

# Museum profile

## The Frick Collection

Bob Frishman

Winthrop Kellogg Edey (1937–1999) would be happy. When The Frick Collection on Manhattan's Upper East Side reopened in April after a \$330 million five-year renovation and enhancement, there finally was a gallery permanently dedicated to horology. 'Kelly', as he was called, bequeathed his world-class collection of twenty-five clocks and fourteen watches to the Frick, but until now, and contrary to his wishes, those exceptionally fine pieces had spent most of the intervening quarter century in store.

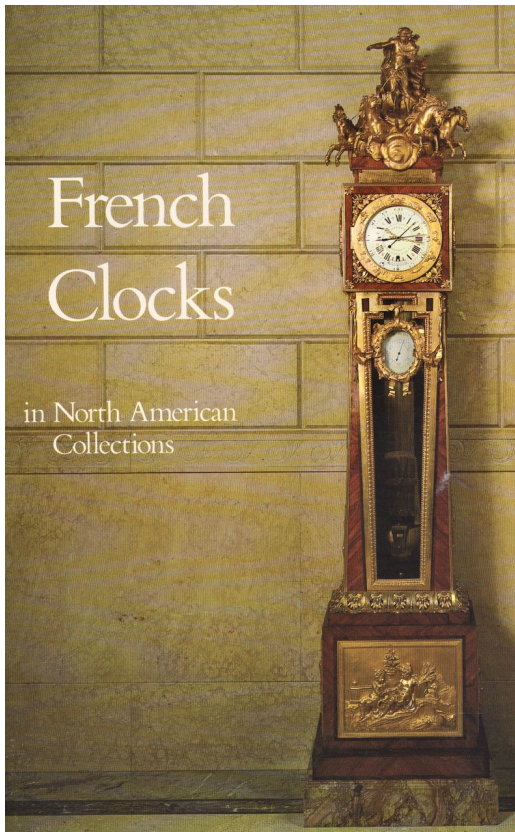
Gilded-age steel and coal magnate Henry Clay Frick (1849–1919) willed his grand Fifth Avenue mansion, built 1913–14, and its contents to a non-profit board of trustees.

Repurposed as he intended as a museum, it opened to the public in 1935 with hundreds of masterworks, purchased by Frick, dating from the Renaissance through the nineteenth century, and its holdings have more than doubled in number. The on-site Frick Art Research Library, founded more than a century ago by Frick's daughter, Helen, is a renowned resource for scholars. The library's online photoarchive, with more than 1.2 million documented images of artworks, was the source of two key otherwise-unknown portraits appearing in my recently published biography of eighteenth-century Philadelphia clockmaker Edward Duffield.

Edey's personal library of 4,332 volumes was also willed to the Frick. It included 1032 auction catalogues, 580 periodicals, 183 works on clocks, 372 on Egyptology, and 312 on classical subjects. Only 1,425 titles were retained and catalogued. (The remainder was sold to fund future library acquisitions.) The books mainly are stored offsite and must be requested in advance.



Barometer clock, c.1690–1700, case by André-Charles Boulle, movement by Isaac or Jacques Thuret, in the mansion's library. In the background is a portrait of Henry Clay Frick by John C. Johansen (1876–1964). Author photo.



Cover of the 1982 Frick exhibition catalogue, written by Edey, showing the Berthoud regulator owned by Henry Clay Frick and a major highlight of the museum. Author photo.

Edey and The Frick Collection have appeared previously in the pages of this journal, but not in great detail. One of his two books, a thin hardcover 1967 Collectors' Blue Book simply titled *French Clocks*, was reviewed in December 1968, and was described as 'written in a most dignified yet easy and readable style'. Its final chapter – 'Some Hints for Collectors' – contains useful advice for today.

Edey's other book, *French Clocks in North American Collections*, was ninety-four pages published in 1982 as a softcover catalogue, with black-and-white images, of a comprehensive Frick horology exhibition of ninety-seven clocks, nearly all on loan from a long list of institutions and collectors. Organized by Edey with Dr Peter Guggenheim (1927–2012), it was the first major U.S. exhibition of French clocks and reportedly the largest grouping of French Renaissance clocks ever presented. Edey was thanked in *AH* for leading a visit to that exhibition by the AHS



Kelly Edey and Cathy Andrewes in Edey's Manhattan townhouse in 1987. They are shown with an Edward East miniature longcase clock, standing just 1.65 meters tall. Photo courtesy of Will Andrewes.

American section. (The Abbott/Guggenheim collection of fifty early European clocks sold in New York City at Christie's in January 2015, for more than \$4 million.)

An article in *AH* June 2002 by William J.H. Andrewes, 'French Clocks in American Collections', devoted several paragraphs to Edey. And in *AH* December 2022, James Nye reported on the NAWCC 2022 symposium, 'Horology's Great Collectors' (that I organized), and he summarized Andrewes' personal recollections of Edey. While Andrewes was employed at Seth Atwood's now-dispersed Time Museum, he recruited Edey to contribute expertise for a museum catalogue, but that work was never published. Andrewes revealed that Edey, to avoid phone calls from strangers, listed his phone number as belonging to Jost Bürgi.

