

[George Potter]

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George Potter

Walnut street

Yankee-formerly employed by Seth Thomas Clock Co

Mr Potter is a member of one of the oldest families in this section of the state, cultured, well-read, deeply interested in and thoroughly familiar with the history of the Seth Thomas Clock Company. He has one of the finest collections of Seth Thomas Clocks of all types in Thomaston. He entered the company's employ in the eighties and spent 23 years as an employe of the concern, leaving for other employment and returning several times. He was last with the company in 1932.

“When I first went to work for them,” he said, “they did all their trucking with horses. They had some of the finest draft horses you ever saw and company officials were proud of them. I remember that during the blizzard of '88, when it appeared that we might be snowbound in the factory (I was working at the old movement shop at the time) they sent the women home by horse and team, and they all got to their homes without mishap. (“In those days the town was experiencing a sort of boom, and one of the recurrent waves of immigration had its effect here. I remember in particular a young Scotchman named James Blaine who came here with his family. He was typically frugal and he had left behind with relatives a Seth Thomas clock which he had bought in Scotland. Why should I bring one over there when I'm going to work for the company? he asked his wife. But when he got here he found he had to pay more for the same model, even with the discount allowed the help, than he had to pay in the old country.

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“You spoke of superstitions a while ago and I'll tell you something that might generally be regarded as superstition but which anyone familiar with clock movements will vouch for as gospel truth. Clocks run faster in summer than they do in winter, and that's due to the expansion of metal by the heat. I've regulated them for years and I know. You have to shorten up the rods and lower the pendulum on pendulum movements—a barely perceptible degree and yet it has to be done. The compensating rod on the old movements had mercury in it—was made to allow for the difference in temperature without the necessity of regulation. (“I understand that during the past few years there have been revolutionary changes in clock making methods. Maybe its for the best, and yet I challenge anyone to show me finer clocks and better timepieces than the old Seth Thomases in my collection.

“I don't recall anything that might be of interest to you in the way of anecdote except one little story that has to do with the late William T Woodruff who was once president of the company.

“He was the epitome of dignity, a self-made man and extremely proud of it and with no more sense of humor than an oyster. He dressed the part of a big executive, was gruff in his relations with his subordinates and had never been known to laugh under any circumstances.

“I remember when this incident happened it was a holiday eve, the day before the Fourth of July, I believe, and perhaps the holiday spirit had emboldened the help somewhat. It was raining and Mr. Woodruff carried an umbrella and wore his rubbers. There was a hat-rack right outside the door of his office, which incidentally, adjoined the assembling room, and it was his custom to leave his hat, umbrella and rubbers there.

“Well Mr Woodruff came out shortly before closing time as was his invariable habit, grabbed his hat and umbrella and slipped his feet into his rubbers. He started walking, but the rubbers stayed behind. Somebody had nailed them to the floor. The old man roared

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in his best style and the air around there fairly crackled. But everybody looked up from work with an air of surprise and though he stood and glared at each man in turn for a few minutes he couldn't find out who did it.

“But he would have fired him if he'd caught him, for he was the kind of man who wouldn't stand for any nonsense.

“We had only numbers for the clocks. There were 103's and 89's and 112's and so on. Only in cases where the movements were made for some other company were they known to the help by names. For example, those made for the Taylor Instrument Company were called Taylors.” (Mr. Potter related a story which he said might be illustrative of superstition on the part of at least one clockmaker, but first exacted my solemn promise that if it were used in print his name would not be mentioned in connection with it. It concerned an ear-timer named “Buddy” Keen or Kerr who had a fetish of some kind tacked above his bench—whether it was a small statue, a doll or a billiken he had won someplace Mr Potter wasn't sure—but Kerr was obsessed with the idea that the thing was his lucky piece. He thought it had some definite bearing on his work. Somebody stole it one day and never brought it back and Kerr became a nervous wreck. He resigned his job a few weeks later and went elsewhere to work, though Mr. Potter says he is still working at his trade and has apparently forgotten the incident.