

## Clock and Bells: Time Is Hastening On

Anne Krantz, Historian

Incredibly, the tower clock did not stop ticking when the meetinghouse, with its attached clock tower and steeple, was pivoted and moved across Church Street to its present location in August of 1836. The entire structure was then raised 8 feet to rest over the new basement or vestry.

As described in the August 26, 1836 issue of the *Farmers' Cabinet*: "The work...has been accomplished by Capt. Nathan Call, of Concord, with screws and tackle, with apparent ease, and entire safety, so much so as that the high and towering steeple, which so long pointed us upward as the way to heaven, has not deviated in its altitude – and the clock has not ceased its monitions that time is hastening on and should be constantly improved."

This clock that would not stop marking the passing of time in 1836 (thanks to a faithful clock winder), is the same one that continues to mark time for the people of Amherst today. In fact it started keeping time in 1815 and has been doing so for 209 years! Fortunately our town clock winder is a clock mechanic who loves our priceless antique and is keeping it in excellent repair.

If you go to the church web page (<http://www.ccamherst.org>), click on *About* and then *History*, here is the section about the clock:

### "Clock Installed in 1815"

The original Thomas Woolson clock has served Amherst since about 1815. Woolson came to Amherst when he was six and lived here for about 25 years, where he received all his schooling. He apparently was an intuitive mechanical genius. The town contracted with him to design the clock and it was built here with the assistance of local craftsman Luther Elliott. The town encountered difficulty in making the final payments, and not until there was a vote to sell the clock unless it was paid off, was the money found. The final payment was made in 1819. Fred Shelly, in an Amherst library book, *Early American Clock Towers*, notes that 'Woolson's clock has managed to survive hand wound and still running to this day, both time and strike.'

Expanding on this short description, "time and strike" refer to the two mechanisms of a pendulum clock; one facilitates the striking of the hour by the bell, and the other keeps time on the three clock faces. These two drive mechanisms are powered by gravity. Two granite weights weighing 400 and 600 pounds are wound up each Friday morning by the clock winder. They slide up and down inside two slots on the side walls. Sometimes you can hear them moving when in the balcony. Obviously weights that heavy would simply plunge to the ground without a lever called an escapement to hold them. They take a week to descend. The heavier the weight the longer a clock will run. The pendulum is the device that keeps time because its swing always takes the same amount of time. It rocks the escapement gears to control the dropping weights: <https://www.explainthatstuff.com/how-pendulum-clocks-work.html>

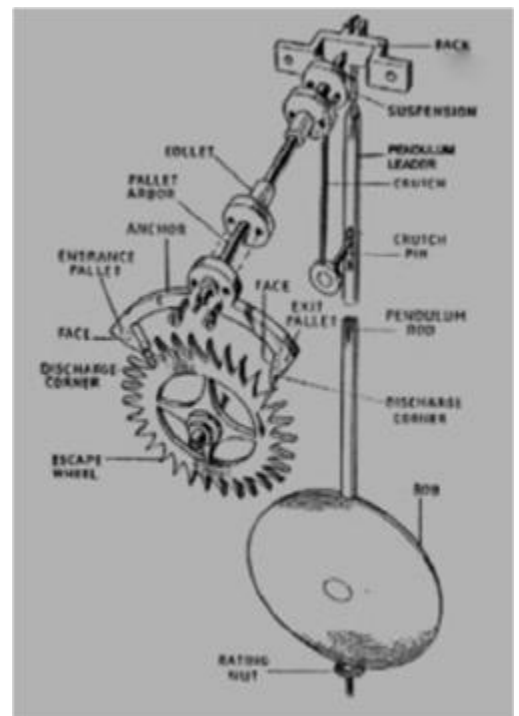
Grandfather clocks work the same way, the two weights are wound by a crank.

### Four Bells Hung in Belfry Between 1794 and 1839

Until the 1815 clock was installed, the bells were rung by pulling the rope. The first bell for the belfry didn't get approved and installed until 1794, and it cracked shortly thereafter. The second and third bells also cracked, and not until the fourth bell was installed in 1839 in the newly located tower, did the persevering community hear a bell to cheer about. [Secomb's pg. 444]



Dan Barton looking at the clock he winds and maintains.



Pendulum diagram.