In 1987, Will and his wife, Cathy, visited Edey's Manhattan townhouse at 14 West 83rd Street. Unchanged in that year since its construction in 1901, the four-story structure (now four luxury flats) with almost eight hundred square meters of interior space, housed his expanding collections. A friend of Andy



Entrance to the Frick Collection, 10 East 71st Street, New York City. Author photo.

Warhol and appearing in the pop artist's film, *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys of 1964*, Edey, a graduate of Amherst College in Massachusetts, was heir to a fortune amassed during the career of his maternal grandfather, Morris W. Kellogg, who designed and built oil refineries and World War II atomic-bomb plants. Nevertheless, although from an affluent philanthropic family of New York society, Edey often complained of insufficient funds to purchase all the fine clocks and watches that he coveted. Friends commented on his eccentric nocturnal lifestyle, awake all night with them or his timepieces, then sleeping until four each afternoon.

Early in his collecting life, an Edey article was published in the December 1967 issue of the *NAWCC Bulletin*: 'An Unusual Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art'. He reported upon the exhibition, *Clock and Watch Design*, that featured artist renderings for cases dating back to the seventeenth century. Edey praised this novel approach to horology based on prints and drawings from the Print Department's large inventory, emphasizing decorative rather than scientific features. He wrote that the exhibition 'illustrates the lack of serious interest in case-

design on the part of collectors and horological historians up to now'. Upon his death from Hodgkin's disease, the Met received several works of art that Edey had also collected, including sculptures by Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

Edey continually sought the rarest examples, and he traded and upgraded to build the choice collection now at the Frick and Met. Each horology purchase was documented, beginning at age thirteen when his notebook's first entries, inscribed on 11 June 1950, recorded seventeen clocks and four watches. In 1972, a number of his pieces were already of sufficient importance to be loaned to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's *Magnificent Timekeepers* exhibition. One of his French clocks was pictured on the cover of the February-March issue of the museum's *Bulletin* that year to accompany a lengthy fully illustrated article on the exhibition written by longtime Met curator Clare Vincent.

In 2013 I spent a day in the Frick library's reading room examining his archived papers that consume ten linear metres of shelf space, and I was overwhelmed by the mass of printed ephemera and his plentiful notations in tiny handwriting. Clearly there is much



Gilt-bronze mantel clock c. 1770, dial signed 'Ferdinand Berthoud'. Author photo.

undiscovered information, assembled over decades by that dedicated and meticulous scholar and collector, that merits our attention.

After Edey died, the Frick has on a few occasions exhibited his treasures. In 2001 to first honour his generosity, the museum mounted a three-month exhibition, *The Art of the Timekeeper: Masterpieces from the Winthrop Edey Bequest*, guest-curated by Will Andrewes. A twenty-two page softcover printed catalogue illustrated the collection and described many of the pieces now on permanent display. Andrewes' introduction discussed the collection's origins, and the museum director's foreword suggested that Edey's donation was inspired in part by past bequests by Sir John Prestige to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

In the July/August 2013 *NAWCC Bulletin*, I reported on an exhibition organized by then curator Charlotte Vignon: *Precision and Splendor: Clocks and Watches at The Frick Collection*. Beautifully displayed in the then new sunlit Portico Gallery, eleven clocks and fourteen watches from Edey accompanied five clocks loaned by collector Horace Wood ('Woody') Brock.

During the mansion's recent closure, a

few Edey clocks were viewable in the Frick Madison, the museum's interim Madison Avenue location that is the iconic building, formerly the Whitney Museum of American Art, designed by Marcel Breuer.

A much-touted enhancement, adding thirty percent more gallery space, is the conversion of the second level, originally private living quarters, from offices and meeting rooms into ten small public galleries. (The staff now occupies the third floor.) The Grand Staircase's rope barrier is gone, and visitors may now ascend to the Clocks and Watches Room, Gallery 23, that originally was a butler's pantry adjacent to the family's breakfast room.

Two glass-front built-in showcases contain glittering watches and clocks. In one case hang thirteen watches by makers including Mudge, Le Roy, George Smith, Abraham or Isaac Gribelin, Robert Grinkin, and Dutertre. A c. 1685 eight-day watch by Jean Hubert shows traditional and canonical hours. A Breguet double-dial watch tells French-Revolution decimal time.

In the larger wall case sit masterpieces including a 1640 automaton lion clock by Christoph Miller. A 1792 Robert Robin four-glass clock shows mean and solar times; as



*The Dance of Time: Three Nymphs Supporting a Clock*, 1778, quarter-striking movement by Lepaute, Clodion sculptor. One of few surviving eighteenth-century French clocks with terracotta sculpture. Author photo.

with a few other examples, Edey noted the mainspring maker – Monginot. There is a 1653 table clock by David Weber with astronomical and calendrical dials, and a 1650 gilt-brass table clock by Pierre de Fobis that has one of the earliest surviving examples of a spring-driven movement. A ‘*Tête de Poupée*’ clock, c. 1680–90, is by Balthazar Martinot II. An 1811 Breguet carriage clock, one of the earliest examples, has lunar, calendar, alarm, and quarter-repeat complications.

