

The San Diego County Courthouse Clock Keeps on Ticking *by Rick Coleman*

(From reference material supplied by Verlyn Kuhlmann)

I'm sure everyone in Chapter 59 knows the courthouse clock, that was originally in the old county courthouse built in 1871, was restored by Chapter 59 members in 1980/81. The clock was put back into service in a display "tower" cabinet that was commissioned by the San Diego County Bar Association (see Photo 1). The movement is a Seth Thomas #16, 8-Day Time and Strike constructed in 1890. Because the "tower" on the cabinet is not very high, an automatic rewind motor system was added. Otherwise someone would have to wind the clock several times a day. Only the time train is wound; the strike train is not used. The auto-wind is completely reversible if ever desired to be removed.



Photo 1 by Rick Coleman

There are two manual winding arbors on the clock, same as a typical time and strike mantle clock. In Photo 2, you can see the two winding arbors. The time arbor is located on the "A" frame section of the clock. It is on the right end of the horizontal beam of the "A". The strike winding arbor is much larger and located on the base frame, left of the name plate. The bell clapper weighed 50 pounds. I can't imagine how heavy that weight must have been.

Earlier this year, the clock had stopped several times. If it was due to a power outage that was long enough for the pendulum to stop, there would be one of two clues. One, the weight would be all the way down, if the power was still out. Two, the weight would be all the way up, but not running because the pendulum can not restart itself.

Verlyn went down to check the clock several times, to evaluate the problem. Each time the weight was

suspended somewhere between the top and the lowest point of travel. This was obviously not a power outage problem. Each time he re-started the clock it would go for a while and then stop again. The loss of power was due to too much friction in the time train. It's time for an oiling of the clock.



Photo 2 by Rick Coleman

On July 27th of this year Joe Kunkler (Ch 59 & 136), Walt Yahn (Ch 136), Verlyn Kuhlmann (Ch 59 & 136) and myself (Ch 59) went to the courthouse to service the clock. We had to lower the weight down onto wooden blocks using the hand crank. We also removed the pendulum which is also a very heavy item. Walt and I held onto it while Verlyn released it from the suspension point. We were only able to easily remove two of the wheels, the 3rd wheel and the escape wheel. This was accomplished by removing the screw held sleeve bearings at each end of the arbors. These are the brass "disks" that can be seen in Photo 2.

The pivots and bearing sleeves were caked with thick rust colored grease. The grease probably a lot lower viscosity when first applied, but it is very thick after years of use. We wiped all of that old grease off the pivots and the bearing sleeves. Tower clock oil was applied to the pivots. The second wheel had too much extra hardware around one end making it difficult to completely remove without a lot of time. We just cleaned off all the grease that could be reached and applied fresh oil. Joe was watching every move and approved of how the task was done.

After putting everything back together, the correct time was set and the pendulum set in motion. The action of the escapement appeared very healthy. If you are ever downtown during the day, you should stop by the courthouse and see the old timer. Just make sure you leave your pocket knife in the car. You have to go through a metal detector to enter the building.