



Blasdel Clockmakers of Amesbury

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David Blasdel Sr. (1712-1756) of Amesbury was one of the earliest American born clockmakers working in colonial New England. He was the son of Jonathan Blasdel of Amesbury, a blacksmith and gunsmith. David's grandfather, Henry Blasdel, was an original settler in Salisbury New Town in 1654, and his great-grandfather Ralph Blasdel was an original settler of Salisbury in 1639.

The tall case clock, commonly known as the grandfather clock, was an improved technology in clock making that was developed in England in the 1670's. By the 1690's a few examples had been imported to the English colonies by wealthy merchants. These were soon followed by English trained clockmakers who settled first in Philadelphia, and then in the major coastal cities including Boston. They passed on this new clock making technology in the colonies by taking on native born apprentices.

David Blasdel, born in 1712, would have served an apprenticeship from about the years 1725 to 1732, most likely in Boston. We know that he had returned to Amesbury by 1733, in which year he married Abigail Colby. In 1735 he purchased land on the main road leading to the ferry (the present site of the Bartlett Museum on Main Street) where he built his house and shop. In the deed he calls himself David Blasdel of Almsbury, clockmaker.

David was unique in that he dated his clocks. It was traditional for the maker to place his name and location on the clock dial. By the mid 1740's David had developed a more



Clock dial made in 1755 by David Blasdel Sr. The dial is a composite metal dial that was the style of the time. It consists of a brass plate with applied pewter time ring, maker's boss and ornamental spandrels. (Note one of the corner spandrels has been lost). The unique four line inscription of David Blasdel Sr. can be seen on the round maker's boss.

descriptive four line inscription that he engraved on his maker's boss. It read: MADE BY / DAVID BLASDEL / IN ALMSBURY / with the year on the fourth line expressed in Roman Numerals. David used the archaic spelling of Almsbury on all of his clocks made through 1752. From 1753 until his death he changed to the modern spelling of Amesbury.

In 1748 David sold his property on Main Street, again calling himself clockmaker in the deed, and relocated to a house he had built on his father's homestead land at the Highlands. This was located on the west side of what is now Highland Street near Greenwood. Located just to the north was the home of his younger brother, Samuel Blasdel (1717-1769), who was trained as a joiner (a cabinet maker). It is probable that Samuel made the tall cases that housed the clock movements made by David.

Like his father, David Blasdel was also trained as a gunsmith. In 1756 he was recruited to serve in an Amesbury

Company to serve in the French and Indian War. David enlisted as an armorer, and he was accompanied by his second son, Isaac (born in 1738), who served as an armorer's apprentice. David left his oldest son, David Blasdel Jr. (1736-1794) at home to carry on his clock making business and to look after his family. Not long after reaching Fort William Henry at Lake George, David Blasdel fell ill. He made his will there on the 10th day of August 1756 and died not long thereafter. It is possible that at least one of three surviving David Blasdel clocks dated 1756 was made by David Jr. from parts left by his father when he left for the War.

David Blasdel Jr. carried on his father's clock making business in Amesbury. In 1759 he purchased land from his mother's family on the east side of Main Street, on the north side of Kendrick's Court. Here he built his house and shop and continued making clocks as well as carrying on general blacksmithing work. David sold land to the east of his house to his



The clock movement made by David Blasdel Sr. is a posted frame 30-Hour type, with two hands and an hour strike, all powered by a single weight suspended on a continuous loop of rope or chain. This was the most common type of movement made by the Blasdel clockmakers, which was affordable to their rural clientele in northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire. They were also trained in making a more expensive brass 8-Day movement that included a seconds hand and separate weights for the time and strike trains. They also made an even more affordable one-hand movement (hour hand only) without an hour strike that was hung directly on the wall, thus eliminating the added expense of a case.

cousin Oliver Blasdel (1736-1803) who built a house there before 1764. Oliver was the son of Samuel Blasdel, was also trained as a joiner, and likely carried on making tall cases for the clock movements made by David Blasdel Jr at this new location.

When Isaac Blasdel returned to Amesbury after his service in the French and Indian War he completed his clock making training under his brother David Jr. Isaac worked as a clockmaker for a few years in Amesbury and then in 1762 purchased land in Chester, New Hampshire. Isaac moved to New Hampshire by 1763 where he became one of the first clockmakers to work in that colony. David Blasdel Jr. also trained his younger brother Nicholas Blasdel (born in 1743) in the art of clock making. After completing his apprenticeship Nicholas moved to Newmarket, New Hampshire, and later, by 1774, to Falmouth, Maine where he worked as a blacksmith, silversmith and clockmaker.

David Blasdel Jr. also trained his brother Jonathan Blasdel (born in 1748) as a clockmaker. There is a clock made by Jonathan that bears his name and the date 1768 on the dial, which likely represents the first clock made by him on completing his apprenticeship. It is unusual in that no other known clocks made by any of the sons of David Blasdel Sr. were dated. Like his father and grandfather Jonathan was also trained as a gunsmith. In 1775 he left his home in Amesbury for Charlestown, where he served General Washington's Army by repairing muskets. Jonathan continued serving in that capacity during the Revolution until dying from illness in 1781, thus cutting short his career as a clockmaker in Amesbury.

There are a number of Blasdel clocks that exist in museum and private collections across the United States. Many of these clocks are still in running condition, a lasting testament to the skill of this early Amesbury clock making family.



The clock movement is housed in its original Amesbury tall case, likely made by Samuel Blasdel (1717-1769). The width of the case was dictated by the swing of the long pendulum, and the height by the drop of the weight needed to power the clock for 30 hours.