Also in the larger case are two very recent additions. Swiss-born Alexis Gregory (1936–2020) willed much of his decorative arts collection to the Frick, and this included his

c. 1700–10 parade clock attributed to Johann Heinrich Köhler, and a c. 1767–72 musical automaton rhinoceros clock by James Cox (see next page). Gregory was the founder of Vendome Press, publisher of lavishly illustrated books on fine art, fashion, jewelry, and more.

At the base of the stairs to the second floor, where it has always stood, is the outstanding 1767 regulator with movement by Ferdinand Berthoud and neoclassical oak-veneered case by Balthazar Lieutaud. Gilt-bronze mounts were by Philippe Caffiéri, and on top is Apollo, as the sun, driving his chariot across the sky. Edey never owned this clock. It was Henry Frick’s, but its prominence in the house may in part have motivated Edey to provide this clock with multiple horological companions.

Other clocks also are found in first-floor galleries. Perhaps most impressive is *The Dance of Time* with movement by Lepaute and terracotta figures by Clodion. Not owned by Edey, it was purchased in 2006 with funds from his bequest. A French gilt-bronze figural clock with annular display is there, along with a large mantel clock signed ‘Ferdinand Berthoud’ (see previous page) that also came directly from Frick. Edey’s 1600s barometer clock, in a Boulle case with Isaac Thuret movement (see opening page), is a centrepiece of the mansion’s library.

In keeping with museum policy, there are no wall labels or signs. The free app, Bloomberg Connects, offers access to more than 900 museums’ exhibits, the Frick among them. Visitors, and anyone’s home computer, can access the Frick collection via its own website, and search clocks and watches on display, or the entire horology collection. On sale at the museum is the printed eighty-seven-page \$5 *Guide to Works of Art on Exhibition* with brief descriptions of each object on view, and a more substantial in-colour 175-page *Essential Guide* with full pages devoted to highlights that include eight clocks and watches.

The Frick’s online pages include photos and descriptions of fifteen horology objects *not* on view. Museum visitors focused on English work will not see clocks by Edward East, George Graham, or Joseph Knibb. Nor can they see Renaissance clocks from Germany’s Hans Bushman or France’s Nicolas Hanet; nor a c. 1677 longcase clock in a Boulle case with movement by Antoine Gaudron.



Two clocks from Alexis Gregory's 2021 bequest: parade clock attributed to Johann Heinrich Köhler c.1700-10, and James Cox musical automaton rhinoceros clock c.1765-72. Author photo.

Perhaps in consolation, the 161 paintings on view include three lovely horology-in-art examples. *Miss Mary Edwards*, painted in 1742 by William Hogarth, is a bold portrait of an influential patron and women's rights advocate; a gold watch hangs at her waist. An 1824 Goya portrait of a lady is adorned with a visible gold watch and chain. In François Boucher's *A Lady on Her Day Bed* painted in 1743, a watch is suspended on the wall behind the alluring subject (see next page). And although no clock is visible, an 1826 view of Salisbury Cathedral by John Constable portrays the site where the oldest known English turret clock movement now rests on the ground floor inside.

If visitors don't need to see only paintings with horology content, there is a visual feast by Rembrandt, El Greco, Franz Hals, Holbein, Reynolds, Velasquez, Gainsborough, Titian, Turner, Whistler, *three* by Vermeer, and much more. 107 furniture pieces, 102 sculptures, and 327 medals can be perused, as can works on paper that include Dürer's *Melencolia I* in which an hourglass is visible. In all, the Frick's collection numbers more than 1,800 works of fine and decorative art, nearly half from its founder. Axel Rüger is the newly arrived director following his five-year tenure as Secretary and Chief Executive of London's Royal Academy of Arts.



Detail, *A Lady on Her Day Bed*, 1743, François Boucher, watch and chatelaine on wall. Author photo.



Gallery 23 with Dr Marie-Laure Buku Pongo, Associate Curator of Decorative Arts. Author photo.

Three oil paintings hang on the walls of the second-floor Clocks and Watches Room. As explained to me by Marie-Laure Buku Pongo, Sorbonne-educated Associate Curator of Decorative Arts, each reflects more broadly the space's 'time' theme. One is *Winter in Norway* by Frits Thaulow (1847–1906); another is *Grapes with Insects on a Marble Top* by Dutch artist Gerard van Spaendonck (1746–1822). The third, by Frenchman Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875), has a title that translates to *Ferté-Milon Valley, Washer by a Pond*.

Dr Buku Pongo, responsible for the gallery's arrangement, formerly worked at the Palace of Versailles. She needed no prompting to mention the abundance of fine timepieces she viewed while walking the halls of the French kings' past residence. While the Frick cannot match the *quantity*, the *quality* should encourage all of us to visit this museum, and honour Kelly Edey's legacy, whenever we are in New York City.

To view the Frick clocks and watches, see <https://collections.frick.org/collections/97/clocks/objects>