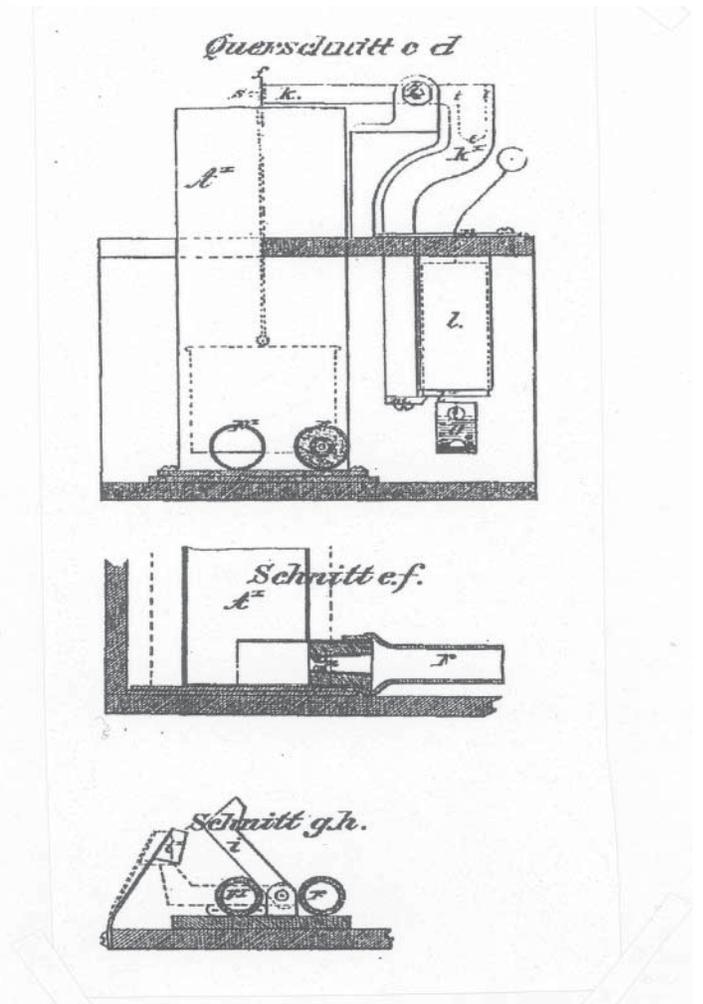


Figure 6

