

MEMORIES

WESTERN UNION TIME SERVICE – JERRY HOROWITZ

“For many years, Western Union was known across the United States as “The Nation’s Timekeeper”. Before the 1880’s, time was relative to local communities, and “noon” was marked when the sun was directly overhead. Residents often referred to a clock on a prominent building, such as a church steeple, to set their clocks or watches. This system worked well when it took days to travel from one place to another. However, problems arose when railroads made it possible to travel long distances in a short amount of time.

“The telegraph time service was especially important after the United States implemented a system of time zones in 1883. Local noon could be several minutes apart for cities at different ends of the same time zone. A nationwide standard of time was imperative for a large, developing country, and “Western Union time” helped fill the need.

“The notion of using the telegraph to tell time began in 1877, when Western Union first received time signals via telegraph wire from the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, DC that would cause a giant ball atop the Western Union building at 195 Broadway in New York City to drop down a large pole. Similar to the time ball at the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, England, mariners on ships in the harbor used the time ball to set their chronometers for navigation at sea. Passersby in the street would look up at the signal to set their watches.

“Western Union hired a clockmaker to transmit U.W. Naval Observatory time on the hour over the company’s network. A system sent signals over the telegraph lines several minutes before each hour of the day, followed by a pause and finally a last “click” directly on the hour. Every hour, on the hour, minute hands on clocks across the nation would snap to “12”, ensuring accurate, standardized time everywhere.

“Subscribers in thousands of locations could keep accurate time, and the service solved the problem of coordinating the arrival and departure of trains with neighboring towns. Into the 20th century, a range of enterprises from broadcasting to sporting events used Western Union Time Service to ensure accurate timekeeping.

“If you have one of these clocks and if you would like service information and other details, you can find it on the web:

www.n7cfo.com/Tgph/battery/battery.htm


www.geocities.com/mvhw/western.html

www.prc68.com/I/SWCC2.shtml


“And if you wonder what the asking prices for Western Union Clocks are, check:

www.surplussales.com/Equipmwnr/clock.html

WESTERN UNION TIME SERVICE



No. 42—\$1.25 per month
Dimensions
11" dial—16" high, 16" wide, 4 1/8" deep



No. 33
Finishes—Oak, Mahogany or Walnut

Dial	Monthly Rate	Diameter of Case	Depth
14"	\$1.25	18 1/2"	6 1/2"
18"	1.50	22 1/2"	6 1/2"

Seconds dial and hand furnished in 18" dial size only at 25c per month additional.

